Mahabubnagar, is considered to be one of the most backward districts in Telangana region. Farmers’ suicides have taken place mostly in the backward districts of the backward regions in the country. The backwardness in the district is historically rooted. Earlier, the district was divided into various feudatories ruled by the local feudal lords. At the top, these feudatories were part of Hyderabad Nizam’s feudal regime. Thus, the district was under double feudal oppression. This chapter discusses about farmers’ suicides as a pan Indian phenomenon. Mahabubnagar district makes a perfect setting for the case study because of a few reasons. This district is considered as the most backward in the Telangana region and it is traditionally a distress-migration prone area. It has been a victim of discrimination in agriculture infrastructural development like irrigation. As discussed in the previous chapter, Telangana has been a victim of discrimination and domination; it has become a critical explanatory variable of determining the economic backwardness of the region. Since the district geographically, politically and economically forms the part of Telangana, the backwardness of the district has to be located in the same discrimination and domination mode. This place also witnessed commercialisation in the post-liberalisation times; the larger degree of commercialisation is leading to higher degree of diversification of commercial crops, wherein low value commercial crops also occupied larger space. Thus, the dependence on ground water for irrigation is ultimately the leading factor, given the variations in the levels of commercialisation, contributing to the suicides across various mandals of the districts. The official data shows that during the span of more than one-decade, 4881 farmers have committed suicides in the state out of which 371 cases (eight per cent) were recorded from Mahabubnagar district alone. In this chapter, a brief history and agrarian structure of the district has been presented. This district due to perennial drought conditions is also known for distress migration. Discrimination in water
allocation to the district has also been discussed in the chapter. Final part of the study is dedicated to the case studies of farmers’ suicides in the district followed by observations or some trends analysis of the case studies.

4.1. Basic Statistics of Mahabubnagar District

Mahabubnagar is the second largest district in Andhra Pradesh. The district lies between the North Latitudes 16° and 17° and East Longitudes 77° and 79° and is comparatively elevated in the north and west, gradually declining its altitude from northwest to the southeast. The vegetation is a dry deciduous with scrubs in the north and northwestern parts and teak forests in the southeastern Kollapur-Amrabad forest region. Geologically, the district mainly belongs to the Archaean formation. The district forms the southern part of the Telangana Region of Andhra Pradesh. It is bordered with Raichur and Gulbarga districts of Karnataka in the west, the river Krishna and Tungabhadra in the south, Nalgonda and Guntur in the east and Rangareddi and Nalgonda in the north. Mahabubnagar has an area of 18,432 sq km and a population of 3.51 million. The literacy rate in the district is lowest in the state, in 1991, it was just 29.58 percent, and in 2001, increased to 44.4 percent. The district is predominantly rural, with villages housing a population of 3.1 millions. The decennial population growth rate (1991-2001) has been 13.97 per cent (marginally more than the state average of 13.86 per cent), 11.9 per cent less compared to previous decennial growth (1981-1991 decennial growth was 25.87 per cent). The district registers an annual crude growth rate of 1.4 per cent. The analysis of the 1991 data (Census of India) indicates that agriculture is the main occupation, with 39.42 percent of the rural main workers classified as cultivators; and about 42.18 percent or the rural main workers are to be reported agriculture labour. According to 2001 census report cultivators are 30.4 percent of main workers and the agricultural labourers amounting to 39.6 percent to main workers. The population density of the district is about 190 persons per sq km, compared to the state average of 275; the district has a population of 35.09 lakhs (as per 2001 census) of which 17.81 lakhs is male and 17.28 lakhs female. Among the total district population 24.18 lakhs stay in

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rural areas and the rest belong to the urban areas. The district records an annual crude growth rate of 1.4 per cent. The district has 1,544 revenue villages with 2496 habitations comprising 7.52 lakhs families and organised into 64 revenue Mandals administered by four revenue divisions located at Narayanpet, Mahabubnagar, Gadwal and Nagarkurnool. The district experiences a dry climate with very hot summer when temperatures exceeds 40°C. During the southwest monsoon, the district receives 77 per cent of the annual rainfall. Agriculture and livelihoods are impacted upon by the scanty rainfall and dry spells during the southwest monsoon. Ironically, the district has a long catchment area of Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers. The recorded average rainfall is also very low.

4.2. A Brief Historical Sketch of Mahabubnagar District

Mahabubnagar district was earlier known as Palamuuru. It was renamed after the erstwhile ruler, the sixth Nizam, Mir Mahabubali Khan in 1929, but people still call it informally by its old name, and migrant labourers from this region are referred as Palamuuru labour. At the time of the state re-organisation in 1956, Parigi Taluk was transferred to Hyderabad; Alampur and Gadwal of Raichur district and Kodangal taluk of Gulbarga district were transferred to Mahabubnagar. In terms of electoral representation, this district consists of thirteen assembly constituencies and two parliamentary constituencies. The present Mahabubnagar district was part of the dominion of the Nizam of Hyderabad from the latter part of 17th century, when the dynasty of this feudal ruler was established in this part of south central India, that is, until 1949, when Hyderabad State was annexed to independent India. In general, land tenure in Mahabubnagar was freehold (ryotwari). However, in 1901 half of district was not under the direct administration (khalsa) of the Nizam but was granted to office holders as payment during the period they served the Nizam (jagir). The district

2 District Study Report (2002) “Panchayat Raj and Natural Resources management: How to Decentralize Management over Natural Resources Andhra Pradesh: (Mahabubnagar) I II III IV”, October,
4 This place also formerly was known as ‘Rukmmapeta’ and Cholawadi; the land of Cholas. It has been the district headquarters since 1883 AD. It is also said that the famous Golconda diamonds including ‘KOHINOOR’ came from Mahabubnagar district.
5District Study Report (2002), op.cit.,
was under autonomous kingdoms (*Samsthanams*), 6 and administratively and politically remained isolated and insulated from the famous Telangana peasant armed revolt of 1947. These were small kingdoms ruled by Hindu rulers. There were four main *Samsthanams* in the erstwhile Palamoor (Mahabubnagar) – Amarchinta, Gadwal, Wanaparti and Jatrapole. 7 All these were all subordinated feudatories to the Nizam of Hyderabad. The feudal structure was hierarchical in nature. There was no place for decentralisation of power; instead, power was concentrated in few hands. It kept the region and the district backward in terms of development of means of production and production relations. One of the principal reasons of the backwardness of the district, as asserted by Haragopal, is that the district was under clutches of feudalism, such as the regional rulers known as *Doras* or the property owners known as *jaminadars*. As mentioned earlier, small feudatories ruled Mahabubnagar until mid-twentieth century and insulated the region from colonial modernity. Land lordism was prevalent more in this district compared to other districts of Telangana region. 8 At the apex, the feudatories were part of the Hyderabad Nizam state. Thus, the district was under “double feudalism” This made land inaccessible to the lower caste and class people, and, down the years, they were compelled to work as labourers and bonded labourers (*Vetti chakiri*). Caste-feudalism does not allow economic forces to develop because few property owners’ control the property and labour. Evidence shows that, though the district is endowed with natural resources there have been no efforts to utilise the resources effectively. This district could not become active participant in the famous Telangana Armed Struggle because high mobility of the distressed migrants from the district. Later in the post-accession of Hyderabad state in to Indian union, the *Doras* have joined politics without developing any alternative political culture in the district. Mahabubnagar district has a long history of distressed out-migration. 9

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6 In the present Mahabubnagar district total sixteen Samsthanams were there among them Palavancha, Gopal pet, Gurugunta, Kollapur and Anagundi were very important.
7 District Study Report (2002), *op.cit*.,
4.2.1. History of Agrarian Distress in a Feudatory of the District

As we discussed, Mahabubnagar district was under number of feudatories (Samsthanams). At the apex of the feudal administrative structure was the Nizam of Hyderabad princely state. All these feudatories were subordinated to the Nizam of Hyderabad. Thus, the people of various feudatories were under the “daboul feudal oppression”, at the local feudatory rulers and the Nizam. People in these feudatories, especially the peasantry were made to bear the burden of daboul taxation, even some times taxes which are not imposed by the Nizam’s or taxes which are not operational in the Khalsa areas of the state. Peasant history of the district reveals us that time-to-time peasants in these feudatories had opposed these kinds of coercive taxation systems, one such peasant’s unrest was recorded the in Gadwala Samsthanam of the district. The peasants protested in the area by refusing to pay the coercive taxes imposed by the Samsthanams ruler. At the request of the peasants, the two member fact-finding committee10 of Andhramahasabha11 investigated the coercive agriculture taxation in 1941 A.D. The land tenure system of the Nizam was divided into three categories: the Khalsa or Diwani, Jagirdari system and Sarf-e-Khas system.12 The Gadwala feudatory was part of the Khalsa system. Ruler of Gadwala was Prabhvinin Sri. Adi Laxmamma, the feudatory consisted of 120 villages and 97 peripheral villages. The rules were imposing heavy taxes in the name of viralaalu (paying tribute or donations) which were not collected by the Nizam (benevolently abolished taxes). In Gadwala, these taxes were collected forcefully irrespective of the situation of the peasantry. Some farmers who defied the payment of the taxes were taken custody and legal proceedings were initiated and later on punished them. The farmers of Aija village sent a telegram to Andhra Mahasabha by requesting to study their condition and make required recommendations to the rules of the feudatory.

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10 Member of the committee were, Baddam Ella Reddy and Vattikota Alwaru Swamy
11 It was a frontal organization of Communist Party of India which was banned in the state during 1940-42 and it was dominated by both radicals and liberals in its ranks.
12 The Khalsa or Diwani system in which 60 percent of the total area was under Government Revenue System, jagirdari system in which 30 percent of the total area was given to the loyalists of the Nizam who provided him military support and other services, and Sarf-e-Khas system in which 10 percent of the total area was under the direct control of the Nizam and his family and revenue directed to palace maintenance and administrative expenses.
The committee toured the area and found that the peasants were made to pay too many coercive taxes in the name of paying donations to the ruler. In this feudatory apart from the Viraalaalu (donation) taxes were some other taxes which were not part of Khalsa areas were coercively collected. The additional taxes were collected in the name of performing Puja (offering prayer to god) and making donations. The regime of Nizam had already prohibited taxes in the name of donations by 1928 through a government ordinance. Instead of following the ordinance, the rulers in Gadwal continued these coercive taxes. There were other types of taxes imposed in the Khalsa areas of the Nizam state, seeing the pathetic conditions of the farmers the Nizam government either exempted the peasants from the tax payment or abolished them completely. The Nizam government exempted the poor from the payment of Nuzul tax on houses, but the Gadwal rulers continued to collect them from the all sections of the society. Another, tax Seenubancharai, which was collected from the farmers was operational prior to 1931, the Nizam abolished these taxes in both Khalsa and non-Khalsa areas. Nevertheless, here in the feudatory farmers were forced to pay this tax. Aayagalla tax\textsuperscript{13} was stopped in many areas but here continued to be collected. There was a tax imposed in the name of “elephant fodder”, to feed the elephant herd of the feudatory. Now there were no elephants left to feed, but tax imposition continued unabated. The committee observed that these taxes were forcefully collected:

\textit{These coercive taxes are being collected very forcefully. It is learnt that, for a long time there has been a struggle between the people and the Samsthanam regarding these taxes. The People and the peasants of this area have made several urges to the Nizam government. The people who are active in urging the Nizam government were arrested, they were made to walk in the streets, legal proceedings were initiated and they were punished. Moreover, they were pressurised and made to face many difficulties, not only that, whenever someone is defying the orders of the feudal rulers, they were facing many hardships. Some respected elders and important persons disrespected through

\textsuperscript{13} Tax on food grains
public scolding. In this situation, one could expect the helpless situation of common people.\textsuperscript{14}

The feudatory had a small and coercive 100 member’s police force. They accompany the tax collectors and harass the people in the area. The irrational toll tax was very high and even animals were not exempted from the payment. Malgujari was collected in some villages as part of the Kaldaaru Sikka. Nazarana tax was also being collected even in the area in where patta (land title deed) had been issued. The committee observes that, the Samsthanam had been collecting taxes 11 lakh per annum, out of which one lakh 32 thousand spent as the salaries of the employees, but no money had been used for welfare of the people. In conclusion, the committees observed that the ‘condition of farmers in this sansthanam is precarious; they are facing so many hardships and leading an indefinable pathetic life. They are in a distress and difficult condition’.\textsuperscript{15} The committee recommends for immediate distress ameliorative actions from the rulers. However, the recommendation goes unheard. Thus, the district has a history of protest against unjust policies of the state. Now the agrarian distress in the post-independent India and in the district appears in a different socio-economic and political context.

4.3. Trends in Agricultural Development of Mahabubnagar District

In 1991, Indian policy maker’s focus was on liberalisation of financial sector and opening up of the economy. Agriculture liberalisation, figured in the year 1994 when India signed the Dunkel Draft under GATT multilateral agreement. After that, agriculture trade was formally liberalised under the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA). Peasant suicides in the country suicides were an outcome of agrarian distress, it was due to the above mentioned policy changes which favoured corporate welfare over farmers’ welfare. This policy shift replaced form-saved seeds with corporate seeds, which requires fertilisers and pesticides and could not be saved. There was an increased risk of crop failures because diverse-culture is replaced with monoculture.


\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p.51
Aften untested and unsuitable seeds were sold in the market by MNCs. There was also ruining situation of viability of small farming replacing generousity of earth with global corporate profit motivations. Also there are rising input prices and decreasing output prices, rooted in the trade liberalisation and corporate globalisation. Drought was a partial explanation for indebtedness and crop failure. Deregulation of the input sector the entry of seed MNCs and the creation of seed monopolies have increased the cost of inputs and risk of crop failure. Thus, agriculture as a profession regresses becoming unrewarding. National Agriculture Policy of Ministry Of Agriculture, Government of India, observes that:

\[\text{Agriculture has become a relatively unrewarding profession due to generally unfavourable price regime and low value addition, causing abandoning of farming and increasing migration from rural areas.}^{17}\]

This kind of situation has further accentuated the agrarian situation of backward regions like Telangana and districts like Mahabubnagar.

4.3.1. Composition of Working Population in Mahabubnagar District

In Mahabubnagar district, for the majority of people, agriculture is the main source of livelihood. The agriculture has been in the crisis due to lack of irrigation facilities in the district. In the agrarian economy, the poorest and the most vulnerable are made to bear all the risk of a transition from the subsistence farming to market-oriented farming. This has been happening on the most onerous and unfair terms like tenancy, which are fixed unilaterally in sullen market situations, owing not only to the scarcity of value of land but also to the utter shortage of off-farm employment opportunities. Another side, this changing situation is making migration to the cities in search of livelihood a very “risky, demeaning and tormenting experience.” In the present context of liberalisation and the distress has aggravated the crisis in the sector. Both structural constraints of agriculture and liberalisation policies have been affecting the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{17} K.C. Suri, (2006) “Political Economy of Agrarian Distress, Economic and Political Weekly, April 22, P.152} \]
livelihood options of the people. There is a phenomenal change in the composition of working population in Mahabubnagar district during the same period.

Table 4.1: Percentage of Total Workers, Main Workers, Marginal Workers, and Non-Workers to the Total Population of Mahabubnagar District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total Workers</th>
<th>Main Workers</th>
<th>Marginal Workers</th>
<th>Non-Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: District Census Hand Book Mahabubnagar District, 2001

The working population during census years of 1991 and 2001 shows that, the total workers to total population have increased from 50.2 per cent to 51.8 per cent (see the table-4.1). At the same time, main workers have decreased from 48.4 per cent to 42.2 per cent. There is no change in marginal workers’ percentage but non-workers have increased from 49.8 per cent to 48.2 per cent. Even the data analysis by Uttam kumar Deb and etal, also reveals the same thing. The working population in rural areas of the district accounts for 53 percent of the rural population. Of these 51 per cent have obtained work for a major part of the year (more than 183 days), while the remaining (two per cent) worked only for less than half the year. In 1991, out of the total 1.05 million main workers there were 0.419 million cultivators and 0.387 million agricultural labour reported, indicating very high reliance on agriculture for livelihoods. The growth rate of the agriculture labour population in the 1981-91 decade was about 56 per cent (population growth rate during the same period was only about 25 per cent), indicating an increasing trend of labour dependency within the rural population. During drought years, a third of the Rabi cultivated area is rendered uncultivable and the impact on the labour population is differentially higher.
than that on cultivators.\textsuperscript{19} The district census handbook, 2001 reports that, Mahabubnagar ranks first place in the percentage of workers engaged in agriculture and allied activities.

\textbf{4.3.2. Recurring Drought Conditions}

Recurring drought has been the main reasons for poor agriculture development of the district. Mahabubnagar is one of the drought prone districts among 12 drought-prone districts of Andhra Pradesh situated in the Southern part of Telangana area and in the Western part of Andhra Pradesh. Basing on the geological status it is receiving third lowest rainfall in the entire country after Jaisalmer (Rajasthan), and Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh). Census records show that the average annual rainfall in the district is 942.6 mm.\textsuperscript{20} but statistical abstract shows a more depressing picture of the rainfall in the district (see the table-4.2).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
Mahabubnagar & 668 & 688 & 536 & 621 & 413 & 585.2 \\
Andhrapradesh & 971 & 874 & 613 & 936 & 704 & 819.6 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Average Rainfall of Mahabubnagar District with the State Average (in mm)}
\end{table}

\textit{Source: Statistical Abstracts, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Various Years}

The state average rainfall between 2000-01 and 2004-05 was recorded at 819.6 mm. At the same time, average rainfall in the district was only 585.2 mm, a difference of -234.4 mm against the state average 819.6 mm. It is a fact that the drought-prone regions are highly prone to poverty with a low level of development. The farmers and agrarian labourers in these dry regions who are dependent on monsoon cultivation in unfavourable weather conditions could be forced into disguised unemployment, which might ultimately lead to ‘no work’ ‘no food’ situation. Drought not only affects the

\textsuperscript{20} Census of India (1991) Series-2, Part-xii- A&B, District Census Hand Book, Mahabubnagar

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life of human beings but also the livestock, which is crucial for agriculture development. Drought affects the livelihoods of most households in various ways in the district. The recurrent drought conditions resulted in loss of crops, reduction of acreage under crops, reduction of incomes, severe shortage of fodder, distressed sale of livestock, reduction of employment opportunities and increase in distress migration and the continuous drought has increased their vulnerability in terms of basic household consumption expenditure, availability of credit, food security and maintenance of livestock. It has been observed that most households are compelled to adopt various coping strategies to tide over the drought crisis. Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Programme observes that:

The various traditional coping mechanisms, like patron-client relation/attached labour, more subsistence and food crops, land-based CPRs, credit from moneylenders, were found to be inadequate in mitigating the ill effects of drought as agriculture and agriculture-related diversification as also non-farm diversification was limited in these villages. In addition, the short-term nature of the government interventions did not really help people in coping with the severe drought. Migration, therefore, became an important livelihood diversification and coping strategy. In fact, migration and remittances through migration overshadowed all other coping strategies for most households in the village study. Severe drought dries up livelihood opportunities.

Since the 1990s, drought has become a recurring phenomenon in the district. In a region where the majority of the cultivators depend on the Kharif season crop for food sustenance, it makes cultivation an unrewarding enterprise. It is not uncommon to see even households with a ten-acre operating farmland migrate for labour opportunities. Supplementary irrigation is highly dependent on groundwater sources and extraction from aquifers (mostly hard rock) impact nearby shallow wells and other borewells, which are used for drinking water. During the Southwest monsoon of 1999, 30 out of 21

the 59 Mandals had a rainfall deficit of more than 25 percent, while 58 Mandals had a deficit of more than 25 percent during the northeast monsoon period. This meant substantial crop losses during *Kharif* and *Rabi* seasons in the district.\(^{22}\) In their study in two villages\(^{23}\) of Mahabubnagar district Deb and etal, observe that the drought in these villages and non-availability of irrigation system have led to widespread crop failures. In that situation of non-availability of work, households sought alternative income within the village but demand for agricultural labour had also declined because many large landowners had left a large proportion of their land fallow.\(^{24}\) It can be argued that perennial drought in Southern Telangana districts especially in Mahabubnagar is an artificial drought. It is the result of the discrimination meted out in water sharing.

### 4.3.3. Stagnant Irrigation Development

Mahabubnagar district has the highest cultivable land in the state, despite that the district receives very least attention in irrigation policy priorities. The district comes under semi-arid zones of the country and receives low average rainfall. A recurring drought condition limits employment opportunities of the people, sometimes it breaks down to ‘no work-no food’ situation. The positive aspect of the district is that it is a well endowed with natural resources; especially water, rivers and their tributaries drain the district. South Indian big rivers like Krishna traverse more than 300 kms in the district. Then why is it that the district is in semi-arid condition? There comes the states slanted attitude toward the district. Successive Andhra Pradesh governments neglected irrigation projects in the district. They have abnegated its legitimate water sharing from different sources. Always powerful, the caste-class regional nexus of coastal Andhra favoured irrigation facilities to the down-streamed coastal region at the cost of Mahabubnagar district and Telangana region. Due to the state reorganisation or merger of Telangana with Andhra, Mahabubnagar lost severely on the irrigation front. By then under construction projects like Upper Krishna right canal, Tungabhadra left canal, Bhima Project by the Nizam’s government were

\(^{22}\)District Study Report (2002), *op.cit.*,  
\(^{23}\)Aurepalle and Dokur of Mahabubnagar district  
\(^{24}\)Uttam Kumar Deb *et al* (2002), *op.cit.*
abandoned or not persuaded by the coastal Andhra dominated A.P government. Thus, the district lost total 170-tmc ft. of Krishna water.\textsuperscript{25}

Stagnation in development of canal irrigation has limited the development potentiality of agriculture in the district. According to the census report of 1981, Mahabubnagar district had 66.85 per cent cultivable area to total area, highest in the state. Out of it, only 12.38 per cent was irrigated or water was available for cultivation.\textsuperscript{26} Panchayat Raj Mahabubnagar district report reveals that 43 per cent of the area in the district was utilised for agriculture Net Area Sown (NSA). However, it is to be noted that 24 per cent of the cultivable land was fallowed during the year 1998-99. About 22 per cent of the NAS is irrigated by one or multiple sources and irrigation intensity is 127 per cent. It shows that the very small portion of cultivable land was provided with assured irrigation. Although average rainfall in the district is around 750 mm per annum, the district supports a considerable amount of rice cultivation with the help of irrigation from numerous runoff collection reservoirs, tanks and wells. Tank building was one of the important activities of kings and rulers for centuries in the uplands and semi-arid granitic areas, mainly to assure water for rice cultivation.\textsuperscript{27}

The irrigation situation witnessed no change during the next decade. The census report of 1991 reflects that the same thing, 66.25 per cent cultivable area was available in the district. Due to non-improvement of irrigation facilities, irrigated area remained at 13.83 per cent to the total cultivable area. The decadal irrigation growth registered only 1.45 per cent. The census report reflects the pathetic condition of irrigation in the district, “above 66 per cent of the total area of district is cultivable nearly 1/5\textsuperscript{th} of which is irrigated, there is no significant change in the irrigation position during the last ten years.”\textsuperscript{28} That is why the main sources of irrigation remain tube wells, filter-points and other wells which together account for 76 per cent of the Net Irrigated Area in the district. In 1991, out of the total 1.05 million main workers

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{26} Census of India, (1981), \textit{op.cit.},
\bibitem{27} Uttam Kumar Deb \textit{et al} (2002), \textit{op.cit.},
\bibitem{28} District Census Hand Book (1991), \textit{op.cit.}, p.27
\end{thebibliography}
(53 per cent of the rural population) there were 0.42 million cultivators and 0.38 million agricultural labour reported, indicating very high reliance on agriculture for livelihoods. However, with the potential for agricultural development being limited as indicated above, the wage employment component accounts for the major part of the livelihood options of the rural population. Chronically drought-prone, the district has huge tracts of unirrigated land with only a single sowing season. The percentage of irrigated area to the total cropped area in the district is 23.8 per cent, while the corresponding figure for the entire state is 42.5 per cent.

4.3.4. Neglected Irrigation Projects

In a sense, the story of irrigation in Mahabubnagar district is the repetition of the Telangana story that has been discussed in the previous chapter. The district lost its excellent opportunity of getting assured irrigation facilities due to merger of Telangana with Andhra to form Andhra Pradesh state. The rivers Krishna, Tungabhadra, Pedda Vagu, Chinna Vagu and Dindi drain the district along with a few perennial tanks. The District Poverty Initiatives Project observes that ‘the irrigation facilities and water resources are very less making the district the poorest one among other districts.’ The blame has to be put on discrimination that has been meted out against Telangana and the district by the government, which was dominated by the Andhra ruling elites. The state maintained disparities in irrigation purposefully across the regional lines. While discussing disparities in irrigation sector in the state, Simhadri argued that, the successive governments have shown half-hearted concern towards Mahabubnagar district. He further elaborates by giving two instances; first instance is Rajolibanda Diversion scheme (RDS) in the district. “It was contemplated with 15-tmc ft. of water to irrigate 87.000 acres in severely drought prone Mahabubnagar district of Telangana region was reduced to 6.51-tmc ft. with irrigable area of 50.000 acres. The second instance is much-awaited Jurala project (Priya Darshini Jurala Project), was proposed with 28.2-tmc ft and it was reduced to 17.84 tmc .ft. The project was to irrigate 1.02 lakhs acres but ended with giving water just to

\[\text{District Study Report (2002), op.cit.},\]
\[\text{Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Programme [APRLP], op.cit.},\]
20,000 acre in the district.\textsuperscript{32} While exposing the state’s role in irrigation front, Simhadri asserts, “Spatially, it has shown scanty attention to drought and backwardness. Historically, it manipulated the planning, budgetary and execution of irrigation projects to the advantage of Coastal Andhra.”\textsuperscript{33}

The erstwhile Nizam of Hyderabad encouraged the construction of minor irrigation storages to provide water to arid lands of the princely state. At the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century there were 21,000 small tanks providing irrigation facilities to 8,80,000 acres in the state of Hyderabad. Ali Nizam Jung, an engineer of Nizam prepared a comprehensive water resource development plans in the major river basins of Godavari and Krishna.\textsuperscript{34} Mahabubnagar comes under Krishna basin area and the Nizam government planned four major irrigation schemes for the district. These were Rjolibanda project on Tungabhadra River, Bheema project on Bheema River (the tributary of Tungabhadra), the remaining two projects were, the extension of Tungabhadra left canal and the upper Krishna (present Almatti Dam in Karnataka) left canal extension. Among them, today only one project survives i.e. Rajoli Banda’. In the post Andhra Pradesh formation Tungabhadra and upper Krishna left canal extension and delay in Bheema project construction has deprived Mahabubnagar district a total of 174.9 tmc ft. water. Had those contemplated projects been accomplished, the 17-lakh acres of land in the district would have been easily irrigated. Knowing the injustice meted out to the region the State Reorganisation Commission Act (SRC Act, 1955) directed the Andhra Pradesh government to pressurise the Central government for the completion of already sanctioned and under taken Hyderabad state projects.

However, in the unified state the fate of these projects went otherwise towards marginalization. The joint Krishna left canal ventured project of Mysore and Hyderabad states near Hospeta started in 1948. The left canal envisaged irrigation in Raichur and Mahabubnagar district of Hyderabad state. By 1956, the dam and most of

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ibid., p.72
  \item S Prabhakar (1997) ‘Telangana: Irrigation Disparities in Andhra Pradesh’ in Simhadri and Rao (Eds), op.cit., p.79
\end{itemize}
the canal work was complete, except last leg of canal benefiting to Mahabubnagar district, which was envisaged water utilisation of 19.20-tmc ft. This deprived the district of its legitimate share. Later on in 1969, Bachavat tribunal was constituted to resolve the water disputes of Krishna river basin areas. Before the tribunal, the Andhra Pradesh government could not advocate effectively the cases of these three projects. Consequently, the tribunal could not heed the case of Mahabubnagar projects. The tribunal in its final verdict said that, due to some technical reasons these projects could not be constructed. As a consolation, it proposed for construction of a dam, i.e. Jurala project with 28.2 tmc ft storage capacity. However, it was reduced to 17.84 tmc ft. The project was to irrigate 1.02 lakhs acres but ended with giving water just to 20.000 acre in the district.\(^{35}\) The tribunal even proposed that in case the jurala project could not be materializes those 17.84 tmc water could be utilised in other place of Telangana. Through Jurala and Rajolibanda, total 33.74 tmc ft. water was allowed to be utilised for Mahabubnagar district. Now the Jurala has been completed but water never has been completely stored. The cause behind this is that the submerged villages of Karnataka have to be compensated just 72 crore rupees. Rajolibanda Diversion Scheme (RDS) was contemplated with 15-tmc ft. of water to irrigate 87.000 acres in severely drought-prone district; it was reduced to 6.51 tmc ft. with irrigable area of 50.000 acres. It was a joint venture of both the Madras and Hyderabad states. It was proposed to facilitate irrigation to the Mahabubnagar district equivalent to K.C (Kurnool Cudappah) Canal capacity. At that time, KC canal used to provide irrigation water to 1-lakhs acres. The project was completed in 1958. Due to state reorganisation, the headwork of and part of the canal went to Karnataka. Subsequently, the government never advocated the case of RDS before the Bachavat tribunal. Now the KC canal has been allocated 39.90-tmc ft. and to RDS only 17.10 tmc ft. water; it means that it is less than half of what the KC canal is getting. Even this 17.10 tmc ft. water is not properly diverted to the district due to certain assumed reasons. It gets hardly 5-6 tmcfs. It is a violation of Bachavat tribunal order. As a result, under KC, canal 3-31/2 lakhs acre area been irrigated but under RDS, only 30-40 thousand acre area been irrigated. More over discriminatory governments never

\(^{35}\) Simhadri (1997), op.cit., p. 71
paid any attention to modernise the RDS.\textsuperscript{36} As a result, district agriculture sector has been showing contradictory features. One side canal irrigation remained standstill and another side expensive tube well irrigation becoming the primary source for irrigation aftermath of commercial drive in the district. During 1950s, tank irrigation was the major source now due to negligence of tank irrigation it has become an insignificant source. It further accentuates already existing regional disparities in the irrigation sector. Simhadri concludes that, “irrigation politics in A.P exposed the state’s true colour of caste, class, regional bias and mechanism to promote their interest.”\textsuperscript{37}

### Table-4.3: River lifts being planned Across the Krishna River

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Designed Pumping Head (m)</th>
<th>Pumping Quantity TMC</th>
<th>Days of Pumping</th>
<th>Rated Power Demand MW</th>
<th>Area Irrigated Lakh Acres</th>
<th>Coast of Irrigation Rs/Acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kalwakurthy</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bheema-I</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bheema-II</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nettempad</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Koilsagar</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AMRP Single Stage</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>AMRP Low Level</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>2184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Srikrishna committee makes an unwarranted observation regarding lift irrigation projects being planned for the Telangana across the Krishna River. These projects are pending for decades which are supposed to be benefiting the drought areas of Telangana, especially, Mahabubnagar and Nalgonda districts. Out of above listed schemes Kalwakurthy, Bheema-I, Bheema-II, Nettempadu, Koilsagar are to be benefitting Mahabubnagar district. From the Kalwakurthy high lift, approximately, as per the data given, 30-tmc ft. (849.5x106 m\(^3\)) of water is to be lifted in 90 days. The average flow over this period comes to 109.25 m\(^3\)/s. The lift involved is 298 m adding for friction losses assumed as 30m, the gross head would be 328 m. The theoretical


\textsuperscript{37} Simhadri (1997), op.cit., p.77
power requirement will be 351.9 MW, and assuming a reasonable pump efficiency of 0.85, the actual average energy requirement will be 894195336.5 KWh. At an economic power cost of Rs 6 per KWh, the annual energy cost per year would be Rs. 536.5 crores per year. This annual pumping cost is over 3.75 lakh acres or 151763 hectares. Thus, the annual electricity cost would be Rs. 35352 per hectare. To this, an annual civil maintenance of Rs.1000/hectare, and annual electro-mechanical maintenance of Rs. 4000/ hectare, needs to be added, giving the total annual operation and maintenance cost of Rs. 40,352 per hectare. Besides this, there is the capital construction cost of the civil and electromechanical works and equipment. This, at current prices would be at least Rs. two lakhs per hectare. At 10 per year interest, this cost would be Rs. 20,000 per hectares per year. It further observes, thus, the total annual charges, including the interest on capital, operation, and maintenance would be of the order of Rs. 60,000 per hectare per year. This annualised cost is likely to be higher than the additional benefits from irrigation. Thus, all such schemes require a much scrutiny.38

Alternate to the government proposed and long pending irrigation schemes in Mahabubnagar district, Telangana Engineers Forum (TEF) has formulated lift irrigation scheme for the benefits of the district. It would not only benefit the district but even would allow the district to utilise its legitimate share of water form Krishna River. The scheme is called ‘Palamuru Lift Irrigation Scheme’. The scheme would also benefit Rangareddi and Nalgonda districts along with Mahabubnagar district, which are part of the Krishna basin area in Telangana region. The forum argued that, in Andhra Pradesh, river Krishna has a total 29,441 sq km catchment area, out of which Telangana region has 20,167 sq km i.e. 68.5 per cent. However, due to discriminatory politics of the state Telangana could utilise only 34.73 per cent. The forum feels it is against the natural justice principle, thus the district and the region has all the rights to utilised its legitimate share out of allocated water.39

38 Ibid.
4.3.5. Consequence of Neglected Irrigation

Lack of assured irrigation facility has been the major reasons behind the farmer’s suicides in Telangana region. It entrapped the farmers in the region and district like Mahabubnagar in indebtedness. Revathi’s observation of Warangal district, ‘fifty per cent cases have been reported obtaining loans for improvement of wells and about 20 per cent farmers incurred debts for digging wells in the last there to four years.’\(^{40}\) It is the case with the Mahabubnagar district also. According to a study, “the district uses only five per cent of rain water for irrigation and drinking purposes while the rest flows unutilised in to Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers.”\(^{41}\) In the absence of canal irrigation system, Mahabubnagar farmers are compelled to depend on other sources like digging wells and borewells. It puts additional burden on already destitute people. For example, in Deb etal, study in two villages observed a phenomenal growth in borewell irrigation. At the same time, depleting ground water levels became problematic.\(^{42}\) Several projects are pending for a long time in the district, because of sheer negligence by the government. These projects could have mitigated the drought conditions, but these plans have remained on papers. For instance, Jurala Project, Bhima first and second phases, Netttempadu, Koilsagar, Peddamarur and Kalwakurthy lift irrigation schemes which were expected to irrigate 4.5 lakhs hectares apart from providing protected drinking water to many habitations. ‘Successive governments have shown little concern or sympathy with the people of Mahabubnagar’.\(^{43}\)

The farmers in the district are forced to irrigate their land through the capital-intensive tube wells, filter points and other wells. These sources accounted 76 percent of the Net Irrigated Area in the district. It indicates that during drought years the irrigated crops are likely to be affected considerably. Thus, the groundwater source emerged as the major component for agriculture in the district. The substantial Rabi season irrigation is more dependent on groundwater sources. There are only two Medium Irrigation Projects - Koilsagar Project and Sarlasagar Project - having an


\(^{42}\) Uttam Kumar Deb *et al* (2002), *op.cit.*, p.97

\(^{43}\) Vishweshwer Rao, (1997), *loc.cit.*,
ayacut of 11,000 and 4,200 acres respectively. This is the ample proof of how the district has been neglected in the canal irrigation front. For instance, during the 1999 Kharif season, the area under Paddy was only 70 percent of preceding years as was the case with groundnut, indicating the lesser availability of water for agriculture. In the district, the poor quality (or undeveloped) land and the non-availability of surface water irrigation have dictated the fortunes of those who contributed to the rural economy.

Table 4.4: Area Irrigated by Different Sources, Mahabubnagar District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Area in Acres. Prop. to total (in percent)</td>
<td>Area in Hect. Prop. to total (in percent)</td>
<td>Area in Hect. Prop. to total (in percent)</td>
<td>Area in Hect. Prop. to total (in percent)</td>
<td>Area in Hect. Prop. to total (in percent)</td>
<td>Area in Hect. Prop. to total (in percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canal</td>
<td>17218(6.79)</td>
<td>13710(18.71)</td>
<td>23730(17.54)</td>
<td>15903(26.57)</td>
<td>14078(10.63)</td>
<td>28964(13.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank</td>
<td>181746(71.68)</td>
<td>40360(55.10)</td>
<td>62065(45.88)</td>
<td>844(1.41)</td>
<td>2479(1.87)</td>
<td>3350(1.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube Well</td>
<td>44711(17.63)</td>
<td>18525(25.29)</td>
<td>44455(32.86)</td>
<td>41949(70.10)</td>
<td>15872(11.99)</td>
<td>12645(5.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Well</td>
<td>9872(3.89)</td>
<td>649(0.88)</td>
<td>4872(3.60)</td>
<td>572(0.95)</td>
<td>3715(2.80)</td>
<td>7571(3.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Sources</td>
<td>9872(3.89)</td>
<td>649(0.88)</td>
<td>4872(3.60)</td>
<td>572(0.95)</td>
<td>3715(2.80)</td>
<td>7571(3.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>253547(100)</td>
<td>73244(100)</td>
<td>135252(100)</td>
<td>59838(100)</td>
<td>132350(100)</td>
<td>211998(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Irrigated More Than Once</td>
<td>42696(16.84)</td>
<td>32167(43.91)</td>
<td>49350(36.48)</td>
<td>15571(26.02)</td>
<td>38660(29.21)</td>
<td>59718(28.17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Note: 1956-57 figures in acres

Canal irrigation is less expensive for the farmers because investment is done by the state and it is good for the sustainable agriculture development. That is why a few decades ago Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru called the heavy irrigation dams as the ‘temples of modern India’. The areas, which have been irrigated through canals, have prospered economically. For instance, economic prosperity of capitalist farmers of the coastal Andhra region has its historic roots in the construction of major
irrigation projects by colonial and the post-colonial state.\textsuperscript{44} It became launching pad to this class of farmers to become an enterprising class. This opportunity was denied to Telangana, more so to Mahabubnagar district. The above table shows that the canal irrigation in Mahabubnagar district had a downward trend or remained unchanged between 1957-58 and 2008-09 from 7.99 per cent to 13.66 per cent. The tank irrigation in the district during 1957-58 was 68.65 per cent and it was reduced to 1.58 per cent during 2008-09. It was due to lackadaisical attitude of the successive governments and negligence budgetary allocation for minor irrigation in the state. The most expensive and capital-intensive irrigation option is tube well irrigation. There is a phenomenal growth in this irrigation front in the district. From the Andhra Pradesh formation to until 1979-80 the tube well irrigation was minimal to negligible level of 0.96 per cent and it turned out to be major sources of irrigation in the drought-prone district. During 2008-09, the tube well became source for 75.22 per cent irrigated land in the district. The indiscriminate digging of tube wells have been causing depletion of ground water level and source of major debt problem and consequential suicides in the district.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Year} & \textbf{1979-80} & \textbf{1986-87} & \textbf{2003-04} \\
\hline
\textbf{Net Area Sown} & 868939 & 925807 & 887553 \\
\hline
\textbf{Net Area Irrigated} & 130994 & 128487 & 144458 \\
\hline
\textbf{Net Area irrigated proportion to Net Area sown (in per cent)} & 15.07 & 13.87 & 16.27 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Net Irrigated Area Proportion to Net Area Sown In Mahabubnagar District}
\end{table}

\textit{Source: Statistical abstracts Government of A.P, Various Year}

In Mahabubnagar district net area, irrigated proportion to net area sown registered a marginal growth between 1979-80 and 2003-04 at 15.07 per cent and 16.27 per cent. The irrigation situation in the state has become grim, for example, the area irrigated by canal has come down from 50.13 per cent in 1979-80 to 31.28 per cent in 2003-04. It is the direct reflection of government’s policy of withdrawing from

the irrigation sector, there is a declining investment in irrigation sector. The institutional structure such as Andhrapradesh Irrigation Development Corporation (AIDC), which was envisaged to help farmers’ in irrigation front, was closed down. During the same period, governments introduced reforms in water management institution, by formulating the Water Users Associations (WUA) for the improvement in the irrigation sector, in a way to withdraw from the sector. These associations were meant for assigning greater rights for the water users. It in turn, in many places resulted in the monopoly in the hands of dominant caste and class peasantry in rural areas.

4.3.6. Changing Cropping Patterns

Farmers in dry regions like Telangana committed suicides due to indebtedness. It happened because of two developments. First, there was commercialisation of agriculture taking place under the ideology of globalisation, and second, the commercialisation drive that was driven by heavy inputs could not match with the underdeveloped agriculture infrastructure. In the dry region changing-cropping pattern stated to be the prime reason behind the soaring agriculture input prices. Ideology behind this change has happened with the opening-up of Indian economy to the global market. This integration raised the expectation of the farmers of export opportunities at the global prices level. They shifted their crops away from traditional subsistence mixed crops. The government’s move to devalue the rupee made Indian exports cheaper and attractive in the global market. This development raised hopes among the farmers of the country to get price parity with global price. They dared to shifted crop form food to cash crop. On aggregate, the total area of county’s farmland growing traditional grains declined by 18 per cent in the decade after 1990-91, whereas non-food crops of cotton and sugarcane increased by 25 and 10 per cent respectively.45 Most of the suicide cases were reported among the cotton farmers in the country. The lure of big profits from HYV seeds and export opportunities led

many farmers to give up their traditional rice cultivation in favour of cotton, which was fondly called ‘white gold’. At the same time twin, process of rising cultivation cost with shift in crop pattern and declining state support with inputs has been taking place. The cash crops particularly the HYVs are input heavy. To yield the promised growth it requires much higher water, fertilisers and other inputs. With liberalisation of agriculture market both input and output, has resulted in declining state support. This led farmers to relay more on the market for input requirements. The input cost has shot up making cultivation a more costly than before. At the same time, shift towards cash crops required more water, but the aggregate net irrigated area remained stagnant in the country, this is more evident from the backward regions. Consequently, there has been an increase in private investment in exploiting groundwater source, mainly bore-wells. This situation led to over exploitation of ground water.

Farmers in Mahabubnagar district were also exposed to this kind of vulnerable situation. That is why the district witnessed change in both cropping patterns (increasingly towards commercial crops in the context of liberalisation, infrastructure development and government food distribution policies that represents diversification within agriculture), and diversification into non-farm activities. The diverse cropping pattern was abandoned with corporatisation of agriculture; they started producing for the market by using corporatised agriculture inputs. The conventional yield shocks associated with deluge or drought have been added shocks resulting from spurious seeds and adulterated pesticides from private dealers. The private agriculture dealers have emerged as the new all in one agent of agriculture, by advancing informal loans, selling inputs required to the agriculture, has become an advisor to the farmers in the absence of agriculture extension services and buyer of out puts form the farmers. The crop failures associated above said causes are major reasons forcing farmers into spiralling indebtness.
Table 4.6: Area under Food and Non-Food Crops in Mahabubnagar District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Food Crops (Proportion To Total)</th>
<th>Non-Food Crops (Proportion To Total)</th>
<th>Total (In hectares)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956-57*</td>
<td>18,10,168 (71.71%)</td>
<td>7,14,084 (28.29%)</td>
<td>25,24,252 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>7,48,122 (76.59%)</td>
<td>2,28,610 (23.40%)</td>
<td>9,76,732 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-87</td>
<td>4,69,659 (70.33%)</td>
<td>1,98,099 (29.66%)</td>
<td>6,67,758 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>4,96,607 (62.25%)</td>
<td>3,01,060 (37.74%)</td>
<td>7,97,667 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>4,99,941 (61.75%)</td>
<td>3,09,700 (38.25%)</td>
<td>8,09,641 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Abstracts, Government of A.P, Various Years
*Note: 1956-57 area in acres

The shift in cropping pattern from rain fed traditional food crops to non-food cash crops was a common phenomenon observed in the post-liberalization period all over India. ‘This shift has obvious implications for the peasantry. Non-food crops imply a greater dependence on monetised inputs, such as seeds, fertilisers and pesticides also means increased recourse to borrowing.’ Often the source of borrowing is from moneylenders in villages and the fertiliser dealers. The major reason behind the farmer’s suicides in the country is a shift in crop pattern and consequential money borrowing from private sources. It is also burdened by food consumptions in the rural areas. This shift was based on assumption that the freeing agricultural product market would only be beneficial to Indian farmers. The given logic was that this would bring price parity between Indian agriculture products with the prevailing global prices. It raised false hopes among the farmers for cultivating cash crops. Especially, it has shown negative impact on the small and marginal farmers. At the same time, the state has withdrawn from agriculture extension services. Instead of getting global out-put prices, for the farmers getting Minimum Support Price (MSP) has become a problem. This phenomenon also affected the farmers in Mahabubnagar district. There was also a sharp shift in cropping pattern in the district. The hopes were created with the onset of liberalisation policies in the country. The table-4.6 elucidates that, there was declining per cent of area under food

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crops from 71.71 during 1956-57 to 76.59 percent in 1979-80, it further declined to 61.75 per cent during 2008-09. In the same period, non-food crop per cent to the total crop area has had decreased from 28.29 per cent during 1956-57 to 23.40 per cent during 1979-80. It further increased to 38.25 per cent during 2008-09 in the district. Commercialisation not only creates the market risks but also even the risk associated with failure of monsoon, in dry regions like Mahabubnagar district. In the district, when the monsoon fails saving the standing crops determines the survivability of farmers. A farmer Shivanarayana, of Mogiligidda village in Farrukhnagar mandal of the district, spent Rs 1,500 to 2,000 per month for buying the water to save his standing cotton crop during august month of 2008. The farmer had borrowed Rs. 20,000 in April of that year to buy cottonseeds and fertilisers. The two borewells in his and his neighbouring filed have dried up and so have some 21 other borewells in the surrounding areas. The farmer borrowed additional money to buy water from a private borewell to water his crop. Shivanarayana says;

If my family and I have to survive, I have to make sure this crop survives even if it means buying water for the field at exorbitant rates. There is no sign of rain, if this cotton crop fails; we will end up in a debt that we won’t be able to ever repay.47

Traditionally, Indian farmers adopted crop diversification strategies to cope up with risks involved in the sector. Even diversification represents the liberty of farmers as to cultivate the crop, which they think was more profitable. Post-liberalisation represents the abridgement of this freedom with the entry of big corporations into agrarian sector. Those who experienced an erosion of income and assets were subsequently forced into the non-farm sector. There were no opportunities for them in agriculture, except perhaps only the very low-paid regular farm servants. Though diversification is not free of risk in the given agro-climatical nature of the district. The diversification process, coupled with uncertainty over availability of agricultural assets in the future

47 Janyala Srinivas (2009) “We May Have to Forego one Meal Today, But We Have to Buy Water for the Crop”, The Indian Express, Tuesday 18 August
raises important policy questions. Above all, there remains a challenge for the structure in which government policy is made and state interventions are carried out.48

This kind of ‘competitive exposing’ made the situation worst.49 It has resulted in a new crisis in the agriculture sector as well as in rural economy of the district. With the onset of commercial agriculture in this dry region, the farmers in the district resorted to rice cultivation as subsistence crop even when yields are unstable ranging from two to twenty-one quintal/acre according to the system of irrigation and its viability. Alary found out that, only farmers possessing a sufficiently deep well along with a five HP pump set attain yield above 10 quintal/acre.50 However, most of the time irregular power supply becomes major hindrance even when there is sufficient water available in the bore-well. In the study it was found that installation of well and pump constitutes important investments, hardly accessible to the majority farmers. According his estimation, a minimum of Rs. 22,000 to 30,000 was needed to cover the cost of digging bore-well and pump set purchase. It also includes risk factor of not finding water.51 Thus, in Mahabubnagar district commercialisation with underdeveloped various agricultural input and output institutions driving farmers in debt-trap and death trap.

4.4. Farmers’ Suicides in Mahabubnagar District: The Case Studies

4.4.1. Debates on Farmers’ Suicides

There are several debates on farmers’ suicides in India developed by several scholars; these debates reflect the ideological perspective of the scholar. However, ‘studies on suicides failed to look at the phenomenon form an inter-disciplinary perspective’.52 Durkhemian model has been used several scholars to understand the suicide phenomenon, especially the effect of the process ‘individualisation’ of traditionally

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48 Uttam Kumar Deb et al, (2002) *op.cit.,*
49 Ibid.,
52 R.S Deshpande and Saroj Arora (2010 eds) “Agrarian Crisis and Farmer Suicides”, New Delhi, Sage Publications, p.4
communitarian Indian village communities in the aftermath of economic liberalisation. This individualisation is a process of socio-economic estrangement from agrarian communities experienced by the rural producers in the recent past. There has been a rapid spread and experience of ‘anomic’ situation in the Indian society.\textsuperscript{53} Another debate tries to locate the reasons of farmers’ suicides in multiple issues. This approach is employed by the state; the state tries to locate suicides in such multiple causes like incessant floods, manipulation of prices by traders, supply of spurious seeds, increasing input prices and declining output prices, increasing loan burden, crop failure, psychological stress, successive drought conditions and neglect by the previous government etc.

Another debate on the crisis attempted to understand it as “ecocide” and as a multiple crisis that was ecological, social and economic. Not all these problems are exclusive but interrelated. This perspective is socio-anthropological in nature, the ecocide theory argues that the farmers’ suicides have been the result of intense use of modern marketised inputs like hybrid seeds, chemicals, pesticides that have consequently lead to a chain a debts consequent to which farmers have ended their lives.\textsuperscript{54} Beside the ecocide theory, there are second set of scholars who tried to understand suicides from four important factors: technological, ecological, and socio-cultural and policy factors.\textsuperscript{55} The third set of scholars tried to understand this phenomenon form the economic reforms and its impact on agriculture related policy and their implications to agricultural and subsequent socio-economic, political fallouts.\textsuperscript{56} The fourth sets of scholars are particularly concerned about any one of these issues. One such issue is that of state policy which have bearings on suicide phenomenon: policy related to agriculture sector, import and export of agriculture commodities, policy related to agriculture finance, irrigation etc. one more debate tried to locate the problem with the negative growth of agriculture in recent past, that

\textsuperscript{53}Mohanty, \textit{op. Cit.}, p.793
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid.}, p.792
\textsuperscript{56} See for instance E. Revathi (2007) Agrarian distress in Andhra Pradesh: Social, Political and Economic Outcomes (http://www.dehelling.net/artikel/380/)
includes multiple factors in the larger globalisation context.\textsuperscript{57}

The fifth debate corollary to the previously mentioned debates is located in “aping the World Bank model of agriculture or what is called McKinsey model of development” which created the condition of capitalist agriculture model translated the sector into agriculture development. This model of development not only created an ecological catastrophe but also destroyed millions of rural livelihoods.\textsuperscript{58} The sixth debate goes beyond the phenomenon of globalisation and treats the problems in other wider changes that had taken place in the rural areas like social structure of the farming communities during the last four to five decades.\textsuperscript{59} This approach tries to combine both sociological and political economy approach. Some debates go beyond the political economy approach and focuses on complex factors such as biological, genetic, psychological, socio-cultural, financial and environmental. Some of the government reports also attribute such causes for farmers’ suicides. One factor runs throughout various studies is the issue of increasing indebtedness of farmers in the country.

In Galab and Revathi’s opinion, the various studies on agrarian crisis and farmers suicides have analysed causes at the four levels, first, international policies (trade liberalisation policies), second, skewed state (internal) policies (fiscal policy, research and extension). third, structural changes in agriculture the emergence of chronically disempowered small and marginal farmers (changes in land ownership, decreased net sown area, increased fallow land, changing cropping pattern, changes in source of irrigation etc), fourth, changes at the household level (mergence of nuclear families, increased expenses on education and health, desired to develop socially and economically).\textsuperscript{60} Majority of scholars understood this problem from perspective of globalisation or economic reforms or Marketisation of Indian economy, especially the


agrarian economy (CSD, 2005). The present study combines all abovementioned approaches, but the impact of globalisation on agriculture sector dominates over other.

Causes of suicide in the Mahabubnagar district are, located in the prevailing agro-climatic, historical, and structural reasons, and the political economy of the district. The structural location of the district in the backward Telangana region makes it vulnerable to the discrimination and domination. Often the state would attribute for such agrarian crisis to the natural causes like drought situation. However, the main cause of accentuating this situation is deprivation of legitimate irrigation water of the district. Moreover, as discussed in the earlier the post-liberalisation period unfavourable changes in agrarian policies affecting the disgorging agriculture sector in negative terms. In the wake of state’s receding economic sovereignty, the situation of backward district like Mahabubnagar has become more vulnerable. It has its grotesque manifestation in the form of farmers’ suicides in various parts of the state and alarmingly in this district.

4.4.2. Farmers’ Suicides: The Case Studies

So far, nearly 400 officially recognised farmers’ suicides have taken place in Mahabubnagar district since 1998. During the period of May and July 2004, around 27 farmer suicides were reported in the district. Out of these total cases, ten cases have been chosen for a deep ethnographic study for the present study. Suicide is a sensitive social issue, thus the investigation has to be very guarded, careful and without hurting the sentiments of the victim’s family. In Deshpande’s argument, “suicides is a strictly personal and confidential act of individual, and the reasons as well as circumstances in many cases have to be inferred from the secondary material available”

Officially, the state government started recognising farmers’ suicide since 1998. The official record puts up the total number of farmers’ suicides in the districts at 371 from 1998 to October 2010. These are the cases, which have been recognised

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61 Assadi, *op. cit.*, p.792
62 Deshpande, *op.cit.*, p. 2603
as genuine suicide cases, the actual number of farmers who ended their lives in the district between 1998 and 15\textsuperscript{th} February 2010 are 857.\textsuperscript{63} That means, only 43.29 per cent case were recognised officially. There is many more suicide cases dismissed by the authorities as the genuine farm suicide cases and denied the official rehabilitation packages. This shows that the state has been under playing the intensity of the agrarian crisis. The civil societal organisation the \textit{Palamuru Adhyayana Vedika} (Palamuru Study Forum) puts the total number of farmers’ suicides in the district between July 1998 and August 2009 at 832.\textsuperscript{64}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Table-4.7: Year wise Breakup of Farmer Suicides in Mahabubnagar District}
\end{center}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Number of Cases & In Percentage \\
\hline
1988 & 4 & 1.04 \\
1999 & 15 & 4.04 \\
2000 & 20 & 5.39 \\
2001 & 9 & 2.42 \\
2002 & 22 & 5.92 \\
2003 & 17 & 5.58 \\
2004 & 117 & 31.53 \\
2005 & 56 & 15.09 \\
2006 & 35 & 9.43 \\
2007 & 31 & 8.35 \\
2008 & 27 & 7.27 \\
2009 & 16 & 4.31 \\
2010 & 2 & 0.53 \\
Total & 371 & 100 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textit{Source: District, Revenue Department, Mahabubnagar District, Collected by the Author}

\textit{Note: Suicides Cases Registered Up to 13-10-2010}

Farmers’ suicides in the district were reported in vernacular dailies from the beginning of 1990s. However, they got official recognition from 1998 onwards. Since it was started reported officially, the year 2004 witnessed the highest 117 farmers’ suicides in the district. Prior to this, the district faced a severe drought conditions, during the same period, the economic reforms policies started affecting the farmers in adverse terms. General elections of that year saw a heightening articulation about the

\textsuperscript{63} Govt of Andhra Pradesh, Revenue Dept (FWC Cell), Collected by the Author.

\textsuperscript{64} Gontettina Palamuru: Karavu Vyatireka PorataKamiti Udyama Kara Patralu-1995-2005, \emph{op.cit.}, pp.277-336
plight of the farmers by the Congress party. In its election manifesto it mentioned about prioritising the sector if it was voted to power. The voters defeated the reforms zealot Telugu Desam regime in the general elections in that year. According to the promise made in the election manifesto, the Congress announced a relief package. Announcement of this package could have motivated the distressed farmers who were at the verge of ending their lives, committed suicides en mass to get relief package for the surviving family members. Thus, unfortunately, government rehabilitation package motivated the unfortunate victims.

Table 4.8: Size Distribution of Ownership Holdings of the Victim Farmers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Class</th>
<th>Number of Farmers</th>
<th>In percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>22.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>29.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Medium</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>22.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data not available</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>18.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Revenue Department Records, Collected by the author
Note: Marginal (0.01-1.00 ha), Small (1.01-2.00 ha), Semi-Medium (2.00-4.00 ha) Medium (4.00-10 ha), Large (>10.00 ha)

The patterns of landholding size of suicide victim’s shows that the majority of them are small and marginal farmers who have resorted to commercial crops. In terms of percentage, the marginal farmers are 22.10 per cent and small farmers are 29.11 per cent, if both categories of farmers are combined together, they are around 51.21 per cent. That means more than half of the suicides cases have occurred among the marginal and small farmers. The suicide percentage among the medium and semi-medium farmers is 30.19 per cent. If we see the gender pattern of suicides 98.12 per cent have taken place among the male farmers, because, patriarchal nature of the family, which assigns the land rights to the male head of the family. In some cases,
women have taken the burden of distress. In the district out of 371 suicide cases, seven cases were reported among the female farmers. Their percentages in the total suicides are 1.88 per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Number of Suicides</th>
<th>In Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCs</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STs</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>07.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBCs</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>52.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Castes</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>15.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste not Known</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Revenue Department Records of Mahabubnagar District, Collected by the Author

The landed dominant castes/classes, which were earlier deriving their social power from land and agriculture does not derive now, because of the onset of crisis in the sector. The rural neo-rich class has shifted its power base from the agrarian village economy to the cities essentially in the bourgeois business of education, real estate sectors. Poor from the dominant castes, who continue to rely on villages and agriculture economy, have become victims of the distress. Those families, which have migrated or diversified their occupations from agriculture to non-agriculture, are in a
better position to cop up with the situation. The neo-rich class, which at certain point of time advocated for better policy options for the agriculture sector, have shifted their power base from the rural areas to urban economy, consequently the concerns of agrarian sector is completely getting marginalised. The recent trends that have emerged in agriculture land purchase practices in rural areas is that, either the poor among the dominant castes or backward castes, in some cases even the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are purchasing the land, which is considered as the ‘distress land market practices’. Agriculture was not new to this class of farmers but surely commercial agriculture, which is linked to the global predatory market practices. It is surely increasing the vulnerability of this class of farmers in the background of their inability to negotiate with the predatory market situation. Thus, farmers are becoming primarily the victims of market fundamentalism. If one sees the social background of the suicide victims in the district, it represents the social proportion principle. The highest number of suicides has taken place among the Other Backward Class (OBC) farmers; a total 193 OBC farmers i.e. 52.02 per cent have committed suicides in the district. The second highest suicides were reported among the Other Castes (OCs) or forward caste farmers, a total 57 cases i.e. 15.36 per cent victims were from this section. Among the SCs 45 persons, i.e. 12.12 per cent have committed suicides. Among the STs 28 persons, i.e. 7.54 per cent have become the victims of this unfortunate suicide phenomenon. Social background of rest of the 48 persons i.e. 12.93 per cent cases could not be ascertained. If one goes by their names, it suggests that majority of them are form OBC category.
### Table-4.10: Details of the Surveyed Cases in Mahabubnagar District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Victim</th>
<th>Date of Suicide</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Social Background</th>
<th>Education Status</th>
<th>Land Holding size (in Acres)*</th>
<th>Crops Sown</th>
<th>No. Of Wells/Bore Wells Dug</th>
<th>Debt**</th>
<th>Institutional Source of Irrigation</th>
<th>Non-Institutional Source of Irrigation</th>
<th>Debt**</th>
<th>Family Size (Male+Female)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khetavath Ramulu</td>
<td>16-8-2000</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ST (Lambada)</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42,100</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (1+5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Devi Bai</td>
<td>28-5-2004</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ST (Lambada)</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Rice, Jowar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12,840</td>
<td>37,160</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (3+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Kurmaiah</td>
<td>1-8-2004</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SC (Mala)</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>Rice, Cotton</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No debt</td>
<td>1,05,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (3+2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ramachandra Rajiah</td>
<td>15-10-2007</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SC (Madiga)</td>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No Debt</td>
<td>75,400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (2+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laxmi Devamma</td>
<td>6-2-2008</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>OC (Reddy)</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>22.30</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No Debt</td>
<td>3,00000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (2+2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Narasimha Reddy</td>
<td>6-5-2005</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>OC (Reddy)</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>Ground nut, Rice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14,430</td>
<td>5 (3+2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangi Gopal Reddy</td>
<td>7-1-2005</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>OC (Reddy)</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No Debt</td>
<td>76,200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (2+4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nandigama Murali</td>
<td>14-5-2006</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>OBC (Tenugu)</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>16.06</td>
<td>Ground nut, Rice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No Debt</td>
<td>2,00000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 (3+2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Golla Chennamma</td>
<td>18-7-2004</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>OBC (Yadava)</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No Debt</td>
<td>1,86,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7 (2+5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Narasimhulu</td>
<td>31-8-2004</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>OBC (Padmashali)</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32,260</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7 (5+2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Filed Survey
*Revenue Department, Mahabubnagar District,
**The amount indicated above is the amount when the victim committed suicides*
Among the surveyed cases indebtedness happened to be the prime reason of suicides in Mahabubnagar district. Their debt pattern suggests that, they have borrowed loans from both institutional and non-institutional sources ranging from few thousands rupees to few lakh rupees. There land holding structure of victims was mixed from small farmers to large farmers ranging from three acres to 22 acres. Number of Tenant farmers among the victims is marginal in the district. The prime cause behind the indebtedness was change in cropping pattern; farmers mostly had sown the cash crops like cotton, groundnut and rice. These crops are not only the capital-intensive but also water-intensive. To meet the increased requirement of irrigation water in this dry district, farmers have resorted to digging borewells with the help of mostly borrowed money. Due to indiscriminate digging of borewell depleted, water tables in the district, consequently bore wells started drying up and started to failing. With this phenomena consecutive crop failure became a permanent phenomenon in many surveyed cases. The loan repayment capacity of the farmers decreed season to season and year to year. Consequently, farmers entered into a never-ending debt-trap. Majority of the farmers borrowed money only for the purpose of meeting the irrigation water requirements. It shows that the importance of irrigation water in the district. At sametime, in all surveyed cases, it was observed that crop pattern has changed just fifteen years back i.e. roughly from the beginning of liberalisation period in the country. All the cultivators were owner cultivators, using the family labour. There were changes in social practices in the surveyed cases. Monetisation of festivities and marriages have been adding additional burden on the fragile economic base of the farmers. Average family size of the surveyed cases shows that the breaking up of large families and formation of nuclear families in rural areas. The Average family size among the surveyed cases was 6.5 per cent. Now let us discuss the individual case.
Case-1: No Way to Escape Debt Burden Other Than Suicide-A Woman’s Tragedy

In Mahabubnagar district out of 371 suicide cases recorded in the Revenue Department as on October 2010, seven women suicide cases have been recorded, such one suicide was reported in Addakal mandal of the district. This was a tragic case of a widowed Other Backward Caste (OBC) elderly woman, after facing multiple economic hardships ended her life. N. Golla Chennamma, aged 50 years widowed women of Kataram village of Addakal Mandal, committed suicide on 18th July 2004. The cause behind this tragedy was a huge accumulated agriculture debt of the family. Climatically, this village is in the arid zone. Agriculture activities take place only when there is a good monsoon. Drought could be a life threatening devastator in this mandal. Second crop is possible only when there is either sufficient rain or if farmers have their own irrigation source like bore wells with availability of water. Thus, along with the monsoon, ground water level determines the survivability of farmers of the village. In the recent past farmers chose monoculturisation by changing cropping pattern replacing earlier crop diversification strategy. With that, they started sowing low-value food grain crops to the high-value commercial crops. This place proved to be not suitable for such crop shifts, because, agriculture is subsistence in nature. One has to remember one thing here is that, this particular mandal is entirely a dry region, such diversification might have proved fatal, compared to a water assured areas. In this area, farmers were not aware about the liberalisation of agriculture market and working of predatory market system. The input market liberalisation has facilitated entry of seed MNCs, and there exists collaboration between the local input traders and these MNCs. In the absence of agriculture research and extension services these traders have emerges as the chief advisors to the farmer. Thus, the farmers were drawn into the ambit of heavy input cash crops with alluring advertisements and false promises. Most of the times these promised costly inputs turning to be spurious. Thus, farmers are becoming victims of greed of the imperfect market.
Photos-4.1: The first part of the photo shows a dilapidated house, in which the victim N. Golla Chennamma committed suicide by setting herself ablaze. The second photo shows a small locked house, victim’s sons purchased this house later on, after abandoning the first house. Then they have migrated to Hyderabad to get out of debt.

Source: Taken by the Author on September 11, 2010

The victim’s family owned one dug well which was dried up; later on, the family dug bore well to cultivate rice in their four-acre land. Subsequently, that borewell also dried up and the standing paddy failed. Chennamma has two sons and two daughters, sons were already married and daughter’s marriages were due. In this distressed economic background, getting two daughters married was not so easy task. In India, marriages are not only a social relation but also have become an economic transaction in the form of dowry payments in marriages. In other words, the emergence of marriage as a market has had a devastating effect on the economical and psychological condition of rural India. Dowry has become distress-accentuating factor in many rural agrarian families. In this case, marriages of two daughters proved life-risking affair for Chennamma. These two marriages further drew the family in the debt trap. Moreover, we learnt that there were subsequent demands made by her son-in-laws for more dowries and sometimes her daughters were beaten up in the process. Apart from this in our investigation, we learnt that the family was also spending considerable amount for unproductive activities like various festivities. There has been theorisation that the economic liberalisation and the phenomena of individualisation have affected the traditional social institutions like family, caste, community etc. that is true in many cases. Nevertheless, in our investigation the kinship or the caste group members have provided non-institutional credit within the
reduced helping capacity of that group because their structural location in the similar economic condition. In Chennamma’s case, also she had borrowed money from her Golla caste (shepherd community) only in spite of diminishing economic position of the kinship group members. Even she had borrowed few thousand rupees from the Kataram golla sangam (village yadava sangam). These borrowings took place in the absence of any repayment capacity of the family. By the time of Chennamma’s suicide, the family had accumulated more than Rs. 2.5 lakh debts.

Under these distressed conditions, the family pride had hit a bottom low in the village community. The immediate triggering factor for her death was her inability to pay back 40 thousand rupees that she had owed to pay on behalf of some other villager. That family had fled the village in the similar condition. With this incident, socially humiliated and psychologically depressed Chennamma committed suicide on July 18, 2004. Two months earlier to the suicide, there was a regime change in AP; Congress replaced the reform-oriented TDP. This regime promised to lift agrarian sector from the distressed conditions and announced a compensatory policy for the suicide victim families. Against this background, the summer of 2004 witnessed massive suicides by the farmers in the state. Andhra Pradesh topped in the cases of farmer’s suicides, in a short span of less than two months, between May and July 2004, more than 400 peasants in the state committed suicides. During the same period of May and July 2004, around 27 farmer suicides were reported in Mahabubnagar district.65

The Revenue Department officials of the district registered Chennamma’s case to compensate her family.66 The family had borrowed Rs. 1, 86,000 from the private sources out of which Rs. 38,288 was paid by the revenue department under one time settlement scheme. According to the revenue department records Rs. 21,000 was released for purchase of one sheep unit and Rs. 75,000 was released for the purchase various agriculture inputs and remaining Rs. 4,000 was kept in the joint account of the

65 V. Sridhar, (2006) op.cit., p. 1559
66 The family was compensated under G.O. No. 421 Rev. (D.A.II) Dept. Dated; 1-6-2004
legal heir of the victim and the concerned Mandal Revenue Officer. Thus, out of Rs. 1, 86,000 only Rs. 38,288 was settled down by the department, remaining Rs. 1, 47,712 was to be paid by the family. To pay back this amount the family sold their land and other agriculture assets. Even then, the family was unable to pay the debt amount fully. As a distress family, it had to move out of the village for survival, as this district is known for the high distress migration. The family members have moved to Hyderabad as construction labourers. Through that hard-earned money, the family is paying back the debt amount slowly. Nobody knows when the family would be getting out of the debt trap.

Case-2: Collapsing Traditional Occupation and Crop Failure Took the Life of a Farmer

Chippa Narasimhulu of Papireddyguda village of Keshampeta Mandal, Mahabubnagar district belongs to OBC category and padmashali caste (handloom weaver’s community). In the recent past, due to the state’s reform agenda various traditional occupations, like weaving, tailoring etc have been collapsing in AP as the state is known for a vibrant history of traditional weaving methods. In a dry region like Telangana, it was the backbone of the rural economy. In the post-liberalisation period due to unfavourable policy regime, the traditional occupation based economy like weaving has collapsed. Consequently, many weavers have resorted to suicides at places like Pochampally, Dubbaka, Sirisilla etc. In vernacular media, it is a very common site to read reports of starvation deaths by the weavers. The weavers in that particular village experienced the similar kind of deterioration in their income earnings from the occupation. It was found that the village was inhabited by a substantial number of padmashalis, most of them have already opted out weaving as an viable occupation. The victim Narasimhulu’s family also followed the suit and chose agriculture as the alternative livelihood source. They have been practising agriculture since past fifteen years. The family owned five acres of land and usually they used to sow dry crops like jawar. However, during early 2000, villagers chose crop shift for higher returns. The victim’s family also followed the trend, because by then the family heard something good about the cotton cultivation. Prior to the
suicide, the victim invested heavily in cotton cultivation in the hope of good returns to offer a better life to the family members. This shift required intensive investment ranging from purchasing seeds, fertilisers to digging bore wells etc. As a known fact this part of the district does not have any minor or major irrigation projects to fall back during the times of drought. The remaining alternative source as a compulsion for the farmers was to invest in digging bore wells. The family started exploring water deep down of the earth. That exploration ended up in digging eight bore wells in a dry and drought-prone area. The family’s economic backbone got completely destroyed. They had borrowed money from private sources for this purpose. Prior to two years of his death, the victim borrowed money and agriculture inputs from the dealers. The dealers supplied spurious and ineffective pesticides, which proved inefficient in pest control. As a result, cotton crop failed consecutively for two years. With the crop failure, the family was not in a position to pay back the borrowed money, which was both from institutional, and non-institution sources. Psychologically depressed, Narasimhulu chose to end his life on August 31, 2004 in the hope that the family would get the government’s relief package. Narasimhulu’s younger son Raju describes the persona of his father:

*My father was a loving and caring person, he never allowed us to share his pain, he was alone in his responsibilities and he was always advising us to work hard to get better position in the society. He was a man of principle. On the day of suicide, we had meals together and he was calm and composed.*

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67 Interview with Narasimhulu’s younger son C. Raju on 26th September 2010
The victim consumed pesticide and he was rushed to Osmania General Hospital in Hyderabad but of no use for he died after few hours in the hospital. During our field visit, the family members were high on emotion, recalling the caring touch of the victim towards them. His wife, two sons and one unmarried daughter survived diseased Narsimhulu. His sons were young enough to take care responsibilities of the family. This case was registered and compensated; according to the official report, the family had borrowed Rs. 32,260 from the bank and Rs 25,000 from the moneylenders. The loan was rescheduled and Rs 32,260 was paid to the concerned commercial bank and Rs. 17,740 was paid to the private lenders. It is also reported that out of one-lakh rupees, which was supposed to be spent on buying for agriculture inputs, Rs 58,000 was spent for buying milk animals like buffalos. In addition, rest of the money was kept under joint account of concern Mandal Revenue Officer (MRO) and the legal heir of the family i.e. wife of the diseased farmer. However, until now the family was not out of the debt trap completely. After the death, the elder son assumed the responsibilities of the family. They borrowed twice for marriages in the family first time, during the marriage of elder son and the second time during the marriage of younger daughter. The marriage of the younger daughter proved to be a debt-trapping incident for the family. In our investigation, we learnt
that to pay the heavy dowry price and for other marriage expenses, the family borrowed five lakh rupees from private sources. Consequently, the family sold off the five-acre land to an agent for a通过 away price.\textsuperscript{68} In that area, there is a feeling of relative deprivation in performing marriage on a great scale. Moreover, people have started perceiving dowry as a symbol of prestige. Now the family members all of them have married and settling down gradually. They do not take any benefits from government-sponsored programmes and they are only dependent on their own manual labour. The family members wish that the state should have a greater role in shaping and saving the lives of millions of the farmers in the country.

\textit{Case-3: Indebtness due to Digging bore wells took the life of the Farmer}

Ginne Narasimha Reddy, 45 years old of Solipur village, Khila Ghanpur mandal of the district committed suicide due to heavy debt problem in 2005. He belonged to the dominant Reddy community of the village. Mr. Reddy’s family owned eight acres of land and wished to subsist completely from the occupation through making profits through cultivation of cash crop. He changed his cropping pattern by shifting to high valued paddy and groundnut cultivation. The village is a part of arid land having no assured irrigation facilities. To meet the demand of water-intensive cash crop cultivation, farmers over there started sinking borewells from the last fifteen years. The capital and water-intensive crop shift stated to be the main reasons for the indebtedness among the farmers like in the case of Mr. Reddy. With the fluctuating water tables in the region, the family ventured to dig 20 bore wells with the help of both institutional and non-institutional loans. Most of the borewells, which were, sank with the help of the borrowed money started failing. Sinking 20 borewells would make any rich person poor. In our investigation only one bore well was in the working condition. Rest of the bore wells got dried up one after another and Mr. Reddy kept digging borewells with a greater hope of getting some water in the borewell. However, his hopes were shattered and borewells failed one by one and his debt

\textsuperscript{68}We learn that the agent later sold that land to Telugu cine-actor Nagarjuna for a bigger price. The area which is mere forty kilometers from Hyderabad city and very near to the Shamshabad International airport has attracted attention of real estate. Many cinema people have bought land in that area. Many farmers sold away their lands at a throw away prices to get relief from the economic hardships. And some of them invested them in the form of dowry to the marriages of their daughter’s marriage. This trend stated to be the one of the reasons for increase of dowry.

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started piling up. According to the revenue department report of the district, the family had borrowed Rs. 14,430 from bank and Rs. 2, 04, 565 from the moneylenders. Out of which Rs. 5525 and Rs 43,975 was settled by the revenue department under fifty thousand rupees settlement scheme to the bank and moneylenders respectively. Under rupees, one lakh scheme according to the report, the family was sanctioned bullocks, bullock cart, water motor etc.

Photo-4.3: Ginne Narasimha Reddy's son Nagaraju and widow Shyamalamma

Source: Taken by the Author on October 03, 2010

Mr. Reddy's family is a nuclear family with his wife, two sons and one daughter. Prior to the suicide, the daughter was married. In our probe, the family members did not count daughter’s marriage as one of the reasons for the suicide but one could infer easily that the practice of dowry which is stated to be very high among the Reddy community, might have contributed its part in aggravating the families
economic situation. The family is lower middle class and all the siblings have studied up to the high school level. Mr. Reddy was an extrovert person, mounting indebtedness after digging 20 borewells and his inability to pay them back created a sense of social humiliation and a feeling of lowered social status. With this heavily depressed Reddy committed suicide by consuming pesticide on his farmland on May 06, 2005.

After the death, the wife and the elder sons assumed the family responsibilities. The two sons had to drop out from the school to migrate to Hyderabad support the family. When they were asked about the subsidies provided by the government, they replied:

*Government subsidies are not helpful to lift the farmers from the distresses conditions. Whatever small subsidies that is available to the sectors poor farmers are always at the receiving end and most of the time they are deprived from taking any government sponsored programmes because there powerlessness.*

When the family was asked about their position in the village as a dominant Reddy caste, they replied:

*Reddy caste is no more in a position to control the village economy and polity. In the recent past, their position has been marginalised because of agrarian distress and the lower caste assertion.*

The family expressed very negative opinions about the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). They said because of the scheme, agriculture wages have gone up and most of the times agriculture labour is not available during the transplantation and harvesting times. In their experience, input cost has shot up in the recent decades and getting remunerative price has always been a big challenge for them. Even though they are reeling under crisis and already have lost the life of one family member, they do not wish to leave agriculture as their

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69 Interview conducted by the author on 2nd October 2010
primary occupation. The family has already diversified its occupational pattern by migrating to Hyderabad and it has become the main absorbing factor for the family during losses in agriculture. The family has not come out of the debt. They are constructing a house by borrowing two lakh rupees from the moneylenders and twenty-five thousand rupees from the bank.

Case-4: Agriculture Debt Killed a Dalit Farmer

The diseased farmer B. Kurmaiah, son of Karre Buchanna of Patha Madigatla village, Peddamandadi mandal of the district who belonged to SC-Mala caste is yet another victim of looming agrarian crisis in the region. He ended his life due to debts burden, consequent to borrowing from the moneylenders. According to the government records, he had borrowed Rs. 1,05,000, out of which posthumously Rs. 50,000 was settled with the compensation money. The family owned four acres of land and agriculture was the mainstay. Diseased farmer Kurmaiah’s wife was substantiating the family income by regularly going for agriculture labour. The couple had two sons and one daughter. They are educated up to high school level and all of them are married now. The main problem that the family facing was indebtedness due to rising agriculture input costs. The family earlier owned one irrigation well that dried up in the 2004 summer season. The family was cultivating rice; they shifted to this water and capital-intensive crop during early 2000. During this period, there was a drought like situation prevailing in the region, the family experienced crop failure due to the drought. The family had borrowed money from private sources for agriculture as well as household expenses. They dug up three bore-wells one over ground and another one in the dried open well by borrowing from private sources, the family indebted Rs. 1,05,000 non-institutional borrowings. In this situation, there was pressure put up by the moneylenders to pay back the borrowed money. First drought then failure of borewells and crop failure crippled the family’s capacity to pay the borrowed money and the traditional social institutions extended no help in this situation. The lender were putting pressure on the family, unable to bear this Kurmaiah chose to end his life on 1-8-2004 by consuming pesticide, when his wife was away in her daily agriculture work. Their sons were not in the village they had just begun their migration and had
gone to Hyderabad to support the family, as a coping strategy to overcome the economic hardships that the family was facing.

**Photos-4.4: Diseased Farmer B. Kurmaiah and The Newly Constructed House by His Sons**

![Image](image.png)

*Source: Photo taken by the Author on October 17, 2010*

After this tragedy, the elder son assumed responsibility of the family. In addition, Kurmaiah’s wife Pentamma continued her daily agriculture labour work in the village. After the death, the family continued cotton and rice cultivation without any substantial returns. To cope up with the negative returns from the agriculture Kurmaiah’s sons continued to migrating Hyderabad as auto drivers. The district revenue authorities registered this suicide case. Under one-time loan re-scheduling scheme, Rs. 50,000 was paid to the moneylenders. According to the revenue department, a record of rupees one lakh, which is meant for purchasing agriculture input, has been spent for purchasing two bullocks, digging one bore-well and purchasing required pump set. Nevertheless, in our investigation the family has not received any such assistant from the authorities. When we revealed about rupees one lakh assistant for agriculture input purpose, Kurmaiah’s younger son Chenna Keshavulu was surprised, He said:
Sir we have not received any such help from the government, even we are not aware about it. Now we have already dug three bore-wells by spending form our own pockets. If any such scheme is there, please help us out to get our legitimate agriculture input compensation from the government, because we are planning to dig one more bore-well.¹¹

Obviously, corruption has crept in while paying the compensation package to the legal heir of the diseased farmer. The family has not yet received the full compensation; so far, they received only Rs. 70,000 out of the Rs. 1, 50,000 that was to be compensated. According to the family members account, the government officials and the local politicians had eaten up rest of the money.

**Case-5: Crisis Takes a Widowed Woman’s Life**

Laxmidevamma, a 48-year-old widowed woman from the Reddy community of Peddamandadi village and mandal of Mahabubnagar district, became the victim, after her husband’s death few years back after assuming responsibilities of the family. Her husband died in 2001 due to snakebite. In addition, her daughter’s marriage was stated to be the immediate triggering reason behind the suicide, because of three-lakh rupees expenditure incurred in the marriage due to dowry payment and other marriage expenses. The family was cultivating 15 acres non-`patta` (non-entitled) dry land. Agriculture was the main source of livelihood for the family. Due to non-availability of irrigation in the village, the family continued with the dry farming for a long time. Nevertheless, when farmers were shifting cropping pattern in the area, the family followed suit. They started cultivating rice, which is a capital and water-intensive. To meet the water requirement since there was no canal irrigation developed in that area, the family like any other cultivators chose to dig bore-wells. The family dug four bore-wells with the help of private borrowings, only to face the problem of drying up these bore-wells. Three out of four bore-wells dried up. For this two-lakh rupees debt incurred to the family, they borrowed this money for the interest of Rs. 60 per cent per annum. At this juncture, unfortunately, Devamma’s husband died. The burden of family, agriculture cultivation and the debt were fallen on the shoulders of Devamma.

¹¹ Interview with the him on 16ᵗʰ October 2010
Her husband’s case was registered with the government for compensation under *Aapadhbandhu* scheme. However, no compensation was sanctioned for the distressed family.

Another unfortunate incident described by the family was her daughter’s marriage, which was held after one year of her husband’s death i.e. 2002. For this marriage, the family paid dowry beyond their economic capacity. In addition, they also spent more than three lakhs of rupees. Marriages in dominant communities like the Reddys have become a place to show their social status and prestige. The ‘relative deprivation’ syndrome and ‘the law of imitation’ would work among the poor section of the dominant castes and other backward castes and simply they imitate without thinking their economic position. Moreover, the emergence of marriage economy made dowry a compulsory part of marriage ceremonies even among the poor. Thus, marriages in many cases have becoming a situation-accentuating factor. Since the family possessed the non-*patta* land they were denied institutional borrowings from banks, because in order to get loans they have to mortgage their *pattas*. The family

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72 *Aapadhbandhu* scheme was started under the Telugu Desam Regime, under this scheme if any earning person dies accidentally, his/her family members would get Rupees one lakh compensation from the government. It was another populist scheme of the TDP government which never helped the targeted groups.

73 *Patta* means title deed of the possessed land
could not able to make *patta* of the land because it did not have enough money to pay for the *patta* and to bribe the revenue officials. Devamma couple have two sons and one daughter; they have studied up to 10th standard. Devamma could not bear the burden of the family and mounting pressure from the moneylenders. With unbearable mental agony and social humiliation, Devamma chose to end her life on 6-2-2008, by consuming pesticide. In Devamma’s sister Ramulamma’s words:

> She was heavily worried about the accumulated debt; especially her worries were accentuated and became unbearable after paying dowry in her daughter’s marriage beyond her capacity. Nowadays girls have become liability; one should not see their faces. In this unbearable situation, silently she consumed pesticide. When we realised about this unfortunate step, we rushed her to Mahabubnagar government hospital some 50 kms from her, but for no use, she was declared brought dead.\(^74\)

With that, Devamma’s sons stopped their studies and decided to migrate. The elder son took up the family burden. He is now working as a truck driver in Kurnool. Now only one bore-well is working and portion of the land has been leased out to a Dalit family in the village. Devamma’s case was registered with the revenue department and rupees one-lakh was compensated. This money was nowhere to meet their debt burden and it proved a meagre. The family still reels under looming rural distress condition. Devamma’s childless elder sister who was residing with her diseased sister has now become mentally disturbed. The family has been cultivating lands for more than 20 years. They never cultivated cotton, but when they shifted the crop from dry crops like *Jawar* to water-intensive rice cultivation, the distresses set in. With this shift, there was also the shift in fortune that led ultimately to suicide in the family. The cost of cultivation stated to be very high in the area apart from the additional bore-well digging expenses. At the same time, output prices sometimes was not enough even to meet to meet the basis needs met. The farmers here do not know about crop insurance scheme. The other welfare programmes are not enough to pull out the farmers form this situation. In addition, privatisation and commercialisation of

\(^74\) Interview with her on 30th October 2010
education and health services are also playing their worst part in rural areas and becoming the additional contributory factor.

**Case-6: Consecutive Failure of Cotton Crop Killed Adivasi Farmer**

“Cotton crop killed my husband and now I am worried about the future of my daughters,” laments Khetavath Kamli, of Nagulagadda Tanda, Keshampet Mandal, Mahabubnagar district, when she was asked about her life after her husband’s suicide ten years ago. They belong to Lambada (ST) community. Back in the year 2000, diseased farmer Khetavath Ramulu owned two acres dry land and leased in three more acres to cultivate cotton crop. In the first year of cultivation, the family could get reasonable returns, but in second year, the crop failed due to drought and spurious pesticides. This is a typical dry region, the family planned for sinking borewells to meet the water requirements of cultivation. They sank three borewells with the help of institutional and private borrowings. They borrowed from the private sources for Rs. 36 per cent interest per annum. Almost all, the family spent Rs. 42,100 borrowed from Bank and Rs. 15,000 form moneylenders. In the year 2000, their cotton crop grew up to a certain level and did not mature to yield cotton. At the same time, water dried up from their borewells. With these unexpected developments, the family lost its capacity to pay back the borrowed money, the family was stranded in deep debts. The couple had three very young daughters. He was also worried about having all daughters, because in his community, the Lambada (Banjaras), the dowry practice has insidiously crept in a few years ago. The Lambadas are going through negative transitional processes. For instance, the traditional Lambada marriages were marked with absence of practice of dowry and bride price was in force. In the recent past, individualisation and the entry of marriage market has whittled away these traditional practices. As a result, now, the girl children are considered a liability. Such changes coupled with poverty have resulted in Lambadas selling or sending off girl children to adoption agencies. Years ago, a woman sold her girl baby just for a sari valued Rs. 200. Thus, for Ramulu, deteriorating crop and dwindling economy of the family was

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75 Tanda is a Lambada Hamlet
a worrisome issue indeed but what was equally worrisome also that he had three daughters.

**Photo-4.6: Diseased Farmer Khetavath Ramulu (photo), His Mother, Elder Daughter and Widow Kamili**

![Photo of Khetavath Ramulu, his mother, elder daughter, and widow Kamili.](image)

*Source: Photo taken by the Author on November 06, 2010*

The family started cultivating cotton crop as a matter of imitation from other farmers, because in some cases, the farmers in the area were getting some profits. On the day of suicide, Ramulu and his wife destroyed the unyielding standing crop. Coming home straight from the field, Ramulu was of unbearable mental agony and consumed pesticide. Earlier, the family had sprayed the same pesticide on the field but it had been ineffectual in controlling the pests. This pesticide, however, killed Ramulu efficiently. After consuming pesticide, there was a sudden realisation of Ramulu about the surviving members of the family, and then he tried to save his life. Before anybody could realise about the unfortunate incident, he drew his bullock cart to reach the hospital to save himself to Shadnagar some 40 kms form the village. After driving the cart some distance, he became unconscious. The others then took him to the hospital and while s undergoing treatment, he died on the same day on August 08, 2000. Now his mother, wife and three daughters survive him. The day he committed suicide, his third daughter was just an eight days old infant. The burden of family and debt fell suddenly upon his widow Kamili. This case was registered and later a relief package was sanctioned in 2004. Under the one time loan settlement
scheme, Rs. 50,000 was sanctioned and later some agriculture input unit was also sanctioned for supporting the occupation. Ten years after her husband’s death, Kamili continues to struggle for livelihood through agriculture only with the help of other relatives. In the present season i.e. monsoon of 2010, the family had sown cotton crop only to overcome the economic hardships with the help of Rs. 15,000 bank loan and Rs.6,000 borrowed from the input dealer, thus, the family continuous to reel under the economic distress. The daughters are grown up now. They are in government hostels to complete their studies. First daughter who is studying in 10th standard is engaged to be married very soon with the payment of some amount of dowry. Kamili is worried about the marriages of rest of two daughters. In her words:

 somehow, I am able to manage money for my first daughter’s marriage, god knows about my rest of two daughters. I am the only livelihood source for my three daughters and mother-in-law. In future for the sake of marrying off my two daughters, I may have to sell off my 2 acres land to pay dowry for their marriages.77

In our study, MGNREGA is not effective in any sense, because rural distress is a very deep-rooted structural problem. It is only helping the rural political elite to take benefits from the leakages of this programme through corrupt means. In our investigation, for such government relief programmes only a few suicide cases have been recommended. In this particular tandas, apart from this case, eleven unreported suicides have taken place.78 The mode of death in almost all the cases was by consumption of pesticide. When we asked them why they did not report these cases to the authorities for compensation, they replied:

 we buried them without reporting the authorities because our people do not like autopsy. Moreover, government compensation procedure is very lengthy it takes its own time and it is a tiresome process. In addition, revenue and police

77 Interview with the family on 6th November 2010
officials and village politicians demand bribe. That is why except Ramulu’s death we did not report the other cases.\textsuperscript{79}

It seems there is no conclusion to the deaths by the peasant in this small adivasi ‘suicide hamlet’.

**Case-7: With Unbearable Mental Agony, Adivasi Woman Farmer Committed Suicide**

With mounting debt and unbearable mental agony J. Devibai of Nagargundu Tanda, Gundyali Village, Hanwada mandal of Mahabubnagar district committed suicide in 2004. Devibai and her husband were farmers and they were cultivating their five acres dry land. Out of these five acres, they had purchased two acres in early 2000. They purchased the land for improving their overall economic position. For this purpose, the family borrowed money from the private sources with Rs. 60 per cent interest. The couple had two daughters and two sons. They belong to Lambada (ST) community. Even though the community is patriarchal in nature and the male head of the family exercises, authority, in this particular instance, Devibai headed family responsibilities owing to the unstable mental health of her husband. Thus, payment of debt became her prime responsibility. In their dry land, they were mostly cultivating dry crops like Jowar, red gram etc. These crops were meant only for self-consumption and since there was no marketable surplus, they could not get rid of the mounting debt. With an unstable husband and mounting pressure from the moneylenders for Devibai there was no way other than ending her life. She ended her life on May 28, 2004. Since the social institutions of caste, village community and relatives were reeling under the same socio-economic condition, there was no help extended from anywhere. Baburao, a neighbour and relative narrated that:

*She (Devibai) was agonised and mentally disturbed due to the debt problem. To get rid of this unbearable situation she consumed pesticide at her field. By the moment neighbours realised the situation went out of hands.*\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} Interview with them on 7\textsuperscript{th} November 2010
\textsuperscript{80} Interview with him on 20\textsuperscript{th} November 2010
Her husband and elder son have assumed responsibilities of the family. Despite the hardships, the Elder son has continued his studies. He is now a postgraduate and is supporting himself with part-time jobs.

**Photo-4.7: Diseased Farmer J. Devibai’s Husband Manikya Nayak With Neighbours**

![Image of the family]

*Source: Taken by the Author on November 20, 2010*

This case was officially registered and relief package was sanctioned. Financially, the family was assisted with Rs 1.5 lakhs out of which rupees twenty-five thousand each was deposited in the name of two daughters. One pair of bullock was also sanctioned; later due to continuing economic problems, they sold it off. Officially, one borewell was sanctioned and a result the family started cultivating rice. However, later on that borewell also dried up. The family got the additional Rs 50,000 form the Prime Minister Relief Fund. They later on sank one more borewell on their own by spending twenty-eight thousand rupees, thus, the family continues to cultivate both dry and wet crops. Now the family is constructing a house with the help of two lakh rupees private borrowings. Thus, the family is still reeling under debt problem; it

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has to pay an accumulated three-lakh rupee to moneylenders, moreover, their daughters are yet to be married. To pay back the debt their sons have migrated to Maharashtra. The migration has been helpful in absorbing the shocks generated by the debt. Now, the family is not availing any kind of agricultural or non-agricultural subsidies. They have shifted their crops because the assumed better returns from the cash crops and thus a better life standard for the family. The officials assured Devibai’s elder son with a government job but so far, it has not been realised. The distressed days are not over for the family.

Case-8: My Husband Was Worried About My Daughters Marriages

Gangi Gopal Reddy, a dominant Reddy community farmer of Dattaipally village, Keshampeta Mandal of the district, committed suicide in 2005. The family owned 8 acres land and they leased in five acres of land. They started cultivating cotton crop in the hope of better returns and better livelihood. The family had been cultivating cotton crop for more than 15 years, but when the Bt. cotton was introduced in the area during early 2000, they also opted in its cultivation. The Bt. Cotton never yielded up to their expected level. Moreover, drought situation around that time also added to the worst part. Therefore, they experienced crop failure. Irrespective of crop yield, the family had to pay rent to the tenant and run the family. At that time, the family had borrowed Rs. 76,000 form moneylenders with Rs. 60 per cent interest per annum. Another worrisome issue for Reddy was having three daughters and one son. He was heavily worried about their marriages. Apart from taking care of the family, he had to spend considerable amount of money on their education. Paying dowry for the daughters’ marriages was looking beyond reach of the family. There was mounting pressure on the family for paying back the borrowed money from the lenders year after year. Even though the family did not perform marriage of any of the daughters prior to the suicide, but they were always distressed about it. This area is very near by the Hyderabad city; especially it is located 30 to 40 Kms away from the newly constructed Rajeev Gandhi International Airport. When the construction of the airport commenced land rates in this area, sky racketed. Since most of the land was dry, farmers’ showed interest in selling off their lands to land developers. Along with that, the practice of dowry became rampant among the people in that area, thus dowry
became one of the prestigious issues in marriages in the area. Because, farmers who got good money after selling their lands started offering dowry in their sons and daughters marriages, thus, sudden prosperity among the section of the farmers created a situation of supply and demand for dowry, consequently, marriage market got consolidated. Thus, development of airport near that region became one of the distressed accentuating factors. Since this village was not so close to the airport area, land rate was not optimistic to overcome the distress. Even though, Mr. Reddy came from the dominant community, his material condition did not match with his caste status. Recurring crop failures, accumulated debt and marriageable three daughters became a distressing issue for him. Under depressed condition, Mr. Reddy committed suicide on January 07, 2005. Describing about the personality traits of Mr. Reddy his brother Ram Reddy says:

*My brother was an introvert person; he used to never share his personal problems with others. He was worried about his debt, family and marriage of his daughter. He developed a feeling that he would never be able to pay dowry for his daughter's marriages and they would never be able to get married. In one word, dowry problem took my brother’s life.*

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**Photo-4.8: Deceased Farmer Gangi Gopal Reddy, His Widow and Youger Daughters**

*Source: Photo Taken by the Author on November 28, 2010*

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81 Interview with him on 27th November 2010
After the death of Gangi Reddy, family burden fell on his wife Bharatamma. With the shock of her husband’s death, Bharatamma became mentally unstable for some time, now she suffers from partial deafness. This case was registered with the authorities and the Rs 50,000 loan was re-scheduled, and some amount was kept in the joint account of Bharatamma and the concerned Mandal Revenue Officer (MRO). The family continued agriculture with the help of Jeetagallu. However, they could not able to pay amount to the Jeetagallu. Now the land has been leased out for Rs. 1000 per acre per crop. The daughters somehow continued their studies and they have joined colleges for higher studies. The widow of Mr. Reddy gets monthly widow pension of Rs. 200. The elder daughter’s marriage was performed after the death. For Bharatamma, the worrying factor is the marriages of her two other daughters. When the revenue department officials were doing the enquiry about the suicide, Bharatamma submitted a photograph of her with Bottu (vermillion) on her forehead. The officials rejected it and asked her to submit a fresh photograph without Bottu because in Hindu tradition a widow is not suppose to apply Bottu on her forehead. The family expressed negative opinion about the MGNREGA, because of these programmes, agriculture wages have gone up and sometimes farmers are unable to bear the cost of daily wages. In their opinion, prior to the inception of the scheme the lower caste agriculture labourers were ready to work for lower wages, but now situation has changed after MGNREGA was introduced, they have stopped coming to work for in their fields for lower wages.

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82 Jeetagallu are the lower caste traditional servants of the dominant castes in the region. It used to be a form of forced labour. Later on it became slightly contractual but most of the wage payments are remained below minimum wages.
Case-9: Crop Failure and Family Dispute took the life of a Dalit Farmer

B. Ramachandraiah, aged 32 years old Scheduled Caste (Madidga) farmer of Manganoor village, Bijinepally mandal of the district committed suicide in 2007. The family owned four acres dry land. Bijinepally mandal is known for cotton cultivation and recorded the highest number of 28-farmers suicides. Ramchandraiah also started cultivating cotton during the monsoon seasons. Since the area is not irrigated, farmers here have invested heavily in digging bore-wells, like elsewhere in the district. In cotton cultivation, the family invested heavily with the borrowed money. Due to the crop failure, the family accumulated debt of Rs. 75,400. This money was mainly borrowed from the input traders, the farmers are forced to sell their crops only to them only. Most of the times, traders take away the crop in the name of adjusting the debt. The next time also, the traders would help financially or
supply them inputs and when the crop is harvested, they just adjust it. It was like an
unending chain of dependant relationship with the input traders come moneylenders.
Manganoor is a typical Indian village represented by caste hierarchy at the top of the
village power structure, there is the dominant Reddy community and at the bottom are
the dalits (SC-Madigas). We learnt that, whatever small agriculture subsidies that was
available to the farmers the dominant Reddys mostly appropriated it and leftover
small amount was distributed among the lower caste farmers. Most of the time
subsidised fertilisers and seeds was not reaching to the SC farmers in the village.
Another example is the distribution of subsidised pindi the SCs complaint that they
are the last receiver of it.

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<th>Photo-4.10: Diseased Farmer Ramachandraiah’s Family</th>
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*Source: Photo Taken by the Author on December 05, 2010*

Ramachandraiha was very young by age. His wife, two daughters and one son
survived him. Apart from the general agrarian distress in the area, family dispute was
one of the immediate reasons for the suicide. In that year, their joint family was
divided and Ramachandraiah started his own nuclear family. At the same time, he
took the independent decision of cultivating cotton by borrowing more money. In that

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83 Pindi is a kind of natural flour used as fertilizer during sowing seeds
year, due to insufficient rainfall, the crop did not yield and the family experienced crop loss. There was mounting pressure from the moneylenders to pay back the debt. In addition, the family conflict became the immediate triggering factor of the suicide. His wife, due to some family problems, went away to her parent’s village. He went to his in-laws village, consumed pesticides and died there itself on October 10, 2007. The case has been registered with the revenue authorities of the district and it was compensated. The borrowed money was re-scheduled and paid and there was one joint account opened in the name of his wife Manemma and the concerned mandal MRO. The elder daughter of the dead farmer is now in the seventh standard, son is in fourth standard and in a social welfare hostel, and the youngest daughter is in the first standard. Mother Manemma is the only earning source for the kids in the family. She is taking care of agriculture of the family with the help of her in-laws and goes for daily agriculture labour to sustain the family. Here Manemma has been negotiating with the different institution from the vantage point of ‘triple-burden’ of being lower caste, lower class, and a Dalit woman.

**Case-10: Commercialisation of Agriculture Killed the Farmer**

Nandigama Murali, a farmer in his early 30s of Gatlakhanapur village of Peddamandadi mandal of the district committed suicide in 2006. Murali belong to the OBC-Tenugu caste, whose traditional occupation is fishing. His father owned 16 acres of land, which was to be equally distributed among the five brothers. The land owned by the family was dry and earlier they used to sow only dry crops during monsoon seasons. In the early 2000, the family stated sowing groundnut crop with the hope of getting better profits. Groundnut crop is one of the water-intensive crops - it demands water from the sowing stage until the harvesting time. To meet the water requirements of the crop, the family started sinking borewells one after another. In this process, they sank 10 borewells with the help of borrowed money from the moneylenders. For sinking these ten borewells, the family spent 2.60 lakh rupees and they were indebted more than two-lakh rupees. Lack of assured irrigation facilities in the area has been forcing farmers here to spend money from their packets and the borewell sinking has emerge as the number one factor for indebtedness. Out of ten borewells that the family sank, 80 per cent, i.e. eight borewells failed due to depleting water tables and
only two borewells were working. Apart from failing bore-wells semi-drought situation in the area during mid-2000 caused for crop failure. Apart from the agriculture, the family diversified its occupation in the brick kiln business. Unfortunately, during the summer of 2006, unexpected rains damaged their business. With this sudden development, coming out of the economic debt became impossible for the family. Meanwhile Murali developed alcoholism, when the situation became unbearable; with the depression, he mixed pesticide with alcohol and committed suicide on 14-5-2006. According to Murali’s brother Harinath, who is a migrant labour and small time contractor in Jabalpur town of Madhya Pradesh, for their sister’s marriages the family borrowed some money, but Murali did not share any responsibilities in that.\(^{84}\)

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\textbf{Photo-4.11: Diseased Farmer Nandigama Murali’s Son And Daughter}
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\textit{Source: Photo taken by the Author on December 26, 2010}
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\(^{84}\) Interview with him on 26\textsuperscript{th} December 2010
After the death, Murali’s widow assumed the responsibilities of their two sons and one daughter. The case was registered with the authorities for the relief package. Under the loan, re-schedule scheme fifty thousand rupees loan was re-rescheduled, this was the limit imposed by the authorities. The moneylender’s money was re-scheduled, and one joint bank account was opened for depositing rest of the released money. According to the official records, the family spent the remaining one-lakh rupees on purchasing agriculture input instruments; it was done through an official procedure. However, in the survey, the victim’s families have received less than what has been mentioned in the official documents. According to the family member’s account, the intermediaries like village political leaders and revenue officials ate up rest of the money. Owing to this small amount of help from the authorities, the family still reels under the economic hardships. Murali’s wife N. Manemma still pays back debts every year. Apart from this compensation, the family does not benefit much form any government welfare programmes.

4.5. Farmers’ Suicides: a Few Observations

According to psychiatry, suicide by farmers is an act that has cumulative causation. It is the accumulation of several ‘events’ and when one or more events combine ‘stressor’ are created. Among the events ‘crop loss’ ‘failure of bore wells’ ‘price crash’ ‘daughter’s marriage’ ‘family problems’ and ‘property disputes’ get included. When one or more events combine, it creates ‘stressor’. These become stressors (stress creators). The stressors are created by the actors/catalysts; they include personalities, who behave like a catalyst to create sense of ‘insecurity’ and ‘insult’ the person who is under ‘stresses’. These actors/catalysts are moneylenders, bankers, traders, relatives etc. These actors/catalysts fire the final act by forcing an occasions to be the ‘trigger’ for the unfortunate incident. Thus, the immediate suicide situation creator is trigger and where as stress is created by many factors. In Mahabubnagar district also among the diseased farmers, events were created through the drought conditions, lack of alternative livelihood sources, indebtedness created by the absence of canal irrigation system, change of water and capital-intensive cropping pattern, failure of borewells and crops, payment of dowry etc. the stressors were created in most of the cases, when crop was failed and debt was mounting. Catalysts were mostly the
moneylenders and sometimes it was a self-assumed social humiliation and insult forced the farmers to commit suicide. Thus, in Durkheimian terms, peasant suicides in the district were egoistic in nature committed in a context of anomie. Alcoholism in some suicide cases was developed due to mental agony not other way around. Thus, the events are social, cultural, political and economical but stress is psychological.

The mode of suicide of the farmers in the district is by consuming pesticides, unlike their western counter part, where, especially ranchers shoot themselves down. Even though the suicides are located in socio-economic and cultural hardships, the confirmation carried out was in the psychological domain. The official enquiry,\(^8\) of a diseased farmer Chouta Pedda Ramulu indicates the merger of events and stressors. The diseased farmer was aged 48 years and committed suicide on August 16, 2009.\(^8\) The enquiry report consist of the following details: the farmer had sown groundnut, maize, cotton and paddy and the indebtedness was related to agriculture only. The enquiry officer’s remarks were:

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\text{In open enquiry and in the statement of the elders it is revealed that farmer-committed suicide with stress of repayment. He committed suicide with unbearable mental agony. Hence, recommended for sanction for financial assistant to the legal heir of the diseased.}^{8}
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However, the available literature on farmer suicides in India suggest that the primary cause of it is to be found in economic hardship caused by crop loss and indebtedness. According to a study\(^8\) in the district, in recent years farmers are falling in the debt trap due to the continuous drought and the resultant crop failures. What is striking is that even large farmers have been affected by the distress situation and they have been trapped into indebtedness in the district. The study attributes four major reasons for the debt these included borrowings for agricultural purposes, health, and digging bore

\(^8\) The State machinery meticulously gathers details and verifies the suicides thoroughly by a three-member committee of Revenue Divisional Officer, Deputy Superintendent of Police and Assistant Director of Agriculture.
\(^8\) The farmer was from Golla Caste, possessed 5.32 acres of land in Mamaipally village of Bijinepally mandal of Mahabubnagar district.
\(^8\) Tahasildar Ref. No. C/6786 2007 Dated 18-8-2009, Mahabubnagar District, Collected By the Author
\(^8\) These two villages are Thimmayyapally and Rangapur, the study was carried out in December 1997 by the AndhraPradesh Rural Livelihood programme (APRLP), op.cit.,
wells, marriages, and costs on festivities.\textsuperscript{89} The agricultural input expenditure forms the major part in their borrowings. Indebtness stated to be the prime reasons behind all the suicides in the district. Indebtness was due to commercialisation of agriculture and growing input cost. In all the surveyed cases victims have, dug borewells to meet the water requirements for their commercial crops. The district is historically known for ‘distress out migration’ known as ‘Palamur labour’ for the export of labour in major earthen excavation works around the country. It has been documented their presence in many major dam construction works (from Hirakud to Narmada) in and around the country. The terms of this livelihood option and the exploitative nature of these contracts have also been recorded by various researchers. In our research observation, those families which have diversified their occupation into non-agriculture urban sectors have developed better immunity or coping mechanism from the rural distress. Whereas, exclusive reliance on agriculture as the main livelihood source of family might lead to debt trap and death trap. In the recent past, in village societies several changes have taken place. People gave become fast adopting the consumerist culture, as a result, the conditions of relative deprivation has increased. In addition, demonstrative effect could be observed in the family functions like marriages and other festivities in villages and urban areas.

In rural areas and among the lower caste social groups, dowry has emerged as the main accentuating factor behind the suicides. In our field survey, dowry problem was stated to be the one important worrying issue for the agriculture households. More daughters mean more probabilities of committing suicide by the farmers. In recent times, the marriage institution has witnessed several disturbing changes. Now, marriages have become a marketable institution, it is operation in the form of practice of dowry. In Padhi’s observation of Punjabi farmers families is that, not only peasants families are forced to pay a huge sum of money in dowry form before suicide but even aftermath of suicide also surviving family members especially whose husbands have committed suicide, have also been taking loans more than once in order to get

\textsuperscript{89} It was found in APRLP survey that 48 households used the loans for digging borewells, particularly in Thimmayyapally, followed by Rangapur. It was estimated that 90 Per cent of the borewells failed in Thimmayyapally village, followed by 30 percent in Rangapur. The persistent drought also resulted in the drying up of open wells: 100 percent in Thimmayyapally, 90 percent in Rangapur
their daughters married.\textsuperscript{90} In her opinion, marriage as a market of social respectability has not still eroded and this is one of the biggest failures in the women’s movement. The inter-generational transmission of shocks of distress that the social tragedy of suicides brings in has deleterious effect on the children. Children are pulled out of school and put to work, as there is desperate need for additional hands for work and income. Girls are married off earlier than normal in a hurry to complete the responsibilities early and for fear of expenses and newly perceived vulnerability of the family. Developmental opportunities of the child are affected in a big way. Children age faster in these troubled times with early entry into labour force, and marriage. The efforts of the parents to move out of poverty have resulted in transmitting distress to the next generation thus pushing them into chronic poverty. Suicides have been reported mostly among the Backward Classes, Scheduled Caste and the poor among the forward castes. It is because, in Galab and Revati’s observation, it is also pertinent to note that the households belonging to scheduled castes and backward castes accessing land either through ‘sale-purchase market or lease-market’ is on increase in recent times.\textsuperscript{91} Thus, there has been emergence of large proportion of tenants, marginal and small farmers and increased participation from these vulnerable social groups led to the formation of poor peasantry or what is also called ‘market-oriented autonomous farmers’ who do not possess negotiating skills to negotiate with the market, state and civil society for undertaking agriculture without much risk, especially in the context neo-liberal reforms.

There is a dwindling intervention in correcting the current pace and direction of rural economy by the state. State intervention in the form of assuring canal irrigation to the dry regions like Telangana is either absent or discriminatory. This attitude is one of the reasons for the sustenance of Telangana movement. The peasantry in the area has hopes on the formation of the Telangana state and they think it is the right kind of panacea for their present problems. Relief package in any case would not pull out the distress agrarian families and the sector out of the trouble. Whatever intervention is done by the state is in the form of post-suicide compensation

\textsuperscript{90} Ranjana Padhi (2009) “On Women Surviving Farmer Suicides in Punjab”, \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, Vol-XLIV, No.19, May 9, p.56
\textsuperscript{91} Galab S and E Revathi (2006), \textit{Changing Agrarian Relations and Farmers’ Collective Actions in Dry land Agriculture: A Perspective}, Mimeo, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad
package will not, in any case pull out the grieving families from indebtedness and distress. Moreover, compensation does not reach the grieving family because of corrupt revenue officials and the village political leadership. In all or most of the cases, farmers are caught unawares about the liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation of agriculture sector. They are also not having much idea about many government-sponsored programmes, schemes like crop insurance scheme, MGNREGA. Non-Governmental Organisation work was not reported in the district. Moreover, much hyped loan waiver scheme implementation was full of flaws did not help much to the distressed farmers and it remains as a policy-adhocism of the state. Marketisation of education and health has become a very important distressed accentuating factor in the district.

The main cause behind suicide of farmers in the districts is drought conditions and discrimination in irrigation polices. The well-endowed and large arable land available district remains dry because invidious attitude of the state. The farmers in the district resorted to capital and water-intensive commercial agriculture in the absence of assured irrigation and credit facilities. In a volatile market situation, income from the crops remained very low and farmers entered into unending vicious circle of debt. The district is the worst sufferer in the irrigation front because it is structural location in Telangana region. The district is traversed by nearly four hundred kilometres of Krishna River but due to discrimination againstn the region, Mahabubnagar hardly get any irrigation water from the river. The enduring distressed socio-economic and political conditions have been pushing lakhs of peasantry in distress conditions. Other than the economic reasons, spending on social festivities, on marriages in the form of dowry and spending on health and education, are working as non-economic accentuating factors behind the suicides in the district. Along with starvation deaths, suicides have become a permanent feature of the district. Now there is an urgent need for state radical intervention in the district to control the present distress situation in the district. There is need to chalk out long-term goals/strategies to mitigate drought and drought-induced distressed in the distress.