

Unraveling farmer suicides in India: egoism and masculinity in peasant life

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Abstrak

Farmers suicides have largely been framed through official suicide statistics, and they have been explained in terms of agrarian production-related crisis across geographies. Based on ethnographic work in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, this book offers a qualified challenge to such explanations. First part of the book describes local transformations that are taking place in interconnected domains of production, consumption, and social relationships. The attempted transition from a century-long involvement in rain-fed groundnut cultivation to groundwater-irrigated horticulture, which is being actively promoted by a pro-market state, has aggravated production-related risks in this fragile ecological zone. The book then explains how production risks contribute to causing anomic frictions amongst local small and middle farmers who aspire to adopt refined lifestyles and consumption practices. Emergent ideas of individualism, competitiveness, and status inequality are stressing familial roles and bonds. A key argument advanced here is that these local processes, their subjective experiences, and the manner in which they are acted upon, are all mediated by the local ideology of masculinity. Against the background of new social and economic processes, the second part of the book suggests that officially certified cases of farmers suicides are not always marked by farm-related economic factors in an objective and uniform manner. In other words, the entire process of production of official statistics of suicide is socially organized. The book concludes by suggesting that farm-related suicides relate to the wider field of rural suicides through new ideas and practices around individual and family honour, status inequality, and dignity.