THESIS SYNOPSIS

The introduction highlights the rationale for conducting a study on ‘Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming – 2004’ (KSPOF). The chapter provides the backdrop to the organic farming policy, the issues and concerns that led to its implementation. The policy is not without its share of controversy, and has generated negative public opinion over its politics and purpose. In the section on 'Organic Farming Policy- A Critical Review' I have critically reviewed the Karnataka state policy on Organic Farming 2004. The policy initiated the pilot project to gauge farmers' response to the policy as well as to assess its efficacy upon implementation. The pilot project was introduced in one village in each district of the state. My fieldwork is based in one of the villages selected for the pilot study, i.e. Moodanahalli village, Bantwal Taluk (Subdivision of the district), situated in Dakshina Kannada district. The reason for choosing Dakshina Kannada is that the district now boasts of a strong export oriented farming sector. This makes the shift to organic farming that much more complex and debatable, as most farmers seek opportunities similar to conventional farming, within organic farming. As the chapter introduces the site of research, i.e. 'Dakshina Kannada' district, its socio-demographic characteristics, topography and agro-climatic conditions, as a background to the study, I have identified three new categories of farmers- selective, conscious and entrepreneur farmers. The purpose behind this categorisation is to demonstrate how the profile of farmers has changed over time. Not only are these farmers extremely aware about the latest technology and market trends, but they are also experimenting with both ecologically and commercially viable alternatives within farming. The profile of farmers for whom this policy is directly relevant are the most neglected part of most policy deliberations, and who ironically are directly related to the growth and performance of agriculture at the village level.

Research Methodology

The second section of the chapter presents the research methodology of the study. This study interfaces with a number of concerns, of which I have focused on the following- the agricultural policy and practice in India, and the debate on organic farming at the policy level, which involve the state, the organic farming movement and the farmers’ movements in India. In the context of my fieldwork, the research concerns itself with the organic farming policy, the organic farming project and farmers' perceptions in
the village as well as Dakshina Kannada District on the same. Study takes into account
the analysis of everyday life of organic farmers, through 'multi-sited ethnography
approach'. The study defines its position in the constructivist approach where realities are
subjective and multiple, constructed by each participant and researcher in a study
(Silverman, 1993; Creswell, 1994). The research gives importance to different
perspectives of organic farming, from the local (project village), district (Dakshina
Kannada district) to the state (Karnataka state) level, to comprehend and present the
variegated perspectives and experiences on the issue of organic farming. The field
research was conducted for more than 14 months from August 2008 to November 2009 in
Dakshina Kannada district. The pilot study during the research proposal stage gave me a
cursory understanding of the project and peoples’ responses to it; my prolonged stay in
the village allowed me to further explore the various dimensions of farming as well as
concerns of farmers over the future of farming in the coming years.

Sampling procedure was context specific, although I also used snowball sampling
and later purposive sampling to select respondents for in-depth interviews. In all, 25 in-
depth interviews were conducted with farmers (conventional and organic) and other
stakeholders such as villagers, women, service provider (VRF), field officials of VRF,
organic farming activists, officials from agricultural department, academicians from
organic research institutes and policy makers of Karnataka organic farming policy. The
primary methods of data collection were unstructured and in-depth interviews. The
research involves a combination of approaches of participant observation, attendance at
activities and events, in-depth interviews, farm visits, participation in seminars,
discussions, meetings and events at the local, regional and state level. Data collection and
preliminary data analysis were done simultaneously within the field (Merriam, 1988).

Chapter one on the History of Karnataka Agriculture Policy, provides a historical
context for the Karnataka agriculture policy. The chapter traces the history of agriculture
from colonial Mysore Kingdom, post independent Mysore state to present-day Karnataka.
The second chapter is Reflection on the Concept of Development: Review of Literature
from South India, explains that, the policy, as it reads now, does not engage with the
history of agriculture policy of the state nor does it critically engage with the issues that
affected the emergence of Karnataka State organic farming policy. In the third chapter,
Village Society: Land, Culture and Ecology, I have introduced the project village in the
The chapter brings out three aspects of the Moodanahalli as how agriculture and development are reflected in the rural life. In the chapter four Karnataka State Organic Farming Project from Moodanahalli, I have discussed the 'Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming Project' and presented villagers’ perspective on the policy as well as implementation of the project in the village. The chapter five ‘Farmers' Association in Dakshina Kannada District’, discusses the phenomenon of farmers associations. Farmers’ associations are the foundation for the farmers’ collective in Dakshina Kannada district. I argue here that, these farmers though farmers associations try to negotiate with the state and market for their agricultural commodities and facilitate farmers' access to the market, and equip them to maximise their returns. In the conclusion chapter Rhetoric and Reality of Karnataka Organic Farming Policy and Project, I reflect upon what I consider are the drawbacks of the project, both in terms of its design and implementation.