

AGRARIAN DISTRESS, CLASS AND SUBALTERNITY: REPRESENTING THE INDIAN FARMER IN *Dweepa*, *Baromas*, *Ramrao* and *A Village Awaits Doomsday*

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Abstract

Agrarian distress has emerged as one of the most persistent and complex socio-economic realities of contemporary India. The present research paper critically examines the representation of the farmer and rural communities in Na. D'Souza's *Dweepa*, Sadanand Deshmukh's *Baromas: Twelve Enduring Months*, Jaideep Hardikar's *Ramrao: The Story of India's Farm Crisis*, and *A Village Awaits Doomsday*. In *Baromas*, agricultural modernisation, rising input costs, debt and market dependence create a continuous cycle of rural insecurity. *Dweepa* represents the threat of development-induced displacement and demonstrates the inseparability of land, livelihood and identity. *A Village Awaits Doomsday* exposes the unequal distribution of the costs and benefits of development, particularly through inadequate compensation and rehabilitation. *Ramrao* transforms the abstract discourse of the agrarian crisis into an intensely human narrative of debt, crop uncertainty, family responsibility, psychological distress and survival. The paper concludes that contemporary agrarian literature performs an important subaltern and critical function by giving narrative visibility to rural communities and transforming the farmer from a statistical category into a human subject possessing dignity, agency and the right to social justice.

Keywords: Agrarian Distress, Indian Farmer, Class, Subalternity, *Dweepa*, *Baromas*, *Ramrao*, *A Village Awaits Doomsday*, Marxist Literary Criticism, Rural Crisis

1. Introduction

Agriculture occupies a foundational position in Indian social, economic and cultural life. The relationship between the farmer and the land has historically shaped patterns of settlement, family organisation, social relations, cultural practices and economic survival. The farmer has consequently occupied an important symbolic position in the Indian imagination. Yet behind the symbolic celebration of the farmer lies a complex reality of economic vulnerability, environmental uncertainty and social marginalisation. The present study approaches agrarian distress as a structural and human crisis rather than merely an agricultural or economic problem.

Literature is particularly significant in this context because it provides access to dimensions of agrarian crisis that cannot be fully communicated through economic statistics alone. A statistical category such as "indebted farmer" does not reveal the emotional burden of debt, the pressure of family responsibilities, the anxiety associated with an uncertain harvest, or the loss of dignity that may accompany financial dependence. Literary narratives can transform these abstractions into lived experiences.

The selected texts *Dweepa*, *Baromas*, *Ramrao*, and *A Village Awaits Doomsday* represent different dimensions of this crisis. Sadanand Deshmukh's *Baromas* examines the continuous cycle of agricultural hardship in rural Maharashtra. Na. D'Souza's *Dweepa* explores development-induced displacement and the threatened relationship between farmers and ancestral land. Jaideep Hardikar's *A Village Awaits Doomsday* documents the consequences of displacement, inadequate rehabilitation and development policies, while *Ramrao* focuses upon indebtedness, crop uncertainty, family responsibility, psychological trauma and farmer suicide.

The existing thesis material establishes that these works emerge from different cultural and geographical contexts but share significant concerns regarding the socio-economic, environmental and psychological dimensions of agrarian distress. The present paper narrows this wider thesis argument to the relationship between agrarian distress, class and subalternity.

2. Agrarian Crisis as a Literary and Social Problem

Agrarian literature has a long tradition of representing the relationship between human beings and the land. From classical pastoral traditions to

modern rural fiction, agriculture has been associated with labour, survival, nature, family and social organisation. However, contemporary agrarian literature increasingly moves beyond idealised images of rural harmony. Indian literature has historically represented the peasant through themes of poverty, indebtedness and social inequality. Premchand's *Godan*, for instance, established the peasant as a significant literary subject through the struggles of Hori. Contemporary writers extend this tradition by examining environmental degradation, displacement, institutional failure, market dependence and the psychological consequences of agricultural crisis.

The selected texts belong to this evolving literary tradition. They represent rural existence not as an isolated or static world but as a social formation influenced by broader economic and political processes. The village is connected to markets, financial institutions, state development projects, agricultural technologies and changing patterns of production.

This is important because the farmer's suffering cannot be understood solely through individual psychology. The larger social structure determines the conditions within which individual

3. Theoretical Framework of Marxist Literary Criticism and Subaltern Studies

Marxist Literary Criticism provides a productive framework for analysing the selected texts because agrarian life is fundamentally connected with questions of land, labour, production, capital and economic power. A Marxist approach directs attention away from individual explanations of poverty and towards the material structures within which individuals live. In the context of agriculture, this means examining the relationship between agricultural production and economic return, between labour and ownership, and between farmers and the institutions that control credit and markets.

Subaltern Studies provides another important framework because many of the rural subjects represented in the selected texts occupy positions of limited economic and political power.

The subaltern is not simply a poor person. Subalternity involves a relationship to structures of power in which particular groups possess limited capacity to influence decisions affecting their lives. The farmers and displaced villagers in the selected works encounter institutions that possess significantly greater authority than they do. In *Dweepa*, the state has the authority to construct a dam and acquire or submerge land. In *A Village Awaits Doomsday*, displaced villagers confront

administrative structures concerning compensation and rehabilitation. In *Ramrao*, the farmer confronts financial and agricultural institutions while attempting to maintain his livelihood. The selected texts therefore provide literary spaces in which marginalised rural subjects become visible. Their experiences challenge dominant narratives of development and economic progress.

4. *Baromas*: Agriculture, Debt and the Economics of Survival

Sadanand Deshmukh's *Baromas: Twelve Enduring Months* provides one of the most sustained representations of agrarian hardship within the selected corpus. The title *Baromas*, meaning twelve enduring months, carries considerable symbolic significance. It suggests that agricultural suffering is not confined to a particular season. The farmer's crisis continues throughout the year. After one crop cycle ends, the financial consequences of the previous cycle continue through debt, interest, household expenses and the need to finance the next cultivation cycle. The narrative observes that the new agricultural inputs initially produced impressive results, but that "as production increased, so did the cost of inputs" (Deshmukh 5). The farmer consequently finds it difficult to meet agricultural expenses and is compelled to sell the harvest in order to repay loans.

The conflict between traditional and modern agriculture is represented through Nanu. His attachment to indigenous seeds and natural cultivation reflects an alternative agricultural knowledge system. His statement that modern agriculture is "like digging up the house to fill up the courtyard" functions as an important metaphor for the destructive potential of an agricultural system that consumes its own productive foundation (Deshmukh 6).

The metaphor has both economic and ecological implications. The "house" represents the agricultural household and its productive foundation, while the "courtyard" suggests temporary expansion or visible productivity. The farmer may produce more, but the increased cost of cultivation and dependence on external inputs may undermine long-term sustainability. The crisis represented in *Baromas* is therefore a crisis of unprofitable labour. The farmer works, produces and invests, yet the economic system does not ensure adequate compensation for that labour.

5. *Dweepa*: Land, Displacement and the Loss of Economic Autonomy

Na. D'Souza's *Dweepa* shifts the focus from indebtedness to development-induced displacement. The central conflict emerges from the construction of the Linganamakki Dam and the

anticipated submergence of Hosamanehalli. The development project transforms the village landscape into a space of uncertainty. Ganapayya is presented as a small agricultural landholder. His agricultural holdings constitute the material basis of his livelihood and social identity. The text describes him as possessing two acres of wetland and three acres of agricultural land. Ganapayya's question, "If that should happen, what will happen to my house?" reveals the emotional consequences of displacement (D'Souza 3). The house represents more than shelter. It embodies memory, family history and continuity. The economic dimension of displacement becomes even clearer when Ganapayya asks where he can go after depending upon the farm and field throughout his life.

6. A Village Awaits Doomsday: Development and the Unequal Distribution of Cost

Jaideep Hardikar's *A Village Awaits Doomsday* extends the question of displacement from individual experience to collective rural suffering. The work demonstrates that displacement affects more than the ownership of agricultural land. It disrupts cattle-rearing, pastoral resources, local occupations, community relationships and traditional forms of livelihood. The proposed rehabilitation sites lack sufficient space for cattle, forcing villagers to consider selling their animals and losing income derived from milk and dairy products. The breakdown of community relationships further demonstrates that displacement destroys social capital as well as physical property. The text's observation that "backward areas and poor people" are required to sacrifice for the prosperity of more advanced areas provides a powerful critique of uneven development (Hardikar 32).

7. Ramrao: Debt, Labour and the Human Face of Agrarian Crisis

Among the selected texts, *Ramrao: The Story of India's Farm Crisis* provides perhaps the most direct movement from structural crisis to individual experience. Jaideep Hardikar presents Ramrao Panchleniwar as a cotton farmer from Hiwara in Vidarbha. The narrative combines documentary observation, personal biography and social analysis to demonstrate the human reality behind farmer indebtedness and suicide. The opening of the narrative establishes debt as a psychological burden. After surviving a pesticide-poisoning attempt, Ramrao continues to see the faces of his lenders. The text describes these faces as haunting him (Hardikar 2). The significance of this image lies in the transformation of debt from an external economic obligation into an internal psychological presence.

8. Pesticide as a Symbol of Agrarian Contradiction

One of the most striking symbolic dimensions of *Ramrao* is the transformation of an agricultural input into an instrument of death. Pesticide is ordinarily associated with protecting crops and sustaining agricultural production. In *Ramrao*'s case, the same agricultural environment contains the means through which he attempts to end his life. The existing thesis analysis identifies this as a symbolic contradiction: an input intended to protect agricultural production becomes associated with the destruction of the farmer himself. This movement between the individual and the collective is central to the literary power of the work.

9. Institutional Power and the Subaltern Farmer

The selected texts demonstrate that agrarian distress is closely connected with institutional power. In *Baromas*, the farmer is positioned within the agricultural market and financial system. His dependence on commercial inputs and credit restricts economic autonomy. In *Dweepa*, the state possesses the authority to construct a dam and administer compensation. The villagers experience the consequences of decisions made at a higher institutional level. In *A Village Awaits Doomsday*, institutional weakness becomes particularly visible through administrative delay, inadequate compensation, corruption and ineffective rehabilitation. In *Ramrao*, institutional failure is represented through the persistence of agrarian distress despite interventions such as loan waivers. The farmer remains dependent upon lenders because agricultural income remains uncertain. These representations demonstrate that the farmer occupies an unequal position in relation to powerful institutions.

10. Class and the Political Economy of the Village

The selected works also complicate the idea of the village as a homogeneous social unit. The rural population is differentiated by landholding, occupation, wealth, caste, access to resources and political influence. This is especially apparent in *Baromas*, where increased agricultural production does not necessarily produce prosperity. The farmer becomes increasingly dependent upon external inputs and credit. The same contradiction appears in *Ramrao*, where agricultural labour remains essential but economic returns remain uncertain. In *A Village Awaits Doomsday*, the unequal distribution of development costs demonstrates the relationship between economic class and political power.

11. Land as Property, Livelihood and Identity

A comparative reading of the selected texts reveals that land possesses at least three interconnected meanings. First, land is **property**. It has economic value and may be bought, sold, acquired or compensated. Second, land is **livelihood**. It provides agricultural production and sustains the household. Third, land is **identity**. It connects individuals and families with history, community and place. This third dimension becomes particularly important in *Dweepa*. Ganapayya's resistance demonstrates that land cannot be replaced simply through monetary compensation. The existing analysis of the text observes that the farmer's attachment to land is emotional as well as economic. Similarly, *A Village Awaits Doomsday* demonstrates that displacement can destroy cattle-based livelihoods, community relationships and traditional occupations. Thus, the loss of land becomes a form of social displacement.

12. Agricultural Labour and Economic Insecurity

The selected texts repeatedly expose the contradiction between labour and reward. The farmer works continuously, but agricultural labour does not guarantee economic stability. In *Baromas*, production costs consume agricultural returns. In *Ramrao*, successful production can still result in economic loss because market prices may collapse. In *Dweepa*, agricultural labour itself is threatened because the land is destined for submergence. In *A Village Awaits Doomsday*, displacement threatens the productive basis upon which rural households depend. Agricultural labour is consequently represented as a form of vulnerable labour. The farmer carries the risks of production while possessing limited control over the conditions under which production occurs. This is one of the strongest points of convergence among the texts.

13. Beyond Victimhood: Resistance and Human Dignity

Although the selected texts represent severe suffering, they do not portray rural communities merely as passive victims. Ganapayya's decision to remain on his land in *Dweepa* represents resistance. The villagers in *A Village Awaits Doomsday* protest, demand rehabilitation and challenge inadequate compensation. In *Ramrao*, survival itself becomes significant. Family members, farm workers and villagers participate in saving Ramrao and supporting him after the suicide attempt. In *Baromas*, continued agricultural labour represents endurance under difficult conditions. These forms of resistance are important because they demonstrate agency within conditions of structural constraint. The farmer is not simply an object upon

which economic forces operate. He remains a human subject capable of attachment, resistance, adaptation and solidarity.

14. Comparative Discussion

A comparative reading of the four texts reveals a progression from economic insecurity to displacement, institutional marginalisation and psychological crisis. *Baromas* primarily exposes the economic contradictions of agricultural modernisation. The farmer is caught between traditional agricultural knowledge and an increasingly market-dependent agricultural system. *Dweepa* shifts the focus to land and displacement. The farmer's economic existence is threatened not by crop failure but by a development project that transforms the physical conditions of rural life. *A Village Awaits Doomsday* expands the problem from the individual farmer to the displaced community. It reveals how development can produce unequal consequences, with economically weaker communities bearing disproportionate costs. *Ramrao* brings these structural questions into the intimate sphere of individual psychology. Debt, crop uncertainty, family responsibility and institutional inadequacy accumulate within one person's life. The four works therefore represent different manifestations of the same fundamental problem: the farmer's limited control over the material conditions necessary for survival.

15. Major Findings

The comparative study produces several significant findings. First, agrarian distress is represented as a structural crisis rather than an individual failure. Second, agricultural modernisation does not automatically produce economic prosperity. In *Baromas*, increased productivity is accompanied by increased input costs and dependence. Third, debt functions not merely as an economic obligation but as a form of psychological and social pressure. *Ramrao* particularly demonstrates how lenders become psychologically present within the farmer's consciousness. Fourth, land possesses economic, social, cultural and emotional value. Fifth, development can produce a class-based distribution of benefits and costs. *A Village Awaits Doomsday* shows economically weaker communities bearing the consequences of projects whose benefits may reach more advanced regions. Finally, the study establishes that contemporary agrarian literature performs a significant subaltern function by bringing marginalised rural experiences into literary visibility.

16. Conclusion

The comparative examination of *Dweepa*, *Baromas*, *Ramrao* and *A Village Awaits Doomsday* establishes that the plight of the Indian farmer cannot be understood through a single explanatory framework. Agrarian distress is simultaneously economic, social, political, ecological and psychological. *Baromas* reveals how agricultural modernisation can produce new forms of economic dependence. *Dweepa* demonstrates that the loss of land represents not merely the loss of property but the disruption of livelihood, identity and cultural continuity. *A Village Awaits Doomsday* exposes the unequal relationship between development and displaced communities, revealing how economically weaker populations may bear the costs of projects intended to produce broader prosperity. *Ramrao* transforms the structural crisis into a deeply human narrative in which debt, crop uncertainty, family responsibility and psychological suffering converge within the life of one farmer. Yet the selected narratives also refuse to define farmers exclusively through victimhood. Ganapayya's attachment to his land, the resistance of displaced communities, the solidarity surrounding *Ramrao* and the continued agricultural labour represented in *Baromas* demonstrate forms of human agency. The farmer is not merely a producer, debtor, landholder, beneficiary or statistical category. He is an individual whose livelihood is connected with family, memory, community, land and identity. The farmer's crisis is therefore not simply a rural crisis. It is a crisis that

raises fundamental questions about social justice, economic equality, environmental sustainability and human dignity.

Through *Dweepa*, *Baromas*, *Ramrao* and *A Village Awaits Doomsday*, contemporary literature demonstrates that the struggle of the farmer is ultimately a struggle over the right to livelihood, land, identity and dignity.

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