

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

Egoism, Anomie and Masculinity: Suicide in Rural South India (Andhra Pradesh)

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## **Declaration**

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others. The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotations from it are permitted, provided that full acknowledgment is made. The thesis may not be reproduced without the prior written consent of the author. I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

## **Abstract**

The dissertation offers an examination of the incidence and significance of 'farmer suicides' in post-reform India. Based on fieldwork conducted in a village in Anantpur district, Andhra Pradesh, it challenges the notion that the official category of 'farm-related' suicides is always characterized by farm-related etiologies. Instead, it shows an etiological continuum underlying these suicides. One end of this continuum does comprise genuine farm-related suicides that are distinguished by high levels of indebtedness on account of non-fructuous investments in groundwater extraction, land-leases, expenditure on marriage(s) of daughter(s) and health related difficulties. But there is also a large sub-category amongst official 'farm-related' suicides that includes many that are not exclusively or principally farm-related. Sometimes called "fake (farm-related) suicides", this sub-category is explained locally in terms of a range of familial or inter-family disputes. It is by systematically creating or inflating the extent of household indebtedness after a suicide, attributing it to 'farm-expenditures', and then denying non farm- related causes in collusion with the police during an inquest, that local peasants manage to have such suicides classified officially as 'farmers' suicides'. Such a classification is to their financial or social advantage.

My analysis of local farming practices confirms the view that the entrenchment of capital-intensive groundwater-based commercial agriculture in a semi-arid zone has intensified various production related risks. However, the dissertation also shows that rural suicides represent significant social and cultural disjunctions. Local inter and intra-family kin relationships are increasingly undermined by rising individualism and its attendant friction. There are also normative tensions that arise out of an acute desire on the part of local peasants to adopt status-enhancing, refined

lifestyles and consumption practices. A local ideology of masculinity (*paurusham*) structures the interaction between these wider economic, social and cultural changes and emergent notions of self amongst the villagers. Local suicides, whether they are principally farm-related or not, represent differential possession of masculine aggression, and one's capacity and willingness to construe and avenge irreversible dishonour (*avamanam*). Insofar as the claim of honour is widely democratized now, and insofar as there is an expansion in the scope of social space in which it is claimed now, the possibilities of experiencing dishonour and the need to avenge it by way of suicide has also increased.

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## **Statement of ethics**

The practice of ethnography necessarily involves confronting and negotiating a range of ethical concerns in the field (Toit 1980, Cassell 1980, Clifford 1984: Introduction). At the heart of these concerns has been the requirement of ‘informed consent’, which is commonly taken to mean that a researcher must, on *her* part, communicate adequately to her informants about the purpose(s), potential impacts, and source(s) of funding of her research [The Code of Ethics, American Anthropological Association (AAA) 1998: 2-3, Toit 1980: 280]. This communication is thus expected to form the ethical bases upon which informants may decide autonomously to participate in a research enterprise to the extent and for the length that they may wish, or to withdraw from it. Other guiding principles of research, such as using the information so gathered in a responsible manner, abiding by the requirements of confidentiality and treating one’s informants with dignity, are also closely associated with the obligation of obtaining informed consent. There can scarcely be any two opinions on the ‘categorical imperative’ underlying informed consent (Cassell 1980:35) – that is, informants ought to be always treated as ends in themselves and not merely means. These principles, however, cannot be applied by rote in fieldworks where the relationship between a researcher and informants is commonly open-ended, observation oriented, and controlled by the latter.

In the course of selecting a village as my primary field-site I visited several villages in Anantpur that had reported farm suicides. I was commonly referred to as a *kottāppā* (a “new/other fellow”) during my interactions with local peasants, and like Geertz’s (1973: 413) experience of subjection at the hand of his “all-too-probing” Indonesian informants, my otherness attracted pointed and unrelenting enquires about my identity, the purpose of my research and about the size and source of my “salary”

(*jeetam*). It thus became my abiding obligation to explain that the purpose of this research was to produce a PhD dissertation on agrarian conditions and ‘farmers’ suicide’. I reiterated constantly that I was not affiliated in any manner to the Governments of Andhra Pradesh and of India, neither to any Non-Government Organization, and that my research offered no such tangible benefits as many of these institutions had been providing to the family of a suicide. Of course these explanations did not cut much ice with my informants and they remained circumspect in discussing the detail of an individual case of suicide beyond making general statements about peasants’ indebtedness and farming-related difficulties. A few of them considered my research to be frivolous (“*mamuli/udake*”), for it offered no material benefits to a deceased’s family. Torn between my anxiety to be trusted by my informants and yet, wanting to leave no scope for any misinterpretation of the purpose of my research, I indeed considered these “conditions of fieldwork” to be serious “*impediments to the task of fieldwork*” (Pratt 1984: 41).

This is a reason why I chose to maintain discretion at the time of taking residence in NRP by professing the object of my fieldwork to be merely an exhaustive investigation of the local dry land economy. It was only after I had secured familiarity with the villagers by way of conducting a village census that I expressed my research interest in local ‘farmers’ suicides’ as well. In hindsight, this discretion helped me contain any aggravation of the intense feeling of suspicion (*anumanam*) – I was dubbed varyingly as a “police informer” or a “government agent” smuggled in to collect information on Maoist activists or household farming properties - that my arrival had generated in NRP<sup>1</sup>. Although a puritanical reading of the principle of informed consent may show my discretion to be a mild version of “disguised/deceptive/undercover-agent model of fieldwork” (Toit 1980: 281-82, Cassell 1980: 35-36), I do not consider my action to ethically dishonest. For one, I

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<sup>1</sup> The pseudonym of the village where the primary fieldwork for this dissertation was conducted.

did not use this discretion to trick or coerce any informant into yielding information on suicides within that village (cf. pp. 208-09 below) and secondly, I resumed giving a full-fledged explanation of my work to the families of the suicides within NRP and outside of it when I began to interview them systematically. There were indeed instances in which I duly stopped my investigation and left the houses of the suicides when asked by a member of the family to do so (pp. 211 below).

The salience of observing confidentiality in fieldwork cannot be overstated, for even a slight breach in this is liable to cause irreversible distress and harm to informants and to all subsequent researches in a community (see the “Tearoom” and “Springdale” controversies in Cassell 1980: 34). To ensure complete anonymity to my informants as I promised to them, *all* personal names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms and so are the names of all those villages. The name and map of the *mandal* where I conducted the fieldwork is also not revealed for similar reasons. I may confess here that I have found maintaining the pledge of loyalty and confidentiality, as Toit perceptively observes (1980: 276-277), to have been a most trying and delicate ethical concern of all to me. To elaborate, as a standard technique of information gathering I would meet with local peasants and officers who were interested in knowing my views on the “genuineness” (*nijam*) of another case of ‘farmers’ suicides’ they had intimately known, after they had discussed one case of suicide with me. In such situations I needed all the tact (including frequent lying) under my command to keep the window of further information or confirmation from their sources open without violating my promise of confidentiality to a deceased’s family (e.g. pp. 252-253 below). The issue of loyalty raises a further dilemma. Whilst it is straighter for a researcher to valorize her loyalty to the community in which she has worked over and above other communities or institutions of a state, how does she act ethically when she is implored to give reciprocal “help” to her informants which implicates her into colluding in an untruthful and illegal, if not entirely an unjust, act

(cf. pp. 221: footnote 14 below)? I may conclude this statement by mentioning that I have tried my level best to preserve the autonomy and dignity of my informants, and to the extent that I have calibrated certain ethical codes given the peculiarities of situations that I faced, my intention has been to understand the complexity of the subject of suicide and not hurt and harm any of my informants.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 'Farmers' suicides': The thesis**

"This season (i.e. December, 1997 to Mid February, 1998), not a day has passed without at least one farmer ending his life as a consequence of failure of the cotton, chilli and Red gram crops in Warangal, Karimnagar, Medak, Rangareddy and Mahbubnagar districts in Telangana region and Karnool in Rayalseema region. *Death has stalked* Guntur too: One farmer committed suicide on January 8 after his crop failed (emphasis mine)."<sup>1</sup>

A mounting number of reports about peasants committing suicide, such as the one superscripted above, have been appearing in the Indian media for over a decade now<sup>2</sup>. Their chronology goes back to 1998 when widespread incidents of suicide - from amongst cotton cultivators in Andhra Pradesh (AP)<sup>3</sup> and Vidarbha (Maharashtra) to red gram cultivators in Karnataka - were reported for the first time in that country. Such reports have continued to appear ever since, albeit with varying frequency, and they suggest the trend to be not only persistent but also broad in its geographical scope. Thus, in 2000-01, new districts in Rayalseema (AP) and Southern Karnataka were reportedly affected, and by 2004-05 news of suicides by cultivators from Punjab and Kerala began to trickle in. By 2006, as many as 30-35 districts spread across four states (i.e. AP, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala) of India were said to have been returning cases of farming related suicides<sup>4</sup>. As well as generating keen interest amongst members of the general public in India, the

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<sup>1</sup> From 'The Killing Fields', *Frontline*, February 7-20, 1998, Chennai.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation, I use the term media to refer to print media unless specified otherwise. Further, amongst the Indian newspapers I have referred mostly to the English daily *The Hindu* (pub. Chennai) and its sister publication, *Frontline*. One is very likely to arrive at different chronologies and geographies of 'farmers' suicides' by referring to different newspapers in concerned vernaculars. My aim here is only to outline a broad picture.

<sup>3</sup> Telangana consists of the 10 north-western districts of Andhra Pradesh (AP). Rayalseema, the south eastern and southern parts of the state, has 4 districts to it and the *Costa* (the coastal strip) comprises of 9 districts. Vidarbha in western Maharashtra is contiguous to Telangana districts of AP.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Chief Ministers' Meet', *The Hindu*, April 11, 2006, Chennai.

constant media coverage of suicides has elicited attention in Indian academia. In 2006 the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) devoted a string of special articles to explain the phenomenon across these states<sup>5</sup>. It is this consistent media and academic attention about what are termed 'farmers' suicides'<sup>6</sup>, and about the explanations offered for it, to which this dissertation owes its conception and with which it engages.

Aside from its regularity, the journalistic and academic literature is also distinguished by a vocabulary that de Certeau would call strategic rhetoric (1984: xix). As the phrases italicised in the initial superscription suggest, a range of tropes have been used to make the thesis of 'farmers' suicides' both general and compelling. "Rash/spate of suicides", "serial suicides", "mass-suicides" and "an epidemic of suicides amongst cultivators" are some of the standard representations used in media and academic reports<sup>7</sup>. The image of widespread disorganisation in contemporary agrarian society thus drawn is also amplified by juxtaposing 'farmers' suicides' with alleged suicides amongst weavers, 'starvation deaths' and 'deepening hunger' in rural India (Patnaik 2004<sup>8</sup>, Gupta 2005). This bundling of images of distress is strategic in its illocutionary functions (Austin quoted by Parkinson 1968: 14). That is, it has been used by a section of the Indian media and academia to take polemical positions (i.e., to warn /persuade) in debates around: (a). the nature and direction of contemporary urban and rural inequalities in India and, (b). the nature and effect of the processes of liberalisation and globalisation of the Indian economy

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<sup>5</sup> EPW April 22, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase 'farmers' suicides' appears under inverted commas throughout this dissertation, my apologies that the notation makes it rather cumbersome for my readers.

<sup>7</sup> See 'Vidarbha's Trauma', *Frontline*, July 31-August 13, 2004, 'A Farm Crisis and Suicides', *Frontline*, April 14-27, 2001. For a more flourishing and equally confusing vocabulary in usage, see '17,060 farm suicides in one year', *The Hindu*, Jan 31<sup>st</sup> , 2008. 'Spate of suicides' is more commonly used phrase in non-journalistic accounts (cf. Vasavi 1999, Mishra 2006, Mohanty 2005).

<sup>8</sup> See *Frontline* February 28-March 12, 2004.

since 1991 on the country's agriculture (EPW 2006).<sup>9</sup> But I use de Certeau's point of strategic rhetoric in another sense here. These representations of 'farmers' suicides' are institutionally circumscribed in that they come from institutions external to the immediate environment of suicides. This dissertation describes how these representations have permeated to the grassroots and have subsumed the native/local languages and speech-acts (Ryle 1968: 109) concerning suicides (Ch. 5 and 6 below).

The thesis of 'farmers' suicides' advances three mutually interconnected arguments. First, it implicitly contends that the phenomenon constitutes an unprecedented genus of suicides that relates exclusively or, at least primarily, to a set of occupational (i.e. farming-related) antecedents (Jodhka 2006: 1533-34, Mohanty 2005, Mishra 2006, Rao and Suri 2006). Put differently, the claim is that 'farmers' suicides' constitute an aetiologically distinct (in Durkheim's sense, 2006: 149, see below) sort of rural suicide which is delimited externally and is homogeneous from within. The set of primary farm-related antecedents causing deaths that recur in journalistic reports include "repeated failure of high cash value crops (such as cotton), the inability of farmers to cope with the changes in the environment (regularly erratic monsoons since 1998), pest attacks on the crops... frustration at the failure of pesticides (in controlling them) and above all, debts."<sup>10</sup>

Severe indebtedness as a result of production-oriented vulnerabilities remains a proximate antecedent in the academic literature too, albeit in a more nuanced way. Thus, Parthsarathy and Shameen (1998), who examined production conditions for cotton in Telangana, impute severe farm-related indebtedness to, (a). decreased and unstable farm incomes in the 1990s which came about as a result of poor

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<sup>9</sup> Refer, for instance, to the interview given by a reputed Indian writer, Arundhati Roy, in the US, available at [www.democracynow.org/article.pl](http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl) (March 03, 2006). This is just one of the many examples that could be furnished.

<sup>10</sup> 'Farmers in Distress', April 4-17, 1998, *Frontline*, Chennai.

monsoons and increasing cost of production for commercial crops and, (b). the predominantly informal nature of outstanding debts. Subsequent empirical studies by Deshpande (2002) in Karnataka, Mohanty (2005: 254-56) in Maharashtra, and Rao and Suri (2006) in AP, not only confirm the presence of these antecedents, but arrange them in the same order of significance. This set of distinct occupational aetiologies is then placed along divergent, although overlapping, social, ecological and political economic perspectives for understanding 'farmers' suicides' (see below). Overall, inasmuch as suicides are attributed primarily to production-related vulnerabilities, an agrarian economic crisis is proposed as the primary causal context for 'farmers' suicides' in the literature (cf. Assadi 1998, Iyer and Manick, 2000 in Jodhka 2006: 1534, Mishra 2006).

Second, the thesis of 'farmers' suicides' argues that this distinct aetiological category of suicides is statistically significant. The argument here is that the cumulative number of such suicidal deaths amongst cultivators is conspicuously large for any of the four concerned states in any single year since 1998. Statistics on farm-related suicides were first catalogued by local sources (i.e. peasant organisations, local media groups etc.). Such folk statistics are useful as a cultural artefact, although in as much as the aggregate statistics of suicide they quote varies from source to source, they are extremely unreliable (see Excerpt 1.2). However, there are some who have recently used the official suicide statistics to confirm the argument (of statistical significance of farm-related suicides). They extend their argument to claim, as Durkheim would have it (1897/2006: 22), a distinct "statistical unity and individuality" for the phenomenon. That is, they argue that the incidence of farm-related suicides has acquired a definitive acceleration in short to medium term, and that it is higher than that for other occupations.

#### Excerpt 1.2

1. “ Adappa and Reddy (i.e. deceased farmers’ names) are just two among the 2,500 cases of suicides in Anantpur over the past six years”.<sup>11</sup>
2. “The state (AP) has seen more than 3,000 recorded cases of suicides in the last five years (i.e.1997-04). In 2002 alone, according to Police records (The Hindu, Hyderabad ed. Jan, 06, 2003) as many as 2,580 deeply indebted farmers killed themselves mainly by ingesting pesticides in three districts – Warangal, Karimnagar and Nizamabad”. <sup>12</sup>

Such a proposition has been advanced by Mishra (2006: 1566) and by Mitra & Shroff (2007). Computing what he calls the Suicide Mortality Rate (SMR) -the incidence of suicides per year as given by official statistics / 100,000 farmers excluding the age group of 0-4 years - for 1995-2001, Mishra claims that the rate sharply appreciated in AP and Maharashtra (by 88.23% and 200% respectively) in this period. He then compares this mortality rate with that of non-farmers – which is presumably the total population of a state minus that of farmers above 0-4 years<sup>13</sup>. The ratio of suicide rate for farmers to non-farmers is claimed to have climbed from 1.25 to 1.52 for AP and from 0.82 to 2.67 for Maharashtra between 1995 and 2001. As I have mentioned above, the facts of a differential suicide rate for cultivators vis-à-vis other occupations, and a rising suicide rate for cultivators in the longitudinal sense, are epistemologically similar to the way in which Durkheim framed the question of suicide research in his *Suicide* (2006, see below).

Adding to these two contentions is a third proposition; that the incidents of suicides by cultivators tend to align more with certain periods in the year than others. The

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<sup>11</sup> P. Sainath, ‘With Drought in the Drivers’ Seat, July 13, 2003, *The Hindu*, Chennai.

<sup>12</sup> Patnaik, U., ‘Rural Indian in Ruins’, *Frontline* 28-March 12, 2004. Patnaik says “more than 3,000 deaths” took place between 1998 and 2003. Out of these deaths, she says, 2580 deaths took place in 2002 alone. If the second figure is correct, it follows that there were only 420 deaths in remaining 4 years, or just 100 per year on an average. In which case, not only the other informal statistics are plainly incorrect, but the entire argument about the statistical significance of ‘farmers’ suicides’ thesis is weakened.

<sup>13</sup> Mishra himself seems to understand non-farmers as those who are not employed in agriculture. The population of 0-4 years is excluded from computation because suicides are supposed not to occur in this group.

more suicide-prone periods are purportedly the two agriculturally intensive seasons, namely the pre-sowing summer months at the beginning of *Kharif*, and/or the pre and post- harvest period towards its end when the effects of an erratic monsoon and/or an inability to procure credit or clear outstanding debts is arguably most pronounced. Thus one journalistic report finds that between May 14- June 14 2004 as many as “ 279 (officially 194) suicides are reported in AP”.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, between September and November 2000 “41 cases of suicides” are said to have taken place in Anantpur district, AP.<sup>15</sup> Here is then a suggestion of a wave, that is, of differential movements of the incidence of suicidal deaths by cultivators intra-annually. Two objections to this proposition are that it remains patently unverifiable in official suicide statistics or in other empirical studies, and that, as Mohanty points out for Vidarbha (2005: 257), there is no *prima facie* evidence linking the aggregate performance of *Kharif* crop in a given year with the incidence of rural suicide for the respective year. Yet when presented in conjunction with other alleged attributes of ‘farm-suicides’ - such as, insecticide consumption being the uniform technology for self-destruction, or a feud with moneylenders being a common triggering factor for suicides - this proposition complements the points of statistical and aetiological exceptionalities.

The broad salience of the 'farmers' suicides' thesis is that it has been explained in the modal terms of agrarian crisis/distress, although different disciplinary perspectives organise the nature of this crisis differently by emphasizing different aspects of it. One perspective understands agrarian crisis as primarily a production-related crisis in so far as it accords exclusive attention to dwindling farm incomes in post 1991 period (Parthasarathy and Shameen 1998, Vaidyanathan 2006, Gill and Singh 2006). It says, correctly ( Ch. 3 below), that just as the real cost of production for cash crops has consistently been rising since the 1990s on account of

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<sup>14</sup>V. Sridhar, ‘An Agrarian Tragedy’, *Frontline*, July 2, 2004.

<sup>15</sup>P. Menon, ‘A Farm Crisis and Suicides’, *Frontline*, April 14-27, 2001.

rising input costs, the yield gains obtained until the 1980s have begun to decline over time in large swathes of India. Negative fluctuations in (private) groundwater irrigation, which incidentally was the mainstay of the yield growth obtained in the 1980s (Harriss 2006: 83-84), is also underscored. Although there are some disagreements about its extent, this perspective also sees the post 1991 period as one during which the market prices for key cash crops, such as cotton or wheat, have experienced downward movement as a result of the liberalisation of state administered import regime and crop pricing mechanisms.

The second group (Reddy 1998, Vasavi 1999, Shiva and Jaffri 1999, 2002) construes agrarian crises as the 'globalisation of non-sustainable' capitalistic farming practices. The entrenched practice of 'green revolution' technology since the late 1960s across India, it argues, has entailed high ecological input demands (on soil, groundwater, genetic variety of plants etc.) which are particularly disproportionate to the ecological and economic endowments of small peasants in the rain-fed areas where suicides are mostly concentrated. It views this fundamental disjunction to be at the root of a range of new production related vulnerabilities, such as the higher susceptibility of high yield (HYV) cash crops to diseases, pest-attacks and moisture related distress (and hence the need to invest heavily in pesticides and groundwater irrigation). It is also this disjunction, Vandana Shiva and others say, that has rendered small peasants subservient to input markets.

Relative to the economic perspective, the agro-ecological perspective shows a better appreciation of the salience of spatiality in the practice of agriculture and of the heterogeneity amongst peasants in terms of their differential production capacities and calculus. It is also more forceful in incriminating the agency of the state for exacerbating ecological and economic disjunction by emphasizing reduced investments by the state in extension services, surface irrigation, in rural credit and

particularly, its de-regulation of Indian seed and pesticide markets for global capital post 1991.

Given these orientations, much of the agro-ecological understanding of the agrarian crisis shades into the political-economic perspective on the subject except for one key point of distinction; in the latter, the crisis facing the Indian peasantry is traced to the marginality of peasantry in the emergent political-economy of the post 1991 Indian state (Jodhka 2006, Chatterjee 2008). Chatterjee, in particular, sees the agrarian crisis as being rooted in an inability of the small peasantry to organise itself and engage with the 'post-developmetalist' state - which is increasingly subservient to corporate capital (pp. 56-57) - even as the peasantry's engagement in the market economy is ever more entrenched. Although there are multiple reasons to think that Chatterjee is overstating his case<sup>16</sup>, one that is particularly relevant here is that the small peasants in AP, as elsewhere in India, have not so much lacked (interest-oriented) organisation as they have steadily transacted it for a caste/identity based politics since the early 1980s. Further, and this applies to all three perspectives outlined so far, they tend to abstract agrarian crisis and 'farmers' suicides' from their immediate sociality by paying scant attention to changes in contemporary agrarian social relations<sup>17</sup>.

Noting this lacuna in the literature, Mohanty (2005) has instead posited a broad Durkheimian social realist perspective of egoistic -anomic disequilibrium in contemporary peasant communities. He reports in his research on 'farmers' suicides' in Maharashtra that it is preponderantly small peasants from the middle and lower castes – especially those who had shifted to commercial agriculture

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<sup>16</sup> Chatterjee's basic proposition (p. 52) that 'the capitalistic industrial growth now under way in India shall make room for the preservation of the peasantry', is not novel. The Marxists have a thesis of 'dualistic functionalism' in which the peasantry is seen as being 'allowed' to self-preserve itself at subsistence level in order to supply subsidized labour to capitalistic farm and non-farm production. Kautsky was the first amongst them to propose this in the late 1890s.

<sup>17</sup> Vasavi (1998, 1999) is an exception here.

recently owing to their declining caste based occupations - who were more susceptible to farming-related distresses and suicides than large and middle farmers from traditional peasant castes. These lower castes include the *Mahār*, *Nav-Buddhā* (Neo-Buddhists) and *Chamār* (p. 259). He attributes their higher vulnerability to local “social antagonisms”. Peasants from these castes maintained high expectations in cotton-farming and, hence, they made investments that were disproportionate to their assets even though they lacked the requisite technical expertise for cotton-cultivation. Mohanty finds that whereas the low-caste peasants were systematically bypassed by the local state farm-extension machinery (p. 260), they also faced an antagonistic upper-caste peasantry that was patently disinclined to help them with the expertise of cotton-cultivation (pp. 262-63) since it viewed them as competitors. Mohanty’s research is an important contribution to the literature. However, one notes that the empirical lynchpin in Mohanty’s thesis – that of an occupational shift – does not quite agree with another study of suicides conducted in the same region of Vidarbha<sup>18</sup>. Also, the point that cotton-cultivation is a highly knowledge/skill intensive activity does not apply to the cultivation of more conventional crops such as groundnut or red gram.

## **1.2 The dissertation: epistemological considerations**

This dissertation, which originated from a sense of substantive dissatisfaction with the literature on 'farmers' suicides', is an ethnographic investigation of the said phenomena. Set within an “ineluctably local” space (Geertz 1983:4) - a dry-land village in southern AP - it seeks to describe the nature of the agrarian present, the context against which incidents of suicides are enacted and enunciated by local peasants. Specifically, it wishes to answer the following four questions. What is the nature of the economic, social and cultural transformations apparent in

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<sup>18</sup> Mohanty (2005:259) finds that “85% of the lower caste farmers (amongst the 66 cases of suicides that he studied) has less than 10 years of experience in cultivation”. On the contrary, Mishra (2006: 1541) reports that, “58% (of the 111 suicides that he studied) had *more* than 10 years experience”. The proportion of lower caste suicides in Mishra’s sample is, however, rather low.

contemporary agrarian communities in AP? Do these transformations and their quotidian experiences relate to the incidence of suicides, especially alleged farm-related suicides amongst peasants, and, if yes, what is the precise nature of this relationship? How do such social identities as those concerning caste, class, gender, age and occupations relate to the ideation and conduct of suicide amongst peasants? How is the ideology and act of suicide enunciated by the peasants themselves? As an answer to these questions, my description of the nature of the agrarian present confirms and reconciles different strands of the four perspectives synoptically presented above, just as it also extends and questions other strands. I shall return to these substantive engagements shortly. But where this dissertation categorically diverges from the literature is in its grounded critique of the presumed epistemological certitude of the propositions underpinning the common thesis of 'farmers' suicides'. Insofar as this certitude is a product of diligent borrowings from, or in Atkinson's words (1978: 14-15), "unflinching deference" to, Durkheim's positivist epistemology of suicide research<sup>19</sup>, this dissertation is also an ethnographic engagement with his scholarship in the South Indian context.

Amongst the three contours along which my epistemological critique is the clearest, the first concerns the presupposition of an aetiological *sui generis* in the thesis of 'farmers' suicides'. It is expedient to heed Durkheim's injunction that "each society has a particular disposition towards suicides at *any* moment in its history (2006: 24, emphases mine)".<sup>20</sup> That suicide has a historicity in rural India - just as elsewhere in the world (cf. Weaver and Wright, 2009) - is to underline that it has always been a mode of cathartic social action in multitudinous contexts. Numerous

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<sup>19</sup> This is so, interestingly, at a time when it has come under renewed scrutiny in western social sciences. See Weaver and Wright (2009) for a summary of the critique of Durkheim's methods in his work on suicide.

<sup>20</sup> From the constructionist end of the epistemological spectrum, Baechler (1979: 38) has also made the same point.

stray references (e.g. Trawick 1994: 161, 180, Parry 2001, Hall 2007, also Durkheim's own description of "Hindu suicides", p. 241) and at least one systematic ethnography of suicide in rural India (Elwin 1943), attest to this. These references trace the ideation and act of suicide amongst rural Indians to polytheistic experiences of negated self-hood (Beck 1971 in Ullrich 1987) within intimate family relationships. Thus, Elwin's pioneering work on suicides amongst the Marias in Bastar during the 1930s finds the most recurring antecedents of suicides being conjugal antagonism, terminal diseases, and resentment at a rebuke (1943: 57) from a close kinsmen/women. Analogously, Ulrich's (1987) Karnataka peasant housewives and Hall's (2007) *dalit* women in coastal AP, regularly consider committing suicide in response to symbolic (Bourdieu 2001: *passim*) and literal violence perpetrated against them by the men in their families. Trawick (1994: 161) refers to suicides amongst men and women in Madurai that are engendered by conflicts in families around the practices of hierarchical masculine prerogatives. These conflicts include a husband's engagement in extra-marital affairs, his bigamy, or his monopoly over the marriage arrangements of his offspring<sup>21</sup>.

So, contrary to the position that the contributors to the thesis of 'farmers' suicides' wittingly or unwittingly take, a suicide by a farmer or someone from his/her household is not *a priori* a case of 'farmer's suicide' in the aetiological sense outlined above. Given the possibilities of multiple non-farm related causes, the principles of causality require of the proponents of the 'farmers' suicides' thesis to establish, to the degree possible, the causes for the act (of suicide) as belonging principally to the farming domain, *and* to falsify the presence of any principle non-farming antecedents<sup>22</sup>. As Lukes (1973: 202) points out, an aetiological

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<sup>21</sup>Further testimonies for this formulation also come from the references to suicides in studies of peri-urban and urban communities in India (see Parry 2001, Mines 1994, Alan 1988).

<sup>22</sup>Reading Wolf (1966), I understand farming reasons as those originating in the economic sphere of production, and non-farming reasons as those that originate within domestic relations inside the

classification must be “exhaustive of the explananda” to be acceptable. It is here that we find the thesis of ‘farmers’ suicides’ to be ridden by the same logical fallacy that Levi-Strauss (cited in Lukes, p. 31) found to be typical of Durkheim’s works, including *Suicide*. This is the fallacy of *petitio principii*; the proponents of ‘farmers’ suicides’ first presuppose the veracity of exclusive farm-related antecedents, which they then seek to confirm. I show in this dissertation that this epistemological fallacy entails two serious implications. First, there is a systematic taxonomical solecism in that such cases of suicides by farmers which expressly lack principle farming antecedent(s) and/or, rather expectedly, demonstrate too intricate a synthesis of farm and non-farm antecedent(s) to be categorically defined either way, are without reason *confirmed* to be cases of 'farmers' suicides'<sup>23</sup>. This further results in a situation in which the possibilities of an aetiological interaction between farming and non-farming antecedent(s), or an exclusive operation of non-farm aetiologies, are by default considered to be too insignificant to merit any systematic analytical attention.

Thus, in Mohanty and Shroff's paper (2004: 5605) , amongst the 8 cases of 'farmers' suicides', for 3 cases (nos. 1, 6 and 7) the exclusive antecedent reported is familial discord due to the deceased's extra-marital liaison, alcoholism and gambling respectively, and all of these arguably appear non-farm related in their contextual enunciations. Yet, in a fashion that is reminiscent of Durkheim's sociologism – wherein Durkheim insists on making 'social' the only independent variable to explain suicide (Atkinson 1978: 24, Lukes, pp. 21-22) - there is a convoluted insistence that such antecedents must be understood as economically/farming related. In another paper (2005: 264), Mohanty describes the suicide of a large farmer from the dominant *Kunabi* caste in Vidarbha who had been the incumbent

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household or outside of it. In making this distinction, my case is not to rack up the old Dumontian dualism between the material and cultural/ideal; the point made is analytical, but crucial.

<sup>23</sup>Note the striking analogy between Durkheim’s formulation about exclusive binary aetiological distinctions - 'social' and 'extra-social' causes (2006: 29) and that in the ‘farmers’ suicides’ thesis – ‘farm’ and ‘non-farm’.

Sarpanch of his village and who was seeking re-election. To quote Mohanty, “(he) lost the election, and despairing of ever being elected, took his life”. Yet Mohanty confirms this suicide as farm-related, as declared in official statistics; he thinks that the “the roots (of the suicide) lay in the sphere of economic production”, although the only justification he is able to offer is a facile observation that there is a “close connection between politics and agriculture”. Similar instances of crude economism can be found in other papers by the proponents of the ‘farmers’ suicides’ thesis (such as Mishra 2006:1544). Avoiding this presupposed economism and the taxonomical coercion that it entails, enables us not only to reach a clearer grasp of the genus of 'farmers' suicides', but also to get an understanding of the way in which it relates to the broader field of rural suicides - aetiologically and ideologically ( Ch. 5 & 6 below).

The fallacy of *petitio principi* in Durkheim's *Suicide* (2006: 148-149) is reflected in the way he arbitrarily presupposes his four social suicide states – egoism, altruism, anomie and fatalism – to cause the suicide rate of a given society to increase<sup>24</sup>, and which he then proceeds to prove in his book. As Lukes helpfully points out (p. 202), Durkheim fails to furnish any empirical proof about why should one believe him when he claims there are (only) four social-etiological types (p. 149), or when he claims that these types must be considered being mutually exclusive in their attributes. In this respect, his justificatory argument (*ibid*) that “one antecedent or a single group of antecedents (such as egoism or anomie) can produce only one result” is rather dubious, because it discounts the eminent possibility of one antecedent, or set of antecedents, interacting with another to cause an effect, or a set of effects. One reason why his explanation must suffer from *petitio principi*, like the ‘farmers’ suicides’ thesis, is the way he frames the question of suicide for sociology. Durkheim believes (pp. 24-28, 150) that it is the differential tendencies of

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<sup>24</sup> A discussion about the substantive aspect of Durkheim's theory of suicide appears below.

social groups to commit suicide across time – or, the relative rate of suicide – which is the exclusive subject-matter of sociological theorisation. This obliged him to look for large scale time-series data on suicide across societies. But, in as much as he found it difficult to obtain a credible inductive description of individual suicides on a sufficiently large scale basis amongst non-official sources, Durkheim had to rely on official suicide statistics ; hence the problem of *petitio principi*. Interestingly, in an effort to make a virtue of this methodological vice, he explicitly insisted that official suicide statistics are indispensable for the sociological project of explaining differential suicide rates (2006:148-150). He also believed, although he never stated it upfront, that the nature of official suicide statistics is unproblematic as compared to unofficial data on suicides (see p. 148).

These two paradigmatic contentions have attracted both vigorous support and scathing critique in the western social sciences<sup>25</sup>. The constraints of space disable me from discussing the first of these in much detail. Nonetheless, I wish to briefly underline my agreement with the criticism that Douglas (1967), Atkinson (1978), and very recently, Weaver and Wright (2009: 4-5) have made about Durkheim's first contention. Each of them historicises Durkheim's *Suicide* to show, rather convincingly, that the emergence of statistical comparison of official suicide data as *the* sociological method is indissociable from the gradual rise of data producing instrumentalities (or, the “governmentality”) of modern western states since the 1850s. The paradigmatic ascension of statistical method, they show, was at the cost of a long-tradition of inductive, detailed, case-study method in psychology. Further, the ethnography of suicide (e.g. Firth 1961, in Giddens 1971, Bohannan 1960, Brown 1986) as well phenomenological research into the registration of a death (Garfinkle 1967 in Atkinson 1978:188-189) would suggest that a (Weberian) interpretive

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<sup>25</sup> Douglas (1967) gives an exhaustive account of post-Durkheimian positivistic theories on suicide. Atkinson (1978: Ch.2) is a more succinct - but less original - appraisal of Durkheimian epistemology.

theorisation of suicide is not only possible, but also remains relevant as an essential corrective to Durkheimian positivism (see below).

It is the second proposition of Durkheim, namely that the nature of official suicide statistics is objective enough to be unproblematic, which is more germane to this dissertation because the proponents of 'farmers' suicides' thesis make much the same assumption. It is certainly curious, as Douglas underlines (1967: 173), that while Durkheim found the official statistics on the motives of suicides "suspect enough" to find it misleading (p. 151), he did not make even a single reference to the general merits/de-merits of using official suicide statistics in *Suicide*. This is despite the fact that the opposition to using official suicide statistics had been widespread and robust in 19<sup>th</sup> century French sociology (Douglas: *ibid*). A synopsis of the charges that have been made against Durkheim's reliance on official suicide statistics in particular (Douglas 1967: Ch. 12, Atkinson 1978: 37-38, Pope 1976: 10-11, Weaver 2009: 53) is that he fails to answer two key questions. They are: (a). whether his 'objective' definition of suicide, in which he seeks to exclude all subjectivities associated with the act (such as, whether one intends to die or not, or the motive(s) of a suicide, pp. 18-19), at all corresponded to the way in which those officials who gathered suicide-data understood the term and, (b). whether the officials who gathered suicide related data could be considered *uniformly* efficient and accurate within and across countries in classifying deaths and their aetiologies appropriately. These two questions - which give rise to the charges of systematic bias and dark numbers (see below) against the official suicide statistics (Douglas 1967: 193-94) - can be applied to the thesis of farm suicides as well. But, before we examine the claims of aetiological and statistical *sui generis* of 'farmers' suicides' on these two counts, and see what official statistics might fail to reveal, it is expedient to see first what these statistics may hypothetically be taken to reveal.

### 1.2.1 'Farmers' suicides': the official suicide statistics in India

In consulting the official suicide statistics of India an important feature that goes unnoticed is that, unlike in the Anglo-Saxon states (Atkinson 1978: 89, Weaver 2009: introduction), the Indian state lacks the dedicated medico-legal system of coroners to investigate and collate mortality statistics<sup>26</sup>. These tasks are, instead, handled by the Police. Junior officials of the Assistant Sub-Inspector rank conduct inquests if and when an attempted suicide/death (presumed to be a suicide) is reported by a concerned village secretary/panchayat secretary/*talari*/medical officer of a hospital<sup>27</sup>. It also bears mentioning here that unlike in the UK (Atkinson 1978:90), attempted suicide remains a punishable offence in India, where it entails the punishment of a year's imprisonment under the Indian Penal Code (section 309). Suicide statistics collected from *mandal* police posts are collated at the District Crime Record Bureau (DCRB), then at the State Crime Record Bureau (SCRB), and finally, at the national level (NCRB).

Scrutiny of the NCRB data for the period 1990-2007 suggests that the number of suicides per 100,000 people (the suicide rate) for India has increased from 8.94 to 10.8. At a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 1.12%, this is a relatively modest increase (cf. Durkheim 2006:25-26). Compared to this, however, the rate of acceleration in suicide rate for AP has indeed been quite sharp; it has doubled from

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<sup>26</sup> As far as I am aware, police officials conducting an inquest in rural India also lack any specific codified legal handbook, such as the one that the English coroners have been using in the UK (Atkinson 1978:89). Having said that, as Atkinson's argument is, even this sort of specialized institutional arrangement in Anglo-Saxon states is not enough to ensure the production of 'accurate and reliable' suicide statistics. Thus, if in spite of elaborately codified precedents and bureaucratic arrangements, systematic biases continue to plague official suicide statistics in developed nations, one can reasonably speculate the nature of the difficulties associated with official suicide statistics in the case of India.

<sup>27</sup>In the quotidian bureaucracy, the village secretary is the lowest revenue official responsible for a revenue village. The panchayat secretary is the revenue cum development worker who reports to the village panchayat (the local form of self-governance). Under him serve the village servants (*Talari*). The term village here refers expressly to a *revenue* village and not its constituent hamlets. What is important for our purpose is to note that, (a.) the village secretary is not an inhabitant of a village, (b.) that panchayat secretary and *talari* are part state and part society in that they usually belong to one of the hamlets of a revenue village. This equivocality is of importance in the procedures of suicide registration and motive ascription in rural AP.

8.9 to 18.2, at a CAGR of 4.30% during this period (Table 1.1). This growth rate for AP is also the sharpest relative to that of the other southern states, e.g., Karnataka (1.11%), Kerala (1%) and Tamilnadu (1.81%), which have traditionally had a higher suicide rate. But, when we consider the statistics of the percentage share of suicides by farmers since 1995, whence such records are available, we find that this contribution is rather small relative to the demographic proportion of cultivators (about 60%) in all the four states (Table 1.2 below). Less than 1 in 5 suicides is likely to be that of a farmer in AP and Karnataka, while only 1 in 4 suicides is likely to be farmer in Maharashtra. Given the higher incidence of suicides on one hand, and the low percentage share of suicides by farmers on the other, one suspects that the growth in suicide rate has been broad-based across urban-rural spaces and occupational categories in AP (unlike Maharashtra). Also, insofar as the statistics show little evidence of a systematic acceleration in the percentage contribution by farmers to the total number of suicides in AP (and Karnataka), it is difficult to share the confidence with which the proponents of the 'farmers' suicides' thesis make a general case for a high suicide rate amongst farmers in these states.

*Table 1.1 State-wise comparison of suicide deaths per 100,000 people*

Year	States		
	AP	Karnataka	Maharashtra
1995	9.43	23.46	13.81
1996	10.3	18.10	12.81
1997	11.6	20.33	14.3
1998	12.7	21.44	15.3
1999	13.8	24.18	15.03
2000	13.0	23.66	15.30
2001	13.9	22.53	15.10
2002	15.2	22.86	14.70
2003	14.7	22.70	14.70
2004	17.2	21.70	14.50
2005	16.8	20.70	14.0
2006	16.4	21.70	14.3
2007	18.2	21.6	14.3

Source; Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, Annual Reports, 1995-2007.

**Table 1.2 State-wise comparison of % farmers in the total cases of suicides**

Year	% farmers in total suicides and their number					
	(%) In AP	No. of deaths	(%) In Karnataka	No. of deaths	(%) In Maharashtra	No. of deaths
1995	17. 67	N/a	22.02	N/a	9.13	N/a
1996	22.62	N/a	22.80	N/a	17.66	N/a
1997	12.90	1,097	17.92	1,832	15.17	1,917
1998	19.22	1, 813	17.22	1,883	17.64	2,409
1999	19.01	1,974	19.05	2,379	17.82	2,423
2000	15.40	1, 525	21.25	2,630	21.58	3,022
2001	14.34	1,509	21.08	2,505	24.19	3,536
2002	16.21	1,896	19.07	2,340	25.43	3,695
2003	16.91	N/a	15.08	N/a	23.86	N/a
2004	19.7	2,666	16.4	1,963	28.2	4,147
2005	18.5	2,490	16.3	1,833	27.2	3,926
2006	19.6	2,607	14.1	1,720	28.7	4,453
2007	12.1	1,797	17.4	2,135	27.9	4,238
Avrg.	18.68		19.97		23.70	

Source; Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, Annual Reports, 1995 - 2007.

**Table 1.3 The official number of 'farmers' suicides' in different states (2000-2009)**

Year	States					
	AP	Karnataka	Maharashtra	Punjab	Kerala	Gujarat
2000-01	191	<b>2,630</b>	50	-	-	-
2001-02	267	<b>2,505</b>	122	-	-	13
2002-03	313	<b>2,340</b>	173	-	-	6
2003-04	393	708	632	13	50	3
2004-05	1126	271	595	32	101	108
2005	657	163	2355	19	119	125
2006	522	346	1985	24	98	149
2007	377	342	1906	-	-	103

Source; Various unstarred questions, Houses of Parliament, India, at [www.indiastate.com/table/crimeandlaw/6/suicides](http://www.indiastate.com/table/crimeandlaw/6/suicides)

There are other difficulties as well in accepting the veracity of official statistics to frame the thesis of 'farmers' suicides'. The lexical units in NCRB data disaggregating the incidence of suicides according to occupations are not quite self-explanatory. For instance, it is unclear whether a suicide by a marginal landowner who occasionally (or regularly) farms a dry land plot but derives a larger share of livelihood from artisanship/ business enterprise, is catalogued under the category of 'self-employed (farming/agriculture)' or 'self-employed (others)', or 'self-employed

(business activity)'. In as much as dry land peasant economies in India - where 'farmers' suicides' are said to be predominantly concentrated - are conventionally distinguished by low incidence of absolute landlessness (Harriss-White 1984: 37) and high degree of occupational diversification, the salience of this vagueness is important<sup>28</sup>. During my fieldwork, I indeed documented a case of suicide in which the deceased had primarily been an artisan (ironsmith) all his life, although he irregularly tilled his small dry land plot that he had come to receive from the govt. But his occupation was entered as that of a 'farmer' during the inquest. Second, it is significant to note that the four states (i.e., AP, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala) to which the media and the official statistics has ascribed a dominant share of 'farmers' suicides', tend to show *lesser* or just about the same percentage share of suicides by farmers as an occupational category to overall incidence, than states that are thought to have no 'farmers' suicides' as yet. Chhattisgarh is a good example of this. The ratio of suicide by farmers to overall suicides is about 1: 3 in Chhattisgarh as compared to about 1:4 in Maharashtra, or about 1: 5 in case of AP or Karnataka<sup>29</sup>.

A second set of official data on the incidence of 'farmers' suicides' between 2000 and 2007 comes from the union ministry of agriculture, Govt. of India (Table 1.3 above)<sup>30</sup>. This data is again rather confusing because for some years the statistics seem to refer to the fiscal year and for others, to the calendar year and no explanation is offered for this discrepancy. Furthermore, when one squares up this

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<sup>28</sup> Another instance of the difficulty in reading occupation specific suicide data relates to the category of 'housewife'. It would seem that the category of 'housewife' and 'female farmers' are mutually exclusive in NCRB data. But, one does not quite know on what basis Police officials elect to categorize a female suicide under one or another; on the basis of my own field work, I understand that married women from almost all classes contribute regularly to agricultural work. Also, the occupation of 'housewife' appears a bigger contributor to the overall incidence of suicides in India than that of any other occupation including that of the farmers.

<sup>29</sup> In a personal communication, Prof. Jonathan Parry told me that some local journalists in Raipur have been contending that the incidence of 'farmers' suicides' has been significant in Chhattisgarh, although this contention has not received any attention in the Indian national media, nor is it reflected in official data on 'farmers' suicides'. Could this mean that the way in which 'geography' has been attributed to 'farmers' suicides' in the national media has been selective?

<sup>30</sup> That is, these statistics were quoted by the Union minister of Agriculture, India, in the upper house of Indian parliament.

data with the NCRB data (Table 1.1 and 1.2), one finds that the total numbers of 'farmers' suicides' in Karnataka for the year 2000-01, 2001 -02 and 2002-03 in table 1.3 are the same as the total number of farmers who committed suicide in those years (Table 1.1); it is claimed that every farmer who committed suicide in Karnataka in those two years died because of 'farming-related' causes. This is a rather untenable claim because this implies that the NCRB data about suicides due to non-farm aetiologies (i.e., family disputes, illness etc.) and, due to "unknown reasons" (cf. NCRB: 2001-03 reports), are completely false. There also seems to be little correlation between the movement in suicide rate of AP (Table 1.2) on one hand, and the incidence of 'farmers' suicides' (Table 1.3) or the overall number of farmers committing suicide (Table 1.1), on the other hand, between 2000 and 2007<sup>31</sup>. The other point relates to the implicit official claim that 'farmers' suicides' are restricted to six Indian states (Table 1.3). I have raised my doubts about this claim by pointing out the case of Chhattisgarh. The NCRB data suggests that Chhattisgarh has a much higher percentage of farmers committing suicides as compared to any of these six states, but Chhattisgarh has not had a single official case of 'farmers' suicides' so far. We may ask if the complete absence of 'farmers' suicides' in Chhattisgarh is a real fact, or, is it just an artefact (i.e., data gathering police officials are not looking for farm-related motives)?

The more fundamental difficulties associated in using official statistics on suicides and 'farmers' suicides', however, are those concerning bureaucratic efficiency and accuracy in registering a death as suicide and ascribing farming-related motive(s) to a suicide (recall the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> question on page 14 above). In critiquing Durkheim's trust in the veracity of official statistics, Douglas cogently reaffirmed a

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<sup>31</sup> The statistics for Maharashtra also shows little correlation between the suicide rate, the total number of rural suicides and the 'farmers' suicides'. Its suicide rate has been relatively stable, but it has also had a relatively large number of 'farmers' suicides' (and rural suicides in general) during 2000-07; for this to have happened, one would think that the incidence of suicide amongst non-cultivators must be declining in that state. I do not have relevant data on that state to say anything on this possibility. Either way, the difficulties with the present data require us to maintain more caution in using them than that the proponents of 'farmers' suicides' thesis do.

long held view in French suicidology that the extent of efficiency and accuracy in registration of suicides is culturally mediated across time and space. He cites an interesting instance of this (p. 193-94); beginning from Prussia in the 1880s, the authority to collect suicide statistics was gradually taken over by the secular state (from the Catholic priests or Protestant ministers) across Europe and this invariably resulted in a quantum jump in suicide statistics across the continent. In other words, the official statistics of a country/society represent a cultural artefact that is often different from actual suicide rates in that country/society (Douglas, p. 9, 194). Akin to the situation in 19 century Europe, then, might not the secular 'increase' in suicide rates for India, its states, or the incidence of 'farmers' suicides', be a function of falling levels of concealment of suicide by villagers, and/or increasing willingness (and penetration) of the bureaucratic instrumentalities to register a suicide (as 'farmers' suicide) rather than an actual increase? Indeed, my dissertation presents evidence showing peasants to be keen to report a suicide (generally a male's) to Police in order to have it certified as a case of 'farmers' suicides' just as they are likely to conceal it (especially a female's suicide) when the possibilities of such certification are estimated to be minimal, and/or the spectre of contracting shame is estimated to be higher in the latter case (Hall 2007 presents one similar instance). This is an instance of systematically biased registration process<sup>32</sup>. It seems to me that Atkinson's reservations about drawing grand "statistical inferences from a sample (of suicide) whose universe remains unspecified (p. 41)" is duly applicable to the thesis of 'farmers' suicides'.

The difficulty with official ascription of motives, namely farm-related causes, or an absence thereof, is even more apparent. Based on their work amongst English and American coroners, Atkinson (p. 44, 111), Douglas (p. 184-190) and Harold Garfinkel (1967 in Atkinson 1978) make a credible case about the nature of

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<sup>32</sup> Systematically biased registration – largely due to concealment – is said to result into the underestimation of overall incident of suicides by as much as 30-50% in the case of US (Atkinson 1978:55, Douglas 1967:195).

methodological difficulties in the *post hoc* inferring of motive(s) ascription to a suicidal death. A summary of their argument is that the task of “producing a recognizably coherent, standard, professionally defensible account” of suicide motive(s) from various cues (Garfinkel 1967 in Atkinson 1978:112) is inherently dialogical (i.e. it is produced in language and in social partnership). In this dialogical enterprise, the extent and nature of search procedures adopted – or not adopted - by an inquest team (Douglas 1967: 186) are as much salient to the sort of decision the team shall eventually return as the weightage the team gives to different ‘hard’ clues (Atkinson 1978:113). In what is a key argument of this dissertation, borrowing from Douglas's and Atkinson's line of thought, I show that the entire dialogical processes by which police officials impute farm-related motives or otherwise to a suicide during an inquest, is more complex and tactical than the proponents of 'farmers' suicide' thesis presuppose. More specifically, my ethnography suggests that a large number of male suicides that are bereft of farm-related motive(s) in local *post hoc* narratives still manage to be categorised as such on the back of a systematic production of material and dialogical clues in collusion with the police. The pervasiveness of masculine symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001), contrarily, ensures that a number of female suicides are falsely ascribed to 'stomach pain" in official statistics (Ch. 5, 6)<sup>33</sup>.

Does my interrogation of the positivist strands in the 'farmers' suicide' thesis – namely the presumed sanctity of official suicide statistics, and the statistical-comparative method of causation – by means of the ethnographic method imply that this dissertation affirms to radical constructionist/ interpretivist epistemologies(cf. Geertz 1973: 10, 1983: Introduction, Douglas 1971:133)? In epistemological terms this dissertation is rather closer to critical realist school that is associated with Roy Bhaskar's work, and three defining claims of this school can

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<sup>33</sup> Kushner (2003) gives a good report of similar masculine bias in suicide research for the US.

be specified in particular in this context. First, *contra* radical constructionists, I agree with the critical realists that there *is* an objective ‘real’ that not only exists independent of our knowledge of it or in absence of our knowledge, but it also has a structure and mediating power (Bhaskar 1975 in Sayer 2000:11). Whether it is the presence of agrarian risks and failures in the local agro-ecological complex in NRP, or the male-female sexual dichotomies – to me they constitute concrete instances of an objective ‘real’. Of course, in the critical realist view, whether the ‘real’ exercises those powers or not, and in what conditions and to what effects does it do so, and whether we experience these contingencies or not, are questions that relate to the ‘actual’ and ‘empirical’ worlds respectively. As such, they must be attended to very cautiously: it is not that suicide statistics are never ‘objective’, but this aspect of objectivity must be scrutinised thoroughly. Second, the independent existence of a ‘real’ and the contingent nature of the ‘actual’ make our knowledge claims open to scrutiny and hence, fallibilistic. The realist position thus stresses on the ‘transitiveness’ and the contextuality of truth-claims in a departure from the foundational and universalist truth-claims in Kant’s, Descartes’s, Hume’s or Hobbes’s senses (Collier 1994: preface).

Third, the ontological stratification of the ‘real’, ‘actual’ and ‘empirical’ also implies that critical realists reject the positivist framework of causation as a mere ‘sequential correlation of events’ in favour of a more nuanced causal framework. In this framework, an effect/event is explained in terms of the emergent aspects of the structure of real objects that both mediate, and are mediated by, culturally-shared mechanisms and meanings (Sayer 2000:13-15, Collier 1994: 8-12). The equal emphasis laid by Roy Bhaskar on the emergent structures of objective world, and on agentative ideology and action, in building a theory of causation is able to resolve the usual social-scientific antimonies of structure and agency, or nature/matter and language. We shall see how in NRP the objective realities of scarce groundwater

resources, the uneven distribution of failing bore-wells, or the incidence of farm and non-farm related indebtedness mediate local social selves and their ideas, emotions and actions in profound ways even as this mediation feeds back into the making of that reality (cf. Cruickshank 2003: 3-5). Likewise, in trying to explain both suicidal action amongst local peasants and the category of 'farm-suicide' (Ch. 5 and Ch. 6 below), I describe how my belief in the Durkheimian dictum of studying suicide statistics as social 'fact' underwent serious revision due to my appreciation of the role played by ideologies, strategies and performances (de Certeau 1984, Bourdieu 1977: introduction) in the entire process of production of statistics. There were constant references to emic concepts and to differentiated performative loyalties to these concepts in everyday life. The categories of *paurusham* (manliness/manhood), *rosham* (aggression), *mānam*, '*maryāda* (respect/honour/reputation/status) and *avamānam* (dishonour/ ignominy) were syntactically related to suicide within the field of "our culture/ our way" (*mā sampradāyamlo/ ma paddhattilo*). Both the Durkheimian positivism and post-modern constructivism arrogantly dismiss the manner in which significative mechanism and objective realities speak to each other. Overall, this dissertation does not, indeed cannot, offer a nomothetic theory of suicide in India although it does hope to contribute to middle level causal formulations about the phenomenon.

### **1.3 Theoretical considerations: the peasantry, modernity and identity**

My account of rural suicides offers a description of a particular form of experiences, expectations, and crises of modernity amongst the peasantry in AP. I find the cognate constructs of modern, modernity and modernisation to be valuable in discussing local social and cultural changes, although as Lefebvre (1962/1995: Introduction) notes, these constructs are scarcely self-evident in theory. A most basic and relatively more agreeable conception of modernity in the sociological literature revolves around the notions of novelty and subjectivity. In his

*Introduction to Modernity*, Lefebvre begins by distinguishing modernity from modernism; to him, modernism is that “triumphant consciousness of being new” which successive ages and periods have had of their selves for centuries (p.1). Modernity, on the other hand, represents the distinct era of a systematic conceptual engagement with this consciousness of novelty and alterity. Although Lefebvre does not always maintain the distinction between modernity and modernism in his book, he does distinguish the modernity of 20th century – he calls it “our modernity” (p. 185) – from that of earlier centuries including the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by underlining a set of contradictions typical of the contemporary world. The growing social atomisation of an individual in an age of unprecedented “socialisation of society” (e.g. the birth of cities, political parties and business groups etc.), widespread well-being co-existing with extreme violence, the commonness of *aleatory* – that is, contingency - in everyday life are some of the defining contradictions of contemporary modernity (1995: xi prelude). Lefebvre’s characterisation of modernity as contradictions is supported in the recent works on the subject by Giddens (1991) or Ulrich Beck (1986 in Lash & Friedman 1991:8).

The notion of great movement and new subjectivities that this movement gives rise to feature in other conceptions of modernity too. Lash and Friedman (1991: 1) consider modernity in a phenomenological framework of “change, flux and unpredictability” in everyday life; as Miller (1994: 11) says, they see modernity “as a contemporary experience of the world.” They conceive this experience of flux as “low modernity” and separate it from the notions of “high modernity/modernism” that purportedly emphasize the abstracted social or philosophical correlates associated with the Enlightenment or the Reformation in Europe. Thus, for them, Habermas’s thesis of rational discourse, or Weber’s theory of purposive-rationalisation, is a synecdoche of high modernity in as much as it privileges cognitive, universalising, abstraction over concrete perception. In their sketch of

low modernity special attention is given to the matter of identity. Compared to pre-modern times, when identities were *given* to an individual by a tribe, or a caste, modern individuals have come to command new possibilities to shape their identities autonomously (pp. 4-5). Marshall Berman (1991: 36-37) adds another dimension to the modern consciousness of identity, which is that it is characterised by “the (universal) drive (and action) for free development” economically, socially, or politically. His notion of the will for development is formed by his reading of Marx and Engles’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848: 10), wherein they refer to revolutionising changes in the productive capacities of modern men, which bring about fundamental changes in the way they relate to self and to each other.

One is sympathetic to Lash and Freidman’s idea of low modernity because it is sensitive to concrete, relativistic, descriptions of modernity. Their conception of low modernity is evidently an effort to escape the teleological evolutionism that has characterised much of the classical theories of social changes, such as Durkheim’s (see below), and the modernisation theory that began to gain currency in the 1940s and 1950s. However, it should also be noted that the defining features of low modernity - i.e., the consciousness of being ‘new’, the possibilities of shaping self-identity autonomously, and the drive for self-development – are themselves the embodiment of Hegel’s concept of the “freedom of subjectivity” (Habermas 1987: 16-17) which Lash & Friedman would see as a construct of ‘high modernity’. Hegel understood the cornerstone of “our time” ( in Habermas, p. 16) to lie in the new structures of self-relation; that is, he defined modernity by underlining the ontological sanctity of individuals, the (individual) right to criticism, autonomy of action, and a remarkably heightened sense of self-reflexivity. Habermas notes: “In modernity, religious life, state and society as well as science, morality....are transformed into just so many embodiments of principle of subjectivity.” In other words, while the notion of low modernity is valuable for sparing us the

universalising theories of modernisation, it is not and can not be understood in isolation from the manner in which the notions of high-modernity have penetrated the contemporary world. Whether is it Lefebvre's general postulations of modernity, or its ethnographic descriptions in Trinidad (Miller 1994), Zambia (Ferguson 1999), or in India (Gupta 1998, Osella and Osella 2000, Chatterjee 2004), what one regularly finds in these texts is an "extremely bizarre diptych" (Lefebvre 1995:190) in which low modernity speaks back to popular expectations of high modernity.

In the context of this dissertation, I find it rather fortunate that I do not seek to offer an exhaustive examination of the contemporary experience of modernity amongst the Telugu peasants against the benchmark of classical attributes of modernity – something that Miller and Ferguson do in their respective works. What I am concerned to describe is the way in which a group of Telugu peasants in Anantpur district create, understand and act upon emergent opportunities, crisis and contradictions of modernity in their midst, and in doing so engender conditions in which they think of committing, and/or commit, suicides. But this does bring me to look in some detail the work of one of the *avant gardes* of modern sociological thought, Durkheim and his *Suicide*. Furthermore, I have chosen to delimit my description of the local experiences and actions in particular reference to three aspects of everyday life; the social (or domestic) relationships in local peasant communities, their farming activities and their changing conceptions of self-identity.

An important concern for the modernists since Durkheim has been to examine the presumably changing morphology of the modern family. Durkheim suggests (1897/2006: 214) that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century an average French family was becoming progressively smaller on account of declining birth rate and increasing divisions. The notion of a higher proportion of smaller conjugal families in

contemporary France feeds into his evolutionist idea in which totemic clans first contracted into a large, consanguineous, community of patrimonial kin, from which derived joint patriarchal families and which, lastly, contracted into the modern conjugal family (Lukes 1973:183). In this trajectory of contraction Durkheim discerned the steady distingration of traditional, collective societies and the corresponding emergence of individualism (p. 184). This is one of the chief social contexts for promoting egotistic suicides in modern societies in *Suicide*. More recently, Eric Wolf, who is generally thought to have brought the peasantry as a central analytic into modern anthropology (Kearney 1996: 55), saw nuclear families to be likely to become predominant amongst peasants as a result of entrenchment of industrialism and “neo-technic farming” if and where peasantry persisted (Wolf 1966:72). His explanation for this predominance lay in the way in which modernity re-organises the division of labour in society. As land becomes increasingly scarce, wage-labour prevails widely, cultivation becomes intensive (and specialised), and peasants immigrate to factory jobs, the division of labour takes place amongst families and not *within* them. The extended family which thrives on dividing responsibilities amongst its members (by diversifying roles and tasks) becomes increasingly untenable as rural economies become specialised.

There is a hint of evolutionism in Wolf, although it is not quite like that in Durkheim's or Parsons's work, or their many local variants that were found in India (cf. Parry 1979: 150-154) and Africa in the 1960s or 70s (Ferguson 1999:171). Going against Durkheim, Goody (2000:149) shows that nuclear families have scarcely been a modern phenomenon in the West. Recent research in India and Africa also shows that outward migration and urbanisation are not intrinsically antithetical to extended families – whether in urban or rural communities (Vatuk 1972: 194, Parry 1979: 182, Ferguson 1999:82-122). But in case of India the debate around the relationship between modernity and family structures has been so much entangled

by the problems of defining family types that Wolf's substantive point about the impact of intensification of cash economy on peasant family structure has been largely ignored. In his research amongst the Kangra peasants in Himachal Pradesh, Parry (1979: 182-83) showed that remittances from the emigrant members of an extended family was an incentive for joint living and determined the stage at which nuclearisation occurred in the family life cycle. But what happens to the family structure in a peasant community that has very low emigration rates, a falling birth rate and a high degree of capitalisation of the farming economy? My ethnography suggests that the intensification of bore-well based commercial agriculture at the cost of mixed farming has exacerbated the division of labour in society and this has in turn sharpened the 'structural cleavages' within extended families. This being so, extended peasant families are indeed likely to disperse *quicker*, as Wolf, or Epstein (in her work in Karnataka villages, 1962), had suggested. Further, with declining fertility rates, they are becoming less dense and remain ever less likely to grow into extended families, unlike what seems to be the case for North India (Shah 1998, Wadely and Derr in Uberoi 1994). The upshot is that the institution of joint family is incapable of binding its members together to a common social purpose in Malinowski's or Durkheim's sense (Bohannan 1960: 8-9): Individualism (i.e., autonomy, self-interest, *swartham*) exercises more traction in intimate family relations now than the notion of familism does.

Having said that, as Uberoi observes (2003: 1061), a preoccupation with the structural/morphological changes in family has the risk of treating changes in the affective dimension of kin relationship as epiphenomenal <sup>34</sup>. The tension between lineal generations (i.e. between a father and the son) or between married collaterals in rural Indian families have generally been registered as structural inevitabilities by many anthropologists affiliated to the structural-functional tradition. Thus,

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<sup>34</sup> An instance of it is Durkheim's discussion of domestic family in *Suicide*.

although extreme affective disruptions related to such tensions including fratricides, parricides and suicides have been noted in family related ethnographies (e.g. Parry 1979: 178 -179), they have hardly attracted any systematic exposition in the literature. Another way of saying this is that the myth of persisting collective familism and hierarchical deference in Indian families - a myth which received its most forceful expression in Dumont (1970:8-9 in Mines 1988) - has remained relatively intact thus far excepting a few notable studies (see below). Thus, Margaret Trawick (1990) begins her remarkably rich ethnography of affection in a Tamil family in Madurai district by voicing reservations about such structural myths (p. 5-6). But she ends up reproducing the impression of a genteel familial order and emotional equilibrium so strongly that the instances of severe affective disruptions she notes regain their extra-ordinariness (see Ch.4 in her book in particular). In a similar vein, Owen Lynch's edited book (1990) on the social construction of emotions in India tends to adopt the classical/Brahministic/higher tradition approach to the subject and thereby, blocks out any possibilities of discussing everyday breakdowns, crisis and violence in millions of Indian families.

Mines' (1988, 1994) research amongst urban Tamilian families disrupts this collectivist- hierarchical view of order and equilibrium in Indian family relations. On the basis of detailed life-histories of individual men and women, he contends that young Tamil men (in their 20s and early 30s) actively seek individual autonomy and accomplishment and in doing so, they routinely rebel against hierarchical orders. Such rebellions, which involve making independent decisions about career, marriage or love affairs lead to lasting rupture amongst family members (1988: 573). Likewise, Vatuk (1990) has recorded acute anxieties amongst elderly parents in Uttar Pradesh at being marginalised by their married sons and their conjugal families. Taking this line of exploration further, I suggest in the pages below that the processes of entrenching loyalty to individualistic developmentalism,

sharpening economic differentiation and changing gender roles have increased the scope for frequent, grave – often lethal – emotional disruptions in the family.

Indeed, a large number of rural suicides speak to this emergent aspect of affective disruption within the family.

The second dimension of everyday modernity that I am concerned with in the following pages concerns the agrarian economy. Like other Marxists, Eric Wolf (1966:35) conceived agrarian modernity in the rise of neo-technic farming wherein production is defined by a specific corpus of scientific knowledge, wide-spread energisation and commoditisation. But Wolf was circumspect as to whether neo-technic farming would result in an eventual disappearance – or transformation – of the peasantry on account of the attendant capitalistic differentiation of rural societies (Wolf, pp. 56-59)<sup>35</sup>. This point relates to the debate about the dynamic of capitalistic growth in agriculture as formulated in the ‘agrarian question’ in classical Marxism. In this debate, Lenin argued that the contemporary Russian agrarian society showed the dynamic of “differentiation” to be at an advanced state insofar as production was increasingly concentrated in the hands of profit-seeking large farmers and there was emerging a class of agrarian proletarians (Lenin, p. 120 in Harriss 1982, Shanin 1988; xiv). The ‘populists’ on the other hand (Chayanov in particular) refuted the suggestion of differentiation by contesting its presumed linearity; while they agreed that there was centrifugal mobility (i.e. differentiation) amongst peasant households, they saw it counteracted by multi-directional changes such as partitioning, mergers or extinction of farm units (Shanin, p. 224 in Harriss 1982). In his analysis of German agriculture in the late 1880s, Kautsky (1899/1988) takes a position that challenges Lenin’s confidence in the inevitability of

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<sup>35</sup> Bernstein and Brass (1996:7) appear to suggest that Wolf’s approach to peasantry as a ‘cultural other’ represents an anthropological challenge to the standard Marxist-Leninist formulation of peasantry as a class. I think this is rather unfair in that Wolf’s discussion of the successful transformation of agriculture under ‘mercantile domain’ is very sensitive to the way in which capital penetrated farming in North Western Europe and sought accumulation by way of changing production techniques. In other words, Wolf works with the Marxist idea of differentiation but he ties the possibility of its universal success to certain “special circumstances”.

differentiation – which is not to say that it strengthens the populist argument - although the reasons he provides are remarkably different (from that of the populists), and they have remained salient to this day.

Kautsky, like Lenin, underlines the intrinsic advantages that accrue to large farms from their scale economies in commoditised farming (p. 108). But his explanation as to why small farms may nonetheless persist is that they have a greater capacity to exploit their farm-labour and that they can subsist at bare-minimum consumption levels (p. 112-114). Indeed Kautsky sees how complete differentiation is detrimental to capital when labour becomes scarce in the countryside (p. 163, also Banaji in Byres 1991:9). Post-colonial agrarian developments in several parts of Asia and Latin America have confirmed and expanded Kautsky's reading of the agrarian question. There is a greater appreciation of the relativistic particularities of agrarian questions, and their resolution, in the contemporary world (Hart, Turton and White 1992: introduction). Byres (1991, 2003), for instance, presents a typology of six historical permutations of agrarian capitalism whilst acknowledging that "they do not exhaust" all possibilities. His typology includes the state led Japanese model - in which the peasantry was squeezed to yield a surplus for industrialisation which later led to re-investment in farm-technology - and the Taiwanese and Korean models in which land-reforms played a major role in augmenting small-scale farm productivity. Chari's (2004) research in Tirupur (Tamilnadu) suggests another 'provincial' variant of capitalistic resolution, one in which there seems to be little differentiation involved. He documents the way in which an agrarian caste (i.e., the Gounders) in Coimbatore has leveraged its social capital and agrarian past - of commercial cotton production in garden lands with a variety of labour-tying arrangements - to gradually diversify into cotton trading and later into garment-stitching enterprise. Chari's work reinforces and expands Kautskyian revisionism by showing how the structural dualities of differentiation theory - e.g. agriculture-

industry, urban-rural, pre-capitalist labour-capitalist labour- are increasingly blurred in contemporary rural India (also Harriss 2006: 162).

On the other hand, a good deal of research in Latin America (de Janvry 1981) and in India (Harriss 1982, Bharadwaj 1994) in the 1970s has also shown how the green revolution technology has helped ensure that peasantry persists at subsistence level by participating compulsively in commoditized production, wage labour and credit markets. Contrary to the success-story of Coimbatore (Chari 2004), John Harriss's (2006) and Barbara Harriss-White and Janak Rajan's (1997) report of the agrarian scene in North Arcot in the 1990s paints a rather sombre picture. Yield growth across crops has been stagnating, output has become more unstable, and a massive ecological plunder in terms of groundwater has been underway in that district. Although there has emerged a rural 'industry' in petty services, weaving and so on, its nature is such that it reinforces prior asset inequalities. My own sketch of agrarian condition in Anantpur strongly identifies with this body of literature rather than with Chari's 'peasant-worker-entrepreneur' model.

In discussing farming in Anantpur, it is important to underline, after Kearney (1996: 92), that the Marxist peasontology has been rather slow to interject ecological crisis into the analysis of agrarian question. Neo-populists like Lipton (1982 in Harriss, 1982) and Scott (1977), on the other hand, have reified the relationship between ecology and peasant rationalities by positing risk-averseness as the typical production function. Set in an extremely fragile and arid landscape, the process of entrenchment of capitalistic farming in Anantpur has historically involved compulsive risk-taking (Washbrook 1973, 1994). Groundnut cultivation, first introduced under the colonial extractive land-revenue regime, has comprehensively replaced dry-grain production over the course of 20th century. The ecological and crop bias of the green revolution technology (Frankel 1971:52,

Narain 1998:119) has further accentuated Anantpur's marginality in India's post-colonial agrarian landscape. One can also see a 'politics of re-peasantisation' in the policies of the successive governments of Andhra Pradesh, wherein the operational rights of impoverished lands have been granted to a large number of marginal and landless lower caste peasants over the last decades <sup>36</sup>.

Against this milieu of entrenched marginality, I document two dimensions of local agrarian crisis. First, dry groundnut yields have been in a state of deceleration and second, this has forced the local peasantry down the path of a highly remunerative but equally unreliable groundwater based *thoTa* horticulture. Thus, the latest shift in favour of citrus cultivation marks the establishment of a class of capitalistic horticulturists who are unsure of the longevity of their bore wells. This class also involves an underclass of small dry land peasants in wage and credit markets. On the other hand, aided by booming rural credit markets, the underclass of small dry land peasants desperately seeks to strike scarce groundwater to make household farm production viable (or, profitable). Overall, my enunciation of farm-related suicides rather reaffirms the salience of the agrarian question at a time when the ecological limits to intensive garden land cultivation are ever most stark, and when the non-farm economy is still quite under-developed in dry land Anantpur (as compared to dry Tamilnadu, Harriss 2006).

The third aspect of quotidian modernity relates to the manner in which local peasants seek to overcome the cultural identity of a peasant by valorising a new consumption model even as they remain critically hamstrung by production related vulnerabilities. In making this point, one of my aims is indeed to resist a standard productionist rification of consumption (such as Marx's 'false consciousness' thesis; Friedman 1994) and agency; as Wolf (p. 6, 13) and Raymond Williams (1981)

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<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, I was only half-aware of its significance during my fieldwork. Hence, while I carry a strong sense of importance this point has in hindsight, my ethnographic evidence (in Ch. 2) for this point is rather limited.

observe, production functions interact with, and they are socially constructed in, the field of consumption. The peasants amongst whom I lived spoke of modernity in their own “local tongue” of consumption (Ferguson 1999: 84). Household consumer goods, languages, people, spaces, occupations, even emotions endlessly reproduced the normative tension between “*pata rakam-pata kalam/mass/palletoor/avasaram*” (old style/ rustic/ rural/need) and “*kottarakam /class/townstyle/vilasam*” (new style / class/ urbanity/ luxury). An acute and constant consciousness of temporal novelty and spatial permutation spoke through their ever-shifting desires (*korikalu*) in the domain of consumption. An analysis of this form of consciousness incriminates one in the characteristic anthropological dualism projected by consumption theories (Friedman 1994: introduction). The Veblen-Simmel-Bourdieu school sees consumption in the structural-functionalist sense of transacting signs of classes /capitals, while the contrarian view takes after a phenomenological turn by linking consumerist subjectivity with the desire for constant alterity, a 'continuous renewal' in late modernity (Friedman 1991, Habermas 1984: 7). Like Ferguson (1999: 99), my own analysis suggests this dualism to be empirically false in that the desire for alterity, real though it is, must come to terms with the differential possession of capitals (in Bourdieu's sense, 1984). More specifically, I underline that the contradictions between differential possessions of capitals (Bourdieu 1984) and the desire for alterity are regularly articulated through envy (*asuya/dwesham*), competition (*poti*) and nihilistic detachment (*virakti*) – each of which engender serious crisis of self-hood (*vitirekam*) amongst peasants.

What I have done this far is to broadly delineate the manner in which the main co-ordinates of agrarian contemporaneity discussed in this dissertation can be situated in theory. Durkheim's (1897/2006) schematic conception of the four social states which exacerbate the incidence of suicides in modern societies is evident in this

discussion. Durkheim's argument is that suicide rates vary across societies (or groups) in time, and they vary for a given society across time. This variance is causally linked to the varying degree of social integration and regulation for a group. The social conditions of "excessive individualism", or egoism as he calls it (p. 225), and "excessive collectivism (i.e. altruism)", tend to increase suicide rates. Likewise, weaker collective regulation of individual economic aspirations (*anomie*, p. 272-273), or its excessive regulation (fatalism), also tend to increase suicide rates. In discussing the nature of familial crises and the chasm between production- related contradictions and consumerist aspirations, I have drawn on the concepts of egoism and *anomie*. There is, however, an obvious epistemic arbitrariness in calling these states pathological. What is the criterion for what is 'normal/pathological' (Lukes 1973:28)?<sup>37</sup> And, are these states really mutually exclusive, as Durkheim suggested? A bigger problem still is Durkheim's sociologism; he conceived these states as "currents/ forces" that "drove suicide-prone individuals at their weak points" (p. 154, emphasis mine). As the psychological critique of Durkheim stresses (De Fleury in Weaver 2009: 65), given the high level of generality he claimed for these currents, his theory is obliged to presume individualistic predisposition in order to explain why (statistically speaking) only a few commit suicide under egoism/*anomie* while a majority does not<sup>38</sup>.

This dissertation provides ethnographic proof of a serious theoretical error that weakens Durkheim's theory. This is his ellipsis of quotidian ideology in discussing suicide. He refuses to give a role to the generative system of experience and understanding – or culture (Geertz 1983) - that necessarily embed egoistic or anomie currents and renders them cultural cognition and affect at individual level. His justification for doing so is that this quotidian experience and understanding – or, the "vulgar terminology" (p. 15) - is "too subjective" (p. 16-18) to be reliable. In

<sup>37</sup> See Weaver (2009:68) and Ferguson (1999:189) for a critique of the pathology approach in explaining social crisis in the US or in Zambia.

<sup>38</sup>This is the form of ecological fallacy critiques have relentlessly underlined in Durkheim's theory.

this judgement, there is yet another echo of the banal duality of social vs. individual that is typical of Durkheim; to him, individual's ideas, emotions and motives are ontologically suspect (see Lukes, 1973: 20 for more on this). In the course of my analysis of suicides, I have indeed found much merit in Michelle Rosaldo's (1984: 137) formulation that rejects this duality: "Thought is always culturally patterned, and infused with feelings, which themselves have a culturally ordered past." The common suicidal circumstances, motives, intentions and organisation in Anantpur bear an indelible mark of the local cultural ideology, particularly that of *parusham* (i.e., masculinity, manliness and malehood). Indeed, taking a cue from Rosaldo's work on the cognition and expression of anger amongst the Illongots or Solomon's (1984) discussion of anger amongst the Tahiti or Eskimos, I want to suggest that certain cultural complexes may exacerbate the suicidogenic impact of Durkheimian social states while others may mitigate it. The complex of aggressive masculinity which privileges immediate articulation of aggression amongst the peasants of Anantpur is of the former sort.

An appreciation of culture as a shared meaning system also helps us find a better answer as to why only some peasants commit suicide under egoism and *anomie* and not others within the *same* cultural complex. This is because a culturally informed analysis is intrinsically more supportive of such action (/agency)-oriented sociological theories and Goffman's 'dramaturgical approach' (1958:153) to performance and performability in regard to gender identities bears an apt illustration. Goffman's eclectic works show that social selves are constructed iteratively through role-performances and projects within a set cultural framework (Goffman, ch. VII, Emirbayer and Mische 1998; 985). He also emphasizes how the capacities for performing a role-act, or the commitment to role-performance and projects may vary from person to person within a cultural group and

correspondingly, how the impact of performance-disruption also varies from individual to individual (ibid; 10-11).

Using this framework, I show that local peasants have differential abilities to make a masculine statement in terms of their compliance to family roles and their participation in the tournaments of masculine aggression (*rosham*), risk-taking (*tiagam*), and violent retribution (*pratikaram*). The threat and counter-threats of suicide, the act of self-murder, post-act discourse and the management of suicide relate intimately to the project of transacting higher masculinity for one's self and emasculate an adversary. Thus, some local peasants, such as Subramaniam (in Ch. 5), or Jaimma (ibid) or S. Reddy (Ch. 6), make such a stringent claim to *paurusham* and *manam* (honour) that a slight in the form of bore-well failures, or an accusation of involvement in extra-marital affair is enough to make them drink poison. But, on the other hand, even the greatest ignominy (*peddaavamanam*) of being dragged by the scruff of his collar in to the bazaar and abused by his creditors is not enough to make Iswariah commit suicide. Durkheim's typology of egoistic, anomie or altruistic suicides fail to capture a most defining element of many suicides in Anantpur; that of aggressive, spontaneous masculine vengeance against a challenge deemed to be untenable. In form, this element of extreme revenge is analogous to suicides in Africa and comes close to what MDW Jeffreys called the category of "Samsonic suicides" (1952:118-22).

#### **1.4 The method of data-collection**

In this section I shall describe the process of collection of the data used in the dissertation and also present a part of my fieldwork account to specify the journey to the villagers whose narratives speak through the pages below. Trawick speaks of the salience of "luck" in setting oneself up for fieldwork (1990: 9) and my own reflections would agree with it. In June 2003, when I was still in the throes of planning my PhD, it was my (Master's) thesis supervisor at TISS (Bombay) who

generously offered to help me by way of providing an introduction if I decided to choose AP, particularly Anantpur district, as my field-site. In as much as Anantpur was regularly incriminated as one of the worst affected districts of AP in media stories on 'farmers' suicides', her offer of help was fortuitous. My reconnaissance trip to Anantpur by an overnight train from Bombay, took me through the vast but desolately brown and subsequently red, arid, Deccan landscape in which, as Harriss writes of regions further south (1982: xviii) , green clumps of a tube-well irrigated wetland appear nothing more than a tiny accidental spec. This vast expanse is the larger part of the semi-arid zone of India and it neatly corresponds to the so-called suicide belt across Maharashtra, Karnataka and AP as portrayed in media reports.

My hosts in Anantpur, my first local guides to the topography, history and sociology of this sprawling district, were based in Cennekothapalli *mandal* (central Anantpur) where they have been running a voluntary development organization since 1990. During a brief stay of three days, I traveled across the *mandal* speaking with peasants at roadside tea stalls and markets through an interpreter. In the collage of topics that we heard them talk about, the widespread failure of dry groundnut crops in 2002, the uncertainty of rains in 2003, and local incidents involving outlawed ultra-left wing Maoists appeared to be recurrent. Courtesy of my hosts, I received the second stroke of fortuitousness on the last day of this stay by meeting Dr. Geyanand in Anantpur town. A gentle, multi-faceted and inspiring middle-aged practicing physician, he is a prominent member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) as well as the People's Science Movement (*Jan Vignan Vedike*, Hyderabad). By virtue of these civic roles he appeared to be the pivot to the group of left-oriented bourgeois intellectuals, political and development activists of that town. With its broad left-oriented agenda, this group and many others like it across India defy Chatterjee's (2008: 57) dualistic characterization of 'civil society' and 'political society' in that country. This acquaintance allowed me to draw help and

support from many members of this group and proved to be crucial sustenance throughout my fieldwork stay.

In early December, 2004, after completing a year of course work in London, I returned to Anantpur for an extended period of fieldwork and this time around based myself in the town. The first couple of weeks were spent in collecting the official list of 'farmers' suicides' and various other official reports on the subject from the district collectorate. Their scrutiny suggested a curious pattern; although 61 out of 63 *mandals* in the district reported a case of 'farmers' suicides', more than one third of the deaths were concentrated in just 10 *mandals* of the district, of which 7 were located contiguously in the central parts of the district, encircling the town of Anantpur<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, there were about 4 villages in these 7 *mandals* which had reported 3 or more cases of suicides each since 2000 even as more cases from them were pending a final official verdict. It seemed reasonable to concentrate on these *mandals* and explore the villages in greater detail. In January 2005, I began visiting each of these 7 *mandals* along with one or two local CPI (M) activists whom I had come to know through Dr. Geyanand, and my interpreter<sup>40</sup>. Pillion riding on their 'splendors' and 'splendor pluses', we toured villages and met and talked with a range of people – from ever helpful native CPI (M) cadres, to taciturn peasants, journalists, input dealers, politicians and government officials.

As to the question about what could be a methodologically relevant context for understanding suicides in peasant communities, a village appeared rather an obvious choice to me for many reasons. Dipankar Gupta (2005) has suggested that the conception of a village is past its utility in understanding rural India not only because of large scale emigration to towns, but also because now villagers are not necessarily agriculturists. However, I am with Chatterjee (2008) and Moffat (1996)

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<sup>39</sup>These are; Anantpur, Garladinne, Raptadu, Kuderu, Kadiri, Uravkonda and Pamidi.

<sup>40</sup> During these trips, it was mostly Dr. Geyanand's son, Rahul (18 years), a pre-university student, who was kind enough to accompany me as my interpreter.

in suggesting that Gupta is overstating his case. A village still remains a space for understanding a vertical interaction between larger political economic forces and local, more specific economic domains as Harriss observed in 1982 (p. 17). It is also a major space, although a more fragmented one now, for understanding horizontal interactions between emergent economic structures and the ideological complex. Srinivas's (1976) observations about a village constituting a background against which various identities of self are formed and practiced, is not yet redundant in as much as it remains a most predominant universe of co-habitation and social-interaction for a majority of Indians.

Before beginning the tour of the *mandals*, my criteria for selecting a village included the following considerations: (a) It should have a relatively high incidence of suicide, (b). It should be distant enough from the town to have farming as the chief occupation, (c). should not be canal irrigated, (d). should not be too large to handle given my resources and yet should not be unrepresentative in terms of its demographic constitution. My trips to these seven *mandals* forced me to add two more unforeseen considerations to this set of criteria. I wished to avoid a village that had a history of factional caste violence as well as one which had a presence of the outlawed Maoist groups. Amongst the 4 villages I toured, there was one village located in K. *mandal* that appeared appropriate on all these accounts; located at a distance of 27 km from the town, this village of about 230 households had seen 3 suicides between 2002 and 2004. Following ethnographic precedence, I refer to this village as NRP throughout this dissertation<sup>41</sup>. There was accommodation available at a middle class Reddy peasant's house in the village and I finally shifted there one evening in January (2005). I had also employed a Telugu interpreter, a postgraduate student of rural development from the Sri Krishnadev Ray University at Anantpur, for a short-period. The statistical and qualitative data that I have used

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<sup>41</sup> NRP is not a revenue village. In an administrative sense, it is a hamlet of IP Panchayat village.

in accounting for social and economic changes (from Ch. 2 to 4) are all derived from NRP. However, in as much as it was required to cover a large number of suicide cases, the data used in Ch. 5 and 6 is collected from a number of other villages in the vicinity of NRP.

Between February and March 2005, I carried out a basic household census in NRP. Aside from familiarizing myself with all the village residents, my aim was to collect the primary demographic and socio-economic information concerning all village households. The information I collected comprised of household profile including the number of members resident in the household, their sex, age and education levels. Further, I collected a brief record of their present and previous occupations and genealogy for two generations (i.e. household head's and his father's family). The farm assets of a household, such as the extent of landholding and its nature (whether wet or dry land), farm tools and consumption durables (House/ TV/fan/ Bikes/ Telephone), were also recorded. Thirdly, I noted a household's institutional affiliations such as one that it might have with a NGOs or a political party. Using the information about a household's landholding and its nature, I had planned to rank all resident households in the village into peasant classes (see below) and study their farm production. However, it was only after I had assigned each household a class that I realized – in course of talking to some of my neighbours - that my information on landholding and its type was systematically under-reported on account of the misgivings my arrival had created in the minds of NRP peasants (cf. Ch. 5 below). This realization came as a rude shock after a month's toil and, perhaps unreasonably, filled us with a deep sense of frustration. We spoke of our frustration to our neighbours and underlined that the distrust they felt for us meant that staying in NRP for “our study of agriculture” was perhaps too difficult. It was possibly the sight of our frustration and plight, or a mark of their kindness, that my neighbours asked us not to worry. They had a plan; dividing the village in to half,

each to be covered by me and my assistant, two villagers decided to walk in each team and have the survey completed in 'two days'. "They can't lie in our presence", I was reassured! Truly enough, I had the revisions finished in two days.

The main source of my statistical information about farming economy (Ch.2) is a detailed survey of household farm production and reproduction of 30 NRP peasants. I began with a sample of 31 peasants but one of them, Jairamlu, committed suicide mid year and it was difficult to replace him at that stage (cf. Ch. 5). In order to draw this sample, I first excluded the households that had no land, or did not cultivate their lands, or those who did not stay in the village. This left me a sample universe of 173 households each of whom depended on cultivation whether as a principle or secondary source of livelihood. I stratified these households on the basis of their landholding – both dry and wet, if any – and its capacity to meet their subsistence need following the method first used by Epstein (1962) and subsequently by Harriss (1982). A detailed account of the method I have used in weighting households appears in Appendix 2 (also see Ch. 2). After classifying them into four classes based on their capacity to meet subsistence needs and produce surpluses beyond it, I randomly drew out every sixth household from each of these four classes in the list until I had 31 household (17% of all cultivating households) collected. Amongst the 30 households, 2 were large farmers, 8 middle farmers, 9 small and 11 marginal farmers; 16 of these 30 farmers had both dry land and *thoTa* (bore-well irrigated garden land), while 14 possessed dry lands only. I obtained detailed information concerning their agricultural activities, inputs and output and marketing of the crop by visiting each of these 30 households every second or third month round the year from March, 2005 to February, 2006. A substantially similar version of this farm survey questionnaire was used to obtain farm related information from the households of the 29 deceased 'farmers' suicides' cases which is used for the analysis presented in Ch. 5.

In the last, in chapter 6, which deals with the ideology of suicides amongst peasantry in general, is based on detailed ethnographic case studies for 22 cases of suicides. These cases were spread over 4 villages (including NRP) within a radius of 15 km from NRP. They exclude all such officially certified cases of 'farmers' suicides' which were held to be genuine by local informants.

### **1.5 Main findings and the organization of chapters**

The second chapter begins by introducing Anantpur and its ecological specificity in order to describe the nature of risks that agronomic conditions present to agricultural production in the district. It also describes in detail how peasants from all classes in NRP have responded to such ecological strains as long consecutive draughts since the late 1980s by way of increased groundwater extraction and intensifying commercial agriculture at the cost of extensive mixed farming. A detailed analysis of dry groundnut production amongst different classes of NRP peasants is presented here to show that its cultivation makes small and marginal farm reproduction non-viable and explain partly the regressive risk-taking in groundwater extraction.

That there is a concurrent and related aspect of transformation in the social institutions is the theme of Chapter 3. I argue that the relationships between household members, and amongst kinship groups, are marked by secular competition and conflicts. In many ways, these changes are intrinsically linked to (in other words, facilitated by) changes in the economic arena; transition to more commercialised agriculture has sharpened individualistic roles within and outside the household and created new spaces for contesting gender and age based family roles. I conclude in the chapter, then, that a transition towards greater individualism is noteworthy in these social institutions with accompanying processes of social distancing and conflict.

In Ch. 4 I look at the nature of transition within the domain of consumption. The focus here is on understanding the emergent ideological value framework amongst NRP peasants as the terms of their contact with the external social and cultural world stands radically altered. Using the local dualism of *class* and *mass* consumption styles, I attempt to show that competitive *class* consumption is becoming the template for the notion of upward social mobility and achieving post-peasant identities. But it is also this idiom of class consumption which accentuates the contradictions produced in the domain of production, besides creating new moral fault-lines and adding to friction within families.

The next two chapters (5 & 6) are, then, about the language and act of suicide. Ch. 5 begins with an account of my experience of researching suicides. The aim here is to show that certain salient methodological considerations are marginalised in the literature on 'farmers' suicides' by deferring to the Durkheimian positivist epistemology in explaining the phenomenon. Against the literature, I argue that studying suicide as a 'social fact' (Durkheim 2006) is restrictive and misleading in that it takes the manner in which motives are ascribed officially to a suicide, and evidences presented to support it, as unproblematic. I then move to discussing the official cases of farmers' suicides to show that they demonstrate an aetiological continuum. There is indeed a category of genuine farm related suicides, which are causally linked to severe indebtedness resulting from the ruinous failure of high scale farm-investments – whether on bore -wells or land -leasing, as well as certain ineluctable non-farm expenditures such as that incurred on marriage of daughters and health related reasons. But, there are also some other suicides in which such farm related aetiologies are too closely intertwined with a non-farm related cause to be catalogued exclusively as 'farm related'. On the other end of the continuum, we have a large number of suicides in which the native explanations categorically

emphasize non-farm aetiologies by referring to them as *abhaddam atmahatyalu* ('fake farmers' suicides').

Taking this analysis further, in the next chapter, I deal with the broader category of suicides in general in Anantpur villages. The analysis makes use of the local discourse around the act of suicide in order to show that suicides amongst men is primarily aimed at negotiating the subjectivity of *avamanan* (ignominy/status failure) that is experienced within key social relations and or/ interactions. The degree and form of this subjectivity of *avamanam* is a function of one's belief in and claim to the performance of *paurusham* and hence, its correlative, *manam-maryada* (respect/status/honour). In the second part of this chapter, the organisational aspects of suicides, such as the method, intent and results of the act, are taken up for discussion. My overall argument is that in as much as the claims to *manam* and *maryada* stand more democratised today in the contexts of changes in the spheres of production and consumption, the scope for experiencing *avamanam* in key social relations stands vastly expanded. Ch. 7 presents a summary and conclusion for the dissertation.

## ***Chapter 2***

### **Ecology, Risk and Cash Crop Cultivation; agrarian change in NRP**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with describing the nature of changes in the farming systems within NRP. In section 2.2, I briefly outline the ecological specificity of farming in the village, namely its location within a semi-arid and fragile ecological zone with inherent risks and uncertainties in farm production. Within this ecological context, sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 deal with social distribution of three important sources of production (land, water and livestock) and the nature of recent changes therein. The bore well rush, in which a substantial number of villagers have repeatedly attempted to sink bore wells and begin intensive cash crop cultivation, often by disposing of their livestock herds, is discussed here. To explain this risk enhancing rush, section 2.6 offers an analysis of changes in dry and wet groundnut production. A central argument of the chapter is that the desperate rush for *thoTa* (garden land), especially amongst the small dry land peasantry, represents largely a compulsive act (Bharadwaj 1994: 208) that is explained by a crisis in groundnut production. Rising input costs and continuing low yields of groundnut – the “cost-price squeeze” (Harriss 2006: 111) – imply that small dry land farmers struggle to reproduce. The state’s implementation of populist policies in some areas and its withdrawal from others and, a vastly expanding informal credit market that is interconnected with the external economy, are two significant facilitators of these agrarian changes.

The analysis presented combines two theoretical perspectives the first of which relates to agrarian change as formulated in the Marxist political economy, and the

second, to risks and uncertainties<sup>1</sup> in dry land farming. In the former, it is widely agreed that the classical thesis (Marx in Dobb 1963:10 and Lenin 1899 in Harriss 1982) of a complete differentiation of peasantry into capitalistic and proletarian classes, and of the transformation of pre-capitalistic social relations, has not happened globally or in India (Kautsky 1899; Ch.8, Tuassig 1982 in Harriss 1982: 178, Hart, Turton and White 1989; 1-10)<sup>2</sup>. The persistence of small and marginal peasantry has been attributed in varying degrees to; (a). their capacity to provide labour at lower costs to large capitalist farms (Kautsky 1899), (b). their largely subsistence oriented production strategy, which is not concerned with the high opportunity cost of household labour (Saith and Tankha 1972) and, (c). their status as a credit receiving 'client' class to merchant-usurers or large farmers (Harriss 1982: 288, Washbrook 1994). However, it is the wider interpretations of these explanations that are pertinent. Marxist economists since Kautsky have viewed small-scale household production and exchange as essentially a compulsive/forced enterprise (Kautsky 1899: 110, Bernstein 1977 in Harriss 1982, Bharadwaj 1974: 2, 1994: 121, Bhaduri 1983)<sup>3</sup> that is geared to yield surpluses for higher classes<sup>4</sup>. These views contrast sharply with more optimistic 'populist/neopopulist' arguments

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms 'risk' and 'uncertainty' loosely and interchangeably to indicate the presence of hazards (Whyte and Burton 1980 in Dixon et al 1989: 167-168)

<sup>2</sup>Kautsky was one of the first Marxists to take this line (1899:12). However, since then, whether 'pre-capitalistic' relations have changed or not, and how to find if they have, has bedevilled Marxist scholars in post-colonial contexts. The famous mode of production debate in India between 1970-75 bears this out. In this debate, Rudra and Chattopadhyaya argued that the production relations in the Indian countryside were increasingly capitalistic, for, they were organized around free wage labour. Patnaik, first, denied the existence of free wage labour, and subsequently the use of free wage labour as *the* referent to identify the location of agrarian social relations in India. Subsequently, Alavi (1975), drawing from a parallel debate between Gunder Frank and Laclau concerning Brazil, criticized Patnaik (and Laclau) for ignoring the incorporation of Indian economy into metropolitan capitalism. In Alavi's view, India's colonial experience produced a qualitatively different mode of production in comparison to the European semi-feudalistic model that Patnaik seemed to have based her views on. Harriss (1982) offers a good summary of the debate while the criticisms of this debate can be found in Bharadwaj (1994:209), Hart et al (1992:Ch.1) and lately, Harriss (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Outside Marxist formulations, though, this involuntariness is often elided completely to describe similar circumstances. An instance is Greertz's (1963) involution thesis.

<sup>4</sup> The argument here is that, given their marginal resource base and largely muted labour and credit markets they face on one hand, and the increasing subsumption of their production and exchange in wider cash economy on the other, small peasants are forced to intensify capitalistic production (and exchanges) at unfavourable terms. Washbrook (1994) offers a cogent historical analysis of the dry ceded districts much on the same lines. See below.

(Chayanov in Harriss 1982, Lipton in Harriss 1982, Griffin, Khan and Ickowitz 2003) that consider the small (and middle) peasantry as an essentially viable capitalistic entity, provided it is actively supported by institutional policies of the state. Although my analysis is temporally constrained in that it is based on a single production cycle, I aim to show that small dry land production in NRP, with its marginal and degradable resource base, is indeed unviable. Further, it is better described by Bharadwaj's thesis of compulsive involvement than by neopopulist formulations. But contrary to some overly stylised formulations in the Marxist literature (such as the thesis of semi-feudal credit and labour relations), I also describe how the processes of commercialisation have significantly liberalised the terms of exchange in credit and labour markets across classes in the village.

The ecological uniqueness of dry land farming systems such as the one that NRP exemplifies, also makes it imperative for this analysis to relate to another area of concern. In India the so-called green revolution underway since the late 1960s has been the pivot around which the neopopulist and Marxist approaches have debated issues. However, empirical assessments of the 'new technology' have commonly emphasized an extensive array of policy biases to support contrasting theoretical positions. Amongst the notable biases identified are, (a). sectoral and production scale bias favouring industry and large farmers against agriculture and small peasantry (Lipton 1982, Griffin 1972), (b). bias in favour of wheat in particular and against cash crops in general (Frankel 1971: 52, Narain 1988: 119- 121) and (c). regional biases in which wetter zones have been favoured over drier ones (Rao 1994: 6, Ninan and Chandrashekhar 1993). Accordingly, the case for extending yield enhancing intensive technology in drier regions and to non food crop has long been

influential (Narain 1988: 119-121, Ninan 1987)<sup>5</sup>. Compared to these works that view the green revolution technology with unguarded optimism, evidence in recent years has exposed its inherent limitations, namely that it may have caused yield instabilities to intensify in general and particularly in areas/crops wanting in assured irrigation (Mehra 1981).

To the extent that the new technology has been extended by the state in fragile zones that are highly vulnerable to ecological degradation (Dixon et. al 1989: 26, Jodha 1991: A-15)<sup>6</sup>, such evidence deepens concerns about sustainability and risk in dry land agriculture. Indeed it suggests that intensive agriculture – whether of neopopulist mould of small-scale farming or large-scale capitalistic farming of the Marxist model – inherently entails exorbitant ecological, social and economic costs. The analysis in this chapter addresses itself to these concerns and, in doing so, hopes to explain why villagers take risks by investing in irrigation technology – much against the purported dry land farming rationality of avoiding them (Hill 1982: Ch. 2, Jodha and Singh 1990, Lipton 1982, Scott 1977).

## **2.2 The ecological specificity of Anantpur**

NRP peasants identify their district as a “*karavu prāntam*” (arid zone). Situated in the rain-shadow median of the southern peninsula, Anantpur receives on an average just 553 mm annually in precipitation – the lowest in AP and second lowest in India<sup>7</sup>. This precipitation is generally spread over 35 rainy days<sup>8</sup>, and the bulk of it (61.2%) is concentrated in the Southwestern monsoon period of June to September. Further, the meagreness of precipitation conceals significant annual,

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<sup>5</sup>And public policy did move in that direction in the 1970s in the form of the National Oilseeds Development project (Planning Commission Evaluation report, 1981). The results of this project have generally been paltry though.

<sup>6</sup> It helps to be reminded that the green revolution technologies have led to widespread ecological degradations, particularly of land and water sources across the country (Vyas 2002, Harriss-White and Janak Rajan 1997), notwithstanding claims to the contrary (Rao 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Next to Jaisalmer (Rajasthan). The district handbook of statistics (2005-06; 4).

<sup>8</sup>That is, a day with at least 2.5 mm of rain (Satyanarayana 1965:37).

intra-seasonal and regional variations. Over 98 years (1901-1998), the number of moderate to severely rain-scarce years (10% to 46 % below average) have outnumbered those of roughly normal or above-normal precipitation; on average, almost every third year was rain-deficient. The monsoon system is also estimated to be more active in the initial phase, i.e., between May 21<sup>st</sup> - June 10<sup>th</sup>, followed by a lull (until August 12<sup>th</sup>), rendering timely and sufficient rainfall from mid August to October critical for dry land crops<sup>9</sup>. Any abnormal variations – in time or quantum of rainfall – in this phase can translate a normal/above normal rainfall year into a poor crop-yield season, as this period covers the “grand period of growth”<sup>10</sup> for groundnut plants. In addition to these, there are regional variations in rainfall corresponding to three physiological zones of the district. The central parts comprising a bare and rocky landscape with low relief, are substantially drier than the elevated, relatively greener southern *mandals* and the northern lowlands. Thus, the *mandal* in which NRP is located in the central region receives on an average a scanty 335-350 mms, which is 37.07% less than the district average and 47.74 % less than that received by Hindupur in the south.

In part a corollary of aridity, the soils of the district are low in strength. Except for the fertile black loam (*nallarégaDi*) in the Northern *mandals*<sup>11</sup>, shallow red soils (*yerranella*) are characteristic of Anantpur. However as the indigenous soil taxonomy emphasises, it is the three humorally imbalanced red soils that are abundant in the district<sup>12</sup>. *Kuntinèllā*, predominantly red clay in low-lying fields (*guntalu*) is relatively fertile and moisture-retentive, but in the absence of moisture it is a “waste” (land) since its hardness impedes optimal aeration and (plough/hoe)

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<sup>9</sup> G.H. Shankar Reddy and Sathynarayan Murthy in ‘Agricultural draught during Kharif crop season in Anantpur’ (Andhra Agricultural journal, Vol. XIV, No. 6, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Narayanswami (1941:2).

<sup>11</sup> Which allow them to make use of precious winter moisture (December – February) for the second *Rabi* cultivation of Bengal gram/chick pea in dry lands.

<sup>12</sup> On the notion of humoral properties of soil in particular and substances in general see Gupta (1998;180) and Vasavi (1994).

tillage<sup>13</sup>. *Ratinèlla* is the uneven stony soil on/around hills that is often referred to, rather dismissively, as “*rālchén*” (stony tract)<sup>14</sup>. Catalogued as cultivable or uncultivable wastelands in colonial records<sup>15</sup>, these tracts were increasingly brought under intensive small scale cultivation in Anantpur in the last century (Washbrook 1994: 133). The third imbalanced red soil is the sandy *tellanèlla* ('white soil'). Its high porosity makes it vulnerable to overheating (*uDkā*) in summer giving rise to severe moisture related distress to Rabi crops. The villagers often have such tracts tiller-ploughed in order to obtain a more balanced constitution. The only relatively balanced red soil is the *yerraregaDi* – dark red loam with the texture of gravel. Its optimal porosity and balanced constitution make it an ideal soil for all crops all year round. Although different red soils often permeate one another and are constantly transformed by human intervention, broadly speaking the central and western *mandals* are impoverished *ratinella* and *tellanella* swathes.

The district experiences dry sunny days throughout the year, except between July and September. The festival of *Mahācivarātri* (in February-March) heralds summer and *Ugadi*, the Telugu New Year (in April), marks its mid-point. During this period, day temperatures stay close to about 40 °C and hot winds (10-20 km/hr.) sweep across the undulating expanses, depleting elevated *tellanella* tracts<sup>16</sup>. It is the welcome arrival of the monsoon that begins to “cool” the earth and ushers in preparations for *Mungari* (July –October crop) sowing. The period between December to February is, to NRP peasants, the ‘cold season’; day temperatures range between 12 °C to 28 °C and widespread showers are recorded from the north-

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<sup>13</sup> And conversely, it is sticky when wet, rendering it unsuitable for groundnut cultivation in the *thoTas*.

<sup>14</sup> Although, the unevenness of the soil is common to all red soil areas; in areas with sharper relief, tillage is always a challenge.

<sup>15</sup> See Francis (1905:52-53). Incidentally, he also mentions that this poverty of the soil meant that peasants were disinclined to cultivate them on annual contract from the state under the *ryotwari*.

<sup>16</sup> An indicator of the general dryness and high evaporation rates in the district is the relative low humidity level (40-50% during summer, rarely exceeding 75% even during monsoon months. The Handbook of Statistics, Anantpur, 2000-06.

eastern Monsoon. Since these showers are considered deleterious for *Mungari* groundnut, *meTa* (dry land) farmers accelerate the harvest, transportation, storing and processing of their groundnut crop, whilst *thoTa* farmers scramble to complete *Rabi* sowing as soon as possible to avoid facing low water yields in summer.

Just as the geographical location of Anantpur constrains the extent and distribution of precipitation received, local geological formations further impair collection, quality and distribution of groundwater. The district is largely situated within the pre-Cambrian crystalline groundwater zone comprising unweathered and unfractured granite, gneiss and quartzite formations (Taylor 1959 in Karanth 1987: 420-4). These rock-formations, with their low porosity, lie close to the surface (Satyanarayana 1965: 14) and they restrict the presence of aquifers within weathered or fractured zones (NCAER<sup>17</sup> Survey 1970: 115). In addition, the aquifers are subject to low recharge and volatility. The consensus amongst villagers is that the aquiferous zone is concentrated around 90-125 feet underground; only one functioning bore well has a higher depth of 250 feet. A majority of bore-wells in NRP are located in 5 clusters and almost all of these are affected by a natural water-draining and storing system (cf. Map2.1 below). NRP's groundwater resources would seem poorer in contrast with the "thicker and more continuous aquifers" in neighbouring dry Tamilnadu districts (Farmer 1977:10), but the pattern of massive over-exploitation of groundwater there in recent times (Harriss-White and Janakrajan 1997) appears quite convergent with the trends of groundwater degradations in NRP (See below)<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> I.e., National Council for Applied Economic Research, New Delhi.

<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, despite my repeated attempts, the district and state Groundwater Directorate officials declined to share groundwater related data under spacious pretexts including the one that, since I studied abroad, I was to submit a formal request forwarded by my University, and signed by my supervisors.

The ecology of Anantpur, like that of any other dry zone, throws into sharp relief the importance of institutional responses to water scarcity. Large-scale technical responses to aridity have remained underdeveloped in the district. Between 1901 and 1997, the percentage of irrigated area (from all sources) relative to the net sown area grew marginally from 10.52 to 15.19<sup>19</sup>. As per 2001 figures only 16.91% of the gross cropped area of the district was under any irrigation, as against 44.87% in the state and 40.20 % in neighbouring Cuddapah district<sup>20</sup>. In fact, the actual irrigated area is often much smaller than that officially registered as such; in 2004-05 and 2006, both of which were largely normal rainfall years, only 38% and 43% of the total acreage under irrigation was actually irrigated<sup>21</sup>. This is explained by a combination of technical and institutional factors including declining storage capacities of reservoirs, ill-maintenance of canals, water pilferage and competitive provincial politicking over control of water. More germane is the fact that the extant canal-based irrigation infrastructure in Anantpur is also organised around restrictions of topography and water flow in local rivers. Pennar, the main river of the district, originates in the southern Mysore plateau (in Karnataka) and flows northwards crossing K. *mandal*. Out of the three irrigation projects exploiting its waters, two irrigate (largely) the southern uplands whilst the third is located about 10-12 km away from NRP. Its canals bypass NRP to irrigate adjoining Garladinne *mandal* and beyond.

Locally, the central *mandals* have had an extensive network of tanks<sup>22</sup> courtesy of the Vijayanagar rulers (14<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> century), who erected and maintained this network

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<sup>19</sup> These are decadal averages (Draft document, The Collectorate, Anantpur, p. no. 140).

<sup>20</sup> The Statistical Abstract, Andhra Pradesh, 2001. In this respect, Kurnool and Anantpur compare quite unfavourably with Chittoor and Cuddapah.

<sup>21</sup> District Handbooks, 2004-06. In 2005-06, a normal rainfall year, actual irrigated area under canals was 57% of the gross *ayacut* area under canals. Refer to the Draft Document, p. 140, District Collectorate, Anantpur.

<sup>22</sup> Francis (105:63) cites a revenue settlement of 1890s that estimates the number of large tanks in the district to be around 700! Out of these 6 were great tanks (*peddacheruvu*) with registered *ayacuts* of more than a thousand acres.

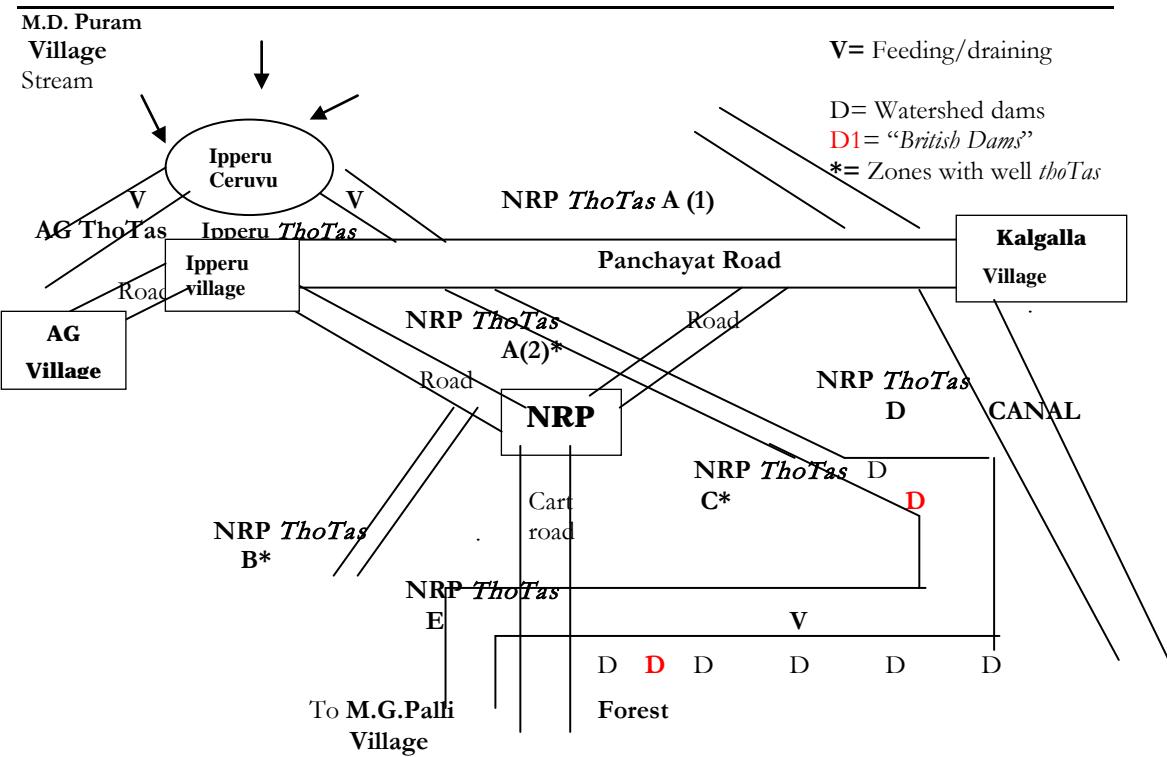
through elaborate land revenue entitlements (Stein 1993: 100-01, Francis 1905: 63-64). However, a precarious dependence upon seasonal feed from local streams, silting/breaches in dikes and competitive encroachment/diversions of feeding and draining channels has made them a minor and unreliable source of irrigation. For these reasons, the Ipperu tank – located 2 kms away from NRP (Map 2.1) – fills-up completely only in an exceptionally good rainfall year. With the exception of village bore wells in Cluster A (1), the availability of water in Ipperu tank impacts NRP's sub-surface and groundwater table relatively the least in the Panchayat<sup>23</sup>. This is possibly because the linking drainage system has been encroached upon substantially in recent years. The decline of tank systems in Rayalseema (Shankari 1991) and in other parts of South India (Bandara 1977; 384 in Farmer, 1977) has given rise to a thesis concerning the dying community traditions of water management, and for this the colonial land and water policies have been held accountable (Mosse 2003; 9-12). In Anantpur, however, the decline of tank systems is intertwined with a massive rise in well digging during the colonial period which has since been supplanted by a bore well rush. Furthermore, both these processes relate to the intensive commercialisation of dry agriculture underway in the district since the 1870s till the present day. Between 1901 and 1997, the area irrigated by tanks, as a proportion of net sown area shrank from 42.05% to 7.61%, while that by wells expanded from 32.92% to 67.68% (Draft Document, District Collectorate, Anantpur, p.140).

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<sup>23</sup> There are 15 NRP households that hold land under the tank command, but only one NRP farmer has a *tari* (registered wet land) of 3 acres.

Map 2.1

NRP; Surface and groundwater sites



It is not surprising that the ecological constraints facing Anantpur and the poor management of local resources render the district vulnerable to drought, and famines have been a regular feature of Anantpur since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>24</sup>. The famine of 1876-78 which has been classified as “the most grievous calamity of its kind in British India”<sup>25</sup>, saw one-quarter of the district’s population perish within two years (Francis 1904 in Washbrook 1994: 131). The colonial authorities, such as Sir F. Nicholson, explained Anantpur’s chronic distress in largely ecologically deterministic terms; “(the) soils and climate are adverse, produce but scanty, the ryot ignorant and backward... (Distress) does not arise from the pressure of population upon the land... (but), the *inability of the soil to yield a crop in bad*

<sup>24</sup> The earliest reference to famine in the district is in A.D 1390-91 and then circa. 1520 A.D (Satyanarayana 1965). But, in 1886, in a report Sir Frederick Nicholson, the then Collector of Bellary (of which Anantpur was a part), listed serial occurrences of 8 major drought-famines between 1803 and 1886.

<sup>25</sup>The Indian Famine Commission report, part 1, p. 16.

season" (ibid: 68-69, emphases mine)<sup>26</sup>. However, contesting this determinism – and also the more optimistic assessments of the commercialisation of agriculture underway since the 1900s - David Washbrook has traced these distresses to the unique form of ecology-colonial state-market interactions in Anantpur (1973 & 1994). He does find a significant proliferation of small dry farms (7-10 acres) from the 1870s in the district who were engaged in the new cotton and groundnut crops<sup>27</sup>. However, instead of taking this to represent capitalistic peasant production, he tellingly shows the proliferation of small farms to be a thoroughly compulsive response of marginal peasantry to larger economic changes in the area. This changes included, (a). withdrawal of large farmers from cultivating unprofitable cotton with attached labour, (b). soaring prices of coarse millet inducing large farmers to discontinue the practice of allowing attached farm labourers an access to their grain pits, (c). credit becoming indispensable for the 'new' small peasantry for cash crop production, and (d). advancing credit becoming the standard means of surplus investment for large farmers.

Indeed, in this respect a comparison of production and exchange conditions underpinning commercialisation in deltaic Andhra and dry Rayalseema since the later half of 19<sup>th</sup> century is illuminating. The growth of the rice economy of the Krishna-Godavari delta was largely a result of massive expansion in canal irrigation since the 1850s – an advantage that has subsequently been reinforced by the benefits of the green revolution technology (cf. Frankel, 1971). In contrast, groundnut cultivation in dry Anantpur remained more or less a compulsive response to fluctuating prices for the crop in Europe before independence

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<sup>26</sup>A good critique of the colonial understanding of draught appears in Arnold (in Guha 1984: 65).

<sup>27</sup> Groundnut cultivation was non-existent in the district until 1894-95. Since then groundnut occupied 27.9% of acreage in Anantpur by 1937-40, whereas the acreage under dry cereals decreased from 77% in 1901-04 to 53.2 in 1937-40 (Satyanarayana 1965:207).

(Satyanarayana in Ludden 2005: 186-187), and in private domestic markets after independence (Purkayastha and Subramanyam 1986).

### **2.3 Relative equality in access to land; sharp inequality in access to groundwater**

It seems that a favourable land-population ratio, as Nicholson insinuated, remained a hallmark of the district until the 1980s<sup>28</sup>. Since then, however, *per capita* landholdings appear to have shrunk a good deal in size; an average holding unit in NRP is now a mere 6.56 acres<sup>29</sup>. Units up to 5 acres constitute 57.07% of all holdings (Table 2.1) and only 15.12 % of them are medium or large (i.e., from 9.88 acres to 49.41 acres)<sup>30</sup>. Only 8 households, of which 7 belong to the patrilineal families of M. Reddy and S. Reddy, possess holdings large enough (i.e., between 20 to 50 acres) to be called *péddā rythu* (large landowners) in the village. Lack of official data at the village level disables me from describing the process of declining landholding size, but small and marginal holdings have shown a steep rise at the *mandal* level, particularly between 1985 and 2005. The number of holdings up to 5 acres have increased by a whopping 151% during the same period, and they now constitute a little more than one-fourth of the gross cultivated area. Conversely, holdings above 12 acres have decreased by a significant 80%, constituting today just 28.81% of total area. Intergenerational fragmentation of medium and large holdings owing to demographic differentiation (Chayanov 1925 in Shanin 1982: 231) is certainly one part of the explanation for this phenomenon. Thus, M. Reddy and S. Reddy's holding units, about 100 acres each 20 years back, are now divided into 7 units each of which range between 20 to 50 acres. An important reason for the rise

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<sup>28</sup> In the early 1980s, Harriss-White (1984:37) found that “Anantpur (was) characterized by a large spread of holding sizes (9.6 acres on an average), the largest average production units, and most waste” in comparison to Hyderabad and Bangalore regions.

<sup>29</sup> Although this compares slightly favourably the figures that Olson quotes for her Chittoor villages (1996:68), but an adjustment for the difference in quality of land (in the later case, a superior quality), would mean it to be on par.

<sup>30</sup> According to the categories used by the agricultural Census, Andhra Pradesh, 2000-01.

in the number of smallholdings, however, is also the large-scale and recurring distribution of wastelands by the state in the last decades, often as a measure to contain the mobilisation of peasantry around land-rights by leftist political parties. Between 2003 and 2006 for instance, 1,042 acres of cultivable wasteland was assigned to landless and marginal landowners from the Backward and Scheduled Castes in the *mandal*<sup>31</sup>.

**Table 2.1** *NRP; Land holding size and its caste wise distribution*

Caste	Size (in acres)				
	Less than 1	1.1 – 2	2.1-5	5.1-10	More than 10
10					
Kapu (Reddy)	-	4	5	7	
Ekula		3	11	14	2
Kuruba		4	37	31	18
Boya			5	-	2
Chakali	-	-	3	-	-
Dudekula	-	-	7	-	-
Madiga	6	9	26	7	2
Mala	-	-	1	-	-
Ediga	-	-	1	-	-
Total	6	16	95	57	31

Village Census Survey, 2005 –06

The declining size of landholdings disguises an asymmetrical distribution of land ownership amongst different castes (Table 2.1). The influential *Kapus* continue to hold a significant share (17%) of the gross cultivated land relative to all other castes; their average landholding size (15.71 acres) relates to a *Kuruba* (a Backward Caste) and a *Madiga*'s (a Scheduled Caste) unit in a ratio of 1: 2.24 and 1: 4 respectively. Further, this asymmetry is reproduced in terms of the caste-specific portfolios of land-titles and their quality. The share of land under ancestral private title – generally of better quality and entailing full proprietary rights – decreases, and that under the assigned land (with no right of alienation) increases, as one moves down

<sup>31</sup>District Handbook, 2003-06. A total of 4.2 million acres, mostly cultivable wastelands, have been distributed amongst the landless/marginal landowners in the state since the 1960s. However, it is unknown how much of this is in possession of the assignees (Balgopal 2007: 3831-3832).

the caste-class hierarchy<sup>32</sup>. Large landowners also tend to have more consolidated and better-located (i.e. closer to the village) plots, which, as we shall see, has helped them command better access to groundwater. Current market prices reflect the distinctions of title and quality; in comparison to Rs. 15,000-20,000 per acre for (dry) assigned titles, old titles command roughly Rs. 50,000 per acre. Overall, however, the disparities of landownership in NRP are not as skewed as reported in other parts of South India (See Harriss 1982:116, Gough 1989:260, Harriss-White 1984: 67). While there are no *bhuswāmis* (landlords) in the village – such as M. Reddy or N. Reddy in the neighbouring villages (owning 150 and 200 acres respectively) – only 21 (9.29%) households are landless<sup>33</sup>.

*Table 2.2 NRP; Landholding and its distribution*

Caste holding	Households (no.)	Landholding (acres)	Landless (no.)	(household) (%)	land (%)
Kapu	16	251.5	-	7.07	16.95
Ekula	30	186	-	13.27	12.54
Vaishya	01	00	01	0.44	--
Kuruba	100	699	10	44.24	47.14
Boya	07	67.6	-	03.09	4.55
Chakali	05	13	02	2.21	0.88
Dudekula	08	35	01	3.53	2.35
Madiga	56	221	06	24.77	14.90
Mala	01	05	-	0.44	0.33
Erikula	01	00	01	0.44	--
Ediga	01	05	-	0.44	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>1483.1</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Village Census Survey, 2005

The extent of land redistribution effected by the open market in NRP is much smaller (Table 2.3) than that from the state, although it suggests another important feature of the changing agrarian structure. There appears to be a consolidation of dry but superior quality holdings around the middle peasantry (i.e. owners of 8-15 acres), particularly the *Kurubas*. Net gains in landholding have accrued to them

<sup>32</sup>A. Also see Balgopal (op. cited)

B. My census of land holdings could not elicit reliable data on this, primarily because, as I have mentioned above (Ch.1), at the time of undertaking the census, I had not been able to dispel the distrust I had aroused amongst the NRP villagers.

<sup>33</sup>In fact, out of these 21, 4 households sold their land in recent years to avoid insolvency or transferred titles to a male offspring in lieu of a fixed subsistence allowance.

from shedding of ancestral titles by large and middle *Kapu* (and a few *Vaishya*) landowners – mostly from the neighbouring IP village – who have migrated to the town. To a lesser extent they have also gained from distressed sales by some small peasants within NRP facing indebtedness or serious financial expenditure. Table 2.3 presents the details of 43 land transactions involving an NRP seller or buyer for the period between 1995 and 2005. Only one large *Kapu* landowner (from NRP) was involved as a buyer indicating the disinterestedness of his class in expanding the scale of production horizontally; 23 were middle class *Kurubas*, 10 *Ekulas* and 4 *Kapus*. Conversely, amongst the sellers, there are 23 large *Kapu*, *Vaishya*, *Kamma* landowners (owning 20 acres or more) from Ipperu. Ancestral titles comprised 56% of all land transactions. On the whole, there has been a process of miniaturization, particularly of large units in the village. This is accompanied by the distribution of marginal lands amongst a number of landless and marginal households. Since there is also an indication of consolidation by middle peasantry through local land-markets, land-oriented differentiation in the classical mould (Lenin 1908 in Harriss 1982) appears to have been arrested in the village (also see Vyas 2002, Shaban 1987 in Ray 1998 for similar conclusions).

**Table 2.3** *NRP; Sales and purchase of land (1995-2005)*

Particulars of Transactions		Area (in acres)
i.	Inter-castes (within NRP)	60.5*
(Of which)	net transfer from the <i>Kapus</i>	37. 5
	Net transfer from the SCs	5
ii.	Intra-castes (within NRP)	53.80
(Of which)	<i>Kapus</i>	10
	<i>Kurubas</i>	34
	<i>Ekulas</i>	6.80
	<i>Dudekula</i>	3
iii.	Intra-village	59*
(Of which)	Net gains to NRP	59
	To the <i>Ekulas</i>	04
	To <i>Kurubas</i>	50
	To <i>Boya</i>	05

NRP village survey, 2005-06

Notes; The figures include both transactions in ancestral titles and assigned lands. It also includes the lone transaction of 3 acres of bore well irrigated plot. \* Includes one transaction of 9 acres of plot under well irrigation.

These trends are reflected in the nature of the local tenancy market. There are no pure (i.e. landless) tenants in the village and the average size of land leased is small; the modal value for sampled observations is 5 acres. Secondly, tenancy transactions, especially inter-class transactions, have often involved land from outside the village (Table 2.4). Today small and middle dry land peasants – and a few small *thoTa* owners – possessing bullocks lease-in dry lands from the neighbouring villages. However, until as recently as in 2000, not less than 20-25 households (10% of total households) had been leasing-in wet land (*magani*) for paddy cultivation from Reddy landowners in Kamlapuram village in Garladinne (15 km from NRP). Since then, a majority of these tenants have become successful bore-well farmers within the village.

Table 2.4

Particulars of tenancy in NRP (2005)

Particulars	Per cent (of total cases)
<b>Extent</b>	
i. Peasants participating in tenancy markets	45.16
ii. Land leased in	76 acres
(of which) Inter-village leasing	39 acres
iii. Land leased-out	08 acres
<b>Class of participants</b>	
i. Inter-class transactions (from large owner to smaller tenant)	46
ii. Intra-class transactions	46
iii. Reverse transactions (small to large landowner)	8
<b>Nature of contracts</b>	
i. <i>Noti-marta Guttakka</i> (one season; advance payment)	31
ii. <i>Noti-marta Guttakka</i> (one season; post-harvest payment)	46
iii. Written <i>Guttaka</i> (one season; advance payment)	7
iv. Written <i>Guttaka</i> (more than one season)	8
iv. <i>Noti-marta Koru</i> (one season)	8
Household Sample Survey (2005-06)	N= 31

Reflecting an institutional response to uncertainties in dry land cultivation, tenancy transactions explicitly invoke the idioms of trust (*nammakkam*) and compatibility (*anukulam*) between concerned parties in a moral economy framework (Scott 1976: 32-33). Thus, verbal fixed rent (*noti-mārTā Guttaka*) for a season that is adjusted

for unanticipated output variations, quality of land, and degree of social distance/proximity, is the dominant contractual form. Rents range from a mutually agreed sum of Rs. 600- 1,000 per acre (i.e., up to 20% of gross value of output) in cash, or 2 bags of unshelled groundnut per acre (Rs. 1400-1450; 25-30% of gross value) post harvest. Conversely, representing distress on the part of a tenant, written (i.e. secured by promissory note) *guttakas* involve rents at the higher end of the range. They are paid in advance and generally span two or more seasons, and hence written *guttakas* are rare. It is in part the flexibility of the oral *guttaka* contracts and their lower rent ratios – 20-30% as compared to 50% in case of standard sharecropping (*koru*)<sup>34</sup> – that explain why sharecropping, which is classically considered a risk distributing contract for the lessee (Smith and Marshall in Griffin, 2003; 6), is also rare. To peasants, sharecropping is more suitable for paddy cultivation where the demand for draft and male labour is much higher; in small, low yield dry land, it is “just not profitable”<sup>35</sup>. Sharecropping was prevalent in NRP until the 1980s when paddy was extensively cultivated in *Mungari* with oxen-operated *Kavali* water-lifts. With declining availability of sub-surface water, the scope for paddy cultivation and with it, that of share-cropping, has been much reduced.

The widening base of landownership amongst marginal peasants and landless households implies an extension of intensive agriculture in marginal lands and the exposure of a larger number of households to direct production risks. This development has also led to an iniquitous and ecologically regressive pattern of

<sup>34</sup> The standard form of *koru* involves 50% of gross output as rent to the landowner. If he splits all costs and draft animal, he receives ¾ of the gross output. Similarly, in *yaddupālu*, a tenant lacking his own oxen team finds a co-tenant with oxen team and splits his share of costs and output (thus, receiving only ¼ the output presuming that the landowner’s bullocks has not been used). Or conversely, if the landlord lacks a pair of oxen he has the choices of either paying the *palikoru* on a day-to-day basis (for his oxen) and receive ¾ of the net harvest, or else, just receives his normal share (i.e., 50% of gross output).

<sup>35</sup> It recalls Lipton’s idea of “satisficing” (1982 in Harriss 1982), i.e., a mix of risk-avoidance and profit seeking. There are only two small peasants in the village who lease large tracts of dry land (12 acres) on *koru* from N. Reddy in Kalgalla.

groundwater usage. Shallow wells (*Bai*), traditionally the mainstay of irrigation, have been scanty in number and hence sparse (1 well to 34.5 acres). Additionally, their ownership within and across castes has also been equally uneven (Table 2.5 A). Yet it is noteworthy that 67% of the extant wells are under joint ownership of patrilineal kinsmen as proprietary rights over family irrigation sources continue after their households have been divided. The compulsions of location and high scale of investment required have also forced non-kin households to dig and manage wells corporately. Jaimma, a *Kapu*'s well was constructed 30 years back and used thereafter by her in-laws and a *Kuruba* and *Ekula* household together. But since the mid 1980s, *kavali*, *yātam* (men-drawn irrigation system) and diesel pump sets (3 HP) have been comprehensively replaced by powerful electric pumps (7.50 HP) and submersible bore wells<sup>36</sup>. The fact that within the last 15 years (i.e. 1989-90 and 2005-06), the net area irrigated by wells in Anantpur has shrunk by 77%<sup>37</sup> is largely owing to over-extraction of groundwater made possible by the new lifting technology (also Subramanyam & Sekhar 2003; 1205). Both marked seasonal fluctuations and a secular decline in groundwater over the decade are now “visible indicators of non-sustainable” extraction (Jodha 1991; A-18). Out of 45 wells in the village there are only 4 that remain perennial; 13 have been completely

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Anantpur; Growth in irrigation technology				
A. Year;	No. of oil engines	Electric motors	(Net)area irrigated by tube well (Hect)	Other wells
1985-86 (?)	114 (13,053)	666 (35,534)	--	--
1987 ( <i>ad hoc</i> survey)	42 (8,973)	1075 (57,788)	--	--
1996-1997	12 (5,538)	748 (??)	651	998
2000-01	11 (1938)	1130 (56,331)	--	--
2002-03	67 (3,894)	618 (71,493)	819	573

Source; DHBS, 1985-86, 1996-97, 2001-02, 2002-03

50 Anantpur; area (in Hectare) irrigated by wells and tube wells (1989-06)

Source	Year			
	1989-1990	1995-96	2000-01	2005-06
i. Wells	75,732	62,914	44,039	17,315
ii. Tube wells & filter points	8,866	53,358	88,414	96,064

Source; Statistical Abstract, AP (2001) and District Handbook of Statistics, 1999-2005

dry since 2000<sup>38</sup>; 15 recharge only for 3 months during the monsoon, and in the remaining 13 the recharge during normal monsoon lasts for only 6 months.

Although bore wells first appeared in the village during the drought of 1986 when existing wells failed widely in the district <sup>39</sup>, the process of their adoption since then has been class relative and in tandem with the extension of electricity connections (as Harriss-White suggested, 1977; 182 in Farmer, 1977). Amongst well-owners who were the pioneers in attempting to sink bore wells in their failed wells, the first group of successful innovators included the 4 largest land and livestock owning Reddy and *Kuruba* families who had their well-*thoTa* closer by (Cluster A (2) in Map 2.1). They were followed by a number of well-owning middle peasants from amongst *Kapus* and *Kurubas* between 1995 and 1999 (in Cluster B and C; *ibid*). However, the most intensive and socially divisive phase of bore-well expansion (in Cluster A (1), D and E) has been underway since 2000. Out of 20 peasants who had made an attempt at sinking bore wells in the sample of 31 households (i.e. 64.51%) that I studied, only 5 had made their first attempt between 1985 and 1990 whilst 10 households had done so since 2000. Also, many pioneers have made subsequent attempts at rigging bore wells in the third phase in order to consolidate their access to groundwater. Importantly, amongst these 31 households, 8 bore well-owners (all *Kurubas* and *Ekulas* except one) have come to possess assigned lands since the 1990s, thereby suggesting that the widening access to landownership in recent decades has intensified the rush for groundwater.

To put it in perspective, the total acreage under bore wells is still a mere 206.35<sup>40</sup>, or 14 % of the gross cultivated area and only 34% of all land owning households in

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<sup>38</sup> In the 5 years between 2000 and 2005, 2001 was a normal rainfall year, 2002 and 2003 were severely rain deficient, while 2004 and 2005 were rain-surplus years (DHBS, 2005-06). Thus, the wells had remained dry despite two consecutive rain-surplus years.

<sup>39</sup> See Balgopal (EPW 1986: 1098).

<sup>40</sup> This is the lower range of the acreage under irrigation in view of seasonal fluctuations.

the village have any access to groundwater. However, since 70 % of all bore wells are under individual ownership (Table 2.5), it has led to a reduction in the overall number of *thoTā* owning households. A majority of joint bore-wells (21 bores in 46 households) belong to the pioneers who struck groundwater in joint well beds or sunk them in co-operation. In other words, by making groundwater an individually owned and consumed property, the bore well technology has allowed greater concentration of groundwater amongst relatively fewer households. Caste-wise, the *Ekulas* can be said to have benefited handsomely from the technology in that they not only have a high number of individually owned bore-wells, but they also have a good number of such new *thoTa*-owning households amongst them who did not own any wells previously.

Similar individual gains have accrued to many *Kurubas*, albeit to a smaller number of households that previously had a joint access to a well; the number of households that have lost access to groundwater completely in this transition is highest amongst them. However, the concentration of individual bore wells is highest amongst the influential *Kapus*. In terms of landholding size, it is the owners of middle and large holdings who have benefitted the most in the process; just 7 such households (Table 2.6 ) own 19 bore wells (27.14% of all). Further, the bore well technology is altering class-structure in NRP. From an era marked by an immutable vertical division between M. Reddy's joint-family and the rest of the village (albeit mediated by the four richest *Kuruba* households) in the 1980s, class differences have come to penetrate intra-caste kin groups and fraternal joint families as never before. For instance, although each of the four Pāmurathi brothers possesses 7 acres of land, all the brothers have been "successful" *thoTa* owners in the last 6 years save the eldest one. They have earned net profits of Rs. 100,000 (£1,430) to Rs. 400,000 (£5,714) from the sale of their first citrus crop whilst the eldest brother remains a marginal livestock and dry land farmer.

**Table 2.5** *NRP; features of access to wells and bore wells*

Caste	Wells										Bore-wells				
	(No. Of Households)		(No. Of wells)		(No. Households)		(No. of bore wells )								
	Individual	Joint	Total	Individually	Jointly	Total	Individual	Joint	Total	Individually	Jointly				
Total	Access	Access	Owned	owned	Access	Access	Access	Access	owned	owned	Access	Access	Access	Access	Access
a. Ekula	01	19	20	1	7	8	7	14	20	8	7	19	1	19	
b. Kapu	04	12	15	4	6	10	9	2	11	18	2	19			
c. Kuruba	5	42	47	7	14	21	18	26	40	21	12	33			
d. Madiga	--	7	7	--	2	2	2	4	06	02	01	03			
e. Others	2	-	2	2	--	2	--	--	--	--	--	--			
Total	12	80	91	14	29	43	36	46	77	49	21	70			

NRP village census, 2005

Note; a. Households with a share in a jointly held bore well, in addition to their individually owned bore wells are counted twice; that is, they appear in both 'individual access' and then in 'joint access' columns. There is one such case amongst the *Ekula*, and 4 amongst the *Kurubas*. But, in the figures of the total no. of households with an access to wells/bore wells', the concerned households are counted just once.

**Table 2.6** *NRP; the new regime of bore well ownership*

Landholding size class (In acres)	Wells	No. Of Households with access to bore well	(2 or more bore wells*)
1. > 5	10	07	1
2. 5.1 –7	40	30	1
3. 7.1-10	15	19	2
4. 10.1-15	16	14	2
5. < 15.1	10	07	3
Total	91	77	9

Note; these are households with individual ownership of 2 or more bore wells, and the number of bore wells owned by them is 23.

Amongst the enabling factors for an unbridled bore well sinking spree in South India, fragmented landholdings, the weak enforcement of laws regulating groundwater usages, and easy availability of finance have been held important (Harriss, 1982; 75). Wade's research (1988) in adjoining Kurnool villages also relates a collective local management of common water resources, or its absence, to communal assessment of benefits and costs; the higher the costs of non-cooperation, the likelier the scope for effective collective action. In NRP the bureaucratic control of groundwater is not only weak, but the state also acts, as I have argued, as an enabler for bore-well sinking by way of its policies. The scope for an easy availability of finances to dig bore-wells remains an important factor.

However, the scenario in Wade's case studies where both communal costs and benefits take definite proportions owing to their clear temporal and spatial background ("tail-end villages drawing water from canal system"), does not appear to obtain in NRP. Access to groundwater, subject as it is to localised acquiferous fissures, is often distinguished as an "individual fortune" (*vayaktik adrushTam*) granted by *Gangamma* (the goddess of water). This aspect of extreme variability ("chance" as an NRP farmer would say) also appears to explain why groundwater has remained outside the sphere of monetary exchange unlike in Tamilnadu (Mosse, 2003) and Gujarat (Shah, 1993). During the field work period, there were two cases in which dry peasants who were cultivating their land with surplus water from neighbouring *thoTas* under a *koru* arrangement, repeatedly attempted to dig their own bore-wells just a few metres away and withdrew from tenancy when they were successful. Lest I be misunderstood, the idea that nature/luck is the sole arbiter of access to groundwater is certainly qualified by individual command of resources. My point is that this belief has so far kept disagreements regarding groundwater under control in the village and in doing so, it has whetted the bore-well rush.

#### **2.4 Declining mixed-farming practices**

Although the critical importance of livestock in a dry land economy has rightly been highlighted in the social ecological literature on India and elsewhere (Kavoori 1998, Jodha 1991, Ellis 1994), Hill's lament (1982:164) about the "neglect of small livestock in the economic literature" on South India is still somewhat relevant. In fact, it would seem that at least some mainstream economic texts rather miss the point completely by considering livestock farming to be a low productivity, environmentally degrading livelihood strategy and associate it with rural poverty (e.g. Rao 1994: Ch. 9). To allow us to put this point in perspective, first, let us see the present distribution of livestock in the village. There are 29 households that

farm sheep and goat as their primary occupation (Table 2.7); another 16 maintain animals as their chief secondary occupation and 8 households deal in livestock. Thus the livestock economy is directly relevant to about a fourth of all households. Amongst the 45 livestock owning households, 34 own dry lands only, whilst 11 households (2 large peasants, 3 middle and 6 small peasants) own a *thoTa* as well. *Kurubas* own large herds that comprise 200-300 animals and the joint-family of the Durgams – who have failed about 20 times in their attempts to dig a bore-well – are the largest herd owners. Thus, although there is a broad correspondence between dry holdings and livestock farming, an inverse connection between the size of holding and size of herds cannot be posited – as the thrust of Rao's argument above would suggest.

**Table 2. 7** *NRP; Livestock distribution across peasant classes*

Class	Total Households		Ox team			Milch Animal			Sheep/Goat		
	(No.)	House-holds	%	Pairs (No.)	House-holds	%	No. of Animals	House-holds	%	No. of Animals	
a. Marginal Farmers	109	26	23.85	52	15	14	Cow (16) She-buffalo (1)	26	24	Sheep (1,270) Goat (355)	
b. Small Farmers	44	26	59	52	10	23	Cow (9) She-buffalo (4)	15	32	Sheep (1,080) Goat (37)	
c. Middle Farmers	39	25	64	51	12	30	Cow (13) She-buffalo (3)	3	8	Sheep (180) Goat (67)	
d. Large Farmers	13	10	77	24	6	46	Cow (27) She-buffalo (5)	1	1	Sheep (30) Goat (40)	
Total	205*	87	42	179	43	21	Cow (65) Buffalo (13)	48	23	Sheep (2,560) Goat (499)	

Note; \*All landless families (21) are excluded from calculation; only one of them maintains a flock of goats.

Even though livestock rearing has traditionally characterised *Kuruba*, *Ekulas* and at least a few *Kapu* households<sup>41</sup>, the emphasis placed on it, and accordingly the mode of its management, has been caste relative. Traditionally the largest herd owners (with up to 750 sheep), the *Kurubas* have practised seasonal transhumance whereas

<sup>41</sup> Anantpur had the highest population of sheep in the state until 1967; at present, it is second to Mehabubnagar (Statistical Abstract of AP 2004-05).

the *Ekulas* and others have practised a more sedentary pastoralism by maintaining smaller herds. Amongst the former, it has been a usual practice for an adult household male – the specialist in animal rearing – and his *jeeta* (attached labourer) to commence seasonal migration beginning *Sankranti* (Jan 14<sup>th</sup>). Foraging on Rabi stubbles in irrigated northwestern Kanekal *mandal*, they would then enter Bellary (in Karnataka) for pasturage and to market the animals to mutton traders. They would begin their homeward journey after *Ugadi* (i.e., April-May), folding in dry lands on their way in exchange for petty cash, and reached NRP around the arrival of *Mungari*. From then on, animals were folded close to the draining stream in forest (cf. Map 2.1) and foraged on extensive scrubland. The non-*Kuruba* herd owners largely grazed their flocks in the forest and in Garladinne *mandal* – all within a radius of 15-20 km from the village. By drawing upon several niches (i.e. favourable bio-spheres, Barth 1956) in the local ecological continuum, livestock rearing has traditionally lent the local peasantry flexibility to accommodate agriculture related risks. As such, despite their herds facing adverse weather<sup>42</sup>, theft and disease, peasants still consider a *thoTa* and a herd to be the paragon of livelihood security.

Even as the attribute of risk dispersal is central to agro-pastoral practices, another important virtue of the livestock economy, as it has traditionally been practiced in NRP, warrants mention. Amongst the 45 livestock owning households, there are at least seven such cases in which the *pater familias* – a large herd owner now – had been a landless immigrant or had worked as a *jeeta* for a considerable period upon his arrival in the village (see K. Anjaneyulu's life history in Ch. 6 below). In other words, livestock farming has traditionally been an important – indeed often the only – means of upward economic and social mobility whereby several landless

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<sup>42</sup> Sheep are very sensitive to rainfall; the likelihood of diseases amongst them is much higher during monsoon.

households have become rich owner cultivators in due course of time. Here, the role of *paidadlu* arrangement, a sort of incentivised livestock farming, can hardly be overstated. *Paidablu* implies extra (i.e., interest free) money that an employer agrees to pay to an experienced *jeeta*, in addition to his annual wages at the time of employment. Such amounts are roughly between Rs. 10,000 to 20,000; they are inversely proportionate to annual wages and usually invested by the *jeeta* in raising another herd. Thus, the *jeeta* minds both the master's flock alongside the one raised from *paidadlu* for the next three years, after which he is free to terminate the contract by returning the sum. At the end of the contract, a fair dividend generally accrues to him from surplus animals begotten and from appreciating value of the herd.

Lastly, in keeping with researches that suggests consistent buoyancy in the livestock sector in India (Rao 1994, Vyas 2002 in Mohan 2002, Blench 2001), large livestock owners and those dealing in them have benefited tremendously from an increasing demand for meat in Bangalore and Chennai. Traders and butchers from these cities converge on weekly animal market in Anantpur and the price of mutton has shot up by Rs. 80/kg within 4 years (i.e., 2003-2007). An average sheep (weighing 15 kg) fetches roughly Rs. 1,500- 1,800 and a goat (of same weight), about Rs. 1,000-1,200 in the market. It comes as little surprise, then, that a *Madiga* herd owner equated sheep with gold and goats with silver ("Gorréllu bangāru číté, meikalu vénDi undi") to me.

Notwithstanding these benefits, the evidence suggests (endorsing Hill 1984: 165) that livestock farming has been a declining practice in the village in correlation with the intensification of the bore well digging. Villagers estimate the scale of this decline in terms of the ruminant population to be "no less than 60-70%" between 1994-05 and 2005. In support they cite the instances of the three richest (and

largest) *Kuruba* livestock farming families of the *Damerlas*, the *Durgams* and the *Avulas*. The combined strength of herds owned by these families stood at about 1900 animals (74 % of current sheep population) until 1995, reduced now to a mere 740. Only the *Durgams* have continued maintaining livestock whereas the *Avulas* and *Damerlas* have disposed of their animals almost completely after successfully rigging their bore-wells. To give a general idea of this decline, I have compared, rather crudely, the number of sampled households maintaining herds presently and the size of these herds, with those maintained by their fathers at the time of household division or the sinking of a bore-well (whichever was later). The results (Table 2.8) show that the number of households depending on livestock has declined a good deal in general and particularly amongst the middle classes that have been more successful bore-well owners in the last decade. The comparison of average herd sizes also suggests large- scale disposal of animals. Rather oddly, however, both *mandal* and district level statistics continue to indicate a rise in animal population over the 1987-2003 period<sup>43</sup>, either implying some statistical manipulation or a substantial growth in livestock population elsewhere.

*Table 2. 8 NRP; The declining possession of livestock*

Class earlier	Households with		Present herd Size (No.)	Herd Size (No.)
	Herds (%)	Herds earlier (%)		
a. Marginal Farmers	55	55	53	91
b. Small Farmers	20	50	06	61
c. Middle Farmers	Nil	87	0	79
d. Large Farmers	Nil	50	0	30

Household sample survey, 2005.

Notes; (A) Amongst the 31 households in the sample, four are brothers; in these cases, the strength of herd owned by the father is entered per head. For all remaining cases, the total strength of the herd owned by the father is entered; (B). Since there are only 2 large farmers in the sample, the figures entered against them are only illustrative.

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Year	District	Mandal
1961	9,79,760 (Sheep); 3,27,792 (Goat)	--
1983	--	37,814(Sheep+ goat)
1987	--	25,408 (Do)
2003	19,05,972 (sheep); 5,03,275 (Goat)	51,713(Sheep);4,924(Goat)

Source; DHBS, 1961; 1983; 1987; 2003

The widespread disposal of livestock is sometimes attributed by peasants to the disinclination on the part of a younger member of a household to undertake the “tougher” (*KashTam pani*) and “coarse” (*mass*) chores of livestock tending relative to “easy agriculture”. However, the reduction in animal population appears to have been mostly an outcome of livestock sales by small and middle peasant households to obtain liquidity for a wider set of circumstantial requirements. In a few cases, some *Kuruba* households have repaid their outstanding debts by selling their herds, but the three most prominent causes for disposing of livestock have been purchase of land (recall the point concerning *Kuruba* households being the most prominent buyers of land), construction of *class* houses after family division (Ch.4 below), and, installation of irrigation machinery after confirmed groundwater availability. The high atrophy rate of extended households has been another significant disabling factor (Ch. 3 below), for, there is little scope for the conventional division of labour between/amongst brothers within a household. Some *Kuruba* households with a young son have been able to retain livestock with the help of a *jeeta*. However, to the extent that sons would rather attend school than tend sheep and, that *jeeta* labour is itself restricted to a few very poor households, even a willing *thoTa* peasant finds it difficult to continue maintaining livestock these days.

On the whole, the large-scale disposal of livestock population in the village is suggestive of an occupational transition on the continuum of agro-pastoralism, i.e., a shift from extensive traditional mixed farming to intensive bore well-oriented agriculture. Of course, Kavoori’s conclusion about pastoralism in Western Rajasthan (1999; 186), namely that it is not necessarily “destined to become extinct” in view of its “encapsulation” by larger economic and political structures, retains some relevance for all middle castes in NRP. In the event of worsening groundwater availability, livestock tending may see a compulsive re-expansion. However, the

scale of livestock tending, the form of livestock management (i.e. transhumance), and its place in the overall livelihood strategy of local households, is unlikely to be the same as the one that has existed until recently. Furthermore, in this process the households that are left with no livestock now have become significantly exposed to risks in production even as they contribute to degradation of groundwater resources.

## **2.5 The agrarian structure of NRP**

The studies of dry land agrarian communities (Epstein 1962:10, Harriss 1982: 126, Olsen 1996: 59) have generally underlined the centrality of access to water in determining the economic standing of a peasant household and NRP is no exception to this. Villagers posit a fundamental dichotomy between a dry land (*meTa*) and a *thoTa* peasant: they say that *thoTa* peasants take “three crops and have little time for leisure” and they employ *kullies* round the year and (hence) command “grip” (influence). Also, they “generate plenty of credit” (*dandiga apullu puTta*). This dichotomy informs another, more elaborate, classifying framework the villagers use in everyday discourse. To them, there are broadly three kinds of households; (a). the *kullies*, who have to work in someone else’s fields, or tend someone else’s herds because they have marginal dry lands only, b. the *bhuswami* (large landlords) who employ *kullies*/tenants to cultivate their extensive dry and wet lands and (c). the *rythu*, who works his own dry and/or wet land but has to employ *kullies* at times and also hires out his labour to someone else. In addition, between *rythu* and *bhuswami* is a *pedda rythu* (large peasant), who owns relatively not too large a landholding (“less than 100 acres”) and works in his field – someone like PV Reddy (M. Reddy’s son) who “works alongside his *kullies*” in his 50 acres farm.

In the relevant literature, however, there have been disagreements within the structuralist camp – both Marxist and non-Marxist – concerning the manner in which peasant households ought to be classified. There are three competing viewpoints. First, the structural anthropological view argues for understanding class in terms of indigenous categories (Beteille 1974: 12, Chambers 1983: 51-55). It believes that an imposition of external (read economic) definitions elides the richness of interaction between the economic, cultural and political factors which form and reproduce classes in everyday life. Amongst the Marxists, however, the focus has primarily been on a precise understanding of how productive assets (i.e. land, labour and surpluses obtained) are distributed amongst peasant households. Patnaik (1987) marshals a 'labour exploitation index' that classifies a household by finding if it is a net employer of casual labour or a net workers in relation to its work in its own land. Athreya and Djurfeldt (1990), on the other hand, have examined the extent to which a household generates, or fails to generate, surpluses over its subsistence needs. My own approach closely follows Harriss (1982: 115) and Epstein (1962: 10, 42). I have looked at each resident NRP household's landholding and weighted it for its access to groundwater, to examine whether it has the capacity to generate a minimum acceptable livelihood requirement or not. Based on the extent of this capacity, I have ranked all households in four largely discrete agrarian classes (Table 2.9; also see Appendix 2). My choice has been dictated by the operational simplicity of this approach - namely that the three sets of data required, i.e., land, household composition and access to groundwater were easier to collect - and its propinquity to the local understandings of class. However, in as much as I have allocated equal weight to all wet land holdings under bore wells as of January 2004, my classification does not account for the varying duration of ownership of bore wells before 2004. Further, I have been unable to include the possession of

livestock in my classification<sup>44</sup>, which implies that my classification underestimates the class status of livestock owning households.

Table 2.9, which presents NRP's agrarian structure, shows that 127 households or 56.19% of all households possess marginal dry plots (of 5 acres or less) that are insufficient for their reproduction (see below). As a result, amongst these 127 households – 50 of which (40%) are *Madigas* and 42 *Kurubas* – we also find the highest degree of occupational diversification. Half the marginal *Madiga* households have at least one significant non-agricultural source of income (in 13 households from electrical works, welding, driving, petty contracting in the town, in another 9 households from cattle rearing and trade, and in 3 households from government and NGO related jobs). Amongst the marginal *Kuruba* households, however, direct occupational linkages with the economy of Anantpur are relatively modest; only 2 households have an unmarried son working in the town. A larger number of these households (23 households) follow livestock rearing and trade, and a few (4) practice tailoring and shop- keeping within village. If we exclude a few *Kuruba* herd-owners amongst these 23 households, these households constitute the class of *kullies* and *jeetas* and I refer to them as the 'marginal farmers'. There are 48 households (23%) who derive their primary subsistence from cultivation, and the 28 bore-well *thoTa* owning households amongst them manage to derive their complete subsistence thereby. However, the dry land owners without livestock amongst these households depend on *kullie* and tenancy work to supplement their incomes. I have taken these households to be the 'small farmers'. Relative to these two classes, there is a small group of 43 households (22.56%), of 'middle' and 'large farmers' that has

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<sup>44</sup> I faced a basic question here; what should be the baseline for considering the ownership of livestock by a household? Unlike that for bore wells, if I applied January 2005 as the 'cut off' baseline, my classification would have been fairly distorted by the fact that a sizeable number of households had already sold their livestock by then. On the other hand, pre-dating my base year posed the question of how to standardize the market value of animals across the years. In hindsight, I think it would have been all right to evaluate the current (i.e., as on January 2005) possession of livestock for my classification.

consolidated its access to groundwater and consequently generates sizeable surpluses from citrus *thoTas*. These households, generally, do not need to engage in supplementary on or off-farm occupations and if a few middle households still lease-in land, the object is to augment their incomes. It is large farmers, especially the Reddys, who have witnessed highest social mobility in the last decade; all in all, this class boasts of 3 sons working in the US, UK and in the “Hi-tech (Indian) cities”, a high-level bureaucrat and 2 successful businessman (in Anantpur). This substantiates the idea that rural elite classes interpenetrate the urban elites (Corbridge 1982: 98 in Harriss 1982, Herring 1983).

Table 2. 9

NRP; Agrarian structure

Sr. No	C.U Score*	Households (No. & %)	Ownership of <i>thota</i>	Primary occupation	Secondary occupation	Class	Indigenous Category
1. A.	0-2	37 (+ 21 Landless) (25.66)	3(all new)	a. Non-farming activities ; basket making (1), petty business (2), cobbling (1), clothe washing (3), tailoring (2), driving (2), electronic/welding works (3) Weaving (1), NGO Worker (1) b. Livestock rearing (7), Livestock trading (3) c. Agri. Wage labour ( <i>Kullie pani</i> ); (22) d. Attached labourers (3) e. Self -cultivation (6), f. Tenancy (1)	a. Cultivation (27) b. tenancy (2) b. Agri. wage labour (6)		
B.	2-4	69 (31.85)	(2 new; 1 old)	a. Non-farming occupations; Govt. employee (1), NGO worker (1), T.V mechanic (1), Basket making (1), Tailoring (1), Seed trade (1), Carpentry (3), Liquor shop (1) Driving 1 b. Livestock rearing (15) c. Cattle business (5) d. Agri. wage labour (19) e. Self-cultivation (19)	a. Non-farming activities (5) b. Livestock rearing (5) c. Agri. wage labour (12) d. Cultivation (43) e. Tenancy (4)	<b>Labourers</b>	<b>Kullie</b>
	Cumulative% (A+B)	56.19				<b>Marginal farmers- cum - Labourers</b>	
2.	4-8	48 (21.23)	28	a. Non-farming activities (5) b. Livestock rearing (7) c. Agri. Wage work (2)* d. Self-cultivation only (11) e. Cultivation (23)	a. Non-farming activities (1) b. Livestock rearing (8) c. Agricultural wage labour (9) d. Cultivation (12) e. Tenancy (5)	<b>Small farmers</b>	<b>Rythu</b>
3.	8-16	39 (17.25)	33	a. Cultivation (8) b. Self-cultivation only (31)	a. Tenancy (5) b. Livestock (3)	<b>Middle farmer</b>	
4.	Above 16	12**** (5.75)	10	a. Cultivation (1) b. Self -cultivation only (10)	a. Livestock (1)	<b>Large farmers</b>	<b>Pedda rythu</b>

Households = 226 (Source; NRP village census, 2005)

Notes; \* I.e., Weighted points for land owned/ Total consumption units in the family \*\* There are 6 bore wells that were sunk in course of survey and hence, for concerned households, the C.U. scores have not been modified accordingly. \*\* Includes one widow who has no adult to cultivate her land. She lives off her son's remittances from the town.

## **2.6 Crop production; Capitalistic intensification under distress**

In my first crop survey I asked the 31 sampled farmers about their investments in fixed capital assets between 2000 and 2005. For almost all except the marginal peasants, their investments in bore well(s) – whether to stabilize and/or augment groundwater - was the primary capital expenditure (Table 2.10). This claims as much as 89.23, 87.16 and 91.11 % of all capital investment for small, middle and large farmers respectively. Only the marginal farmers<sup>45</sup> have invested a higher proportion of their modest available funds in land development (e.g. removing boulders, leveling etc.) and purchasing draught animals. Underlining the compulsive and speculative nature of groundwater exploration, the share of expenditure on failed attempts at sinking bore wells ranges between 30 to 48% of all capital expenditure. The high incidence of failed attempts – three times as high as the successful ones (Table 2.11) – and drying of bore wells, of which I recorded at least 15 instances in the same period, demonstrate the ever-increasing social cost of private irrigation. As has been repeatedly pointed out (Chambers and Farmer 1977: 416, Harriss 1982: 158), such costs and associated risks relate inversely to peasant classes in that small farmers incur the highest cost per acre on irrigation (Table 2.10). This size bias essentially implies that they face a longer gestation period for their investments in bore wells to break even. The desperation for bore wells is a corollary of prolonged public under-investment in irrigation in the state since the 1980s (Subramanyam et al 2003). A more important question is; what has made largely “risk averse” dry land peasantry of yesteryear (Binswanger 1978: 50) so desperate as to become risk-defying agents?

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<sup>45</sup> It is not that marginal peasant households are averse to sinking bore well owing to its hazardous nature; whilst some of them may be dissuaded by the risk involved, a greater number of such households cite the lack of capital or credit required to do so.

**Table 2.10 NRP; (Av.) Capital farm-expenditure (in Rs.) across peasant classes (2000- 2005) per acre**

Class Items	Marginal Farmers	Small Farmers	Middle Farmers	Large Farmers
1. Land Development	512.34	10.76	10.00	--
2. Purchase & Repair of tools	243.65	142.56	82.68	612.50
3. Irrigation Technology				
a. Successful attempts*	654.54	4,185.83	1,934.85	2,262.50
b. Failed attempts**	131.40	2,342.00	1,440.39	3,450.00
c. Micro-irrigation	247.93	305.86	390.31	875.00
4. Draught animal & Allied assets***	527.54	671.50	462.06	30.00
	<b>Total = 2, 317. 40</b>	<b>7,658. 51</b>	<b>4,319. 98</b>	<b>7,230.00</b>

Note; \* includes cost of drilling, pump set, P.V.C laying and power connection.

\*\* Includes such attempts, too, that were successful initially but quite short lived (up to 1 year)

\*\*\* Does not include investment in livestock for such households that derive a major source of livelihood from it.

**Table 2.11 Peasant classes; Av. bore well attempts per household (2000-2005)**

Class	Attempts* (No.)	Successful attempts (No.)	Success ratio**
1. Marginal Farmers	1	.33	1:0.33
2. Small Farmers	2.8	.90	1:0.32
3. Marginal Farmers	3.3	1.05	1:0.31
4. Large Farmers	4.8	1.66	1:0.34

Note; \* in such cases where brothers with separate households co-operated in groundwater exploration, *per head* estimates are taken. \*\* This is the no. of successful attempts divided by the no. of all attempts made to sink a well.

It is as well to recall that compulsive risk-defiance has been an integral part of commercialization of dry agriculture in Anantpur for more than a century. Thus, with 75% of gross sown area of the Anantpur being under groundnut cultivation during *Mungari*<sup>46</sup>, the crop has comprehensively replaced the cultivation of dry cereals, viz, sorghum (*Jonna*)/ pearl millet (*Sadda*)/ ragi (*Ragulu*) and pulses (i.e. cow gram, horse gram) in the last four decades<sup>47</sup>. Only one farmer in my sample sowed any cereals in his 7 acre dry land plot (Table 2.12). Groundnut is now a mono crop cultivated largely with red gram. The disappearance of dry cereals from

<sup>46</sup> Anantpur is the single largest groundnut-producing district in India.

<sup>47</sup> The total area under coarse dry grains was 2.46 % of the gross cropped area of the district in 2005, whereas in 1963 it comprised 47.9% of the same (see Satyanarayana 1965: 188).

production – which is a general case across semi-arid zones (Vasavi 1994: 286, Harriss 1982) – and from the local diet has largely been a consequence of the relatively higher payoff offered by groundnut. Adoption of TMV.2, a high yield bunch type variety (of Spanish/Valencia group) in the village in the 1970s is key to this transformation<sup>48</sup>. Its shorter period of maturity (120 days as against 150 for the indigenous TMV.3), excellent pod yields (up to 400 kg/acre) and higher oil content enables it to fetch Rs. 100-150/bag more than the TMV.3. Indeed, TMV.2 continues to fetch Rs. 50-100/bag more than other groundnut HYVs even though some of the latter are better – if not vastly superior – in terms of their pod yields and immunity to moisture related fluctuations<sup>49</sup>. That some NRP cultivators have reverted to TMV.2 after experimenting with alternative varieties (e.g. JL 24) because of better price returns suggests that the expectations of higher returns rather than associated gains (for instance, better resistance to diseases) have been the key to crop and cultivar changes.

**Table 2.12** *Cropping pattern and gross acreage (All seasons, 2005)*

Crop	Area sown (in acres)		
	<u>Dry land (Mungari)</u>	<u>Mungari (%)*</u>	<u>Thota</u>
1. Groundnut	202.5(65.11)	14(16.54)	14.75
2. Citrus		41.5 (49.54)	--
3. Chilli		06 (7.09)	3.30
4. Sorghum/castor/ <i>Korra</i>	7(0.022)	02 (2.36)	2.50
5. Sunflower		10.25(12.11)	1.00
6. Paddy		08.75(10.34)	1.00
7. Others (i.e. Vegetables)		2.10 (2.40)	--
Total area farmers)	209. 50	84. 60***	22.55 (N=31)

Note; \*A. this includes two sowing seasons, i.e., early *Mungari* beginning from April-May and late *Mungari* beginning September in some individual cases, C. \*\*\* The net area under *thoTa* is 65 acres only.

However, it is the remarkable shift from groundnut to citrus (*ćina*) in *thoTas* lately that explains for the most part the logic of risky bore well investments. 78% of all

<sup>48</sup> Although, TMV.2 was released in the 1940s (Cf. Nigam et al 2005), oral suggestions are that it came to NRP in the 1970s.

<sup>49</sup> See Nigam et al (2005). It may be true though that because the entire technology of groundnut processing is biased in favour of TMV.2, and hence possibly the price difference offered by the merchants.

*thoTa* owning households have citrus orchards at different stages of growth and its acreage has increased by 63% between 2000 and 2005 in the *mandal*. In spite of its longer gestation (i.e., 5 years for first harvest) and susceptibility to moisture distresses<sup>50</sup>, the surge in citrus cultivation is explained by the higher returns per acre that it offers relative to all field crops including paddy, and the state has aggressively promoted citrus cultivation as a most important plank of its latest agricultural intervention in the district. Although the unreliability of data on expenditure incurred during the five years' gestation period prevents me from offering detailed cost and income analysis, a conservative calculation (Table 2.13) suggests that per acre gross returns from citrus are at least 60-70% higher than those that large farms might obtain from double cropped irrigated groundnut (cf. p. 32). It is this scale of difference that explains why even a small peasant without livestock or extra-farm income is as willing to invest Rs. 50,000 –60,000 for a bore well system as a profit-seeking middle or large peasant is. The refrain is; “(even) with 1-1.5 inch of (ground) water and a few hundred plants, one could clear all debts within one year of harvest”. Distribution of free plants from the govt/non-govt. agencies<sup>51</sup>, large subsidies for installing drip irrigation and a liberal regime of ‘long term’ credit under a horticulture development programme further predispose a small farm to attempt sinking a bore well. This popular justification for adopting the cultivation of citrus repudiates the maxim of “subsistence motivation” for the peasant mode of production (Chayanov 1925 in Harriss 1982, Lipton 1982: 266, Scott 1976: 17). However, the element of compulsion in sinking bore wells for citrus

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<sup>50</sup> Possibly brought in the 1940s from adjoining Cuddapah, citrus cultivation was long restricted to water assured *mandals* (Satyanarayana 1965:197) due to these reasons. Some large peasants who pioneered its cultivation in their well-irrigated *thoTa* in the 1980s, painfully recollected that they had to “chop down the plants at the stage of fruit bearing” when their wells dried in the drought of 1986-87. Thus, C. Naidu, in the course of guiding me through his citrus orchard, said, “My grandfather planted the saplings for the first time 20 years back. His brother in law also planted them same year (in Garladinne *mandal*). Within 5 years, he (grandfather) had to chop the saplings, as there was no water in the well, but their orchard continued. They are cashiers now...we stood static (*walu pedda cashier ainaDu; memu elaga nilbaDinandu*).

<sup>51</sup>The AP govt. has been distributing citrus saplings free to *thoTa* owning farmers under its “*Indirapathakkam*” program. Earlier, the district watershed Management Authority (DWMA), too, had offered saplings free of cost to the NRP farmers.

cultivation is also equally evident from the fact that it is seen as the only means to reproduce the farm-household while remaining a peasant. As such, it is difficult to consider citrus cultivation exclusively as an instance of small farm entrepreneurship, as the neopopulist school would have us believe.

*Table 2. 13*

*Estimated per acre annual returns from citrus cultivation*

Particulars	Yield (Av.) x Rate (Av. 2004-05)	Gross receipts
i. <i>Gairang</i> harvest (i.e. April/May);	5-6 Tons/acre x Rs. 8,000	Rs. 40-48,000
ii. <i>Season</i> harvest (i.e., July/August);	2 Tons /acre x Rs. 4,000	Rs. 8,000
Gross income (Annual)=		Rs.48-56, 000/Acre

To bring our focus back to groundnut, the intensive cultivation of TMV.2 – as reflected in the relatively high ratio of 86% of the gross sown area being under the crop during *Mungari* – has led to complete incorporation of the local peasantry into commodity markets. Whereas *thoTa* cultivators across classes appear to depend the least on external seed, it is the small and marginal dry land cultivators who rely most heavily on the seed market (52.5 to 67.5 % their requirements come from the market; Table 2.19 below). The groundnut seed market is presently dominated by subsidised seed from the govt. agencies. The reliance on non-subsistence seed amongst dry land peasants can be said to be technically forced because the in-store durability of TMV.2 is less than that of TMV.3 on account of its higher susceptibility to pest-infestation. In some local discussions, the mechanization of processing was also held responsible for exacerbating the likelihood of damaging the kernels.

*ThoTa* owners growing chili, paddy or sunflower rely completely on the private seed market where quality is often suspect and where a purchase of seed on credit involves (apart from interest of 2% p.m.) an understanding that the resultant crop is sold to the dealer who has granted the credit. All this would suggest that the role of the state as an active regulator in the seed market – a role that some accuse it of having increasingly withdrawn from in recent years (e.g. Shiva et al 1999) – cannot be overemphasized.

The application of farm manure in dry groundnut appears to have fast declined amongst all classes and particularly amongst middle and large *thoTa* owners who tend to use it predominantly for citrus cultivation (Table 2.14). Rising demand for manure from citrus cultivators amidst dwindling local supplies, due largely to decreasing livestock population, has caused its price to rise dramatically; between January 2005 and June 2007<sup>52</sup>, the price of a cartload shot up from Rs. 250 to Rs. 1500 and citrus cultivators were looking for it as far away as Bellary. As Hill reported (1982: 174), high prices also cause many small dry land farmers to sell farm manure rather than use it, obviously at a cost to yields in their own fields<sup>53</sup>. Their reliance on inorganic fertilizers and chemicals has, as a result, increased manifold. A bag (i.e. 50 kg) of fertilizer is applied during sowing to 3-4 acres of dry land groundnut (Table 2.14), which is substantially lower than the average fertilizer application nationally (cf. Subrahmanyam and Sekhar 2003: 1207). However, irrigated groundnut receives 50-80 kgs of fertilizers per acre spread over sowing and de-weeding, and this quantity is significantly above the recommended levels for both middle and small farmers (*ibid*). Further, the quantities of organic and inorganic chemicals (i.e., pesticides, fungicides and micronutrients) applied in *thoTa* groundnut, at 400 to 600 ml/acre, that are proportionately even higher. Here again we see small farmers using quantities that are close to that of large farmers. The quantities applied in chili (and possibly citrus) are only greater at around 2.5 Litres per acre. J. Lingamurthy, a chili growing large peasant in the village, reported using 3 litres of chemicals (of as many as 21 different types of pesticides/insecticides/nutrients) per acre.

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<sup>52</sup> From telephonic conversations with the villagers.

<sup>53</sup> In the entire *mandal*, Karutapalli,(10 Km from NRP) is known to report the best dry land groundnut yields, i.e., about 15 bags/acre, with the unanimous claim that the consistent application of farm manure for years is the most important reason.

**Table 2. 14 Per acre consumption of fertilizers and pesticides and insecticides in groundnut (All seasons, 2005)**

Class	Dry land ( <i>Mungari</i> )			Thota		
	Fertilizers (In Kg)	Pesticides/ Insecticides (ml)	Manure (No. Carts)	Fertilizers & Micronutrients	Pesticides/ Insecticides	Manure
a. Marginal Farmers	12.60	59.25 (& 60gm)	1.07	--	--	--
b. Small Farmers	13.36	15.72	0.37	77.08 (83.33)	625.00 (187.50)	(1.00)
C. Middle Farmers	09.25	30.00	0.30	58.33 (--)	388.89 (138.89)	(1.11)
d. Large Farmers	15.00	--	--	46.36 (363.63)	773 (272.72)	(0.90)

Notes; a. The figures in brackets under 'pesticides/ insecticides' are those of insecticides, in Kg; b. the figures under 'fertilizers' includes one case of use of inorganic fertilizer, i.e., castor cake used, c. the figures for manure under dry land (in italics) are subsistence manure while those under *thota* (in parenthesis) are purchased manure.

Subramanyam and Sekhar (2003) report that AP ranks high amongst the states in terms of the intensity of application of chemicals for groundnut in India. When asked about their high application of pesticides and insecticides, small farmers explain it by pointing out increasing yield-related risks and uncertainties in groundnut cultivation. At least five pest-related diseases were reported during *Mungari*. The most potent and unfamiliar of these was the so-called "AIDS virus" which caused severe damage to the crop during its crucial prod formation period (4-6 weeks to harvest). Initial responses included unsuccessful application of all the known pesticides, such as Monocrotophos, Endosulfan and Quinolphos, and subsequently, many peasants applied Confidor – a new and highly expensive (Rs. 3000/lt.) pesticide. That the increased application of pesticides implies their decreasing marginal efficacy in controlling pests, even while it increases the costs of production<sup>54</sup>, is not entirely lost on an NRP peasant. However, it is the scale of investments made and the expectations of high income that lead the peasantry into a spiralling pesticide trap. Jaimma, a middle class peasant, was distraught upon discovering pests in maturing paddy heads (*yénu*) and said, "Till yesterday, everyone said, it looks so good; there shall at least be 100 bags (of paddy). Now

<sup>54</sup> In the sense that not only are they ineffective in controlling pests, but also making necessary additional investment in micro-nutrients to compensate for the adverse effects they leave on the health of the plant!

suddenly this; we have sprayed pesticides three times already with an investment of (Rs) 12,000 on this (crop), thinking (Rs.) 40-50,000 shall come. (But) at the time of taking it to the mouth, everything is turning worse (*antā vāgné kanpincindi; notelo péTinapuDu aitlā aitunnāi*).” The compulsive usage of pesticides vindicates Palmer’s (1972 in Jodha 1991; also Matson, Power, and Swift 1997) warning that HYVs are more vulnerable to diseases and failures owing to their poorer genetic base.

Given the uncertainties of production, however, it is also the case that the notion of applying excessive fertilisers and chemicals as a defensive act of risk-mitigation is often transformed into the idea that an aggressive chemical consumption is a *sine qua non* for maximum crop yields. This amounts to saying that in NRP the contradictions of ‘hybridity’ (Vasavi 2002: 291, Gupta 1998: 5-6) in which peasants are seen as trying to mix the modern and pre-modern farming practices, are resolved by a complete predisposition of a villager to the modern practices, albeit at higher production costs. Thus the injunction “*péTTabaDhi péTTite digabaDi vastandi* (yields are proportional to capital investment)” is both an exhortation to and a statement of judgment about one’s aggressiveness in farming. Put differently, expenditure on inputs applied or absence thereof indicates an individual’s “masculine capacity” (*dhairyam/tirkash*) to take (*tiskunedi*) a crop, and hence it is amenable to becoming a template for masculine competition. J. Chalapathi and Shivaiah, patrilineal kinsmen and fellow chilli growers, publicly challenged one another to obtain a higher yield; following this challenge, they often announced their fertiliser and chemical consumption and related expenditure in the village bazaar <sup>55</sup>. The local input dealers, who have occupied the sphere of farm extension

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<sup>55</sup> After the challenge was struck, the plants in Chalapathi’s *thoTa* began to shed flowers. Alarmed by it, he immediately had the micronutrients sprayed. When it failed to arrest the problem, his chemical dealer made an on-the-spot assessment and prescribed another “medicine” which was duly sprayed yet again. It did control the problem and Chalapathi, in his subsequent conversations, prominently underlined the dealer’s helpful nature and his own resourcefulness.

services that has been left increasingly vacant by the state<sup>56</sup> (compare this with the green revolution period in Chambers & Wickremayake 1977 in Farmer 1977), exploit such masculine competitions to their advantage by selling their merchandise on loans.

Table 2.15

Access to extension services; NRP

Particulars	N= 30
a. Farmers having received information/demonstration/field visits from M.A.O*;	04
b. Farmers receiving information/demonstration from input dealers;	13 (43%)
c. Farmers in a durable patron-client relationship with input dealers;	08 (27%)
d. Farmers having received inputs on seasonal credit from input dealers;	04 (13%)

\* I.e., The *Mandal* Agricultural Office, the concerned field extension office. The period referred to is *Rabi* and *Mungari*, 2005.

After seeds and inorganic chemicals, it is the increasing daily casual labour rates for sowing and harvesting during *Mungari* that have pushed up the overall cost of groundnut production rather dramatically. This is largely due to two reasons. First, as it is rather well known, movements in wage rates are closely interconnected with annual and seasonal rainfall patterns (Hill 1982:115-119, Harriss 1982: 119-121). The labour absorbing capacity of local agriculture is constrained in general in so far as the number of total male labour days spent annually on farm groundnut production ranges between just 35-55 days (36-50 days for a female) and even *thoTa* owners work for not more than 100 days on cultivation<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, the entire agriculture work is preponderantly concentrated in the *Mungari* season. During

<sup>56</sup> Various reminders of the state's purported ownership of extensions services are visible though; there is a *Mandal* Agricultural office in K. *mandal*, the *Rythu Chaitanya Yatra* (farm education campaign) toured NRP for a day and at least two sampled peasants (one large and another middle) have attended the official farmers' conferences (*rythu sadassaslu*) that seek to disseminate technological information amongst small and marginal farmers. Yet, during the whole fieldwork year, I saw the *Mandal* Agricultural officer in NRP only once; on the day of *rythu chaitanya yatra*. Conversely, the number of input shops has increased to 3 from 1 in 5 years; they encourage farmers to engage in durable relationships by offering premium services to loyal clients by offering discounts, easy credit, replacements of ineffective articles post use, and field-visits on demand, in an event of emergency. This is the context in which inputs of sub-standard quality (i.e. expired pesticides, spurious fertilizers and underperforming seed varieties) are sold discreetly with impunity, although not to the extent described in Telangana (Reddy 1988).

<sup>57</sup> These figures are lower than the estimate of 91 labour days put forth by Rastogi and Reddy for the district (in Harriss-White 1984: 41).

*Rabi*, the demand for *kullies* is restricted amongst middle and large *thoTa* owners who recruit female labour for weeding groundnut, citrus and/or chilli<sup>58</sup>. *Kullie* rates, hence, hover round Rs. 20/day for women and Rs. 30/day for men, rising by Rs. 10 for special chores like threshing of groundnut, and these are universally paid in cash except in case of the three largest *Kapu* peasants who pay their semi-permanent *Madiga* labourers (both sexes) Rs. 20 with a meal. The upshot of this is that large and middle *thoTa* farmers appropriate a higher surplus value from labour during *Rabi* with their superior yields, whereas small and marginal farmers confront a stiff labour market with lower yields during *Mungari* (Table 2.19, p.98).

Presuming normal rainfall, *Mungari* presents a complete contrast to *Rabi* in so far as moisture availability/excesses set the three key chores of sowing, weeding and harvesting to a rigorously definite duration. In July 2005, following delayed rains, ploughing teams and *kullies* were in such great demand – since all sowing had to be completed within a fortnight – that draft teams were hired from neighbouring AG village (for Rs. 150/day for dry land) and *kullie* rates rose by Rs. 20 a day (i.e., by 100%)<sup>59</sup>. Indeed, as Hill suggests, dry land small and marginal peasants often find it hardest to hire teams and/or *kullies* for sowing and they respond by having the land ploughed sub-optimally.<sup>60</sup> Although a spell of dry weather after sowing led the

<sup>58</sup> NRP; Labour days per household for groundnut in *Rabi* and *Mungari* (2005)

Class	Days worked on Farm		Labour days hired in		
	<i>Rabi</i>	<i>Mungari</i>	<i>Rabi</i>	Female	<i>Mungari (Dry land)</i>
	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
1. Marginal Farmers	--	30(26)	-	-	09 26
2. Small Farmers	09(14)	26 (22)	4	39	05 23
3. Middle Farmers	09 (09)	44 (30)	02	40	12 58
4. Large Farmers	18.5 (19)	37 (27)	04	81	87 188

Household sample survey (2005-06). Note; a. 'Days worked on farm' include labour days spent by all adult (above 18 years) male and females (in parentheses) who worked in the concerned season; b. It does not include labour days spent by women on preparing groundnut seeds.

<sup>59</sup> There are 2 tractors in the village, available at Rs. 300 /hour; a tractor ploughs roughly 2 acres per hour. Unless a farmer is short of enough cash, time, or cannot find an oxen team, he prefers bullock tilling because of its more thorough horizontal tillage. Yet, time is often so scarce during sowing that tractor owners are hardly short of ploughing work.

<sup>60</sup> That is, ploughed only once by *madaka* (plough) and a *chakalguntaka* (four teeth hoe) instead of two rounds of *madaka*. Incidentally, lack of intensive tillage was often officially cited as one of the reasons for increased pest attacks to the groundnut crop.

*kullie* rates to stabilise at Rs. 30/day for much of weeding (a female chore), in November the high level of sub-soil moisture again required groundnut harvesting to be completed at the earliest. This was because the crop was exposed to heightened damage from the 'AIDS virus' and additionally, there was a perception that it was prudent to complete manual harvesting when sub-soil moisture level was higher - harvesting in drier conditions would necessitate draft or tractor hiring. From Rs. 50 for both sexes, wage rates shot up to Rs. 100 plus a complementary meal in a few cases within a fortnight; piece rates (*opundum*), which labourers distinctly preferred over daily wages (also see Gidwani 2008; 145), worked out to be Rs. 165-200 per day. Once again, unable to hire labour at these rates, small peasants had to draw on their household labour including children for a prolonged harvesting (Table 2.16), possibly accentuating their yield losses.

Table 2.16      *Labour days per acre Groundnut (all seasons 2005) in NRP*

Class	Hired Male	Hired Female	Male	Exchange Female	Male	Female	Child (ren)	Male	Total Female	Total Children
<i>Thota cultivation</i>										
1. Large Farmers	3	42	-	-	7.5	8	-	10.5	50	-
2. Middle Farmers	3	20	1	½	6	6	-	10	26	-
3. Small Farmers	3	27	1	-	8	10	1 ½	12	37	1 ½
<i>Meta cultivation</i>										
1. Large Farmers	4	12 ½	½	-	2 ½	01	-	07	13 ½	-
2. Middle Farmers	1.5	5 ½	½	1	05	4.5	-	07	11	-
3. Small Farmers	1	5	¼	½	06 ¼	4.5	½	07 ½	10	½
4. Marginal Farmers	2	4.5	¾	1	4 ¼	3.5	-	07	09	-

Household sample survey, 2005-06. Notes; (A). Hours spent in participation in the input and output markets, maintaining draught animals, or on irrigation are excluded from the calculations; (B). 'Child (ren)' implies adolescents up to the age of 14; (C). The number of hired male labour days for large farmers includes labour days equivalent to the hours tilled by the tractor.

The second reason for the rise in nominal and perhaps real wages during *Mungari*<sup>61</sup> is akin to what Harriss calls “tightening labour markets” (2006: 116-117), although unlike Randam, its origin is different in NRP. We have noted that some *Madiga* households have members working in the town (p. 75 above) but the overall incidence of complete withdrawal from farming has been much slower – only 14 households have emigrated in the last decade. It is largely new demand, especially for female labour, created by increasing bore well *thoTas* that has tightened and relatively balanced the demand for labour across *Rabi* and *Mungari* seasons. As table 2.16 indicates, every acre of *thoTa* groundnut creates about 30 labour days annually and this number is possibly higher in case of chilli cultivating *thoTa*. The need for labour round the year explains why all *thoTa* employers in general court a select group of dry farm neighbours by advancing small and large credits to them as well as by scrupulously “not acting as their employer (*yazaman type pravartanam chaisediledu*)”. Also, *thoTa* owners prefer employing *kullies* from within caste so as to soften the class dichotomies between them and their *kullies* (also see Patnaik 1987: 206). Only the large peasants from amongst the Reddys have to depend on the *Madigas*. However, these measures also increase encroachment on each other’s ‘circle’ by advancing credit or by enlisting a household’s labour on a monthly or yearly basis. Taking advantage of this competition, both *Madiga* and non-*Madiga* *kullies* are able to subvert personal/long term labour relations under one pretext or another during the high demand *Mungari* period. Thus, in November 2005, at least 30 families from the SC colony went to work in the neighbouring village causing large *Kapu* farmers to agree on higher piece-rates for harvesting.

The processes of change outlined so far – the bore well rush, the intensification of cash crop cultivation in dry and *thoTa* lands, the rising application and costs of

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<sup>61</sup> It seems that whilst the *Rabi* wages have just kept pace with significantly higher food prices (especially rice) in last two years, *Mungari* wages represent a real rise in income in both absolute and relative terms; in 2004-05 (Jan), a *Rabi* male *kullie* daily wage could buy 2 kg. of coarse RNR variety, the same that it could buy in 2005-06, but the *Mungari* wages in 2005-06 could buy 50% more rice than that in the previous year.

inputs including labour costs – have indeed been greatly facilitated by a credit boom in NRP. A word about my credit related data is in order here. My informants were more forthcoming about their debts than about the amount they had lent and the lent sums are not insignificant. This being so, the figures of seasonal credit and outstanding debt I present (Table 2.17 and 2.18) are inflated and should be taken as being merely illustrative. 90% of all studied households took seasonal cash credit – for production and consumption – during the reference year and the only exceptions were three middle and small peasant households who said they did not require any credit. Amongst the notable tendencies that appear in the table (2.17), the first one is that formal credit institutions seem to have made considerable inroads amongst all classes, just as Burgess and Pande have shown (cited by Harriss 2006:167). But the proportion of credit from such sources to the overall credit in the case of marginal farmers remains almost half (23%) that of middle and small farmers (43%). In particular, the off-take of seasonal crop loans from formal sources – which is Rs. 4,900/acre for dry lands – has been impressive in so far as all studied households except two have availed themselves of these loans in the last five years (i.e. 2000-05). Because most of the small and marginal farmers have not repaid them (66-70%) within the stipulated period of 3 years (since receiving credit), the renewal of crop loan for the reference year are low. Also, many middle and small citrus-growing *thoTa* owners have begun to receive large long term (payable over 12-15 years) horticultural loans – of sums ranging between Rs. 100,000 to 300,000 – and discussions about how some politically active farmers were trying to pull strings to get massive loans of Rs. 500,000 (£ 7,500) were rife in the village. Small and marginal farmers also receive small loans from women's saving societies promoted by both the government and local non-government organisations. Overall these trends constitute a more optimistic view about the availability of formal credit in rural areas as compared to the picture Swaminathan and Ramchandran present (in Harriss 2006: 167-8) , although it is also apparent

that both dry farmers and livestock owners stand automatically discriminated against in the present regime of formal credit distribution.

Table 2.17

Seasonal credit (Principal, all seasons, 2005); extent and source

Source	Large Peasants	Middle Peasants	Class Small Peasants	Marginal Peasants
a. National Banks	--	3,750	890	909
b. Regional Rural Bank (mandal)	25,000	---	2,222	1,364
c. Agricultural co-operative Society (ATP)	3,375	3,375	1,333	--
d. Saving and thrift societies (GO/NGO)	--	--	167	210
e. Non-Professional moneylender (incl. Employer)*		--	1,333	1,182
e. Large farmers (including employers)	2,000	—	389	1,000
f. Relatives	--	1,000	1,889	3,136
g. Friends (cultivators)**	2,500	1,750	778	3,454
h. Widows		1,000		
i. Input dealers/traders	2,700	3,125	1,556	182
<b>Total</b>	<b>35,575</b>	<b>14,000</b>	<b>10,557</b>	<b>11,457</b>

Source: FHS (2005-06)

Notes: (A). 'Non-professional money lenders' are all such lenders from within the village, not belonging to the class of large farmers (as defined by the classification adopted earlier) nor traders (see below), but who have been lending on a significant scale for a long time and who may also employ the debtor for a significant duration; (B). 'Large Farmers' are all such farmers who are defined as such previously, including those who employ the debtors as labourers for a significant duration; (C). 'Relatives' are all affinal and consanguine kinsmen/women; (D). 'Friends' are non-relatives, from the same class as the debtor, as from a different class, with whom the debtor (or his son) is known to share social space on a more or less equal basis; (E). 'Traders' are suppliers of farm inputs used or buyers of output produced by the debtor.

Table 2.18

Outstanding debt (Principal; as on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005); extent and source

Sources	Large Peasants	Middle peasants	Small Peasants	Marginal Peasants
a. National Banks	--	15,500	05,800	01,818
b. Regional Rural Bank	31,000	02,000	03,700	08,454
c. Agricultural Co-operative Society (ATP)	--	03,375	02,700	03,636
d. Non Professional Moneylenders (including employers)	5,000	09,687	10,500	10,909
d. Large farmers (incl. Employers)	--	01,250	08,600	09,000
e. Relatives	11,250	23,937	06,050	13,318
f. Friends	10,500	06,312	10,950	19,545
g. Widows	11,000	02,375	01,000	00,909
h. Input Dealers/ traders	--	--	02,300	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>68,750</b>	<b>64,437</b>	<b>51,600</b>	<b>67,589</b>

Source: FHS (2005)

This is not to deny that middle, small and marginal households continue to rely heavily upon informal sources for seasonal loans, just as the literature on rural credit suggests ('Indebtedness of farmer households', NSSO 2005; 21, Harriss 1982: 168, Kurup 1976). Broadly consistent with the point that merchant capital increasingly penetrates intensive commodity production (Harriss, 2006; 93), all 8 households – of which 4 were small and 3 middle peasants – that received inputs on credit, and cash advances from a groundnut trader, possessed a *thoTa*. At Rs. 1,000-5,000, such credit was modest but crucial in so far as it often coincided with *Mungari* harvests at which time *thoTa* owners – more so than dry land cultivators – were likely to have exhausted previous credit in meeting their expenditures. Whereas advances obtained from Ipperu groundnut traders are largely "interest free", inputs purchased on credit from dealers in the town involve an interest rate of 10% per season. However, the condition of selling one entire crop to the lender was uniform in all 8 cases. Interestingly, while four of these borrowers paid a hidden interest in the form of both undervalued output and weight manipulations – roughly of the order of 5% of modal prices (for groundnut) – the remaining farmers clandestinely sold a part of their crop elsewhere (unlike the situation Harriss describes, *ibid*). Another instance of participation in interlinked input markets (Bharadwaj 1994) involves marginal *Madiga* farmers who continue to depend upon their Reddy employers for credit and who pay a hidden interest in terms of receiving depressed wages, although such inter-linkage is increasingly too weak to prevent them from working elsewhere during the key *Mungari* period.

Table 2.17 and 2.18 also suggest that middle, small and marginal non-*Madiga* households – both *thoTa* and *meTa* farmers – are able to obtain credit on large scale from their relatives and friends than from other sources. This is an important point for it suggests that the notion of a positive relationship between creditworthiness and

class-status, a cornerstone for theories concerning rural credit markets in Marxist and Neo-classical approaches (cf. Bhaduri 1983: 70-76), is increasingly mediated by social 'connections' (Bourdieu 1984). In a situation that is similar to Harriss's description of the credit market in Ramdan (1982:182), households across classes in NRP engage in "turn over"; they lend any spare amount they have even if they have to borrow an amount little later and they often service one loan by acquiring another from someone else. In such polygonal credit relations where a household can have 6-8 pending creditors and a similar number of borrowers, not all bilateral transactions are of equal importance, but the scope for credit availability is much wider. B. Pulanna, a middle *thoTa* peasant, remarked; "you can get credit for anything; you ask 10 people and you will get it from one of them". NRP's credit economy has also soaked up a great deal of cash from dowry receipts, remittances from the town (contrasting partially with the idea of a unilateral flow of capital out of rural areas in Lipton's urban bias thesis), livestock sales and, lately, surpluses from citrus production. There are at least 6 households (the 3 largest Reddy farmers and 3 *Kuruba/Boya* livestock owners/traders) in the village which are believed to have each invested between Rs. 100,000 to 300,000 in the local intra-village credit market and there are another 15 households – mostly middle *thoTa* or livestock owning households – who reported to me a net lending investment that range between Rs. 20,000- 50,000. Instructively, one of the largest lenders is Anjanamma, a widow with just 12 acres of dry land who has built her credit business – reportedly said to be above Rs. 300, 000 (£ 5,500) – over decades. It is small *thoTa* owners and small and marginal dry land cultivators without any livestock who are most heavily indebted.

In his influential essay on "The Method of Usury" (1983: 75), Bhaduri made the isolation of unorganised credit markets – besides a muted land and labour market – in

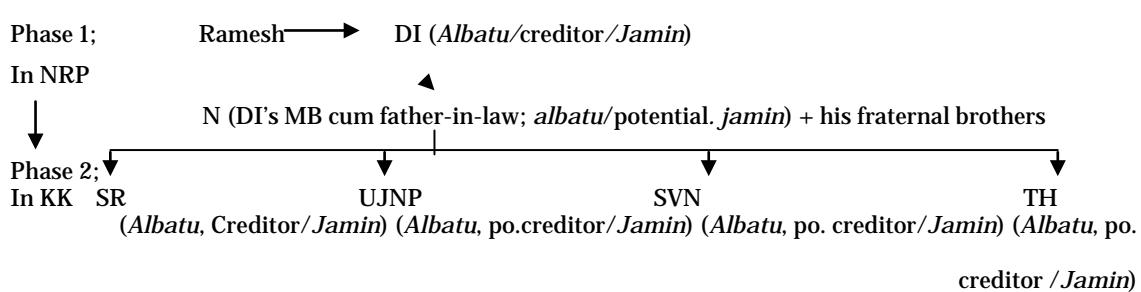
rural areas the lynchpin of his theory of backward agriculture. He suggests that it is this isolation which allows a lender to personalise his credit relations so much so that he can charge fantastically high interest rate in order to force a default on the part of a creditor. My research shows that this isolation is fast disappearing in spatial, institutional and social senses. Aside from the burgeoning availability of credit within the village, increased mobility amongst intra-village affinal networks and to Anantpur town has also qualitatively expanded an individual peasant's or his family member's capacity to generate credit from outside NRP. Figure 2.2 sketches Ramesh's 3-year-old credit generating friend circle based on the notion of trust (*nammakkam*); as a livestock trader, Ramesh struck an acquaintance with Iswaraiah, a wealthy *Kuruba* livestock owner in the village and in due course he acquired a group of *albatulu* (acquaintances) amongst Ishwaraiah's affinal relatives in KK village. Note the expandability of Ramesh's circuit of credit as a result. Besides his 2 present lenders (i.e., DI & SR), all the remaining 3 men have become potential lenders for Ramesh, who can lend him money and who can be to be lent to should they require credit. Also, each of these 4 new acquaintances may vouch for Ramesh's creditworthiness as a *Jamin* (guarantor) to all other lenders within KK village that he individually knows, or he may take a loan in his name to give it to Ramesh who is from a completely different village.

Transferring trust inter-personally is a role that close friends/ affinal relatives willingly play to oblige and sometimes, to live up to, the ideal of *paurusham* (i.e., "daring" to stand guarantor for a friend/relative). Villagers use friends and relatives to source credit from and advance it to intra-village networks and a substantial share of investment in bore-well technology has thus been financed. Two major implications follow from this. Contrary to Bhaduri's contention in the same paper (*ibid*), creditworthiness is increasingly a function of one's social capital that usually but not necessarily corresponds to one's material status, and indeed it can be used strategically

to mask the latter. And, the high proportion of informal credit amongst small and marginal classes may in fact suggest its easy availability these days rather than the inability of these classes to obtain credit from formal sources, and hence challenges the notions of rural distress as conceptualized in the 'farmers' suicide' thesis (Ch. 1).

Figure 2.2

*Ramesh's network of Albatulu/jaminlu*



Overall, NRP's credit market appears closer to being capitalistic than backward (Bhaduri, *ibid*). An explicit interest rate of 1.5 or 2% per month is general in the study area (compare with Rudra 1982: 69). Only four sampled households, of which one was marginal, contracted Paddy loans from their relatives and these loans were repaid in cash at 2% per month's interest on going prices at the time of lending [contrast with Kurup's 3-5% per month (1976), Bhaduri 1983: 201)]. Also, there is some evidence to suggest that *kuduvu* loans (gold mortgages) are increasingly coming from banks and not from a certain infamous Reddy pawnbroker in the village; three of the four farmers who admitted contracting such loans in the last two years had chosen banks and the fourth pawned gold in Kalgalla village. Moreover, those contracts that involve *Madiga* households, a majority of credit contracts in the village are indeed secured only by a promissory note (*patralu*) and by the conventional notions of mutual trust and honour. Thus, as suggested above, although a borrower's production scale (i.e., the presence/or absence of *thoTa*), his liquid assets (possession of livestock/other incomes) or his capacity to work as a labourer influence his creditworthiness, he is not completely

constrained by them as long as he commands a network of trusting *albatu* and *jamins*. This explains why many marginal households in my sample report debts that are considerably higher than those of even middle farmers. For instance, there are 3 *Kuruba* dry land cultivators without livestock who have received credits between Rs. 70,000- 150,000, mostly from their relatives and friends. In fact, the most indebted of them managed to obtain credit from different individuals by concealing the true extent of his overall indebtedness. There are also numerous other instances where borrowers have staged temporary disappearance from the village to lead their lenders into accepting partial payment of the sum owed. The easy availability of credit – which by default shows that lending remains as attractive a form of investment as it earlier was (Harriss-White 1979 in Harriss 1982:49) – appears to have not only continued to sustain small and marginal peasantry (as Washbrook's work shows) but has also enabled it to undertake a riskier path of agricultural development.

## **2.7 Declining yield and the non-viability of dry land groundnut cultivation**

In the previous section, I have attempted to describe production conditions for groundnut and to argue that its cost of production has been increasing significantly on account of production risks and rising input costs. Since the pitfalls of drawing any conclusions from a single year's data for dry land production are well known, I emphasize that conclusions offered in this section are only illustrative of broad and plausible trends. Table 2.19, which presents a class-specific cost and return account for groundnut, shows the cost of production to be highest in small and marginal farms in wet and dry lands respectively. Rather more remarkably, productivity ratios – the cost incurred to produce one bag of groundnut (41 kg) – consistently show the large and middle farmers to be more efficient than the small and marginal farmers in both dry

Table 2.19

Crop budget for peasant classes (per acre)

Expenditure	Thota			Meta			
	L. Farmers	M. farmers	S. Farmers	L. Farmers	M. Farmers	S. Farmers	Ma. Farmers
a. Seed (cash)	277	--	--	460	483	719	644
b. Seed (Subsistence)	957	1746	1827	691	661	346	581
c. Draught hire	-	--	339	-	-	44	86
d. Manure (cash)	-	--	480	-	-	-	03
e. Manure (subsistence)	-	148	--	-	29	57.5	204
f. Fertilizers	430	363	656	88	115	73	139
g. Pesticides (& chemical)	232	076	221	-	15	06	24
h. Pump set costs	243	118	79	-	-	-	-
i. Machinery hire*	372.5	219	301	158	170	161.5	153
j. Labour (hired)	868	500	680	779.5	360	360	503
k. Interest	240	094	259	62	67	57	129
l. Marketing charges	128	96	-	144	69	34	87
m. Cattle maintenance***	30	36	23	09	22	11.5	11
n. Depreciation							
Pump set	118.50	93	124	-	-	-	-
Cattle**	51.50	72	56	28.5	76	43	43
Equipment	40	27	25	16	35	21	28
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>3987.5</b>	<b>3,588</b>	<b>5,070</b>	<b>2,436</b>	<b>2,101.5</b>	<b>1,933.5</b>	<b>2,635</b>
<i>Of which</i>							
Cash Costs	2820.5	1,502	3,038	1,700.5	1,301	1,466	1,779
All costs (including							
Imputed value of H. Hold Labour)	4,388.5	3,917	5,522	2,629	2,518	2,423	3,026
Gross Value of Yield (Rs.)	16,680	7,105	8,838	5,091.5	4,530	3,670	3,683
Gross Yield (in bags)	23.5	10.75	12.5	7.1	6.39	5.33	5.30
<b>Productivity (cost/bag, Rs.)</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>364.4</b>	<b>441.76</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>454.6</b>	<b>571</b>
<b>Surplus (Rs.)</b>	<b>12,296.5</b>	<b>3,188</b>	<b>3,316</b>	<b>2,462.5</b>	<b>2,012</b>	<b>1,247</b>	<b>657</b>

Notes: 1. Includes expenses on a. annual repair costs due to the ironsmith, b. cost of processing harvest mechanically, and c. expenses on hiring pesticide sprayer or bullock carts for transporting harvest.

2. In calculating depreciation, a straight-line method has been followed; taking the average cost of a pair of animals at Rs. 20,000, use-span at 10 years and resale value at Rs. 4,000, the per year costs and per acre per year costs have been allocated. To bring parity between wet and dry lands, costs have been allocated in the ratio of 1; 2 for dry and wet land groundnut/chili/citrus and 1; 3 between dry land groundnut and paddy.

3. Includes only the monetary expense on periodic nailing of *lalam* (metal shoe).

4. In view of the fact that a number of farmers chose to shell their harvest and sell in *Kandi* (amounting to 240 Kgs), while others sold it unshelled (in bags of 40-41 kg), I have converted the former into the latter in a ratio of 1;7 bags, the compromise between 6.5 to 8 bags that generally make for a *Kandi*.

and wet conditions. To take *thoTa* groundnut first, it appears that the efficiency of large farmers derives primarily from their more efficient use of seeds and fertiliser as well as from their ownership of oxen teams. It is also plausible that large farmers further benefit from intensive use of causal labour for weeding (Table 2.16 above) and more secured irrigation during Rabi, which is a most important determinant of yield during that season. Apart from the reasons given above, there are two other important factors that seemed to enable large and middle farmers to obtain better yields, in the reference year, in dry lands. First, their higher capacity to finish all sowing when subsoil moisture levels were optimal was matched by their better ability to finish all harvesting before rain and pest-attack caused the crop to deteriorate and<sup>62</sup> secondly, their plots are of superior quality to the mostly marginal lands of small farmers. These observations support the grounds on which Hill (1982: 168-172) rejected the “general conclusion of superior efficiency of the poor (i.e., small) cultivator in dry grain mode” – an influential conclusion that was first drawn by Sen (1964 cited in Bhardwaj 1974) and subsequently rather supported and cautiously explained by Bharadwaj (1974, 1994).

Having said this, class relative yield and efficiency variations should not cloak the disquieting fact that groundnut yields remain too paltry in both rain fed and irrigated conditions. Ranging mostly between 225- 287 Kg of unshelled pods per acre, the yields obtained by NRP farmers are higher than both the district average for reference years and the mean yields since 2000-01, but they remain inferior to those that obtained in Northern Tamilnadu three decades earlier (Harriss 1982: 154). In fact, a longitudinal comparison of average dry groundnut yields obtained in Anantpur since 1989-90 shows them to have declined substantially even within the district (Table 2.20). This trend

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<sup>62</sup>This contrasts with Harriss’s observation (1982:154) that he finds the large farmers to obtain lower groundnut yields because of less intensive management. It would seem that although largest NRP farmers faced labour problem in good measure, they were still able to finish important chores by offering higher wages during crunch periods.

agrees with other studies that have shown the growth rate of yields (which were so conspicuously modest even during the heydays of green revolution in the state) having declined during the 1990s (Ninan 1987, Subramayam et al: table 1 & 2). Given these dismal and varying yields, rather unsurprisingly, profitability of groundnut has depended precariously upon rising nominal prices (from Rs. 600 per bag in 2003-04, Rs. 700-720 in 2005-06 to Rs. 1,000 in 2008). Incidentally, once again, larger farmers were better placed to exploit substantial intra-seasonal price variations by holding their *Mungari* stocks until February-March unlike the middle, small and marginal farmers who sold them right after harvest in December-January.

Table 2.20

*Dry land groundnut; yield*

Years	Average Yield (kg) per acre
a. 1988 –89 to 1992- 93	296.35
b. 1996-97 to 2000-01	355.78
c. 2001-02 to 2005-06	193.35
d. 2005-06 (district average)	176.51
e. NRP (mean of yields in sample)	225 – 287

Sources; District Handbook of Statistics, Anantpur (1988 –06) & the Household Sample Survey, NRP.

Finally, it appears that all classes manage to obtain some profit from dry land groundnut in a normal rainfall year like the reference year, although the profit obtained by large farmers, such as PVR and his two other kinsmen, are substantial. In fact, to these households, and another ten households of the middle peasantry with fruit-bearing orange *thoTas*, profits derived from dry groundnut are only a complement to the substantial profits derived from citrus and irrigated groundnut (Table 2.21.). A greater number of middle peasants without a citrus crop obtain more modest gross profit of between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 25,000 per year and this profit allows them some insurance against financial contingencies. It is the small and marginal dry land cultivators, whose margins of profit are so low that they are sensitive to even a minor fall in output of, say, just one bag per acre. This confirms the idea that farmers of these

classes are more concerned with gross returns than profits (Bharadwaj 1974); but then, even gross returns in their case are insufficient to meet their basic reproduction requirement – of roughly Rs. 2,000 per month (Appendix 2) – unless they have a complementary sources of income and/or credit available. This raises the very point of economic non-viability of small dry land households with about 5-6 acres of land. This (and indeed all my arguments in this chapter) can be illustrated by citing Oblesh's example. Alongside 5 acres of assigned marginal dry land, Oblesh had been cultivating paddy as a tenant in KMP Kamalapuram for many years. When I first interviewed him, in Jan. 2004, he reported a debt of Rs. 85,000 even as he had two daughters of marriageable age. Despite his diverse sources of income (i.e., remittances from a son in the town, *kullie* work, and tenancy; table 2.21), Oblesh's annual subsistence account was inadequate to meet his financial obligations unless he switched to *thoTa* cultivation. In April 2006 he successfully sank a bore well using a large loan he obtained from his *Kuruba* friends and relatives in NRP and KK and immediately planted citrus in his *thoTa*.

Table 2.21

Annual accounts of the peasant households of three classes

Cash receipts	PVR	C. Linganna	P.Oblesh
a. Income from cultivation of dry land groundnut; Rs. 1,14,000	61, 320	10,683	
b. Income from cultivation of <i>thoTa</i> groundnut; --	--	--	--
c. Income from the cultivation of Sweet orange; Rs. 3,00,000	--	--	--
d. Income from the cultivation of Paddy; Rs. 19,000	--	--	--
e. Income from tenancy cultivation (dry Groundnut) --	--	08, 100	
f. Income from <i>Kullie</i> work	--	--	1,520
g. Remittances	--	--	12,000
h. Hiring-out of threshers			
Expenditures:			
a. Cash required for family reproduction;	65,500	41,970*	24,600
i. Cash surplus (from farm)	Rs. 3,66,500	19,350	None

Notes; although the term income is used in the sense of net income, it is not adjusted for the value of family labour. Income from paddy is the residual surplus amount after the stock kept for consumption, b. Income from the cultivation of sweet orange is the approximate amount given by the three respondents, and not based on crop budget survey. \* This includes Rs. 15,000 spent annually on the higher education of his son, which, in its scale, is rather atypical.

## 2.8 Conclusion

To reduce the risks in agriculture in such adverse ecological zones as arid or semi-arid areas, John Mellor unequivocally suggested “abandoning intensive, arable agriculture” (1991: 6) and diversification of income generating opportunities outside agriculture.

The description of the trajectory of agricultural growth in NRP would suggest a contrary, regressive pattern of *deepening* intensification of agriculture in dry zones. In agreement with Washbrook (1973, 1994), I have contended that this intensification – first of High Yield groundnut monocropping followed now by citrus cultivation – is largely a compulsive response to the non-viability of dry land farming. I have also suggested that the populist policies of the state have aggravated risks in farming by being contradictory. Whereas its land distribution programme and credit policies have widened the possession of dry marginal land and have actively promoted *thoTa*-based growth (also see Vasavi, 1992), it has progressively withdrawn since the 1990s from the key responsibilities of investing in a public irrigation programme (Subramanyam et al: 2003), the regulation of pesticide markets and the provision of an efficient extension service. It is perhaps significant to draw to attention the fact that in other Indian states peasants often stopped groundnut cultivation as production conditions became more stable with the help of irrigation (Ninan 1987). Some authors, such as Bhaduri and Nayyar (1996: 107-112), have associated the withdrawal of the state from regulating farm-input markets with the restructuring of the post-1991 state. Contrarily, in a neoliberal vein<sup>63</sup>, some have argued that the prices of oilseeds have been “inefficiently protected (i.e. maintained at a higher level as compared to international prices)” by the state and hence, they ought to be further liberalized (Gulati 1988, 2000). Given the precariousness of groundnut production in Anantpur - the largest groundnut producing

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<sup>63</sup> Following Harvey (2005:21), I use the term to refer to the literature that believes that state interventions necessarily lead to economic inefficiencies, and hence the state’s role be minimal in market operations.

district in India, the implications of such liberalization of trade in oilseeds may be particularly ruinous to the local peasantry.

## ***Chapter 3***

### ***Aham, Swartham and Poti; rising individualism in the village***

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the theme of transition in familial relations that constitute a part of the context for suicidal behaviour in NRP and other adjoining villages.

Following Durkheim (1898/2006: 225-233), my argument is that there are processes of social disintegration in the institutions of family, inter-family kinship and caste. They are reflected in the growing preponderance of elementary families over joint or extended ones - both from static and dynamic perspectives (section 3.2). This implies that - contrary to the scholarship that has not only dismissed the thesis of decay of joint families (Kolenda 2007: 339, Gould 2007: 413, Cohn and Singer 2007, Uberoi 2003: 1072) but also suggested its revivalist preponderance (Shah 1998: 66, Uberoi, *ibid*) – I suggest that there *is* a disorganisation of the joint-family system. However, against the potentialities of greater (individualistic) fulfilment that the proponents of the modernisation thesis saw in elementary families (e.g. Good 1963 in Uberoi 2003:1067, Kolenda 2007: 340), the chapter describes how increasing friction and dilemmas accompany this transition in both joint and elementary families due to the encompassing ideology of *paurusham* (masculinity). In other words, intra-family kin relationships are marked by rising egoism (*aham/swarthem*), i.e., individual or conjugal self-interest, and not by the sentiments of collective familism and hierarchical order that many have associated with domestic groups in India (e.g. Uberoi 2003:1062, Trawick 1990, Dumont, 1970: 9 in Mines 1988: 569-573). I substantiate Mines' argument which emphasizes the concerns for equalitarian autonomy and individuation amongst urban Tamils (*ibid*) by describing how inter and intra-family relationships are increasingly marked by a strong sense of status oriented competitiveness (*poti*) and self-interest

(*swartham*). Moreover, going a step further than Mines, I hope to show that this process of individuation also, perforce, engenders experiences of aggression, violence and detachment (*virakti*) amongst peasants (section 3.4 & 3.5).

### **3.2 The household as a dimension of family: the preponderance of elementary families**

At the outset of my fieldwork, the local *Anganwadi*<sup>1</sup> schoolteacher estimated the current resident population of the *ur* (village) “including the *mādigeru*” (the cluster of the *Madigas*) to be about 230-240 *illulu* (houses). Some days later, a group of men sitting in the bazaar reckoned that there were about 200-odd *kutumbamlu* in the village. In commonplace parlance the terms *illu* and *kutumbam* enjoy an interchangeable usage. Yet the sociological differences between these two terms are significant and conspicuous. An *illu* refers to a discrete dwelling unit, supposedly inhabited by a socially distinct group of people whilst a *kutumbam* refers explicitly to patrilineal, predominantly patrilocal, kindred who partake from one hearth (*poi*) and live in a clearly demarcated dwelling unit. Implications that arise from this difference are as follows: (a). an *illu* may have no *kutumbam* (i.e. lying vacant), (b). an *illu* may have one resident *kutumbam*, (c). an *illu* may have more than one *kutumbam*, each demarcated by an *arragoDā* (a wall that divides the house into halves) and (d). a *kutumbam* may have more than one *illu*. There are three *kutumbam* who have more than one *illu* in the village. Another 116 *kutumbam* reside in their own individual *illu*; they are discrete hearth cum dwelling units. The remaining 107 *kutumbam* share a house (but no hearth) with another agnate that is demarcated by an *arragoDā*. In other words, the local usage of the term *kutumbamu* refers to the household dimension of the family (Shah 1973, Uberoi 2003: 1069).

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<sup>1</sup>The name of government-run schools for children in the age-group of 1-5, under its Integrated Child Development Scheme. The centre heads – the schoolteachers – maintain ready-reckoning statistics about the demography of the village.

The commensality and co-residence of patrikin in a *kutumbam* distinguish it from the wider genealogical networks of 'blood relatives' (*rakhtabandhuvalu*) that it is a member of (Mandelbaum 1948 in Shah 1998:29). In the widest sense *rakhtabandhuvalu* are all patrikin with a common lineage name (*inti-peru*). In narrower ritualistic and property senses, however, *rakhtabandhuvalu* include partilineal kinsmen sharing a *zézé/tātā* (grandfather). This understanding of kinship parallels that reported by Pocock in Gujarat (1973: 15-20); the wider genealogical blood relation or joint family is invoked at the time of marriage, death or ranking lineages in terms of status, while the narrower notion operates on the occasions of relatively mundane life rituals and partition of ancestral property.

Theoretically, a *kutumbam* may completely correspond with *rakhtabandhuvalu* in the latter's narrow sense – it may have all the three generations of patrikin (i.e., *zeze/father/ego*; counting from ego as the household head) living together. In reality, however, there is no instance of a complete correspondence between the two in NRP, since I count living generations from the ego as the household head. With 4 generations of agnates living together (i.e., ego's father, ego, sons, and grandchildren), Janne Shivaiah's family comes closest, but only partially so. Overall, it is the *kutumbam* as a hearth and dwelling unit that organises and satisfies autonomously the day-to-day economic, social and emotional interests of its members.

However, as Shah emphasizes (1998: 31), the term *kutumbam* fails to reflect the density or the nature of kin members present in it. For instance, a *kutumbam* in the village may have between one and twelve members, or just one conjugal unit or many (Table 3.1). A majority of *kutumbam* (70%) have a membership of 4-6 people; 22 of them (about 10% in all) have a relatively larger membership of 7 or more. NRP people use a more specific term, the *umaDikutumbam* to refer to families with extended kin members; the prefix *umaDi* means combined/attached hearth (*poi*), dwelling unit and property that a married man shares with his married brother(s).

In other words, the indigenous basis of classification of families accords an exclusive privilege to the commensality of all married brothers taken together, at a time when there is a real scope for them to divide as distinct conjugal hearth-cum-property groups. Uberoi observes that there is no direct correlation between household type and size (2003:1070). But to an NRP person an *umaDiKutumbam*, or the 'collateral joint family' in Kolenda's typology (2007:346), rightly appears to be numerically denser (Table 3.1). She speaks of a *peddākutumbam* as a "large family".

Table 3.1

Size of the households in NRP

No. of persons	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Per household	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
No. of households	4	18	25	55	64	38	13	5	2	0	1	1
Average size of <i>UmaDikutumbam</i> :	6.67											
Average size of 'separate' households:	4.27											
Mean of the membership in households:	5											

(Source: NRP Village Census, 2005)

Structurally as well as normatively an *umaDikutumbam* is the generative category of family for peasants; that is, the other two familial categories are derived from it<sup>2</sup>. When one asks a villager if a particular household is an *umaDikutumbam*, one is likely to receive either an affirmative answer or one of the following expressions: "Lédu! Okkaru alagā unnādu, iduru kuDāgā/kalasigā unnaDu" or "Ledu! Undaru GaDDkipoiNaDu" [No! One (of the brothers) has divided his household while the (remaining) two are staying together" or, "No! All of them have divided their households"]. Evidently, the extent of fraternal divisions in an *umaDikutumbam* forms the principle for the indigenous family taxonomy. To reformulate, a *kudaga/kalasiUnDewaDu* is a partially combined household of at least two married brothers who continue sharing the same hearth, house and assets after the third one

<sup>2</sup> This is also reflected in the absence of a specific term in Telugu for an elementary family so defined.

has partitioned his part of the conjugal household. The *alaga-unDewaDu* ('one who lives alone') is a completely fragmented unit of an erstwhile *umaDikutumbam*, comprising one married brother and his conjugal family. Thus, endorsing Uberoi (ibid, p. 1070), the indigenous conception posits for the most part a continuum - not binary - of family types although its polar ends, i.e., the *umadikutumbamu* and *alaga-unDewaDu*, do constitute two diametrically opposed ideals of family and affinity.

This understanding of the family system has important definitional and empirical implications. Firstly, the presence of parents in an elementary or joint-family of either type, as a 'lineal supplement' (Kolenda 2007: 346), is epiphenomenal to a local peasant. One of my informants explained such parental presence as a matter of *anürāgam* (affection) and *gauravam* (respect); it is subject to the varying moral dispositions of individual sons and their conjugal family members. Indeed, in a sign of low *anürāgam* for the elderly, there are at least 13 households (5% in all) in which an elderly parents or a widowed mother live on their own. All of them have adult married sons who have chosen to stay separate (compare with Vatuk 1990: 68, 78). This fact, and several cases of suicide amongst the elderly that I document (Ch. 6), appears to repudiate Uberoi's (ibid: p. 1071) and Shah's (1998:68) optimism about the 'emerging pattern of stem families' in India who undertake the care of the elderly. Second, a household with just one male offspring is also patently elementary in nature, for it has no potential scope at all to grow into a collateral joint family. The indigenous taxonomy of families in NRP is thus sensitive to the dynamic of cyclical change in family structure (Fortes 1949 in Parry 1979: 154), although only in the collateral direction; it is the completely combined/joint *umaDikutumbam* that produces partially fraternal-extended (*kalasi-UnDewaDu*) or completely separate elementary families (*alaga-unDewaDu*). The presence of other members of the patrilineal kin, including parents, is merely a variable "accretion" to the collateral core, to use Mayer's phrase (1960: 179).

There has been a long debate about how to categorise families in discrete extended and elementary categories for comparative purposes (cf. Shah 1998, Uberoi 2003). As Kolenda has remarked (2007: 344), much of the confusion stems from, (a). the non-synchronous severance of different forms of ties (e.g., joint cooking/ residence/ property/ rituals) binding conjugal families together and, (b). the presence of residual members of an earlier conjugal family or an unmarried member. I have mentioned above that NRP people consider the ties of hearth and common budget between married brothers or a father and his married son and as the two variables to distinguish a *umaDikutumbam* from either a *kalasiunDewaDu* or *alagaunDewaDu*. They say, “*Kunda vere; kulamu vere*” (once the cooking pot goes separate, the caste goes separate). In doing so, their outlook is identical to what Parry and Mayer have described the case to be in Kangra (1979: 157) and Malwa (1960: 180) respectively. A separation of hearth, whether lineally or collaterally, perforce marks the separation of a common dwelling by raising an *arragoDā*, or nowadays, by taking a new residence on rent (*pace* Uberoi, p. 1,070). Division of land, livestock, financial entitlements and debts, all usually coincide, if not immediately then within six months or so, of dividing the hearth. Divided sons/brothers may continue to pool income and expenditure, or exchange labour, but they do so only as individual labour and property groups. As to the second point, we have already noted that the presence of residual members of an erstwhile conjugal family, or of any other member of kin, does not have any structural significance to a household in the local view.

In a conversation with me, Chintal Naidu, the eldest married son of Gunda Shivaiah, was proud of himself, saying that his “*kutumbam* had four generations (*taralu*) of kin (including two married brothers) living together at a time when one could count the number of *umaDikutumbamulu* in the village on one’s fingers”. Was his pride and the empirical claim behind it correct? Table 3.2 catalogues the kinship composition of 226 resident households in the village.

Table 3.2 Resident households in NRP in terms of their kinship composition

Structure	Frequency
1. Man + wife with or without child (ren)*	117
2. Man + wife only**	14
3. Man + wife + child(ren) + his parent(s)	41
4. Man + wife + his <i>only</i> son who is married	12
5. Man + wife + his married sons and their wives and children	6
6. Man + wife + his married son(s) and his family (with unmarried sons) ***	21
7. Man + wife + child (ren) + his brother (s) and his family	3
8. Man + wife & child (ren) + brother and his family + his mother and unmarried brother	2
9. An unmarried son/daughter + widow (mother)	5
10. Widows, abandoned wife	2
11. Others (such as widowed daughter with parents, widower with children)	3
<b>Total households</b>	<b>226</b>

Note: \* Includes two cases of polygamy

\*\* Includes those husbands and wives who have adult child (ren), but who have decided to live separately. In two of these cases, a grand child lives with the grand parents

\*\*\* Includes two cases in which the man's widowed mother is also staying in the household

From the local perspective, household types 1, 2, 3 and 4 belong to the rubric of completely separate/elementary households. Conversely, households with kin members of types 5, 6, 7 and 8 are identified as joint/extended households, both complete and partial. Naidu's pride is empirically justified in that only a tiny section of households (14.15%) are joint, whilst the vast majority (81.41%) are completely elementary. The remaining households (4.44%) are what villagers classify as 'small households' (*cinnakutumbam*). This preponderance of elementary households is maintained even if we keep the families with parents and single married sons (types 3 and 4) - the 'lineal-extended families or supplemented families' - out of the category of elementary families [as Mayer (1960: 180) and Shah (1973: 69) have done]; without these two types, the majority of households (62.38%) are still elementary. However, a more pertinent question, following Shah (1946 in Parry 1979: 154), is to ask how many elementary *kutumbam* have had the choice of being extended – whether completely or partially? In answering this, we find that the preponderance of elementary families in NRP is a function of positive choice amongst brothers and sons and not a demographic compulsion. Amongst the 158 cases of elementary families (i.e., types 1 and 3 combined), only 12 households do

not have a brother in the village. In other words, 146 households could be fraternally extended households to varying degrees, whereas none are. Likewise, amongst the 29 *Ekula* households, only 7 remain collaterally joint whilst 27 could have been so.

These conclusions are, however, based on a static view of the present kinship structure of families. As the proponents of the 'development cycle of a household' (Fortes 1949 in Parry 1979:155, Shah, 1973: Ch. 5, Madan 1965:59) have argued, this structure is liable to change over time. The processes of demographic, social and economic change are likely to influence the kinship composition of a household a great deal over a medium to long period. Although any definitive formulation of such interaction can be simplistic, I wish to subject the static conclusions to further scrutiny from this dynamic perspective. An examination of the present kin composition of a majority of the households in the village, especially in a majority of currently elementary households (i.e. all types of households excluding type 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) suggests that they can not grow into joint families in the collateral sense. Out of a total of 168 such households, only 63 (37.5%) households have more than one male offspring allowing them a theoretical chance to grow into fraternal extended families. However, as I have already noted above, a growing number of households prefer being separate rather than remaining joint, whether lineally or collaterally, even when there is a theoretical scope to do so. To the extent that a separate/elementary household is also a substantially less dense family (4.27 members against 6.67 in an *umaDikutumbamu*), it does reflect Durkheim's notion of domestic disintegration (1898/2006: 211) in a diachronic sense<sup>3</sup>.

In the light of the evidence presented, Kolenda's conclusion about joint households being weak in South India, more so amongst lower castes, appears noteworthy

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<sup>3</sup> While drawing the conclusion that the average size of households, both joint and elementary, have increased since 1961, Shah does not refer to the regional differences Kolenda has indicated. I do not have data for AP, but NRP's evidence, both quantitative and ethnographic, would appear contrary to his point.

(cited in Uberoi, p. 1072). Ullrich (1987:263) has offered similar observations for a Karnataka village. In NRP, this weakness is a combination of both an intrinsically lower demographic chance of formation of joint families (pace Uberoi, p. 1070) and their quicker divisions due to certain social and economic changes. Increased compliance with family planning in the village – which finds a parallel in substantially lower population growth rate, i.e., 1.3%, for AP (Business line 2001) – reduces the scope for the formation of collateral joint families in future. Further, even in such cases where the demographic conditions are favourable to the formation of a joint-family, they are being neutralised by the extension of intensive bore-well oriented cash crop cultivation. The proliferating cash economy, amongst other things, is transforming the conventional idioms of familial status, gender role and obligation; it is transforming the local “self-concepts” (Shweder & Levine 1984: 12). Following Durkheim (1952/2006), an important approach in understanding this transformation and its relationship to the rising incidence of suicides is to document the process of breakdown of what Dumont calls kin-links (1983:11). Indeed, such an approach questions and revises the notions of familism and hierarchy/deference being strong in India (cf. Desai 1964 in Uberoi, p. 1072, Dumont, 1970 in Mines 1988), which have endured in the relevant literature (e.g. Shah 1998: Ch.4 and Trawick 1990).

### **3.3 *Kutumbam*: increasing individuality and contestation**

In this section the three dyadic relations, those of a father and son, male siblings and a husband and wife are discussed. The purpose is to describe the manner in which new cleavages are being created (and experienced) and old ones accentuated, not only in the lineal and collateral joints in an *umaDiKutumbam*, but also in the conjugal joint of a nuclear family.

### 3.3.1 Father-son relationship

A father (*nāNā*) has traditionally been the supreme head of a *kutumbam*. As the *peddā-manishi* (the 'big man') of his household, all familial operations have conventionally been under his headmanship (*pettanam*). His decision-making authority spans deployment of family members for farm labour, employing son(s) on *jeeta* work, adjudicating in intra-household feuds and partitions, and performing rituals and worship on behalf of the household. There are many pointers to his exclusive and absolute authority on the household (*contra* Trawick 1990: 179). It is he (as the head of a household) who is entitled loans on credit (*appu*) in the village including the one secured against his son(s) as a *jeeta*<sup>4</sup>. It is also solely a father's prerogative – not his son(s)', even if he is married – to control all financial activities including capital investments, marketing of crops and buying provisions for family's consumption under his "maintenance". As adult men put it, the "key of the *birwā* (family money chest) is always in his hand" and he may seek explanations from any family members including his sons as regards their financial conduct. A father's singular command over the household is considered equivalent to a 'rājalu's *paripālanā*' (a king's reign); it combines power with status (*pace* Dumont 1970 in Kolenda 1976)

However, a father's authority in the household is also inherently moral in nature. *Peddatanam* is a "pedda badhyata" (big responsibility/duty), and hence a *bharavu* (burden), and its exercise must follow the established code of conduct (*paddhati*, also see Dube 1955). A father's household duties have both enduring and sequential dimensions. His primary responsibility, that of providing (*sakDam*) for all members of his family, is enduring in nature and requires him to conduct headmanship in an earnest and impartial manner. Many deny *maryada* (honour/deference) to Narayan Reddy, although he belongs to the higher and influential *Kapu* caste, as he is a lazy

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<sup>4</sup>His guarantee (*pooci*) may be asked for even if his son succeeds him in the household.

person (*somari*) who ignores the obligations of *pettanam* in his passion for cock-fights and alcohol.

Second in the hierarchy of a father's responsibilities is the marriage of his offspring. Although both a son and a daughter are required to be married when they come of age, the marriage of a daughter is critically linked to his *maryada* (status/honour). Popular expressions underline the changed relationship between a pubescent (*pedda*) unmarried girl and her immediate social surroundings. She invites 'gossip' and 'sexual advances' that can result in her, and by extension the family head, being labelled as one with *lopam* (shortcomings of character). This compromises him as a 'wife-giver' (Yalman 1963: 48)<sup>5</sup>. Such a threat to his public status must then be resolved by her early marriage; to ensure this a father should be generous in offering dowries (even within cross-kin marriages). A father judges his performance, and he is judged by others, on the basis of how he meets these responsibilities (Goffman 1958: 10, Butler 1997 in Haywood & Ghaill 2003:12).

The manner in which a father has exercised his household responsibilities is understood to be reflected in the property that he acquires (*Sadhincanam*) during his lifetime. Put differently, the notion of patrilineal attachment frequently refers to a father's (and a grandfather's) personhood in terms of his material acquisition, or lack thereof: a son may nowadays confront his father by asking, "*mā kosham yémi sampādaninchawa*" (What have you earned for us)? The ancestral property (*vamsa-sommulu*) that a person receives as his share at the time of partition acts as an index on which he, his sons and others adjudge his entire *peddatanam*. Any errant behaviour (e.g. indulging in alcohol, sexual promiscuity etc.) on his part may stifle the acquisition of new properties, or worse, cause an erosion in the ancestral

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<sup>5</sup> According to Yalman, this concern for female sexual purity post-pubescence is associated with maintaining *caste*-purity. His structural-functional response is aimed at Gough who sees it as a "general, unconscious fear of deflowering women on the part of the men of the society" (1955: 70). A father of a post-pubescent girl is not only afraid in general, as Gough suggests; he is fearful of the implications it has on him as a 'wife-giver', but then, it appears to me that the non-Kapu castes in NRP do not formulate it in such neat caste-specific terms as Yalman does either.

property he has received. Furthermore, by indulging in alcoholism or sexual promiscuity he may also hand down a 'bad name' (*cedda peru*) to his son(s) who have to erase this bad name in course of their own lives.

The concepts of personal autonomy, gender identity, status and affinity are directly linked to material accomplishments, especially amongst the *Kapus*, and we shall see below that this has involved *Kapu* men in competing at the tournaments of masculinity within their joint-families. To illustrate this point immediately, when Narayana (80) passed away, his only son Pullanna (45), who had until then had an estranged relationship with his parents and lived separately, organised a ceremonial funeral procession accompanied by a band, rose petals and large sums of coins continuously being showered at the corpse *en route*. In the villagers' assessment, notwithstanding the feud between the son and his father, the celebration of the latter's death as a 'good death' (Bloch and Parry 1982) was eminently warranted in view of Pullanna's achievements as a father – if not as a 'person-in-public' (*manci peru*). Narayana, an emigrant to NRP, had lived in a hut and worked as a *kullie* (wage labourer) in his initial years. He purchased 20 sheep and worked for an influential Reddy landlord-cum-panchayat secretary in the adjoining village to secure a plot of government assigned land of 5 acres. Successfully turning a part of this plot into *thoTa*, he eventually acquired two *pucca* houses and savings that reportedly ran into 'lacs of rupees'.

In contrast to his father, who derives parts of his social self from his responsibilities, a young son is both sans responsibilities and a social face (Goffman 1958). Young boys are "so-and-so's son", called by a nickname (*addamperu*) that caricatures their physical/temperamental peculiarities, or they are just *thikkoda* (lunatics)<sup>6</sup>. Responsible paternity, therefore, involves assigning responsibilities and imparting physical, temperamental and vocational skills to a son to help him to acquire these

<sup>6</sup> A Telugu child is not completely a non-individual in this sense; he has a 'face', but it is not a social one.

attributes in a gradual manner and eventually to take over the *pettanam*<sup>7</sup>. This duality, namely that although separated by a generation and by age (Dumont 1983: 17), a son will eventually take over his father's responsibilities, gives a distinctive variation to their relationship over the years. During early childhood (i.e. 1 yr onwards), he commands his father's (or grand father/uncle's in an *umaDikutumbam*) affection and care (*lalan*), albeit paternal discrimination in bigamous marriages is well-known. He is taken around the village by the father for hours, returning to his mother only for the basic chores of washing, feeding and sleeping. The dominance of outside/public in the socialisation of a son is manifestly a corollary to his father's (and other males') influence and appears to differ from the mother/female oriented higher-caste socialisation process reported in other parts of India (e.g. Gough 1994: 158 in Uberoi 1994, Mandelbaum 2007: 31 in Singer and Cohn 2007). Masculine attributes such as physical toughness (*gatti*), temper/aggression (*roshamu*), and fearlessness (*dhairyam*) are actively inculcated, both by men and women, in the course of this early public exposure (also see Trawick 1990: p 225).

### Field notes 3.1

Chintal Naidu (28) tells me that his one-year-old son is very stubborn (*picci*)<sup>8</sup>; he loves being taken around and starts crying when made to sit still. This evening, when Naidu brought him to me, Jaimma (i.e. my landlady) was around. She took the baby in her hands and began to smack him on his back, muttering, "I shall beat you up today". Naidu watched approvingly in silence. The child whimpered and noticing this, I protested, "Why are you beating him and making him cry?" She replied. "Smacking him now shall make him tough throughout his life" (*ipuDu kOTTite jeevithamtha gattiga untaDu*).

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<sup>7</sup> To mention a caveat here, younger sons are dealt with more leniently in the delegation of family responsibilities than the elder ones.

<sup>8</sup>*Picci* in Telugu and, *pidivatam* in Tamil appear to be a largely masculine trait; in NRP men often use the term to refer to the positive strength of their will. Refer to Trawick (1990:225).

In late childhood (5-7 yrs), however, the relationship assumes distal and hierarchical orientations with gradual delegation of vocational responsibilities to a son. From undertaking symbolic masculine chores such as sawing firewood and tethering a bullock, he graduates to grazing a flock of sheep or undertaking farming activities by his early teen. In executing these tasks, he also comes face to face with his father's punitive authority. He is regularly ridiculed and chastised (also Trawick, 1990). While the father uses patently insulting masculine salutations and rebukes [“lái/rā, “ne puka”( your vagina)]<sup>9</sup>, a son must still adhere to the code of deferential conduct towards his father; talking back, laughing loudly, loitering and smoking in the latter's presence are strongly disapproved of. Communications between the two are infrequent and specific to work in the household<sup>10</sup>; furthermore, amongst households lower in the caste-class order, the necessity for wage work from an early age makes fathers ever more distant towards their sons. As a result of this trajectory of socialisation, a son demonstrates a high degree of individuation (i.e. non-dependence<sup>11</sup>), in terms of his work, by late adolescence (16-18 yrs). Overall, the idea of a “subterranean, emotional connectedness” of an Indian son with his father notwithstanding their hierarchical relationship (Alan 1988: 106), which is congruent with anthropological theses that there are meta-cosmic ritualistic connections between the two (Dumont 1983:14, Madan 1965, Misri 1985), appears misplaced from an NRP son's perspective<sup>12</sup>. Of course, in so far as young *Kapu* sons from the wealthiest families identify with their fathers and the latter's aggressive

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<sup>9</sup> I did not come across a single father who used similar phrases for his daughter.

<sup>10</sup> A contradiction that underpins the process of socialisation of the sons is that while they are expected to be compliant and inhibited in their conduct towards their fathers (and elder agnates), their conduct towards other males in general is quite uninhibited. Teenage boys share social space with young men and exchange swear words and jokes with strong sexual and aggressive overtones. In other words, deference to a father is unique in an otherwise egalitarian and uninhibited context.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Independence’, in Dumont's sense (1986: 279) is not appropriate in its use here.

<sup>12</sup> Mines makes a similar point against this dominant school of thought whilst referring to the related aspects of presence of personal autonomy and individuality in India (1988:572)

masculinity<sup>13</sup>, they come close to this Brahminical model. This does not imply that they do not confront or rebel against their father nowadays. However, the lineal link has conventionally been weaker amongst non-*Kapu* households. An *Ekula, Kuruba* or *Madiga* son, who has been employed as *jeeta* from his early childhood embodies filial distance at its extreme.

It is only after his prolonged participation in an area of household responsibility, and his marriage, that a son has conventionally earned the legitimacy to make suggestions/give advice to his father. Brahministic *sanskaras* (e.g. sacred thread ceremony) – which mark the ‘rites of passage’ for a higher-caste son in India and mediate his relationship with his father (Gough 1994 in Uberoi 1994, Madan 1965, Misri 1985: 128) – are conspicuous by their absence in the village. Such advice and the paternal response to it constitute, as Alan rightly observes (1988:98,106), a most important milestone in the development of the social self of a son/young man. To reformulate, a son’s ascension from a highly subordinate helper to an equal advisor, and finally, a mature successor has been contingent on the protracted process of his apprenticeship under his father’s scrutiny. Shivaiah’s (30 years) insightful observation (Excerpt 3.1) underlines that the logic of hierarchy between the father and his son, the sanctity of singular family headmanship (whether a son’s or his father’s) and the notion of trust (*nammakkam*) in each other’s decisions, are all derived from it. Stories of diligent sons who have acquired complete trust and recognition in their fathers’ eyes – and by extension attained social parity with him – are mentioned as much in male discourse on family relations as stories of those sons who represented a failure. A father’s authority over his son has been conventionally rooted in a localised, partially commercial mixed-farming economy

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<sup>13</sup> T.M. Reddy (26), the son of S. Reddy (cf. Ch. 6) from the pre-dominant *Kapu* family, faced acute labour shortage during *Mungari* harvesting season in 2005. He told me, “These SC (Scheduled Caste) people, when my father was there, they did not dare say no, they would come to work on one call (*pilsedi ante*). Now they have fat on them (*epuDu kowwu aindi*)”

that has had few non-farm sources of livelihood, and in an underdeveloped labour, and credit market.

#### Excerpt 3.1

"If the son wanted his father to listen to him, in those days (*apuTki*), he would have to work to the fullest extent (*fullaga*). (Others nod). The fullest extent. If he was diligent (*vagunte*) in the work being given by his father, in whatever field – it could be agriculture or sheep rearing or *thoTa* work, the father would come to know that "he (i.e. the son) is good in this and this" and hence he would accept (*upkuntaDua*) suggestions from the son; and if the son wanted to allocate some work to his father (that is, after a son succeeded his father's headmanship), his father would readily agree. Every single father would do so. Now, take the case of Krishnamurthy *mama*. His father knows more about agriculture than he does. So, in this case, he (i.e. Krishnamurthy) would not go further in giving an advice to his father, nor would his father would come forward to listen to him."

However, as Shivaiah's usage of reflexive distinctions 'then' and 'now' suggests, the indications of contemporary transition in this relationship are vivid. Regular and serious violations of interactional rules compromising the father-son hierarchy and attachment bear this out. The continuum of violations spans active or passive refusal to comply with a father's commands, engaging in heated arguments with him, using foul language (*cheDDa marta ceppaDDam*) and, indeed, physical assault (*kottaDDam*) and annulling all sociality (*assal touch ledu*) with him. An extreme instance of interactional breakdown during my fieldwork occurred when a married *Chakali* son, living separately, publicly thrashed his father – even as his brothers watched - in retaliation for the latter having beaten up the son's wife because of the 'typical' tensions between the mother and daughter-in-law. Another instance involved two threats of suicide by Potanna, a *Kuruba* young man (23 years), to his father who rigorously opposed Potanna's love for a *Kuruba* girl within the village.

In a structuralist sense, such acts of violence (or threats of violence) on the part of a son are a repudiation of the natural, permanent blood-relation between a father and son in favour of the inferior relation of marriage (Schneider 1968 in Das 1976: 11). They are also a repudiation of the irreversibility of hierarchy between the father and his son. From an expressive perspective, in contrast to Alan's case studies of middle class urban Indian sons who seemingly internalise rebellious emotions against their fathers (1988:31), sons in NRP explicitly rebel against their fathers. Further, a son's explicit defiance is often articulated in the idiom of aggression (*rosham*) and violence and it parallels the description of behaviour of rebellious Tamil sons that Mines (1988:573) and Trawick (1990: 161, 163) have given. Aggression and violence is often used to circumscribe or punish a 'recalcitrant' father. Thus, whether an act of rebellion and/or aggression in a given set of circumstances is normatively justified or not is not tangential (Ch. 6 below); what is more instructive to note here is the devastating impact it has on the relationship. Such emergent 'expressive components of social life', to use Goffman's phrase (1958: 160), support the popular notion of a growing social disorganisation (*arajakata*) in which a father's status is increasingly compromised.

There are four general dimensions of this transition that warrant attention. First, the conventional trajectory of socialisation involving protracted on-farm work on the part of a son to earn the legitimacy to counsel his father about the latter's *pettanam*, stands eroded. The autobiographical narratives of Ramesh (26) and Laxminrayana (28) cited below illustrate this development. Ramesh had just a few years of experience of tenancy farming when he proposed (in 2001) to his father that they should attempt to sink a bore-well, while Laksminarayana had absolutely no experience of farming when he made a similar proposal. Hence, their action of making what both men thought was an axiomatic suggestion, contravened the interactional rules that is expected of a son. An explanation for this behavioural irregularity lies partly in the emergence of mobility and formal education as the new

sources of knowledge and legitimacy within households. When asked, Ramesh attributed his suggestion to his visits to KK village in Garladinne *mandal* where he saw citrus cultivation and heard how farmers “earned lacs (of rupees) every year from the crop and thought that even he could do likewise (*munduki powaccu*) if he had a bore well”. Wider spatial sensibilities have exposed young men to a range of capitalistic possibilities in agriculture as a means of upward mobility; the introduction of chilli, papaya and onion crops in the village can be traced to visits to affines and friends within Anantpur and Bellary. These possibilities have also aided young men in internalising the “discourse of developmentalism” in the Foucauldian sense (Escobar 1995: 5-6, Ferguson 1999; Introduction). The neighbouring “*improvement/dabbu-akwa uur*” (developed villages with more cash) of Kamlapuram and Muddulapuram are the most proximate referents for upward mobility to the young men of the “unclean, underdeveloped NRP” (*maruTa/galij uur*) of NRP. To young men like Ramesh, the adoption of bore-well agriculture, however risky, is thus an axiomatic means to fashion an equal self.

### Excerpt 3.2

“I was idle even after my marriage. My elder married brother was already in sheep business. We had good amount of land – 20 acres between two brothers. But this land was not being cultivated, because there was no one to work in the field. So I thought that I could plunge (*digitanu*) into agriculture if we had a bore. I suggested to my father to try sinking a bore. He said; No! What if there is no water found? Could I work to pay the debt (in his name) back? I became quiet (*urke ainanu*). But I did not give up on the idea in my mind” (*chustamu anukuntini*).

“We have 12 acres of land. You have seen that in our village groundwater is plentiful (*dandigaunnāi*). Every one has a bore and a *thoTa*. People rig bore and develop; even those with less land than what we have developed. So, I told father to try sinking a bore. He said; No need! No need to take unnecessary risks. I persisted (*mallacceptini*); Just see once. He became angry. I said it was not for my benefit only, it was for the entire household. He said; It is my headmanship.

If you do not like it, you can leave. I became silent, but inside my mind, I was so angry (*lona kopam leshintri*); I thought, I would show him (*chubhistanu annukuNtini*). Next day, in the morning, I purchased and swallowed medicine (i.e. sleeping pills)".

Laksminarayana's case, on the one hand, points to the entrenchment of formal education as another category of legitimacy and construction of an equal self (also see Srivastava 2003: 1003 in Das 2003). The youngest son of a retired school teacher, he proposed a bore well to his father when he was a student in Anantpur college (in 1999). Education supposedly imparts sophistication in literal and metaphorical senses; educated person are "dignified (conscious of self-dignity) and *mettaga*" (soft) in disposition and thus, superior to a "coarse/ hard" (*maruTa*), *rythu*. This being so, education – even of modest levels (Table 3.3), alters the hierarchy between the father and son in important ways. Aside from rendering prolonged and well-regulated apprenticeship on a farm difficult to maintain, it also weakens mutual compliance to the conventional idioms of deference. School-going sons are generally accorded greater personal recognition; they are called by their proper names and treated more indulgently in the household than a working son. In as much as all post-secondary educational institutions are in the town, those young men who attend these institutions become conspicuously influenced by the urban mode of consciousness, self-representations and the urban life-style – as exemplified in the popular ideal of *neatness* (Ch. 4 below). Such relatively educated sons demonstrate fewer inhibitions in their day-to-day interactions with their fathers, in terms of offering suggestions, wanting to make their own decisions, and expressing aspirations regarding a whole range of household activities, as compared to those who are completely illiterate.

Table 3.3 A comparison of educational levels of NRP peasants

Age group	No Education	Middle	Secondary Higher
1. < 50 years	87		13
Their sons:	-	56	44**
2. 30-50 years	52.39	47.61	-
3. > 30 years	-	100	-

Source: Village sample survey, 2005-06

Note: \* Percentage computed on the basis of total number of sons to the farmers in the age group and their educational attainments

\*\* This entry includes a case where a son of a farmer with no education has gone on to study at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology for his bachelors.

Secondly, in more recent years, there has also been a growing consciousness amongst young men that economic differentiation within the village has vastly accentuated. They increasingly scrutinise and articulate, both publicly and in private, their assessments of their fathers' *peddatanam* vis-à-vis other households. Note that inter-household status comparisons are an entirely new axis of assessing a father's *pettannam*. If Ramesh articulates a relatively general projectivity of further economic development ("munduki rawala"; to go forth), Laksminarayana's expressions implicate his father's headmanship more sharply by drawing an explicit comparison with other upwardly mobile households in the village. A son now commonly assesses his father's headmanship in relation to the higher economic status of a close collateral kinsman who is seen as a competitor. In an instance that involved two of the wealthiest peasant households from the *Kapu* caste, the college educated son (22) repeatedly contrasted the 'growth' (*pergaDam*) attained by his elder uncle's household with the 'slump' (*yenuka powdam*) of his own household under his father's headmanship in the latter's presence. He saw the sinking of a second bore well in their *thoTa* as the only route to move ahead and demanded that he be given the headmanship to raise the status of their household. Of course, in most cases of friction I have noted so far, a son's suggestions, such as sinking a bore-well or constructing a new house, invoke collective family mobility (the "we/family-self", Alan 1988:98). But by criticising a father's *pettannam* in explicitly

comparative phrases in his presence, and/or demanding a replacement/revision to it, the son challenges the very bases of a father's hierarchical masculine self. In all such cases, contrary to a father's risk-averse prudence, the son understands risk as a built-in aspect of bore-well oriented development that ought to be borne in a manly fashion; what is "risk" (*pramadam*) for a father is "*bhayam*" (fear) to his son.

Third, as Mines (1988) argues, going beyond just a critical assessment, it is the scope for and the growing tendency amongst the sons to execute their individual ideas that strikes at the heart of paternal authority. I have suggested that a complete and exclusive financial control in the household has conventionally underpinned a father's headmanship. However, the increased monetisation of the village economy, wider mobility and favourable affinal support has enabled the sons to completely overcome their fathers' regulative authority in this regard. They manage to raise credit and financial support from their extended network of acquaintances, the *albatulu*, and/or affines, to pursue individualistic projects in the face of a father's opposition. Ramesh managed to bypass the difficulties of raising credit within NRP – where his father's assent and guarantee (*zamin*) was indispensable – to sink a borewell by taking credit from his newly acquired network of friends in Kamlapuram village. Nagendra, another young son, when faced with stiff opposition from his father to his suggestion of constructing a "neat house", also succeeded in raising a large sum of credit within the village without having to offer any guarantee (*pooci*) from his father. Indeed, the point at which a son becomes creditworthy independent of his father is the precise moment the latter is said to "go weak/soft/emasculated" (*mettagga*). As I document below, even the threat of denial of ancestral property to discipline a rebellious son (Gould 2007: 416) has become irrelevant on account of these factors. The extension of a cash economy within the village and its interaction with the external economy has considerably weakened a father's conventional regulative authority on his household.

Fourthly and lastly, the specific effects that these realignments bring to bear upon the relationship between a father and his son must be emphasized. To a father, an act of defiance on the part of his son not only strikes at the sanctity of the institution of singular *peTTanam*, and at his hierarchical supremacy that is legitimised by it, but also calls into play the ideology of *paurusham* or masculinity. Negating the conventional trajectory of succession, it has the potential of creating a deep, sometimes unbridgeable, chasm between them and makes the separation of household imminent if a son, too, claims *paurusham* (a new sort of claim I suggest) by stubbornly refusing to withdraw from the confrontation (also, Mines, p. 573). It is more likely, however, that following an explicit rebellion a father will dissociate himself from household matters, leaving the reins of *pettannam* to the rebellious son, at the same time disowning the likely implications of the defiant act on the household. This is what happened in Ramesh's case. In yet another scenario where an overt censure (*ninda*), or worse, an expression of aggression has marked their confrontation, a father may experience a complete loss of his sense of a hierarchical self (*manam*), and unable to withstand this big dishonour (*peddavamanam*), he may leave the house for good or attempt/ commit suicide. The suicide by K. Anjaneyulu in NRP and D. Kulayappa in Ipperu (see Ch. 6) are examples. Of course, this is not to suggest a teleological connection between negation of hierarchy and suicide; to anticipate the argument I make in chapter 6, the intensity of experience of dishonour (*avamanam*) at the irreversible loss of hierarchy in such cases is directly proportional to both the intensity of one's claim of, and commitment to, the performative aspects of *paurusham* (Goffman 1958:10, Sears 1955 in Solomon 1984: 240). For a young son, on the other hand, the defiant pursuit of his own projects results in greater individuation (also Mines, *ibid*). He is likely to take over the reins of headmanship completely in the wake of a successful pursuit of his own ideas. However, in the event of him failing to realise his project, he may undergo an

increased sense of isolation and guilt (Excerpt 3.3.) - a state of being that again relates emotively to suicide.

#### Excerpt 3.3

"With (Rs.) 25,000 (of debt), I called the borewell agency; they tried (sinking the bore) at two places. No water. I lost 15,000 on that single day. Only 10, 000 was left. I had taken this amount on the pledge (*martaichyanu*) of returning in one year's time. (My) Father told me, "It is your responsibility, do what you want to do". I was seriously depressed (*pedda alocana apiandi*). I would lose my name there. Here my father was hurt".

#### 3.3.2 Husband-wife relationship

The ideology of masculinity, or *paurusham*, is the encompassing ideology for peasants in Dumont's sense of the term (Kolenda 1976: 138); it appears to override all other ideals of manhood. Some references to the local idioms of its construction and experience and its contribution to conflicts within household have been indicated while discussing the father-son bond. However, after Connell (2005: 68), for a man in the village masculinity perforce relates to *āDatanam* (femininity). The interaction between these gender ideologies and the processes of economic and cultural transitions and the new areas of friction that they conjure up is thrown into sharper relief within the context of conjugal relationship.

Masculine articulations derive their legitimacy from the men's supposed anatomical and temperamental differences (Bourdieu 2001, Moore 1994: 13), engendering them as a superior class to a woman. A man is a repository of physical hardness (*gatti/balam*) which is increased greatly by the sort of physically intensive work he undertakes. He is sexually virile (*dāham/akali akwā*) in a manner that compares to an "uncastrated oxen"<sup>14</sup>. As a 'giver' - in sexual imagery the male body, a plough (*madaka*), goes through the soil (*bhuamma*), representing the female body – he is

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<sup>14</sup> Thus, in jocular relations, a masculine woman may threaten a young boy or man with castration (*saman cut chesta*).

inviolable in a complex of compulsory heterosexuality (Rubin in Connell 2005: 104). The structural homologies of male/active/culture and female/passive/nature (Ortner 1974 in Moore 1994:10) are vivid in these conceptions. In fact the terms in which men express their cathexis and transact masculinities in both hierarchical and equalitarian contexts are pregnant with sexual aggression and violence; the three most common verbs used for coitus are *dengaDam* (to ram/mount/jump), *gummaDam* (to ram hard) and *nukkaDDam* (to shove). Cognitively, wider public exposure renders a man rational ('*alocincedishakti akwa*') and temperamentally more stable, while women cannot 'reason'<sup>15</sup> and hence, remain prone to uncontrolled anger (*avesham*). Most importantly, they are sexually vulnerable in the dual sense of possessing high sexual desire of their own and being the standard sexual object-choice for the male lust (as Cohen says, 1995: 417). Hence, mobility and gender relate inversely for them; men say, "*āDulu tirgi céDpotāDu, mogwalu tirgipoka cedipotaDu*" (Travelling spoils a woman; not travelling spoils a man). In accord with ethnographies that relate construction of masculinities essentially against femininity (Herdt 1994 and Brandes 1980 cited in Gutmann 1997: 386), NRP men conceive femininity's otherness as a foil to create, legitimise and experience their manhood as a "first-order" self-construct (Geertz 1983: 124).

This being so, conjugal relationship has been a space for reproduction of authority of husbands over their wives and it begins soon after marriage. After marriage, which is generally patrivilocal, spouses demonstrate a heightened consciousness of elders around them and avoid one another. Any explicit gesture of conjugal affinity is very likely to be interpreted as his 'succumbing to her charm' right away. Hence, his conduct towards her in the household as well as outside it is of avoidance, indifference and hierarchy. Before his marriage, Ramlu had made no secret of his affinities for his *mainmama's* daughter (MBD). However, post marriage, Ramlu

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<sup>15</sup>"*aDwaniki artham teliyedu; mogawaniki biDDa bathakadu* (women lack comprehension; men can't raise a daughter)".

would not stay at home at all during the day and evening. As is standard practice for men, he spent most of his leisure in the arenas of male-bonding (Tiger 1984 in Gautman 1997: 393) – the bazaar (public space/the main thoroughfare) or in the “friend-circle”. One of the older ladies of the neighbourhood commented to me, “We have tried to tell him to stay at home more often. He does not; he does not show any signs of *sambharam* (romantic affinity) with her”. Even as a general practice, men scarcely register a wife's presence in the public domain. Trawick (1990: 93-95) views such avoidance, including a refusal to register each other's presence publicly, as a deliberate strategy of concealment that *affirms* love rather than denies it. However, in NRP, men believe that a public acknowledgement of conjugal affinity such as walking together, staying indoors with her, or even accompanying a wife to a doctor in the town, involves a compromise of the husband's *paurusham*, eventually leading to his emasculation (*weak aipowDam*).

Patriarchy has also structured the organisation of reproductive arena. Within the house, a husband speaks to his wife in a conspicuously raised and authoritative tenor (*ghāTangā māTlarDam*) that parallels a Reddy landlord's tenor for a *Madiga kullee*. In a tiff involving two males, if the pitch of one's voice is raised, the opponent may say, “Do not talk loud with me; I am not your wife”. As regards gender roles, although the use of Sanskritic term of *bhartā*, the “one who provides for”, instead of the Dravidian *mogru* (man) may have become popular only in recent decades, normatively it has been a man's express obligation to provide or contribute to corporate provision for the needs of his family. His wife, on the other hand, must attend efficiently and devotedly to 'household world' (*inti-sansaram*) – the inner space. Keeping the house clean and in order (*neati*), caring for children and culinary skills, are feminine attributes of a wife the possession of which men and women often relate to a husband's 'good luck' and reputation. Her responsibilities also relate specifically to caring for/attending to her husband within this space; providing him with food, organising his bath, preparing bed and clothes and giving

him sexual pleasure (*sambharam*) are her responsibilities. Indeed, being cared for in these deferential forms is the idiom in which husbands speak of intimate conjugal co-habitation (*kapuram*), happiness (*santosham*) and love/attachment (*premā*), or conversely, pain/envy (*vedanā/nuppi*) and detachment (*virakti*). Another ideal attribute for a wife is her deference to the patrilocal group of blood-relatives. Her brawls with them – or with others outside the family - underline her disregard for the culturally sanctioned role of her husband to represent her grievances and if need be, defend her. Likewise, while with age and seniority ('seniarity') she may come to advise her husband who may or may not take it seriously, an independent decision on her part about household matters certainly undermines her husband's authority (*contra* Trawick 1990:179). Lastly, given that public spaces are largely masculine, she is expected to be discreet towards men in public.

In day-to-day life, one or both spouses often contravene these ideal, code bound gender practices (*paddhatti*). However, akin to Herzfeld's account (p. 124), conventionally contraventions on the part of a husband have merely implied a further proof of his manhood. R. Sreeramlu would play *pullikatta*, a chequerboard game men played in the bazaar, whole day long while his wife undertook a great deal of agricultural work in the *thoTa* that he ought to have been doing. Likewise, Narayan Reddy, whom I have referred to above, neglects the headman's role to enjoy the patently masculine pursuits of *koDipandem* (cock fights) and frequent drinking. A most vivid illustration, however, of the extent of elasticity of transgression by a man of his role as a husband in transacting masculinities is the *pandem* (duel) between Mallikarjuna and Ramesh (Ch. 6 below) wherein Mallikarjuna bets and loses his field with standing crop for two years to Ramesh. On the other hand, given the largely subsistence oriented dry land agriculture with frequent seasonal troughs, women's work across castes has straddled reproductive and productive arenas. During the drought of 1987-89, wives worked with their menfolk outside the village in a government public work programme. Indeed, men

reluctantly agree that a women's productive work (i.e., public mobility) is indispensable for reproduction (*kaDpu kosham*: “for feeding a stomach”). Yet, in what instantiates the Gramscian notion of hegemony (cf. Connell, p. 71), transgressions of gender roles by men have conventionally represented masculine dominance, a given fact, but those by a female have represented a challenge, except in necessary and hence defensible circumstances. A most important means available to men to restore hegemony in such situations has been through punishment.

The institution of punishment fully reproduces the practice of hegemonic *paurusham* in that it flows uni-directionally from a husband to his wife. This is not to suggest that a wife has no means of punishment available to her. She may reprimand him or deny him sex for small transgressions. She may also threaten to leave, or leave him to return to her father's household after discovering his extra-marital relationship with another woman. However, in comparison to her, a husband commands a broader range of situations wherein her transgressions ought not to go unpunished and in most of these situations corporal punishment of varying degree is both sanctioned and applied. If food cooked by her is unsatisfactory, a verbal reprimand or rejection (i.e. leaving the food) may be enough although a folk song sung by young girls during *Gowramma puja* sanctions violence : “*Uppu Khārmu takwā aite, vanga petti gunda radu*” (If salt and spices are found lacking in the food (that I prepare), my husband shall bend my head and smack me on my back). However, her audacity in talking back (*yadurga martlaDiste*), a sign of her having “excess of fat” (*kovvu aqua unnai*) must not be tolerated - the defiant fat must be purged. On the day when D. Fatima (26) was being beaten by her husband for making a caustic remark about his property, N. Reddy, who is known for frequently beating his wife, said to me; “I search for a mistake (by his wife) – she must talk properly to me and others. If she deviates a bit, she shall get it (i.e. a beating).” Clearly, Maula Ali (Fatima's husband), N. Reddy and 5 other husbands whose beating of their wives I came to witness or learn of

(excluding the SC colony) in the course of my stay, were using wife-battering as an idiom of performance (Goffman 1958: 8). Such performances have conventionally been conflated with a man's/husband's ordinary reproductive chores. A local saying, “*katti narkettinapudu, bharya kottinapudu daggiraki poghurdu*”, is noteworthy in cautioning people against going close to a man who is chopping logs or beating his wife; both acts raise the spectre of self-harm for the intruder (also see Herzfield 1985: 61). As researches in family violence have underlined (Gelles 1980: 875), the complicity of wives in sanctioning the violent exercise of *paurusham* by their husbands has also been vivid. Relating to the exclusive prerogative of her husband to beat her, the refrain of the *Chakali* daughter in law to her *mama* during the fracas was; “who are you to beat me; are you my man”? (Compare with Ulrich's cases, 1987: 274)

However, men emphasize that the most serious transgression (*pedda tappu*) by a wife is to participate in an illicit or extra-marital relationship (*akram sambandham*). I suggest below (Ch. 6) that the concern for chastity and the obligatory use of violence is a new development that is associated with the process of democratisation of honour and civility (*nagarikatvam*). The sexual transgression of a wife strikes at the very heart of male subjectivity. More than a reflection of a woman's sexual lust which in any case is given, it expresses a man's failure in sexually 'saturating' (*truptinchu*) her, which is compounded by his failure in shielding her from becoming an object of lust to another man. The seriousness of this transgression warrants corporal punishment of extreme severity – even if it leads to her death<sup>16</sup>. Some first-hand accounts of a husband beating his wife to death after having seen (her) in the act (*kanlara chusinaDu*) would suggest that such a course of action is not always just a normative proposition for him. I hasten to add, however, that such an extreme punishment is not inevitable. Indeed, male

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to the section on illicit relationship in Ch. 6 for a fuller discussion on the subject.

discourses on punishing an adulterous wife in particular and a rebellious one in general tread the narrow conceptual distinctions between malehood (i.e., things that men think and do to be men) and manliness [i.e., a belief that some men are manlier than others (Gautman 1997:386, Herzfield 1985)]. Men believe that a husband's capacity to punish his wife is strongly mediated by his sense of manliness, that is his capacity to express his *paurusham* by violent punishment; "some men seriously attend to it (a wife's mistake), some don't" (*kontamandi pattinchkuntaDu*; *kontamandi pattichkoru*). As Connell (2005: 83) rightly suggests, punishing a wife violently or not, and the nature of the transgression for which she is punished, is a transaction in masculinity in which some men gain *paurusham* while others lose it.

These three conventional idioms of evaluating and transacting *paurusham*, namely providing for the household, indulgence in masculine socialities and keeping their wives in control - often violently, are also the idioms in which men articulate the transition in gender relations. Most NRP men would agree with Narayan Reddy, one of the hyper-masculine husbands, that a wife is no longer fearful/deferential (*bhayam ledu*) towards her husband/men (see Excerpt 3.4). Of course, rebellions and violent confrontations by a wife – the "heroic breaks in everyday routine" (Bourdieu 2001; viii) - have been known in the past as well. However, if how Chakeerappa (70) was beaten up by his wife and her sister about 20 years ago is an allegory of an individual male's emasculation, her subsequent beating and banishment from her house (and from the village) by men of the village is a matching allegory for the immediate restoration of masculine order. These days, however, rebellions by, and confrontations with, a wife are popularly related as constituting a 'systemic social disorder/crisis' (Connell, p. 84) or, *arajakata*. There are three aspects to this sense of systemic social crisis in conjugality. First, confrontations with wives are becoming markedly general, both in terms of the number of households in which she is said to act at variance with her husband's

decisions, and the nature of issues on which confrontations are likely to occur. Secondly, there is a growing consciousness amongst men that the hegemonic practice of violence is not only difficult nowadays in view of a man's desire to preserve his civility in public, but that the practice of violence can also redound on him. Whilst the threat of suicide by P. Reddy's rebellious wife circumscribes his practice of violent *paurusham*, Shankariah's wife ritually 'kills' Shankariah in a domestic dispute. This is not to suggest that all men are emasculated by such difficulties; indeed some like N. Reddy use them as an excuse to transact more masculinity. Thirdly, the scope for collective restoration of masculinity and symbolic violence in the event of its loss due to a wife's transgressions, as one would expect in the case of Shankariah, is remarkably rare now. Overall, there is an opening in gender relations where men's hegemonic control of decision making and discipline over his wife is more liable to be contested than not.

#### Excerpt 3.4

N: (you say) Women do not listen to men (now). An example in which a wife does not listen?

NR: (Smirking) There are so many! Take my brother's (FBS) wife. When she came to live with him after marriage, they lived in a joint *kutumbam*. Peddi Reddy and Malli Reddy together. Then, she began to object (*ichileDu*) to her husband giving some thing, such as *gorru* (hoe) or *guntaka* (leveller) when some one came to ask for it. She once did that to me; I went for a *madakaa* (plough), she said, "What a beggar you are (*Yenta pedda yachakaDu, nuvvu!*). To come asking like this". I said I do not want to talk to a woman.

N: Then..

NR: She even refused to allow her husband give things to Malli Reddy (her younger brother-in-law). She would pick a fight at the water tap with other women. Her husband would beat her black and blue (*apudu adhimanga kottutunnaDu*).

N: Why?

NR: Then do what? She would pick up a fight here and there...would not talk to people properly (*marsanga martalaDru*).

N: But, why did she do all this?

NR: Too much fat (*Kovvu aqua*)...it has increased these days; women do not give you respect at all (*adulu asala maryadaivuru*).

N: Why?

NR: They have no fear (*bhayam*) now, of their husbands. Earlier, they were under control (*sashanam*). These days...you know Durgam Shankariah...lives) in the inside lane at the bazaar. You must have seen him. He has a flock of sheep and he takes them for grazing. If he loses one sheep, his wife shouts at him. She would not give him food and she would not eat either. One day after a fight, she took off her *tallibottu* (necklace) and *Kalimeteru* (toe-ring) and said that to her he was dead ...will you believe this?

N: But he could beat her up, couldn't he?

NR: Yes, but look at Peddi Reddy's wife. He does not beat her up now. One day he beat her up...she went and drank pesticide. Since then, he does not say anything – 'do what you want'.

Amongst the various reasons why such a seemingly important shift in gender relations should take place, one which the male discourse ignores is the increasing importance of household female labour in bore-well oriented agriculture. The widespread adoption of new technology has rendered many conventionally male-dominated farming tasks either gender-neutral or feminine. In general, given the availability of water, *thoTa* fields for groundnut is ploughed twice, vertically and horizontally (this is locally known as *yerrasala* sowings) as compared to the dry fields that are ploughed only once (*okkasala* sowing). Whilst this allows for a denser sowing in *thoTa*, *yerrassala* sowing also renders hoe-driven weeding - a man's work - impossible. Likewise, while the traditional variety of groundnut, TMV.3 (*natticinkai*) required hoe-driven harvesting owing to its widely spread out root system, TMV.2 is harvested by hand in wet and dry land (unless the field is too dry) due to its bunch-root system. Hence, both de-weeding and harvesting groundnut crop has now become more feminised than it was earlier. Application of root-based fertilisers has become a feminine chore and indeed, even in the application of pesticides, which men insist is a heavy masculine job, women often help men in preparing the concoction or refilling the sprayer. Overall, taking groundnut crop as

the dominant crop in the village, women of the household appear to work roughly as much on the farm as men do (Ch.2; footnote 84, Table 2.16). Moreover, they are many times more likely to work as *kullies* than their men (*ibid*). It is little wonder that despite gendered wages, the overall amount of wages earned by women across the classes are higher than those earned by men (below).

**Table 3.4** *Average monthly wages earned by men and women amongst peasant classes\**

Class	men	women
1. Large farmers	--	--
2. Middle farmers	Rs. 713.6 (+10.28 kg rice)	Rs. 841.8 (+5.28 kg rice)
3. Small farmers	Rs. 2,806 (+42.6 kg rice)	Rs. 2,389 (+16.6 kg rice)
4. Marginal farmers	Rs. 1201.11 (+3 kg rice)	Rs. 1533.33 (+6.3 kg rice)

Source: Field sample survey (2005-06)

Notes: \* Includes those households only who participate in the daily wage labour market (i.e. excludes permanent and semi-permanent or attached labour)

Absence of any entry against large farmers suggests that women from these households do not participate in the wage labour market at all.

Includes wages earned by participating in the government employment generation scheme as well. Since wages are given on family basis and not on individual basis in these programmes, I have divided the wages (cash and in kind) earned in equal half for equal number of days worked by a man and his wife.

These statistics imply that, as feminist theories have suggested (cf. Moor, Ch.5), the burden of reproductive labour has grown disproportionately on women since the arrival of bore-well technology. Besides taking the gendered role of social and biological reproduction of a household, their labour has also become key to its economic reproduction. Given their vital role in the productive arena, women use it as one of the levers to scrutinise and explicitly contest the hegemonic conduct of *paurusham* by their husbands in the reproductive arena. Within the set up of a joint family, this not only implies that wives are more conscious and articulate about their own conjugal interest, but also that their notion of conjugal interest itself is transforming (Excerpt 3.5). Secondly, and more generally, from a wife's perspective,

the conventional indulgences of *paurusham*, such as a husband's autonomous expenditure on eating out or drinking with friends or spending time with them in the bazaar are patently 'wasteful' and hence they usually become points of friction. Illustrating this, M. Reddy told me in the bazaar, "Now, I am talking with you. When I go home she (wife) shall start asking where have I been? Would Kumar (this researcher) give you food that you were talking to him until now? If I remain silent, it is ok. If I do not, then conflict (*ghoDwa*) starts". Indeed, to the extent that both the scope for enjoying masculine indulgences and their forms have vastly expanded now (Ch. 4. below), increased scrutiny and contestations by a wife translate into higher likelihood of domestic friction and violence if indulgent husbands are, unlike M. Reddy, not prepared to forfeit their conventional claims to *paurusham*. Many suicides of spouses relate to this new scope for friction (Ch. 6 below).

If her growing productive role helps the understanding of a wife's bolstered bargaining position vis-à-vis her husband, the formation of new aspirations around social mobility and modernity on her part, is another aspect of the changing conjugal relation. Akin to a man's heightened self-reflexivity as a father, son or brother, whether expressed in the universalistic frames of 'wanting to develop', or in competitive frames of upward social mobility, a wife also demonstrates her own reflexivity of upward mobility. In other words, stress on conjugal relationship also emanates from the fact that a wife is as likely to articulate herself being inferior as a son is, in relation to her affinal or uterine kin who she sees as becoming more 'developed'. The conversation between S. Reddy and his wife (Excerpt 3.5), in which this researcher is strategically implicated by the wife as a ratified participant (Goffman 1981:10) whilst she lays out her expectations of mobility, illustrates a rather subtle form of reflexivity. Although semantically within the sanctioned position of beseeching her husband, she is associating (Goffman 1981: 8) the homologies of upward mobility, i.e., education/town, urban life/comfort and urban

life/honour, in a patently competitive frame so that her husband stands fully implicated as a failed husband. The other 'successful' ones – the template for her self-production in a Lacanian sense (cf. Trawick 1994: 144) - are her brother and sister-in-law whose family has long been settled in the town. Evidently, to S. Reddy himself, as *Kapu*, this implication was not lost; after we came out of the house, he said he felt his wife's statements as poisonous "barbs that constantly pierced him" (*yellavelalla gunchutundi*). Although a party to the joint project of educating their children and hence subjected in Lacan's sense (*ibid*), he did not wish to sell the village land in order to settle down in the town – as suggested by his wife but opposed by his father. It is this sense of growing subject-hood, entrapped by conflicting objectives in his role as a father, husband and a son, that led him to draw an analogy between his condition and that of those men who were led to commit suicide ("ma etle waDu mandu tragic sachipoach"; also see Parry 1979: 178). It is also this sense of projectivity and subject-hood which possibly deterred him from punishing her violently, as other husbands often do.

#### Excerpt 3.5

W: See (looking at N), you have gone to a foreign country to study. He (looking at her husband) never cared to study (*chudvu gurinchi asal phatickola*). All others have gone to the town. Here, for our children; there is no future for them to study in the village.

H: They (the children) have to wait for the auto to reach the school in time and they often miss the class.

W: But that is why I have been telling you to go to the town (to settle down). For five years now...(Looking at N again) but he does not pay any attention.

H: But what could I do (the pitch of his voice raised, looking sternly at his wife)...in last five years...there has not been a single good crop...just enough for all to eat...nothing more (*yemi mingaLe*) ...this year we have sunk a bore...

W: Uunh (muttering in resentment, eyes downward cast) everyday, I have to walk in to the sun (*yenda*) to fetch water...stand for so long there...when so many people are around...

H:(Looks at N) That is why *I* go to fetch water now.

W: (Again at N) How often...once, twice, then?

H: (Looking at the tea cup in N's hand and noting that the tea is finished) you have finished, let's go to the shop.

### **3.3.3 Relationship amongst brothers; rising *swartham* and quicker household partition**

As many students of the family system in India have pointed out (e.g. Parry 1979: 162-166, Shah 1998:85), fraternal relationships in NRP intertwine the notion of symmetry founded on identical “source of origin” and coparcener’s claims with the asymmetry of unequal age. To take the point of asymmetry first, the higher the disparity of age between two brothers, the clearer the features of asymmetrical relationship. Since higher age implies seniority (*seniarity*), the deference given to a father is also extended to a much older brother, although such deference is categorically qualified (unlike Parry’s high caste informants, p. 161). Mutual avoidance, restrained conversations and use of honorific term of address – *aNNa* – on the part of a younger brother, mark their mutual interactions. A minor difference in age (i.e. of 2-3 years), however, allows for a remarkable relaxation in interactional and expressive rules; once again, unlike Parry’s high caste Kangra brothers (p.161), younger siblings in NRP use a singular second person of *nuVVu* (you) as a term of address for an elder and although they still conspicuously avoid an elder brother, their conversation is relatively less inhibited in as much as emotions and expressions of dissent are clearly expressed. Age also mediates the delegations of responsibilities between them. Seniority enables an elder brother to undertake various household responsibilities that require a higher degree of skill and management and explains why he is far likelier to take on agricultural responsibilities whilst his younger sibling may take on livestock tending. An elder brother’s seniority ensures that he takes the headmanship from his father and is in a position to command his brothers. In accord with the principle of singular

*pettannam*, fathers play little role in influencing the way he commands his siblings (*contra* Shah, *ibid*).

However, an elder brother's headmanship is moral to a degree that exceeds that of a father because, although culturally sanctioned by the hierarchy of age, its legitimacy rests solely on fraternal trust or *nammakkam* (also Gould 2007: 369). Recognising its brittleness, both folklore and popular expressions harp on blood/milk ties; since "brothers are born from the same mother", they must always be tied by trust.

However, as the head of a household, the onus of preserving *nammakkam* lies expressly with an elder brother. Two specific areas of household responsibility, namely the fair division of labour on the farm and fair management of household finances, relate crucially to sustenance and augmentation of trust and, by implication, to the quality of this bond. The division of work, an exclusive privilege of an elder brother, must show earnest parity (*nispakshanga*). In a household with mixed farming the impartiality of work allocation is rather easily ensured by way of sectoral bifurcation of responsibilities; one looks after agriculture while the other tends livestock. However, this is rendered difficult in wholly agricultural households. Any absence from work, except in periods of severe illness, represents a selfish, deliberate act of shirking one's responsibilities. Moreover, since certain chores such as the marketing of crops, buying inputs or managing irrigation on-field are physically less intensive (they are called *neerDalopani*, or the work in shade) than tilling or weeding, the ethos of *nammakkam* requires an elder brother to undertake physically demanding chores (*kastampani*) in equal measure, in addition to attending to the less intensive responsibilities that are his exclusive prerogative. Even a seeming failure on his part to ensure this impartiality has the potential to appear, or to be publicly construed as violation of the notion of trust. It may set off

an irreversible process (*pace* Parry 1979: 178) of mutual suspicion (*anumanam*) and eventual rupture of fraternal ties<sup>17</sup>.

As regards household finances, since an elder brother commands the entire repertoire of financial activities including handling overall income, debt, loans, consumption and investments, the importance of preservation of *nammakkam* on his part cannot be overstated. Of course, his appropriation of the household income or credit for the purpose of drinking alcohol, gambling or maintaining illicit/extramarital relationships constitute an overt violation of trust reposed in him. Equally discrediting but far more general have been such discreet forms of selfish (*swartham*) appropriation as concealing a part of the household income to benefit his conjugal unit by under-reporting the income accruing from his sector of responsibility; by inflating liabilities in the form of pending debts or, by discreetly lending a part of the overall income under his wife's name. It is, therefore, incumbent upon an elder brother not only to regulate and evenly distribute all consumption within the household, but also to share the information concerning financial transactions with his other brother(s). Eldest brothers, who are the head of a joint family, may be found accounting aloud in conversation as to how clothes for all the members are purchased together (having roughly the same price) on select occasions (i.e. *Ugadi*, the Telugu new year or the Dussehra festival). They also present an account of household income and investments – past, present and prospective – in their daily conversations<sup>18</sup>. In a nutshell, an elder brother's financial headmanship is very much akin to household trusteeship.

However, as has been frequently pointed out (Shah 1998:86-87, Parry 1979:178), maintaining the high ideals of *nammakkam* in everyday life has conventionally been

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<sup>17</sup>A proverb says as much: 'punDu putindi, benDu mandu' [the wound is born, (now) the scar (of wound) shall not (never) go away].

<sup>18</sup> A one line injunction for an elder brother is: "yeppuDuaina 'nadi' anugurdu, anukoni pani chaigurdu; 'manadi' anala, mankosham chaiyala (never say 'mine' and act that way, always say 'ours' and act for 'us').

difficult, if not impossible. Ensuring a proportionately equal work-load has been difficult in wholly farming based households (such as, amongst the Reddys) having a number of male siblings, especially when fathers are known to be lenient in delegating intensive work to their youngest son. Similarly, several cases of financial embezzlement on the part of an elder brother are also known. As Madan and others have noted (in Parry, p. 178), such cases reflect both an unavoidable structural conflict between fraternal and conjugal and parental bonds as well as between the duties of an elder brother and the unbridled indulgences of *paurusham*. In one particularly notorious instance, a *Kuruba* elder brother heading a joint household of 4 (2 unmarried) brothers clandestinely accumulated a massive debt of about Rs. 150,000 owing to his 'drinking and eating' and the family had to sell its entire flock of about 300 sheep to settle the debt. Yet, while keeping a fuller discussion of household partitions for later, I broadly agree with Epstein's suggestion – albeit Parry considers it only of secondary importance (p. 151-178) - that intensive cash crop cultivation in the village in place of partially commoditized, mixed farming has exacerbated the problems of maintaining fraternal trust. In other words, whilst I do not suggest an exclusive causal relationship between an extension of the cash economy and the decay of joint families as Epstein (cited in Parry; *ibid*) does, it is my contention that the extension of the cash economy has exacerbated the scope for fraternal distrust and conflict long before a younger brother is married, with serious emotional ramifications for those involved.

Taking the issue of equal division of labour, the conventional practice of mixed farming as a typical livelihood strategy in NRP has helped to maintain fraternal trust. Bifurcation of sectoral responsibilities and periodic transhumance have not only reduced the scope for a conflictual scrutiny of one another's work-load, but also provided a built-in mechanism to circumscribe an elder brother's complete dominance (*adhipatyam*) in the financial affairs of the household (Excerpt 3.6).

However, the decline in livestock rearing and growing commercialisation of

agriculture has produced two conflicting tendencies in the last two decades. An intensification of agricultural activities causing an upsurge in the demand for household labour has been accompanied by growing spatial compartmentalisation (to use Singer's term, 2007: 438) of agricultural activities. In place of the single *Mungari* cycle of groundnut-coarse millet-pigeon pea cultivation, the widespread adoption of bore wells has extended the agricultural calendar round the year. As a result, the requirement for household labour for physically intensive on-farm work or *kullie* work has intensified. Yet, the practice of commercial agriculture has also, of necessity, heightened the need to engage in various off-farm "easy" chores such as buying/accessing inputs, replacing /repairing tools and machinery in the town and, visiting cities such as Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru to sell the crop. Needless to say that the higher the market value of the crop grown, the higher the need for specialised participation in exchange markets (and other off-farm work) and the higher the tendency of a brother, generally the eldest one, to abstain from on-farm chores (Table 3.5). Narayan Reddy's eldest brother, S. Reddy, who took the headmanship of the joint-family of 4 brothers, was accused by his second (unmarried) brother of "touring the town while they worked in the field" and soon after his marriage, the latter began to press for partition. During one such conflict, aggrieved by his brother's repeated accusations (*tagada*), S. Reddy felt so angry and detached ("virakti puttinaī") that he immediately left the household and the village with his conjugal family, vowing never to return again – a vow he maintained for a decade until all his brothers were married.

Table 3.5

Crop and number of days spent in exchange markets\*

Crop markets	No. of labour days spent in exchange
1. Groundnut (in rain fed conditions)	0-3 (crop duration of 5-6months)
2. Groundnut (in <i>thota</i> )	6-8
3. Chilli	25-30 (crop duration of 6-8 months)

- These are rough estimates based upon an average number of work days (comprising eight hours, for which a day's wage is paid) that a farmer forgoes on account of his visits outside the village. It should also be added that the figures presented here exclude the number of days spent in securing credit from institutional sources.

Similarly, the rapid monetisation of the village economy and its interface with the town has also opened up the scope for distrust and serious conflict amongst brothers concerning financial matters before they are married. NRP is certainly different from Chadhiar in that an external cash remittance from brothers play very little role in determining the quality of fraternal relations (Parry, p. 177). Nonetheless, intensive cash cropping has vastly expanded the scope for generating individual incomes even for an adolescent boy, primarily from casual daily wages and from petty investments in the credit market. It is very normal these days for younger unmarried brothers to keep a part of such incomes for their own consumption, calling it 'their own money' (*swantam dabbu*), although this amounts to selfish "stealing away" (*daspettaDDam*) in the strict sense of *nammakkam*. Jeetendra (17) keep roughly Rs. 500-600 per month for his own '*enjay*' rather than giving it to his elder brother and admits that this has often led to violent altercations with the latter. Likewise, Raja (22), a paramedic in the village, lent Rs. 2,000 to Jaiamma in my presence. I do not think his elder married brother, the headman of the household, was aware of this. This early opportunity to earn money and enjoy lifestyle allows adolescents and young men to construct an idea of personal self-interest (Dumont's economic category of individualism, 1986:14) and they make heavy emotional investments in cultivating this idea. Indeed, as Medick and Sabean (1984: Introduction) emphasize, just how sharp such constructions of self-interest are and how quickly they call into question

the dominant idioms of *paurusham*, is vividly illustrated in the suicide of T. Reddy. An unmarried *Kapu* man (25 years) from a large landholding family in K. *mandal*, he lent his elder married brother (30 years) Rs. 2000 to sink a bore well in a partnership. However, when continuously pressed to return the loan, his elder brother not only refused to do so but also assaulted K. Reddy in front of other household members for daring to demand the money. K. Reddy retaliated first by threatening to commit suicide and when dared to do so, poisoned himself to death (in 2002).

Such distrust concerning division of work and finances is certainly sharpened by the 'structural cleavage' (Fortes 1949 in Parry 1979:155), that is the conflict between the conjugal and collateral-lineal roles of brother after his marriage. Hence, partition has been considered to be a normal phase in the development cycle of a joint-household. Yet, as Parry (following Fortes) rightly emphasizes to some extent, the structural cleavage interacts with the wider economy to produce a pattern of the timing at which partitions – whether lineal or collateral – take place. In other words, the longevity of joint households depends much on whether wider social and economic processes aggravate or constrain the role-related frictions. In Parry's report of Chadhiar (p. 181), the friction appears to be constrained so long as brothers working in the cities remit cash to their joint household within the village. In NRP, on the contrary, the structural cleavages are aggravated owing to the specific manner of the entrenchment of the cash economy. In the following paragraphs, I shall try to show this and argue that it is a reason why joint-households are now breaking up within 2-5 years of the marriage of a son, or a brother, in complete disregard of the cultural injunction that partition should be initiated only after all siblings are married.

Household partitions in NRP are expressed as the terminal point of a process in which the acts of economic self-interest/expectations (*swartham/apeksha*) on the

part of a son/brother have led to an irretrievable loss of deference and trust amongst his siblings. The creation of a conjugal unit is central to the negative interplay of corporate trust and self-interest. The recruitment of a wife and affines to the family (even if it is a cross-cousin marriage) occasions a thorough realignment of roles and responsibilities on the part of the spouses. Post marriage, as we have noted, a wife becomes the explicit and exclusive responsibility of her husband and both her productive and reproductive responsibilities must be mediated (only) through his authority. In carrying out his role, a husband is also increasingly drawn closer to his affines. He visits them regularly while his wife takes a long residence (about 10 months) at her native home during her first pregnancy. Such visits often initiate the scope for friction amongst brothers in an extended family. Frequent absence from farm responsibilities as well as expenses incurred on account of such visits are manifestly acts of *swartham*; the former may lead to a breach in equity of workload while the latter may violate the condition of financial fairness by using corporate income for conjugal interests. Even a father may be implicated if he is known to have given more money to one son (usually the younger) than the others for these visits. In M. Reddy's family, R. K. Reddy was married into a village farther away than that of his younger sibling. However, both received an equal amount of Rs. 200 – an impressive sum in 1980s- from their father to visit their wives. Taking advantage of the relative proximity, the younger brother saved money by commuting on bicycle and invested it in the credit market in his in-law's village. When R.K. Reddy and his wife learnt of this, they demanded a higher amount and frequent tussles ensued between the two daughters-in-law.

However, as Parry points out (p. 185), the consciousness amongst conjugal units that they constitute a distinct interest group is directly related to their differential memberships in terms of the number of offspring they have. As a father, a married brother is conscious of his own lineal responsibilities and hence partition and its timing are of strategic importance to him. In broad terms, demands for partition

are based upon (a). the size and the constitution of labour pool within a conjugal family at a given point of time vis-à-vis its land and livestock entitlements, (b). the financial contribution that a conjugal unit makes to the larger unit, (c). the current and expected financial gains and liabilities of the conjugal unit vis-à-vis other unit (s) on account of its consumption and marriages of offspring and siblings. The case of partition in the Durgam family about 15 years back (Excerpt 3.6) illustrates the extent to which brothers have been likely to transgress the ideals of *nammakkam* in pursuit of their lineal interests. As the eldest brother, Lakshmanna's decision to divide early on is based on his idea that his conjugal unit, much smaller in size than the rest of the household, stands to lose financially due to the higher current consumption of the rest of the family as well as the impending liabilities on the corporate income on account of siblings' marriages<sup>19</sup>. Further, his adolescent sons can be used as male labour for livestock rearing whilst he takes up agriculture. The conditions are reversed for Narayana; anxious about the scarcity of land on a *per capita* basis for his larger conjugal unit – and subsidised by Oblesh's share of land - his strategy is to defer partition for as long as possible.

#### Excerpt 3.6

"Lakshmanna, Obanna, Narayana and Oblesh are four brothers with Chandramma, a sister. Lakshmanna was married early on and within 8 years of marriage, he had three sons born to him and he separated his household. Chandramma was married 2 yrs later in Koppalakonda. In the next five years, all three brothers were married and remained together. Their joint flock of sheep grew up in number and its sale enabled them to purchase three acres of canal irrigated land in Koppalakonda. Obanna was slightly "*mental*" and had no male issue, just one daughter. Narayana had three sons and Oblesh had just one son. Obanna married his daughter to Chandramma's eldest son (FZS/MBD).

Being the sole heir to her father's *bhagam* (coparcenary share), Obanna's daughter staked her claim upon it to her uncles in NRP. But both Narayana and Oblesh argued that because she was already married in a well-off family with wet land while they

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<sup>19</sup>To the extent that dowries were less in vogue 20 years back, he did not stand to gain from receipt of income on account of his brothers' marriages.

had a big extended family to run with only dry land, she should leave this *bhagam* to them. They said they were ready to give her the three acres of land purchased by the three brothers in the same village and Rs.50,000 (a running market value of one acre of land that was her father's share in it) in return for this. When Lakshmanna came to know of it, he also joined the race by telling his two brothers that he was ready to give an equal share of Rs. 50,000 to get a share in Obanna's share of property. Narayana and Oblesh told him, "You divided your household when we were young and left us like orphans and now you have come to ask for a share". Lakshmanna was greatly disappointed. Obanna's daughter agreed to take the three-acre plot and Rs. 50, 000 and gave up her claim to her father's share in the joint property of 500 sheep, 20 acres of land and the house in NRP. Narayana and Oblesh agreed to divide Obanna's share after his death.

But then, because he had three sons in comparison to Oblesh's one, Narayana thought that a splitting of Obanna's share of the property meant loss for him and his sons. He requested Oblesh to have the property divided on the basis of the number of sons they each had. He added that they could deal with this matter later, but Oblesh was alerted. Meanwhile, Obanna passed away leaving the two brothers in full charge of the household. Narayana became the household head and took the responsibility for agricultural chores while Oblesh took control of the livestock. They began to cheat on each other (*fullga tinnaru*); Oblesh gave a lesser amount than he had actually earned to his brother, saying that he had sold lesser number of sheep in the market or the prices were low. On the other hand, Narayana underreported the agricultural yield and over-reported credit liabilities by showing false credit notes.

A further incentive for early partition is pending indebtedness (*baki*) in a father's or elder brother's headmanship. In the event of debts flowing from a father's headmanship, an elder brother may think that he contributes a disproportionately higher share of his income towards servicing debts while receiving the same amount of assets (*hasti*) at the time of division, as his younger brother(s). The custom of awarding *jyesthabagham*, an additional voluntary gift of assets to the elder brother besides his coparcener's share, which is akin to *juthandu* in Kangra (Parry, p. 167), recognises some of these difficulties, although it does not necessarily address them. The *jyesthabagam* offered is very nominal – a couple of sheep or in rare cases, half an acre of land, that is, if it is at all given. Given the

structural cleavage and the disadvantages that accrue to an elder brother who chooses to stay longer in a joint-family, it may be asked how separating tendencies amongst brothers have conventionally been restrained. The answer possibly lies in the nature of conventional household economy and partially in the cultural and jural 'principles of jointness'. Firstly, in a precarious and subsistence-based agrarian economy, extended families have conventionally afforded a larger pool of male labour to pursue both livestock-rearing and agriculture, as is evident from table 3.6. The implication is that smaller conjugal units with only (a) girl child(ren), or one son, or with minor sons would be less inclined to press for partition in a household which depended on mixed farming. Secondly, such elder brothers who maintained impartiality in both roles of son-brother and husband-father, have been ascribed greater manhood publicly; they are said to have performed well (*nirupinchaDam*) and receive *maryada*. To lend jural weight to all this, an elderly father has also maintained jointness by refusing to partition the joint estate pending the marriage of all his offspring unless the son demanding partition is ready to give away a sum from his share of ancestral property towards the prospective expenditure on marriage for all his siblings.

*Table 3.6      Livelihood profile of households before division in NRP*

Activities	No. of Households
1. Sheep/goat rearing only	--
2. Sheep + Dry land cultivation	9
3. Sheep + Dry land + Well-irrigated <i>thota</i>	9
4. Sheep + Dry land + Borewell-irrigated <i>thota</i>	1
5. Dry land + Borewell <i>thota</i> only	1
6. Dry land + Petty business	1
7. Dry land + agri.wage labour work + petty services (carpentry/tailoring/washing)	4

N=25

Notes: This is from a list of those divided households, about which I could collect a reasonably detailed data. In this list, however, the divisions in both SC and *Kapu* households are significantly under-represented.

The four regulative constraint to partitions enumerated above, namely economic, demographic, cultural and jural restrictions, are becoming less relevant than earlier

and they are hastening fissions in joint families (as Table 3.7 suggests). Several instances in which an elder son/brother partitioned his household long before the marriage of his sibling(s), in which case the latter lived with his/her parents, show that the cultural and jural injunctions against partition pending marriage are regularly transgressed. Indeed, somewhat contrary to Parry's findings (p. 179), that landed interests stabilise lineal joint families, all the 6 eldest sons who have initiated partition first (between 1995-2005), and that too within 2-5 years of their marriage, did so despite having been denied a share in the ancestral property and livestock. In other words, quicker lineal and collateral fissions relate to increasing economic viability ("*opika/askaram*") of a dividing household, especially when it is smaller, in the wake of a changing agrarian economy. The often-heard, and partially correct, explanation for early divisions is that nowadays "there is confidence of somehow managing to earn a livelihood (*yedo okkapani chaise bathkuntamu dhima undi*)" even when one is refused a share in the joint estate. Both Gopala (32) and Thimappa's (26) households have recently divided from their father's joint family without receiving a share of the joint estate (around 3-4 acres of dry land). Since then both have depended on casual daily *kullie* work, tailoring and share-cropping. Krishnamurthy's (34) household, which he separated without his share of land (around 15 acres) in expectations of maximising his economic interests, has depended on tailoring by both spouses and profitable livestock trading. The extension of the bore-well oriented cash economy has provided a margin of economic viability that was hitherto unavailable to a new conjugal unit and, hence early partition is now on an incline.

Table 3.7

Particulars of collateral partitions of joint households

a. The number of cases of division	25
b. Duration of married brothers staying together (counted from the marriage of elder son/brother)	
i. More than 10 yrs	6
ii. 5-10 yrs	9
iii. 2-5 yrs	10
c. The number of cases where unmarried siblings were present at the time of division	11
d. The number of cases where the eldest brother divided the household first	6

Further, in a departure from Kolenda's observation (2007:341) that the growing phenomena of dowries stabilises joint-families, dowries in NRP appear to have provided another incentive for early partition amongst non-SC families. Dowries have at least two components with correspondingly different entitlements. Whilst gold (*bangaru*) in the form of jewellery is generally presented at the time of marriage as a gift to the bride and hence, purportedly remains in her possession, the cash component of a dowry is presented to the bridegroom. A son may give this cash to the father as the household head, who could use it at his discretion; I was told of some instances in which a father used it to clear debts, and in others, he ploughed it into the credit business. However, a married son is now more likely to retain both the cash and gold dowry for his own conjugal unit, if his relationship with his father or with other male siblings are devoid of *nammakkam*. Krisnamurthy, for instance, received a sum of Rs. 25,000 in cash as his dowry. With the help of his affines, he clandestinely ploughed it back into the short-term credit business in their village and within two years of his marriage, the investment had grown into Rs. 40, 000, giving him the confidence to separate his household. In other words, a dowry is not only the nucleus of individual property to be reclaimed at the time of eventual partition, as Parry says (p. 187); it is also an individual property that may be strategically arranged to prepare for partition. Incidentally, as Kolenda has rightly observed (2007:341), the commercialisation of agriculture and large gifts of dowry are often interlinked in that it is successful *thoTa* cultivators who have given away (or received) some of the fattest dowries in recent years.

Increasing emphasis on dowries in marriages has also made affines important catalysts in encouraging partition (or physical separation) early on. Deriving a new legitimacy as 'givers' of dowry, they often moot the proposal of partition (or physical separation) to their son-in-law after their daughter complains to them about uneven division of chores in the household or 'harassment' at the hand of her mother-in-law. Such complaints concerning the uneven division of household chores between a wife and her sisters-in-law or tussles with her mother-in-law serve to camouflage the underlying financial imbalances from the point of view of an individual conjugal unit. Jaimma advised her new son-in-law, who had not yet become a father, to separate his household as soon as possible when his younger (unmarried) brother declined to split the household liabilities (*baki*) of Rs. 70,000 that had accumulated on account of the former's investments in a bore well. She reasoned that her son-in-law would have to bear a disproportionate cost of investment in new technology, while the younger brother stood to derive a disproportionate benefit, both present and in future, if her son-in-law continued to live in the joint family. What this instance also shows is that the explanation of household partition and its timing in terms of 'interest imbalance' of demographically different conjugal units (Parry 1979: 185) is not sufficient in its scope; the nature of economic change may cause interest imbalances between brothers long before a demographic differentiation in their conjugal families occurs. What this case and several others also underline is how the use of a dowry is used as a legitimate source to force partition by affines; Jaimma insisted to me that she had not given Rs. 40, 000 cash and 5 *tolas*<sup>20</sup> of gold for her daughter "to suffer" (*kashatanki elai*); she was waiting to go and "fight it out with the aged ones and force them" to give her son-in-law his share of land and live separately.

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<sup>20</sup>A *tola* is 10 grams of gold

### **3.4 Inter-*Kutumbam* relationships: *swartham* and *poti***

If material self-interest is a *de facto* rationale for household partitions, it becomes the *de jure* principle for agnates to conduct their relations post-division. It is not that all forms of fraternal cooperation and attachments cease to exist with partition. There is an explicit term, *vaddyigi*, to denote secular ties of cooperation and attachment amongst collateral agnates thereafter. Agnates with *vaddyigi* continue to share agricultural tools, assets and machinery, household labour, especially for sowing, weeding and harvesting in *Mungari*; they swap farm related responsibilities and information and provide financial help or credit to one another. These forms of *vaddiyigi* presume the normal commensalities of visiting each other's house (or exchanging food-items) that Pocock documents (1973:17) in Gujarat. However, an examination of post-partition relationships in 25 households that divided between 1996-2006 suggests that the overall incidence of cooperation and attachment positively reduces after partition (Table 3.8).

*Vaddyigi* is also scarcer and weaker, as Madan (in Parry 1979: 160) and Pocock suggest (1973: Ch. 1), with a growing generational divide between agnates: "They (agnates) become separate branches (*kommullu vere aitai*)". Furthermore, as I discuss shortly, *vaddyigi* itself does not preclude the pursuit of self-interest. It is, in fact, increasingly the vehicle for furthering *swartham*. When asked why some households maintain *vaddyigi* when others – the majority - don't, peasants relate it to the compatibility of wives, which to say that it is likelier when the wives of two brothers are sisters. A general explanation for the variability of *vaddyigi* lies however in the nature of domestic conflict causing partition and in the degree of material insufficiency faced by a new household as a productive unit. A son's relations with his father (or the father's household) post-partition are conspicuously weaker. In complete agreement with Vatuk (1990) - except for the son who keeps his

father (or parents) in expectation of (*apeksha*) receiving the latter's individual income (e.g. a pension/ land) - other sons and their families are completely indifferent to an elderly father.

*Table 3.8 The incidence of cooperation among divided brothers*

	Incidence in %
i. Presence of <i>vaddyigi</i>	
a. Exchange of tools	31
b. Exchange of household labour	31
c. Exchange of farm responsibilities and information	29
d. Financial help	35
ii. Complete absence of <i>vaddyigi</i>	58

Note: The percentage is derived from all 71 possible pairs of two brothers from 25 cases of divided households between 1996-2006.

A majority of intra-kin ties, however, are characterised by the relationship of envy (*irshyam*) and competition (*poti*) in which the experience of *virakti* (detachment/alienation) is often a logical corollary. These negative ties are inherent in the pursuit of material self-interests and there are three ways in which *swartham* engenders envy and competition<sup>21</sup>. Self-interest causes an agnate to refuse to recognise and honour exchanges and obligations that distinguish consanguinity as a supra-individualistic bond in a Durkheimian sense (Pocock 1973, Parry 1979; 161). The emphasis that local peasants place on a continuity of exchanges after the division in a household is certainly quite idealistic because all agnatic relations devoid of *vaddigi*, such as P. Reddy's wife's act to deny agricultural tools to her husband's agnates, are by default expressions of egoistic self-interest. But, NRP men also acknowledge that the tie of *vaddiygi* itself can be used strategically (in Bourdieu's sense 1977; 6-9) to maximise one's interests by controlling the time, quality or quantity of an exchange, i.e., by intentionally making it asymmetrical vis-à-vis a blood-relative.

<sup>21</sup> See Ch. 4 for a more detailed discussion on envy.

A brother/kinsman may, for instance, borrow a cart, bike, agricultural tool, or money but discreetly avoids lending, or lends the same articles for a smaller period on some pretext or other. N. Reddy lent groundwater to his cousin, P. Reddy, to irrigate a 5 acre groundnut crop for two months; but, P. Reddy's wife, a “*swarthee* lady” did not allow N. Reddy to use her bullocks even one hour beyond the agreed duration. Likewise, Ramanjee suspected that his elder brother Krishnamurthy had been cheating him by underpaying the value of livestock they sold in partnership and when he asked me to do the accounts, his suspicion was confirmed. Such manifest asymmetries reinforce moral individualism amongst kinsmen since complete self-sufficiency and autonomy (Dumont 1986: 279), i.e., 'not being under anyone's obligation (*mulajee*)' becomes a standard moral goal for brothers who feel cheated by each other. The most culpable form of individualistic non-sociality (ibid: 61, 279) that *swartham* breeds is when even key obligations of consanguinity are subordinated to material expectations (compare with Pocock 1973: 17-18). Refusing to contribute to a father's/brother's medical treatment, or to the maintenance of one's elderly parents, or worse, a refusal to share expenditure on performing the last rites of a deceased parent instantiate such non-sociality. Krishnamurthy, to take one instance amongst many, refused to share the expenses for his father's last rites (in 2006), making Ramesh, his younger brother “feel so angry that he wanted to thrash Krisnamurthy”.

As distinct from repudiating reciprocities and obligations, *swartham* may also oblige a man, especially as a household head, to compete with his partilineal kinsmen in order to maximise the interest of his own family, and thus engender greater *paurusham* and *maryada* in the process. *Poti*, or competition, amongst brothers has conventionally centred around the acquisition of scarce resources, such as good quality land and livestock. The ‘biggest *poti* (*pedda poti*) witnessed in recent decades (in the 1980s) was between M. Reddy and S. Reddy, the two *Kapu* brothers who owned about 100 acres of land between them (see Excerpt 3.7 below).

Evidently, as both Pocock and Parry observe (1973: 14, 1979), the origin of collateral rivalries often lies in the contradiction of the role of fatherhood and land/property fragmentation. However, where *poti* in Anantpur fundamentally differs from the rivalries described in Western India by Pocock - and where it is close to Herzfield's (1985: Ch.4) account of expressions of masculinity in Crete - is its relationship to the ideology of *paurusham*. *Poti* of a particularised form, such as the one between M. Reddy and S. Reddy, is essentially a public duel in which two brothers (or kinsmen/others) employ elaborate strategies and mobilise resources within the agrarian context to transact honour by emasculating the opponent. The organisation of crop production, acquisition of farm-assets, and participation in the male spectacle of *Dhoolamrai* (dragging a stone boulder by one's oxen teams) are each strategically aimed to shame an opponent, even if he is a brother. Moreover, as this instance shows, violence is a characteristic idiom of masculinity in such duels. In other words, the obligations of aggressive *paurusham* often prevail over patrilineal affinities in a *poti* <sup>22</sup>.

#### Excerpt 3.7

"There is less *poti* these days. It was there 20 years back; between M. Reddy and S. Reddy. M. Reddy had three sons; S. Reddy had four. First, M. Reddy bought 9 acres of land. Just some months later, S. Reddy purchased 6 acres. Then M. Reddy found a single 50-acre plot belonging to a widow in KGL (i.e. neighbouring village) and began to negotiate to buy it. But S. Reddy got a wind of it and he went to his elder brother and said, "I have four sons, while you have three. Allow me to buy 20 acres from this 50-acre plot". M. Reddy did not say anything then. But he asked PVR (his eldest son) about this request. PVR told him, "No! We require this plot more than them. Let them look for land somewhere else if they want". M. Reddy left for Bombay (to meet the owner and settle the purchase) secretly in the night and in two days, he had it registered in his name. From then on, the *gharshanam* (feud) began between them – about who was a bigger farmer, who could acquire bigger property. If one had produced 200 bags (of groundnut), the other would try to get 250. If one's oxen dragged the stone boulder for 10 feet, the other tried to go 20 feet. One day, M.

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<sup>22</sup> Narayan Reddy, in the same conversation, went on to add, "the *Kapus* are always like this; they have more of *garvam*. They do not like receiving a challenge, even from their own brothers."

Reddy told S. Reddy not to use his fields, as a passage to the latter's fields. S. Reddy insisted on using it and his sons abused M. Reddy's middle son. When M. Reddy's youngest son learnt of this, he came in front of the house of his uncle and challenged them to come out "if they were males". While he was doing this, the third son of S. Reddy came from behind and hit him with an iron rod on his head...blood poured out from his head. Even now, he (the attacked son) can not walk properly, can not talk properly."

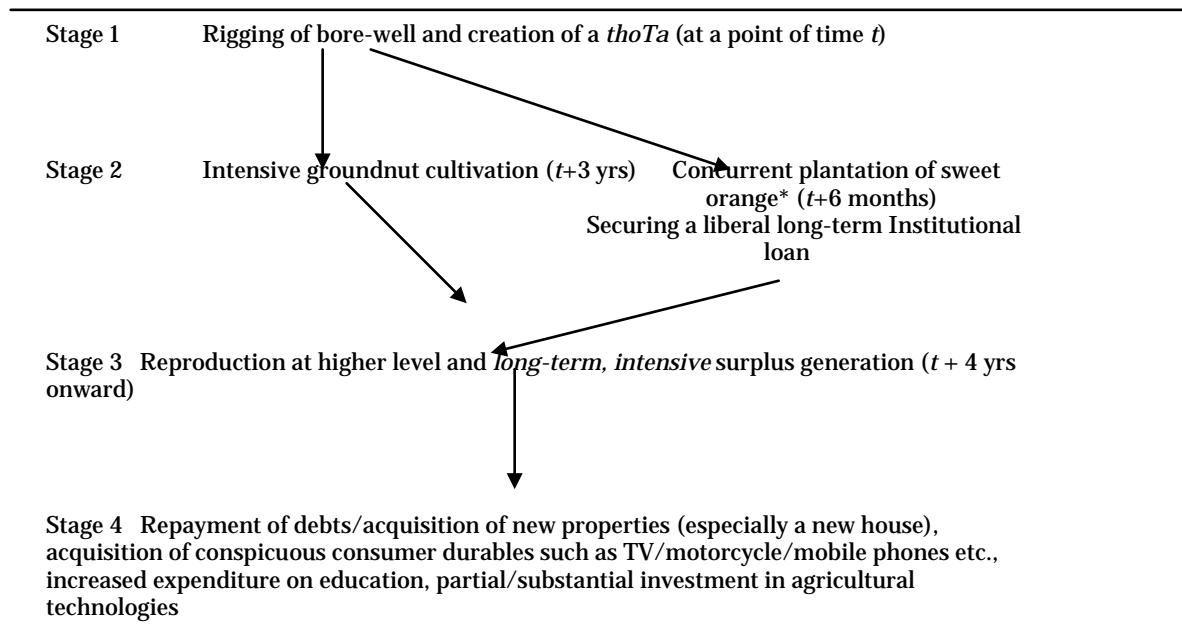
Since *poti* requires considerable mobilisation of economic resources over a period of time, egoistic competition amongst kinsmen and caste members have usually remained restricted to only a few wealthy *Kapu* and *Kuruba* households (also see Washbrook 1973). The intensification of commercial agriculture has radically altered this in-built economic constraint on competition, and thereby universalised it as a characteristic state of kin relationship. Further, it has also added a whole range of new templates for households to compete with each other (see Ch. 4 below). Figure 3.1 represents the popular conception of household development in the village. Although each stage of this model presents scope for general competition<sup>23</sup>, the importance of the preliminary point of securing groundwater by rigging a bore-well can scarcely be overstated. As the realisation of the entire project (of household development) depends on stage 1, a successful bore well places the owner on the first gradient of hierarchy by bracketing him within the category of *thoTa*-owners, as distinct from dry land cultivators. The nature of groundwater availability (i.e., water yield etc.) further mediates this gradient of hierarchy/equality. Since agnates, kindred and caste members tend to share physically contiguous plots of land, it is from amongst them that one recruits or receives particular competitors and enviers. Groundwater related competition between agnates have sharply increased in the village, albeit there is no incident of violence in the village. But, local newspapers and oral accounts are often replete

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<sup>23</sup> I need to clarify that cooperation is, theoretically as much possible, as competition and conflict are. However, as the previous analysis, I hope, may have shown, to the extent that division of a household amongst brothers represents a clear loss of *nammakkam*, cooperation is rendered difficult.

with stories of brothers/kinsmen violently attacking each other at the time of sinking bore wells or chopping down the sweet orange trees of an opposing individual in a *poti*. In this sense, bore-well economy has both introduced a new duality to the meaning of *poti* and expanded its scope. As well as an idiom for universalistic, non-conflictual, aspiration of upward mobility, it remains an aggressive masculine statement of egoism in a larger social context now wherein violence is regularly used.

*Figure 3.1 The indigenous model of economic development of a household in NRP*



\*In groundwater rich zones, the crop of sweet orange may be replaced by banana /chilli/papaya etc.

If the availability of groundwater helps establish the relation of *poti* – whether of a general sort or a particular one – the conduct of commercial agriculture deepens this competition further. As opposed to dry land agriculture, where a farmer's agency is manifestly subservient to natural conditions, the possession of groundwater brings the entire organisation of farming into individual hands and subjects each constituent of farming to the status-oriented frameworks of 'success' and 'failure' within the public domain. Shivaiah, a young *Ekula* farmer, remarked during our conversation, "*Poti* is bound to take place among *thoTa* owning people.

The crops are the same, they are sown at the same time; also, one can see the results easily. It is all up to a farmer – when to water the crop, when to apply the fertilisers, when to spray the pesticide. It is not so in a *meta*; one bad rain and everything is finished.” A couple of months after this conversation, as I have mentioned above (Ch. 2) Shivaiah ran into a challenge (*pandem*) from his brother (i.e. FBS) Chalapati about their chilli crop. The practice of commercial agriculture offers a uniform format of social and economic growth across households in the village, making it demonstrably possible for the villagers to define and assess themselves in relation to each other as well as to appraise themselves against the format itself.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In his discussion on the relationship between the nature of domestic groups and suicide rate, Durkheim takes (2006: 201) the density of a domestic group as an indicator of social integration for a society and contends that domestic density has a prophylactic impact on suicidal dispositions. Following him, I have shown that the density of a family in NRP has been on decline, as evident from the preponderance of elementary families in the village. The reduction in the density of domestic group reflects the reduced “vitality” of “collective sentiments” or “collective conscience” (*ibid*). I have shown that each of the three major relationships in the family has come to be characterised by enervated familial sentiments insofar as increased contestation and friction amongst family members has become the order of the day. If it is the practice of groundwater oriented and resource intensive commercial agriculture that is usually the point of friction between a father and his son, brothers are increasingly alienated from each other by the violation of fraternal trust in terms of unfair distribution of work and financial returns. Similarly, the increased contestation by women of masculine dominance in the family captures a major dimension of wife-husband relationship. As I have said above, these conclusions challenge the influential thesis that an Indian family is a symbol of hierarchical

order, love, and collective familism (Uberoi 2003, Dumont 1970 in Mines 1988, Trawick 1990).

## **Chapter 4**

### **‘The Desiring Village’; consumption, status and identity construction**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The severe ecological constraints characterizing dry land agrarian production in NRP and the shift towards intensive but risky cultivation of cash crops under bore wells has been described in the preceding chapter. Against the background of an inherently volatile agrarian production regime, I wish to describe in this chapter the new patterns of consumption<sup>1</sup> and life styles<sup>2</sup> that peasants actively follow and/or aspire to within private and public spheres (section 4.2). My argument is that NRP peasants understand consumption in the hierarchical binary of *class* and *mass* (villagers use the English words) cultural practices where the former communicate status achievements, success and honour while the latter represents status failure and dishonour. In other words, the aspired consumption styles imply an upward social mobility from following *mass* cultural practices to adopting *class* practices; NRP peasants not only employ this trajectory as a means to fashion their social self, but also regularly assess themselves in a competitive, masculine and expanding social milieux. This argument is in agreement with many contemporary ethnographies of social change in South India (e.g. Osella and Osella 2000, Upadhyay 1997) and elsewhere (Ferguson 1999 in Zambia, Miller 1994 in Trinidad) that understand consumption styles as sites in which modern self-identities are fashioned and represented. However, this chapter also diverges from some of these

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<sup>1</sup> Following Miller (1995:31-2) and Douglas and Isherwood (1979:38), I understand consumption to imply the free act of using goods from the market, as well as the services from the state, in order to recreate a sense of self.

<sup>2</sup> Following Ferguson (1999: 95-101), I understand life-style to mean a cultivated pattern of self – fashioning in which a montage of consumption practices are selected around the self. Bourdieu (1984:170-71) understands life-styles as ‘systematically classified and classifying practices’. These two understandings, I believe, are complementary to each other.

ethnographies in an important respect<sup>3</sup>. Foregrounding the emerging consumption styles against a volatile and inequitable agrarian economy, I hope to show that the project of following/becoming *class* is not unproblematically natural, but inherently anomic in NRP. Put differently, I argue that the *class* life style pursued and aspired to by local peasants involves moral de-classification – and economic maladjustment (Durkheim 1952/2006: 247-248,368, Ferguson 1999). Anomic envy, detachment and suicidal tendencies are some of the corollaries of this moral de-classification.

#### **4.2 Food and drink; “enjoying class”, leaving mass**

It has been remarked that the terms “consumption” and ‘lifestyle’ sound foreign to South Asia... (They) have no ready equivalents in the Asian languages”, even as they remain culturally vital categories (Kumar 2003: 675). The Izhavas in Kerala who use 'progress' to refer to a range of upwardly mobile consumption and life-style practices would appear to validate this observation (Osella and Osella 2000: 36, Ch. 4). NRP, too, would corroborate this. Consumption is understood – whether as a faculty or as a pattern – in the village only metonymically, namely as '*tinDam*, *trāgDam*' (to eat, to drink), '*karch peTTaDam*' (to spend) or '*sansaram-karcha*' (household expenditure). Lifestyle is referred to as the mode of life (*jeevith-vidhanam*). Yet, consumption is often referred to in a monetary scale for comparative purposes; households with 'big expenditure' (*bhari/pedda karcha*) are hierarchically contrasted with those having only 'small expenditure' (*chillar/takwa karcha*). Further, like the Izhavas, who understand progress to be the process of acquiring medium and long-term consumption durables/services (household articles, house, education etc.) as opposed to short-term consumption (*ibid*; 135), NRP farmers speak of '(to) develop' (*develop kavala*) as a positive relationship

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<sup>3</sup> With the possible exception of Ferguson (1999:100-101) whose account underlines the dialectic of fashioning a social self within severe political-economic constraints. Unsurprisingly, suicide does appear in this account with a distinct anomic stamp to it (*ibid*:156-157).

between immediate, medium and/or long-term consumption practices. A person or household indulging in short-term consumption that compromises its pecuniary health or its capacity to acquire long-term durables is denounced (*nidinchaDam*) as “having eaten up/erased everything” (*anta tinaisnāDu/kottesnāDu*), and as ‘moving backwards’ (*yenugā poinādu*). Obversely, “*pudupu(gā) powDam/wārDam*”, or consuming efficiently in a manner that aligns short-term consumption with long-term accretion (Osella and Osella 2000: Chapter. 4) has been the normatively sanctioned style. In sum, as Simmel observed (1978:75-76), peasants have customarily understood consumption as a normative hierarchy of sacrifices involving time.

Criss-crossing this framework of time, however, another mediating concept organises consumption in the village, which is the fundamental opposition between rare and common cultural practices (Bourdieu 1984; 176-77). The cultivation of rare/refined taste betokens *class* and it confers dignity to an agency; apropos a person, villagers say “*chālā classgā unnāDu/taiyār aināDu*” (he is a man /has become a man of *class*). Antithetically, the practice of *mass*, i.e., vulgar/unrefined taste, represents a sort of ordinary, non-dignified status. The two other synonyms for the term *mass* are ‘coarse’ (*māruTa*) and ‘ordinary’ (*māmuli*). The opposition between *class* and *mass* permeates all objects, persons and places, even the language/tone in which one speaks, so that they are constantly organised diametrically. The town (Anantpur), for instance, represents *class* cultural space and its residents are consumers of dignity whereas the village (*uur*) denotes coarse non-urban space. Within the *uur*, the Reddys (mostly) have customarily possessed *class* and dignity whereas the BCs have (mostly) been the members of *mass*; occupationally, *rythu* (peasants) constitute *mass* whereas “employers” (i.e., white collar workers) represent *class*. Evidently, the *class-mass* dichotomy in the cultural space relates to class-status in economic sense (Bourdieu 1984, Veblen 1994:69).

To develop, e.g., to make a durable transition from the *mass* cultural practices to *class* practices requires accomplishing higher productive capacities (viz., *thoTa* cultivation)<sup>4</sup>. Thus, 'pretension' (*class chubhiyaDam/ baDai/jambham*) in NRP involves pursuing *class* practices upon largely *mass* productive capacities. However two clarifications are in order here. Firstly, as Bourdieu emphasizes, higher economic capital is necessary but not sufficient to absolve one from pretension; as we shall see, it is the absence of certain types of cultural capital that makes the *nouveau riche* bore well owners as the big pretenders in NRP. Secondly, *pace* Bourdieu and Veblen, in as much as consuming *class* involves for an NRP peasant consuming ever-emergent *mass* produced goods, spaces, images and services, it is much more than just an expression of one's class-status. The words *class* and *mass* are used in this broad and fluid sense here. To recapitulate, it is the dialectical interaction of *class* and *mass* cultural practices on one hand, and of short and medium/long-term consumption on the other, and their overall interaction within political economic constraints which provide the framework to elucidate the emerging practices of lifestyles in the village.

I begin with the consumption of food and drink, or the field of primary taste and distinction in everyday life (Bourdieu 1984:177, Campbell 1995: 106 in Miller 1995). It is a matter of social courtesy for peasants to enquire if one has "eaten rice" (*annam tinnāwā?*); as in better-irrigated parts of south India (Appadurai 1991:497, Osella & Osella 2000:147), eating meals, i.e. eating contentedly (*kadapu ninDala*) implies eating rice which is the staple food grain across all classes. Large farmers consume mostly rice and a variety of rice based products (Table 4.2), with a tiny amount of wheat (scarcely exceeding 5 kg/month in any household that I studied) in the form of *chapathis* and *puris* (leavened and or deep-fried bread) as a

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<sup>4</sup> It is a necessary, but not sufficient condition.

supplement. Amongst these households, the consumption of dry millets such as *ragi*, *jonna* or *korra* is almost nil; even amongst those non-*Kapu* large farming households that consume any dry grain at all, it scarcely exceeds 1.5 to 2 kg per month and is used only as a condiment (*ruchikosham/ruchivastu*) to mutton or chicken. Most middle farmers, too, consume rice as their principal food, although a third of them in the sample do so in conjunction with marginally bigger quantities (up to 5 kgs per month) of *ragi* or *jonna* as the second main food grain. In fact, highlighting their resourcefulness in terms of the frequency of their rice-lentil consumption, and claiming distinction on this ground (Douglas and Isherwood 1979:83), the *nouveau riche* non-*Kapu* bore well owners say that they are “those who eat (only) rice-lentil three times a day” (*memu mudu putu annam tinewaDu*). Dry grains form a relatively more regular part of diet amongst only the small and marginal dry peasant households, albeit, at just 6-10 kg/month, it scarcely constitutes more than 10-15% of their total monthly grain consumption (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1** *Monthly consumption of grains per CU in four households*

Grains	Ramesh (LF)	Ramlu(MF)	P. Oblesh (Ma. F)	M. Sreeramlu (Ma. F)
• Rice	3.87 kg	6.81kg	10.71kg	8.33 kg
• Wheat (Flour)	.431kg	.600kg	.428 kg	.185 kg
• Jowar (flour)	Not used	.227 kg	.714 kg	Not used
D. Ragi (flour)	.172kg	.075 kg	.928 kg	Not used

Source: Monthly household expenditure survey, 2005 .

LF; Large farmer; MF (Middle Farmer); Ma.F (Marginal farmers). CU is consumption unit (Appendix 2).

Given the homogeneity of rice-consumption, rich and middle peasants have to employ other 'marking' devices to claim *class* (Friedman 1994: 6-7, Douglas and Isherwood 1979: 50, 59-60). Some of them emphasize the distinction of source which, as Osella and Osella (2000: 147) note in the case of Kerala, translates into the degree of freedom/choice enjoyed by a household in purchasing rice. Amongst the 16 *thoTa* owners in my sample, only 7 households across classes (1 large, 2 middle, 3 small and 1 marginal) grew paddy during *Mungari*, of which only 3

reported complete self-sufficiency in rice; they are privileged to consume their own grain (*swantham annam*) round the year. Otherwise, most large and middle farmers purchase their requirements in bulk from the rice mill in K. *mandal* while some middle farmers supplement their purchase of rice from the mill with their monthly entitlements (i.e., 15-20 kg) of the 'store *beeyamu*', the rice available from the subsidised Public Distribution System (PDS). All small and marginal dry land farmers, on the other hand, have to rely substantially on the PDS rice, blending it with rice purchased from market (if required). These distinctions, in turn, correspond to the quality of grain consumed. All large farmers consume locally produced BPT or *Sonamasura*, the two most expensive (Rs. 2100 per quintal) local rice varieties. The consumption of BPT declines sharply amongst middle, small and marginal peasants – only 50% of middle farmers and just a few small and marginal peasants consume it on daily basis. Conversely, RNR – the "fat grain" (*lavuannam*) – which is a much cheaper (Rs. 1100 per quintal), lower grade rice - is the staple amongst these households<sup>5</sup>. But it must be borne in mind that even the distinction of quality is not quite watertight; even a marginal *Madiga* livestock owner like Menuga Sreeramlu consumes BPT in conjunction with store rice in order to maintain *maryada* when his wife's sister's family – who are 'employers' in Bengaluru – come to visit him.

The almost complete replacement of dry grains – on which Hill (1982: 33, 49) based her thesis of 'dry grain mode' in the 1980s – by rice and the distinctions woven around rice varieties speak of the emergence of new subjectivities amongst the peasantry. For instance, Balraj (30 years), a small dry land farmer for instance says "this is the age of the computer (*computer yugamu*); earlier one person could eat three, four, five *muddalu* (balls of boiled *ragi* flour), only *ragi* (*uthaku ragi*

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<sup>5</sup>An analogous Veblenian logic (of pecuniary strength) explains why the consumption of wheat declines amongst the lower classes; at Rs. 18/kg in December 2008, wheat flour was dearer than Ragi by 30%, Jonna by 17% and RNR rice by 45%.

*pindi*), (but) now the majority of people do not like eating *muddā*”. Providing one of the chief reasons for this popular distaste towards dry millets, Venkatesh (45), a small *Ekula* farmer bitterly described *ragi* as a grain that “all of us including animals used to eat earlier” (Excerpt 4.1). In general, these statements bear testimony to Bourdieu’s thesis of ‘stylisation of life-style’ (1984:176-177), by which I mean that there is an increasing commitment on the part of peasants across all classes towards the cultivation of a taste for softer ‘white rice’ (*tella annam*), or leavened bread (*chapatti*) in place of the ‘harder’ dry millets. Of course, this commitment is relative to the differential habitus of individuals. A well-off relative of a middle *Kuruba* peasant in NRP, hailing from the canal irrigated Garladinne *mandal*, distinguished herself as a person “who eats *sonamasura*” as opposed to her NRP relatives “who eat *lavuannam* (RNR)” and complained that her daughter who had recently been married to her brother’s son in NRP, experienced constant stomach problems as a result<sup>6</sup>. Thus, there appears to be a particular emphasis on the humoral implications of the stylisation of grain consumption; the consumption of rice and wheat, an instance of *class* practice, causes a person to become softer, comfort seeking as opposed to a person who used to be crass, but strong due to her consumption of dry grains earlier (also Osella and Osella 2000:187, Vasavi 1994)<sup>7</sup>.

Further, the notion that the consumption of rice relates to the usage of computers and to the concerns of individual equality and dignity (Excerpt 4.1) – both putative emblems of modernity (Miller 1994:59-61, Habermas 1987:7) - is inherently political in meaning. As stated above, even the poorest NRP household today mixes *ragi* with rice to prepare *mudda* (boiled balls of grain) and in doing so indicates its commitment to choice and alterity. Indeed, using the term in Simmel’s sense (1904:133), NRP peasants see this practice as a statement of

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<sup>6</sup> About six months after the marriage, the newly-wed couple moved their residence to the town, apparently to a plot of land that the family owned there.

<sup>7</sup> Taste, as Bourdieu (1984:190) says, helps shape the *class* body.

culinary ‘fashion’ (*fashionga*). The import of this fashion relates to the local cultural politics (Hebdige 1993 in Beng Huat 2000:5); whereas now rice consumption signifies narrower, mutable class differences, until 1983 it represented an immutable hierarchy amongst local peasants. Prior to that year, rice was consumed and zealously controlled as an ‘information good’ (Douglas & Ishwerwood 1979:passim) by an elite group of wealthy *thoTa* farmers comprising of three *Kapu*, one *Ekula* and 7 *Kuruba* households. The *Madigas*, mostly attached labourers to wealthy Reddy and *Kuruba* households, consumed ragi *shark/amli/ganjee* (a seer of ragi flour boiled in 2-3 litres of water, garnished with salt and chilli) made from the grain-wages<sup>8</sup> whilst the non-*Madiga* dry land peasants consumed solid *mudda* (often blended with *korannam*). In such households, rice was often available only during *Ugadi*, *Dashera* and *Malpournami* festivals when one could ask for a *mutudu* (i.e., 6 seers of grain) from one’s employer as an advance (*mulajee*) against future labour. Further, as Appadurai notes in Tamilnad (1981:498), the general hierarchy of exclusion along caste-class boundaries paralleled the hierarchy of responsibility within a household; it was only the *pater familias* (*inti-pedda/yazman*) who was entitled to get to eat rice (i.e., “he was the household head, he could not eat *mudda*”). However, these structural hierarchies relating to rice consumption were rendered redundant in one stroke of paternalistic populism (Kohli 1988) in 1983 when the N.T Ramarao government introduced a scheme providing 25kg rice to poor households at Rs. 2/kg<sup>9</sup>. Since then, the growing consumption of rice has become a synecdoche for the desire for an equal and modern self.

#### Excerpt 4.1

“The Reddys, our employers would eat rice – they were in the habit of eating white rice since the Kavali and yatam period. Except in cases where a *jeeta* worked for a Reddy,

<sup>8</sup> As attached farm servants, until 1983 *jeetas* were entitled to receive three meals a day at their place of employment apart from the two seers of ragi as daily wages.

<sup>9</sup> See Shatrguna, K. (EPW 1992:759) for an account of the local politicking behind the ‘rice scheme’ in Andhra Pradesh.

(where) he could get a *mutudu* as advance, “please give me a *mutudu*, *aiyya* (the honorific saluation for a Reddy), the New Year has come upon us” (*samvacharulu vachindi...dushera pandaga vachindi*)”. No one else would give paddy on credit. The Reddys would not let it go out of their house (*baitheki annam tirdu*). For the *jeetas*, the *rythulu*, *ragi* ...that was the food of the animals; that is what all of us including animals used to eat.” (Venkatesh, 45 years)

Broadly in line with both Keynes and Engel's propositions that consumption relates positively to income, although that of basic food items relates inversely to the latter (Friedman 1994: 5), the consumption of non-subsistence vegetables, fruit, milk<sup>10</sup> products and meat forms an increasing part of the new daily dietary regime. It is the upwardly mobile large and middle *thota* owners who, as the vanguard of new consumption practices, include lentils, a wide variety of *class* vegetables (e.g. cabbage, carrot, beet root etc), fruits and meat in their diet. Their monthly expenditure on these items ranges from Rs. 500 to 1,500 per month on average. Ramesh, who has been one of the most extra-ordinary cases of upward social mobility in recent years, reports an impressive expenditure of Rs. 1,485 per month on vegetables, meat and fruit including the purchase of costly novelties like apples (Rs. 50/Kg.) and chicken once every week. Like rice, the growing consumption of fruits, poultry and meat is completely routinised in a syntagmatic sense (Douglas 1972: 67). Marking the climax of a week's menus – or marking certain days as days of grander consumption – chicken is the indispensable delicacy for these farmers on Sundays<sup>11</sup>. In addition, the consumption of chicken also occurs on almost all secular ceremonies such as a visit from friends or relatives at one's home, grand *enjai* parties (see below) and during *mokku* (thanksgiving) ceremonies for local folk-deities. On account of its price (Rs. 150

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<sup>10</sup> Refer to Trawick (1990:223, 231) about the consumption of cow milk and ghee in a family as a sign of luxury.

<sup>11</sup>In 2004, Andhra pradesh was the largest producer and the third largest consumer of chicken after Kerala and Tamilnadu; at 3.57 kg, its per capita chicken consumption was double the national average. Business Line, September 25, 2004.

per kg), the consumption of mutton, the commonly consumed meat earlier, is generally restricted to large and middle farmers - that is, besides the livestock owners – who purchase it once or twice a month. Small and marginal dry land farmers usually restrict their consumption of vegetables to green chilli, tomato and potatoes, and of fruit to bananas (the cheapest fruit available) and their consumption of chicken is also relatively more occasional (maybe fortnightly). As a result, their average expenditures on these items ranges between Rs. 250-300 per month. Most of the marginal *Madiga* peasants do not buy chicken more than once a month, and mutton only on festivals (e.g. Christmas) and eat beef and pork instead.

#### Excerpt 4.2

R; he (Bheemlinganna) is a *bankoDu (miser)!*  
B; not just *bankoDu, full picanaDi!* (*bankoDu kadu, pucca picanaDi*)!  
(Every one breaks into an uproarious peal of laughter)  
K; *picanaDi?*  
B; yes! (In his family) every day it is *annam-pappu..or muDDa..*  
R; he does not even buy tomatoes to use in the *pappu*, except only for two months when it is the cheapest. He would use only *chinTa pandu* (tamarind), why, because it is available free!  
(Pause)  
B; we buy it even if it is Rs. 10-15 a kg.  
Ramesh; what 15 ! I bought it even when it was (Rs.) 40 last month.

Although maintaining distinction in order to claim higher status and the equally strong trend of imitation to seek parity is evident in local consumption patterns, these strategies cannot be divorced from self-oriented pleasure driven motives that place gastronomic novelty and sophistication at the centre of local discourse (Campbell 1995:161 in Miller 1995, Friedman 1991:158). Peasants in general and *thoTa* farmers in particular often speak of 'experiencing boredom' (*tinnabuddhi kadu*) at the repetition of food items at home every three or four days, even if it is the refined meal of rice-lentil (*annam-pappu/chari*). Relating to this need for

alterity (ibid, 1991:158), Ramlu, a very recent bore-well farmer, says, "generally I tell them (his wife, mother) to make *chapathi* or *poori* after three four days, or else, they prepare it on their own, when they (i.e., his wife and mother) feel bored with eating rice. "Within a household, the yearning – which is fairly democratic now – for novelty (*marp*), thrill (*mauj*) and sophistication (*neati*) in both paradigmatic and syntagmatic senses (Michael Halliday in Douglas 1972:62) is reflected in the diversity of food menus (Table 4.2). However, a most conspicuous manifestation of this longing for novelty is the *enjay* party – the 'grand' (English word used) outdoor lunch or dinners.

*Enjay* parties restrict the membership to celebration very strictly; women of the households are almost invariably barred except when it is a intra-family picnic<sup>12</sup>, and only close and symmetrical *albatulu*, or friends (inter or intra-caste), are invited to them. A bar in the town or a picturesque but discreet outdoor site around the village, such as the MPR dam or a *thoTa*, is used as a venue. Very often, such parties celebrate (and consume) an aspect of individuality, such as one's luck(*adrushTam*) in the event of successful drilling of bore wells, or one's entrepreneurial 'success' (English word used) in fetching a very handsome price for agricultural products, or the company of an esteemed friend or relative. In such cases, the cost of the party is borne by the successful individual. But when an *enjay* party lacks an ostensible reason except that of enjoying the amity of normal company distinctly, such as when friends visit town, the costs are shared per capita. A most striking feature of an *enjay* party is its conspicuously exaggerated consumption; to use Douglas's phrase (1987:4,8), it constructs an 'ideal word' of *class* and abundance, of uninhibited and competitive consumption of food, alcohol, tobacco and the exchange of sexual banter, within the customary framework of

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<sup>12</sup>During my stay, I witnessed only one *enjay* party with women participants; this was in Koppalkonda village where four separate households of one patrilineal family organised a picnic in their *thoTa*. The characteristic adjuncts of male conviviality, i.e., alcohol and sexual banter was conspicuous by its absence during the whole party.

*paurusham*. In other words, it marks the deliberate relaxation – rather the inversion – of regulated daily consumption (*pudupu*) in favour of novelty and abundance. The choice of a bar in the town or a *thoTa*, fried chicken, *chapathis*, costly alcohol and beer brands (Hayward/Old Monk; Rs.90-100/80 ml. and Kingfisher, Rs. 75/bottle), branded cigarettes (the 'big gold', the larger version of an upmarket cigarette brand) are *class* items. They represent, both in form and scale, a contrast with the plebeian (*mass*) counterparts of dry fields, hearth made rice-lentil, country arrack (*sarai-natti*) served in 'dirty' (*maddi/galiz*) road side shops and everyday smoking of *bidi* (country cigarettes). This contrast explains why many old peasants critique *enjay* as a byword for *jalsa*, or profligate merrymaking.

#### Excerpt 4.3

(Discussion about the party continues amongst Ramlu (27), Seena (32), Ramesh (27) and Raja (23) in my room in NRP);

S;(Hotel) Haripriya. (it is)..on the Bangalore road. (It has) chairs (laid) in the garden, service is good.

Ramesh; (looking towards me); why there? Dam is better. We can purchase chicken, have it cooked (at the hotel) and carry it (to the dam site). Within (Rs) 400-500, everything can be finished.

Seena is not impressed, but remains silent; Ramlu seconds the dam as a venue, so it is agreed we go to the dam. All go in to wear clothes; Raja and Seena are dressed in shirt trouser, Ramlu and Ramesh in shirt *lungi*. They have taken out their bikes. After 45 minutes' ride, we reach Penkacharla village (22 km) and stop at a chicken shop. Alighting, Ramesh, Ramlu and Seena discuss how much meat is sufficient.

Seena; 5 people, 3 kilograms is enough.

Ramesh (mockingly); my penis.. 2 (kg) is sufficient.

(Ramlu interjecting); no! take 3 Kg..we shall have half (cooked) as fry..and half *rasam* (curry).

Ramesh; *chapathis*?

Ramlu; take 2 dozen.

Seena and Raja go inside the shop to give instructions about cooking and emerge out after ten minutes.

Ramesh; *bawa* (brother in law), *hotta* (or) *cool?* (insinuating about alcohol; beer is cool, *hotta* is rum/whisky).

Seena; *hotta*.

Ramlu (and Raja); beer

I also settle for cool. Seena and Ramesh walk towards the wine shop. Ramlu and Raja stay by me. Ramlu laughs saying that last time around, he drank just two ounce of 'hot' (whisky) and it brought him to a *mop* (stupor) in minutes. Raja says he has only been drinking beer for one year. Ramesh and Seena walk back with the drink bottles.

Ramlu; did you get cigarettes?

Seeena; gold, *pedda*(big)!

Ramlu; how many?

Seena; two packets.

Ramlu; what did you all buy (indicating the drink bag)?

Seena; two quarters...and three Kingfisher (an upmarket Indian beer brand).

Of course, the contrast between elaborate *enjay* parties and home based food consumption is frequently mediated by outside eating amongst peasants. Thus, whilst visiting the town on work, at least once or twice per week, they eat tiffin (or 'meals') in the Mamata or Taj hotel, two popular budget restaurants (meals cost Rs. 18) near the bus stand, and they call such eating indispensable (*tappaDu*)<sup>13</sup>. However, the 'youth' (English word used) of the village willingly experiment with a wider array of food in classier restaurants invoking an idea of novelty that further extends the threshold of gastronomic boredom Ramlu expresses above. The two class restaurants frequented mostly by them include Hotel Emerald<sup>14</sup> and *Haripriya* which primarily serve an aspiring urban middle class clientele as well as urban 'love-birds' in their air-conditioned enclosures, and offer a varied menu of Chinese and North Indian dishes. Instead of the ordinary meal at home, young farmers prefer to eat *gobi-manchuri*, noodles, and *Hyderabad biryani* in these restaurants. Although NRP peasants do not articulate dining out with family as essential to the claim of being modern like the Ezhavas (Osella and Osella 2000: 130-131), frequent eating out and drinking in male company certainly suggests their

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<sup>13</sup> Those who avoid eating in the town on a day or half-day trip, are called "misers".

<sup>14</sup> Hanumappa (22), Ekula Shivaiah's son, who runs the cable TV service in the village, said he and his friends had to 'wait for two hours' on New Year's eve to get a table in Emerald because of the heavy rush on that evening.

constant yearning for alterity. 5 of my NRP friends – 3 *thoTa* owners and 2 dry land farmers – reported on average 3-4 *enjay* parties every month; the frequency of *enjay* parties accelerated during the harvesting period of November - January, and the average individual expenditure revolved around Rs. 500 per month.

**Table 4.2 My own experience; 'Class' food periodicities in Jaimma's household**

<b>A. 1. Primary Structure; solid</b>			
Morning Tiffin	Accompaniments		Frequency
<i>Upama</i> (Coarse ground wheat( <i>Rawa</i> ) Mixed vegetables )	<i>Chenga pudi</i> (groundnut powder), <i>Majjigga</i> (buttermilk)		3 times/ week
<i>Dosè</i> (Rice ground ( <i>nukkalu</i> ) with <i>Pesarpindi</i> (ground lentils)	Coconut or Ground-nut chutney		Amavasya
<i>Uggani</i> ( <i>bhurgalu</i> , flattened rice fried with peanuts)	GN powder/buttermilk		2 times/month
<i>Idli</i> (Ground rice)	Coconut/GN chutney		
Once/month			
<i>Chapathi</i> (Wheat leavened with oil)	Lentil soup / <i>Guddufry</i> (fried eggs)/ mashed potatoes ( <i>Talimpu</i> ) /fried vegetables		2 times/week
<i>puri</i> ( wheat bread, deep fried)	-do-		2-3 times/week
<i>Pulihora</i> (rice fried with tamarind/lemon)	GN powder/buttermilk		once/fortnight
2. liquid			
Coffee			2 times a day
Milk ( <i>Class</i> )			Every morning
<b>B. Secondary structure; Meals; Afternoon</b>			
<i>Annam-pappu</i> (rice and lentil soup)	GN powder and buttermilk		5 Days/week
<i>Annam-pachidi</i> (Rice, Garlic and chilli Chutney)	- Do-		
<i>Annam-Chicken</i>	<i>ApaDam/Bhajjikayulu</i> (savouries) <i>Majjigga</i> ( <i>Post-lunch Fruits</i> )		Sundays
Evening			
<i>Annam- pappu</i>	GN powder & <i>Mazigga</i>		5-6 Days/week
<i>Chitrannam</i>	- Do-		
<b>C. Tertiary Structure; special dishes;</b>			
'Sweet' or 'cool'			
<i>Oligalu</i> (bread, leavened and stuffed with ground Bengal gram flour and jaggery)	Milk and/or clarified butter		Festivals (Day)
<i>Kudalu</i> ( <i>rava</i> with sugar)	-		Festivals/life-rituals
<i>Parmannam</i> (Rice-pudding)	-		Festivals
<i>GuntapawnaLu</i> (fried rice dumplings with Bengal gram <i>Apadam</i> / Savouries) <i>Saudrutha</i> flour and Jaggery)			Festivals
"Hot" dishes			
<i>Mutton -Alsandlu Vada</i> (deep fried lentil dumplings) or Chicken			Malpournami

(Source; Field notes, NRP, 2005)

A corollary of the widening refinement of food habits has been that the difference between the daily/weekly menu and the 'special' menu, consumed on festivals and at life-rituals (Douglas 1972:62) becomes increasingly inconspicuous. The calendar of festivals, in which we find the addition of the global festivities of Christmas and New Year to *Shankranti*, *Ugadi*, *Malpournami*, *Peerpandaga* and *Dusshera*, is generally marked by the preparation of 'cool/sweet' and 'hot'(i.e., meat) dishes on successive days. The former primarily includes *Oligalu* (sweet pancakes) and these days almost all *thoTa* households mimetically consume it with high-status condiments of milk and/or clarified butter (*neyi*) that were earlier restricted to the wealthiest *Kapu* households. The hot dishes prepared on special occasions, chicken and mutton, have become a part of the weekly menu in a majority of households. With rising affluence, the desire and capacity to mark customary as well as modern life-rituals more grandly, i.e., by throwing feasts, is becoming a mark of status for peasants. During my stay in NRP two new *thoTa* owning *Ekula* households celebrated their sons' birthdays (*puttinroju*) by inviting relatives and friends to a feast. To Balraj, a dry land farmer, this appeared a " *kotta sampradayam*" (new tradition) since earlier only a *keshkandana* (or *Cerukulu*, the first ritualistic head tonsuring of a child around 2-3 years of age) would merit a feast, that too, only if the family was a wealthy enough.

#### **4.3 Clothes, style and 'looking good'; consuming *class* without showing off**

In as much as clothes are a public 'hieroglyphic' (Marx cited in Sennett 2001: 9), to NRP men they are a more visible idiom of consuming class and extending 'grip', i.e. social clout/traction, than food. It is natural in Veblen's sense (1994: 168, 170), then, that the sartorial style for men of the highest class and age - the *Kapus* in our case- is customarily the most refined and conspicuously distinctive. All elderly men in the families of M. and S. Reddy wear spotless traditional *Khaddar* – hand-loom

spun white cotton shirts – with ankle-length *tellapanci* (south Indian wrap-around) and drape a matching white *angvastram* (a silk towel) over their shoulders to visit the town or attend cultural occasions. White *khaddar* shirts worn by large landowners may cost between Rs. 500- 2,000 apiece to be stitched, and furthermore, their cumbersome upkeep – stiff starching, ironing and scrupulous safe-keeping from dirt and stain – lend to the Reddy persona the customary insignia of both financial strength and conspicuous leisure (Veblen 1994:171). Although Reddy landlords in NRP always venture out dressed in whites, even within the village, in everyday life they wear a relatively simpler cotton *slack* (shirt) over *tellapanci* that is folded up to the knees. Elderly medium and small BC peasants in contrast wear only *shine banni*– coarse terelyne vest (Rs. 20-30/ metre) stitched within the village, on *khaki nicker* (shorts). Nowadays, for an outing they too dress in the high status *khaddar* – although of cheaper quality for which they may sometimes be ridiculed by their peers as wearing 'dupe' (counterfeit khaddar) – with *tellapanci* and a colourful *auli* (towel). Elderly *Madiga* men go about either bare-body or in *shine banni* and *nicker* within the village although they also wear a terelyne white shirt-*tellapanci* when making a visit. Paralleling the trickle down of rice consumption, the popularisation of the high status white *khaddar* represents the plebeian claims of cultural equality, though not necessarily an economic one, and in the process makes it lose its value as a pure symbol of status (cf. De Certeau 1984:32, Simmel 1978:210, Goffman 1951 in McCracken 1988:33).

Of course, reflecting a limitation of the Veblen-Simmel-Bourdieu school (Friedman 1994 : introduction, Campbell 1995 in Miller 1995) these distinctions have also been tempered by customary notions of parsimony and austerity. PVR and Bhojanna, arguably the richest *Kapu* and *Kuruba* farmers in the village, with their estimated worth ranging between Rs. 15- 50 lakhs, wear *knicker-shine banni* – just as their *Madiga kullies* do – for farm work. They consider patrician dressing to be a positive

aspect of their life-style (“why show off”, PVR asked me) – a notion to which many elderly men in the village would be sympathetic. But, the new bore well owning young *Kuruba*, *Ekula* and *Boya* peasants ridicule such austerity by holding it to be an instance of one’s miserliness or uncouthness (*class ledu*). The implication that wealth ought to be reproduced through its conspicuous enjoyment, sartorial elegance being an example, is perhaps less remarkable – for it has already been present in the customary consumption ethos. It is the *new* mould of dressing elegantly and the lifestyle that it derives from, namely the “town culture” that is novel. Following Campbell (1995:251), the concept of ‘newness’ implies here more freshness and innovativeness (i.e. more efficient) in dressing than novelty/originality *per se*.

Through their new dressing styles, adolescents and young villagers show a remarkable consciousness of their immanent self as being different ; from as early as the age of 15 or 16 years, boys prefer wearing printed *lungi*, i.e., ready made colourful *lungi* (Rs. 75-90/piece) purchased from the town, rather than the customary *knicker*. Seeing themselves as youth – that is, temporally different from their elders (for whom the pejorative term *musLodu* is used) – they shun *shine-banni* for ready made vests purchased from the town. Likewise, except during the hot summer months, they wear *lungi*-vests only within their own street/neighbourhood (*geru*); even to go to the village *bazar*, they change into a shirt. Young and middle-aged peasants, including Reddys, too prefer *lungi*-vests or shirt within village. The rationale offered by young men for choosing *lungi* over *addampanci* – that “it is easier to work in *lungi* in dirt and dust” – is seductively attractive, but unhelpful in understanding their dislike of *nicker* for that purpose. The popularity of *lungi* and shirt over customary dress lies instead in its value as a respectable general middle class home wear for young men across the state, indeed across south India (Osella and Osella 2000:119).

Although wearing *lungi-banni*, or *lungi* and shirt brings young NRP men in their 20s and 30s closer to their aspirations of urbanity within the village, it does not address the emergent nature of urban/*class*- rural/*mass* dichotomy completely. For young men to wear *lungi* and vest in the village, or wearing *lungi* and shirt while visiting the town is also vulgar from an urban cultural perspective. When asked to clarify his desire to wear good clothes (*manci battallu*), Ramlu (27) explained it in terms of 'variety' and 'glamour' (*varietyga, glamourga*) - the two chief attributes of *class* dressing style, by which he meant "wearing clothes that are better than those of others (*verewalu kante inka mancidi*) - T. shirt and trouser, and good sandals".

A little later in the same conversation, Seena (32), the *Kuruba* shop-keeper who commutes to the town almost daily in white shirt and trousers, added ready to wear "short length" coloured shirts and jeans, i.e., trousers stitched to the size of thick-heeled leather boots ("boot cut"), currently fashionable in men's wear, to this list of desired clothes. Routine trips to the town are a most important means by which such desires are engendered; young villagers keep themselves abreast with the latest merchandise of ready-made shops specialising in jeans and shirts/ T. shirts. One such shop very popular with them is the 'Jeans Corner' which is located in the impressive glass faced shopping centre of the Raghuveera Tower. The need for variety, which relates to individualism, requires creating an ever-increasing assortment of dress that defines their use-value in vertical terms; colourful polo T. shirts, the finest shirts and jeans are kept for long-distance 'tours', such as Tirupati, or Hyderabad, or for *enjai* parties; sober white shirts and formal trousers are for *class* marriage ceremonies – of 'employer' relatives or friends in the town – while *mamuli* (cheap/ordinary) white shirt and trousers are worn for commuting to the town<sup>15</sup>. Concerned about an impeccable fit – between individual physicality and

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<sup>15</sup> Seena took me to a small clothes shop behind Raghuveera towers, which had shirt and trouser cut pieces available for as cheap a rate as Rs. 50-60/metre. He says he had been buying shirts from this shop for his daily usage.

dressing - these young men do not rely on the 4 village tailors, as elderly men do.

They prefer to have their clothes stitched by the very posh 'Bullet' or 'Marshal' tailors in the town at a cost that are three to four times higher than that in the village (i.e., Rs. 100; Rs. 30).

The yearning for variety acquires both imitative (field notes 4.1 below) and emulative forms and although young men like Seena and Raja from small dry land families try hard to be the vanguards of dressing style in the village, the group of new young *thoTa* owners demonstrate a higher capacity to engage in such emulation on an enduring basis. Within a year of sinking a bore well, Ramlu bought (or had stitched) six shirts and two trousers, cumulatively costing Rs. 1,850, whilst Ramesh, with a similar history of transition to bore well bought eight shirts and two trousers costing Rs. 3,150. Shivaiah (33), one of the most immaculately dressed *Ekula* middle farmers in the village, reportedly owns a collection of as many as 30 shirts and 12 trousers. On account of the fact that the purchasing of clothes is an occasion that reproduces the sociality of friendship, these men also exemplify what may be called suggestive emulation; one ends up buying a shirt or trouser on an immediate suggestion from within one's group whilst being in a shop without intending to buy it beforehand. Of course, men and women in general prominently display their dress on festivals, at fairs and marriage ceremonies and make gift of dresses to their relatives and it is also very common to brag about the price of clothes purchased for such occasions. But *thoTa* owners tend to indulge in more elaborate, costlier and periodicity neutral consumption of clothes. Ramlu did not reciprocate the gift of clothes annually given to his family by his *thoTa* owning sister's family as long as he was a dry land farmer; but after drilling a bore well successfully, he began returning the gift every year.

#### Field notes 4.1

Raja (23) walks into the room with a bag and says to me, “ *bhai!* Bought a t. shirt yesterday.” It is a light blue, round neck t. shirt with a white ring printed in the middle. Ramesh looks at it intently: “Wah! Quite *class*, son-in-law (*chala classg, alludu*)!” Raja, in embarrassment, replies, “Nothing like that, mama, bought it for (Rs.) 90 two days back.” Ramesh says, “Give this to me, Raja, you buy another one” and brings out a Rs. 100 note from his underpants' pocket. He wears it; it is tight on him. *Saripai* (fine), says Raja.

Apart from clothes, the cultivation of a 'neat look' (*lukku*) also requires greater investments of self and one's resources in body-caring and in acquiring appropriate accessories. Sporting a *neat crop*, i.e., a sharply dressed hairstyle, and *neat* face, i.e., trimmed moustache and a clean shave, rank high on the list of body care. Young peasants of all classes patronise the modern style hair salon in Kederu while some like Krishnamurthy, a small dry land farmer and livestock trader, mention that they use their own gillette (shaving kit, Rs. 200) after seeing its advert on TV. These developments imply that the two *Manglis* (barbers) from IP village whose families have been serving NRP households under the *zazamani* contracts, find their clientele shrunk considerably just as the *Chakalis* (washer-men) have; Venkatramdu (28), one of the *Manglis*, estimated the extent of loss of his clientele amongst young men to be not less than 75%. Toiletry such as soaps, shampoos, talcum powder and deodorants/perfumes are a standard part of any *thoTa* household budget. Indeed, it is the fundamental opposition of using *class* and *mass* brands, for example using *santoor* (Rs. 18) or *dettol* hand wash (Rs. 47) as against the ubiquitous *lifebuoy* (Rs. 10) for soap, or an ordinary face cream as against 'fair and lovely' for a beauty cream that distinguishes one households from another <sup>16</sup>. As part of the overall look leather sandals (Rs. 250-300) are very important, and they are replaced in the town on slightest disrepair - most farmers reported at least three

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<sup>16</sup> On important cultural occasions, such as when attending a marriage ceremony, costly deodorants and perfumes are also used; before going to *mandal theRA*, a number of young men swarmed into Seena's house to get a spray of perfume on their shirts. Likewise, when I asked my friends what would make a good gift to Durgammppa on his marriage, the reply came pat – 'scantu' (perfume).

to four replacements annually. Evidently, relative to greater integration with the outside world, there appears to be a reflexive preoccupation with dressing the body up socially and making it neat in its minutest details (Giddens 1991: 102, Sennett, 2001:13)

Even as the capacity of young *thoTa* peasants to pursue the desire for sartorial variety is better than their dry land counterparts, the general motive for such dressing is not only to make and/or maintain class distance as Veblen and Bourdieu's thesis would suggest (Campbell 1995:247, Friedman 1991:158). Of course, the desire for *class* dressing is primarily other oriented (ibid, McCracken, 1988:94f), namely it is concerned with fashioning a public self, as Bourdieu points out ( 1984:200) ; but the other represents here a continuum of social space extending from the village to the simulacrum of urbanity at large. This objective is aptly captured by the widely prevalent notion of *grip* flowing from sartorial elegance. At the village level, as a marker of pecuniary standing, sophisticated dressing – whether customary or modern style– provides many “unearned increments of wealth” (Simmel 1978:217). It reportedly engenders preferential treatment in the village credit market and deference/status (*maryada*) in the bazaar. Similarly, in another form of *grip*, well-dressed men are said to command preferential attention amongst females for pre-marital or extra-marital liaisons. However, in a more a concrete sense, the modern style of dressing that young peasants cultivate allows them to claim symbolic parity in the town, or in such public institutions as the *mandal* office, the bank, where lungi and shirt stands as a stamp (*mudra*) for uncouth provincialism (*palli tuur wallu/amaykDu*). In other words, the desire for urbanity through clothes amongst young NRP peasants is also a desire for an equalized civil anonymity (*nagarikatvam*) concealing the inferior identity of production (Sennette 2001:10-11). On the extreme side of this simulacrum of urbanity, as Osella and Osella note in Kerala (2000:120-121), the

desire for a short-length shirt, 'boot cut' jeans and t. shirts entails appropriating the style of popular Telugu movie stars in order to fashion a glamorous social self ('image', the English word is used) amongst one's friends. In December 2005, the solo monochromatic posters of Nagarjuna for his super hit film *Mass* exhibited this montage of glamour. Wearing blue denim trousers, black designer t. shirt, stylish wristwatch and leather boots, the actor ostensibly represented *mass* character, although from their habitus, young men like Hanumappa saw him embodying *class* style and sought to imitate him by wearing similar outfits for their outings to the town.

As the Osella and Osella note in Kerala (p. 119), although the consumption of a variety oriented urban dressing style is gender neutral, the choices in dressing afforded to women and children are smaller relative to men. Adolescent girls prefer wearing *Punjabi* dress (i.e., the north Indian *salwar kurti*) to the customary skirt and blouse (*lahanga-paitu*) whereas younger women prefer chiffon sarees (between Rs. 200 to 300 apiece) for their daily use. Dharmavaram silk sarees (*pattu cheeralu*), the feminine counterpart of the classy white *khaddar* (upward of Rs. 300), are now purchased by middle and small *thoTa* owners as well. Unlike men, women generally purchase their daily-use clothes within the village, from moped-borne vendors. Such transactions, patently public, mark a wife's vicarious consumption of her husband's class since the money expended is derived notionally from the husband (Veblen 1984:182, Miller 1994:223). Alternatively, it may also exemplify her own resourcefulness, or 'immoral' autonomy, depending upon the habitus of a commentator. Jaimma purchased a saree from the hawkers almost every two months, sometimes by selling off PDS paraffin collected from a number of households in the street. Whilst she was much envied amongst the young women ("dudliamma"; she is the woman with money), an elderly lady discreetly remonstrated with her for her individualistic indulgence. Generally speaking,

however, Jaimma instantiates a growing space for young wives in *thoTa* owning elementary families to expend on dressing relative to those in extended families. A most crystallised form of emulation, and a normatively less ambivalent one, is manifest during key life-rituals for women and children. Kin and kindred networks – both consanguineous and agnatic – aim to make competitive statements of grandeur and status by making costly gifts of clothes (Bourdieu 1977: 5-7). A rumour that did the rounds in the entire village on the occasion of J. Reddy's marriage was that the bride's relatives had presented her a silk saree worth Rs. 20,000 for her bridal dress implying that the gift made by J. Reddy family members must have been cheaper, and hence not mentioned. Similar emulation within and across a kin network is manifest during *Sreemantham* (conception ceremony) when concerned households compete to make the costlier gift, or at least a symmetrical one to avoid being called miserly.

In his work on Muria Gonds in Bastar, Gell (1986:111) reports a 'consumption dilemma', that is, a lag between processes of rising economic differentiation in a community and its strong egalitarian consumption ethos. In their pursuit of the new style of dressing, the dilemma that faces young peasants in general and upwardly mobile young *thoTa* farmers in particular is possibly more varied. The pursuit of *class* lifestyle, so important for fashioning both class status and modern identity, and for claiming tangible functional advantages they yield, requires young villagers to align their dressing habits with urban styles; yet, this alignment makes them liable to be ridiculed as unqualified and pretentious (*dawlu*) by elderly peasants. As we have seen, the customary consumption ethos considers the notion of qualification (*arhata*) in terms of a rigid association between economic and cultural distinctions – such as the prerogative of a Reddy landlord to wear a *khaddar*. Similarly, the modern sartorial style (trousers and shirt) is associated with a unified personal sophistication, consisting of modern educational, professional and

interpersonal communicational skills. In this view, a trouser and shirt befits a man like K. Reddy, the landlord cum retired lecturer (in Anantpur) from IP village, or this researcher or even Raja, the Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP) in the village, but certainly not the “7 class failed men” like Ramlu or Ramesh even though their economic capital is vastly augmented now. Importantly, in as much as one’s style of dressing is also a political act – it is a claim for social clout - this lag is appropriated by one’s rivals (de Certeau 1984:xix) in the masculine tournaments of honour and status.

In other words, although personal qualifications (*arhata*) are an important *de-jure* moral principle for assessing style, day-to-day assessments are often – if not always – based on personal rivalries in which shaming a “dressed-up” rival is a prime objective. When Ramlu wore a polo t. shirt in the village, he was ridiculed by his other senior *thoTa* friends (“*Abba!* He is wears modern dress and wanders in the village!”) who had similarly low cultural capital but who dressed in customary class style. Of course, there are certain ways in which this dilemma – of trying to negotiate the gap between *arhata* and *class* – is addressed in every day life in public as well as within a household. One of them is to just repudiate the connection between *arhata* and *class*. Young men, for instance, mock this connection, and tell me that, “these days even a shepherd dresses in jeans trousers and shirt”. However, in as much as making such a retort is not always possible, they try to stick to the generic *lungi* and shirt within the village except on festivals and at fairs (Osella and Osella 2000: 120) to avoid the charge of overdressing (“*over undgurdu*”). But, bearing out what Singer calls the strategy of compartmentalisation in addressing the dilemmas of modernity (2007:438), they use the town as the space to display their modern style of dress. The implication is, of course, not that these tactics address the dilemmas completely, especially within a household. This is precisely one of the contexts in which dramatic contestations between young adolescents and

men and their fathers take place with very destabilising emotional repercussions for both.

#### **4.4 Cell phone, Bike, TV; consuming 'outside' in competition**

Both facilitating and accompanying the preoccupation of consuming *class* in terms of food and clothes, an impressive scale of investments is made in acquiring such household consumer articles that aim to consume the 'outside/other' (Miller 1994, Peters 2001:79). A particular mention can be made of the three commonest articles desired and used by peasants, i.e., cell phones, motorbikes and colour TVs. At the time of my arrival in Jan 2005 there were no cell phones in the village; by March, 2006, calling one another on cell phones, or exchanging songs and video clips, from across the streets was a common occurrence. Likewise, in Jan, 2005, there were only 17 households with a personal motorbike in the village – by March, 2006, there were 39. Ekula Naidu rode around conspicuously in the village, and to his *thoTa*, on his shining new bike worth Rs. 57,000 (£850). The demand for new technology in TV was also equally impressive; the number of households with Black & White TV declined from 99 to 64 while those of colour TVs rose from 8 to 44 in the same period. In Jan, 2005, my landlady Jaimma (a *Kapu*) was the sole cable network operator in the village, offering two local Telugu channels (*Jamini/Teja*) aside from the Doordarshan for the previous 5 years, to the 99 households. In March, over a fracas involving payments, Ekula Naidu's family felt so slighted that his family invested close to Rs. 40,000 in a matter of two weeks and began offering separate services within a month. By March, 2005, however, both had sold their infrastructures calling the returns unprofitable. Following this, all CTV owning households have linked themselves to either 'Sun-direct' or 'Dish-TV', the two direct-to-home (DTH) terrestrial broadcasting services, by investing Rs. 3,000-3,500 with a recurring monthly cost of Rs. 250-300. Cell-phones, motorbikes and 200 odd satellite channels offer NRP peasants a seamless view of the outside –

regional, national and 'foreign' representations – which they, in turn, use to reproduce their own locality and notions of self (cf. de Certeau 1984: xii, Peters 2001).

*Table 4.3*

*Motorbikes and TVs in the NRP*

Caste	2004-05/2005-06	Models			
		Moped	<i>Pedda bandi</i> (Honda/Discover/Victor)	B/W TV (Onida)	CRTV (Samsung/Sansui/Videocone)
a. Kapus;	None	2 / 5		9/1	3/11
b. Ekulas;	None	1/ 7		20/12	1/13
c. Kurubas	7/7	1/8		50/38	2/12
d. Boyas	1/1	0/3		3/1	1/3
e. Dudekulas	2/2	0/1		4/2	0/3
f. Madiga (Dalits)	3/3	0/1		11/10	1/2
g. Others	0/2	–		–	–

(Source: NRP census survey, 2005)

Following Belk (2001:181 in Miller 2001) and Miller (1994:237) who see possessions as tools to manage identities, these objects relate to the processes of fundamental transition in the self-perception of the peasantry. Obviously, one aspect of this transition is the desire to consume newness and distinction by acquiring the latest brands. Sophisticated Nokia cell-phones with 'colour background', wide screen, inbuilt camera, of the kind that Mallesh (Jaimma's son) owns (worth Rs. 8,000) command attention in the village and this researcher is advised to replace his old black and white model with an identical one. M. Reddy, a new *thoTa* owner, has purchased the first flat screen Sansui CTV (worth Rs. 8,000), although knowledgeable men like Hanumappa think Samsung would have been a better choice. TVS mopeds, which until Jan, 2005 were almost entirely owned by small dry land sheep traders – the three 'big bikes' (*pedda bandilu*) were owned by the two largest *Kapu* landlords and a wealthy *Kuruba* *thoTa* owner – are completely passé. Responding positively to masculine electronic advertisements for motorbikes, the group of new *Kuruba*, *Ekula* and *Boya* *thoTa* owners have

acquired newer and trendier models including Hero Honda, Splendour, Bajaj Pulsar, Discover etc., which cost three times more than a moped (Rs.45, 000 to 60,000). This researcher's old Bajaj scooter is frequently held to be archaic (*mota bandi*) and eminently replaceable.

As an analogue to the consumption of rice, or wearing *khaddar*, the relative ubiquity of motorbikes and CTVs in the village reduces their generic distinctiveness (and hence the imperative to invest in ever newer models). Indeed, motorbikes have become a synecdoche for the notion of a masculine self that is in motion to 'develop' – the evidence for an NRP peasant's yearning for modernity - in an inherently unequal and uncertain agrarian environment. In everyday discourse, successful citrus cultivators are said to be "speeding away to development" (*speedga rawdam*), at "up to 60 km/ph", compared to whom dry land peasants have either "*slow pick up*", or none at all. Being static, dry land farmers are said to be way behind. But then, such a high-speed of development is also commonly associated with the simulacrum of sudden death (a fragile Heideggerian *Dasien*, cf Giddens 1991:36, Miller 1994:293, Ferguson 1999: Introduction) for *thoTa* owners; a bore-well failure is a "speed breaker" for the self-in-motion-to development and it hits *thoTa* cultivators "right on the head".

Another aspect of the transition in self-perception is clear in the way the concepts of the need (*avasaram*) and want (*korika*) are articulated in reference to a bike, a cell-phone or TV. Some *thoTa* peasants cite difficulty in walking to their *thoTa* everyday, all of which are, incidentally, within a radius of 2.5 km from the village (compare with Miller's description of a Trinidadian's experience with cars, p. 238), or the wastage of time in waiting for an auto to the *mandal* headquarters, or the need for entertainment of the family in evenings. This new consciousness of space and time as an obstacle, which needs to be addressed by means of a bike and/or a

cell phone and/or a TV relates as much to the point of the self becoming softer, due to a more refined lifestyle, as to the need to increase one's social availability (Douglas 1979:78-80). The articulation of pure want, in comparison, is exclusively novelty oriented ("*pedda mauj*"; for fun). Of course, as Douglas emphasizes, many wants have turned into 'needs' over time (1979:70-72) but the distinction is culturally relevant ; when Jaimma purchased a bike in 2005 in lieu of the long planned bullock cart, her neighbours ridiculed her decision as "build up" (i.e. showing off). It is here that the intent of obtaining *grip* harmonises needs and wants. Firstly, being the largest one-time investment after house construction, and with significant overheads (around Rs. 350- 500 per month), the bike is certainly an arriviste insignia of an individual's financial success (Belk 2001: 181 in Miller, 2001). In Ramesh's self-narrative, his father explicitly recommends to him to purchase a bigger bike in an acknowledgement of Ramesh's individuality, and his social *grip* over the family and outside. Secondly, owning a bike helps instantaneously to produce (masculine) sociality by allowing the owner to organise and consume outstation *enjay* parties. Since a bike or CTV owner is also in a condition to ingratiate a non owner, probably a dry land farmer, he commands a choice as to whom to accord his 'preference' (the English word is used) and to whom to deny it (Simmel 1978:209-212).

Since the acquisition of a CTV, cell phone and bike objectifies a developing and/or successful social self with the claim to *grip*, the traditional tournaments of honour, *poti* and *pandem* (competition and challenges, Ch.2), are also waged through them. The element of transition here lies in the use of an ever widening circuit of commodities, in more democratised social space, for staking the customary claims of manliness. If in Sudhakar's case, the *poti* between an *Ekula* businessman and a *Kapu thoTa* owner is mediated through a bike (Excerpt 4.5), in Naidu's (a large *Ekula thoTa* owner) case the *poti* with Jaimma (a middle *thoTa* farmer) is

mediated through a TV cable network. *Poti* involving high cost goods such as bikes, cars and houses (see below) are still restricted to the higher classes, albeit no longer exclusively the Reddys ; the progressively declining costs of other goods, such as cell phones and CTVs, render them amenable to emulative consumption in general. It is the asymmetry of consumption (as opposed to that of production) that objectifies values of *manam* and *avamanam* in a *poti* so that obtaining/maintaining inter-household parity ('*level*') by identical consumption at all costs becomes the motor of acquisition. In this form of creolization (Hannerz 1987), wherein consuming global material icons furthers the pursuit of *paurusham* locally, emergent consumption becomes eminently meaningful to NRP peasants; to them, to aggressively emulate each other in consuming commodities becomes a matter of "*Rayalseema paurusham*" (i.e., a unique kind of regional masculinity). Indeed, as Vijay's example in the excerpt 4.4 illustrates, such emulative consumption undercuts the moral ethos of deferred and limited consumption of desires (also see Miller 1995:270). In emulation, taking credit to finance acquisitions becomes value neutral in that it becomes a normal aspect of local self-hood.

#### Excerpt 4.4

N; I do not see your friend Vijji these days?  
S; he has changed in the last one week (*marpoinaludu*); *garvam akwa* (too much of arrogance)!  
N; why, I mean in a week's space?  
S; do not know; may be because he has obtained agriculture loan, (Rs.) 50,000. The other day, his brother asked me to drop him to the town on bike. I did so. Last week, we all were sitting (in the shop). I asked him if he could fetch my mobile from the neighbour's shop. (He said) " You are asking a *Reddy* to go and fetch the phone? Don't forget (*marchvaddu*). There is nothing that you have and I do not (*me daggirra yemi ra na daggirra levu*) !" I said, "I also went to drop your brother on my bike". Since then he does not come to my shop.  
N; oh...

S (smiling); yesterday, I heard he has mortgaged his gold necklace and bracelet for (Rs). 10,000. To buy a splendour plus; one that is same as mine.

The arrival of satellite channels has rendered the 'TV *gadi/baithe gadi*' (the TV room/public room in the house) as the venue competing with the bazaar for consuming leisure and sociality during evenings. The central public sphere stands fragmented in Habermas's sense (in Peters 2001:79), although it does not as yet imply consuming family oriented western sociality as young men watch television with close inter/intra caste companions. The contingent processes of a fundamentally reconstituted 'focus' (Gupta & Ferguson 2001:6, Peters 2001:75) and accompanying interpretations (Hall 1973, and Hebdige 1979 in Morley, 1995) are vividly apparent. One of them is the gendered (and gendering) consumption of products. Men spend most time watching films and film based programmes, such as 'Dance-Baby-Dance' (on Gemini TV) wherein young men and women from across the state dance to popular Telugu songs for top awards, while women prefer middle class soap operas. Men minutely (and varyingly) dissect the 'personality' of participants/actors; females are scrutinised for their 'figure' (physicality), dance steps, way of talking and extent of skin exposure whilst male actors are dissected for their personal bearings - dress, accessories and their shows of aggressive masculinity. As Hall suggests (in Morley 1995), these representations set agendas for and categories of possible self-creation and appropriation. Raja (22 years) and Hanumappa (21 years) appropriate the lover-boy suaveness of Venkatesh (a Telugu film actor) by mimetically consuming his wristwatch, cell phone and modern clothes while Govinda (42 years) appropriates the hyper-masculinity (*'full paurusham'*) of Balkrishna (another Telugu movie actor, see excerpt 4.5). In this 'bi-focality' (Peters 2001), the local is understood against the global and vice-versa; to Govinda, the slain local TDP leader Paritala Ravi (cf. Ch.6) represents "Hero Balakrishna" who, like the latter, takes on the dominant Reddy landlords and rowdies in an extremely violent factional feud. Similarly, the global

representations of 'develop' – modern Telugu heroes studying/working/romancing beautiful women in London/America (as in the super hit film *Nuvastanante Nevadduntana*, 2006) – become a local template for fathers to underline the need to educate their sons at all costs.

#### Excerpt 4.5

"Brother, ten year back, 10 year back, *preminchkunnanu* ('I have fallen in love'), Venkatesh (the lead star) had worn a watch; I wished to buy that watch in my life (Ramlu laughs).

N; what sort of watch it was?

S; that was like plastic type; not all dials were there. Only four, in different corners. I went looking for it in Anantpur. There, in model books (in the shop), I looked and found it. But he did not have it available. If I gave him advance, he said, he would have it supplied in one month. I paid him the advance, and had it bought in one month. (Rs.) 950, 10 years back.

R; what has the hero worn, the shirt, trousers, shoes, crop (i.e. hairstyle), watch. In *Yumdongalu*, Junior NTR (a popular actor and the grandson of NT Rama Rao) used this cell phone. I saw that and bought it from the town".

#### 4.5 Constructing new houses; the desire for "neatness"

Vastly higher in economic value than the category of articles of immediate consumption discussed so far, is the class of high cost durables owned by a household that involve greater sacrifices in acquisition (Simmel 1978:76). They are referred to as *vilvuainahasti* (valued property) and primarily include landholding, a house and (sometimes) milch animals, although a house commands particular attention as it succinctly objectifies the biography of an individual as a householder (cf. Ch. 3, Kopytoff 1986: 64-5). "Big people", it is said, "have big houses (*pedda manishi, pedda illu*)" and the mansion of CV Reddy's family, built about 30 years back by his father, aptly instantiates this idealised symmetry ('*arhaTa*') between the scales of person-hood and objects owned (McCraken, 1988:84). Chiselled stones and finished granite slabs (*belpabanda*), imported on

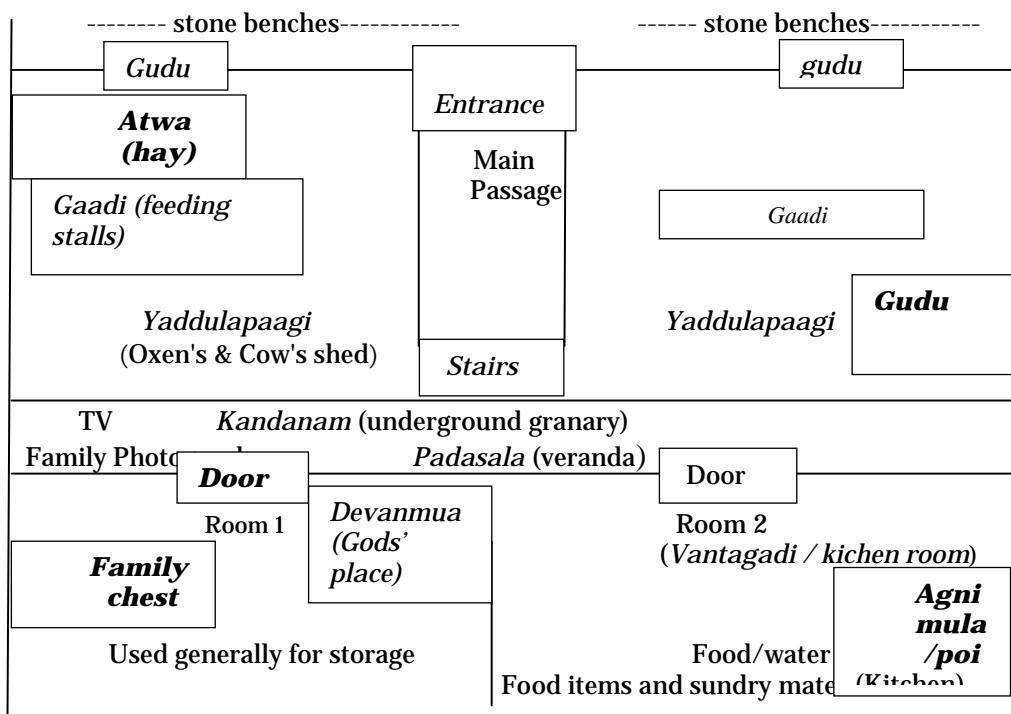
bullock carts from Udiripikonda (25km), were used to build the walls, ceilings and floors by skilled *Odde* caste masons. Exquisitely carved, smooth wooden pillars (*sthambham*) support the slab ceiling. When built, it was the only house in the village with a *middi* (staircase), an 'upstair' room (i.e., second storey) with a balcony, a *donnil* container (rainwater container), large grain pit (*kandanam*), a separate kitchen room and a bathroom with water-heating fireplace (*alekGu*). The traditional dwelling units of middle and small peasants have been far more modest in comparison; walls are made of local stones cemented with clay and the roof comprises a mesh (*taDaka*) of wood and reeds, plastered with clay (*sawdunella*) from above and there is no separate kitchen or bathroom. The *kullies* and *jeetas* – mostly *Madiga* households – have lived in huts with thatched walls and roof. Overall, a house has customarily objectified inter-penetrating categories of caste, class and individual agency (cf. McCracken, p. 110).

However, undercutting the structural and aesthetic distinctions corresponding to class differentiation, the design and organisation of space within the conventional house has usually reproduced agrarian lifestyle and values (cf. Map 4.1). The space in the foreground, the *pagi*, which is also the largest of the three spatial segments, is the domesticated agrarian sphere meant for keeping cattle, agricultural tools, hay and fire wood. The veranda (*padsala*) is the interstitial space that facilitates and grades public (masculine)-private (feminine) sociality and the sphere of consumption; besides grain storage, it is the venue for food consumption, conversation, entertainment and display of family memorabilia (photographs of forefathers, gods, a wedding picture of the household head). *Madiga* *kullies* do not enter the veranda of a caste house and even caste men outside of the kin network scrupulously avoid this feminine space in the absence of the male head/member. The interior room(s) (*kotidi*) – which is not an individual living room – is the private section that houses the *devanmulu* (god's corner) in the eastern corner, a

*birwa* (the family chest), and access to both is most select; whilst men and women of the house access this room only in a ritually pure state, only the family head can access the *birwa*. The furniture in a house is most patrician across classes - except for the richest Reddy households who possess cots (*mancham*) and wooden chairs, family members (and guests) universally sleep on the floor in the veranda. Thus, the customary house style externally objectifies the social identity of an individual and/or his family in its structure and architecture while retaining the communitarian principles of utility, jointness, gender and purity distinctions in the organisation of space internally.

Figure 4.1

*Mota Illu* (the old house); an outline



But now, although a house still represents the customary categories of class and individual agency, it does so to underscore an identity of *neatness* and *class*. The notion of neatness with reference to housing, both realised as well as aspired to,

imply the idea of possessing a discrete dwelling unit – externally as well as internally – for one's conjugal family. Analogous to the changing housing styles in the Trinidadian villages (Miller 1994: 32, 36) , or to those in western Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Braudel 1973 in McCracken 1988:135), a neat house is one that stands out individually by means of a front yard that is enclosed (a compound) by an iron gate. The desire for a distinguishable house with a well-defined private space, has led many elementary families living in internally divided customary houses ( as mentioned in Ch. 3 above), and some joint families too, to construct a new house in the family farm yard (*duddi*), or in newly purchased plots on the fringes of the village. Internally the idea of neatness prescribes adopting modern structural and architectural design that expressly dispenses with agrarian utility. In its most basic form, popular amongst small and marginal dry land households, it includes a brick-mortar single or double room house with concrete ceilings, cemented floors, glass windows, wall shelves, concrete hearth in the interior room and a separate bathroom. The newly affluent middle and large citrus *thoTa* owners and livestock-traders go much further in identifying with the urban middle classes lifestyle by constructing (or aspiring to construct) larger two storey houses with impressive exteriors (with portico/ façade), a hall, marble/terrazzo flooring, concealed electric fittings, stylish staircases in the front of the house, a modern slab kitchen, attached toilet and bathroom. A separate cattle shed within the compound or outside is constructed. Some of them like Ramesh aspire to construct a new large house which, in addition to these things, will have modern style plumbing with running taps (see below). This would emulate PVR – the wealthiest Reddy landowner - who invested close to Rs. 21,000 on laying a water pipeline from his *thoTa* about 750 metres away to his house in 2005. The house, apparently, has become an “object-code” (Sahlins 1976 in McCracken 1988) for both continuity and change; it is a *known* medium to wage local status politics even as it is also a sign to consume the runaway urban modernity.

Excerpt 4.6

N; and then, you are planning to build a house?

R; yes, from next January, big house; I shall live according to my tastes (*na estimate prakaranga unDala*)

N; what tastes?

R; there shall be five rooms; one on the first floor, and 4 on the ground.

N; why four; what shall you do with so many?

R; It ought to be neat (*neatga undala*); one room for TV, sofa set, the best one (*bhariga*), even if it costs Rs. 40,000-50,000. I have seen it in the town, I have an idea about them. Then, one room for food only; kitchen and sitting on the table, both sides. One to sleep in (*pandakundaniki*). One to keep rice, other articles, like a storeroom. There shall be a bathroom and toilet, separate. If some friends, male, come, *neatiga*, a room on the first floor (for them).

N; how much do you think this shall cost?

R; 6, 7, up to 8 lacks (£11,900) is all right (*animidi laksalu varke kanile*). I shall come to my farmyard, have 3 cents, shall buy 3, from P. Reddy, in six cents, there shall be a compound around the house, some vacant place in front, for green grass (*gadka kosham*)

N; where did you see this estimate?

R; in the city, many places; shall get water to the house from the *thoTa*, by pipe, turn the tap and water should come in the bathroom.

Although it has followed class-relative mobilisation of resources, the scale of penetration of neatness in terms of the construction of new houses has been truly striking (cf. Table 4.4). Except for one Yerikula family, not a single household lives in a thatched hut any more. The SC colony comprises concrete, albeit uniform, single and double room dwelling units that have been built between 1992-1997 under the part subsidy part loan (totalling Rs. 25,000 per household) government rural housing scheme, or under full subsidy from the Rural Development Trust. A majority of small and marginal dry land BC peasants have constructed single or double room houses under the govt. scheme although their aspiration for neatness in terms of a larger built up space, better interior and exterior finishing ('look') and staircase construction is more conspicuous. Obliged to make investments of up to Rs. 100,000, four times the maximum govt. subsidy, within a

short period of 6-8 months, these peasant households borrow large sums from *thoTa* and/or livestock farmers as an advance against future labour. In 2006, Virubhadra's (a marginal dry land peasant) wife committed suicide when she failed to get credit from her consanguines for the house already under construction; Virubhadra had been pressing her to get credit from them for some time, and had threatened her not to return home empty-handed before she went. The erstwhile small and middle dry peasants, now successful citrus cultivators, are investing their large agricultural surpluses, often to the tune of Rs. 200,000 to 300,000 in the construction of new houses. In fact, instantiating the evocative imagery of "high-speed mobility" noted earlier, a *thoTa* farmer in IP village with just 3.5 acres of citrus orchard (productive for about 3 years) has constructed a double storey mansion, with a huge compound and iron-gates, marble flooring and a portico, costing reportedly Rs. 800,000 (£11,900).

**Table 4.4** *The distribution of old and new house (%)* N=31

Class	Old	New
1. Marginal peasants	27	73
2. Small peasants	30	70
3. Middle peasants	62	38
4. Large peasants	-	100*
Overall	28	72

Note; \* Only 2 large farmers are represented in the sample and hence this is just illustrative.

Given the wide acceptance of *neatness* as the new idiom of status and, in turn honour (Pitt-Rivers 1970:22), for those who have to continue living in an old, "primitive" (*moTa*) house, of whatever standard, is to feel shame (*feel aiopowdam/siggupadDam*). It constantly reminds the resident of his laggardness and attendant inferiority vis-à-vis his consanguines and consociates who live in new house. Shame is strongest, however, in those face-to-face interactions in which an employer/urbane friend or relative, i.e. an agent of a superior cultural category, visits the resident in his old house; Ujinappa (a middle *thoTa* farmer)

who was faced with the prospect of welcoming his bank-manager friend at his old house, said that he “did not know where to sit him”; he took the manager in the new house of his cousin that was fortuitously vacant at that time. However, while living in a new house confers status and honour on the resident in general, the grounds on which to judge the scale of neatness of a house once again demonstrates the same moral schism that we have noted above. To many middle and elderly peasants, a mansion of the kind Ramesh plans to construct, or the one constructed in IP village, is patently pretentious for the owners fail the test of *arhata* – the required level of education and sophistication. Following Hannah Arendt (1958 in McCracken 1988), such criticism betrays an attempt to arrest the serious dislocation of traditional meanings that new wealth has brought. But in doing so, it ignores the fact that a house also objectifies an aspiration for urban identity and emulative claims of parity and *grip* amongst rich non-Reddy citrus cultivators who have been the oppressed castes until very recently (cf. Simmel 1978:221, McCracken 1988:117).

#### **4.6 Money, *Asuya* (ill-will) and Anomie; “consume and show off”, or “consume but don’t show off”?**

A central paradox is that just as consumption of modern goods objectifies the claims of higher individuality, e.g., achievements of status and success, it also triggers, as has been recognised (Pocock 1973, Foster 1972), a whole range of pathological emotions including *nuppi* (angst), *irshya* (jealousy), *asuya* (envy/ill-will) and *dwesham* (hatred). Overt and ubiquitous status oriented competitions to command scarce ground-water, land and honour, in a sort of zero-sum game, engender these emotions. Here, I am concerned with the condition of *asuya* in its particular relevance to the consumption of *class* lifestyle and its debilitating impact on the conception of self. As Foster observes about envy (*ibid*, 168), *asuya* emanates in immediate and objective asymmetries of production and

consumption; a person's possession of a *thoTa*, bike, house, fine clothing, wealth (or even an extra-marital access to a woman) causes *asuya* amongst those who relate to him intimately and yet lack one, or all of these objects. In other words, although the social field of *asuya* is limited, its scope in terms of the triggering object is not. In NRP those who claim to be the victim of *asuya* are generally the most successful *thoTa* peasants in the last 7-8 years. They often trace envy to the selfish, unreasonable, and hence unrequited, demand on their 'personal' goods by others. Ramesh, who suffers from an acute sense of being envied, relates it to his refusal to share his new Bajaj Discover motorbike, his new cell-phone and his money – as credit or as *kharch* (spending) on *enjay* parties with his friends as *they* wish. These envious friends include both rival equals, i.e. other *thoTa* owners across castes) as well as non-equals, that is, other dry land farmers (Davis 1936: 401 cited in Foster, p.170-171).

From the envier's perspective, however, it is the "show of dignity/class" (*class chubhiyadam*) by the envied that attracts *asuya*. The not-so-subtle shift of onus is noted; while the envied considers envier(s) unreasonable in demanding a share of his personal goods and wealth, the envier accuses the envied of having an overreaching, pompous consumption style. Both positions are inherently subjective. 'Dignity' – which runs parallel to pretension in Bourdieu's sense – is said to be shown when one consumes the range of new *class* goods with an aim to claim and secure higher status/image in the public eye without seemingly possessing the corresponding economic or cultural capital (*arhata*). Thus, when an illiterate *nouveau riche* *thoTa* peasant builds a mansion in the village, or when Ramesh, again a semi-literate, newly affluent sheep trader, sends his young son for education to a boarding school in Ranchi with my help, it is held to be ostentatious (*jambham*). Similarly, when one talks people down, or refuses to share social space and commensality – not because of caste specific considerations of pollution, but

due to the newly acquired taste for neatness - one shows dignity. 'Speaking high' (*marti dubbari*) in the 'heat of money', a hubristic act, such as that of Ramesh in the *pandem* (see Ch. 6 below) is also a 'show-off'. To reformulate the contradiction I have been suggesting here, the objects and acts through which men compete for status and *paurusham* are also the very objects and acts that expose them to envy.

It is the expressions and implications of *asuya* which are instructive. As Blums finds in Greece (1965:128), it is expressed through a range of actions, namely satire (*jokega*), back-biting/gossiping/calumny (*cheDga cheppaDDam*), casting a 'bad eye' (*cherpu*), and at times, aggression (*dari*) against the envied one's property. The notion that envy is articulated through praise only in non-peasant societies, as Foster (p. 172) argues, is possibly incorrect; in NRP it may take the form of exaggerated praise, such as, "what about you! A millionaire you are (*KotisswarDu*); the son of *Lakshmi* (*LaksmiputraDu*)! You are worth your weight in money (*dabbuto samanam*)"<sup>17</sup>. These expressions are made both directly to an envied as well as to a third party, implying that a direct expression of envy is not morally reprehensible as Blums suggests (*ibid*). More serious is the spectre of defamation for the envied. The commonest sorts of envious defamation link the envied person to an extra-marital sexual liaison, and/or as Osella and Osella note (2000:137), attribute his new affluence to morally dubious acts. In Ramesh's case, I heard both these accusations. The accusation of an extra-marital liaison was not entirely baseless, though it was indeed used strategically by some of his rivals to cause him financial and status loss. However, the most damning expression of envy is the ridicule, direct and indirect, that follows an envied person - the so-called dignity shower- if and when his consumption of *class* is rendered non-feasible in the event of drastic economic and/or social reverses, such as when his

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<sup>17</sup>An expression I heard against Hanumappa, Ekula Shivaiah's son as well as in the self-narratives of Ramesh, when he was referring to his consciousness of being envied.

bore well fails. The general refrain in such a case is, “Good, isn't it! He tried to show off and now he has fallen flat on his face (*vagne kada! Badai padipoinaDu!*)!” In other words, the expression of envy is the loudest and harshest at the end of the *poti*, or *pandem*, which is precisely when, as Durkheim emphasizes, the need for “mutual moral support” is the highest ( 1952/2006:226).

Given the scale of economic differentiation in the village, each *thoTa* owner is conscious of being envied for his wealth and style of consumption and constantly faces the resultant spectre of losing status and honour until his pecuniary status is completely secured. The most successful of these owners, like Ramesh and Adiappa, say they experience social and psychological detachment (*virakti aipowdam*) – a sort of forced pathological individualism - as they are constantly conscious of their envious friends and relatives calling them *papisthaDu/nishThuram* (brute/heartless) behind their backs. Being envied engenders a state of ever-alertness, in which what enviers say to the envied's face or to a third party, namely any insult/ derogatory gossip/calumny (*ninda*) is liable to “burn the envied from inside, simmering slowly (*lopakalchestundi, mantutundi*).” It is little surprise then that envied bore well owners often speak of “living by themselves” as being morally appropriate, although they are also conscious that any practice of moral individualism only accentuates an envier's accusations and slights. Moreover, as I have mentioned, in the event of the failure of a bore well, which carries the entire burden of one's success, honour and aspirations, the experience of detachment, or *virakti*, may indeed be grave enough to make suicide a very proximate option (cf. Excerpt 4.7). This idea of social detachment is distinct from the voluntary pathological individualism in Durkheim's *Suicide* (p., 225) because, to *thoTa* owners it appears to be a *forced* detachment. In fact, contrary to Durkheim's rather contrived belief that pathological individualism and *anomie* relate to two separate social spheres of

integration and regulation (cf. Pope 1976:56, Sainsbury 1955:22), the emotional state of *virakti* is a sort of egoism that stems from an *anomic* constellation. Accentuating desires faced with uncertain financial means, the competition for status in a hyper-masculine social world, and excessive envy combine egoism to *anomie* rather seamlessly.

#### Excerpt 4.7

N; is it that, being sensitive to what other people say about you, after you are seen to be wealthy (*dabbu undewadu*), that you try harder, deliberately, to look undignified?  
R; that is there; I try. Now that money has come to me, by chance, if I suffer financially, I shall not (be able to) live ( *dabbu vachindi naki, e prakaram lo yemi aina dabba tinte, manmu bathakamu*). Suppose, if I stumble down from here (*miss aipoite*), (they shall say), “man! What a motorbike (he purchased) in two days! What *thoTa*, what drip (irrigation system)! Sending his son to Ranchi for education, what a great show off (*walu jambham yemi!*). I can not outlive any financial loss at this stage (*naku ee parishthiti to dabba tinte thatkolenu*).

Following Foster who marshals a range of ethnographic evidence to argue that “all societies appear to have cultural form, norms and outlook to reduce the fear of consequence of envy” (p. 175), it may now be asked if there are no ways available to NRP peasants to reduce that fear. He presents four cultural strategies, namely, concealment or denial of affluence, symbolic sharing and true sharing (ibid). It appears that all these strategies of self-control are used varyingly by the peasants, but the efficacy of these strategies is compromised by both the nature of the transition in question and the dominant and contradictory framework of *paurusham*. As I have said, both compartmentalisation of consumption and displaying “ascetic poverty” (Simmel 1978:251), such as wearing *nicker/shine banni* or working with *Madiga kullies*, as PVR does, or deliberately trying to appear dirty amidst livestock as Ramesh does, are forms of concealment of wealth and denial of neatness. But these regulatory practices are contradicted by the equally strong demands of *paurusham* which put a premium on communicating one's success loud

and clear. As we have seen, not making an investment in new acquisitions and services is only a sure sign of being called a miser (*bankoDu*). Concealment and denial are also not feasible when the village credit market is the most rewarding avenue of investment for peasants. Someone like Adiappa – one of the richest new *thoTa* owners - is reported to have deposited all his surplus money in a bank to avoid the risk of envy in the village, but most others take that risk in the expectations of higher economic returns, and/or as a measure of symbolic sharing of wealth. Ramesh's frustration is in no small measure due to the fact that his friends, whom he has tried helping with credit as liberally as possible, are also his enviers. With no effective social system of true wealth-sharing in place, in the midst of increasing differentiation, status insecurity and conflicting value systems, one of the most effective strategies to avoid envy is to embrace religion and invest in temples. A number of temples are being built in and around NRP.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to document the nature of transition in the pattern of consumption and lifestyles pursued, and aspired to, by NRP peasants and some of the important implications resulting from it. From local food habits, clothes, leisure activities, to the desire for neat houses, there is a clear commitment amongst peasants to aestheticise (Hebdige 1993 in Huat 2000: 5) their lifestyles on the model of the urban middle classes. The local peasants use the acquisition of new commodities to communicate ideas of individual success or failure in an overtly competitive framework of *paurusham*. Yet, this desire for stylisation, or *neatness/class* in their words, is inherently anomie. For dry land peasants, who experience being left behind in this individualistic emulative community, the consumption of *class* involves ends – or desires - in contradiction to their financial means (Durkheim 1952/2006: 271). The suicide of Virubhadra's wife instantiates this aspect of anomie. In comparison, the extended capacity for production amongst

*thoTa* peasants enables them to pursue the new style of consumption with greater ease. However, they too face *anomie* as a result of the uncertainties that are associated with the bore-well based production regime. Furthermore, they feel socially disintegrated as a result of being envied for their wealth and consumption. In sum, NRP can be said to represent the morally “declassified” community in the Durkheimian sense (p. 276), wherein burgeoning aspirations to consume modernity and achieve ‘post-peasant’ identities are in conflict with an agrarian production regime that is fragile and hence risk-prone.

## **Chapter 5**

### **'Farmers' Suicides'; a critical appraisal**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter is the first part of my analyses of rural suicides and it focuses on the phenomenon of 'farmers' suicides' amongst the local peasants. A brief overview of the official narrative and statistics concerning 'farmers' suicides' in Anantpur district appears in section 5.2. Following this, there is a discussion about the process in which my method for data-collection (section 5.3) evolved in the field. Here I argue, against Durkheim, and against proponents of 'farmers' suicides' thesis who have followed him, why studying suicide as an objective social fact (Durkheim 2006: Ch.1) in the field is epistemologically difficult, restrictive, and indeed misleading. The next sections (5.4 and 5.5) present broad aetiological patterns that emerge from an examination of 29 cases of 'farmers' suicides'. Against the notion of an aetiological unity - that is farming (i.e. agricultural) related distress being a necessary and sufficient cause, as suggested in official and academic literature on 'farmers' suicides' (Vasavi 1999, Vaidynathan 2006, Mohanty 2005) - a broad aetiological continuum characterises these cases. Put differently, I suggest that whilst there are some farm/agriculture related suicides in the mould of the Weberian ideal type, there are other cases that are difficult to be catalogued as being primarily farm-related and indeed, still others which are indistinguishable from general rural suicides due to the exclusive or principal presence of non-farming related aetiologies. This means that contrary to this literature which fails to scrutinise the official discourse and statistics on farmers' suicide as inherently problematic (*ibid*), I show that the official process of attributing motives *ex post facto* is mediated by what de Certeau (1984: xvii) calls the polemological enterprise. That is, the motive of farm-relatedness is dialogically and materially created (*srintincDam*) *post mortem* in such cases by the kinsmen of a deceased and by

other community members, with an active acquiescence from, or in collusion with, the larger institutional agencies such as the police and bureaucracy.

### **5.2 A brief overview of official cases of ‘farmers’ suicides’**

The government agencies constitute a primary source of statistical data about the phenomena of ‘farmers’ suicides’ in the district. Both the objectives of, and the method stipulated for, examining the cases of suicide officially and return a verdict as to whether they are farm-related or not, are informed by a particular aetiological conception and their supposed material presence. A set of policy guidelines that were issued by the state of Andhra Pradesh in May 2004, betray this conception and amongst them, the promulgation titled “The interim special package for relief, economic support and rehabilitation, 2004<sup>1</sup>,” is specially noteworthy. An important paragraph from the promulgation is cited below (Excerpt 5.1). Apparently, the official narrative aims to accommodate all sorts of aetiological perspectives offered for the phenomena in the Indian media and academia. Yet, it shall be seen that many of the reasons advanced for farm-related suicides are rather presumptuous. Further, it may also be noted that the ‘farm-related’ reasons enlisted in the official communiqué have to empirically found or proved at the local levels. Lastly, the externalisation of the loci of causes – that is, suicidal action being considered completely external to the agency of the deceased farmer and his family – is another salient feature of the official position.

#### Excerpt 5.1

“The reasons for committing such (i.e. farmers’) suicide may be various. The natural calamities like successive droughts and pest attacks, mounting of debts year after year, consequent social humiliation faced by the family, financial extortion and psychological trauma resulting in social disconnect are leading to eventual suicides.”

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<sup>1</sup>Refer to the Government of Andhra Pradesh Order. Ms. no. 417, Revenue (DA.11) Dept., dated 31-05-2004.

The objective of the special package, the promulgation states, is to provide an immediate financial relief to bereaved families in short term, and rehabilitate them occupationally in the long run. Accordingly, Rs. 50,000 is provided to an 'eligible' family towards a one-off settlement of all outstanding debt liabilities whilst an *ex gratia* grant of Rs. 100,000 is given over a period of three years for farm-rehabilitation<sup>2</sup>. The stipulated institutional method for the selection of "cases of suicides provisionally arising out of farm income related issues" is the formation of a committee of three district officials including a police officer. This committee is expected to "verify each case" of suicide taking place within the area of its official jurisdiction to "establish the correlation between farm related operations, economic distress and social humiliation eventually leading to suicide." In other words, the onus of establishing the correlation – or its lack – is on this district committee. The verification and certification process at the district level commences with the receipt of a preliminary report on a suicide from the *Mandal* Revenue Officer (MRO) along with the mandatory First Information Report (FIR) lodged with the local police station, the police inquest report, the *post mortem* report and a forensic report about the cause(s) of death. If a positive causal correlation between the suicidal act and farming is proved, the cases are recommended to the District Collector for his approval and release of the package of benefits. Courtesy of the promulgation, the relief package has been under operation in the district with retrospective effect from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998 to this date (i.e., 2006).

In compliance, the district committee has so far – that is from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998 to 30<sup>th</sup> December 2006 – returned 352 cases as certified cases of 'farmers' suicides' in the district, even as another 17 cases await a final decision. The year-wise distribution of these cases is as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, the benefits of such public welfare schemes as suitable to their needs, housing and education being the two most common one, are also extended to them.

Table 5.1 The incidence of 'farmers' suicides' between 1998-2006

Year	Decisions returned	Groundnut Yield (kg/Acre)
1998	1	--
1999	9	--
2000	21	383
2001	35	467
2002	60	372
2003	72	284
2004	80	810
2005	48	436
2006	43*	--

Source: The District Collector's office, ATP Total = 369

The Handbook of Statistics, Anantpur District (2000-2006)

Note; \* this includes the 17 cases on which a final decision is awaited.

There are certain salient aspects of these official statistics that may be emphasized here. First, there is a temporal division in the distribution of cases; there are relatively lesser number of cases returned as we move back in years before 2004, especially so during the 1998-2001, while it increases substantially around 2003 and 2004. It may well be possible that the lower number of cases in the period before the relief package was announced (i.e., before 2004, especially in 1998 and 1999) is due more to the methodological difficulties associated with verifying a case as farm-related and not because of a lower incidence of 'farmers' suicides'. Lack of awareness amongst the peasantry about the relief package and a pronounced disinclination on the part of peasants to register a case with the police are two such difficulties. The converse possibility may explain the increase in the number of reported cases around 2004. Partial support for this possibility comes from the fact that the yields of groundnut, which is a good proxy for the agrarian economic situation in the district, registered steepest fluctuations in 2000, 2002 and 2003 while recovering sharply in 2004 /05. Second is the geographical dimension of the statistics. Of the 352 cases, 138 (39.20%) are concentrated in just 10 *mandals* of this sprawling district, while the remaining 214 (60.80%) are distributed across other 51 *mandals*<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, of these 10 *mandals*, the 7 located contiguously in the very

<sup>3</sup>There are 63 *mandals* in total in Anantpur district, out of which only 2 (Lepakshi and Chilimathur) do not report any case of officially certified farming suicide by a farmer. These *mandals* are grouped in three revenue divisions; the north - western division (headquartered at Dharmavaram *mandal*), the central-eastern division (headquartered at Anantpur *mandal*) and the southern division (headquartered

centre of the district, encircling the town (Anantpur), contribute a conspicuously larger number of cases as compared to all other regions; nearly a third (28.40%) of all 'farm suicides' are concentrated in these seven *mandals*. This again raises the possibility of geographical asymmetry in the reportage of suicides to local police. Lastly, there are discernible socio-economic patterns associated with these cases. Amongst the 296 suicide cases for which I have the relevant data, the deceased are preponderantly male farmers from the 'Other Castes' (OCs), primarily the dominant agriculturist *Kapus* and *Kammas*, and from the 'Backward Castes' (BCs), primarily the *Kurubas*. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are conspicuous by their absence. Approximately half of the suicides appear to have been of marginal and small farmers, with the size of their land holdings reaching up to 5 acres only.

*Table 5.2 The socio-economic profile of the official 'farmers' suicides'*

Particulars	No.
Sex	
Male	283
Female	13
Caste*	
Other Caste (OCs)	142
Backward Castes (BCs)	122
Scheduled Castes (SCs)	17
Scheduled Tribes (STs)	12
i. Ownership of land*	
>5 acres	153
5-10 acres	92
10-20 acres	40
<20 acres	9

Source; The List of 'farmers' suicides, District Collectorate, Anantpur

Note; \* the number under these headings add up to 293 and 294 respectively for lack of relevant data in the remaining cases.

### **5.3 Method with experience; the exigencies of fieldwork on suicide**

When one reviews the exploratory literature on 'farmers' suicides', especially those which involve field-surveys, one is struck by what Atkinson (1978: 23) calls the "taken for granted, crude positivism" in suicide research. Explicit comparative

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at Penukonda *mandal*). Thus, the first and the third divisions have contributed disproportionately less to overall number of officially certified farming suicides, while the central-eastern division had contributed disproportionately more.

frameworks with matching 'controlled' samples in a Durkheimian vein are used with claim that they are 'superior' to those studies that don't use a comparative framework (e.g. Mishra 2006:1541, Mohanty and Shroff 2004:5599, Mohanty: 2005). Although Vasavi (1999:2268) is an exception in pointing out, in an endnote, about the 'sensitivity of the issue' of suicides, for almost all other field-workers the subject of suicide appears epistemologically natural, as if waiting to be captured in its Durkheimian matter-of-factness (Atkinson, 1978:20). Unsurprisingly, in this naturalist framework, there is no scope for reflexivity, i.e., objectifying oneself as a researcher (Tierney, 1984:584), and for accounting the deeply unsettling sort of confrontation that a fieldwork on suicide inevitably entails for the fieldworker due to the embeddedness of suicide in a cultural, social and political context (Atkinson 1978, Douglas: 1967).

I myself stand partially guilty of this positivist crudeness owing to my failure, as Devereux suggests (1967:5), to distinguish between the procedures of physical sciences and a general scientific method with interdisciplinary validity. I was aware of the disapproval in Hinduism to the act of suicide – it is a 'bad death' (Bloch & Parry 1982; 16-17). I was also conscious of the critique of Durkheimian positivism from the phenomenological perspectives (Douglas 1967, Atkinson 1978). Accordingly, I did anticipate my ethnographic experience to be demanding and unsettling. The actual challenges of the field, however, were too varied, immediate and anxiety-provoking to be accounted for in the methodological framework I had developed before entering the field.

To select a primary field-site (i.e. a village), I travelled to some villages reporting cases of 'farmers' suicides'. Without prior announcements, we – two local Communist Party of India (Marxist) peasant-workers<sup>4</sup> and I – would visit bereaved families and try to ascertain the chain of events around the act of suicide. As a

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<sup>4</sup> Includes Mr. Jayachandra, an educationist in Anantpur town, and Rahul, Dr. Geyanand's elder son.

'new/other person' (*kottaappa/vere appa*), my presence attracted pointed enquiries with a triteness (see below) that shone in contrast to the elaborately forthright 'arrival tropes' that ethnographers are used to describing (cf. Srinivas 1976 , Pratt 1986, pp. 36-40 in Clifford 1986). In my first few meetings, the peasants I spoke with appeared less circumspect in discussing 'farmers' suicides' than I had anticipated. But they were also disarmingly general; "the lack of rain, mounting debts and pressure from the creditors make peasants die; what else can they do (*varsham raka, appulubadha to rythulu chinpottunaDu; marri yemi cestaDu*)?" Such general responses seemed to suggest, in a Foucauldian sense (cf. Brass 1997: 3), the penetration of the local interpretations by the 'external' discourse of 'farmers' suicides' that had been playing out in the local *Telugu* news papers and TV channels.

Indeed, the attention of the state (Geertz 1995:106 in Gupta and Ferguson 1997:26) and that of the civil society was ubiquitous in the discourse. My enquiry about the total number of suicides that Chiyedu village (in Anantpur *mandal*) had witnessed between 1998-2004 was thus answered; "(there have been) 5 suicides but only one has received money this far (*atmahatya chaisinwaDu aidu mandi unnaDu, kani dabbu okka atanu ki wachindi*)". By establishing an administrative framework to bracket the cases of '*raithulu ātmahatyā*' from other rural suicides, and by extending the relief package to the former, the state had conjured a binary of suicide categories. The officially certified cases of 'farmers' suicides' appeared to be publicly somewhat accessible to an outsider, albeit only in a general vein, whilst 'other' rural suicides, I sensed, remained outside of the domain of this public discourse. The field appeared muddled and disturbed, not natural and 'pure' (Geertz 1995 in Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 7 -13, Devereux 1967). The tales of visits by the Prime Minister, the Chief Minister, politicians, journalists, bureaucrats and researchers, and the stories of their giving *ex gratia* money, or promising monetary help, were the points of

notation in the local narrative. The aetiological specificity of a farm-related suicide I had hoped to find and record stood quite marginalised in the local discourse.

My presence, i.e., the presence of an observer, in the villages and the purpose of my 'enquiry' (English word was used by peasants) attracted a thorough, symmetrical scrutiny against this framework of signification (Devereux, p. 20). It is intriguing how others studying 'farmers' suicides' or suicides in general posit and sustain the view of a Newtonian unidirectionality of observation. "Who is he"? "Is he a govt. functionary surveying (the households of) suicides to report the outcomes to the govt"? Or, "is he from a *samstha* (i.e. a Non Government Organisation), or RDT<sup>5</sup>"? "Is his survey going to get money to the families of suicides? "Is it going to prevent them from getting it" <sup>6</sup>? "If he is neither giving money, nor sending his report to the Govt., why is he doing this enquiry? "Who gives him his salary; is that in England *dubbu* (currency)?" These questions, which were incessantly put to my interlocutors, indicated symmetrical struggle and anxieties on the part of local peasants to place me - the 'observer/outsider' - in the emergent frame of signification: an outsider/observer like me was made sense of in relation to the tangible consequentiality – both intended and unintended - of her enquiry. For me as a researcher, this frame of scrutiny entailed a double bind. Even as I felt anxious to dispel any erroneous expectations on the part of my informants, the alternative spectre of my presence becoming 'pointless' insofar as my work offered no tangible benefit to a bereaved family was also equally disturbing to me. My linguistic handicap of not knowing Telugu did not help the matters either. On one occasion, using the same frame of signification, my CPI (M) peasant friends described the

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<sup>5</sup>The Rural Development Trust is a large NGO with interest in education, health and housing amongst the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the district. In local conversations, it is often hyphenated with the 'govt' on account of its massive presence in Anantpur villages.

<sup>6</sup> Some months after I had begun my fieldwork, I was to learn that a "tellagga *amma*" (white lady) had visited many of these suicides cases recognised by the govt. as genuine cases of farmers' suicides, soon after the incidents to present them Rs. 500 each.

purpose of my enquiry to be a *resurvey* of the suicide cases on the behest of the Government!

The relationship between the notions of nativity, self and other and their epistemological implications has attracted systematic reflections in ethnographic theory (e.g. Gupta & Ferguson 1997:16, Pratt 1986:36-40). Geertz's field-work account (1983) exemplifies the powerlessness of a non-native, white, observer in the post-colonial field-work setting as against the archetype of subservience (Levi-Strauss, 1966 in Dwyer, 1977; 143) that underpinned the observer-informant relationship in classical fieldwork encounters. I was a native researcher (Tierney 1984) and yet, my own experience of powerlessness betrayed contextual relativities that are disguised in the term nativity – a point that escapes Tierney's attention. Field note 5.1 shows how marked and immediate is the reservation of a local peasant to discuss an incident of suicide – in this case it was not a 'farmers' suicide' – involving a member of his kindred or acquaintance, with an outsider/other. It is arguable if Naik, who was more native than me, could have pressed on about the causes of suicide in my absence or in a more private setting. In hindsight I doubt if he could<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, to anticipate my critique of the existing literature on 'farmers' suicide' on epistemological grounds, the presence of an outsider, which stringently mediates/distorts the native accounts of suicides, speaks to the boundaries of an 'imagined' community of the village of a suicide. Being outside of this bounded space in the early days of fieldwork, my slightly concerted investigation in a case of 'farmers' suicides' in NRP was sufficient to make my neighbour Ramanjee walk out of the room in suspicion about my enquiry! It seems plausible to say that studying in a village/locality - doing fieldwork in ethnographic sense - is not an epistemological choice as some may now say (cf. Clifford 1997: 192), but it is a

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<sup>7</sup> In course of work, often overwhelmed by lack of progress in a particular case of suicide, I requested my close friends in NRP to find out the causes of suicide in a village in the same *mandal* or outside of it. I realised that they often succeed only marginally more than I did! I shall explain the cause of this difficulty shortly.

*necessity* when one knows that one's presence as an outsider/other for a short-term is likely to distort the reality under study.

#### Field notes 5.1

I am sitting at the tea stall by the road; Venkatesh, Nagraj and two other young local men are reading a Telugu newspaper and conversing in between. Their discussion concerns a man wanted by the Anantpur police for his alleged role in the Paritala Ravi (an influential Telugu Desham Party politician from the district) assassination case. As they are talking, a motorbike stops by the shop and two young men alight. One of them, smartly dressed in denim trousers, shirt tucked in and with a golf cap, shakes hand with Venkatesh and others including me. I learn that he, Naik, is working with the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and the other person is his colleague. Naik is a native of the same *mandal* and has been known to Venkatesh and Nagraj. Naik asks Nagraj, how the latter has been and what work does he do. Nagraj says that he has a vehicle servicing shop beside the usual cultivation. Naik continues, "and how is your brother, where is he these days?" Nagraj, his eyes withdrawing from Naik's face and dropping momentarily onto his own lap, mumbles, "*suicide cheskunnāDu* (he committed suicide)". There is a brief silence from both sides; there is no further question asked and no further qualification offered. An uncomfortable silence. The two newspaper reading men resume their conversation on assassination.

The circumstances I have been describing, namely those in which an anxious observer/researcher engages with his equally anxious informants, often produce scotoma or blind spots for the former (Devereux 1967: 69). One of my scotomas was my failure to appreciate the full import of a categorical reluctance on the part of local peasants to discuss a particular case of suicide chrono-historically. Responding to the challenge of my otherness within a short-term perspective, my priority was to devise a strategy as to how to enter the primary field-site (i.e., NRP). I remained discreet about my purpose to study 'farmers' suicides' at the time of taking residence in NRP; my purported aim was to research its dry land economy. References to suicides in general or to the 3 cases of 'farmers' suicides' in NRP (the most recent was less than 2 year old) remained few in my presence during the first 3

months <sup>8</sup>. Having secured familiarity with the villagers by way of carrying out village census, I cursorily began to ask my relatively close friends, who were by then also my Telugu language teachers, about why there were so many newspaper reports of suicides amongst farmers in the district. This strategic discretion did help contain a potential aggravation of the intense feeling of suspicion (*anumanam*) my arrival in NRP had generated. I was seen as a 'Police informer', and a 'Government emissary' smuggled into the village to find-out all about landed property. The cost of this discretion, which I came to learn of only after 2 months of work, was that the data concerning household landholding in my census were grossly and systematically under-reported.

The result of my scotoma was that I pressed on with conducting a pre-fabricated, quasi-experimental, comparative matched surveys (on the lines that Simpson discusses in Durkheim's *Suicide*, 1952) to explain 'farmers' suicides' in spite of having experienced the early warning signals in the field. A recapitulation of this design, which is typical of the literature on 'farmers' suicides' (e.g. Mohanty 2005, Mishra 2006), is in order. I had planned to draw randomly a sample of suicidal deaths from the official list of 'farmers' suicides' and assign to them classes in the same way as I classified NRP farmers (Ch.2 above). By collecting a range of data concerning their household economy, agricultural operations and case histories up to point of suicidal action and comparing it with those of a control group of farmers in same class, I had hoped to isolate the suicidogenic factors amongst the former. Ideally, the control group should have been recruited from the same village(s) as that of the suicides in order to minimise agro-climatic and ecological variables. However, since I had drawn randomly a sample of 31 farmers in NRP for farm-related survey, I was prepared to allow myself to use this group as the control group

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<sup>8</sup> The incidents of suicides were referred to twice in a span of three months by NRP people in my presence, once to account for a gap in the annual *peer pandaga* (a secularised form of *Muharram*, the Islamic festival) celebrations in the village and at another time, to explain the rituals surrounding death.

by proxy. To remedy this disadvantage, namely that there was no strict control for agro-climatic variations, I proposed to select the cases of suicides from *mandals* closest to NRP. Following my plan, I took a sample of 36 cases of 'farmers' suicides', spread over five central and northwestern *mandals*, from the official list of 296 cases that had occurred between December 1998 to December 2004.

It is in the course of conducting these surveys with the wife, son or the father of a suicide, that the challenges described above began to form a pattern that showed the non-suitability of this comparative design. Firstly, the 36 suicides I had selected were scattered in a number of villages where my externality remained a handicap. Some of the bereaved families I approached were non-cooperative, and a few were indeed hostile. In one case (in K. *mandal* village), the wife of the suicide was prevented from speaking with us by her father-in-law who tersely told us that there was nothing worth my 'inquiry'<sup>9</sup> and in another, we were abruptly asked to leave the house after having introduced ourselves and having been asked to sit for about 15 minutes. Secondly, even amongst those families which were cooperative, the problem of 'memory loss' and/or sheer ignorance ("*maki yemi telisu! Cepparru*; how would I know? He never shared anything") seemed to blight the data concerning a suicide's agricultural investments, output, income and overall debts in years prior to his death. The older the occurrence of a suicide, the higher was the likelihood of the challenge. Incidentally, these are precisely the sort of enumeration that underpin the confident, causality oriented academic and policy discourses on 'farmers' suicides'. I was to learn only later that such 'memory losses' and ignorance synecdochically represented an aspect of the institution of *paurusham*; the performance of *pettannam* (cf. Ch. 3) on the part of a headman categorically precludes democratic decision-making in his family, and hence a wife or young son

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<sup>9</sup> When I asked them if they had received the *ex gratia* amount, they said 'no', whereas the government papers showed they had. During the subsequent visit, the head of the household took his leave in anger as soon as I reached his house and the remaining members remained completely incommunicado.

is very likely not privy to his agricultural decisions. As a corollary, the narratives of my informants remained 'empty' (Devereux 1967:3), thickening only around the aspect of the bureaucratic categorisation of suicide motives. Fourthly, even though I was often aware of the grounds on which to doubt an informants' version of the motive of a suicide, I lacked the wherewithal to validate or falsify his/her narrative from an alternative source.

With the reality of having already spent about four months in field by this time, my self-estrangement in its nature and extent was not different from Trawick's account of her self-dissolution (1990: 8-9). If good methodology is one that engages with the "living realities" of a field (Devereux 1967:97), my pre-fabricated, constricted method was exorcising that reality. At this juncture, slowing my pace of work and reforming the method seemed the only possible way forward. As a first remedial measure, I began to solicit and carry referential recommendations/company from my NRP friends to their relatives living in the villages of the sampled 'farmers' suicides'. This proved to be quite helpful, when available, in that it afforded not only some concrete contextual information on a suicide beforehand, but also provided me with additional sources from whom to cross-check the aetiological narrative of the family members of the suicide. I also deliberately began to visit those cases in the sample first that were closer to NRP. During surveys, in situations where an enumerative question failed to elicit a response, or received a vague one, the answer that appeared to enjoy widest consensus amongst family members and amongst my other acquaintances was recorded. I approached the relevant government officials and accessed records of the promissory notes (*patrālu*) <sup>10</sup> which had the details of

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<sup>10</sup>These notes are a single page forms printed in Telugu and usually available with petty shopkeepers in villages. On one side (the left), the name of the creditor is filled up while on the other (right), the name of the debtor is written. Other particulars of the transaction, such as the date, place, the amount, rate of interest to be charged are filled and a revenue stamp, worth appropriate value, is affixed and duly signed or impressed by the debtor along with a witness. These notes are the property of the creditor and they are destroyed only when the transaction stands complete in terms of payments. In the case of suicides included in the official list, the govt officials at the time of holding their inquest took away the promissory notes from the concerned creditors as a matter of policy. This was used to

the debt transactions of deceased farmers. It also seemed important to conduct interviews in looser, multi-sessional frames to allow my informant the time to humanise me and feel encouraged to develop with me a biographical portrait of a suicide. With these measures, I surveyed ten sampled cases of 'farmers' suicides' by June 2005 and decided to assess the quality of data in the period pending the completion of *Mungari* sowing. I also hoped to improve my Telugu by this time. In early September, as I prepared to resume the survey of cases of 'farmers' suicides', NRP witnessed two consecutive suicides, first by a wife and then by her husband. These suicides and the discursive field they engendered forced me to reformulate my method substantially and, in a qualitative shift from the relevant literature, led me to restructure my understanding of the issue.

### **5.3.1Ishwaramma's and Jairamlu's suicides**

I knew Ishwaramma (25) and Jairamlu (35) rather personally in the ethnographic sense of the word (Clifford 1986:13). Jairamlu had been one of the 31 sampled farmers for my bi-monthly household farm surveys in NRP, and since January 2005, I had conducted two rounds of household surveys with him. The last of these surveys had pre-dated his suicide by just over a month. I believed our rapport to be good, judging from the long and transparent conversations we had whilst conducting the surveys at his house, or when we met in the bazaar. Ishwaramma had complained to me, albeit mildly, about his alcoholism and about his wandering with his friends and neglecting farm-work ("tragedi, nirlakshyanga tirgeDi"). Rejoining to this, equally mildly, Jairamlu had mentioned his chronic ulcer (he had had two abdominal surgeries since 2000) and stomach-burning (*kaDpu-manta*) as the reason for not being able to work. But neither the villagers nor I had a grasp of the nature of conjugal discord brewing underneath these mild-mannered

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settle all outstanding credit due to the deceased under the policy of one-off credit settlement by the government. As a result, very few households that I visited were left with any evidence at all of the extent to which the deceased had been indebted or the kind of sources he had taken credit from.

complaints. The following is my (substantially) paraphrased account of the twin suicides as they emerged in the village discourse in the aftermath of the incident;

Case 5.1

Year of suicide; Sept. 2005

a. The background; consensus in the narrative

The couple had been married eight years since. It was Jairamlu's second marriage after his first wife had left him (on why did she leave him, the consensus breaks; (a). 'because she could not conceive with him', b. because she was 'having an extra-marital affair', c. because he was an alcoholic). Iswaramma's mother was opposed to her marrying Jairamlu (on why, the consensus is his alcoholism); they wanted her to marry her *mainmāmā* (MB, a resident of NRP) instead. Ishwaramma's *mainattā* (FZ), however, insisted that she be married to the Jairamlu, her brother-in-law, because "in land and money, he was much better than the *mainmāmā*, who has nothing but a few sheep and goats". Ishwaramma herself had seen and known Jairamlu in course of her previous visits to her *mainattā*'s house in NRP. Iswaramma's parents, dismissing *meinatta*'s insistence, arranged for a *manci-marta* (ritualistic engagement) with her *meinmama*. But, pending the *manci-marta*, (the female discourse says) the *meinatta* invited Iswaramma to NRP and one day, "pushed Iswaramma into the room with Jairamlu and bolted the door from outside". (The male discourse says) The *meinatta* arranged for their elopement from NRP and for them to marry secretly (*dongā peli*).

Upon their return, Ishwaramma's parents refused to let her go to their house and wished to maintain no relations with her forthwith. In the last eight years, her parents remained incommunicado to her; even her *vodibiyam* (the ceremony marking the first pregnancy of a married woman that must take place in her native home) was conducted at her *Cinnānā*'s (uncle) home instead. However, just four months before her suicide, when Ishwaramma's youngest sister was being married, all the relatives assembled at the marriage. Iswaramma also participated in the marriage and for the first time in eight years, she and her parents spoke with each other.

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The couple, in the meanwhile, had two children. Two years back (i.e. 2003), Jairamlu sunk a bore well successfully and planted citrus in his 2 acre *thoTa*, but he continued his waywardness (*panikimal*); alcoholism and playing *pullikatta* in the bazaar claimed most of his time (some also emphasize his gambling and philandering habits). Iswaramma bore the burden of her husband's negligence (this is more strongly put forward in the *female* discourse); she worked routinely in the *thoTa* besides carrying out all household chores. If she complained about his waywardness, he used to beat her up.

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When Iswaramma met her parents at the time of her sister's marriage, they said that since they had not given her any dowry at the time of marriage, now that all the sisters were married, they were thinking of gifting her 8 *tola* gold. She told her husband about this on return to NRP. However, her parents changed their mind after Iswaramma's *mainmama*, who happened to visit the family, warned them that Jairamlu would pawn it to a bank to take loan and given that he was an alcoholic, there was a fair chance that he would forfeit it. They proposed to have the equivalent sum of money fix-deposited in her/her daughter's name and Iswaramma accepted this readily.

But when she told this to Jairamlu, he disliked the idea. This increasingly became a bone of contention between the wife and the husband; the later wanted her to press for the gold because he wanted to use it to invest in buying the drip irrigation system for his *thoTa* while she declined to press her parents on this. His drinking habits intensified in the weeks leading to his wife's and later, his suicide.

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b. The foreground; consensus in the narrative

On the day of Iswaramma's suicide, about 8 o'clock in the morning, Jairamlu went to the town to buy the drip system instrument and returned the evening around 6 o'clock<sup>11</sup>. His mother, who was going to her native village early next day, was sitting on the platform outside the house. Jairamlu entered the house, sat next to his mother and saw that his wife was cooking meal in the kitchen. He spoke aloud, facing his mother " *na makham baga chudule amma! Nenu akwa bathkonu. Na pillolunee nuvve chudala* (Have a good look of my face, mother! I shall not live long, you shall have to look after my children." Upon hearing this, his wife came out of the kitchen and replied (angrily), " *nuvvu enduku etla cestava, nene cesta* (why you, I shall do it) and walked over to the adjacent living room. Inside, she took the bottle of pesticide (450 ml) and drank it all at once, and came out vomiting and coughing. Jairamlu and his mother saw her, smelt pesticide and they lifted her out to the street. Jairamlu began howling (*aRskunaadu*); "my wife has drank poison; I shall also die (*na bharya mandu trageshindi, ipudu nenu kuda tragesta*)". Some neighbours ran to his wife and others tore him away from her. On P Reddy's motorbike, she was rushed to the *mandal* hospital, and from there to town hospital. At 8.30 in the evening, she passed away. The corpse was brought back to the village and buried by about 10 p.m the same night. In the First Information Report (FIR) with the police, the motive for Iswaramma's suicide was entered as unbearable stomach pain.

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When Iswaramma's body was brought back from the hospital, the entire village had assembled at Jairamlu' house. People said in unison (*andaru ceppedi*), "how hardworking and responsible she was, a *bangaDamma* (lady with the heart of gold); she worked all the

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<sup>11</sup> He had taken a credit of about (Rs.) 10,000 from a number of people in the village in preceding weeks to make these purchases.

while as he idled his time and money in drinking and playing in the bazaar” <sup>12</sup>. Some said, “had he died instead, at least the children wouldn’t have been orphaned”. Jayramlu heard all this; his *maryada* (honour) was lost (*maryadapai*). He remained depressed (*algedi*) for the next two days. His elder brother kept a watch over him lest he attempted committing suicide. On the third day, about noon, Jairamlu said that he needed to go to the *mandal* headquarter in connection with some work. His mother insisted that he took his daughter with him if he really had to go. Jairamlu took her along from the house, but sent her back from the bazaar. He went to the *mandal* (headquarter), purchased a bottle of Monocrotophos (a widely used pesticide for groundnut) and then went to the *Shiva* temple at the outskirts and drank the poison in the temple precincts. He was responsible for his wife’s suicide and people/community (*prajalu*) had rebuked him publicly. He knew that and (hence) he committed suicide.

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c. The connection between background and foreground; a partially contested account

Jairamlu had been suspecting for some time that Iswaramma maintained an extra-marital relationship with Ramanna (18 yrs), their unmarried neighbour. The couple had serious altercations on this issue. Just four days prior to the suicide of his wife, around midnight, when both the spouses and the children were sleeping in the house, Ramanna came to their house and waking them up, asked if they had some medicine. He said he was suffering from a painful wound. Jairamlu asked Ramanna sternly why had he come to their house at this late hour; if he wished, he could have come early in the morning. Scolding him, Jairamlu sent him back and returned to the room. Iswaramma who was awake and had heard their conversation, asked her husband why did he scold Ramanna; was he insinuating something? Jairamlu replied, “what if other people see him visiting the house at this time of the night? They will have doubts (about you and him)”. “Both had kept this incident in their minds”. Four days later, when Jairamlu, after returning from the town, told his mother that “she should see his face last time, who knows if he would be alive by the time she returns”, Iswaramma heard it and knew that the threat of suicide implicated her and in a fit of anger (*avesham*) drank poison. After her attempt, when she lay unconscious in the forecourt of her house, Ramanna came to see her and took her head in his lap. Loosing his temper over noticing Ramanna there, Jairamlu publicly rebuked him that it was because of him that she had to poison herself and went to beat him up.

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<sup>12</sup>Three days after her suicide, when I was returning from the field of one my friends, S. Reddy in the evening dusk. On our way we passed by Jairamlu’s *thoTa*. The sweet orange plants appeared slightly wilted, perhaps in need of water. But the groundnut crop appeared promisingly luxuriant. Around the bore-well, S. Reddy pointed out to me, a medley of green chilli, tomato and coriander plants were visible, all in good health. He remarked, “*shavalu panta*” (the dead person’s crop). I asked him what did he mean. He explained, “it was she who used to work hard on the field; growing little bit of this, little bit of that. She is dead now, so a corpse’s crop, I said”.

Three salient aspects of this polyvocal discourse which sought to reflect on and account for the extra-ordinariness of two suicides in three days warrant attention. The first concerns the dominant conceptual mode in which the conjugal discord is framed by the peasants, namely the dichotomy in the spouse's compliance to the domestic *doxa*, i.e., code of conduct (Bourdieu 2001:1-2) discussed in Ch. 3. Iswaramma, an ideal but helpless wife is positioned against a failed but domineering husband. The contrast reflexively problematises not so much the conventional indulgences of *paurusham* viz., alcoholism, sexual perfidy<sup>13</sup>, negligence of responsibilities of *pettannam* and violence against a wife in Jairamlu's agency, as its extent by placing Iswaramma's diligent compliance to the masculine order in its centre. Jairamlu's doubt about her fidelity is also rendered meaningful against the same masculine cognitive categories (ibid). In the male narrative, most agreed that Jairamlu was perfectly entitled to his doubt as a husband. However, they also emphasized that his role-status as a husband and a man enjoined upon him a careful scrutiny (*vicekshana*) of all circumstantial evidence before subjecting a good wife to the denouncement (*ninda*) of being adulterous. In as much as he failed to do so, and acted on “*sulla anumanam*” (unqualified doubt) – eventually precipitating her suicide - he continued in his failures to comply to the *doxa* of *paurusham*. There was also a minority male perspective, from Jairamlu's closest friends, which proposed a further contention; there appeared to have been overtures from Ramanna to Ishwaramma, if his general character and his immediate, close presence at the scene of the wife's suicide was any indication. But even they conceded that there was no evidence as yet to suggest Iswaramma had reciprocated to his overtures. The narrative thus sees Jairamlu's agency as a

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<sup>13</sup> According to Jairamlu's neighbours, he had been an alcoholic for about 15 years with a certain pattern in his drinking. After the dissolution of his first marriage, it intensified, but “after Iswaramma came in, it was slightly in control”. Just two months before his suicide, he had vowed in the name of goddess *Muthyalamma* that he would never drink again. However, only a month and a half later, he not only resumed drinking, but also beat up his wife when she protested to his drinking. Similarly, some of my friends averred that “had he not died of suicide, he would have died of AIDS; he had frequently visited *lanjalu* (commercial sex workers) in Gooty, Guntur and even in Anantpur town”.

sustained diversion from the doxic performances of *paurusham* and Iswaramma's, a sustained convergence, and in doing so, it restores the sacredness of the local masculine order (Bourdieu 2001:13, Brown 1986).

Hence the dramatically aggressive, manly, reaction from Iswaramma. Issuing a threat, (an equivocal suicide threat unless it is juxtaposed with Iswaramma's response, cf. Atkinson 1978: 116) in his mother's presence, and thereby broadening the 'participation framework' (Goffman 1981:3) of his accusation, Jairamlu employs suicide to transact manliness. It purports to implicate her morally and conserves/increases his *maryada*. The homology between temperamental virility (i.e. ego's capacity to show aggression) and ethical virility (i.e., ego's capacity to conserve his honour by dying), as Bourdieu suggests (2001:12), is vivid in Jairamlu's threat. In as much Iswaramma construes her husband's threat as not only untenable but also incriminating if pursued – that is, she accepts its andocentric content - the language of suicide becomes a compelling and strategic means for her to reply to the ethical gauntlet ("*shart*"). Ishwaraiah, Jairamlu's close friend, coalesced these meanings; "since he issued the threat in front of his mother, it became a challenge; if he commits suicide, I stand implicated, (hence) why he, I myself shall die" (*amma daggira vidrinchnaDu kada, shart aipaindi; atanu sachpote andaru na paine anumanam paDtaru, nuvvu enduku, nene tragista*). Iswaramma's self-poisoning is thus, as Giddens writes (1971:149), a pre-emptive political statement of returned reprisal and self-redemption, albeit one that only reproduces the masculine order (Bourdieu 2001:13). Ethnographic data on the subject endorses this interpretation (cf. Firth in Tikopia 1971:209 in Giddens 1971 Brown in Peru, 1986). The outpouring of a Durkheimian collective conscience at her death also vindicates her masculine aggression; her self-poisoning is precipitated by an uncontrollable but legitimate rage ("*avesham nijame kada!*"). That is, it is liminally a homicide conjured by Jairamlu. The same collective conscience, however, implies a *crisis of paurusham* for him, precipitating his escapist suicide

(“*andaru thittnaDu; ee bharya sachpai, muduTu bharya apuDe poindi, ipuDu atanu ki ammai yevuru istaDu* ; everyone had denounced him; his wife died, the first one had left him, now who would give him a daughter (for third marriage)?” Thus, in the discursive universe, these two suicides symbolically consecrate the liminal categories of personhood, masculine dominance and honour.

Lastly, I wish to underline the dominance of “*akram sambandham gurinchi anumanam*” (the suspicion about the extra- marital liaison) as the aetiological background for the twin suicides. All other alternative notations of significance, viz., the conjugal discord around the form in which the dowry was to be received, or the form of its potential investments (farming or the daughter's marriage later) or Jairamlu's chronic health problem, stand marginal in the aetiological discourse. The only farming related reference made at all is the one concerning his small investment (around Rs. 10,000) in micro-irrigation technology for which he had borrowed small interest free sum (*cinnappulu/ceyubadlu*) from friends including my landlady, Jaimma. That this absence of references is not accidental (Crapanzano 1986) is borne by Jairamlu's account of his household economy as presented to me a month before his death. On the income side, he had a reasonably good dry groundnut crop in previous *Mungari* (2004), yielding a gross income of Rs. 54,000. His debt-liabilities were relatively light (Rs. 70,000 in principal) and a major share (60%) of this amount was from non-institutional sources. But these loans were new (Rs. 20,000 in 2003 and 30,000 in 2004-5), and possessing a flock of 30 goats, Jairamlu commanded enough liquidity to secure a large part of solvency, if pressed to. Indeed, he had self-financed (i.e. from livestock sale) a major share of his 9 attempts at sinking a bore-well (8 of them had been failures) between 2003 and 2005.

### **5.3.2 Converting a non-farm related suicide into ‘farmers’ suicide’; focalisation and transvaluation**

The discursive notations by which Jairamlu’s suicide is explained locally clearly excludes any farming-related aetiologies. It is not an incident of *raithlu atmahatyalu*. Yet that is precisely how it managed to be certified officially and accordingly classified. In this section, I describe this process of motive conversion in which a collective communal agency colludes with the quotidian representatives of the state (Gupta 1995: 376) to denude the context-bound non-agricultural aetiology behind Jairamlu’s suicide, and aggregate it into the universalistic category of ‘farmers’ suicides’. Such *ex post facto* motive-conversion appears to involve the same process of focalisation and transvaluation that Tambiah (1990:750), and later, Brass (1997: 1-5) have shown to be at work in their studies of communal violence in South Asia. In their work, they show how extremely localised, contextually rich non-communal issues, are placed into general pan-Indian discourses of Hindu-Muslim nationhood. An important difference, however, is that in the case of ‘farmers’ suicides’ the state is implicated within a narrower discursive frame.

The successful processes of motive-conversion rest on the availability and systematic arrangement of a range of different contexts (i.e. ‘meaningful milieu, Clifford 1986:6, Asad 1986:151-153 in Clifford 1986). Primary amongst them is the domestication of the universal discourse on *rythu atmahatya*, and the attendant method to certify it, by local peasants. So, as I stood in the mourning crowd of men outside Jairamlu’s home, many people in the assembly wondered – and asked me to check if his death “could be written under the *atmahatya scheme* and if the survivors could receive money”. A few days later, I overheard two elderly women converse with Jaimma about his death and the ‘suicide scheme’ and when I asked them about it, one of them replied; “if a suicide is reported as caused by the grief of being indebted, the family receives money (*appulu badha to shachyaDu rabhiste kutumbaniki dabbulu vastai*)”. Feigning ignorance, I further asked how did they

know the relief was certain to come to such a family; in reply, they took the names of all 3 most recent suicides in the village that were officially listed as 'farmers' suicides'. Precedence appears to have aided NRP peasants to domesticate the official discourse on farm-related suicides so that the relief package had become a govt. *scheme* like any other. The result was that focalisation, i.e., the process of denuding the aetiological diversity in an act of suicide, was completely autogenous.

The second context, which answers the question about why should there be a focalisation and transvaluation, involves the purpose of incidental moral redemption for the community. The mourning crowd, the collective conscience of the village, denounced Ishwaramma and Jairamlu's suicides as the acts of individualism ("*ghoram! cala ghoram!* They did not think a bit about their children."). Abstracting Jairamlu's death as a 'farmers' suicide' to claim monetary benefits from the scheme allowed the village community to restore its collective moral ontology and agency (i.e., as a 'kindred of cooperation', Mayer 1960) as a superior ideal; it was to compensate the victims of individualism - the orphaned children ("If the 'govt. money' came, it would be some good to them")<sup>14</sup>. Hence, I was also implored to give help. And hence, Jairamlu's kinsmen, friends and the entire village community decided to report the death to police.

The facts (i.e., empirical clues) around the motive of a suicide, Atkinson, Garfunkle (in Atkinson 1978: 117) and indeed Durkheim himself observes (1952:148), essentially represent dialogical interpretations so that an official categorisation of motives is at best one dominant, reified interpretation. It was during the police inquest on the subsequent day that the leading men of NRP attempted successfully to impute and reify a 'farming-related' aetiology. The inquest team comprising an

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<sup>14</sup> While paying my last respects to the deceased, I remained at the scene for about close to an hour. A man amongst the assembled villagers requested me to see the promissory notes (*patralu*) in Jairamlu's house and advice the family as to how to proceed about making a case to get money. The request had me in a state of a dilemma; was it correct/fair to become an accomplice? Fortunately, the theatre of the activity had already shifted to Jairamlu's elder brother's home where he and other close friends of Jairamlu planned how to handle bureaucratic procedures and I was forgotten.

Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI), a Constable and the Village Assistant Officer (VAO), held its proceedings of which a summary is presented in excerpt 5.2. There is an equivocality in A's account initially in explaining the delay in reporting death to the police as well in imputing a motive to it. Strategic discursive interventions – the insertion of 'farm related' distress ("worry about debts and being *pressed by creditors*") as a major factor and the elision of conjugal discord - are, however, made by significant others and they are duly supported by the representatives of the village community. But, going beyond the discursive malleability inherent in an *ex post facto* inquest as suggested in the literature, even the supposedly 'hard' material clue of the presence and extent of debt due to farming reasons is rendered plastic by a colluding communal agency. Thus, the significant others in the village created (*srisTincaDu*) overnight three fake debt transactions (*donga patralu*) by writing credit notes in Jairamlu's name, backdated it, and stamped it with false impressions. Two of these "created creditors" were Jairamlu's elder brother and sister. As a result, his overall debt, which was Rs. 70,000 in July 2005, became Rs. 125,000 in September 2005.

#### Field notes 5.2

"ASI; (to the elder brother of Jairamlu, A) when did he leave the house on the day (of committing suicide)?

A ; in the morning, sir, about 9.30. He went to the *mandal*..(His mother interjects) he (i.e. A) followed him, sir, when he came to know that Jairamlu had gone away. He looked for him at the *mandal* but did not find him. A man came from the temple side and told him that a man had drunk poison in the temple. A ran to the temple... Jairamlu's body was lying there. ASI (sternly, to A); he drank poison yesterday, in the *mandal* itself. Why did not you bring the body directly to the police station (from the temple)?

A; we were shocked (*badha*), sir... did not think of it...did not know it. (*pedda badhalo unntivi...yemi cheyala teliyedu*)

ASI; what was the reason? Why did he commit suicide?

A; Stomach-ache...he was suffering from stomach-ache for a long time and could not bear it any more and did this (*kaDpu nuppi to atla chaisinaDu*, sir, *muduTu nunchi undi, thatakolaika chaisenaDu*).

ASI; both wife and husband dying from stomach-ache, within three days! Tell me correctly what happened?

(There is an interruption at this point; Sriramlu's brother-in-law whispers something to the ASI and takes him to one corner. They both come back within a couple of minutes)

ASI; yes?

Iswariah; Sir, it was not because of stomach-ache. His wife died and he was greatly hurt. Debt was worrying him, creditors were asking him (for payment) *and now his small children became without their mother (appulu badha unne a manishi ki, appulu walu vachi adagitunaDu, malla apude bharaya chinpoindi, pillolu tallilaika ainaDu)* Villagers also rebuked him," if you had died and your wife lived instead, at least your children could have survived". He felt he lost his *maryada*, he had earned a bad name in the village.

ASI (looking towards others present); is that true?

Others (in unison); yes. That is true.

ASI; would all the elder people (*pedda mandilu*) present here make a statement to this effect and sign it?

Others (in unison) ; yes.

(T. V. Reddy and others begin to draft the statement there, which is duly signed subsequently).

A; shall the money come, sir?

ASI; it shall. Bring all the promissory notes to the station tomorrow.

Indeed, by May 2006 Jairamlu's suicide had been duly certified as a 'farming related' suicide. The entire process of motive-ascertainment necessarily directs our attention towards the quotidian interactions between the representatives of the state and local communities and its implication for the official suicide statistics.

NRP men could scarcely have accounted Jairamlu's suicide as the one caused by farming-related indebtedness in absence of the collusion of the inquest team and its benign acquiescence by higher district level bureaucracy. The extra-ordinariness of both spouses committing suicides within three days, or the motive behind

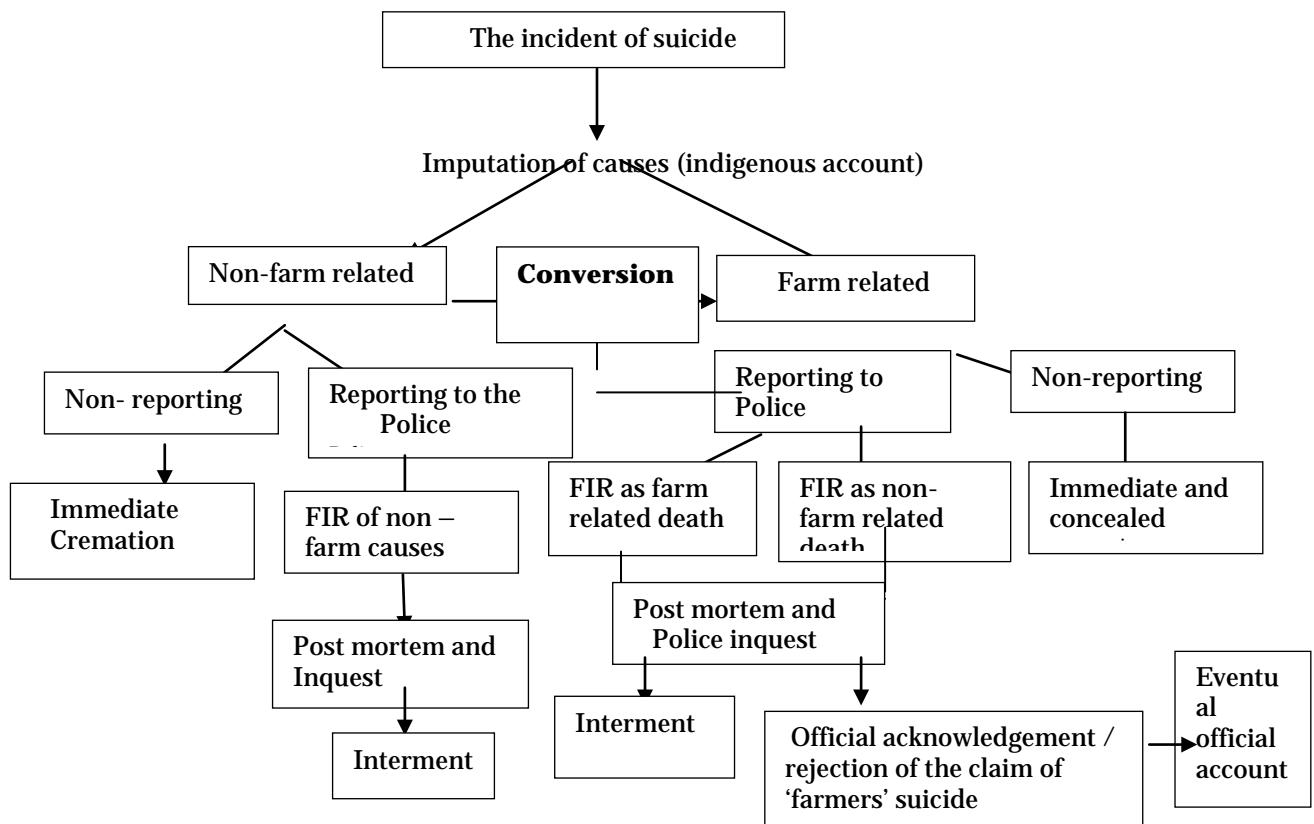
Iswaramma's suicide was not taken into account by the inquest team. Likewise, the team did not consider it important to investigate Jairamlu's indebtedness or his being pressed by his lenders during the village meeting. Although an exact detail of what transpired during the intervention of taking the SI into the corner remains unknown, but to my NRP friends it clearly meant the promise of a bribe (*lancham*).

To the best of my knowledge, the district committee, on whom the final onus of establishing the (farming) correlation lay, did not visit NRP neither did the local *Mandal* Revenue Officer; the primary report filed in by the VAO along side the Police inquest and the communal affidavit formed the only basis on which the committee eventually returned its decision. The entire episode corroborates Durkheim's dim view of motive-ascertainment by bureaucracy (2006:151), albeit here it was a deliberate act of collusion and not only an inherent epistemological difficulty as he envisaged. The inquest also demonstrates the irrelevance of the Weberian notion of an insulated bureaucracy, or of the dichotomy of the state and society in India (Gupta 1995: 384, Brass 1997). Also note the paradoxical imagination of the Indian state in the subaltern eye; just as the state asserts itself by way of an *atmahatya scheme*, it also negates itself by allowing rampant corruption amongst its lowest representatives.

Witnessing these two suicides and the subsequent processes of aetiological conversion in a stroke of 'ontological fortuitousness' (Gupta 1995:376) was unsettling for me on account of its implications for my work. Each case of officially certified 'farmers' suicides'- including the 10 that I had already surveyed – now appeared to possess an equal theoretical scope of having been a focalised and transvalued reification. Unlike Mohanty (2005:252, 271) or Gill (2006:2764), I could scarcely continue to presume the official causal imputation of farming-related distress to a suicide to be indisputable, so that it required merely an "explanation, no probing criticism" (Douglas 1967:166). The standard explanations for farm-related suicides, such as the deceased farmers having had 'more severe crop failure and higher indebtedness, especially non-institutional sort' (Mohanty 2005:257, Mishra 2006:1542), could now be accounted simply as a systematic over-reporting (i.e., posthumously created) of indebtedness. Proposing a thesis of 'farmers' suicides' on the basis of indebtedness indeed seems to involve a claim of methodological certitude that is often empirically untenable (cf. Harriss 1982, also

see below). Jairamlu and Ishwaramma's unfortunate suicides exposed me to another epistemological limitation of the scholarship on 'farmers' suicides'. I became acutely aware of the fact that 'farmers' suicides' was just one stylised aetiological (and discursive) category of rural suicides amongst many others; analogous to the Sassurian conception of a language (cf. Douglas 1972), understanding farm-related suicides required understanding its syntagmatic link with other sorts of suicides. Figure 5.1. attempts to represent the organisational aspect of such a link. Lastly, and rather ironically, these suicides heralded a new episode in my relationship with NRP people. As an equal witness of entire process of motive-conversion, like Geertz (1983) during the Police raid in Bali, I became a member of the colluding community from whom sensitive information concerning suicides needed no further screening.

*Figure 5.1: A schematic representation of the process of registration of suicide*



I faced a question of methodological choice now. I could either continue pursuing my comparative design whilst trying to explore if there was an alternative indigenous account of death for each sampled case of suicide. Or, I could replace it with a purposively selected, less scattered and smaller group of official cases of 'farmers' suicides' with a reasonably better chance of understanding them in detail. I chose the latter. Henceforth selecting cases strictly on the basis of the presence of a reliable source for validation – that is, relatives and friends of my NRP friends who were willing to give me an insider's version on a case of 'farmers' suicides' in their villages – I collected ethnographic details of a total of 29 cases (see Table 5.3). Working within a much smaller geographical spread now, I tried to balance the cases to be studied on the basis of their farming background and their caste, gender, age and the year of their death. I must also admit that, despite my best efforts, the ethnographic details for all 29 cases were not of the same standard. Overall, having seen and grappled with what Giddens (1976) calls the 'double hermeneutic of the social world' throughout my fieldwork, I saw a value in rallying on the critical realist epistemology, and hence my analysis shares in the strength and weaknesses of this framework (cf. Ch. 1:23-24).

*Table 5.3 A profile of the studied cases of 'farmers' suicides'*

Particulars	No.
i. Sex	
Male	27
Female	02
ii. Caste	
Other Backward Castes (OCs)	07
Backward Castes (BCs)	21
Scheduled Castes (SCs)	01
iii. Years of occurrence of suicide	
1999-2001	04
2002-2004	19
2005-2007	06
iv. Land ownership;	
a. dry land only	
>5 acres	10
5-10 acres	07
<10 acres	04
b. Dry land + wet land	
> 5 acres	03
5-10 acres	01
>10 acres	01
c. Canal irrigated	
> 5 acres	03

Source; The survey of the households of 'farmers' suicides', 2005-06

#### **5.4 'Farmers' suicides'; an aetiological continuum**

That there may exist a marked incongruence between the indigenous and the official accounts in terms of their respective causal ascriptions to an incident of 'farmers' suicides' has been underscored by Jairamlu's case. Using the extent of this incongruence – or its lack – between these two accounts as an organising principle, the causes of suicides amongst the 29 cases of 'farmers' suicides' can be divided into three aetiological categories; (a). suicides caused primarily (or substantially) by farming reasons<sup>15</sup>, (b). suicides caused by a combination of both farming and non-farming factors and (c). suicides amongst farmers caused primarily (or substantially) by non-farming reasons. The first category is characterised by a complete congruence in the two accounts, while the second category exhibits a partial congruence. The last category, in a manner akin to that of Jairamlu's case, shows a complete or substantial variance with the first one. These three categories taken together appear to constitute an aetiological continuum amongst them. On the basis of this categorisation, there are 14 suicides<sup>16</sup> (48.27%) of the first type, 2 of the second type (6.8%) and 13 (45%) suicides of the third type.

##### **5.4.1 Suicides caused primarily (or substantially) by farming reasons**

Such suicides which are characterised primarily by such farming related antecedents which are necessary and largely sufficient as causes, are referred to in the indigenous discourse as "*nijam atmahatyālu*" (genuine farming suicides). They are opposed to the category of "*doop/abbhaddam atmahatyālu*" (fake/false farming suicides) in which a farming reason is discursively - and materially - 'created' *ex post facto* and receives official validation as such. One of my acquaintances from an adjoining *Mandal* informed me about a suicide that

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<sup>15</sup> See Footnote 12 in Ch. 1(p.11) for my usage of the word 'farming' and 'non-farming'.

<sup>16</sup> These include one case that is awaiting a final decision by the district committee, while the *Mandal* Revenue Office has recommended it, as I was given to understand by them, as a case of 'farmers' suicides'.

occurred in his village and he instantly qualified it as a case of *nijam atmahatyā*. To him, and other peasants in that village, this suicide constituted the archetype of a genuine farming suicide, an ideal type with all necessary defining attributes of the category (Weber, 1978). They unanimously agreed that “there were no other rival causes such as conjugal discord, drinking, or gambling, whatsoever – for this suicide” (*vere yemianiā, intighoDwā, trāgDam, āRDam, aTlāTyemi kāranāle ledū*). Hence, each unit of the suicide’s actions, and the underlying structures of meanings and purposes, lends itself to the analysis of genuine farming suicides as a distinct sub-category.

Case 5.2; Year of death; Feb, 2007

“Subramaniam had a wife (28), a daughter (14) and two sons (12, 10). He had received a 5 acres plot from his father, who was also a farmer. But the father did not have any bore-well then. The father said no to bore (*nānā anTā vadhu*); (sowing) groundnut, sorghum, millet whatever...(he) did not follow this method (of cash crop cultivation).

This fellow, eight years back (in 2000), thought of sinking a bore well and attempted sinking the first one. No water was found (*neel paDlai*). Same day, same time, he sunk another one. But again no water. That day itself (he thought) that I would do this (commit suicide)’, he had planned (*ā roje ee vidhangā cheskuntānu, prayatanam lo uNNāDu*).

N; why do you say that?

V; for three days, he disappeared from the village, went somewhere else. Next year (2001), (he) sank another bore well, 100 feet (in depth). It, too, failed. Some 15 days later, he tried another, up to 250 feet; 2” water was found. He prepared the field at once to sow paddy and planted 250 *cheena* (citrus) plants too. (But) within one year, the (ground) water began decreasing. (Since) he thought plants would die (if water dried up completely), he sank another bore (in 2002)..290 feet...again, 2.5” water was found.

With (water from) the last bore and the new one, he raised the plants. Last year (2006), from the first citrus crop, he earned (Rs) 40,000. Last year, he planted another 250 citrus plants.

N; why again?

V; (he thought) “there is water, so more plants can be grown”. But this year (2007), just last month, it (groundwater) began to go down fast. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, he called the bore drilling machine again. They drilled up to 100 feet, did not strike any water. The drilling team went back. He could not even pay them their charges, (Rs.) 5,000 was still due. Yesterday, he went to the town alone. He did not even have the bus fare on him, took Rs. 200(as credit) from someone, thinking that, if water was found this time, someone would lend him (*neel*

*durkite yevuruainā appulu estāDu*). He called the drilling team again, without informing any one in his family. They (the drilling team) tried first at one point but could not find anything. Then, he asked them to drill at another place, but when it reached about 200 feet, without finding any water, he left the field saying he was going to attend nature's call. He went out in the dark and drank poison".

As I have described above (Ch. 2), compulsive attempts at sinking a bore-well, which is the dominant explanatory context for Subramaniam's suicide, is a general form of capital investments amongst the local peasants. Amongst the sample of 31 NRP farmers, 20 (67.74%) had attempted sinking a bore-well – either in partnership or individually – in since the 1990s while amongst the 14 genuine farm-suicides, a marginally higher number of peasants (71.42%) had done so during the same period. However, a distinctive dimension of farming-related suicides appears to be the higher number of attempts made by them to sink a bore well. The average number of attempts made individually amongst them is 72.68% higher than that of farmers in NRP (Table 5.4). Indicative of a higher degree of compulsive involvement on their part in groundwater exploration, the desperation to switch to *thoTa* cultivation is also captured by the distinctly higher temporal and spatial density of bore well attempts in their case. Whereas Subramaniam made 8 attempts at sinking a bore well within 7 years in his 5 acre plot, as a category the genuine farm-suicides made a higher number of attempts, with much smaller landholdings, as compared to those made by the NRP farmers (ibid). The reasons for a higher number of bore-well attempts in a relatively shorter span of time are partly tautological, as Shah records (1992:516), in that a high incidence of failure in discovering groundwater (every three in four attempts is a failure in their case) leads, in turn, to an even higher number of attempts. A compounding feature amongst the suicides is the abysmally shorter longevity of successful bore-wells (ibid); every second successful bore-well they sank dried up within two years of its sinking. The deceased, a majority of whom were small dry land peasants, appear to have demonstrated only

a more pathological sort of risk-appetite by trying to sink a bore well repeatedly under conditions of complete uncertainty than generally the case is (Ch. 2, also Harriss 1982:158). They also failed more remarkably.

**Table 5.4 Bore well attempts; a comparison of genuine suicides and NRP farmers**

Particulars	Suicides (n=11)*	NRP Farmers (n= 20)
i. Total no. of bore wells attempted	9	41
ii. Average no. of bore well attempts per individual	3.54	2.05
iii Failed* bore well attempts (% of total attempts)	79.48	39.03
iv Longevity (i.e., beyond 2 yrs) of successful bore well (%)	50	80
v. Temporal distribution of bore wells (i.e., the average no. of bore well attempts per year*)	1.19	0.571
vi. Spatial distribution of bore wells (i.e. the no. of bore well attempts; per acre of land*)	1; 2.22	1; 4.38

Source; Household sample survey in NRP & Field household survey of Suicides, 2005-2006

Notes; \* the cases in which no bore well was ever attempted is excluded from statistical computations, in both the suicide group and amongst the sample of NRP farmers.

; \*i.e. failure at the time of sinking of bore well in finding water.

; \*The figures are the cumulative averages of the number of total bore wells sunk by a farmer divided by the number of years between the first bore well(s) and the last one.

; \* In arriving at these figures, lands owned by the respective groups remain unadjusted for their differences in productivity and access to irrigation.

As a corollary, the average expenditure incurred on failed attempts at sinking a bore-well amongst genuine farm-related suicides exceeds that of the NRP farmers by three times (Table 5.5). Similar contrast marks the two groups concerning their respective investments on additional irrigation infrastructure (i.e. the submersible pumping engine-set, sub surface pipe network and electricity linkage) for short-lived bore-wells (*ibid*). As I have argued above (Ch. 2), in tandem with the point Barbara Harriss-White (1996) makes, such high costs of groundwater extraction reflect both size bias and time bias (not forgetting the policy bias involved, Subramaniyam et al 2003). Small farmers exploring groundwater lately (i.e. post 2000) are forced to bear higher cost per unit of water relative to larger farmers who pioneered the abstraction of groundwater in the 1980s. Also, Subramaniyam's case throws into sharp relief the extent of margin of error that marks a peasant's estimation of his bore-well's behaviour even in the short-term. Unlike in Junagarh,

where peasants have devised a somewhat verifiable index (i.e. the level of water in the nearby rivulets) to predict the behaviour of their dug wells/tube-wells (Shah 1992:516), local peasants operate their bore-wells under complete uncertainty. Further, given the acute sense of competition around groundwater (Ch. 2), this margin of error may also be talked up by envious neighbours <sup>17</sup>. As well as a relatively more reliable availability of groundwater, a number of present NRP farmers have also benefited from the fact that drilling bore wells in dug wells has been a joint (*kuDaga*) action amongst fraternal kin-members within an *umaDikutumbam*. Thus, 13 bore well owing farmers out of 20 owners in the sample have at least had one bore well in joint ownership before attempting another. Risk-distributing co-operation is singularly absent amongst the suicides; in all 11 cases in which a bore-well was attempted, it was carried out by the deceased alone, most often after his separation from an *umaDikutumbam*. The damaging impact of capital intensive investment on groundwater amongst them is apparent against their meagre land assets<sup>18</sup>.

*Table 5.5 (Average) Expenditure on bore wells; a comparison between genuine suicides and NRP farmers*

Particulars	Suicides (n=11)	NRP farmers (n=20)
i. Expenditure on failed bore wells	Rs. 26,281.81	Rs. 9,258. 34
ii. Expenditure on successful bore wells (And irrigation inputs) that dried up within 2 yrs	Rs. 22,728	Rs. 5,516. 67
iii. Expenditure on groundwater exploration (i. + ii. + any other) per acre of land owned*	Rs. 5,773.12	Rs 1,645.34

Source: Household sample survey (NRP) & field household survey of suicides, 2005-06

\*These estimates are based upon gross landholdings and they do not imply any standardisation in terms of the quality of land holding or its access to irrigation.

<sup>17</sup> Thus, peasants in Subramaniam's village told me, "(in case of a bore-well striking water) people shall say, " very good amount of water..very good amount of water..it is 2", 3"! Only to find that it begins decreasing day-by-day". Some, amongst this group, went a step ahead and ascribed the intent of deliberate *manipulation* to these remarks; "*Uur walu urke penchtaDu* (the villagers talk you up unrealistically)".

<sup>18</sup> Both an exceptionally higher expenditure on bore wells and other irrigation inputs as well as relatively smaller land holdings (the average land holding size of the suicide household sinking bore-well being 8.29 acres as against 9.64 acres amongst NRP farmers) explain the higher expenditure on groundwater exploration per acre of land owned amongst the suicides in comparison to the NRP farmers.

Large financial investments on groundwater exploration— a failed bore- well attempt with 200 feet's depth involves Rs. 10,000 while a successful one may cost about Rs. 50,000 – also relate positively to the incidence of indebtedness (Ch. 2, Harriss 1982). Given the scale of capital involved in it, agricultural surpluses are seldom enough to allow groundwater exploration on the scale generally seen in Anantpur, although, as noted in Ch. 2, a number of NRP farmers have raised a part of this capital from livestock sales (also Harriss 2006). Amongst the 11 suicides, however, only two large farmers (each with landholding of 20 acres or more) reported self-financing their groundwater exploration. All remaining deceased financed it wholly by means of loans from informal sources. Having said that, the point that the reliance on informal credit has been crucial for groundwater exploration and exploitation appears to be only a partial argument. Subramaniam's case demonstrates the converse of it to be equally true; a sustained availability of groundwater itself is of critical importance to maintaining the flow of informal credit for production, especially for the long-maturity citrus crop. It is this mutually reinforcing and vicious relationship between the easy availability of informal credit, intense groundwater exploration and the critical need for a continued presence of water for further credit – at least until one has broken even, that captures the essence of the new compulsive capitalistic *thoTa* farming. Subramaniam's recurring action of sinking bore-wells are, in part, located in this circularity of credit transactions; “(he) thought, if water is found, someone shall lend him”. Likewise, Yeriswamy (55), another suicide, had earlier twice felled his three old year old citrus plants completely, as hundreds of other farmers did during the droughts in late 1980s and 1994-95 in the district. He could earlier do so because, as his son remarked, “then, there was no big investment in bore, no big investment in crop, so no big debt (involved) as it is now.”

As NRP peasants put it (Ch. 2) - and there is support for them in the literature on the commoditisation of agriculture (Washbrook 1994, Bhardwaj 1982, Harriss 2006: 91), indebtedness has become an indissociable feature of the bore-well based agriculture. Its endemic nature is evident in that all 14 cases of suicides and, all but two NRP farmers (out of 31) are indebted. These numbers cast serious doubt on Vaidyanathan's observation (2006: 4009), which is rather curiously based on National Sample Survey results (2002), that the incidence of rural indebtedness is exaggerated in literature on farmers suicides. But, it is the extent of debt and the capacity of a farmer to repay them that distinguish the genuine suicides from the NRP farmers. While making allowance for the methodological difficulties I have mentioned above and in Ch. 2 concerning information on debt, the outstanding debt (i.e. principal with interest) amongst the suicides, at an average of Rs. 161,007.30, exceeds that of the NRP farmers by 122.07% (Table 5.3). Given their smaller land assets, the ratio of debt per acre of land between NRP farmers and the suicides is 1:4.21. Both the average size of debt and debt-to-land asset ratio amongst the suicides are far higher than the figures Mohanty & Shroff (2004:5603) provide for their sample of suicides in Maharashtra. At 65%, my figures for debt-to-land asset ratio for the suicides appear to be remarkably above the low ratio (7%) that the National Sample Survey 2002 results (Vaidyanathan, *ibid*) provide for rural households. Indeed, in view of their meagre, un-irrigated dry landholdings and no livestock possession, that such large debt implied insolvency for the suicides seems a reasonable conclusion.

Further, contrary to Vaidyanathan's contention, other studies of 'farmers' suicides' (Vasavi 1999: 2265, Mohanty 2005:256) are correct in suggesting that deceased farmers borrowed preponderantly from non-institutional sources comprising of kin relations, friends, acquaintances and moneylenders. However, this is not a distinguishing aspect of the genuine suicides; the difference in percentage

borrowing from such sources between the two groups is insubstantial (Table 5.6, also see Ch. 2)<sup>19</sup>. Vasavi attributes the general resurgence of informal lending to a credit contraction in rural formal banking system since the 1990s (Rawal and Swaminathan 1998 cited by her, p. 2265) and later field researches by Ramachandran and Swaminathan in Tamilnadu (2005 in Harriss 2006:167) would support her. But a higher share of informal credit amongst the suicides I studied is explained more by the proportionately higher intake of overall credit amongst them rather than their inability to access formal credit for production. The short-term (i.e. seasonal) crop loans – a universal institutional credit scheme – is as widely accessed by the suicides as it is by NRP farmers<sup>20</sup>. Disagreeing with her and Ramachadran and Swaminathan, I have shown above (Ch. 2) how it is rather the credit boom, both in formal and informal categories, in Anantpur villages that has mutually facilitated the regressive risk-taking pattern in terms of bore well sinking; but for an easy availability of informal credit, and an expectation of receiving large formal LT loans on citrus orchards, Subramaniyam could scarcely have made such rapid attempts at sinking bore-wells. This also implies that the assumption of non-institutional lending to be synonymous with usury, which was the cornerstone of Bhaduri's semi-feudal model, does not quite hold true in Anantpur (see Ch. 2, also Harriss 2006). The relatively moderate and homogeneous interest rate of 24% per year (compare with Vasavi for Karnataka and Mishra for Maharashtra) and unsecured (i.e. collateral-free) credit transactions are two important indicators of it. This of course is neither to deny that even at this rate, a loan doubles every 4 years,

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<sup>19</sup>There is only one instance amongst the suicides, in which an input dealer doubles up as a creditor. Otherwise, agricultural input / output dealers or their agents advancing long or medium-term credit to the farmers is rare, certainly far less common than the case appears to be in agriculturally more commercialised districts in Andhra Pradesh. (Refer to Rao & Suri 2006). That non-institutional sources are major sources of credit would contrast with certain other studies that report institutional credit to be the major share of debts amongst suicides in other parts of South India. See for instance Mohan Kumar and Sharma 2006)

<sup>20</sup> As mentioned, out of 14, only in the case of 3 suicides, no loan from a bank was ever taken. Significantly, in 2 of these cases, the inability of the concerned persons to access the basic crop loan was imputed to their low social capital; villagers in these cases, asked me, “ who would stand as a ‘zamin’ (guarantor) for him to get the loan”, while in the third case, not taking the loan was attributed to personal choice.

nor that a failure to repay interests for three consecutive years (in some cases, one year) often attracts *maDhesi* (compound-interest) payments. In 4 cases of genuine suicides out of 13, a simple credit transaction was referred to have been converted into *maDhesi*.

**Table 5.6 The incidence of Debt; A comparison between genuine suicides and NRP farmers**

Particulars	Suicides (n=14)	NRP farmers (n=30)
i. Amount of debt (in Rs.)	161,007. 30	72,500
ii. Source of debt (%)		
Institutional	13.04*	23.25
Non-institutional	86.96	76.75
iii. Debt in relation to land assets (debt per acre of land)*	16,136.72	3,827.94
iv. Debt / Value of land* owned (%)	65.56	--

Sources; Household sample survey (NRP) & field household survey of suicides, 2005 -06

Note; all figures are averages.

; \* The figure includes three cases of large-scale horticultural loans received by three suicides for their citrus plantations.

: \* Irrigated/ wet land – both under canal ayacut and under bore well are adjusted in terms of their productivity vis-à-vis dry land in computation for these figures (refer to Appendix 2.1 for the methodology of standardisation). However, the possession of livestock remains unaccounted.

: \* The value of land has been computed at the prevailing prices of dry and wetland in NRP and adjoining areas in Year 2005-06. Since these have been normal rainfall years, the prices may be taken to be less affected by both inflating and deflating tendencies.

I have suggested that both the demand for credit and its actual intake has been higher amongst the suicides in comparison to the NRP farmers. Failed bore-well attempts remain an important cause of severe indebtedness amongst the suicides. Yet, an exclusive bore-well induced indebtedness, as seen in the case of Subramaniam, appears to be an empirical rarity; the demand for credit is more commonly occasioned by a variety of agricultural purposes including recurrent seasonal loans for cultivation, leasing-in and even for purchases of land (in a few cases) in addition to the bore-well attempts amongst the genuine suicides (Table 5.7). The 4 cases of land-leases, all written *guttaka* contracts which is an explicitly compulsive tenancy transaction (cf. Ch. 2: 62), involved large pieces of lands and significant cultivation expenditures. Further, a primarily agriculture related indebtedness, as seen in Subramaniam's instance, is also empirically equally rare;

loans for agricultural purposes are present in a majority of cases in conjunction with credit taken for meeting non- agricultural requirements, especially the marriage of daughters and serious health disorders affecting either the deceased himself or a family member respectively. Indeed, as is evident from the table below, and as others have reported (Mishra 2006) the likelihood of a marriage of daughter being a cause for severe indebtedness is as common amongst the suicides' households as repeated bore-well attempts are<sup>21</sup>.

*Table 5.7      Debt by reasons (amongst the genuine suicides)*

	Present in cases (n= 14)
i. Agricultural purposes	
i. Sinking of bore-wells + cultivation expenditure	8
ii. Leasing of land	4
iii. Purchase of land	2
ii. Non-agricultural purposes	
i. Marriage of daughters	8
ii. Marriage of daughter + serious health problem	1
iii. Serious health problem	3
iv. Household consumption expenditure	3

Source; Surveys of the suicide households, 2005

Note; The presence of these causes are not mutually exclusive, hence the instances in which they are recorded do not add up to the total number of cases (i.e. 14).

It is a truism that loans taken for agricultural and non-agricultural purposes are intertwined in the reproduction budget of a peasant household; being a methodological challenge, however, they often attract an arbitrary nomination as being either productive or non-productive (for instance, Vaidyanathan calls the latter "imprudent"). In distinguishing a genuine suicide from an *abhaddam/doop* suicide, NRP farmers use the criteria of the extent of indispensability of a non-agricultural cause of indebtedness for the material and cultural reproduction (Wolf, 1966: 6) of a farm-household. Taking loans to meet an expenditure on serious health problems, and/or on the marriage of a daughter are thus eminently warranted; "*tappadu! Papa chetuku vaste peli cheyalchindi*" (there is no

<sup>21</sup> These two causes co-exist in 5 cases, out of 13 suicides. Similar pairs of other causes, such as serious health problem and sinking of bore-wells, or leasing of land and daughters marriage also exist in all cases of suicide, except that of Subramaniam.

alternative; if the daughter has come of age, she must be married). Moreover, a point that the literature on 'farmers' suicides' has missed is that these two non-agricultural purposes are also correlated – often causally - with credit taken for production in most cases. Thus, one often finds an upsurge in agricultural investments amongst the suicides in years immediately preceding the suicidal act – either in sinking of bore wells or large scale leasing in of land – in order to meet such indispensable non-farm expenditures or because of them. As Rammakka's case illustrates (case 5.3), her efforts to intensify agricultural production in the last 5 years to her death by making attempts at sinking a bore well, are aimed at meeting the spiralling consumption expenditure including that on the daughters' marriage.

Case 5.3

Year of suicide; 2004

S; the mother was married 40 years back. My father received 12 acres of land and 50 sheep as his share when he separated his household after marriage. Three years later, he purchased 8 acres of land in the village by selling a part of the livestock. This land was registered in my mother's name.

N; Why?

S; Father, by then, had diabetes. (It was) mother (who) used to do everything. It was a big family; four brothers and two sisters<sup>22</sup>. My eldest brother took to cultivation, younger one tended sheep. I was sent to the school, and after 10<sup>th</sup> went to town (to the college). (From then) Difficulties began, economically. They (parents) would converse, "crops are poor, expenditure is rising (*apudu nuti kastam aindi , arthinga, "panta sarike panDatam levu, karcha aquaga ainai" antaru* ), what to do? (*atla chaisedi*)

N; why did expenditure rise?

S; I was studying in town...big family. Elder brothers were married. (Father's) medicines, so after Inter (1997) I discontinued studying, came back and began helping in cultivation. Next year, we attempted sinking a bore well twice, and spent Rs. 20,000, (but) found no water. That year, in *Mungari*, one night, younger brother and I went to the field for some work. There was a power failure at that time. A storm had lashed (*toofan leshindi*). It was pitched dark. We tripped over a (live) current wire. *Anna* died on spot. From the shock, my legs were burnt. I was in hospital. (My) legs were removed. (Rs.) 70,000 were spent - all debts. It (debt) was rising. There was a (young unmarried) female in the house. We took 10 acres of land on lease (in 1999) for Rs. 10,000. But the crop was not good.

N; how many bags (of groundnut) came?

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<sup>22</sup>Brothers were aged 30, 25, 21 and 16 years at the time of conduction of this interview while the sisters were aged 28 and 18 years.

S; do not remember exactly, something like 60-70 bags (in 30 acres). We hoped the next crop to be good. So took 15 acres (on lease in 2000). (We) attempted sinking bore well twice again, but again found no water. Sister's marriage took place that year. We gave 10 *tola* gold, gift, and other expenditures. Another 40,000 was spent, all from loans.

Thus, amongst the suicides there is a sharp convergence of the general agrarian causes of distress, such as the non-viability of dry groundnut cultivation (Ch. 2) and larger unfructuous investments on bore wells on one hand, and the indispensable familial expenditure on health/marriage on the other. To this convergence, one must add, as others have underscored (Reddy 1998, Vasavi 1999), the aggravating impact of seasonal distress, i.e. widespread droughts between 2000 and 2004 and consequent crop losses. I have emphasized the methodological difficulties in examining the incidence of crop losses in different farm households. If the extent of yields losses suffered in the season immediately preceding the death of a concerned farmer are taken as a rough indicator, amongst the 10 deceased dry land cultivators, 5 reported almost complete yield loss of 80-100% while the remaining reported 50-75% losses. Having said that, my case studies also suggest that it was the farmers-tenants with large land leases (taken on fixed rents) followed by large landowners (with 20 acres or more) who sustained a disproportionately higher financial setback from the incidence of consecutive crop losses. This is for the simple reason that their scale of investment – as paid-out capital – was disproportionately higher than the output obtained in relation to smaller, non-leasing farmers<sup>23</sup>. If one notes the paradoxical impact of drought on informal credit, namely that the demand for further loans increases precisely when creditors – many of whom are themselves small and middle peasants (Ch. 2) - begin to reduce lending and press for

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<sup>23</sup>To say that a farmer with a land holding of 2 or 3 acres of dry land could not repay his loan that are often in the region of Rs. 1,00,000 because of a crop failure for consecutive years seems rather incorrect in that the scale of his production is simply incapable of generating enough surpluses, in one year or three years, to repay such large debts. This is not to say that the varying incidence of crop loss has not contributed to the worsening state of indebtedness but these are qualitatively different sets of arguments.

repayments of outstanding loans (also Vasavi, p. 2267), the particularity of converging distresses amongst the suicides becomes more clear.

These distinctive aetiological features of the genuine farm suicides are general in a Durkheimian sense; they are the realities external to an individual (Durkheim, 2006:149). But then, how precisely does this general aetiological set affect (only some) peasants so strongly as to commit suicide? The absence of intervening variables in the Durkheimian theory (Atkinson 1978:25) makes it incapable of explaining how general aetiological antecedent(s) come to produce distinct, and selective, morphological (i.e. individual) effects (Durkheim, p. 149). For instance, it can scarcely explain Subramaniyam's consistently aggressive responses including his suicide to the incidence of bore-well failures whilst many of his friends with similar experience have not resorted to suicide (see Lukes, p. 216-217 for this line of criticism). Likewise, contrary to the thrust of arguments in the literature on 'farmers' suicides' that are sometime put forth in statistically predictive tones (Mishra 2006 for instance), many heavily indebted small dry land farmers in NRP, at least two of whom have been even subject to humiliation in public by their creditors, have not resorted to self-mortification. Given his sociologism (i.e. the encapsulation of the individual by the social), Durkheim resorted, rather crudely, to "an individual's *inherent susceptibility*" (2006:154) to suicidogenic social "currents" to explain why certain individuals committed suicides. Differing from this far-fetched and an a-cultural, proposition, I have suggested above that it is the *doxa* of *paurusham* –a most general form of Durkheimian collective representation (Lukes, 1973; 7) - that organises the ways in which peasants perceive and act on social realities. In other words, such general, external antecedents as outlined above are internally represented by an individual by means of the local notions of masculinity (ibid; p. 12). Further, departing from Durkheim's uni-dimensional characterisation of collective representations as being general and constraining (p. 13), I have also

suggested variability in the extent to which an individual has internalised, and hence is committed to, the doxa of *paurusham* (Ch. 3).

Vaidyanathan and Mohanty are partially correct in saying that farm-suicides represent an aspirational failure. When I asked Subramaniam's friends why "having a bore-well was so important to him, unlike his father's case", their answer was; "he said, I must live amongst four people, I must live with a *thoTa*, (he) became depressed when his attempts at sinking a bore well failed" (*tension, full tension manishi; nenu bathakālā, nalagurulo thotā petti bathakālā, feel ainaDu, nāku neel kaDgāla*). As my argument has been, this mode of objectification of one self as an inferior subject unless one has a *thoTa*, and unless one is developing (Foucault cited in Escobar, 1984; 379), is derived from the context of objectively rising economic differentiation (Ch. 2, 3) between *thoTa* and *meTa* peasants on one hand and between urban and rural communities on the other (Ch. 4). Like several other instances, Subramaniam's subjectivity derived from the mirror-image of his successful, upwardly mobile *thoTa* owning neighbours<sup>24</sup>. However, going beyond Vaidyanathan's point, what is equally instructive to recall here is the substantialisation of repeated or multiple attempts at sinking bore wells as an act of fearlessness/courage, *rosham/tyagam* (Ch. 3); although it is essentially an act of risk and distress (*pramadam*), groundwater exploration has been subverted into becoming an idiom of aggressive *paurusham*. By taking multiple attempts at bore-well sinking in quick succession, Subramaniyam, a *tension manishi* (aggressive person), was also transacting hyper-masculinity unlike his cohorts who, accepting their fate, became quiet (*urke unnanu*) after failing to find groundwater. Each of his

<sup>24</sup> To the following question, "is there one (bore) around his fields", they answered; "there are many; right next to his. They have plenty, bountiful of water. They have been taking good crops. (Subramaniam thought) if these plants (sweet orange) bear fruits, tomorrow, I could take good money, plenty of it. He faced the difficulty (of committing suicide) when he tried to maintain the same 'level' as theirs". (*dandiga neel unDai ; atanu thota pakkine, walu ki dandiga pushpulanga neel unnai, panta baga tiskuntunnaDu* (another person interjects) *a chattulu kashite, reppu bramhandanga dabbulu, dandiga tiskovvachu kada? Ena aa level to maintain kavala moment lo ne etla kast padinaDu*)

attempts to sink a bore well represented his renewed claim to honour and each of his failures, a subsequent repudiation of that claim (*avamanana*).

Severe indebtedness can also compound a suicidogenic crisis of masculinity if, as Goffman puts it (1958), a peasant claims an absolute commitment to the doxa of *paurusham*. There is a homology between indebtedness and the notions of personhood (Ch. 3); since 'doing debt' (*appulu ceyDam*) represents, *pace* Dumont (Kolenda 1976), the unified hierarchies of power (*artha*) and status (*dharma*) of a father/household head, it is an important moral template for his self –appraisal. An awareness of the precise extent of his debts rendered Balappa (60), one of the 14 genuine suicides, depressed/emasculated ("*mettaga ainaDu*"); he sat silently, in isolation ("*kadarkunnaDu*") in weeks preceding his suicide. When his eldest son asked him the reason, he reportedly said "my pain is mine only; to come (from the crop sales of the season) is Rs. 4,000 and to pay is about 3 lakh." Although Balappa's son was sympathetic to his father and advised him to sell a part of their land, in a number of other cases, the wife or son of the deceased accused the latter of *swartham* in accumulating huge debts. In such cases, the local interpretations dramatised the contrast between the moral tenability behind an indebted father's action to take loans ("loan was taken for the entire family") with the untenable accusations cast on his action ("it is you who took it; who told you to do so?"). Here Goffman's point (1958:10) about "a performer's complete belief in the reality of the performance he stages" is very helpful. Some suicides, like Balappa, did not consider selling their land, or any other assets, to obtain solvency even when suggested to do so, because they believed that the land was not their property, but a coparcenary asset (compare it with distress sales amongst suicides in Vidarbha, Mohanty, 2005; 257/272). Others, standing explicitly accused of *swartham* from an inferior family member, experienced an insult so great as to think of committing suicide (see Ch. 6 below on the local experiences of insult and anger).

The point of an association between the variation in one's loyalty to absolute *paurusham* and the idea of committing suicide can be illustrated from the opposite end of the argument as well. Many heavily indebted small dry land peasants in NRP, like M. Reddy or P. Ishwariah, routinely joke about their enormous debts in public. Some indebted farmers in the village have even staged a brief disappearance from the village to avoid their lenders. That is, such farmers have withdrawn their claim to *paurusham* and honour, and thus they escape self-subjection and social censuring that emanates from the moral economy of indebtedness (such as, "to owe is to live under a lender's "*mulajee/obligation*"). Indeed, in spite of being subjected to gross public ignominy - a number of his creditors dragged him to the bazaar, hurling choicest profanities on him - Iswariah did not ever think of an insult for he is not committed to the idea of *paurusham*. But, for Balappa and other suicides, a mere spectre of the insult evokes the loss of face (Goffman 1958). The experience of *avamanam* (dishonour) and shock/distress (*badha*) amongst the suicides at the loss of their creditworthiness, and/or being rebuked by their borrowers, which are sometimes the proximate antecedents to the act of suicide, are associated to this claim; the deceased experienced an irretrievable loss of *maryada* because they claimed to have it, acquired and conserved through their consistent individual performances.

#### **5.4.2 Suicides caused by a combination of farming and non- farming reasons**

As against the 14 genuine suicides, there is a small number - 2 amongst the 29 cases that I studied - in which the indigenous narratives lacked an agreement as to whether they were genuinely farm-related or false farm-related suicides. In one of these cases, my informants emphasized an intricate interaction between farm and non-farm related factor(s) and in another, they were too circumspect to provide the

details, or express their own opinions, as regards the circumstances of the suicide<sup>25</sup>.

The implication is that there are a number of suicides – although they may be relatively smaller than the two other categories – in the official statistics which defy a clear categorisation on the basis of motives. I shall illustrate briefly why and how one of these cases, for which I have details, appears to occupy the borderline area between two categories of genuine and fake farm-suicides. The following is the account of Padma's (50) suicide, as narrated by her husband Raghu (62);

Case 5.4

Year of suicide; 2000

"After our marriage, she worked as a *kulli* and I, as a *meshri* (petty labour supervisor). For ten years, I worked on the dam construction (near to the village). When the work finished, so I began doing *koru*, for five years, and then left it.

N; why?

R; (retorting angrily) why, because, the debt grew as much as the crop (output) did (*yentā lothagā digbaDi vastanTai, antā lothagā appulu vastanTai*). Did I have my own land that I could get more? Then, I left for Cuddapah (a neighbouring district) for construction work. She lived here, cultivated the field. I would just come to see her, give some money and go back. Children grew up; two sons were married, two daughters also married. All on debt. They (sons) divided only 7 months back before her suicide - within a year of their marriage.

N; why so soon?

R; that was what saddened her most (*ade pedda samsaya a amma ku*). He (the first son) separated to stay with his in-laws, in the hope that he would get a part in their property. We had planned that we would set up a shop after selling the land he would get in dowry from his in-laws - they had promised so at the time of the marriage. We could live well here. But, they (the in-laws) lied; they had no land to give. They said, if he (the son) stays with them, they would give the land. So, he left; since then he has never returned. We did not know even his whereabouts for ten years (*assal addresse ledu*).

N; did your younger sons not help their mother?

R; that was another issue; the middle one, he joined the *radicals* (the outlawed Naxal group active in the district then) and married there. He was in love with the girl, and after marriage he divided his household very soon. He is also a very difficult person (*waDu kuDa kathimaina manishi*) does not talk to anyone; even to me he speaks little.

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<sup>25</sup> The suicide, in this case, was an extremely impoverished peasant. Besides cultivating his marginal piece (.82 acres) of canal-irrigated land, he had been leasing another 4 acres of irrigated land in the village. His debts were relatively very modest (Rs. 19,500), as the official inquest showed and which my interview with his wife appeared to confirm. Interviewing the wife of the deceased was difficult for she said that she did not know about her husband's farming related transactions, neither could she provide me an account of the circumstances leading to the act of suicide. These failures were compounded by my inability to speak with other villagers about the causes of the suicide.

N; did something happen on that day (of suicide) in the household?

R; nothing on that day, there was just one thing; I had returned home from Kadapa, a month before her death and stayed for some weeks. I had taken a loan of (Rs.) 50,000 from my employer four years ago (i.e. 4 years before Padma's death) for my own treatment (of Tuberculosis) and household expenditure. .

N; what household expenditure?

R; to eat, for cultivation, to build this house. He (the lender) did not ask me for repayment as I had been working for him all these years. I never paid back any principal or interest: The crop had not been good for three years; every year we would put Rs. 10,000-12,000 and yields would be 7 bag-8 bag only (in 4.5 acres), that year too, there was a pest attack (*tevulu vachinai*). There was debt here (within village) too; (Rs.) 60,000, for marriage of girls, 7 tola gold, 20,000 in cash as dowry.

N; then?

R; when I did not go back to work for some weeks, they (employer) began writing letters asking for repayment. She knew about the letters and was shocked. Here she was the household head, she had a courageous heart (*pedda gunde ammadai*).

N; so how could such a courageous women commit suicide?

R; the first son's problem, the second son's problem and then on the top, the son-in- law's problem.

N; what about him?

R; leave it (*vaddule*) (turns his face down, tone falls). He drinks and beats up his wife. If she came here, he would follow her and fight. He did not have the courage to fight with my wife. But then my (second) son supported him and the son-in-law abused her (Padma). She was thoroughly disturbed by this (*idi pedda kashi aipai*).

N; but why did your son support him against his mother?

R; Because "(I ) did not give him any thing, (I) did not earn anything for him, sent (him) out of the house without property (*yemi iledai, yemi sampadiyelede..urke gaDDa pampinchnaDu*). All this hurt her greatly (*Anne pedda badha vachnnai amme ki*)."'

N; when did this happen?

R; 7- 10 days before her death.

Raghu's 4.5 acre dry plot was economically non-viable in terms of the gross returns it offered, as the case is for most small dry land farmers (Ch. 2). This non-viability of dry land farming forms the subtext for his migration, and exacerbates his indebtedness from other convergent distresses such as his poor health, the marriage of the daughters and yield losses (75% below normal yield) within the preceding three years of Padma's death. The presence of such farm-related factors of distress

indeed point to the agrarian (economic) crisis being a salient aetiological category for farm-suicides (cf. Deshpande 2002, Vaidyanathan 2006). However, Raghu's narrative also exposes this category to be causally insufficient (a.) by consistently referring to the extreme forms of egoistic-anomic disaggregation of the three structural joints of his domestic group (Durkheim in Lukes 1973:195, also Ch. 3), (b). by placing the violent altercation between Padma and her son-in-law, in which her son supported the abusive brother-in-law, temporally closest to her suicide, and (c). by invoking the point of Padma's loyalty to the doxa of *paurusham*. Referring to his wife's suicide, and extending it as a general aetiological feature in his society, he said; "people who have a lot of temper, have this risk (of committing suicide). She had a lot of temper (*roshamakwa undi*). She would not like going to anyone else's house, she liked to lead her life on her own." The subsequent police inquest, however, yet again focalised and transvalued these motives behind her death by associating her suicide with economic distress ; " She (had) had undergone economic distress, due to ill health of her husband who was working as a contract labourer. She was alone managing farm activity. Debts made to perform marriages of daughters also burdened them. Only two male members are left in the family. Under severe economic distress, she committed suicide".<sup>26</sup>

#### **5.4.3 Suicides caused by exclusive non-farming reasons**

All the remaining 13 cases of suicides are accounted as "*abhaddam atmahatyalu*" in the indigenous narratives.

If in explaining genuine farm-suicides the primary aetiological context is the extraordinary (or, "exaggerated", Durkheim 2006:20) convergence of farm-related vulnerabilities, the category of *abhaddam atmahatyalu* is conspicuous precisely by

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<sup>26</sup> From the inquest report of the district committee for examining farming related suicides.

the absence of such a context. To begin with, the intense desperation for groundwater, as reflected in a very high number of attempts at sinking a bore-well amongst the genuine farm-suicides, appears to be infrequent amongst the false farm-suicides. Only 3 such deceased farmers out of 13 had ever attempted a bore-well in their lifetime, and even in these cases, the fact of failure in striking groundwater remains marginal in the concerned aetiological accounts just as it was in Jairamlu's instance. Moreover, there is little evidence of any other noteworthy farm-related investments – of the kind reported amongst the genuine suicides – in these cases; leasing of land is reported in only 2 (15.38%) cases, with the extent of lease being much smaller (5 and 10 acres respectively) and there is only one case in which the deceased farmer had invested in a new flour mill some years before his death. Indeed, in view of their relatively smaller average size of landholdings – 5.21 acres as against 8.81 acres amongst *nijam* suicides – the false suicides depended more upon a supplementary source of livelihood, such as tailoring, smithy and masonry than the genuine suicides did <sup>27</sup>.

Notwithstanding a remarkable absence of agricultural investments in the years preceding their death, the official inquest reports of the concerned suicides suggest that the incidence of indebtedness remains severe amongst them. The average amount of debt in this category, at Rs.91, 408.84 is smaller than that of the genuine suicides, albeit larger (by 26.08%) than that of NRP farmers. Also, the sources of debt confirm the pattern mentioned for other two categories, if only more strikingly; the non-institutional sources continue to be a predominant, accounting for 90.79 % of all the debts. The number of those individuals who did not access any loan, including the seasonal crop loan, from institutional sources is relatively higher in this group, but in absence of any record of investments in agriculture, such large-

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<sup>27</sup> Such miscellaneous secondary occupations were reported in 7 out of 13 cases. Amongst the genuine farm suicides, the comparable number of peasants engaged in such secondary occupation is only two.

scale debts can point to three possibilities. First, that the loans were taken for meeting non-agricultural requirements, dispensable or indispensable, or that they were merely created after the death of a suicide, as seen in Jairamlu's case, or that both of these occurred together.

*Table 5.8 Incidence of indebtedness amongst the fake farm-suicides*

i. Average individual debt	Rs. 93,776.00
ii. Source of debt (in%)	
Institutional	9.21
Non-institutional	90.79
iii. Debt in relation to land (i.e. debt per acre of land owned)	Rs. 15, 258.50

Source: The survey of the suicide households, 2005-06 and the official inquest reports.

In 5 cases of fake farm-suicides (including Jairamlu's), I enjoyed the confidence of my respondents, and in these cases there was an explicit acknowledgement of the creation of false credit notes to inflate the extent of outstanding debts due to a deceased. The process of debt creation remained much the same as seen in Jairamlu's instance. A small network of close kin members and friends who were seen capable of, and willing to, testify in support for the created debts to the inquest teams and who would remain steadfast in protecting its confidentiality, created back-dated debt-notes as creditors and the village community either explicitly acquiesced to it or simply did not care much. In the remaining eight cases, an explicit acknowledgement of debt-creation was absent, although my informants did not rule out its possibility. But, then, does it imply that all the debts (amongst the fake farm-suicides) reported at official inquests were created, as a section of local peasantry believes (see below)? I recorded one suicide (which is not included in the 13 cases), in neighbouring IP village in 2007, in which the entire sum of debt reported (Rs. 120,000) at the inquest was indeed fictitious – and obviously, the sum was shown to be lent by “informal sources”<sup>28</sup>. However, in the 13 cases, my

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<sup>28</sup>The person who wrote these false credit-notes posthumously, a close friend of mine, told me this in confidence.

informants did not rule out completely the presence of some genuine debt, whether for farming or non-farming reasons, although they expressed their inability in confirming the precise proportion of genuine and created debts for an individual suicide. The purported purposes of borrowings, as presented by the kin members of these deceased during my interviews (Table 5.9), are not distinct from that of the genuine farm suicides, except that, for obvious reasons it is the “seasonal loans and loans for consumption purposes (*sansaramkarca*)” which claim a higher proportion of debts amongst the false farm-suicides<sup>29</sup>.

**Table 5.9      Causes of indebtedness amongst the fake farm- suicides**

Agricultural purposes		Present in cases (n=13)
i.	Seasonal loan for cultivation	<b>9</b>
ii.	Sinking of bore well	2
iii.	Purchase of livestock	2
Non- agricultural purposes		
i.	Household consumption	<b>8</b>
ii.	Marriages of daughters	4
iii.	House construction	1

Source: as reported by the kin members of the deceased during the survey of the household of suicides, 2005  
 Note: None of these causes are mutually exclusive and hence in all cases, they are found in conjunction with one another.

Aside from referring to the artificial inflation of debts, the notion of falsity in the motives attributed to the category of fake farm-suicides involves two other connotations as well. One of them is a transvaluation in which although there is little evidence of any artificial creation of credit-notes on behalf of a deceased, but the purpose of his genuine debts has precious little to do with his farm-reproduction, although it is shown as such in the official inquest. M. Reddy's (60) suicide in K.T.Palli village is an example of this aspect of falsity. His inquest report shows a huge debt of Rs. 243, 900 against an asset of 11 acres of dry land. My

<sup>29</sup> If one considers the size of the household, which has a most important bearing on the extent of household consumption in the rural context , the *abhaddam* suicides have an average 4.3 members in their families as compared to 5.8 members amongst the *nijam* suicides. As far as the presence of a daughter against the sons in the family – a factor that may determine the net likely direction of transfer of resources through dowry – one finds that both the groups fare almost same; the ration of sons to daughters amongst the *abhaddam* cases is 1; 1.22 as against 1.20 amongst the *nijam* suicides.

curiosity in his case was aroused when I discovered that the inquest-team had already once rejected his suicide being a case of ‘farmers’ suicides’, only to retract its decision subsequently<sup>30</sup>. The reasons for rejection were as follows; “the deceased committed suicide due to family affairs. The case does not come under the purview of agricultural debts and crop failure.” In my enquiries with the kin members, the respondents underlined that his enormous debts were on account of the costly, but dubious “MBA course” that his son had been pursuing in Bengaluru. Reddy had taken a large sum of dowry for this son’s marriage on the basis of this “MBA degree” and when the bride found this out, there were domestic feud and her family, a “town family”, finally got a legal injunction for M. Reddy to repay the entire dowry before she divorced her husband. In spite of layers of falsity, it was the family’s opportune political alignments (i.e. being from the dominant Reddy caste) that explained how the case was reinserted as a ‘farming-related’ suicide.

The fourth aspect of falsity amongst the fake farm-suicides carries another variant of focalisation and transvaluation – one in which a genuine presence of severe indebtedness and/or the act of suicide attributed to farming related distress, is in fact due to a *lopam*, or character-related vulnerability. The three most common forms of *lopam* referred to amongst the 13 fake farm-suicides are alcoholism (*trāgDam*), gambling (*matkā āRDam*), extra marital sexual relationship by a spouse and doubt thereof (*akram sambandham gurinči anumānam*) and of these, the first two are exclusively masculine vulnerabilities. As regards their causal relationship to indebtedness, it also appears that the first two are more frequent. In all nine cases of alcoholism (Table 5.10), the drinking habits of the deceased were quoted as being so protracted and extreme that not only the income of the deceased (i.e. daily wages) was used up, but even the joint incomes of other members of the

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<sup>30</sup>I believe that there was a considerable elapse of time, probably about a year, between the first decision and the retraction by the concerned district inquest committee.

family and large sums of credit purportedly taken for farming reasons were used instead for drinking.

For want of any detailed individual case-histories in their papers, I am suspicious of Mohanty (2004:5606) and Gill's claims (2006:2766) that the incidence of alcoholism and gambling amongst the suicides of small peasants in Maharashtra and Punjab is a function of recent farm-related (economic) distress in these states. My evidence, instead, confirms the cross-cultural ethnographic data (Douglas, 1987) that drinking (and gambling) has been an integral feature of consuming sociality amongst NRP peasants (Ch. 4). Instead of positing an unfounded causality between agrarian distress and alcoholism, my data suggests that chronic alcoholism is a dominant – albeit not always the only - cause of severe indebtedness amongst the fake farm- suicides. It also suggests that the pathological forms of alcoholism that one often finds amongst fake farm suicides relates to a host of non-farming factors, such as a husband's suspicion about his wife's sexual liaisons, or a father receiving abusive treatment from a son or wife within his household.

Mohanty (p. 5605) and others fail to take note of these possibilities. They also fail to make an eminently warranted aetiological distinction between such suicides that are accounted by local peasants exclusively in terms of extra-marital liaisons and chronic alcoholism, and those that are linked primarily to farm-related distresses.

*Table 5.10 “Lopam” amongst genuine and fake farm- suicides*

Kinds	No. of cases reported in	
	Fake farm suicides (n=13)	Genuine suicides (n=14)
1. Alcoholism	9	2
2. Gambling	2	0
3. Illicit sexual relationship	3	0
4. Suspicion of an illicit sexual relationship	3	0
5. “Lopam/ bad habits” present in cases;	11	2
6. ‘Lopam/ bad habits absent in cases;	2	12

Source: The case studies and group discussions for suicides, 2005.

Note; The figures in parentheses show the total number of cases of suicides covered in both categories.

As table 5.10 suggests, almost half the fake farm-suicides I studied are aetiologically associated with extra marital liaisons. Although the number of cases in which an evidence of the complicity of one spouse was available to the other is equal to that in which there was no concrete confirmation, both scenarios presented an identical scope for conjugal violence including homicidal and suicidal threats. Excerpt 5.4 is a part of my conversation with a male neighbour about one such case in which the husband committed suicide after discovering his wife's liaison. Apparently, unlike Jairamlu's case, here the suicide himself was free from the *lopam*; his emasculation rather concerned his inability to mete out an eminently warranted punishment to his adulterous (*vyabhicharini*) but forbearing wife, and hence the male discourse saw his suicide as a demanded performance. In all these six cases, the suicide's indebtedness remained completely marginal in the local narratives. Overall, whether on account of sexual liaisons, alcoholism or gambling, amongst the fake cases we find a higher incidence of domestic strife, violence, threats and counter-threats of suicides as the precipitating antecedent to a suicide (Table 5.11). If it was sometimes an elder brother who physically beat a deceased for his drinking and gambling activities, there are also other instances in which a younger male, such as a young son or brother-in-law beat up the elder deceased farmer, engendering a devastating crisis of the self for the deceased. In absence of a challenging male in the family, however, violence generally followed the standard hierarchy of gender; it was an alcoholic husband who beat his wife when she reproached him for his foul habits. In cases pertaining to extra-marital liaisons, it was often the failure of a husband to punish his wife that engendered a crisis of *paurusham* for him.

#### Excerpt 5.4

“ He used to go with his flock ( of sheep) to the forest and would not return for days. Here she (his wife) had a touch (liaison) with some one in the village. She is a clever sort of a woman (*amma koddiga hosiyarga undi*). It must have gone on for some time. He may have known about it. One gets to hear it, although these things do not come out quickly (*yetuvanti vishyalu tondarga bazaar lo radu*). But one day, he went away, saying that he

would be staying overnight in the forest itself. But, he came back in the afternoon. He had been suspicious (*anumanam lone unnaru kada*); the door was closed from inside. When she opened it, he (the lover) was inside the room. This was two days before his suicide. That night they quarrelled at home. He told her to leave (house), to which she said, I am not, do what you want. She had no fear, no shame (*bhayam levu, moh marta levu*). What could he do? The next day he went to the forest and drank poison”.

*Table 5.11 The list of precipitating causes amongst fake farm-suicides*

Precipitating circumstances	No. of cases (n= 14)
i. Public rebuke of ‘causing the death of one’s wife’	2
ii. Altercation with wife/son/mother –in law over alcoholism/ gambling	4
iii. Altercation with spouse over “doubtful/ confirmed” extra-marital liaison	3
iv. Altercation and rebuke by a son over financial management of the household	1
v. Rebuke by the father for having gone to watch a film	1
v. Unknown	2

Source; The case studies of suicides, 2005-06

Overall, given the ease and regularity with which the conversion of motives has come to take place, it is unsurprising to find that towards the end of my fieldwork that local peasants themselves were patently dismissive about the credibility of the thesis of ‘farmers’ suicides’ (Excerpt 5.6). This dismissal invariably invoked the complicity of, and corruption amongst, the *mandal* level Police and revenue bureaucracy. In Jairamlu’s case, I could not discover the precise amount of bribe the inquest team had received; in the case of IP suicide, where all the debts shown were fictitious, the inquest team received a bribe of Rs. 4, 000 (£55). In addition, I understand that the *mandal* revenue bureaucracy took a ‘cut’ of Rs. 20,000 (£260), or about 13% of the entire *ex-gratia* amount. As a result of the reports of widespread and systemic kickbacks in the entire official process of certification, the view that “it (conversion) has become easy to get money after committing suicide” was recurrent. In fact, going a step further, a large number of peasants believed that “people (that is, farmers) were committing suicides in order to get money.” I disagree with this opinion for want of any evidence. But, it can certainly be

suggested that peasants are now more likely to report a suicide as 'farm-related' in expectation of ex-gratia amount.

Excerpt 5.6

A; you are researching 'farmers' suicides'?

N; yes!

A; How many of them you have found to be genuine?

N; there are some!

A; 60-70% of them ('farmers' suicides') are false. They are not caused by debt.. not related to farming, because of something else. There was a case in the village. A man drank poison because of health reasons. They took him to the big hospital (in the town). The police came and they said to the family, "*atmahatya kind rabhicko, dabbulu vastai*" (have it registered as a suicide because of farming reasons, the money will come) There are many who have had it written as such.

N; could you say that for the two cases of 'farmers' suicides' in your village?

A; yes, they are both of this kind<sup>31</sup>.

It is not that the components of the state in question are not aware of these systemic subversions although their explanations for the same are different. "It is because of the pressure from the police (to have the case registered as farming related suicide)", as one Revenue Officer at the *Mandal* Revenue Office told me, " that there are so many applications to our office". He also spoke of the relatively lesser reported aspect of local political 'recommendation', either from the MP or MLA (Members of Parliament or Legislative Assembly) pressing for conversion. Understandably enough, when I asked him what was the rejection rate on the total number of submissions for 'farmers' suicides' that his office had received, he said, "none! We have recommended all (17 cases) that we have received for recommendation". The other officer, in another adjoining *mandal* accounted the

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<sup>31</sup> When I asked this person why "he, as a member of the village, did not speak out against lies (*abhaddam*) being turned into truth, his answer was; "*nenu cheptanu, yevuruku? Police walde, rajkiyam to tirgataDu, dabbu vaccheki vachestundi...kani nato ghodwa apudu nunci start...urwalu antaru, nuvvu enduku addamlo neelbaddedi?* (I say, to whom? The police shall support them, they curry support amongst the politicians, they shall manage to get the *ex gratia* amount, but for me, the strife begins from that moment on. The villagers will say, " why are you coming in the way?")

same fact in a manner of an acknowledged altruism; "We know there are false cases. There are so many different reasons (for committing suicide); there was one case in which the person committed suicide because of AIDS, people said. But we see the condition of the family, they are poor, so let it go". It is such discretionary/personal interpretations of the criteria laid out to distinguish a 'farm related suicide' from a non-farm related one which explain how the district committee interprets the presence of alcoholism/gambling/extra-marital affairs etc., differently in different cases. For instance, being alcoholic may be cited as a reason for a deceased farmer's ineligibility to be considered a 'farm-suicide' in one *mandal*, but the same history of being alcoholic and a gambler may not be enough to make another deceased ineligible in another *mandal*.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

I have tried to suggest that the official and academic conceptions of 'farm-related suicides' artificially denude the incidence of suicides from the immediate social and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. The consequence is that significant patterns of continuities - such as the nature of risk in production - amongst the genuine farm-related suicides and discontinuities – the way in which farm and non-farm factors are interwoven - are invariably effaced. The discourse of *nijam* and *abhaddam* suicides can be read as both an acknowledgement and a critique of this conception. Although compulsive bore well sinking and groundwater failure, crop -losses and indebtedness on account of marriage of daughters are approximate aetiological factors for *nijam* suicides, these can scarcely be seen in isolation either from the emergent discourse of developmentalism or the practice of masculinity. In other words, farm related suicides are often individuals who were committed to the idea of modernity (i.e. to develop, cf. Berman, 1982) and to the idea of honour at a time when farming, the only means available to them, has become individualistic,

insecure and shorn of state support. The fake farm-suicides, on the other hand, indicate the breakdown of agrarian domestic institutions, especially the family. How these categories of suicides fit aetiologically and ideologically in the larger landscape of rural suicides is my concern in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 6**

### ***Mānam and Avamānam; the ideology and organization of suicides***

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter constitutes the second and broader part of the analysis of suicides amongst the local peasant communities. In the first part of the chapter (section 6.2) I delineate the native conceptual framework by means of which an act of suicide is conceived and represented locally, and in doing this I follow the currents that are common between the cultural theory concerning self, cognition and emotions (Geertz 1983, Swechder and LeVine 1984, Rosaldo 1989) and the ethnology of suicide (Fontaine 1960 in Bohannan 1960, Firth in Giddens 1971, Brown 1986). The following sections (6.3 and 6.4) are concerned with relating this conceptual framework to certain representative form of circumstances in which suicides are commonly performed in the local peasantry. In more specific terms, the analysis presented there relates suicide to the field of honour, with all the different but inter-linked meanings that the word evokes (Pitt-Rivers 1992; Introduction), and shows this field to be undergirded by the encompassing ideology of *paurusham*. My argument is that suicides amongst men are primarily aimed at negotiating, often aggressively, the polysemic subjectivity of *avamānam* (i.e., disgrace, insult, shame-guilt<sup>1</sup>, defeat) that is experienced within circuits of key social relations. I also reiterate the suggestion (made in Ch. 3, 4 above) that the scope for experiencing *avamanam* – which is contingent on the claim of *manam* and its social

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<sup>1</sup> There is a debate in ethnographic literature about how shame relates to guilt. Mead contrasted shame with guilt in dualistic and evolutionary terms wherein the first related to the idea of social dishonour, relevant in non-western, community-oriented societies, while the second represented the loss of self-esteem in more individualistic Western society. Although avoiding the evolutionary component, Bourdieu (2001:52) makes a similar contrast by defining shame as an “other-oriented” emotion as opposed to guilt which is self oriented. Against this dualism, Pitt-Rivers sees guilt as internalised shame. Although it is analytically useful to maintain the distinction in certain contexts, as Rosaldo (1984) suggests, I agree with Pitt-River’s formulation for the reasons that are discussed below.

acknowledgment - has expanded substantially in proportion to the democratization of the claims for *manam* due to economic and cultural transformations described above. In the second part (section 6.5) the organization of the performance of suicide, that is its method, intent and results, is described. Overall, an enunciation of the vocabulary of suicide as system in which peasants transact notions of masculine honour and esteem, exposes the inadequacy of Durkheimian theory in understanding a crucial feature of local suicides – that of avenging/shaming an opponent by way of self-annihilation (Jeffrey 1952, Bohannan 1960).

*Table 6.1*

*Suicides amongst peasants in ATP villages*

Male	12 (52%)
Female	10 (48%)
(Of which)	
i. Adolescent boys (up to 18 years)	1 (4%)
ii. Adolescent girls (same age)	5 (22%)
iii. Married	11 (52%)
iv. Unmarried	10 (43%)
v. Widow/widower	1 (4%)

Source: field case studies, 2005-06

## **6.2 Suicide; the indigenous discourse**

As recounted in Ch. 5, during the initial months of my fieldwork references to suicides remained noticeably absent in local discourses in the village although it had witnessed two suicidal deaths as recently as two years back (in 2002-03). However, a range of suicidal conducts continued to occur at regular intervals over the space of total 18 months of my residence; besides at least three cases of threats, 4 completed and one attempted suicide transpired in this period. Peasants would enunciate these incidents in the bazaar, and in private, with intense interest in their immediate aftermath. Interspersed with these episodic discourses there were collective and individual reactions to stories of suicides from neighboring villages (four completed suicides in same period in the nearest two villages) and to

newspaper reports of such deaths from other *mandals* in the district. This field of diverse dialectical exchanges – sharing information, expressing reactions, constructing the structures of a plausible explanation and drawing moral judgments from it – cumulatively constitute the indigenous discourse on suicide for me. This indigenous discourse is my universe of analysis and it is concordant with what Bohannan (1960: 26-27) has called the “folk explanations” of suicide.

NRP peasants rarely use the standard term for suicide in Indian languages, namely ‘*ātma-hatyā*’, or a death consciously brought about by one’s own self<sup>2</sup>. Instead, like the Tikopians (Firth 1971:201 in Giddens 1971) they say “so and so drank poison/took to hanging/jumped into the well”. Positive and conscious self-authorship of the act, and the mode employed, distinguish suicide as a mortuary category from outside and within and accordingly, men employ it to catalogue deaths amongst their “consociates” (Schutz 1962). “This is the 16th incident (of drinking poison) in the village that I know of”, M. Reddy (40) stated in the tumultuous bazaar on the evening of the suicide of Jairamlu. Such cataloguing affords them a cogent perspective on the incidence of suicide; Reddy also observed that the frequency of poison-deaths had positively increased in the village “in recent years”. Official statistics indeed indicate a quantum increase of 114% in suicides between 1996-2006 in Anantpur<sup>3</sup> although, as I have noted above, one is not quite sure about the extent to which it is merely a statistical artifact. Such temporal deductions are also associated with inter-village comparisons; peasants believe that their village is most suicide prone amongst all the four villages in the same *Panchayat* although this consciousness is of limited utility in mitigating suicidal behavior in the village (see below). Hence, to an incident of suicides they often

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<sup>2</sup>This is the definition of suicide followed throughout this chapter. It contrasts with Madan’s rendition of the same term, as “killing of one’s own self”. Apparently, my usage restricts the reference to corporeal dimension of the result and the agency whereas Madan understands may seemingly be taken to contain a reference to the non-physical dimensions of death. See Madan (1987).

<sup>3</sup>Annual reports (2000-06) of the State Crime Record Bureau, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh.

respond rather wryly; “*mandu trāgDam, idi ippuDu vokka rankangā fashion aindi; pratiokkaDu tragéDi, saccéDi*” (to drink poison has become a fashion these days; everyone drinks and dies). Yet, the three key claims that are contained in this statement, namely the overwhelming predominance of one mode of committing suicide (amongst many historically known alternatives), its extreme lethal potential and the generality of the suicidal act, appear consonant with micro-level statistics (Table 6.1).

To answer why a person commits suicide, villagers employ a terminology that is an inversion of the one used to relate to the properties of “good name” and “good life” (*manci péru, manci jeevitham*). This inversion can be reduced to the antonymic core of *mānam-avamānam*; the villagers say, “it is *mānam* that enables a person to live, live with absolute courage (*shartangā bathakaDam*), and it is *avamānam* that causes him to drink poison. After Peristiany (1966: Introduction) and Pitt-Rivers (ibid:21), *mānam* may most appropriately be rendered as, (a). the state of claiming social value or esteem (“*vilvu*”) and (b). coming to possess such a value. *Avamānam* denotes the state of its loss – that is, the lack of social acknowledgment, or a repudiation, of an individual’s claim to esteem. In their scope, these concepts appear to be co-terminus in varying degrees with a number of terms (and compounds) peasants use in everyday life; the continued possession of *maryādā* (status/reputation/honour) as against *maryādā powDam* (i.e., honour going away), the possession of *paravu/pogaru* (masculine pride/arrogance) as against its loss/lack, *gaurvam* (respect/deference), *vijayam* (victory/ success) as against *apajayam* (defeat/failure), being *goppā* (great) as against being *culakana* (inferior/belittled), possession of *grip* (hold over others) as against loss of *grip*. Of all these terms, there appears to be a particular symbiosis between *mānam* and *maryādā*. *Maryādā powDam* is a more generic and flexible phrase used to refer to a range of circumstances in which a peasant experiences loss of honour/reputation

including relatively minor ones, such as when one is sighted smoking by his elders (compare it with Beattie 1960:145 in Bohannan 1960). However, it converges with *avamānam* at the point of relatively serious and irreversible loss of honour. Hence these two terms are employed interchangeably here. In order to enunciate the causal association between *avamanam* and suicide, a description of the practical applications of *mānam* amongst local peasants is indispensable.

#### **6.2.1 Paurusham and *mānam*; the requisites for a “life with honour”**

As structuralist anthropological thought would suggest (Fuller 2003: 478, Parry 1979, Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992:5), for a NRP person, his *mānam*, the positive property of his social selfhood, is perforce engendered by his social status (*sthānam*). It derives from the two mutually interacting, rank-conferring institutions of caste (*kulam*) and gender. In complete absence of any ‘twice born’ (*dwija*)<sup>4</sup> in the village, the local caste hierarchy occupies the lower rung of the classical *Varna* system (Dumont in Gupta 1991, Fuller 2003:479). Villagers divide the resident caste groups discretely, albeit unsatisfactorily, into the two polar segments of the big/higher castes (*peddā kulalu*) and small/lower castes (*chinnā kulalu*). The *Kāpus*, traditionally the dominant landholding caste (Srinivas 1987) of *Shudra varna*, occupy the extreme point in the first group, while the *Mādigā* and *Mālās* take the space on the opposite extreme. The non-servicing castes of the *Ekulās*, the *Kurubās*, the *Boyās* and the two servicing castes of the *Chakalis* (washer men) and *Dudekulās* (ironsmith), occupy higher and lower ranks in the intermediate space between the big and the small castes. The Dumontian principle of purity and pollution acts as a basis of status differences, and organises the resident castes in a series of concentric boundaries of commensal inclusion-exclusion. The *Kāpus* strictly (and all the immediately lower non-service castes, to a lesser degree) still avoid maintaining any commensal relations with the *Madigas*

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<sup>4</sup>There is only one Brahmin and one *Vaishya* family in the village - both are recent emigrants.

and other service castes in the village, since the latter “do all sorts of unclean works, from carcass scavenging to its consumption to leather related works etc<sup>5</sup>.” Hence, (only) the *Kāpus* have the privilege of enjoying some commensal proximity with the Brahmin – such as consuming cooked food in his company, although not from the same vessel, when they are in a state of higher purity<sup>6</sup>. The overall emphasis on purity for organising status and honour is also metonymically articulated by cleanliness (*subhram*). Adults often compare an unclean *Kāpu* child with that of a *Mādigā* and all men who take the 41 days long vow of wearing the Sabarimalai Swami *mala*<sup>7</sup>, and strictly abstain from polluting social transactions, are addressed deferentially as ‘*Swāmi*’ during that period. *Swami* is otherwise a salutation that is used exclusively for a Brahmin.

Yet, as Fuller observes (2003:483), the strength of local caste system as a denominator of hierarchic status depends no less on the differential distribution of secular politico-economic resources, or “the power of cash”, than on the principal of purity and pollution. The twenty *Kāpu* households (a mere 7.26% of all NRP households) cumulatively hold 16.43% of all farmland of the village; they have, on an average, twice as much land per household as the numerically superior *Kurubās*, two and half times more than the *Ekulās* and nearly thrice as much as the *Mādigās*. They, the high caste, have conventionally formed the dominant class of peasantry. Being net employers of farm labour, especially from the lower castes, it is understandable why a *Kāpu* man considers it a grave insult to work as a *kullie* in anyone else’s farm. N. Reddy, in a boastful manner (*paravu*), would tell me that he has never sent his “wife to work (as a *kullie*) except amongst the *Kāpus*” despite

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<sup>5</sup>N. Reddy, while explaining why the *Kāpus* have been the dominant caste in the region.

<sup>6</sup> Such as during religious festivals and ceremonies (*anusthanam*).

<sup>7</sup>Sabarimalai Swami is an important member of the Hindu pantheon across the south Indian states. In December, (only) men take a vow to remain in a state of renunciation by taking to wearing a black *panci* (the cloth men wear from the waist), shirt and *oli* (cotton towel, folded and kept hanging over sides), giving up consumption of all polluting articles such as meat, alcohol and abstaining from sexual intercourse (some avoid all physical proximity with a women) during these 41 days.

suffering from economic distress, and that how he was “overcome with anger (*peddā kopam vachindi*)” when one of his *Kāpu* creditors, who was also a member of his kin, asked N. Reddy to work as a *kullie* against his debt<sup>8</sup>.

However, his statement also underlines that the *Kāpus*, a homogenous class from without (in the sense of almost no participation in inter-caste farm labour market), are not a class-in-themselves. Indeed, just one *Kāpu* patrilineal kin group, that of M. Reddy and S. Reddy, hold almost one-ninth (10.78%) of all village farmland, amounting to more than two-third (65%) of all land under the *Kāpu* ownership. This family, with its reputation as the “*peddārythu*”, the large landowner, has historically been the patron-employer of the largest number of *kullies*, attached labourers (*jeetalu*) and share tenants (*pālikaru*) from amongst the *Mādigās* and from amongst a few impoverished *Kapu* households (*kullies* only). Interestingly, employing its economic clout as a lever in the arena of ritual status, this family has made substantial monetary contributions to the construction of the *AnjeneyaSwami*<sup>9</sup> temple near to its house, and to the settlement and maintenance of the only Brahmin family in the village. From its ranks have been recruited an influential local Congress (I) politician-cum-Panchayat President, a high-level government official and a teacher. On account of these reasons, the family has been a sort of first family in NRP, and its members, the “*goppāmanishi*” (the big man), are held in esteem by other *Kāpu* households as well as by other castes. The role of economic stratification in determining local constellations of caste-based hierarchy (in Dumont's sense, Gupta 1991:488-91) and mediating individual statuses and honours within a caste, the first rather ambiguously handled (Fuller, p. 485) whilst the second noticeably disregarded by Dumont, is clear in NRP (also see Mayer's work in Ramkheri in Fuller, p. 487). On a general note, underlining the

<sup>8</sup> The class-difference between N. Reddy and his creditor was not quite substantial and hence this anger. N. Reddy's statement does not imply that no *Kāpu* in NRP works as a *kullie* for a non-*Kāpu*, although this is an exception rather than a rule in the village.

<sup>9</sup>I.e., Lord Hanuman, a popular deity of the Hindu pantheon.

manipulating influence of cash over rank, NRP men cite a proverb; “*Dabbu unte Subiganiki Subbarao untāDu*” [if he has money, Subigani (i.e., a nobody) becomes a SubbaRao (i.e., a Brahmin)]”.

The correspondence between rank and differential ownership of power begets asymmetrical caste-specific functions, responsibilities, characters and privileges. The *Kāpus* have possessed highest social esteem; giving them honour, the members of lower castes address them as “Reddy” (seldom prefixing proper names in face-to-face interactions). The *Mādigās* still either stand or sit below them at a discreet distance and maintain an obeisant tenor. Conversely, *maryādā* receiving *Kapus* have traditionally denied the same in varying degrees to the castes below them; they use “*rā*<sup>10</sup>” in place of proper nouns to address a *Mādigā* man, or at best the generic “*appa*” (i.e., Mr.) for an elderly *Mādigā* and others. They maintain a commanding tenor towards him and often lace their sentences with insults that wilfully transact the sexuality of the latter’s kinswomen (cf. Bourdieu 2001:19), such as “*ne ammā /ne akkā dengā*” (f\*\*\* your mother/sister). The *Kāpu* self is extremely domineering in that “the *Kāpus* have excessive pride (*garvam akwā*), they cannot take any challenges from anyone.”<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the *Kurubas* “who only graze sheep and goats” are said to lack pride/arrogance (*pogaru*) and suffer from weak cognitive abilities. A *Kāpu* man told me, “*Kuruvuroki vyāpikāi yerri untāDi* (the *Kurubas* will certainly have the lunacy of (at least) the size of a Neem fruit)”. The implication is that they can be easily dominated and duped by other castes, especially the *Kāpus*. Consonant with their lower status and menial occupation, the *Mādigās* allegedly posses dullness (*nikkalu*) of disposition. Perpetual command and supervision are hence in order to deal with them. Overall, the conventional circuit of

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<sup>10</sup>“You”, spoken in a distinctly commanding, often insulting form.

<sup>11</sup>But, as both Pitt-Rivers (1992:Introduction) and James Scott suggest, the non-*Kāpu* castes have their own private, subversive take on the Reddy dominance. A proverb says, “*Reddylo buddhi, maDalo buddhi*” (a Reddy’s intelligence and a penis’s intelligence are equal. That is to say, both are liable to illogical fits of pride).

*maryada*-transaction in public has been both uni-linear and disproportionate; while the *Kāpus* have been used to receiving *maryada* from all lower castes (and classes) while requiting either a disproportionately smaller amount or no *maryada* down the structure, the *Mala/Mādigā* self has traditionally paid unrequited *maryada* to all castes above it (that is, up until recently, as Mendelsohn 1993, shows to be the case in Haryana).

Although rank and economic stratification mediate one's *mānam*, one's agency mediates its augmentation, loss or transference within and across caste. The production of agency as an autobiographical agent invokes the ideals of *paurusham*. As I have described above (Ch.3), the notion of *parurusham* has two interrelated dimensions; one relates to the physicality of being a man, or his *puTabaDi* (i.e., personality), whilst the other relates to its dispositional, social and moral aspects (*caritram*). It is the construction of anatomic difference that underlies the local "social programme of perception" (Bourdieu 2001:11). Engendering themselves and their andocentric cosmology, men say they possess a moustache (*misham*) and a penis, and their body is hard (*gaTTishariram*) and full of physical strength (*balam*). These features are used as a generative principle for differential claims to *manam* and they are conspicuous in egalitarian spaces within or across castes. Ramanjaneyulu (a *Boya* peasant) often asked me to judge his moustache with that of N. Reddy (a *Kāpu*) for its thickness and appearance, and the symbolic subversion of the hierarchy of caste in this claim was never lost upon N. Reddy. The competitions of masculine strength, endurance and courage are culturally privileged spectres; men lift *gaDār*<sup>12</sup> during fairs and marriage *merimeni*<sup>13</sup>, and participate in collective hunting (*VēTa*) of wild boars and compete intensively in sports like

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<sup>12</sup>An iron bar, of 6-7" height and weighing about 40 Kg., that men and boys use for weightlifting.

<sup>13</sup>On the evening of the subsequent day of marriage, the newly weds are taken around in a procession of relatives, mostly women, to the village deity in the groom's village. People gather in their verandah and in the street to watch the procession.

*KabaDDi* or *Dhoolamrai*<sup>14</sup> on *Ugādi*. Gopala (32), a *Kuruba* man is an icon of masculine build and virility as a successful *gaDār* lifter. This virilised masculinity is the template for transacting honour and reputation. One twirls one's moustache in a serious feud and aggressively dares one's opponent by issuing a *tod*<sup>15</sup>, or by asking; “*yemiainā peektāwā*” (shall you pluck anything)? The question bears reference to one's pubic heir (*āta*). As the “symbols of virility”, a challenging reference to one's own moustache, genital and pubic heir or, a reference that denies an opponent the possession of a phallus [“*ne pukā*” (your vagina)], is a performance to feminise one's rival (Bourdieu 2001:21-22) and hence, it constitute an incendiary challenge to the rival's *paurusham*.

In its second dimension, the concept of *paurusham* relates to *mānam* in the sphere of social reproduction, that is the manner in which a man exercises (*tirupinchDam*) his role as a householder. Since I have already described it above (in Ch. 3), just a brief recapitulation of its salient features suffices here. As a father, he enjoys the authority of autonomous decision-making on the entire gamut of household activities. It entitles him compliance and deference from all the family members. However, his authority is morally bound with proper execution of big responsibilities (*pedda badhyatalu*), from providing sufficiently for his family members and marrying his offspring to acquiring new properties (especially land) for his male successors. The cultivation and usages of such qualities as capacity for hard work, occupational acumen (*telivi*), financial discipline (*pudupu*) and integrity form the three most important dispositional correlates of *paurusham*. Conversely, his laziness, lack of occupational ingenuity (*maruta*), unjustified indebtedness or failure to clear debts leads to the loss of his honour (and this infamy transfers through patriliney) and invites communal criticism. There are instances in which a

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<sup>14</sup>The competition of oxen teams to drag a boulder that is organized on the morning of the festival of *Ugadi*.

<sup>15</sup>A tight slap of hand on the middle of one's front thigh, in the manner in which wrestlers challenge their opponents in India.

headman/father has been stripped of his authority and status by his sons on account of these deficiencies of character. A. Kondanna (65), a father of 3 married sons, had reportedly been maintaining a number of illicit liaisons for years, aside from being a “drink master” (i.e., an alcoholic). Since he conducted his ‘reign’ inappropriately (“*paripālan sakrangā ledu*”), his 3 sons wrested the headmanship from him. Today, they do not give him any respect (*maryādā*); “he looks up to them to buy even a packet of *beedi* (i.e., country cigarettes) even as they play *kabaDDi* with him”<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, N. Narayana’s reputation derives from his accomplishments as a hardworking father and farmer (Chapter 3); he is praised as one “who had not even a dime (when he arrived in NRP), but working in a field full of stones, he acquired lakhs (*pavlalekokunda unnewaDu Kotisampadnichnadu*)” for his son.

As a householder, the manner in which men dispose of the role of a husband is of special significance to the formation and preservation of *paurusham* and *mānam*. Given the systematic dichotomization of sexual identities, maintaining control over the wife, or ‘enforcing discipline’ as Bourdieu says (2001:27), is both a natural order and a moral project for men. As husbands they consciously avoid intimacy and equality in their conduct towards her in public; she is spoken to in a commanding tenor even as she is not to talk back to him, and married couples carefully avoid walking together or conversing in the bazaar<sup>17</sup>. He scrutinizes the manner in which she undertakes cooking, housekeeping and possibly farm work, for, her efficiency and hard-work augments his prestige amongst his friends and relatives. Similarly, she is to be discreet in her public conduct; her rudeness to others, unnecessary movements and interactions and participation in a feud jeopardizes his reputation.

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<sup>16</sup>That is, each of his sons tells him to go to the other to ask for such a small amount as Rs. 1 or 2.

<sup>17</sup> NRP men often take the avoidance of intimacy and attention to their wives to extreme extents. For instance, husbands avoid accompanying their wives to a doctor in the town as a matter of convention. They would leave this job to another woman in the family or to the Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP) in the village.

He, on his part, has the express moral obligation to provide for her<sup>18</sup>, and protect her from all potential affronts including sexual advances of other men. Although the transgressions of the code of ideal conduct by a spouse –which are certainly quite common – attract gossips (“*rakarakanga marTalu*”) and veiled denouncements (*ninda*) in public, whether, how and when husbands respond to transgressions on part of their wives indexes their *puarusham* and *mānam*. There are emasculated/feminized (“*bharya mundu weak ainaDu*”) husbands in NRP, like Chakirappa, Sangappa or P. Reddy (Chapter 3), who have been beaten up, punished, or intimidated by their wives. But husbands like N. Reddy and Krishnamurthy do not brook even a seemingly small transgression, such as that of a wife participating a feud amongst men (Excerpt 6.1), and mete out swift retributions to augment their *paurusham* and distinguish themselves.

#### Excerpt 6.1

There is a crowd near the *Anjaneya Swami* temple. About 20 men, some are sitting, others are standing about. There are onlookers in the street and outside the houses. Krishnamurthy has accused Swami (the Brahmin priest) of losing his book of prayers. His voice is raised, as is Swami's, both keep looking at the people about, who silently watch. Krishnamurthy's wife, after having watched the altercation from the veranda for about ten minutes, comes out of the gate (not facing the crowd directly). She walks towards the crowd and says (to the small group of men and women about her), “he (Swami) has not given.... (Krishnamurthy, noticing her, gets up from his place, walks towards her and interjects glaringly) you ...prostitute's son (*lanjakoduka*), you prostitute, why did you come here...f\*\*\* your mother...who told you to speak...(do) you go back in or not?” With him, on her back, she immediately retreats to the house in silence.

Thus, in summary, *mānam* is a deferential acknowledgement of (and compliance with) one's hierarchical statuses as well as a recognition of one's diverse

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<sup>18</sup>Her love/deference for him – men use “love” (*prema*) very much in the sense of “deference” - is based upon this moral and hierarchical arrangement of responsibilities. An *Ekula* peasant, in a conversation on conjugal bond, told me, “*sampandankartha paina tinewadulu ki prema untaDi* (dependents shall have love for the breadwinner)”.

achievements in multiple masculine roles. The scope for *avamānam*, too, lies in these two contexts; all acts, whether positive or negative, authored by the self or a ‘dependent other’, that undermine a man’s hierarchic statuses or challenge his masculine equality, represent a temporary destabilisation of his *mānam*. In such circumstances, men, *qua* men, are obliged to reclaim it by summoning their *rosham* (aggression) and by making a befitting response, or else they stand to lose their *mānam* permanently. Here the instrumentality of *rosham* for the continuous conservation of *paurusham* must be noted; its presence explains the contrast between Krishnamurthy’s reaction to his wife’s conduct and other husbands’ reaction to their wives’ transgressions. There are innumerable instances of acutely conscious aggression on part of men, especially *Kāpu* men, to what they conceive to be a slightest affront to their hierarchical supremacy. The logic and form of masculine reaction when challenged contradicts Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers’s formulation that “those whose honour is greatest feel least obliged to defend it” (1992; 5); in NRP, those who possess higher honour must redeem it by issuing swift (and disproportionate) retribution which generally includes violence. S. Reddy was the member of the first family of the *Kāpus* in NRP (see above). He once severely thrashed a *Mādigā* person in front of the latter’s house (i.e. in the SC colony), because the latter “took a loan from the Reddy and told him that he would come to work as *Kullie* the next day and did not turn up”. In another instance, S. Reddy’s cousin brother, N. Reddy, a high school teacher, had an altercation with the headmaster about coming late to the school one day, and Reddy “thrashed the latter with chappals, flung his resignation on him, came back home and said, I do not want to do a job *under someone else*”. Incidentally, this acute sensitivity about preserving honour also explains why inter-caste friendships involving *Kāpu* men are known to be very brittle.

The dialectic of *mānam* and *avamānam* unravels differently in more symmetrical contexts. In such contexts, as Peristiany suggests for Mediterranean societies (p. 11), men voluntarily transact masculine social esteem by staging or partaking in competitions (*poti*) and challenges (*pandem*), and hence *mānam* and *avamānam* here correspond to the notion of individual victory (*vijayam*) and defeat (*apjayam*). I have described the different forms of *poti* above (in Ch.3 and Ch. 4) and shall just recapitulate them here. In its universal form *poti* implies the cognition and verbal articulation of the relationship of competition in terms of one's secular possessions, accomplishments and aspirations; villagers proudly compare each other's crop yields, agricultural incomes, farming skills or consumer durables to publicly enhance their status. However, the individualistic forms of *poti*, such as one between two individuals of identical kin group, caste and class, involve strategically premeditated trajectories of action – including violence – over a period of time to defeat/ dominate one's opponent. The use of violence against a rival including close kinsmen in a *poti* re-affirms the point of the “sacredness” of masculine honour that Bourdieu (2001) and Pitt-Rivers (1992) underline in their work. Being voluntary and public, participation in a *poti* necessarily subjects the performance of a man to intense public scrutiny. On the day of *Ugādi*, D. Ishwariah and his agnates came in high spirits to participate in the *dhoolamrāi*<sup>19</sup> competition. However, despite his prolonged manoeuvres, including constant lashing of the animals and many rounds of harnessing, his party could not bring the oxen to move the boulder by even an inch. Ramlu, one amongst the hundreds of spectators, summed up Ishwariah's predicament; “they know that if they are not able to move it, they shall lose their prestige (*mānam*), people will say they took a plunge (*digninaDu*), but could not do it”. Chalapathi, another spectator, seconded him, “I know my oxen are not strong, why go and bring myself *avamanam*”. Discrepancies of judgment concerning one's

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<sup>19</sup> There is a competition in which bullock teams participate to drag a stone/concrete boulder. The team that drags it the farthest is the winner and the competition is organised at the village, *mandal* or even district levels and it is watched by hundreds and thousands of peasants.

real abilities/resources and claimed ones while making or accepting a challenge (which in itself is an honourable act, though) invites communal ridicule [“*ogulu paDinadu*” (he was showing off)].

In comparison to *poti, pandem* (“betting/challenge”) is a precipitate duel between two men transacting their aggression (*rosham*) and risk-taking courage (*dhairyam*) with one another. It is distinct in scope from other spontaneous challenges that NRP men of roughly equal status commonly engage in. For instance, men often enter into altercation (*vād-vivādam*) with each other about the veracity of topical facts in their day-to-day conversations. In such situations, they may dare their opponent by asking, “how much do you know” (*nuvvu yemi telisā*?), or by ridiculing him by saying “my penis (*nā maDa*)”. A more explosive form of challenge, as I mentioned above, is to dare one to “pluck”. To such challenges men with *paurusham* respond equally aggressively and should they successfully administer retribution, their honour stands augmented at the cost of their rival (s) (Pitt-Rivers 1992:24). During the *peer-pandagā*<sup>20</sup>, a group of men were dancing to the tunes of drums in a procession. When they reached near to E. Ramanjanyulu’s (21) house, he told them to tone down their noise. One of the men from the group came up close and, twirling his moustache, asked, “We shall continue dancing, what you shall pluck?” Ramanjaneyulu, with his strong build up, grabbed the man by his neck, and with the fingers of the free hand wrenched out hairs from his moustache, leaving the group humiliated and stunned. *Pandem*, although originating from similar verbal contests, differs from ordinary challenges in that it contains an object or a monetary value voluntarily staked out by the participating contestants as a reward for victory. One such major *pandem*, which occurred during my residence, was between Ramesh (27) and Chidambare (35);

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<sup>20</sup>The local version of the occasion of *Muharram*, the Islamic ritual of mourning the death of one of its Caliphs.

Excerpt 6.2 (Ramesh's narrative)

" (I had gone to *mandal* headquarters to buy some pesticides. There, I saw L. Reddy, Chidambare and other people).

L Reddy; why have you bought so much pesticides?

R; I do not want (to take) any risks. The crop shall be strong (by applying pesticide). I have already spent 50,000-60,000, do not know if there would be any profit (*giTTatundi, giTTadu, teliyadu*).

C; what are you talking about, I will give you one lakh...give me your crop.

R; give (ee)!

C (Silent).

R; *mundi* (lost)?

C; *aie!* Why are you talking like this (*enduku etla mataDtunnada*)?

L. Reddy; why did you put so much of capital?

R; tilled with the tractor, then seed cost 15,000, clearing the stones (in the field) 5,000 and then had the silt (*manna*) applied into field for 5,000.

C; 25000! Give me 30,000, I shall give you my crop.

R; O.k! I will give you 20,000...give me your field and crop for 2 years.

C; O.k.!

R; take this hundred as an advance.

C; stay upon your words (*martaki neelbadina*), if you are a man, (if you) have a moustache; pay the amount (*nuvvu mogra aite kaTTu, meke mishal aite kattu*)  
(I felt great anger come over me)

R; *aie!* What about the moustache (*mishal leki yemi*)? Give me a day and I shall pay you the money.

C; what one day, take one and half days.

(I walked away, from there itself, that instant, called Suri (one of my friends and creditors) to ask him to give Rs. 20,000. He said, o.k! I am coming with the amount to NRP in the evening. I returned to the village where the news had already reached. His (i.e., C's) wife came to my house when I was eating, she said, why have you bought my field, if you have so much of money, buy me. I said, go back, I have not done anything; your husband has challenged me, I have just accepted it. She said, do not take it seriously. If you buy it, I shall drink poison and die. What she had said frightened me. So I thought it was better that the matter was over, I thought, just forget it and went away on my business. I told Suri on phone that there was no need for money. He said, o.k! I am outstations for 2 days. Next morning, I retuned to NRP around 12 noon (the deadline to pay was 10 a.m.). But as I reached the bazaar, C came to my face and said) What! Have you forgotten your word, are you just a liar?

R; *aie!* It was your wife who came to plead with me...

C; I do not care for what my wife said. Are you paying or have you lost (and twirled his moustache)?

R; in 2 hours I am giving you money.

(I went straight to Ishwariah (rich *Kuruba* sheep owner and Ramesh's friend) and asked for money and told him that I would return it in 3 days. He gave it and I came back to C. in the bazaar, in front of Sriramlu and Jaiappa (witnesses) I gave him the money. He wrote a note (pledging the field for two years).

Ramesh described the *pandem* after the event as “*mārTā-midā mārTalu*” (challenge upon challenge). When I asked him why he and his opponents staked such a premium on their challenge, he replied that it became “*paurusham marta*” or, a matter of masculine honour. The entire duel had been spectacularly public and had repeatedly used key physical and dispositional indexes of challenging one's manhood and hence, it was difficult for them to renege on its terms, for, (in that case) “they would loose *maryada* amongst ten people”. After Chidambare's wife vainly threatened Ramesh with committing suicide if the terms of the *pandem* were executed, she repeated the same threat to her husband. He responded by saying that he “had given the word and could not go back on it”, and if she pressed him any further, he would leave the village, as he “would not have a face to show in there”. Different strands of “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu 2001:35) interact here; her threat of suicide reflects her subordination to the terms of the *pandem* her husband had staked, and yet, as the “weapons of the weak are always weak weapons” (Lucien Bianco, 1997 in Bourdieu 2001:32), her threat is itself subjugated and rendered ineffective by the counter-threat that Chidambare issues to her. Likewise, his ‘face’, which bears an inscription of his honour, not only underlines the differential social valuation of the human-anatomy (Pitt-Rivers, p. 25, Bourdieu, p. 17) but also reaffirms the precedence of male face/shame over the female life. Subsequent communal interventions failed to persuade him to annul the *pandem*. Ramesh, on his part, indexed his victory in equally strong masculine idioms [“*vijayam sādhinchnānu! Dummalo romam puTTinchanānu*” (I secured victory! I bore heir

on my heart<sup>21</sup>]. Of course, he did not fail to draw my attention to another dimension of higher masculinity, namely his capacity to exchange his good name for money in real time. Put differently, the honour he claimed was commensurate with the honour he commanded (Pitt-Rivers 1994: 12)<sup>22</sup>.

### **6.3 *Paurusham* and *avamānam*; the circumstances of suicides for men**

The male perspective says that it is men with *paurusham* who are likely to drink poison when they experience irreversible *avamānam*. To a manly man, the cognition of *avamānam* is indissociable from the strong emotions (*bhāvāvēsham*) it evokes in him; he feels “great anger (*pēddā kopam*), shame (*siggu/moh-marta*) and/or nihilistic detachment (*virakti*), come over him” when his *manam* is gravely challenged, or when he loses his *maryādā* in public. That for such a man the cognition of *avamanam* is indistinct from the affect it engenders substantiates Rosaldo's (1984:138-139) rejection of the dualism (of which Durkheim is one instance, *ibid*; p. 140) between thought and affect, inner/psychic/personal and social-cultural. Furthermore, all the emotional correlates of *avamanam* are potently debilitating, for, they oblige a masculine man to react instantaneously (*vénTéné*) – to “strike back” (*yadur-dari*), or else, “think repetitively (*ālocanā ákwā* or *vattaDī*)” about the loss of *maryada* sustained. It is precisely when Chidambare publicly challenges Ramesh's *paurusham* (“if you are a man”), or Jairamlu challenges Ishwaramma's sexual fidelity (Ch. 5) that they experience great anger overwhelming them, “provoking” (*raichpoināDu*) them to strike back with characteristic masculine aggression (cf. Sears, 1955 in Solomon 1984:240). Hot outrage, or *peddakopam* (Rosaldo, *ibid*, Solomon 1984:240) evoked by an insult reproduces the possession of aggression (*rosham*) just in the same way as that of

<sup>21</sup>As an example of what W.V.O Quine calls ‘radical intranslatability’ of languages (in Solomon, 1984:240), I am unable to do justice to this phrase in English. To my village friends, the phrase meant an act of utter courage.

<sup>22</sup>The emphasis on liquidity as an idiom of *paurusham* in NRP is similar in nature to that amongst Kerala men (Osella and Osella 2000).

calm but obsessive recapitulation of an insult does. On the night of the day that Chintallamma committed suicide, N. Reddy concluded in our meeting, “(those) who think too much become suicidal, e.g. I have lost my entire crop, I have debts to clear, I have expenses to meet, or how could she say that (to me); I shall show her”. Chalapathi, Chintalamma’s son-in-law, agreed that those with “excessive aggression” (*rosham akwa*) were suicide prone (also see Firth 1971:209 in Giddens, 1971) <sup>23</sup>. Instantaneous revenge and compulsive thought pattern<sup>24</sup>, whose occurrence and manifestations depend upon situational peculiarities and agentative limitations, expose what Bourdieu (2001: 51) calls the “immense vulnerability” in being a man ; aggression which is an indispensable index of one’s higher *paurusham* is also a cause of severe emotional destabilisation.

By placing aggression related transactions in the centre of their discourse (i.e. “hypercognising” it, Solomon 1984:243) peasants construe suicide rationally and this contrasts with folk-aetiologies that impute suicides to super-natural forces (such as the Busogas or the Gisus do in Africa, Fallers, 1960; 69, Fontaine, 1960; 111 in Bohannan, 1960). However, they occasionally do elect to disguise it under similar meta-cosmic ideas, such as the providential script [“it was written on his/ her forehead” (*mā tālā rāti*)], or to the quality of past deeds (*karmā*) or the malevolence of time (*walu kalam sarike ledu*) ”. Some men attributed the suicide of Virubhadra’s wife to the ‘flawed *vāstu*’<sup>25</sup> of his house that was being reconstructed under the government housing scheme. However, such non-human agencies are invoked to obfuscate precipitating circumstances and agencies only when commentators/narrators find themselves placed in difficult social circumstances. To

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<sup>23</sup>Thus, both imply that aggression is a gender-neutral emotion and it is “pathological” aggression that is suicidal. Both these suggestion have logical inconsistencies to them. For instance, if aggression is gender-neutral, it implies parity between sexes in terms of their masculinity. Some NRP peasants tried to resolve it by making a distinction “good aggression” (*manci avesham*), attributed to men and “bad aggression” (*chedda avesham*), attributed to women.

<sup>24</sup>This incidentally supports Rosaldo’s (1984) contention that emotions are *processual* judgments.

<sup>25</sup>The set of elaborate architectural rules in hindu philosophy that ought to guide house construction.

do so suits them well in public to conceal their individual views amongst an audience with doubtful personal affiliations, lest it be carried to the protagonists in the act and result in a fracas. Blaming meta-cosmic factors is also preferable for similar reasons when a suicide is from a higher and dominating caste (especially the *Kāpus*) than that of the narrator/commentator. For commentators who are either directly involved in the act or the kin members of a suicide, a fatalistic explanation is a safety valve that arrests the cycle of destabilisation of social ties set off by a suicide. After Chintallamma's suicide, her nephew (i.e., yBS) Naidu blamed their *rāti* instead of naming Chalapathi's mother (i.e., Chintallamma's son-in law' mother) as the culprit, as privately admitted to me, in order to prevent their ties from being damaged any further.

The nature and form of the tripartite interaction between *paurusham*, the experience of *avmānam* and suicidal conduct finds expressions in the pattern of circumstances in which suicides amongst male peasants occur. The household as a distinct unit of intra-family relationship constitutes the single most important institutional context for this interaction; household reasons/problems (*inti-kārnālu/samasyālu*) are reported as an omnibus aetiological category in 9 out of 11 suicides by married men (amongst the 22 cases under study). In line with several cultural studies of suicides from Africa (Fallers, p. 78, Fontaine, p. 113, Bohannan, p. 261 in Bohannan, 1960), Latin America (Brown, 1986) and indeed also South India (Ulrich, 1994), household *role* situations are the *locus classicus* for suicidogenic *avamanam*, and amongst these role-situations the conjugal roles are the most prominent; half the married men killed themselves after experiencing *avamānam* as a husband. An explicit and irreversible challenge to their hierarchical authority in diverse forms, and thus a serious transgression of the code of ideal conduct on part of the wife, is a prominent form of suicidogenic *avmanam*. The point of moral non-tenability (*naithik balam*) in such transgressions is crucial, both

to the considerations of suicide himself and to the popular assessment of the motives of the suicide. Peasants derive the point of moral tenability from the degree of a compliance/non-compliance of the concerned spouses to the doxa of conjugal roles. S. Reddy's (45) suicide that occurred in 1995 provide an excellent example of how a wife's defiance, clearly untenable in this instance, represents his *avamānam* and causes him to drink poison. The narrative below is an excerpted part of my discussion with a group of non-*Kapu* NRP peasants;

Excerpt 6.3

S. Reddy, NRP village (K. *mandal*), 1995

R1; "I was married (at the time of his suicide). He (S. Reddy) had not been given his due share in the division of household, (although) he worked the hardest in the household. He was a good worker, good *rythu*. After division, his two brothers got united against him.

N; why?

R1; he could beat them up, he was a *rough man* (*mārutā manishi*), would not listen to other's suggestions (*chepte wine wāDu kādu*), an obstinate fellow (*yaduru*).

N; how?

A; when they (he and his three brothers) were living together, suppose someone (i.e., a villager) went (and said), "annā! Reddy annā! Please lend me your hoe, people in your family have said no, (he would shout to his wife and others), *aie!* I am the one to give (*Ichedi nenu*)! (To the villager) Go, take it (*Tispo*). Suppose others (in his family) had already said yes, (he would command), "*aie!* I am not giving anything (*Ivanu*)! (To the villager) Get lost (*VeLLapo*).

N; so?

R2; his wife also, she was not in the habit of giving any preferences to anyone (*āmē yevuruki yeéi preference icchédílēdu*). *Full daring amma* (English words used). In those days, she used to quarrel with R. Reddy's wife (i.e., HeBW) in the house, about property division. When they fought, their mother-in-law would close the door from outside.

N; why?

R2; because they would loose *maryada* outside (*baithe maryādā potundi*). She (i.e., Reddy's wife) did not listen to anyone. So he had groundnut crop in the field. It was harvesting time; there were 30-40 *kullies* working in his field, harvesting groundnut. The day's work was getting over, so some *kullies* took a few bunches of groundnut stalks to eat at home. She wrested it (*gunchkunnāDu*) from their hands and began to quarrel. He said (intervening), "*aie!* They have taken it, let them, what is the problem

(*peekanāDu.tiskonilai, dāni to yemi*)?" (She shouted), will you keep quiet, won't you (*nuvvue urke unTāvā ledā?* ), shoved him back (*dobbindi*), he almost fell over (*pakkinā etlā padinaDu*). That evening, he carried the crop home. Next day, in the morning, he drank poison."

The intensity of S. Reddy's *avamānam* is (only) proportionate to his differential *paurusham* and *manam*. He belonged to the first family of the *Kāpus* in NRP and the popular referents of this family's *maryada* have been mentioned above.

Apparently, S. Reddy collapses the collective *Kāpu* hegemony, the superior status of his family vis -a- vis other *Kāpus* and his own status within his household in his hyper-aggressive *paurusham*; "he had a lot of arrogance (*pogaru*), he had thrashed many people including his labourers. He would thrash them first and talk later.

Once his ox strayed into M. Reddy and Ashwathappa's *thoTa*. Both man caught the animal, brought it back (whilst) lashing it to his house. He came out (and seeing him), Aswathappa (a *Kuruba*) decamped instantaneously. S. Reddy began to hit M. Reddy even as someone informed M. Reddy's father about it. He came with a stick and struck S. Reddy on his head. Reddy began bleeding. If he went to beat someone, he would beat and stay put, not retreat. "The disapproving use of such adjectives as *mārutā* (roughness) and *yaduru* (hot-headedness) to capture his non-calibrated aggression indexes S. Reddy's hyper-masculine style (Gautmann 1997, Herzfeld 1985). As against his aggressive style – which is legitimized by his commendable farming abilities - his wife's challenge represents a flagrant defiance. By not only disobeying his injunction of letting the *kullies* take *tirpuginjilu* (the free grain)<sup>26</sup>, but shouting him down and finally shoving him, she compounds his loss of *maryādā*. Moreover, this concatenation of affronts carried out in front of 30-40 *kullies* is patently public; the *kullies*, the key subjects to S. Reddy's exercise of *paurusham*, are an audience free to see, interpret, and disseminate his *avamanam* (all the disadvantages of face to face interaction, Goffman 1963:16, Peristiany 1966:

<sup>26</sup> A widely acknowledged customary right of the *kullies*. Generosity shown by the *rythu* in allowing them to take this free grain is socially appreciated. See Harriss (1982:216) for a similar report in Tamilnadu.

25). Also note the contrast between the mother's and the wife's commitment to conserving the vital dichotomy of the public and private for the family *maryādā*. Hence, whilst attributing S. Reddy's suicide to the spectacle of his emasculation, NRP men strongly empathise (*sahanbhuti*) with him; "in our area, the wife must stay under a husband's hand (*chéyulu kindā unDala*), listen to him, but no, in this case people should think that she had more *pogaru* than he. How pained (*badha*) he must have been, how much *tension* he must have gone through (*anTe yentā over ainTāDi atanu ki, yentā tension manishiki*). That is why he committed suicide." To the androcentric eye, such refractions of masculinity demand punitive suicide; it can scarcely be forgotten (unlike the *Illongot* anger, Rosaldo 1984:148).

The indispensability of hierarchic control and deference from a wife for a husband's *mānam* also implies that men experience similar *avamānam* even in the contrasting situation, i.e., when a wife challenges him on account of his own deviations from the responsibilities of a husband. In other words, although his 'bad habits' (alcoholism/gambling/illicit sexual liaison) - which are only an advanced state of normal masculine privileges (Ch. 4, 5) - are damaging to his status and reputation if publicly known, a husband still considers his wife's censures in this regard a repudiation of his authority and privileges in his own household. The widespread and enduring usage of violence against her is an indication of his hyper-masculine response. A junction of suicidal conduct and acts are embedded, much in the same manner as Firth describes (p. 209), in such circumstances; spouses, especially the wife, commonly issues suicidal threats (*vidirimpulu*) or dare (*shart*) each other to die. A spouse is prone to drinking poison – at times in extremely dramatic shows of aggression that are reminiscent of a *pandem* (see Excerpt 6.4), in the course of such altercations. Although the motive of reprisal(*chubhinchala*) for the errant wife appear dominant in male suicides, it is an unsatisfactory explanation in that it fails to explain by itself such suicides (a). in which the husbands who were

known for beating their wives ruthlessly (*chitrahimsa*) for her tenable protests chose to commit suicide instead of employing another bout of disciplining violence and, b. in which the husbands chose to commit suicide without any altercation with a wife preceding the suicidal act.

Excerpt 6.4 KP village (Atmakur *mandal*), 2002  
C; what problem did they have! None. They are big people (*pedda manishi*). Everything was going all right. One day, for his elder brother's daughter, some of his relatives came with a (matrimonial) proposal and to see her. Around 4 p.m., after seeing her, they left the house. Reddy, on that day, too, was drunk.

N; had he been alcoholic for long?

C; (looking amused), what! He used to take contracts for the liquor shops in the area much before his marriage. He had been a drinker for thirty years now. They have so much of property. That day (when) the relatives had left, he was sitting (and), drinking in the room upstairs. His wife (came and) rebuked him (*dandichnchinDi*), "Even today, (you are) like a pig, could not you avoid drinking today (*eeroju kuDa pandalu elta, tragka unDleda*)?" (He replied), " aie! Your barbs (*puTukulu*) are becoming too much these days. I shall drink (*mandu*), if need be, I shall die". (She said, indicating to the shelf nearby), "see there! There is a bottle (of poison), drink it", and came out. He stood up, drank the bottle (of poison), came out repeating, "I have drunk poison". All this happened within two hours, by 6 o'clock. The wife is a good lady; this fellow was the son of a prostitute.

Instances of suicides by compulsive alcoholic husbands would suggest that in such circumstances, the samsonic rage (Jeffreys 1952) evoked by a wife's contestation is varyingly intertwined with an intense experience of self-hatred/guilt-shame ("ātma-glāni/ *siggu*"). Jeffreys (1952 in 1971:186) himself conceived the samsonic aspect of a suicide in the exclusive presence of an other-directed revenge that was devoid of any self-oriented guilt. S. Reddy, Iswaramma, or R. Reddy's suicides are possibly ideal type instances of such samsonic rage. But this other-oriented revenge is not so unequivocal in male suicides due to bad habits; the purpose of avenging oneself on the contesting wife often shades into the purpose of punishing a guilt ridden, untenable self, as Hoebel (1954 in Jeffrey 1971:185) and Firth (1971:208) observe

about the Ashanti and the Tikopians respectively. B. Venkatesh (35), a marginal *Ekula* peasant and chronic alcoholic and gambler, was wont to beating his wife whenever she protested against his indulgences. One day, he lost Rs. 5,500 that he had received as the rent for leasing out his five acres of land in a single gambling session. That night, upon his return, when he demanded food to be served, she told him that there was no food left in the house as “he was throwing away money on his indulgences”<sup>27</sup>. In rage, without beating her, he left the house that instant and drank poison in the field. On the other hand, instantiating the complete lack of other oriented revenge down this continuum, B. Chaptala (46) used to beat his wife ruthlessly whenever she complained about his bad habits; he had even pawned her earrings for his drinking. However, he hanged himself after failing to retrieve her earrings as promised to her on the previous day as she left to attend the marriage of one of her relatives. His friends attributed the experience of guilt (*moh-marTalu*) to his suicidal act; “Incapable of bringing the gold, to avoid watching his wife’s face again, he committed suicide (*gold epichkoneki chatkakone, bharyaki makham chudka sachnaDu*)”. In as much this anger-guilt emanates from a husband’s untenable transgressions, R. Reddy or Chapatala’s suicides are “ignoble” suicides (Brown 1986:317).

The male perspective is more categorical about how a man with *paurusham* experiences an outrageous shame at the suggestion or discovery of his wife’s extra-marital relationship. Even a verbal slight relating sexually to her, whether made as a challenge (in a serious fracas, men dare each other; “*neeālini/pénlāmni déngā*”; shall f\*\*\* your wife) or overheard in male gossips, husbands say, “flames one’s body” (*mantalu léshtāndi*). The state of suspicion (*anumānam*) and actual discovery of her liaison (*kallara chuDam*), although empirically and (hence) morally distinct from each other, are equally debilitating to his *mānam* and

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<sup>27</sup>The suicide’s wife’s statement.

*paurusham*. A husband's acute sensitivity to her liaison(s) primarily emanates from the time lag that often marks the public (male) knowledge of a liaison and the husband's suspicion/discovery of it<sup>28</sup>. Suspicion precipitates *vattaDi*, the state in which one repetitively makes "imaginary associations (*sulla anumanam*) of all kinds irrespective of whatever work he may be engaged in"<sup>29</sup>. *VattaDi* thus resembles the Freudian state of melancholia - the negotiation of object-loss by a punitive super-ego (Hendin 1971:320 in Giddens 1971, Giddens 1971; 102) - and engenders irascibility; being mordant and violent towards the adulterous wife, a husband may threaten to drink poison or dare her to do so even in seemingly minor domestic altercations (recall Jairamlu's instance in Chapter 5).

A personal discovery of her involvement, however, enrages him against her and against the lover most spontaneously (i.e., without melancholia), although its first and more common target remains the wife. This is because, as the local men say, "a bitch does not allow a dog to come close to her, barks him off, unless she herself is moist." Beating an adulterous wife, terminating marital union, suicide (culpable and non-culpable), uxoricide and (culpable) homicide are all spoken of as being tenable options in such a state. Men, however, appear to posit a sort of hierarchy amongst these responses; given the difference in the nature of these punishments in terms of their severity, and the scope and the capacity of a husband to execute them, the choice of a response made is a function of (and reflection on) the husband's differential masculine prowess (*chāt*).

In other words, the ideology of *paurusham* postulates violent reprisals that find some resonance with classical psychodynamic theories positing an inverse relationship between homicidal and suicidal tendencies (Freud 1916 in Hendin

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<sup>28</sup>Discreetness on part of men against referring about the liaison of the wife in front of a husband explains this time lag. The implication is that the husband is certain that public knowledge of the liaison precedes his knowledge of it.

<sup>29</sup> These are expressions of a group of young peasants in NRP, none of whom were *Kāpu*.

1963: 236-44, Wiess in Giddens 1971:385). Avenging oneself (*pratikāram*) on the offending lover, and then punishing the wife, is an act of fiercest masculine courage (*peddadhairyam*) and power. Short of that, a husband seeks to punish the complicit wife by beating her – with or without the intent to injure her mortally – and/or by banishing her from the house permanently. However, he is likely to drink poison when he finds himself incapable of punishing either the offending male or the complicit wife in any way. Each of these implications is borne out with varying frequency in the villages<sup>30</sup>. Although I heard many first and second hand stories of homicide and uxoricide on account of extra-marital liaison within or across castes and kinship connections , I recorded only two such homicides in the *panchayat* between 2000 and 2006. One of them had been precipitated by an intra-kin liaison and the other concerned the rape of a married woman by deception. In both instances, the intent on part of the husband – not the wider kin group<sup>31</sup> – to kill the lover was reflected in his method and organisation of the attack.

Incidents of homicides and their narrative forms appear to suggest that the *Kāpu* husbands are more likely to demonstrate the intent and capacity to avenge themselves on the lover than others. Moreover, villagers commonly believe that the incidents of homicides that arise out of liaisons between a *Kāpu* wife and a lower caste man are very likely to be made out to appear as incidents of suicides. The differential *puarusham* of a *Kāpu* husband is manifest here in the double sense of

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<sup>30</sup>Here one notes the contrast between the reactions of men to the adultery of one's wife in other parts of India and in Rayalseema region. In Parry's report (2001), Ankalu wavers about expelling his wife or taking her back, whilst his sons, although threatening to kill the lover do not do much for want of "courage". In Rayalseema, men with *paurusham* feel obliged to avenge themselves "courageously"; there is no case in NRP in which a husband has taken back a wife after expelling her in such circumstances.

<sup>31</sup>The emphasis is deliberate to indicate the contrast; Parry (2001:792) quotes Chaudhari (1997) as reporting that violent sanctions are executed by a 'outraged' collective in cases of inter-caste sexual improprieties. Mendelssohn (1993:814) cites Cohn to the same effect. The same would be true in NRP about pre-marital inter-caste affairs. However, in case of an extra-marital affair, the prime responsibility of seeking revenge is on the individual husband, for, his wife involvement is a slight to his *manam*, not to the entire caste. Having said that, at least in one case in NRP, some mobilization of the closest kinsmen to punish the offender did take place.

his capacity to execute a homicide, and his power to control the subsequent narrative, at least to an outsider. Cases of uxoricide are, too, publicly accounted as suicides; in one such incident, the *Kāpu* husband (26) hit his wife lethally on her head in an altercation about her suspected liaison with her brother in law (i.e., eZH). When I met the husband's family members, I was given to understand that hers was a suicide<sup>32</sup>. Within six months of her death he also drank poison when his neighbours publicly rebuked (*thiTanaDu*) him for "murdering" his "innocent wife" during a dispute.

The circumstances in which husbands commit suicide present a pattern that completely contrasts with that of homicides and uxoricides. In a reversal of the order of domination, in these cases it is the wife who is commonly described as being domineering, and the husband as "weak candidate", an emasculated man. Both a husband's own deficiencies - physical, sexual or of character<sup>33</sup> - and/or her overbearing disposition may explain this anomaly. The implication is that such husbands are unable to punish either the adulterous wife or the offending lover in any manner whatsoever. In the latest suicide in NRP (2007), Virupakshi (35), a marginal dry land farmer discovered his wife and a male (of equal caste rank) in coitus and demanded the male to pay a hefty sum (of Rs. 2 lakhs) as the reparation which the latter refused to comply with. On the other hand, his attempts to expel his wife from the house were also equally unsuccessful; it was she who had been maintaining the household from her *kullie* wages. Incidentally, the lover in question, and the two other males she had previously liaisons with, were her *thoTa*-owning employers. The villagers considered Virupakshi's suicide to be rational in

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<sup>32</sup>The entire neighbourhood contradicted this version. They suggested that I visited the parents of the wife which I did. It was there that I was told that the wife had been murdered. Apparently, in this case, the husband's family did not possess the capacity to control the narrative.

<sup>33</sup>In cases where a husband's infirmities are well known, men hold a women's involvement justifiable. They may say, "*Kuntoruto kapuram etla chaised*"(how can she cohabit with a disabled).

the given circumstances, but morally untenable, on account of his complete failure as a husband (*santame perfectga ledu*).

However, this thesis, namely that the complicity of a wife in an extra-marital liaison is an affront grave enough to oblige the husband to seek violent reprisals including committing suicide, appears to be a new idiom of *paurusham* amongst the (young) men of middle and lower castes<sup>34</sup>. For one, it disagrees with the conventional discourse that acknowledges extra-marital liaison to be gender-neutral expression of sexuality in a remarkably permissive manner. Men have usually considered their sexual virility as an indispensable part of their manliness; a proverb, quoted as a satire on this researcher's bachelorhood, advocates, “(just as) an ox ought to die lifting weight, a man ought to die having sex” (*yaddu iggi cāvalā, mogu dèngi cāvalā*). Tales of sexual escapades, performance, and fantasies litter male camaraderie. A sexual liaison outside conjugal bonds aligns the property of sexual virility with the demands of novelty (Ch.4); having a female lover (e.g., “*touch/keep/stepney*”<sup>35</sup>) is to eliminate *sawkā* (boredom) and to give men new thrill (*mauj*). Given this, NRP men estimate that, “80-90% males in the village have had a *keep*” – a figure that is certainly not as fantastic as it appears<sup>36</sup> - whilst maintaining that the incidence has somewhat decreased now. Just as men have their *touch/keep*, a wife has her *mindagāDu* (i.e., male lover); “*aliki minDagāDu mogulu ki nestamgāDu*”<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, a wife with a *mindagāDu* is normatively

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<sup>34</sup> My observations appear to support Parry (2001: 803) as regards his point of the “straight-lacedness” of the young working class (and lower caste) men to adultery of their women in Bhilai (Chhattisgarh).

<sup>35</sup> One is struck by the plethora of bywords used by men for a female lover. There are, on one hand, words in *Telugu*, such as the *Sutturālu* and *nestamgāDu*, whilst on the other, a range of new words have been imported from English with suggestive usage. Interestingly, men rarely appear to use the *Telugu* terms, while women rarely use the English terms.

<sup>36</sup> I was offered, as a rough sample, the street in which I lived and almost fifteen cases of extra-marital relations, either of men or women, were counted off in quick succession to my surprise. That this was not just a male gossip, was revealed when many of the men who figured in the list confessed their acts in my presence or were made to do so in friendly banters.

<sup>37</sup> An often-quoted proverb in the discourse on sexual liaisons. What is of importance is the contrast between the women of Chattisgarh and other north Indian states and their *Telugu* counterparts in terms of the reasons for their starting an extra-marital affair. Parry (2001:805) hypothetically suspects

superior to a *rokanDi* / *peddarokanDi* or a *lanjā* ; while the former maintains a relationship with one man on a long-term basis for romantic or monetary reasons, the latter engage(s) in sexual act with complete disregard for all social relations by currying sexual favours for material transactions.

Secondly, the generality of extra-marital liaisons contrasts sharply with the (statistically) low incidence of violent sanctions; there are only five cases of suicides and uxoricide (3 deaths due to confirmed liaisons and two from suspected liaisons) in NRP, all of them having taken place in the last 10 years. The average age of these suicides is about 31-32 years and four of them belong to the *Kurubas* (and one is *Madiga*), the castes that are associated in popular opinion with highest sexual permissiveness. Thirdly, elderly and middle aged men in NRP say that earlier expelling the errant wife or seeking violent reprisals were restricted to the dominant castes, while in recent times violent reprisals have become the order of the day for other castes too. Indeed, they cite examples of two well-known cases (both from the higher castes of the *Kapus* and *Ekulas*), about 15 years back, in which the wives in question were merely expelled from the household rather than violently avenged<sup>38</sup>.

The trend of seeking violent reprisals in cases of extra-marital affairs appears to be associated with the democratization of self-esteem. According with what micro-village studies have long been suggesting (Chakrabarty 1975 cited in Mendelshon 1993, Hall 2007), the democratization of rural power-structure has implied that the aspiration of *mānam* is now entrenching amongst the BCs and the *Madigas*. They claim *manam* as a general state of self-hood and not a privilege of Dumontian ranks; “(these days) everyone demands self-respect, even the SCs; “it is not only the

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that it the “undertaken in search of potent seed” and reports a number of corroboration from Gujarat and Punjab. In NRP, as the men say – with credible authenticity – that women enters into an affair either because of “monetary benefits” that accrue from the lover or “the novelty” or even “romantic love”. The search for seed appears to be a marginal reason in the discourse.

<sup>38</sup> In both cases, there was no subsequent marriage on part of the husbands.

privilege of a Reddy, it is my privilege too. I too should live as equal (*nenu kuda camanaga unDala*)<sup>39</sup>." The expanding apparatuses of the state and the urban economy, and emergent consumption patterns have incubated this slow revolution of self-esteem. Pointing to the interaction between self-formation and social change, Sridhar, a *Kuruba* Panchayat Secretary (in a village with significant *Kāpu* population), said; "these days, one travels more. 20 years ago, if one had to go to the MRO (i.e, *Mandal* Revenue Officer), he would request a knowledgeable person (*telisinwaDu*), a Reddy, to go with him. Now it is not that; everyone, because of politics (*rajkiyanga*), or as a citizen (*nagarikatvanganu*), goes out with confidence (*yeDudalato*). Whoever has a work (at the government office), goes directly and gets his work done". However, the democratization of *manam* and expansion of the circuit in which it is realized, perforce, reproduces the democratization of the scope of *avamanam* and expansion in the circuit of its experience<sup>40</sup>. The boundaries of self are now scarcely co-terminus with boundaries of the village/panchayat; they rather assimilate the large universe of friends, acquaintances and relatives across villages, the town and cities. Communication networks facilitate the reports of a wife's involvement in extra-marital liaison to reach this wider public space almost instantaneously, thereby giving rise to new scales of anger and shame hitherto unavailable. Substantiating Hall's (2007: 222) account of a teen-aged *Madiga* girl's suicide attempt, self-destruction appears to address this new form and scale of honour and shame; Sreedhar continued, "What shall others think? My wife, too, is one of these (i.e., adulterous) women, I shall get a bad name, I have to go outside tomorrow"<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup>The form of crystallization of egalitarianism I am speaking of was evident from a row that had erupted in NRP in 2008. I came to know of during a telephonic conversation. A *Kuruba* man had apparently called a young *Madiga* man as "Madigoru" in the *mandal* bazaar. After a bitter spat there, a number of scheduled caste men from NRP went in to file a case with the Police and the *Kuruba* men was arrested within days.

<sup>40</sup>As we shall see below, the omnipresent bazaar has become an essential component of one's self as a result of these processes.

<sup>41</sup>Sridhar's statement.

Although less common than the *avamānam* experienced in marital relationship, loss of honour in paternal and fraternal roles is also germane to the conduct(s) of suicide. Whilst conjugal transgressions are a likelier cause for suicide amongst young and middle aged peasants (i.e., approximately up to 45 years), it is elderly men who commonly resort to poisoning themselves on account of misconducts of their son(s) or his conjugal family. The two quotidian manifestations of such misconduct, which I have discussed at length above (Ch. 3) and to which both Trawick (1990:163) and Vatuk (1990:68) make general references in their studies, are as follows; (a). an explicit defiance of the father's authority during the latter's headmanship and b. neglecting/abandoning him (and the mother) so that he feels being either a *bharavu'* (burden) in a household or a complete *anātha* (i.e., orphan) after the division of an extended family. A widower-father is held to be more susceptible (than a widow-mother) to committing suicide in these circumstances in as much as the death of his spouse, his closest personal 'minder', represents to him the loss of the most important giver<sup>42</sup> of *maryādā*. Such suicides as those of elderly fathers (see Case 6.6 below) scarcely instantiate the "altruistic voluntarily suicides" of elderly men that Durkheim notes and associates with the Hindu renunciation (2006:236); their aetiology rather represents the individualistic atomization of the joint-family in which all affective ties of patrimony have increasingly come to rest on material expectations/ individualistic interests ("*Vyaktikanga Swārtham/apeksha*") of the sons. In a poignant expression of their forced detachment and anxieties, elderly parents compare themselves to a "football that is kicked around" (football *madri aDtaDu*) by their selfish sons. The circumstances in which K. Anjaneyulu (55), a *Kuruba* peasant and a father of 3 sons, drank poison illustrate the defiance of a manly father by his *swarthee* son.

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<sup>42</sup> In conversations about conjugal relationship, husbands describe the feelings of *prema* (love) and *santosham* (happiness), both to and from the wife, in the context of her disposal of hierarchical duties towards him, such as "asking and serving him food as soon as he returns from the field, preparing water for his bath, pressing his leg etc." That the earnestness with a wife performs these duties is crucial to her husband's feeling of self-worth and familial attachment is repeatedly underlined here.

Excerpt 6.5

K. Anjaneyulu (55), NRP village (K. *mandal*), 2002

"His father had settled down in NRP, they had no land, just 50 sheep. When Anjaneyulu separated, he got just 20 sheep and a hut. Later, his flock grew in size and he thought of buying some land. He bribed (*lanchamichnaDu*) N. Reddy, the *karnam*, Rs. 2,000 and had 10 acres of *poromboke* land registered as landless. Since then, (taking) one *Mungari* crop and (doing) sheep rearing in the summer, with his 3 sons, he became slightly better off (*okka rakanga ainaDu*). His flock grew to 500 in some years; his was one of the largest flocks. He constructed a house and for his 3 sons, he wanted to buy a plot of *thota* land. He bought 9 acres from H. Reddy by selling some 300 sheep. But later on, Reddy's family members objected to the sale and Anjaneyulu suffered financially. At home, there had been a series of quarrels (*ghoDwa*) between him and his sons, especially the second one, about (agricultural) work; they (i.e., the sons and their wives) would do no work; useless fellows (*panikimal*). This fellow (i.e., the second son) had been demanding gold for his wife (saying), "she should also have it as his elder brother's wife had<sup>43</sup>" and he was pressing for a division of property. On that day too, in the morning, there was an altercation; when he told his (second) son to go to the field for work, he (the son) replied (mimicking with a terse intonation), "*me po vah! Naki yemi sambandham ledu* (you go/ get lost! I have nothing to do with it)". Within hours, Anjaneyulu went to K. *mandal*, drank heavily, purchased a bottle of poison and returned home. He hid it in the barn right opposite his house. In the night, bolting the door from inside, he drank it".

Household property and finance related disputes between a father and son or between/amongst brothers have traditionally been known to present suicidal situations. When asked to remember the earliest cases of suicides witnessed in their lives, many peasants narrated past incidents relating to *hasti tagādā* (property disputes). Diametrically opposed to the situation described above, these suicides are often strategically directed against the authority of a father (and the headman) for illegitimately undermining the principle of equality and fairness in the division of patrimonial property. In one such case, the elder son hanged himself, as his father "did not see the two brothers equally (*camananga cuDalāî*)"; he favoured the

<sup>43</sup>The elder brother's wife had received gold ornaments as part of her dowry. However, since the second son's marriage was not an arranged one (i.e., an in-caste love affair), his wife did not receive anything from her father.

younger son over the elder", while in the second, the son-in-law hanged himself when he was repeatedly denied his promised share of property. Given the father/headman's eminently untenable conduct of authority, peasants accord such suicides a justification that parallels the form of "institutionalized suicides" (Krober cited in Giddens 1971) although it is yet again far removed from the Durkheimian notion of altruistic suicides; "these (suicides) have moral support (*diniki naithikanga balam undi*) that he could have understandably died, why should not he (*enduku sachipoDu marri*)? Having been made to work so badly, today, if he is denied his share, wouldn't he die? *Anyone* would." Such suicides are said to demonstrate the crucial quality of *vichekchana* (i.e., critical faculty) on part of the agent – and not his impersonality as Durkheim supposed (p. 241) - in that self-destruction is chosen as an extreme but eminently just political means on account of one's compliance to his roles and responsibilities. They qualify as "good/just suicides" (*nijamain atmahatya*), unlike the more contemporary cases of suicides in which young brothers and sons drink poison in dramatic, hyper-masculine manner for completely untenable reasons.

Such suicides amongst young men and adolescents as that by K. Reddy or Laxminarayana (Ch. 3 and Ch. 4 above) represent a complete breakdown of what Ekman (1984) calls cultural display rules and it seems to be an implication of the same process of democratisation of self-esteem amongst the people that have hitherto been outside the purview of (claiming and) possessing it. The increasing incidence of suicide amongst adolescents and youth is noticeable; in NRP, 4 (out of 16 suicides between 1992-2007) have been of adolescents – all girls – while in IP village, all 5 suicides (of which 3 are by girls) in as many years are by persons aged below 20 years. The circumstances of suicide for adolescent boys and girls converge on certain occasions, such as friction with father concerning marriages, love affairs and routine friction between parents or other family members. Yet, they also

diverge on issues that run along their gendered roles. Boys appear more susceptible to committing suicide after failing an examination, feeling inferior (*culakana*) amongst their peers and falling out with their fathers on farming related decisions while adolescent girls are said to be more disposed to committing suicide in dramatic flashes of anger against parents or in unrequited love affairs. Adolescents themselves explain the act of suicide in a manner very similar to that of an adult; they are aggressive acts of samsonic revenge to negotiate the “untenable” denial of self-respect by their father/guardian or the *avmanam* suffered amongst peers. For instance, students in villages frequently relate suicides amongst their peers to the regularity and harshness of rebuke a peasant father/guardian metes out to him for his poor academic performance [ “see the other fellow, he has got so much of marks, first class, drink his urine (*walu uccha tragu*), (then) you shall acquire intelligence (*buddhi*)”]<sup>44</sup>. The tension in the discourse is reproduced here; an adult/a figure of authority is likely to construe these acts amongst teenaged and adolescents as exemplifying the lack of *vichekchana*, a hallmark of their inferior individuality, while an adolescent is likely to interpret them as a response to an untenable and egoistic (*aham*) exercise of hierarchical power. SubbaraiDu’s (17) suicide may be quoted in detail to illustrate this tension in operation in a novel constellation of circumstances;

Excerpt 6.6 SubbaraiDu (17), KTNK village (*Garladinne manda*), 2002

R; it began with his elder brother’s marriage; the wife and mother-in-law began quarrelling, everyday about household work. The mother would complain (to her son) that his wife did not work and fought with her. This was an everyday affair. So

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<sup>44</sup>A local peasant’s narration of his treatment of his young nephew. Quite often a son also appears to internalize this comparison as a part of his self. I may recall here my chance meeting with the young son (about 19 years) of a local peasant, who had been preparing unsuccessfully for his medicine admission tests in Hyderabad. As soon as I had told him that I was meaning to study suicides in Anantpur, he said, with some seriousness, “Suicide! Who knows, even I may do it, if I don’t get it”. I learnt that his elder brother had already secured a seat at the medical college in Anantpur.

they divided the household. The parents (now) lived with the younger son (SubbaraiDu). He came back from the town.

N; leaving his study?

R; yes! But, this fellow still talked to his brother (after division), to his sister-in-law and often visited them which his mother did not like. She told him not to talk with or visit them.

N; were there fights even after division?

R; yes, there were, about something or other. One month after the division, once, the daughter-in-law went to her natal village and whilst returning bought some sweets. She wanted to give some to SubbaraiDu. His mother, when she learnt, told him not to take it. But, he thought of them as being together, staying together, and did not like their fighting. So he went and took the sweets. His mother came to know of it and rebuked (*dandyichaDu*) him. The next day he committed suicide.

N; you said, he wanted to stay together and did not like their fighting?

R; see, he thought, “(our) *maryada* is going in public (if) they (the women) fight everyday. We live in the bazaar, we ought to live good”. But his mother would not listen, and likewise his sister-in-law would not listen.

R2; there was no point saying any thing to either women. This is like (one's) voice has lost its value, then why live? (*martaki pedda vilvu ledu, etla undi; malla enduku bathakala*)

N; but, other people also fight in their house, isn't that a common thing?

R2; when they (SubbaraiDu's mother and sister-in-law) fought, others watched it in the village; he did not like it. In fact, just a couple of days before his death, he met me, in the field. He knew that I was close to his brother. He said, “*mama!* Tell my brother, they fight everyday, our honour is going away.

N; where is his house?

R2; Over there (pointing towards a house visible at about 10 yards distance from the village bazaar, where we sat and where stood the bus stand, a couple of tea-coffee shops, and a motley group of villagers/non-villagers were chatting. They could see/hear voices from the house just as some one from the house could be see and hear them). (Otherwise), I shall die, he said to me. I said, why do such a (big) thing, what is there in it. I shall speak with your brother.

R1; see, he and his father's brothers, they are six brothers, living close to each other's houses there. (So, SubbaraiDu thought) “(I) Shall become *culakana* amongst them (*walulo shulakan aipotanu*)”

N; *culakana*?

R2; I shall become *lose* (R1 interjects with the English word, “shame”).

N; why shame?

R2; they (other families) do not fight like this, *neatga untaDu*, they restrict themselves to their work, SubbaraiDu wanted to live like them. His family has money, like they do, but lacks their conduct, lacks their capacity to understand the point

(*walu madrie bathakala, etanu ki feeling; dabbulu weela daggira kuDa undi, kani walu pravartanam weelu daggira ledu, artham cheskundewarku walu daggira undi, weela daggira ledu*)

N; how many days before his death did you have this conversation?

R2; a week.

Apparently, the tension referred to above concerns the difference in the son's and the mother's conceptions of intra-family feud and its impact on the *mānam* of the family. The mother's conduct of disciplining the adolescent son is in sync with the common saying, "*Kundā véré, kulam véré* (once the pots of the family go separate, one's caste also go separate)" and her recurrent feud with her daughter in law is rather typical ("*mamuli inti kotlata*") of their relationship. However, for SubbaraiDu, the incompatibility of intra-family feud with the *manam* of the family is located in his claim of *manam* ("*neatgā unDālā/ vāgā unDālā*"). It may be correct to say that SubbaraiDu's construction of *avmanam* is not so much a novelty (one may recall S. Reddy's mother's conduct of shutting the door even as her daughter-in-laws fought inside the house) as an entrenchment of the consciousness of honour amongst the traditionally non-elite peasant households. As we have seen in Ch. 4, the phrase attributed to SubbaraiDu (*neatga undala*) represents a new idiom of *manam* amongst youth which is pegged on one hand to acquiring a certain level of living standards (i.e., clothes, consumption articles etc) and a refined personal conduct on the other hand. Thus, Malla Reddy's adolescent daughter (16 years) warns him not to come home drunk and when he does not pay attention, she "serves him food in anger and disgust (*ghrina*)", while Nagraj, a young man (20 years), drinks poison on account of his failure to "earn a lot of money", as vowed in a challenge with one of his friends. The conflict between this new idiom of democratic self-respect and the conventional matrix of hierarchical control by parents/adults not only perpetuates an environment that is conducive to suicidogenic tendencies amongst the youth, but it also poses serious challenges to

those moral co-ordinates on which peasants have traditionally distinguished a “good suicide” from a “bad suicide”.

#### **6.4 The excesses of *paurusham*<sup>45</sup>; the circumstances of suicide for women**

If male suicides represent samsonic vengeance against challenges to their *paurusham* and *mānam*, suicides by women represent a “recognised” (in Bourdieu's sense, 2001:13) political tool to counter the excesses of masculine dominance. As the microcosm of masculine *libido dominandi* (the desire to dominate), conjugal roles form the common context for suicides amongst both sexes. We have seen that Chidambaree's wife issues a threat of suicide to deter the two rivals from executing the terms of the *pandem* that presupposes their absolute autonomy in their households. Yet, as Bourdieu remarks, the episode reveals the redundancy of the political use of suicide by women in the hyper-masculine world. This form of dialectic (an aggressive threat of suicide met by an equally aggressive counter-challenge) is typical of the situations in which the masculine dominance borders on excesses. Married women commonly resort to drinking poison when their husbands have completely abandoned their compliance to the doxa of husbandship, even as they continue to respond with intense violence to her tenable protests. Of course, the use of violence against a wife, whether justified, unjustified or disproportionate, is a standard mode of expressing their *paurusham* (Ch. 3, also Bourdieu, p. 51). To express the weight of masculine domination, NRP women speak of a proverb; “*pagalantā pani chèisèdi, sāyantramu loDugoDuto thiTTilo tantilu* (Work hard whole day long to receive rebukes, thrashings, from the ‘fault-finder’ in the evening)”. However, in the circumstances mentioned above, the act of suicide relates to both the compounded moral incongruities in a husbands' conduct and limited remedial alternatives available to the wife (see Brown 1986, Ullrich

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<sup>45</sup>This section is based more upon my conversations with men rather than with women for the obvious reason that my access to the latter was limited. In addition, I have relied upon my observations in NRP and newspaper reports on suicides by women in the district.

1984 too). As a result of his prolonged negligence of his responsibilities, in a forced reversal of the ‘natural’ order, wives often assume the task of providing for the household. In spite of this and an imminent financial ruin of the household, a husband may continue to forcibly/stealthily divert scarce finances of the household, including loans taken for household consumption/production purposes, to finance his indulgences instead.

In these circumstances, the remedial measures accessible to a woman include using the threat of suicide and organising the interventions of her agnates, affines and close acquaintances (if it is available). Amongst the few female suicides that I studied, these tools, which were broadly aimed at arresting his indulgence(s), and/or replenishing household finances, repeatedly failed to yield expected results. Firstly, controlling addictions in the advanced state of *bānish* (presumably compulsive addiction), with even the best efforts, appear ineffective. Secondly, since the capacity of the wife to organise external interventions were contingent upon a number of factors, such as her closeness with her agnates, their willingness to intervene and offer financial support repeatedly, such interventions were neither always available nor effective. The disintegrated ties Ishwaramma had with her agnates may provide one illustration of it. As the male discourse sympathetically points out, suicides in such circumstances (see Excerpt 6.7) represent a cathartic escape from the masculine excesses; people say, a wife kills herself in extreme “pain” (*peedā/vedanā*) because she could not “stand it any more (*thaTkolaikā SachināDu*)”. The husband’s repudiation of his responsibilities and his indifference to external interventions are attributed to his having lost all positive ingredients of *paurusham* in the state of *banish*<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup>This is what appears to explain, although unsatisfactorily, each of the suicidal eventualities at this junction of suicidal eventualities; if the addiction of a husband to bad habits has not yet reached the terminal stage of “*bānish*”, he still possess his *rosham*, the positive state of ego, and *vichekchana*, the quality of critical moral judgment. Thus, he may be provoked into committing suicide at the wife’s protests in a state of rage and shame. If he has already reached that state, then, he “does not care

Excerpt 6.7 Nagamma (45), KK village (GarlaDinne *mandal*), 2004

"She had 3 sons (20, 15 and 10 yrs), they have 15 acres of *thota*. The husband, 24 hours he is drunk, drinks full (*full mandu koDtaDu*). This woman, she laboured, laboured as in extra-ordinarily laboured (*manci kashtam paDe di, kashtam ante viparitanga kashtam*); to provide for the son, to provide for the husband. On the top of that, she had T.B. (i.e., Tuberculosis). For 3 years. In the last, *writhing under pain* (*egi, egi, egi*), grinding away at her household work (*sansaram chesi chesi*), (in the last) she did not even food grain at home, if she brought some money from somewhere (on credit), he (husband) would take it and drink it up. If she said something, he would beat her up. Her sons also did not listen to her, he also drinks. She had *no control* (*ammadi jargaDu*). Strife everyday (*daily galaTe*); drinking, beating. With nothing to eat, no money to get medicine, unable to see this (*thatkolaika a roju mandu tragindi*), she drank pesticide, early morning.

That a husband's suspicion about his wife's involvement in an adulterous liaison may create a suicidal situation for them has been discussed in detail. Sexual domination also contributes immensely to the high scope for suicides amongst those unmarried girls who get involved in love affairs/pre-marital sexual relationship. The conflation of love affair and pre-marital sexual relationship here is deliberate; it represents the dominant male perspective that uses love as a byword for pre-marital sex (*kamam-pani*). Adolescent boys in NRP delineate a love affair in explicitly sexual language and some even add that "It (i.e., love-affair) is just use and throw". "Use and throw" is, notably, a colloquial for readily available/substitutable (inanimate) objects of personal consumption (viz., bikes/mobile phones); the young men seemingly partake of "the symbolic availability of female body" as a matter of conspicuous consumption (Bourdieu, p. 8, 29-30). As against this, in the four suicides I have records of, the girls who had been at high schools/colleges at the time of the affair, essentially conceived themselves as individuals and nurtured matrimonial expectations from their love

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about anything" (*yemi moh-marta unDavu*), including suicidal threats from his wife and in that state, it is she who may commit suicide.

affairs. Gender differences in the conceptions of a love affair (and of sex, cf. Christin in Bourdieu, p. 20-21) entails differential liabilities; in these suicides, the men explicitly spurned the girl's plea for marriage, especially in inter-caste love-affairs, after she was pregnant. In all these suicides the point of limits that *paurusham* places upon a women's usage of suicide as a political tool against "errant" men recurs. When Surekha (18), an SC girl asked his lover (a BC boy) to marry her after 3 months of affair, he flatly declined. She accused him of using her and he returned the charge *verbatim*. Thereupon, she threatened to "die", to which he responded bluntly, "Go! Do it (*po! Chesko*)". She returned home in rage and set herself ablaze<sup>47</sup>. Significantly, I noted that my male informants remained distinctly hostile to the girl for her 'audacious immorality' in having chosen to have participated in a love-affair in the first place (Hall 2007 also notes the same) ; a group of young co-villagers attributed Surekha's suicide to "fat on her bottom" (*gudakovvu to chesindi*) that made her insolent enough to have a "love affair".

Lastly, not all female suicides are said to be due to masculine excesses. Some of them indeed arise in female role relations and they show the reproduction of the samsonic aggression in the feminine space, although male infirmities are held responsible for it, too. Suicides precipitated by "structural conflicts" amongst womenfolk of a family (which have a strong resemblance to suicides amongst married African women, see Bohannan 1960), such as between a daughter and her mother-in-law, or between sisters-in-law, are rather common in Anantpur. However, as husbands, men are here more directly implicated in such conflicts. If a wife enjoys the support of her husband, structural conflict between/amongst women are resolved by way of a division in the family. On the contrary, if he is close to his mother, then he disciplines his 'errant' wife in time. The scope for suicide increases when he chooses non-interference, whether as a strategic choice or on

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<sup>47</sup>The account of a close friend of the boy in question.

account of his own infirmities (in which case he may himself threaten to commit suicide). Laxmi Devi (35) consumed insecticide to avenge herself on her mother-in-law who had censured her for taking the keys of the chest without permission. The husband was squarely blamed for having failed to reign in the two women who had been quarreling for some time. 'Structural conflicts' may also run along cross-cousin inter-household kinship, such as between two mother-in-laws living in same village. Chintallamma (65), a widow living with her (only) daughter and son-in-law (i.e. BS) was in the habit of giving gifts to her sister's daughter<sup>48</sup>. Her son-in-law's mother quarrelled with her about it because it was her son who was the *de jure* owner of her property. The son-in-law himself never intervened in these altercations.

Chintallamma drank poison in rage after one such altercation.

#### **6.5 The effects of *paurusham*; the organisation and method of suicide**

From the discussion so far it is clear that whilst a large number of suicides are precipitate action, others are processual in that the ideation, organisation and execution of the act unfolds over a period of time and circumstances. Suicidal communications of diverse kinds, the "forewarnings" (Wilkins in Giddens 1971: 410), are a likely feature of both. Out of the 23 cases, in 12 cases forewarnings were issued by the suicides. They are communicated in three forms; (a). as subtle hints, announcements of intent or expressions of implication concerning the imminent act (50%), (b). aggressive threats and symmetrical counter-challenge (25%) and (c). suicidal gestures and attempted suicides (25%). Save for one case, suicidal notes are completely absent. The common Telugu noun-verb, *vidirimpu* (i.e., threat) covers all the three forms. In this section, these forms are briefly discussed in order to explore why, as it is obvious, a number of forewarned suicides are allowed to take place.

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<sup>48</sup> Who was the wife of her son-in-law's stepbrother.

General forewarnings are liable to be made to a closest relative such as a spouse, mother or sister in the household or to a friend (especially by adolescents and elderly men); that is, the recipients of such communications are both directly involved household members as Wilkins contends (1971: 410 in Giddens 1971) as well as close non-involved friends. SubbaraiDu directs his plea for help, along with an announcement of the threat to commit suicide, to his brother's closest friend while Kulayappa foretells his suicidal intent to his friends in a completely different village, where he works. Amongst forewarned completed suicides, such forms of communications as vague hints, explicit announcements, expression of implications, and extremely symbolic farewells constitute a sort of continuum along the overlapping dimensions of the degree of intent and required logistical preparations made for the act. At one end, female suicides experiencing marital/household discords and male suicides suffering from terminal diseases or heavy debts, commonly spoke of suicidal death as a "preferential" state of being ("deen kante/arogyam thatko laikā, saché di mela"; to die is better than this/this disease) to their 'tormentors'/spouses/ relatives/friends during weeks and (sometimes) months leading to the act. In fact, in these instances, the suicides often appear to have been toying with the idea tentatively - as if waiting to see the impact of his/her hints on the family members. Expressions of implication, which only male suicides appear to have made, include more crystallised formulation, such as "I shall die, you shall cry over me" (*nenu sachta, nā painā arstāwā*) or, "it is all over/this is my last act/sight of you" (*anta aipai/ idé last nādi*). On the other end of the continuum, sometimes overlapping the communication of implications, a married man may engage in symbolic farewells just hours ahead of eventual suicidal conduct; he may apply vermillion on the forehead of his wife (a sign of nuptial tie), or ask her to press/touch his feet the last time or present (or leave a written record) to his son/wife a list of loans taken and or other obligations pending in the household. Farewells appear to be positively related to careful logistical

preparations for the final act; in all such instances that I recorded, the parting gestures were made after poison had been duly purchased by the suicide and discreetly stored. It is a matter of significance that, as against the instances of general forewarnings, the aggressive/precipitate threats of suicides appear to have been made only in those instances where poison was readily available close at hand.

Suicidal gestures and attempted suicides are second-order forewarnings. Their significance as a mode of communication lies in the sharp organisational distinctions between an attempted 'gesture' and a completed suicide (*pace* Weiss, 1971; 386 in Giddens, 1971); the usage of a distinctly mild poison (rodent poison/sleeping pills/ "10% *puDi*"<sup>49</sup>) as against lethal pesticides, a very small intake of poison as against large dosages, consumption in broad daylight, as against late in the night, at home amongst family members as opposed to outside in the farmyard/field and breaking the news of consumption voluntarily and instantly as against maintaining a discreet secrecy about it. In other words, to villagers, a gesture or attempt of suicide is defined by the lack of *chetāyampu*, the intense and unqualified will to die, and this lack explains why they insistently use the term *vidirimpu*, a threat, as a binary opposite of *chetāyampu*. Two supporting evidences, coming from opposite ends are also cited in this discourse. One is that gestures or attempted suicides are commonly driven by a "secondary gain motivation" (Wiess in Giddens 1971; 389); in 5 such cases (that I have records of) – all of which are young men (up to the age of 35<sup>50</sup>), the motive of attempt was to coerce (mostly) a 'recalcitrant' wife, or a person of hierarchical authority (a father/husband), into submission after marital/household discord. Two, as they say, there are few instances in NRP, in which a person committing suicide with *chetāyampu* has ever

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<sup>49</sup>A powdery insecticide used in the households/fields to control ants/termites etc.

<sup>50</sup> Although, these are small numbers, and not known as a proportion of a random sample, they are in contrast to most researches in European context, that widely agree that women constitute the majority of attempted suicides. See Stengel (in Giddens 1971:375).

survived despite swiftest and best interventions although the counter-factual, that is someone just attempting a suicide has never died, is not true.

This notion that forewarnings and the “will to die” are mutually dichotomous mental and behavioural events, is often explained in terms of differential *paurusham* and it accordingly moulds popular responses to suicidal forewarnings. Hints and announcements of the intention of suicide are so frequent in the village (as Siegal and Friedman note in general about suicide, in Wiess, p. 410, see also excerpt 6.8) that they remain “asymmetrical” (Wiess in Giddens, 1971); that is, they are dismissed as commonplace (“*mamuli*”) statements, divorced from the will to execute the threat. Even the gestures of farewell were dismissed by all the wives in question as “a drama (*natkam*)/stunt/joke” at the time of their appearance. However, it is suicidal forewarnings in the forms of aggressive “threats” and attempted suicides that invite a most categorically hostile dismissal (i.e. 'counter-challenge'); on account of a manifest secondary gain motivations, the person against whom they are issued construes them as manipulative intimidation (“*kangaDpettedaniki*”). In other words, an aggressive threat represents a blackmail and hence an unqualified challenge to one's *paurusham*. An aggressive threat to commit suicide, hence, engenders a duel (*shart*). In a striking contrast to how a Tikopian surviving a *forau* (suicidal outing on the sea) is taken back into the community (Firth, p. 210), we have consistently seen how P. Reddy's wife, Chidambare and Surekha's lover refuse to heed (read surrender to) the threats of suicide and dare the suicide to die instead. Ditto in attempted suicides; in all 5 cases of attempted suicide, the persons attempting suicides not only failed to gain expected concessions from the concerned persons, but also invited ridicule in public for their “acting/stunt” subsequently. As a direct result, 3 of them made a successful attempt to commit suicide within subsequent weeks. The implication that follows endorses Wiess's view (in Giddens 1971; 389) that a doubt about the efficiency of

suicide as a means of bargaining does translate into higher probability of death in an attempted suicide<sup>51</sup>. The more general way of saying the same is that given the milieu of *paurusham*, aggressive suicidal threats do not so much resolve the tensions of power in key social ties as aggravate them.

#### Excerpt 6.8

C; "these days, many people do this (issue the threat). G. Mallikarjuna's wife, she has attempted suicide not less than seven times!

N; why?

C; lavve...(love!!) (all three men laugh uproariously)

R; leave love, suppose her husband beats her up for something, she would drink poison, *action only (action ante)...*

L; she doesn't drink poison, just sprinkle some hither and thither (pointing to his chin, neck and clothes), and then (mimics coughing) "unh, unh...." (Again laughter).

C; he (the husband) would ask, "what happened", someone may say, "(she) has drank poison", he shall say, "good! Let her".

Finally, moving over to completed suicides, their most conspicuous feature is the extensive use of highly lethal pesticides, such as Monocrotophos or Endosulfan, that are used in a range of cash crops. As one would expect, there is a correlation between the consumption of lethal pesticides and the family ownership of the *thoTa* land; out of 18 cases, in which I have concerned details, 11 suicides had used pesticides available at home (that is, within the house or field), and barring one, in all these cases, the family owned garden land. Availability of the technology at home implies that access is symmetrical; it is available to all family members, especially women and adolescents at such times when there is an altercation or strife in the family. Larger villages, with better irrigation facilities are very likely to have pesticide shops within them, selling their merchandise to all including children who

<sup>51</sup> Although in absence of a sizeable, random and standard sample of attempted suicides in the district, it is difficult to say anything conclusively, but it appears that a higher number of attempted suicides do get translated into successful suicide in the study area than what has been reported to be the case in the European contexts (Stengel in Giddens 1971). In my own studied group, the percentage of such cases works out to be 9.09 %, substantially higher than Dahlgren's figures of 6% and Stengel's .72%.

may be sent by their parents to make a purchase. Secondly, the consumption of these pesticides ensures almost definite death; *post hoc* communal interventions, however swift, are almost of no consequence as it can be seen from the table 6.2. In other words, farm (liquid) pesticides, once consumed, render all other organizational details concerning the act, such as the time/place/scope for help/medical intervention and its quality almost completely irrelevant. The import is that as the standard category of technology of suicide in Anantpur, pesticide drinking has blurred the distinctions between attempted and completed suicide (cf. Wiess 1971, Stengel 1971; 375 in Giddens 1971) to a degree that strikingly contrasts with all other means used traditionally, such as rat poison, hanging or immolation. The beguiling simplicity of this technology has rendered the performance of the suicidal act temporally condensed and it is increasingly a precipitate show of masculine aggression. The ubiquitous *mandu* – which in Telugu stands at once for medicine, pesticide/poison and alcohol, in other words has become a metonym for an easy death.

*Table 6.2*

*The organisation of completed suicide*

Total cases of completed suicides; 22	
Of which	
a. Those occurring in the daytime	18 (82%)
b. Those occurring in the early evening	2 (9%)
c. Those occurring late in the night	2 (9%)
d. Those occurring within the house (when other members are present)	9 (42.85%)
d. Those occurring within the house (when no other member are present)	8 (38.09%)
e. Those occurring outside of house (i.e., farmyard/field/outside of village)	4 (19.04%)
f. Those in which some intervention was made before death	6 (26%)
g. Those in which no intervention was/could be made	3 (13%)
h. Those in which death occurred at a medical institution	9 (39%)
i. Details not know	4
h. Those in which highly lethal poison was consumed	17 (80%)
i. Those in which less lethal poison was consumed	3 (10%)
j. Those performed by other means	3 (10%)
ix. Completed suicides (in first attempt)	18 (78%)
x. Completed suicides (in subsequent attempts)	4 (22%)

Source: Survey of suicides (2005-06)

## 6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have suggested that the notion of *avamanam* permeates the local discourse on suicide. The three typical situations of suicides for a man are as follows; an irreversible negation of his hierarchical rank within his household, a repudiation of his claim to equal status in public and, his defeat in masculine competitions/challenges for status. The second of these three situations relates closely to 'structural tensions' within family while the third relates to masculine risk-taking. The field of *paurusham* ensures an affective synchronisation in that peasants and their family members are susceptible to understand these situations as that of *avamanam* and further, that they elect to respond equally aggressively in order to redeem their honour by avenging themselves on the responsible rival. Moreover, I have attempted to show that the scope for construction of *avamanam*, proportional as it is to the construction (and claim) of *manam*, has itself greatly broadened amongst peasants, especially young men. Suicides amongst husbands on account of a wife's suspected or confirmed adultery, or of adolescents due to a rebuke from their parents, are symptomatic of this new development. The phenomenon of suicides amongst peasants for farming reasons is also directly associated with the idiom of *manam-avamanam*; failure in farming is increasingly constructed as an individual defeat, much as success is celebrated as an individual victory and both outcomes are related to the context of *poti* (competition).

To train one's focus on the nature of local suicides from the point of view of the Durkheimian typologies of suicides, is to find both patterns of significant connections as well as crucial incoherencies and I shall discuss this statement in detail in the next Chapter. Here I wish to restrict myself to the issue at hand, namely the manner in which the predominant cultural pattern of aggressive honourific vengeance that we have discovered in local suicides are dealt with by Durkheim's typology of "altruistic suicide" (2006; Ch. 4). In Durkheim, the altruistic suicides

are social suicides *par excellence* ; they represent a pathological degree of social integration wherein an individual is “obliged” to sacrifice his life for the collective structures and beliefs. Given his evolutionary and dualistic framework, Durkheim associates such suicides to the “inferior” non-European, non-modern societies such as that of India (cf. p. 234). Although he divided altruistic suicides into ‘obligatory’, ‘optional’ and ‘renunciatory’ sub-types, the last of which was typical of the Hindu’ suicides (p. 241), the idea of a moral duty or moral aspiration remained common to them. I think it reasonable to advance Firth’s (1971: 212 in Giddens 1971) doubts about whether Durkheim’s characterisation of honour and shame related suicides as ‘altruistic’ suicides is either so straightforward or illuminating for two reasons. Firstly, as the preceding discussion has hopefully shown, Durkheim was plainly wrong in thinking that altruistic suicides represented a state of impersonality intrinsic of the “moral characteristic of the primitive ” (p. 241). As Firth says, *no* suicide, and certainly none that relates to the idea of honour and shame, is borne of impersonality; on the contrary, I have shown that the act of suicide is used for conserving, augmenting and transacting the personality of greater manhood in the local communities. Using Bourdieu’s phrase (p. 13), one may say suicides “symbolically consecrate” the possession of greater manhood especially when it is morally tenable. Further, Durkheim’s naïve ‘psychological’ beliefs (about the ‘primitives’ and women in particular) and his sociologism not only prevented him from realising that the thoughts of honour and shame could rather co-mingle with the structural states of egoism and anomie – as many of the suicides I have discussed above illustrate (Giddens makes this point most clearly, 1971:106-07). He also failed to see that the obligation/moral duty to meet social ends is not universally complied with in any society. Lastly, his misplaced scienticism, of refusing to engage with quotidian motives makes his theory sorely unhelpful in understanding the nature of relationship between threats, gestures and attempts of

suicide and their relationship with the larger social and cultural fields which they constantly reproduce.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In conclusion, I shall summarise the key findings and arguments of this dissertation and touch upon their broader relevance for understanding suicides in contemporary rural India. In the first part (section 7.2), my focus is on reiterating the nature of crisis in agriculture in fragile ecosystems and the relationship of this crisis to the Durkheimian social state of *anomie*. This is followed (in section 7.3) by a brief discussion of the crisis of egotism, or moral individualism, within agrarian domestic relations. The third part (section 7.4) is a summary of my findings pertaining to the aetiology and ideology of local suicides. In the fourth and last section (section 7.5), I briefly outline what I think are certain key areas for further research on suicide in India.

#### **7.2 Agricultural crisis and *anomie*; contradictions between production and consumption**

My analysis of the agrarian scene in NRP began by localizing it within a marginal and fragile ecosystem of Anantpur district that is susceptible to recurrent droughts (Jodha 1991:A-15). The practice of mixed economy (i.e. poly-culture of cereals and livestock rearing), undertaking periodic short transhumance to greener tracts of neighbouring Karnataka, and relying on a patron's grain heaps during droughts (Washbrook 1994: 135), have historically been important components of the local mode of reproduction. However, in a process of commoditization that corresponds with the trajectories of agrarian change in dry land Tamilnadu, and in parts of Africa (Bernstein 1982:161 in Harriss 1982), a large class of attached labourers and marginal peasants began to adopt groundnut cultivation from the 1890s in order to meet extractive colonial land-rent

demands (Washbrook 1994:134, Satyanarayan in Ludden 2005). Post-independence, the trend of producing higher value but higher risk groundnut<sup>1</sup> in marginal lands has advanced so much now that in 2005-06, I found just one farmer in my sample of 31 peasants in NRP cultivating any subsistence cereal (Ch. 2.2). The complete mono-culture of groundnut – it is intercropped with red gram only - in NRP supports the general trend of the disappearance of dry cereal cultivation from across semi-arid districts in India (Vasavi 1994:286, Harriss 1982:182).

One way in which the concept of 'agrarian crisis' has been used in the agrarian economic literature is to represent the sharply uneven, and ecologically non-sustainable, nature of capitalistic growth across crops, zones and classes in a country/region (cf. de Janvry, 1981:Introduction). The monoculture of groundnut in dry lands in Anantpur has come to represent a crisis for similar reasons. Even as the scale of public investment in irrigation remained marginal in Anantpur throughout the last century – unlike the deltaic north-eastern AP (Satynarayana in Ludden 1995) - the crop bias of the green revolution (Frankel 1971: 52) has helped institutionalize uneven growth on a much wider scale. Thus the compound annual growth rate of groundnut yield in India has remained almost half that of rice and little more than one third of growth in wheat yields between 1962-65 and 2003-06 (Bhalla & Singh 2009:40). At about 7.1 bags/ per acre (i.e. 728 kg/hectare), the best yields that large farmers obtained in NRP in 2005-06, which was a normal rainfall year, was about 28% less than those obtaining in North Arcot (in Tamilnadu) in the early 1970s (Ch. 2.6, Harriss 1982:154). In fact, the yield level of 2005-06 is lower than the average yields that obtained within Anantpur a decade ago (Ch. 2). This corroborates Barbara Harriss-White and Janakarajan's (1997:1472) pessimistic report of a regression in groundnut yields in North-Arcot since the 1980s. But what makes the

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<sup>1</sup> That is, groundnut cultivation involves input and output price related risks in addition to yield related risks, as compared to dry millet cultivation.

regression in Anantpur particularly remarkable is that it follows from the base-line of a historically inferior yield level in comparison to North-Arcot or other dry districts in India (also see Subramanyam and Sekhar 2003:1208). Besides moisture related distress, it is pest related risks that appears to lead to the regression in groundnut yields lately, and this risk is linked with the extensive monoculture of the crop (Palmer in Jodha 1978, Matson et al 1997).

What is equally noteworthy is the class-dimension of this crisis. The cost and budget analysis for dry land groundnut has shown (cf. Ch. 2) that yields (i.e., the value of output per acre) on large farms in NRP are superior to those on small ones. This finding supports Polly Hill's (1982:168-172) conclusion that cast doubts about the possibility of an "inverse relationship between yield per acre and size of holding" (Bharadwaj 1982: 275) in dry lands. Of course Bharadwaj (1982:280) had herself suggested that the evidence for small farm efficiency in terms of superior individual crop yields was much weaker than that for gross yield (for all crops) on a small farm. As Polly Hill notes in the cases of dry Karnataka districts, it is the large and middle farmers who are likely to own superior quality plots, draft power, and ready capital (and, there is no double-cropping in dry lands). These advantages afford them greater flexibility in responding to precipitate moisture related fluctuations, pest-related vulnerabilities, and labour scarcities (*pace* Harriss 1982:154), as compared to small farmers. The disadvantages of scale also force small and marginal farms to incur relatively higher costs of cultivation for lower yields and thus, they have become a most heavily 'squeezed' class (Bernstien 1982, Harriss 2006). I have shown that, at about Rs. 1,106 to Rs. 1,300 per quintal, the productivity for groundnut <sup>2</sup> is consistently lower on small and marginal farms relative to large and middle farms in the village (Ch. 2; Table 2.19). Overall, the evidence

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<sup>2</sup> That is, total cost/acre divided by total output/acre. The cost includes the imputed value of household labour at going market rates.

presented rather reiterates a long held view (Harriss 1982:161, Bharadwaj 1974 in Harriss 1982) that small and marginal dry-land farms cultivating groundnuts struggle to reproduce their farms even in a normal rainfall year, let alone in a drought year.

With limited scope for off-farm employment within the village, and low emigration, this crisis in rain-fed groundnut production has pushed local peasants to adopt riskier citrus cultivation using deep bore-wells since the late 1980s. The rush for groundwater over the last two decades is marked by indicators of ecological duress (also see Harriss-White & Janakarajan 1997:1472), such as the large scale drying of dug-wells and the high rate of failed bore-well attempts in the village. The social costs of increasing ecological degradation is more pronounced for small dry-land farmers, as is evident from their higher per acre investments on bore-wells (Ch. 2; Table 2.10) and high indebtedness on this account, because they have been the last of all the classes to attempt the sinking of bore-wells. Amongst the reasons that facilitate this risk-neutral bore well rush, I have suggested the expanding and liberalizing informal credit market in the village to be most important. Large scale capital inflows accruing from household savings, remittances, sale/trade of livestock, dowries, and surpluses from citrus cultivation from within and outside the village have ensured that informal credit is easily available (i.e. untied by a collateral) at relatively low interest rates (18-24% p.a.<sup>3</sup>). Additionally, there is also the 'pull' factor of citrus cultivation under bore wells. Its remarkably higher profitability – citrus gives at least 60-70% higher returns per acre than double cropped irrigated groundnut - induces farmers to culturally attenuate<sup>4</sup> (Kasperson et al 1988) the attendant risks involved<sup>5</sup>. The popularity of citrus in a precarious groundwater regime contradicts the usual casting of the peasantry in a predominantly 'risk-averse' mould in

<sup>3</sup> The interest rate of 24% is far lower than 40-50% Vasavi quotes for Karnataka villages (1999:2265)

<sup>4</sup> That is, they speak of bore-well 'risk' as the 'indispensable' cost for upward mobility and internalize it culturally as a matter of masculine aggression. Refer to Ch. 3 for an elaboration of this point

<sup>5</sup> Citrus has a long gestation time of 5 years.

the neopopulist literature (Chayanov 1924 in Harriss 1982, Lipton 1982:266-268, also Binswanger 1978). Having said this, the risk-neutrality of small and marginal dry-land farmers sinking bore-wells is more an instance of their 'compulsive involvement' (Bhardwaj 1994: 212) in groundwater exploration than their entrepreneurial zeal (as the neopopulist school would suppose), in so far as they are forced to do so in order to reproduce their farms at the emergent cultural standards.

If the crisis in groundnut production has induced local peasants to attempt cultivating citrus, the other reason for adopting horticulture is the competitive aspirations of upward social and cultural mobility. In Ch. 4 above, I showed this by discussing how NRP peasants across classes actively follow "*class*" consumption practices, as distinct from the coarse, "*mass*" style, in order to claim the honorific status of being "develop (sic)." The binary of '*class-mass*' styles organizes all sectors of consumption, from consuming high-status white rice in lieu of dry millet (*ragi-mudda*), to wearing trouser-shirt in place of *lungi*-shirt, or consuming *enjai* parties, possessing trendy bikes, mobile phones and colour TV, and living in a new house. A part of the social logic that drives this "stylization of life style" (Bourdieu 1984) is explained by the Veblen-Simmel-Bourdieu school of consumption theories. Taking a structural-functional position, these theories suggest consumption to be a neatly ordered and stable sphere to reproduce, transact and imitate class/capital related differences amongst hierarchical social groups. Thus, the mimetic consumption of such positional goods as white rice or *khaddar* shirt on part of the Backward and Scheduled Caste/lower class peasants, especially the *nouveau riche* bore-well owners amongst them, is oriented to bridge the conventional differences of honorific taste between them and the elite Reddys. However, in what is a partial corroboration of the critique of the structuralist position (Campbell 1987:161, 1995, Friedman 1994), I have attempted to show that *class* consumption in NRP also involves

consuming ever-emergent mass-produced status goods, services and images for self-oriented novelty. Insofar as young peasants blend a status oriented consumption style with self-oriented pleasure and novelty, this stylization of lifestyle is geared towards the fashioning a 'modern self' (Habermas 1987:Introduction) that claims cultural equality as well as constant individualistic alterity and 'glamour'.

It is in the context of this contradiction between the volatility of materialistic production on dry and *thoTa* lands on one hand, and the new aspirations for social mobility and modern self-hoods on the other hand, that I have drawn on Durkheim's concept of *anomie*. Durkheim himself characterized *anomie* as a social state of moral "declassification" (2006:276-277); it is a state in which one's (or a group's) material lifestyle (and desires) are in a state of continuous friction with his (or theirs) material means. Durkheim used it in both narrow (economic) and broad (cultural) senses. In its narrow economic sense, he attributed this state of friction to two opposite, mutually exclusive, conditions; (a) the sudden loss of one's material standing and his capacity to continue maintaining his usual life-style and, (b) the sudden gain in one's material standing, and hence a sudden explosion in his new desires. The volatility of production in NRP and other villages regularly blends these two states. The suicide by Subramaniyam, a small citrus farmer, following the failure of his bore well (in Ch. 6), and Ramesh's expression of his "inability to live" in the event of his bore-well failing (Ch. 4), instantiate occupational *anomie*. In its broad sense, Durkheim used the concept to refer to the general regime of "normlessness", i.e., the ever-increasing pace of desires, in the age of modernity (p. 277) and throughout Ch. 4, I have tried to draw on this broader meaning of *anomie*. I have tried to underline, in particular, the tensions between the conventional norms that aligned (and thus controlled) *class* consumption style with one's higher economic and social capital and, with high ideals of austerity, the new norm

which increasingly seeks to decouple *class* style from caste-class based hierarchies. This tension has the potential to become suicidogenic in domestic social contexts.

### **7.3 Egoism; rising individualism and self-interest in social relations**

Durkheim himself sought to draw a neat dividing line between *anomie* and *egoism* (p.284). He did so, rather facetiously, by characterizing the former as 'normative (largely *economic*) regulations' and the latter as 'the lack of *collective* (social) life'. The problem with such a neat formulation is that it refuses to acknowledge that 'normless' economic (and non-economic) desires, or passions, at an individual level are but a correlate of moral individualism (i.e., 'cult of personality' in Durkheim). Thus, the discussion in Ch. 4 shows that young NRP peasants emulate each other in acquiring *class* lifestyle in order to articulate their individuality and transact it with others. Likewise, they experience *detachment* (*virkati puttutundi*) when they are envied, and when their names are 'deliberately tarred' by their enviers/rivals; this compels them to restrict or annul their *social ties* with the latter who may be a member of the kin, or caste or the village community. But even though the possibilities of a circular causality between *anomie* and *egoism* is one that Durkheim's conceptual framework chooses to ignore, it does not lessen the value of the substantive core of the concept of *egoism*, i.e., low degree of integration to social institutions, in his theory.

In Ch. 3 above, I delineated the local articulations of *egoism* in the context of 'domestic society' (Durkheim 2006:224). Drawing on Durkheim's idea of the morphological dimension of social (dis)integration (p. 211-216), I first noted the positive relationship between household size and household type (*pace* Uberoi 2003:1070); joint families *do* tend to be denser than nuclear ones. This led me to argue that, contrary to what some of the literature on family in India contends (especially, Shah 1998:66, also Uberoi, *ibid*),

there is a decline in the size of peasant families in so far as joint families are dissipating quicker and the birth rate has been falling in the state. Put differently, this decline is not a function of periodic fluctuations in the family size, as the 'developmental cycle of family size' thesis suggests (cf. Fortes 1962 in Parry 1979), but reflects a conscious social preference to stay in nuclear families. This atomistic social preference is associated with the entrenchment of egoism/moral individualism in intra-family kin relationships.

Whereas the traditional constructs of self, individuality (*vayaktiTvamu*) and status in the village have largely been aligned to the manner in which different *hierarchical* masculine roles, such as that of a father, husband, brother and son, were disposed of in a family, the new claims of individuality derive from education and/or mobility, the possession of wider social capital ('connections') and *class* consumption styles. Claiming to possess a self as an *immanent* center (as opposed to a socially earned one) of their judgment and action (cf. Shweder 1984:12), young sons routinely scrutinize, contest, circumvent, and sometimes, violently avenge a father's hierarchical authority in farming and marriage related decisions. Leaving one's elderly parents to live on their own post-division unless it is financially harmful, is another instance of self-interest (*wwartham*). Given their relative symmetry, fraternal ties have conventionally been most susceptible to the formation and articulations of *swartham*, particularly after the marriage of brothers. But now the commercialization of agriculture creates the conditions of 'structural cleavages' even before a conjugal family is formed. The result is that household divisions routinely take place long before all brothers are married off, in contravention of conventional cultural norms. Fraternal ties are more likely to become dysfunctional post-division, or they may be subsumed by a strong sense of rivalry. Overall, extending Mines's emphasis on the rising expressions of Individualism in urban Tamilian families (1988), I have presented evidence that challenges the long-held

notions of familism, hierarchical order, and lack of individuality attributed to domestic groups in India (Uberoi 2003, Trawick 1990, Dumont 1970 in Mines 1988).

#### **7.4 Rural Suicides; an etiological synchronization of egoism, anomie, and paurusham**

In Ch. 5, I offered an ethnographic appraisal of the thesis of ‘farmers’ suicides’, as espoused in the Indian media and academe. Insofar as this thesis takes after Durkheim’s epistemological approach - that is, it frames and explains ‘farm related’ suicides on the basis of official statistics of suicide - it presuppose the process of production of official statistics as being ‘objective enough’ to be unproblematic (cf. Durkheim, 2006; 24, 181, Mishra, 2006, Mohanty, 2005). However, my description of the organizational processes through which a defensible narrative is posthumously produced shows that neither the official statistics on suicide, nor their etiological classifications (i.e. ‘farm’ or, non-farm related), are unproblematic objective facts. As *ex post facto* reconstructions, they inevitably emerge through a process of subjective judgments and dialogical negotiations amongst the primary ‘producer’ of data (i.e. the kin of a deceased and other community members) and the (external) data-gathering agencies of the state, i.e. Police and inquest team<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the local peasants regularly choose to *report* an incident of male suicide to police, and deliberately manufacture standard “farm-related” etiologies during the inquest, by posthumously creating/ inflating the extent of his indebtedness and attributing it to ‘farm’ expenditures. Any reference to a ‘non-farm’ related cause that may have been known to play a principal or complementary role in a suicide is dialogically relegated or, amputated. The purpose behind such systematic motive-conversion, or

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<sup>6</sup> Thus, as Simpson (1950 in 1990:16) notes, there is an epistemological ‘double bind’ here that the proponents of ‘farmers suicide’ thesis blissfully ignore. At the primary level, the local peasants are challenged to produce an *ex post facto* reconstruction of ‘what may have happened’ for their understanding. Indeed, in most cases, it is very difficult for them, too, to come up with a cogent, unanimous, reconstruction. This primary reconstruction is, then, subjected to varying degrees of *re-modifications* if and when it is represented to an inquest team, or to any ‘outsider’ as a ‘farm-related’ suicide.

what can be termed 'transvaluation' (following Tambiah 1990:750, Brass 1997:1-5), is to claim the official *ex gratia* assistance as well as to publicly disguise any shameful aetiologies to a suicide (such as extra-marital liaison).

On the other hand, they are also likely to conceal an incident of female suicide, or even a male's suicide, when the possibilities of receiving *ex gratia* amount are low or when the spectre of shame/dishonour (*avamanam*) in reporting the suicide to police is high (cf. Ch.5). The andocentric and widely corrupt police bureaucracy further promotes systematic biases in registering suicidal deaths and cataloguing their motives. Overall, my findings substantiate the criticisms that the social constructionist school (primarily Douglas 1967, Atkinson 1971:88, Garfinle 1967 in Atkinson) – and the historical school (Weaver, 2009) - has made of Durkheimian epistemology. Firstly, with Douglas (1967: Ch. 12), I have suggested that official statistics of suicides and their motives are cultural artifacts whose production can scarcely be abstracted from their immediate social backgrounds. Secondly, insofar as the proponents of the 'farmers' suicides' thesis presuppose the official categorization of 'farm-related' motives as given, which they then seek to prove/explain – not *probe/falsify*, they reproduce the same logical fallacy of *petitio principi*<sup>7</sup> that is characteristic of Durkheim's approach (Lukes 1973:31, 207). The implication is that the eminent possibility of an interaction between farm and non-farm related etiologies, or an exclusive operation of local, contextually rich, non-farm related causes, is obfuscated from their analytical remit (see, for instance, Mohanty 2005). This is what I have called an instance of transvaluation and focalization in the 'farmers' suicides' thesis.

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<sup>7</sup> That is, presupposing the truth of a causal statement that is being sought to be explained (Lukes 1973:31). Thus, Durkheim first presupposes the four etiological classifications of suicide, i.e. egotism, anomie, altruism and fatalism, and then sets about *explaining* them, without ever bothering to explain why there can not be more than his four types.

Of course, this is not to say that the official category of 'farm-related' suicides is a complete misnomer. What I have suggested is that if one takes the local narratives concerning 'farm-related' suicides as an organizing principle, an etiological continuum begins to emerge, replacing the notion of causal homogeneity suggested by the official statistics, and by proponents of 'farmers' suicide' thesis. At one end of this continuum there is a sub-category of Weberian 'ideal type' farm-related suicides, or the *nijam rythu atmahtyalu* (genuine farm-related suicides), wherein farm-related antecedents are confirmed by locals as being either an exclusive or a principal cause of death. But there is also a large sub-group amongst the 'farmers' suicides' in the middle and other end of this continuum, in which a farm-related cause is either intricately linked with non-farm related etiology, or there is no farm-related cause at all. The local peasants dismissively refer to such official 'farm suicides' as "*doop/abhaddam atmahatyalu*" (fake suicides) and explain them principally in terms of a range of conjugal or other family related disputes (due to extra-marital liaisons, gambling or alcoholism etc.).

Concerning the sub-category of genuine farm-related suicides, I have suggested that these suicides demonstrate a remarkably higher degree of indebtedness relative to the control-group of NRP peasants. *Pace* Vaidyanathan (2006), this supports researches from across India that consistently holds relatively higher indebtedness to be a most important antecedent to farm related suicides (Vasavi 1999, Jodhka 2006, Rao & Suri 2006, Mohanty and Shroff 2004). The average outstanding debt for the suicides stood at Rs. 1, 61,007, which was more than twice (122%) as high as that of an average NRP farmer; the debt liability-land asset value ratio in the former case was 65%, implying that the specter of insolvency was serious amongst the former. That 87% of their credit came from informal sources, also endorses the view in this literature that it is higher-interest rate informal credit that dominates the rural credit market. But, for reasons that I have

discussed in Ch. 2, I disagree with those researchers who tend to reify informal credit by associating it with 'professional (usurious) money lending', and in turn use it as a by-word for agrarian distress. A higher incidence of compulsive bore-well sinking was an important (sometimes, the exclusive) reason for their severe indebtedness, even as the incidence of failure in striking groundwater was twice as high amongst suicides as amongst the NRP farmers. The other reasons for high indebtedness included farm-related investments, such as credit taken for cultivation, land-leases, or non-agricultural causes such as the marriage of daughter(s) and serious health- related expenditure in the household. Indeed, the compulsive sinking of bore wells or land-leasing amongst suicides was often aimed at generating surpluses either in order to meet an impending expenditure on marriage of daughter(s) and serious health related difficulties, or because of an outstanding debt due to these reasons. Overall, genuine farm suicides commonly show a sharp convergence of production oriented setbacks in a fragile eco-system - as their credit-financed unfruitful investments in bore-wells shows, with indispensable, large scale expenditure incurred on marriage or health-related issues in their household.

As mentioned above, the farm-related aetiologies that characterize genuine farm-related suicides can be represented as an anomic state in its dual (broad and narrow) senses. But, given that it is a general state within any local peasant classes, the problem in using the concept of *anomie* is that it does not explain its selective morphological impact; that is, it does not explain why only some 'anomic/egoistic' peasants commit suicide while a majority does not. Aware of this limitation in his theory, Durkheim invoked the facetious logic that anomie or egoism 'entered' through an Individual's "weak points", driving him to self destruction (2006:154); from his position, these farmers were 'weak' and 'passive' individuals who simply 'fell' to anomic currents. This formulation is not only completely the converse of what local NRP peasants thought of these suicides, but it is also

irreconcilable with the aggressive, strategic show of rage that one commonly finds in local suicides, farm-related or otherwise.

The problem indeed lies in Durkheim's delineation of his universalistic aetiological types, such as *anomie*, in a sort of cultural vacuum to make them scientific<sup>8</sup>. I have tried to show that the search for a more credible explanation as to why only some indebted peasants chose to commit suicides, or the way in which they did it, leads us to ideologies of masculinity (*Paurusham*) and honour/grace/esteem (*manam*). In the context of the structural transformation of a local agrarian economy, possessing a bore-well has been internalized as one of the indexes of aggressive masculinity. It signifies a man's risk-taking capacity (*tiagam*) for household development and also to compete with others in following *class* consumption style. In so far as the failure of a bore-well attempt, or its sudden drying, involves permanent (or sudden) de-classification, it implies an 'aspirational failure', or defeat (*avamanam*), for a manly man. Severe indebtedness can, too, conjure a crisis of masculinity. An indebted peasant who claims to possess manliness is liable to experience *avamanam* as a creditor, father or a husband, especially when he is accused of self-interestedness (*swartham*) by his hierarchically inferior wife/son in accumulating debts.

A demonstration of the close interaction between masculinity and suicides in the field of honour was the theme of Ch. 6. As a positive - or for some even sacred, state of social

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<sup>8</sup> Reading *Suicide*, one is struck by the structural tension between Durkheim's aspiration for an a-cultural, universalistic theory and his compulsion to show its precise operation in ordinary everydayness. Since he is committed by his insistence that "every speech/individual consciousness" (concerning suicide), being 'subjective', is 'suspect' in explaining suicide (2006:16, 151, 154), he must rely on a device outside culture to show how his suicidogenic social states operates at the micro-social level. To resolve the problem, he relies on a dubious, that is, *arbitrary*, non-verifiable, complex of social-psychological correlates for each of his social types of suicide (in Ch. 6 of *Suicide* in particular). Thus, egotism, anomie and altruism, correspond respectively to 'melancholia', 'irritation' or 'anger', leading one to commit suicide. Epistemological inconsistencies are indeed a hallmark of Durkheim's *Suicide*.

self-hood (Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992:4), *manam* derives from two mutually interacting co-ordinates; (a). the hierarchies of structures – primarily caste, a system of exchanging purity and pollution (Dumont in Gupta 1991), class (differential ownership of politico-economic resources), and gender (hierarchical social organization of male-female difference), and (b.) the voluntary competitions of masculinity – such as *poti* and *pandem* - within and across these structures. Put differently, the state of being in *manam* involves social acknowledgement of one's hierarchical statuses as well as recognition of his differential individualistic achievements in multiple masculine roles. As Bourdieu notes in his discussion of masculinity (2001:51), the 'traps' of *avamanam*, too, lie in these three contexts; all acts, whether positive or negative, authored by the self or by an important other that undermine a man's hierarchic statuses, or will imply his defeat/inferiority vis-à-vis other rival men in competitions of masculinity, involve emasculation. The consciousness of *avamanam* is emotionally debilitating in that it evokes the state of *vattaddi* – or, compulsive thought patterns. In such circumstances, men, *qua* men, are expected to reclaim *manam* by summoning their aggression and making a befitting response or else, lose their masculinity and honour permanently. I reiterate that it is the differential possessions of *manam* which determine one's capacity to recognize (i.e., experience) *avamanam*, and feel obliged to retaliate against its perpetrator. In other words, as the anthropology of masculinity and honour emphasizes (Gautman 1997:386, Herzfeld 1986, Peristiany & Pitt-Rivers 1966; Introduction, Bourdieu 2001:50-52), some peasants are considered manlier than others in terms of their higher possessions of *manam*, their higher capacity to augment it, and to avenge even a slightest *avamanam* as a matter of duty.

Amongst the different role situations that regularly produce such 'traps' of suicidogenic *avamanam* and *vattadi*, the conjugal roles are particularly important. A wife's explicit

inversion of her husband's hierarchical authority over the household, or over her, is a prominent cause of a man's *avamanam*. Whether such a challenge is morally tenable - as in case of terminal alcoholism or gambling habits of a husband - or untenable, is not incidental to suicidal motives and posthumous social evaluations. But, given the sheer cultural investment in the notion of masculine hierarchy, a challenge nonetheless implies emasculation for a manly man and hence, it causes an outburst of rage, *peddakoppam*, against a challenging wife. Violence, samsonic suicidal threats (Jeffrey in Giddens 1971: 185) or suicidal challenges – which are issued as moral reprisals by either spouse - are usually the logical corollaries of such masculine rage. A wife's confirmed or alleged involvement in an extra-marital sexual liaison is, however, most emasculating in so far as her sexual promiscuity incriminates both his sexual potency as well as his ethical virility (i.e. his control of her as a person, Bourdieu 2001:12 ). Hence, once again, in the hierarchy of privileged masculine reprisals, suicide represents an honorific solution next to avenging oneself on the lover and/or a wife by violently punishing them. Having said that, my sense is that this sort of honorific suicide on account of extra-marital liaisons of a female household member is a rather recent development in as much it is the young peasants from the Backward and Scheduled Castes who are the staunchest votaries of such reprisals. Parry (2001) and Hall (2007) have made similar suggestions. Although less common than the *avamanam* likely to be experienced in marital roles, another emergent 'trouble spot' is the inversion of a father's authority within the household by his son and suicidal threats or action is liable from either side. Conversely, elderly men are likely to commit suicide when ill-treated, or when not cared for, by their married sons after a household's division. Disputes related to household finances in paternal and fraternal relations are also known to present samsonic suicidal reprisals by a 'victim'.

To the extent that local discourse of suicides, especially non-farm related suicides, is located in the fields of masculine honour and morality – there are ‘good (reasonable)’ and ‘bad (un-reasonable) suicides’<sup>9</sup> - one is tempted to find the traces of Durkheim’s altruistic suicides in them. Although he divided altruistic suicides in to three subtypes (obligatory, optional, renunciatory), the basic component of altruism is the presence of a “coercive moral duty”. That is, a suicide is compelled to sacrifice himself for larger social ends, such as preserving the honour of a group and escape social ostracisation (2006: 220). However, just as Raymond Firth found this in his discussion of honorific suicides in Tikopia (1971: 212), there are problems in conceptualizing local suicides as being altruistic. Firstly, in Durkheim’s dualistic schema, altruistic suicides are representative of ‘primitive-societies’ that are marked by “*excessive social integration* (p. 221)”; as an antonym of egoism, altruistic suicides represent ‘under-developed’ individuality in these societies. So, from his perspective it would simply be a matter of conceptual contradiction to suppose local suicides to be altruistic when the nature of social relationship I have described above appears to be excessively individualistic. Secondly, Durkheim presupposes the motive of ‘moral duty’ to be a monolithic, ‘given’, norm that equally compels each ‘part/unit (i.e. individual)’ of a ‘whole (i.e. society)’ to either comply or face social ostracisation.

I think that both these difficulties arise because Durkheim arbitrarily and grossly simplified the relationship between ‘personality’, ‘individualism’, and ‘society’ in order to arrive on the schematic categories of egoism, anomie or altruism. For instance, he, without empirical data, forecloses the possibility of any notion of self/personality/individuality in non-western world because he thinks that non-western

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<sup>9</sup> I hasten to add here that it does not mean there is always unanimity in moral evaluations of a suicide. Quite the contrary, I think there are few cases with complete unanimity of opinion; a larger number of suicides evoke strong, competing, moral judgments. This point is the same on the basis of which Firth (1971:212) criticizes Durkheim’s presumption of unanimity in social opinions on moral ‘duty’.

communities are 'homogenous' (p. 238)<sup>10</sup>! Likewise, it does not occur to him that if the 'moral duty' of preserving honour compelled each 'part (i.e. individual)' to equal measure, as he contends, he should have found the incidence of suicide in colonial India much higher than he reports (p. 236). Contrary to Durkheim, one key conclusion that this dissertation advances is the following. Given the nature of fundamental changes that the contemporary agrarian society and economy demonstrates, it is perfectly possible, indeed very likely, that egoistic and anomic social states shall coincide with aggressive *honorific* motives of committing suicides. With the democratization of social and economic aspirations, and with the entrenchment of the individualistic claims to honour, the conventional notion of honour being a preserve of hierarchical caste, class, gender and age-related structures are under challenge. Insofar this entire politics of honour unfolds in rural Anantpur along the template of aggressive masculinity, an expansion in the scope for suicidogenic *avamanam* amongst an even larger group of people is but logical corollary.

#### **7. 5 Suicides in India: key areas for further research**

Although the field of suicide has remained a virgin field in Indian sociology, and hence it offers space for diverse sorts of research, I should like to mention two broad areas that seem to cry out for further research in particular. The first of them relates to the sociology of production of official suicide statistics. This thesis has shown that the registration and cataloguing of suicide by the police are not 'natural' facts. They are rather cultural artifacts and in being so, they show the evidences of systematic biases. Hence, it seems logical, and pertinent to suggest that there is a crying need for gaining a comprehensive sociological understanding about the processes by

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<sup>10</sup> The fact that Durkheim knows of the caste system in India, and its attendant politico-cultural heterogeneity, makes his sweeping conclusions about 'homogeneity' in 'primitive societies' appear rather bizarre.

which suicide is organizationally defined, processed and treated by the police within localized social systems in modern India. Such an effort will be able to give us a better understanding of how, and to what extent, does the dark number problem (the difference between 'real' incidence and reported suicides) works in case of a locality, a state or the whole of India.

The second area of potential research relates to the substantive aspects of suicide related sociological theorization. At the current state of literature on suicide in India, it is premature to think of a general social theory. But, a greater understanding of the way in which social, economic and cultural processes cause suicidal behaviour requires both intensive, but interdisciplinary ethnographic investigations as well as cross-cultural, comparative researches. This thesis represents a step towards this goal by trying to understand the phenomenon of high incidence of suicide in one locality in South India. It is legitimate to wonder if and how does the understanding that this thesis proposes relate to the constellation of social and cultural processes that produce high incidence of suicides in Kerala? Is the synchronization of social egoism and economic anomie with masculinity that I found in Anantpur of any relevance to Kerala? Is the disconnect between democratization of consumption-oriented modernity and the crisis of 'uneven economic development', which we found to be an important aspect of suicide in Anantpur, of any general etiological value for other parts of Andhra, or Karnataka? As I said, suicide has remained a virgin field for Indian sociology and the possibilities of posing fascinating questions are immense.

**Appendix 1**

**Masculinities, Modernities and Consumption in  
Contemporary India**

**A 1.1 Introduction**

In this essay my aim is to summarize such works that are located in the overlapping field of interest around masculinities, modernities, and emergent consumption styles in post-reform India. The essay is, therefore, an extension of the general discussion that appears in the beginning of the thesis (i.e., Ch. 1: section 1.4). It is organized as follows. I begin (in section A 1.2) by laying out certain key strands of the general theories of gender and masculinity, and then by understanding the manner in which recent empirical works Indian and South Asian contexts relate to these strands. This is followed in section A 1.3 by an overview of ethnographical work on consumption style as one of the technologies used by men to experience and act upon – thus particularize – modernity in different spatio-cultural settings in India since the early 1990s. I hope to relate this entire discussion to the context of social change in Anantpur district by way of the conclusion that appears in section A 1.4. A caveat that may be mentioned here is that this discussion is primarily focused on men and masculinities in South Asia, and it merely touches upon queer and other sexuality related works.

**A 1.2: Theorising gender, masculinity and Indian masculinity**

A rather less partial way to understand gender theory, as Osella and Osella and Chopra (2004:11) have discussed, is to outline it as a dialectical engagement between structuralist perspectives on gender that is associated with the second wave feminist theory of the 1970s, and the poststructuralist perspectives that have emerged since the 1990s. Although there are critical differences within second wave theory, for instance

on the question of if and to what extent class mediates gender, this literature is broadly unanimous in its foundational thesis that an ontological distinction separates biology from gender even though it is emphasized that these two are often empirically related. That is to say that the consideration of 'male- men – masculinity' as an internally overlapping set of categories that opposes and hierarchies the category of 'female-women-femininity', has been the general hallmark of the literature of this period (cf. Jackson and Scott 2002:9). An obvious premise in this thesis is that sexual bodies are binary and bounded – that is, their anatomical differences are real, limited to two sexes, and these exist beyond linguistic construction (*ibid*:15).

While the contribution of classical feminist theory in disrupting androcentrism and in unraveling how gendering practices reinforce, and are reinforced by, wider political-economies cannot be overstated, poststructuralist theories, amongst which Judith Butler's (1993:2002) contribution has been influential<sup>1</sup>, have elaborated the manner in which the premises underwriting these theories have led to conceptual obfuscations. An instance in point is the critique of the concept of patriarchy: although a useful shorthand for general masculine hegemony, it has rightly been shown to be inadequate in capturing temporal and cultural nuances within and across different contexts of men-women relationship (Jackson and Scott 2002: 10, Osella, Osella and Chopra 2004:11). But poststructuralist theories make two other more fundamental challenges. They (e.g. Butler 1993, Garfinkel 1967 in Jackson and Scott 2002:16) generally contest the foundational thesis that sex is a 'pre-social', 'natural' or 'fixed' category onto which normative constructions (i.e. gender) are supplanted: they argue that the category of sex itself is a 'socialised' construct in that it is produced through the hegemonic

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<sup>1</sup> One could perhaps say that Butler's postmodernist contribution has been so widely discussed in recent gender theory as to have unfairly eclipsed earlier challenges to structuralist theory – such as Garfinkel's (1967) excellent work on Anges from the ethnomethodological perspective. See Jackson and Scott (2002:16) on this.

imagination of discrete and hence *immutable* physical referents. The implication then is that any valorization of sex as a ‘natural’ category ensnares one within a conceptual framework in which it is difficult to see how sexual bodies (*not* genders) can themselves be ambiguous/malleable/processually transformative [see for instance Cornwall’s discussion of *Travestis* in Salvador (2004:6) or Kessler (2002:447-453)]. Further, such a framework elides multiple ways in which genders are creatively – and compulsively (see Garfinkel’s work cited in Jackson & Scott 2002) – ‘performed’ within the two gender system. The idea of performativity in Butler (1993:2) refers to speech acts by which selves/subjectivities come to construct themselves as ‘real’ within inchoate discursive fields: such categories as ‘men’, ‘masculine’ ‘feminine’ and ‘heterosexual’ are not, Butler says, the categories of primordial physical or social ontology but rather the categories of performances, albeit repeated performative productions may give ontological effects to these categories. Although I am amongst those (e.g. Busby 2000: 11-13, New 2003 in Cruickshank 2003:6) who contests Butler’s rather extremist position wherein all materiality of biology and political-economy, and of context-relative distinctions between biology and gender (Butler 1993) is rejected, the poststructuralist challenge is valuable in exposing the foundational suppositions of the two-gender system and their consequences.

The engagements between structuralist and poststructuralist perspectives within the general theory of gender resonate amongst works that deal primarily with men and masculinity. In a significant book *Dislocating Masculinity*, the editors Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994: 11-19) question the typical ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of such terms as men, male and masculinity in men’s studies (e.g. Kimmel 1987 cited by them) which has often formed the basis for conceptualizing socially exalted forms of being a man, or what has been called ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 1987 in Jackson and Scott 2002: 60-62, Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1987/2002:99). The notion of hegemonic masculinity

in Connell is the idiom of hierarchy which generally plays out between men and women although Connell allows (1995: 78-79) that it may involve hierarchical relations amongst men too. Cornwall and Lindisfarne concede the salience of hegemonic masculinity as an analytical construct – just as Carrigan et al (1987/2002) concede different forms of masculinities, but their point of departure from Carrigan and others lies in their arguments that there is rarely “only one hegemonic masculinity operating in any cultural setting” (1994:20), and that there need not be a hierarchic relationship between different hegemonic masculinities in a given spatio- temporal context. They are ably supported by their ethnographic evidence in these assertions. But I find the three dimensional framework that Carrigan et.al suggest (1987/2002: 111) for exploring masculinities, namely the division of labour, the structure of power and the structure of cathexis, equally instructive in so far as it is constitutes an effective handle to understand and relate structural changes in one arena with that in the other. Haywood and Ghaill (2003: 23-40), for instance, find some qualified evidence for the thesis of ‘crisis of masculinity’ (Willis 2000 quoted by them) by documenting how the male involvement in British labour force has been in decline, and how it is being increasingly casualised, which lead to fundamental restructuring of articulations of masculine identities, relations of power and even cathexis [see Campbell’s (1993) and Connell (1995) researches in particular, pp. 38-39].

In considering if and how have some of these concerns been articulated in the scholarship on South Asian masculinities, one notes that unlike other cultural regions of the world, masculinity – which I, following Connell (1995:71), take to be an embodied practice as well as a gendered space - has begun to attract anthropological attention only lately in the region. Osella, Osella and Chopra observe (2004: 2-3) that this gap arose out of a peculiar convergence wherein masculinity as a subject of exploration has been backgrounded both by feminist studies that have kept women’s

subordination in their ethnographic focus (e.g. Wadley 1991, Dube 2001) and by South Asianist who have been rather interested in understanding the manner in which women and men interrelate through their general social roles (e.g. Madan 1987, Mines 1994, Trawick 1990)<sup>2</sup>. Yet, in broad terms there are three major dimensions along which the literature on South Asian gender system can be seen to speak to wider theories of masculinity. The first is the post-colonial thesis that the 'West' in general and British male colonialists in particular used gendering as a potent political means to masculinise themselves and emasculate Indian men, and that Indian men actively duplicated the colonial gendering structures to fashion their self (Nandy 1983: 4-7, Krishnaswamy 1998/2002: 295). Nandy argues (1983:8) that a far-reaching implication of this development was that references to androgyny (*klibatva*) – more than those to femininity - were pathologised in the Indian male consciousness insofar as it "counterpoised" androgyny "against undifferentiated masculinity".

Nandy is correct in seeing historical continuities relating to the dominating colonial constructs of sex and gender that persist through India's political autonomy. The patently masculine terms in which discourses of economic growth, dominant homophobia (Khanna 2007:160), or of containing 'fragmenting Indian/Hindu nationhood' by restoring a masculine Hindu self are conducted in cotemporary India relate at least partially to post-colonial sensibilities (cf. Srivastava 2004: 180, Vijayan 2004: 365). This last point about seeking to contain 'challenges' to Hindu nationhood by recovering a hyper-masculine Hindu self also intersects with a dominant and recurring theme in the general South Asianist literature and in certain ethnographies of masculinity. I have in mind here the formulation of 'Hindu manhood' in terms of the antonymic categories of householder and renouncer (Dumont 1970 in Osella, Osella

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<sup>2</sup>These scholars note (2004:3) that an exception to this paucity is the vast literature on colonial masculinities.

and Chopra 2004:4), in which the renouncer – the Brahministic ideal of a celibate man who accumulates vigour by annulling sexual transactions permanently and uses it for communal goals – is held to be a superior to the householder. Madan (1983: Ch.1) has subsequently rejected the dichotomy of renunciation and attachment in Hindu thought and practice by suggesting that it is non-renunciation that that constitutes “good life” amongst Kashmiri Pandits. Overall, one notes that although the narrative of the ‘loss’ of an ‘Indian male self’ and its eventual ‘recovery’ during the colonial interaction, or the contiguous narrative of a hegemonic model of celibate renunciation or non-renunciation are useful to understand contemporary articulations of masculinity, they are inherently partial. This is primarily because they (a). either work with the idea of Indian/Hindu ‘men’ or ‘masculinity’ as a unitary category (e.g., for Nandy the ‘colonised mind’ is devoid of any internal social hierarchies within masculine space ), or (b). often take the Brahminical texts and practices to be the (only) hegemonic mode of masculinity in India<sup>3</sup> and, (c.) understand the causes and articulations of hegemonic masculine discourses and practices in relation to ‘the past’.

Rather contiguous with the Dumont’s inclination for textual analysis and his renouncer-householder dichotomy thesis, the second perspective on Indian masculinity is an analysis of psycho-cultural moorings of men in India. Although a part of its genesis goes to early ethnographies of rural India (e.g. Carstairs 1957 in Osella, Osella and Chopra 2004: 5-6), a most coherent psychoanalytic understanding of sex, sexuality and gender has been in Kakar (1997: preface, 2009: 49). Kakar understands sex to be embedded in the dialectic of asceticism and eroticism in India: it entails the specter of loosing sexual fluids (*dhat/veerya*), the source of intellect, so that masculine attitudes

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<sup>3</sup> Not only post-colonialist works but some contemporary anthropological works, too, demonstrate this lacuna. Derne (1995:ix, 4-5), for instance, purports to write an ethnography of “Hindu men” in Benares and finds them preferring to live in joint families, preferring arranged marriages and restricting the activities of their womenfolk outside home. It turns out that almost *all* his 49 respondents are upper-middle class Brahmin, Vaishya and Kshatriya men!

to sex, and by extension, to mature women, are ambivalent and they crystallize in “semen-loss anxiety”. Kakar singles out a Hindu male’s ambivalent relationship to his mother as the fulcrum of the latter’s self. Departing from the Freudian formulation of the Oedipus complex and its resolution, he suggests the hegemonic “psychic reality” for Hindu men to be the “Ganesha complex/maternal enthrallment” (1997:70-75) wherein a son covets a sexual and emotional reunion with the maternal body throughout life with the entailment that he remains deeply shamed and conflicted by his urges. Despite gaps between the post-colonial thesis of the emergence of a hyper-masculine Hindu male and Kakar’s argument of Hindu men’s conflictual androgenic urges, and in spite of his post-modernist sympathies (cf.1997: 3-4), Kakar too regresses (to use Jameson’s term, cf. 2002: preface) to work with the overarching category of “Hindu/Indian men” and with grand temporal contexts. He too seems to be unmindful of the ways in which the “perplexing conditions of contemporary modernity”, as Osella, Osella and Chopra neatly put it (2004: 8), interpellate and mould the psychic world of this monolithic category of ‘Hindu/Indian men’, if there is one.

### **A 1.3 Modernities, masculinities and consumption in contemporary India**

I may briefly turn my attention now to the dimensions of modernity and modernisation which form a component of the analytical framework for many recent works –which together constitute the third perspective - that are concerned with men and masculinities in their everydayness in India. An influential perspective on the nature of Indian modernity adopts as its primary framework the specific terms on which the Colonial regime(/West) engaged with the structures and ideologies of the Indian society for almost two centuries: the fabric of modern democratic politics woven around associations and institutions (Kaviraj 2000: 150), or the Indian version of enlightenment giving rise to the discourses of progress as a national project (Nandy

1983:13), social reforms, and of a distinct 'Indian national culture' (Chatterjee 1994:7), are associated with India's colonial experience. Although it is tempting to see in this formulation an expansion of the "Western programme of modernity" (cf. Eisenstadt 2000: 1, Kaviraj 2000:137), both Kaviraj and Chatterjee rather disrupt such a view by describing how this western programme underwent significant refractions on account of India's pre-colonial social and cultural realities, the uneven or muted emergence of processes of modernisation, and the specific nature of the reflexivity of Indian nationalist intelligentsia. Their thesis, when abstracted, contributes to the notion of "multiple modernities" (Eisenstadt 2000: 2, Wittrock 2000: 53-55, Appadurai and Breckenridge 1996; Ch.1) wherein the classical Western programme of modernity is first seen as being uniquely refracted at multiple levels as it enters non-western societies and cultures through different conduits, and further on, as these societies continually interact with each other. The analytic of multiple modernity resolves, as Gardener and Osella suggest (2003: xii), the usual antinomy of 'high/meta/homogenous Western modernity' and 'low/quotidian/non-Western modernity' (e.g. Lash & Friedman, 1991: 1, also see pp. 23-26 above) by focussing upon the myriad ways in which popular and institutional practices and narratives intermesh with each other around certain core and general referents of modernity in different societies. In other words, such general referents of modernity as the collective and individual projects of carving autonomous identity (Lash and Friedman 1991: 4-5, Eisenstadt 2000: 5) and the "drive for free development" (Berman 1991: 36), and continual self-reflexivity (Giddens 1991) may take vastly different forms of expression in accordance with different institutional configurations.

Amongst others, an important means by which popular practices and narratives speak to such general referents of modernity as mentioned above – and this language often appropriates the category of masculinity – in South Asia is that of upward social

mobility through migration and/or consumption (Miller 1994, Ferguson 1994, Osella and Osella 1999, 2000, Parry 2003). In the third perspective on masculinities in India we see the exploration of these themes occupying a centre-stage, and it is also here that one begins to see endeavours that seek to soften the hard -edged dualities of the structuralist and the post-structuralist perspectives on masculinity to capture the empirical complexity, diversity and fluidity of masculine practices in India. Srivastava (2004) scrutinizes 'footpath pornography' and 'subterranean sex clinics' in Delhi and Bombay that are accessed by immigrant men from rural hinterlands. He finds that by hybridising 'traditional' and 'modern' knowledge systems and the value frameworks underwriting them, such clinics and literature offer a means to this class of dislocated men to vicariously consume metropolitan spaces (parks, malls etc.), and to hope to reclaim masculine virility and control in an adverse environment. If Srivastava suggests, like Haywood and Ghaill (2003: 23-40), that the evolving modes of masculine self contain old anxieties (e.g. semen-loss) that are accentuated by new ones, and that they are class-mediated (cf. Outlook 1997: 5), Osella and Osella's work in Kerala (1999, 2000, 2004) nuances this suggestion by seeing masculinity as a *flexibly structured* practice that configures amid broader categories of caste, ethnic and individual identities. She finds the Izhavas, formerly an 'untouchable' caste in Kerala, to be carving a masculine self around the modernist notion of "progress" that is attached to local inter and intra-caste cultural referents. These include landing a well-paying job in the 'Gulf', receiving fat dowries on this basis and then converting these capitals into status-enhancing consumption styles (eating and drinking, gift-giving etc), and eventually employing these capitals to negotiate for equality in local ritualistic and political fields. Parry (2003), too, finds the axial project of upward mobility and self-transformation amongst his migrant industrial workers in Bhilai who resist going back to their 'backward' villages after retiring from their jobs in the 'modern' township.

At a general level the referents by which the Ezhava men and Bhilai industrial workers make 'progress' meaningful to themselves is an affirmation of the hegemonic framework of an upwardly mobile, 'modern', but casted householder in different settings of modernity. But within this general framework, the means of migration and popular consumption create multiple modes of masculinity across different stages of life and different classes because they involve the continual enterprise of harmonising aesthetic choices with economic capitals (Bourdieu 1984) and cultural norms. This reading is reiterated in the Osella's work (2004) on the relationship of young Malyali men to their two movie heroes – Mammootty and Mohan Lal: although men experience the masculine appeal of these two heroes through their class, age, religion, and androgyny related sensibilities, and although they affirm the hegemonic referents to this appeal –e.g. the domination of other men and women or the stability of masculine self through flux - their aesthetic affiliations to the style of either of these two heroes are barely fixed. De Neve's work (2004) supports the thesis of multiple masculinities within a *single* cultural setting by showing how there are three different styles of being a successful Tamil men – namely a patron, a householder and a cosmopolitan man-based largely upon three different consumption styles. It is however unfortunate that unlike in the case of the Osellas, De Neve is silent about the implications for those Tamil men who cannot invest in any of these configurations by being generous with giving away credit or gifts and by consuming 'modern' housing, clothes and education to the extent that they would like.

Whether it is the consumption patterns of new middle classes living in non-metropolitan spaces that De Neve, the Osellas , Parry, or even Van Wassel (2004) describe in their works, there is some truth in the assertion that (Dwyer 2000: 78, Appadurai and Breckenridge 1996: 6) that there is an increasing convergence between the consumption cultures of metropolitan middle classes in India and abroad on one

hand, and their non-metropolitan counterparts on the other. Although middle and large peasants are universally excluded from the membership of this otherwise ambivalent category of 'middle class' (cf. Dwyer 2000:59), both the Osella's work in Valiyagramam and my research in NRP would rather suggest these classes to be actively partaking of in urban and metropolitan consumption cultures. The frames of analysis used in literature concerning consumption styles, the fashioning of masculine self and identity, and the middle classes in India appear to betray usual sociological antimonies. The unprecedented culture of consumption appropriating 'body-caring cosmetics', clothing, bikes, cell phones, dining/drinking out, 'touring' etc. by a cross-section of Indian men (cf. Outlook ,July 1997, Ch. 4 above) has been variously understood as a component of an 'identity project' set against old and new social hierarchies in India, or as a sign of (sometimes 'immoral') individuation underway in the country (Van Wassel 2004), or mere commodity fetishism let loose by burgeoning mass media in post-reform India (Kothari 1991:557 in Van Wassel 2004:107). In this respect although Liechty's ethnography of the emergence of middle class modernity in Kathmandu (2003:4-7) shows this modernity be temporally newer than the Indian experience, it is gainful nonetheless to follow him in seeing consumption at once as a site, a process, and a performance that is not only conjured by the interaction between mass-media, the state, economic and cultural capitals of different classes and gendering practices, but one that is also *constitutive* of these categories. `

#### **A 1.4 Conclusion**

It may be emphasized in conclusion that it is an enterprise in conceptual hybridisation to analyze the empirical field that overlaps around the categories of sex, gender and modernities in India (Osella, Osella and Chopra 2004: 11). This hybridity entails retaining the poststructuralist accent on the contingent, relativistic nature of identity-

formation within discursive fields that these categories seek to apprehend, but without succumbing to the associated idea of amorphous “subject positions” which lie completely outside biological and social structures. So, when NRP peasants choose to specify themselves under the unique supra-district category of “*Rayalseema paurusham*” (pp. 186-187 in Ch.4 above), this category certainly engenders them as a performative subject, as Butler would say. But it also specifies multiple but overlapping hegemonic correlates of *paurusham* (e.g. acute competitions in agriculture/commodity consumption/sexual and ethical virility related performances in Goffman’s sense) that are mediated by an adverse agro- ecological zone and the structures (*meta* vs. *thoTa* farming, class, caste, a near unanimous emphasis on two-gender system, mass-media) that socialise it. It also means that there are different styles of being a man – on the lines of De Neve’s ‘patron’, ‘householder’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ men – available under the category of *Rayalseema paurusham*. The importance laid in NRP on the strand of one’s *paurusham* in order to forge one’s modern self and the ever-increasing field of means by which this project can be realised – and reflexively indexed–are the products of modernity that emerge through the interactivity of different agencies (the State/Political parties/satellite TVs/Telugu cinema, migration etc), and yet, they also constitute these agencies of modernity. One needs just to see, for instance, the cinematic caricatures of the “*Rayalseema paurusham*” in Telugu film industry (e.g. *Rakhtacharitham*). One could follow Sudipta Kaviraj in saying that the piquancy of Anantpur’s experience of modernity lies in the fact that the core constitutive aspects of ‘modernisation’ are remarkably refracted and discontinuous (e.g., acutely reflexive subjectivities seeking upward mobility within predominantly agrarian setting) in the district.

## ***Appendix 2***

1. Following Epstein (1962:42) and Harriss (1982:303), I have assumed a standard household to comprise one adult heavy male worker, one adult heavy female worker, one adolescent worker and two children. Such a standard family shall require 12,600 calories per day, or 2500 calories per consumption unit (as per the Indian Medical Research Council conversion table cited by Harriss).
2. Given that rice is the preferred grain, I have assumed that 3/4 of this 2500 calories per day is gained from rice. Thus each consumption unit requires 525 grams of rice per day (as per the FAO estimates cited by Harriss, 1982:304). This works out to be 79 kg rice requirement per month for the entire family. At March 2005 rate of Rs. 10 per kg (for RNR variety), such a family requires Rs. 9,480 per year to meet its grain requirements.
3. Aside from rice, a sample of household budget data, which I collected randomly from four peasant households, suggested a monthly expenditure of Rs. 830 on pulses, oil, spices, vegetables, milk, cloths, smoking, medicine, entertainment and other miscellaneous expenses. Yearly expenditure on these items for such a household works out to be Rs. 9,975. The total cash (rice + other expenses) required annually for the family is thus Rs. 19,455.
4. If such a family cultivates groundnut in dry land, it can expect an average yield of 8 bags (of 41 kg unshelled) groundnut per acre. At the 2004 prices of Rs. 700 per bag, his gross income per acre is Rs. 5,600. Deducting production costs of Rs. 3,000, the net income may roughly be Rs. 2,600. In other words, such a family will require 7.5 acres of dry land to be able to reproduce itself.

5. If, on the other hand, such a family owns double-cropped groundnut *thoTa*, it can expect to produce 13 bags of groundnut per season. Since Rabi groundnut fetches much higher price, at an average of Rs. 800 per bag, the net income per season for the family is Rs. 6,600. 1. 3 acres of double cropped groundnut *thoTa* shall suffice the family's basic reproduction needs.
6. I listed each resident household of NRP according to the number of consumption units it had in relation to the nature of its landholding. To do so, I awarded 10 points to each acre of wet land owned by a family; the *thoTa* owning family would require 13 points to reproduce itself. Each acre of dry land accordingly, received 2.5 points. On the basis of this consumption unit score, I organized all NRP households into four classes as they appear in Table 2.9 in Ch. 2.
7. This stratification yielded four different classes of the peasantry: the big farmers, the middle farmer, the small farmers and the marginal farmers. From the list of 226 resident households in the village, I excluded all the cases of landless people and those who did not pursue cultivation because of a number of reasons such as they were too old, or did not have any sons to cultivate or did not have financial assets to carry out cultivation. I also excluded those owners of land who do not stay in the village.
8. After these exclusions, I had a sample frame of 173 people in the village who were depending upon agriculture as their main activity. From this frame I selected my sample.
9. I was ready to take 31 sampled people for my study; it comes to about 20 % of the total resident households in NRP. This number was considered appropriate in terms of my overall work load and the nature of the work. Then, I drew every sixth name from each of these classes until I had the entire sample collected.

10. It was after six months of survey work that one of my respondents committed suicide and hence, my sample size was reduced to 30.

## Appendix 3

## **Village Household Census Form**

## **1. Basic household information (for all households of the village)**

i. Place .....  
ii. Date and time of survey .....  
iii. The quality of rapport (any significant observation) .....

## 2. Personal Information

i. Name .....  
ii. Age .....  
iii. Education .....  
iv. Caste .....  
v. Religion .....  
vi. Family Type (Joint/ Nuclear) .....

## A profile of family members

Relation to the respondent (specify if resident or not)	Age (yrs.) and Sex	Education

iv. Respondent's birthplace .....

v. A genealogical sketch of the respondent's family'.....

Vi Duration of residence at the present place.....

### ***Current Occupational profile***

Family members	Principal Occupation <sup>2</sup> (and span of time for which it has been practiced)	Secondary occupation (and the span of time for which it has been practiced)

(In the event of respondent being involved in agriculture for less than 10 years, then the following table applies)

<sup>1</sup> The genealogical sketch is to be drawn on a separate sheet. The sketch of at least four generations including that of the ego is desired.

<sup>2</sup> The criteria for deciding whether the occupation falls into principal or subsidiary category is on the basis of the occupation contributing more than the half of the income of the family annually.

x.

Family members	The occupation (before switching to agriculture)	The duration of occupation (prior to farming)	Income from previous occupation (monthly)

*3.i. Household assets (non farms)*

Items	No. of items	Observations about type/size/current valuation (At current price)
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- a. House
- b. Bicycle
- c. Radio
- d. Television
- e. Telephone
- f. Any other consumer durables

*ii. Farm Assets:*

Land holding (Map Reference No. ....) <sup>3</sup>

Land	Area (in acres)	Ownership/contract (since)	Irrigation for the current and last year	
			Fully Irrigated	Dry land (rain fed)
Owned				
Under-operation				
Lease-in/out				
Total under operation				

*a. Assets, tools and equipments*

1. Livestocks: Drought Animals	Number
.....	.....
-Milch Animal (i.e. cows/ Buffaloes/ sheep/Goats)	
-Any other	
2. Tools	
-Plough	
-Tractor	
-Any other Minor tools	
-Pump sets	
-Threshing machine	
-Bullock Cart	
-Any other major tools	

*5. Average Monthly household consumption<sup>4</sup>*

Item	Amount consumed	Expenditure
Food: Cereals		

<sup>3</sup> In the local village revenue book.

<sup>4</sup> To be collected thrice in three different agricultural seasons of winter, summer and monsoon periods for inter-seasonal comparability and computation of average annual household consumption.

Allied food material:

- 1.oil
2. salt
3. Spices
4. Vegetable
5. Pulses
- 6.sugar
7. Tea/ coffee
8. Any other

Other Household material

Fuel

Clothing

Durable Consumer goods

Medical

Travel

Entertainment

Religious Practice

Payments against services

Cosmetics

*6. Social/political affiliations<sup>5</sup>:*

Institutions	The duration of membership (and the name of the institution)	The nature of membership
Political Parties		
Co-operative Societies		
Non governmental Organization		
Voluntary farming groups at the village level		
Any other		
None		

6. Total Yield of Groundnut in the outgoing season (Kharif, 2004, in Bags).....

7. Total Price of Groundnut Received at sale.....

8. Any other remarks:

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<sup>5</sup> Qualitative details on these questions shall be sought out.

**Appendix 4**  
**Detailed Farm Sample Survey Questionnaire**

1. Sample Number \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Village \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. Agricultural Season \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Month \_\_\_\_\_  
 5. Date of interview \_\_\_\_\_

Section 1

**(Verify all responses as a last measure during the last survey)**

**1. Landholding**

- i. (For landownership refer to the basic household survey form in the basic household census)
- ii. If a part of owned land recently<sup>1</sup> bought, mortgaged or sold,

Land	Year of transaction	Person transacted with	Area transacted	Amount received/Paid
1. Purchased				
2. Mortgaged				
3. Sold				

(Record qualitative responses, if any<sup>2</sup>)

**2. Tenancy**

- a. Have you leased-in land?
- b. Have you leased out land?

Yes/No  
Yes/No

(Skip this sub-section to move over to the next if this is not applicable)

Type of tenancy	Location of land (within/outside of the village)	Name of the land-owner	Whether Written Contract or Verbal contract and also the mode of payment
1. Fixed Annual Rent ( <i>Guttaka</i> )			
2. Individual Share Cropping ( <i>Koru</i> )			
3. Collective Share Cropping ( <i>Palu</i> ): Specify names			

(c) Have you been leasing in/out land from this (One) landowner/tenant for more than a year? If yes, then for how many years?

(d) Have you faced any problem in leasing in/out land in this season or in previous years? Have you also had any problem with your tenant/land owner while you leased in/out land?

<sup>1</sup> Up to 10 years.

<sup>2</sup> Such as ' wish to sell but no buyer available, or buyer available but prices offered are very low'.

(e) Particulars of the tenancy contract

Type of Tenancy	Amount of land leased –in/out	Rent proportions (In cash or kind)	Whether irrigated or not (specify the area of land)
Fixed			
Individual Shared Cropping			
Collective Share cropping			

**3. Irrigation and capital expenses**

I. (Agricultural season and year wise changes)

Source of irrigation	Number owned	Area Covered (in Years)	
		2005	2004
Bore wells (specify the capacity in HP)			
Bore (without well)			
Tank			
Wells			

ii. Change in the source of irrigation and expenditure incurred

Year	Number of attempts in digging wells/rigging bore wells	The Number of successful wells/bore wells	The Lifespan of Successful bores (in year/Months)	Amount spent (On rigging new bore wells)
2005(to date)				
2004				
2003				
2002				
2001				

iii. Expenditure on old and new items of agriculture (i.e. tools, irrigation system, land development etc.)

Year and time	Items (specify the new items)	Source of Information and service	Expenditure
2005	Cattle purchase/ maintenance  Machinery Purchase / repairing  Equipment purchase/ repairing  Any other:		

**Section 2**  
**Production in Leased- in land\***

**1. Land Use Pattern**

i. In current Season

Crops	Total area of land sown (in acres)	Area thereof	Irrigated	Area rain fed thereof
1.				
2.				
3.				

ii. in same season last year

Crops	Total area of land sown (in acres)	Area thereof	Irrigated	Area rain fed thereof
1.				
2.				
3.				

**2. Cash Inputs**

a. i. Seed<sup>3</sup>

<b>Irrigated land:</b> Type of seed (specify name and varieties <sup>4</sup> )	Quantity Purchased	Rate/gram	Source of Purchase (name of trader)	Time of Transaction/ On cash or credit (specify the actual cost if taken on credit)/ time of sowing
1.				
<b>Dry land</b>				
1.				

Qualitative remarks:

iii. Have you encountered any problem in buying seeds in the market, such as unavailability of seeds or high prices?

b. i. Pesticide used

<b>Irrigated land:</b> Type (specify name and crop for which used)	Quantity purchased	Rate/lit	Source of Purchase (name of trader)	Time of Transaction/ On cash or credit (specify the actual cost if taken on credit)/ time of application
1.				

\* Move to next section if not applicable.

<sup>3</sup> To be filled up at the beginning of the season once only.

<sup>4</sup> Such as the HYVetc.

<b>Dry land</b> 1.				

For Qualitative remarks:

ii. Where did you get to know about the quality and other related information regarding the pesticides you have used in this season?

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iii. Have you bought a spurious pesticide in this season (i.e. one which is duplicate of the an established brand label)? And if yes, from where

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c. Fertilizer used

<b>Irrigated Land:</b> Type (specify name and its use crop)	Amount Purchased	Rate/Kg	Source of purchase (name of trader and location)	Time of Transaction/ On cash or credit (specify the actual cost if taken on credit)/ time of application
1.				
<b>Dry Land</b>				

i. Where did you get to know about the name and the quality and other related information about the fertilizers you have used in this season?

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ii. Have you had any problem in getting fertilizers in the market, such their unavailability or selling at very high prices so far in this season?

d. Manure used (specify whether for the dry or the irrigated land)

Source (and crop for which used)	Amount taken	Rate	Time of purchase and application
1.			
2.			

### 3. Subsistence inputs

Inputs	Amount applied	Source of input	Any interest charged (if yes, specify the charge and due time of payment)	Time of application
-Seed (irrigated land)				
Seed (dry land)				
Manure (irrigated land)				
Dry land				
-Water				
Credit (irrigated)				
Dry land				
Any other				

Qualitative remarks:

### 4. Pre harvest labour input:

Irrigated land: Crop Name (& Variety)	Activities (i.e. ploughing/sowing etc)	Family/exchange labour Day (wages in bracket)		Hired Labour Day		Attached labour days		
		Male	Female	Male	Female			
1.								
<b>Dry land:</b>								

Qualitative remarks:

**5. Credit in cash taken from market**

Source of Credit (specify name)	Amount	Purpose	Interest Rate	Interest payment record/ Total loan amount to be paid as of date
Formal: National Bank Regional Rural Bank Co-operative society				
Informal: a. From money lender b. From Non Professional Moneylenders (big farmers) c. From close friends/ relatives d. From widows e. From seed/pesticide shops/persons				

Qualitative remarks:

Any general remarks about production in leased in land:

Section 3

**Production in Self-owned land**

**1. Land Use Pattern (Verify the extent of land that was *left uncultivated* and land that is *uncultivable waste* during the Rabi and the Kharif, 2005)**

i. In current Season

Crops	Total area of land sown (in acres)	Area Irrigated thereof	Area rain fed thereof	Left non cultivated
1.				
2.				
3.				

ii. in same season last year

Crops	Total area of land sown (in acres)	Area Irrigated thereof	Area rain fed thereof
1.			
2.			
3.			

## 2. Paid out Inputs

a. Seed<sup>5</sup>

<b>Irrigated land</b> Type of seed (specify name and varieties <sup>6</sup> )	Quantity Purchased	Rate/gram	Source of Purchase (name of trader)	Time of Transaction/ On cash or credit (specify the actual cost if taken on credit)/ time of sowing
1.				
2.				
<b>Dry land</b>				
1.				
2.				

Qualitative Remarks:

b. Pesticide used

<b>Irrigated land</b> Type (specify name and crop for which used)	Quantity purchased	Rate/lit	Source of Purchase (name of trader)	Time of Transaction/ On cash or credit (specify the actual cost if taken on credit)/ time of application
1.				
<b>Dry Land</b>				
1.				

Qualitative remarks:

<sup>5</sup> To be filled up at the beginning of the season once only.

<sup>6</sup> Such as the HYVetc.

c. Fertilizer used

<b>Irrigated land:</b> Type (specify name and its use crop)	Amount Purchased	Rate/Kg	Source of purchase (name of trader and location)	Time of Transaction/ On cash or credit (specify the actual cost if taken on credit)/ time of application
1.				
<b>Dry land</b>				

Qualitative remarks:

e. Manure used

Source (and crop for which used)	Amount taken	Rate	Time of purchase and application
1.			
2.			

f. Subsistence Inputs

Inputs	Amount applied	Source of input	Any interest charged (if yes, specify the charge and due time of payment)	Time of application
-Seed				
-Manure				
-Water				
Credit				
Any other				

**II. Pre harvest labour organization**

<b>Irrigated land:</b> Crop Name (& Variety)	Activities (i.e. ploughing/sowing etc)	Family/exchange labour Day (rates in bracket)		Hired Labour Day		Attached labour days
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
1.						
<b>Dry Land</b>						
1.						

Qualitative remarks:

**III Labour organisation: During and post harvest**

<b>Irrigated land:</b> Crop Name (& Variety)	Activities (i.e. ploughing/sowing etc)	Family/exchange labour Day (rates in bracket)		Hired Labour Day		Attached labour days
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male

Dry <b>land</b> : crop labour And Varieties	Activities	Family/ Exchange labour Days (Male)      Female	Hired Labour days	Attached Days
Groundnut: Picking/Piling				
Transporting ( <i>Duddee</i> )				
<i>Vama</i> -laying				
Machine Threshing ( <i>Zinna</i> work)				
Transportation (Home)				

**3. Credit in cash taken from Market in the season (cross check all particulars as a last measure)**

Source of Credit (specify name)	Amount	Purpose	Interest Rate	Interest payment record/ Total loan amount to be paid as of date
Formal: National Bank Regional Rural Bank Co-operative society				
Informal: a. From money lender b. From Non Professional Moneylenders (big farmers) c. From relatives d. From friends or same caste members e. From widows f. From seed/pesticide shops/persons				

vii. Did you encounter any problem in securing credit for this season? If yes then, elaborate  
 viii. Did you work for your lender this year?  
 ix. Did you take credit from your employer this year?  
 x. Did you take credit from your landlord this year?

**4. Repayment record for the year (cross check all particulars as a last measure):**

Repaid to	Amount	Repaid in (Month), 2005	Outstanding Debt as In December, 2005
Formal: National Bank Regional Rural Bank Co-operative society			
Informal: a. From money lender b. From Non Professional Moneylenders (big farmers) c. From relatives d. From close friends/ members of the same caste e. Widows f. From seed/pesticide shops/persons			

**5. I Livestock (Labour use month wise)**

Livestock	Nature of Activities	Male Labour (in hours per day)	Female Labour (in hours per day)	Attached labour/ Children labour (in hours per day)

ii.Commerce/ exchange/ participation in agricultural input and output markets for the season

Crop	Activities	Time of the year (months)	The location of market (i.e. village/ town)	Male Labour (in hours per day)	Female Labour (in hours per day)

Non-agricultural activities, If Any

iii. Artisan Production (Labour days in a month)

Activities	Time of the year (months)	Male Labour (in hours per day)	Female Labour (in hours per day)	Children labour (in hours per day)

#### **iv. Wage Labour: Family Labour hired out during this season**

Crop	Name of activity	Source of labour (within /outside the village)	Male & or Female labour days	Wage per day
1.				
2.				
3				
4.				

## Section 3

## 6. Crop Production: output

Crops (specify time of output)	Total Actual Production	Total expected Production <sup>7</sup>	Production in previous agricultural season (in the year 2003-04)
1. Groundnut			
2. Paddy			
3. Any other			

## 7. Disposition of products

### *a. Farm Products*

### a. Groundnut

b. Paddy

c. Any other

a. \* Have you been selling to this merchant for more than one year? If yes, then, for how many years?

b. \* Where is this merchant based;

c\* Mark yes/no to the following statements, if they are correct for the case:

i. The crop or a part of it has been sold to the lender this year?

ii. The crop or a part of it has been sold to the lender last year?

iii. The crop or a part of it has been sold on cash?

iv. The crop or a part of it has been sold on credit?

v Have you sold any processed agricultural Product in this season?

<sup>7</sup> The time when the peasant himself first made the figures of this expected production should also be recorded as it could show the suddenness of variation between the production expected and the production later yielded.

*b.sell of Non- Farm Products*

i. Artisan products

ii. Any other

**8. Stocks held post harvest (collect the data for December, 2004 to June 2005 and December 2005 onwards):**

Crop                   Amount (in bags, pod form/Kgs of kernels)                   Purpose (farming purpose/ consumption)

a. Groundnut

b. Paddy

c. Any other

**9. Non farm cash Loans taken during this season**

Purpose of taking loan	Source	Amount taken	Time of transaction	Interest rate
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

Loans: Remaining from previous years

Purpose of taking loan	Source	Amount taken	Time of transaction	Interest rate and due time of payment

**10 .i. Farm or non- Farm *Kind* loans (such as paddy for household or groundnut):**

Purpose of taking loan	Source	Amount taken	Time of transaction	Interest rate
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

**10.ii. Farm or non- farm kind loans repaid this season/year**

Repaid to                   Amount                   Time of repayment  
outstanding due

**11.i. Non- Farm Activities and Income**

**Non-Farm Income**

a. Remittances received in current season

From (relation to the respondent)	Source (job, trade etc.)	Amount received or earned)	Time of receipt (month wise)
1.			
2.			
3.			

**b. Gift/Charities received in this season**

From (relation to the respondent)	Source (job, trade etc.)	Amount received	Time of receipt (month wise)
1.			
2.			

**c. Income from any activity sponsored by govt/ NGO/ any others received in current season**

The name of the Govt/NGO Programme	The number of labour days put in		Wage (earned)		Time of such activities
	Male	Female	Male	Female	

**d. Livestock related activities undertaken in this month**

Livestock (or related activities)	Number /units sold	Rate	Amount received or earned
1.			
2.			

**12. Distress mortgage/ sale of assets (apart from land), if any, during current agricultural season**

**a. Mortgage**

Items	Time	Amount mortgaged at	Interest	Due time of payment
1.				
2.				
3.				

**b. Sale**

Item (specify in bracket the number of items originally owned)	Time	Amount sold at	Sold to	Price of item in 2003 <sup>8</sup>
1.				
2.				
3.				

**13. Non Agricultural farm Expenditure**

**a. Sundry expenditure during the year (for the Month of.....)<sup>9</sup>**

Item	Amount (aprox)	Actual Expenditure	Expenditure Last year (2003) <sup>10</sup>
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**Food: Cereals**

<sup>8</sup> The prices of winter season in this year can be taken somewhat as a baseline as it was closer to a normal agricultural year. Alternatively is it possible to take the prices of those neighbouring districts, which have faced the drought situation to a lesser extent?

<sup>9</sup> To be collected for all the months of an agricultural year.

<sup>10</sup> This section has been added after my preliminary meetings with local people suggests that there is a wide gap between what people spend in drought years and what they spend in normal agricultural year and that this gap often constitutes an important source of pain and guilt on part of the household head (the peasant himself).

Allied food material:

Other Household material

Fuel

Clothing

Durable Consumer goods

Medical

Travel

Entertainment

Religious Practice

Payments against services

Cosmetics

b. Exceptional Expenditure, If any (marriage dowry, health or buying of capital stock etc in current or last year) during this agricultural season.

Item	Time of expenditure	Amount expended	Source from which amount secured
1.			
2			
3			
4.			

#### **14. Service related experience**

a. Have you experienced an electricity break down in this season?

Yes/No

B If yes, for how long did you not receive electricity and what was the reason?

c. How many connections are there from the DP that you are connected to?

d. Did you face any technical problem in running of bore well in this season?

e. Have you received any suggestions or training from the extension office located in Kudair or the agricultural office in Anantpur?

Yes/No

f. if yes, then pl. explain....

g. Have you paid the land revenue or cess to the govt in the running agricultural year?

#### **15 Farming experience:**

a. Are you satisfied with the agricultural output and in turn the agricultural income that you have received for the year?

Yes/No

b. if no, what were you expecting in the output (in terms of no. of bags of groundnut and paddy)?

c. How would you rate your agricultural income in last five years?

- i. Satisfactory (when the expected income and the real incomes have tallied)
- ii. Non- satisfactory (when the real income has been far less than the expected income)
- iii. More than satisfactory (when the real income has been far more than the expected income)
- iv. Absolutely unsatisfactory (when the real income has been far less than the expected incomes).

d. Can you rank order the causes of your satisfactory or non-satisfactory farming performance this year?

- i. Poor yields due to erratic rainfall
- ii. Poor yield due to inadequate supply of inputs
- iii. Poor yield due to pest attack
- iv. Reduced income due to dip in the selling prices
- v. Can not say
- vi. Any other

e. Can you rank order the causes of your satisfactory or non- satisfactory farming experience for the last five years?

- i. Poor yields due to erratic rainfall
- ii. Poor yields due to inadequate supply of inputs
- iii. Poor yields due to pest attack
- iv. Reduced income due to a dip in the selling prices
- v. Can not say
- vi. Any other.

f. How do you assess your economic condition vis a vis your father's?

- i. Better (If you think you are more able to fulfil basic essential requirement of your family than your father did)
- ii. Far better (if you think you not only fulfil these basic requirements better than your father but have accumulated some new productive resources too).
- iii. Worse (if you think you are less able to fulfil the basic essential than your father did)

g. How do you see your farming future?

- i. Promising (as you are sure of producing increased surpluses in the coming years)
- ii. Satisfactory (as you see yourself producing at the same resource level and producing adequate yields)
- iii. Unsatisfactory (as you see yourself producing at the same resource level and producing inadequate yields)
- iv. Worse (as you think your present resource levels and the production levels are going to decrease in future).

h. Would you like (or would have liked) your sons to continue being in agriculture as you did or rather go into other vocation?

- i. Yes, I would
- ii. No, I would rather have them move out of agriculture
- iii. I am not sure.

Thank you.

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