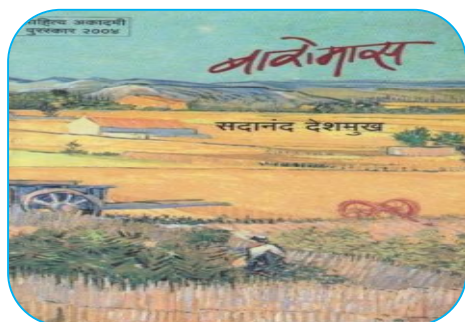




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## 'BAROMAS: TWELVE ENDURING MONTHS' - AGRARIAN CRISIS AND AFTER

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### ABSTRACT:

'Baromas: Twelve Enduring Months' (2013) is an English translation by Vilas Salunkhe of Sadanand Deshmukh's Sahitya Akademi Award (2004) winning Marathi novel 'Baromas' (2002). Prof. Sadanand Deshmukh hails from a cultivator family in Vidarbha. Naturally, rural life and rural consciousness make an oeuvre of his writings. The concern of his writings is to describe how farmers are being affected by post-globalization free market economy. 'Baromas' is a realistic novel. It reproduces contemporary village reality. The protagonist Eknath is a representative of those young people who find it difficult to get a job in an era of privatization and

liberalization and their educated background makes them alienated from farming as they find themselves unfit to function as farmers. Their marital lives are ruined because their wives don't find their aspirations to be fulfilled in them.

**KEYWORDS:** bankruptcy, corruption, crisis, debt, draught, farmer suicide, globalization, poverty, unemployment.

### INTRODUCTION

It is a tale of a cultivator family of Vidarbha region in Maharashtra which makes frequent news for suicides by farmers as they are distraught by draughts. It is least irrigated province in Maharashtra having lowest rainfall. It is facing dire shortage of water for farming and household. The novel depicts the story of young educated Eknath Tanpure who has to take farming because of unemployment. He is an M. A., B. Ed. He wanted to become a lecturer, but he could not pay the donation and remained jobless. So, he has to live in his village and look after farming. He

is married to Alka, daughter of a government employee from a city. Her parents married her with Eknath with a hope that he will get a job. But, since Eknath is jobless her dreams are crushed. Their marital life is uncompromisingly unsatisfactory. The agrarian crisis in modern times has touched different aspects of village life. To discuss some of them is the purpose of this paper.

### ECONOMIC CRISIS:

Green revolution brought rise in the agricultural production. But, this modern farming stressed on the use of hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. This resulted in the increase of production cost. On the other hand the rates given for agricultural produce were not significantly increased; therefore, it

resulted into lower profit affecting the financial well being of the agricultural household.

Grandpa Nanu, the father of Subhanrao, opposed modern farming and insisted on traditional methods where indigenous seeds and compost manures like cow dung were used. He cautioned that the fertility of soil will go waste because of the use of fertilizers and pesticides besides there will not be enough income from farming, "There is no farm produce stored in your house. This is like digging up the house to fill up the courtyard. The soil of your farms is simply

being dissipated in its own ground (Deshmukh, 2013, p.5).” Initially, Grandpa Nanu did not allow sowing the hybrid seeds; but, finally he had to succumb to the insistence of Subhanrao. There used to be an occasional exchange of words regarding this matter. Grandpa Nanu used to point out how modern farming has been a business of loss and how chemicals and pesticides will harm their body. He would ask:

If your earning has really increased, where does the money go? Tell me, why are farmers not building their own houses? That’s not all. If you eat this less nutritious food, you will slowly lose your health. After all it is full of chemicals. And how long do you think you could live on chemicals? (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 7)

### Enemies of Farmers:

Naru *bhau* is a progressive farmer in the village Sanjol. He also helps other farmers in the village to do modern farming. He organizes an agricultural convention and invites agricultural scientists from different universities to guide the farmers. In his speech he talks about the three enemies of farmers (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 67). He says that nature is the chief enemy. Sometimes we expect rains and the season goes dry; and when we don’t need it pours in abundance and the crops are washed off. The second enemy is market. And, the third enemy is government’s import-export policy. The government imports those goods which are cultivated in abundance and this import lowers the price the native farmers could get for their crops. And, the government also puts a ban on export and the farmers are deprived of good price from foreign sources.

### Bankruptcy and Farmer Suicides:

Because of the lack of enough income from farming the farmers have to borrow money during sowing season. If the government banks or cooperative societies don’t provide them loans, they have to get it from private money lenders on high rate of interests and if, there is not enough yield and income from the next season, they find it difficult to repay the debt and they are caught in a vicious cycle of private money lending. P. Sainath explains how the poor are bereft from credit provided by government financial institutions, “There were any strata within the poor, and different levels of poverty. The lower down the order you are, the less likely it is that such credit will cover your family. The R.B.I. pointed this out as late as 1987 (Sainath, p. 196).”

Raosaheb, the brother-in-law of Eknath needs money for second sowing because the first sowing had gone vain because of the scarcity of rain. He sends his son Raju to Eknath to borrow Rs. 5,000. But, since there is no money in the house and he returns with bare hands. Raosaheb commits suicide. He had taken loan from Baluseth. But, he could not repay the debt. Raosaheb and his men put him in a cellar and beat him up and demand he should sell his land to him. With the fear of being dishonoured in the society, Raosaheb commits suicide. He hangs himself to a tamarind tree. He has left no suicide note or any evidence that could hold Baluseth responsible for his suicide. The police officer expresses his inability to file a chargesheet against him. Actually, the police officer was bribed by Baluseth. Eknath finds it difficult to file a lawsuit against the moneylender. This is a common scene in India where the moneylenders exploit and dishonor the farmers and with the fear of loss of honour and dignity the farmers commit suicides. The moneylenders with the use of money and power purchase the system and set themselves free from the clutches of law. Although Raosaheb’s brothers initially express zeal to send Baluseth to jail their enthusiasm soon wanes away. Some people say that inspector Chopade has taken Rs. 3 lakhs from Baluseth to ‘close’ the case.

Subhanrao takes loan of Rs. 2 lakhs from Dahadusheth Mahakal and in return he gives farm on contract. The money is borrowed to bribe government officials so that Madhu gets the job of *gramsevak*. But Madhu cheated and the middle man runs away along with his money. Dahadusheth says that if Madhu doesn’t return his total money he will go to court and purchase the land according to deal. He insults Subhanrao. With the fear of losing the land Subhanrao tries to commit suicide by drinking poison. But, his life is saved by his neighbours. P. Sainath remarks that private money lending creates servility and dependence (Sainath, p. 200).

### Family at Crisis:

The family members in 'Baromas' are at a state of war with one another. Shevantamai and Alka, the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law duo, are not at good terms. Shevantamai wanted that Eknath should marry her brother's daughter Mukta, a village girl. She thought that Mukta could have helped her at home and farm and the bond between brother and sister could have grown stronger. Eknath wanted to marry a city girl. That made Shevantamai to hold a grudge against Alka. Shevantamai wants that Alka should sell her golden bangles gift to her by parents and give money for sowing. But Alka protests and it hurts Shevantamai's ego. It has become a usual pattern that after any dispute with in-laws Alka goes to her parents at Mohadi. Eknath finds himself crushed between his mother's traditional approach and his wife's rebellious nature.

Alka's parents married her with Eknath thinking that he would get a job. But, since, his parents were not ready to sell land and pay for donation he had remained unemployed. Alka is city bred and therefore, she does not like the village life. She wants to get settled in a city. She insists that he should sell his share of land and move to city and start a business: set up a shop in computers, xerox machines or stationary.

Alka's parents are worried about her future. They are disappointed because their dream to get a well to do son-in-law for their daughter is crushed. They thought that Alka will live in city and not in the village. The mother-in-law complains Eknath: "What household work do you talk about? Is it a house you have there? Cattle sheds are cleaner. What sort of people do you have? Women from the town were saying about her mother-in-law that she is a quarrelsome shrew. She would quarrel with the wind... And what dirt! I have been there just once. There was so much dirt and dust; one's lungs might choke up. Even the idea of going there again makes me shiver. I don't know how Alka spends her time in that atmosphere.... (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 119)." Eknath retorts that if Alka is not ready to come with him, it is better that she should give him divorce. Then, the father-in-law replies that divorce is unacceptable in their community. He further says that he will not commit mistake for his second daughter to marry her with a villager. He will marry her with a government servant.

The dilemma of Eknath is that he is caught between his mother's wishes and wife's aspirations. He is crushed between the two. He expresses his angst, "I'm caught between my wife and my parents, as though I am being pressed in a sugarcane crusher (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 102)." The family members are drifted apart from one another. Their relationships are so much strained that it has become difficult for them to come at terms. All this has happened because of financial problems in the family. Eknath feels, "I feel numb, I don't know what I should think of my parents, my brother and my wife – all are so different from one another! Even God can't bring them together (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 104)." Shevantamai does not like the urban way of living of Alka in the village. She dislikes her wearing gown in the village. She calls it a 'baggy'.

Eknath thinks that whatever wrong has happened with him has been because of his being born in a farmer's family.

I would have been happy, had I married Mukta and not Alka. Alka, too, would have been happy married to someone she liked.

How many lives did I destroy through this one mistake?

I have made many mistakes, and my mistakes arise from my inheritance, belonging to farmer's family (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 100).

Alka returns to her parents with the determination not to return anymore. She had got aborted thrice fearing that what will become of the child born in that farmer's family. She is more worried with the thought that if she has a daughter her life will become hell like hers. So, she has decided not to give birth to a child. The sexual life of Eknath and Alka is stressful since their relationship is dry and loveless. She calls the occasional love making between the two as 'rape'.

### Identity Crisis:

The novel deals with conflict between rural and urban, literate and illiterate, old generation and new. Educated city born daughter-in-law Alka is confronted with uneducated rustic mother-in-law

Shevantamai. The status enjoyed as a mother-in-law makes Shevantamai dominate Alka. But, the educated daughter-in-law Alka is not as submissive as her previous generation. Both think that their stands are right and the divide deepens between the two. When Eknath tries to convince that the times now are changed Shevantamai remarks, "How can it be it different? Does the sun rise in west now? Do daughter-in-laws stay at their parents' today? Even though times have changed, it's women who bear the children. Are men going to deliver babies now (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 101)."

### Unemployment:

Eknath and his younger brother Madhu are both educated but unemployed. Their parents gave them education enduring all the hardships they faced, but they could not get jobs because the family had no money either to bribe or pay as donation. Subhanrao expresses his helplessness, "What more can I do for all of you now? I starved myself paying for your education. I paid for Eknath's M. A. and B. Ed. and sent you [Madhu] to an agricultural college. What use was it? These days, I lie awake at night worrying about you both (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 9)."

Alka was married to Eknath with anticipation that he will become a lecturer. But Eknath's parents had no money to pay for donation. So, Alka complains to her in-laws that if they had sold a piece of land and paid rupees one lakh, Eknath could have become a lecturer at Dargaon college (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 17). The unemployment among educated youths makes them bitter against the government policies. Madhu thinks that the government should not give jobs to both husband and wife. One job in a family should be enough (Deshmukh, 2013, p. 80).

### Greed for Hidden Treasure:

The helplessness because of not having money at home and consequently not getting a job makes Madhu go for a different career – to find out gold in some old, dilapidated mansion in some ancient village. So, he has formed a gang of gold hunters – the golden gang. When Eknath asks why he is fruitlessly digging graves without finding anything good, Madhu remarks, "If you won't let me go dig up gold, I won't go. But you should buy me a jeep; I will make trips between Chikhali and Khamgaon and make a lot of money. Do you think I want to dig up graves night after night? (Deshmukh, 2013, p.9)"

Chapter 3 is about the mis/adventures of Madhu's 'golden gang'. The members of the gang are all educated but unemployed since they can't afford to pay the bribe or donation to get a job. Therefore, they have decided to go for treasure hunt during night in the neighboring villages because that area was believed to be rich during ancient times. They also hire the services of a *mantrik* named Banuba who can control the spirits guarding the treasures. Dilip Pawar attends the quest for gold with the gang but accidentally falls on a stone and gets hit on head and loses his mental balance. He is a B. Ed. working without salary on a non-grant school. Once the school gets grants the administration asks him to pay the donation of rupees one lakh. After his father's death his mother had brought him up and since he has no patch of land to sell he decides to join the gang. But, unfortunately, his maiden attempt proves a tragedy for him.

After Eknath is deceived by Uttam Thokare, Madhu had left no chance to get a job. He tells his gang members that there is no point in searching the gold underground and it is better to stop the vehicles at night and loot the people and hunt the 'running gold'.

### Corruption:

Corruption in education has become a common thing. Although the government lays down eligibility criteria for teaching posts, it is the people of management that select a candidate. The institutions which get salary grants i.e. the salaries are paid by government take donations from candidates and appoint them as teachers. The candidates who have money become teachers despite other candidates are better or well qualified compared to them.

We know that a man teaches a couple of hours for a salary of Rs. 15,000 – Rs. 20,000, while another, who is equally qualified, is not able to get even Rs. 15 a day. (Deshmukh, 2013, p.64)

Eknath's friend Sopan Bhagat is a lecturer in a junior college but still he runs five batches of tuition classes. He has built a bungalow. It is not expected from a salaried teacher that he conducts private tuitions. It is neither moral nor professional. Eknath calls him a man belonging to a mafia gang doing business in the field of education.

Corruption in bureaucracy is a major social concern. The illiterate farmers are prone to be exploited by bureaucracy. Kamble *talathi* does not give a copy of 7/12 to needy farmers without extorting money. He unashamedly justifies bribery, "You know, it's our system here that we wouldn't give a copy of *saat-baara* even to God without pocketing our share (Deshmukh, 2013, p.80)."

Madhu's friend Suresh Sathe had become a *talathi* by bribing government officials. After getting a job he started real estate business – buying agricultural land and getting permission for non-agricultural use and selling the plots. He exploits the needy people and amasses money. He says, "I've been busy wringing people's necks. I grab every chance I get to make money (Deshmukh, 2013, p.89)." His wife is a school teacher. So money is bringing more money in his life. He feels that there is all 'greenery' in his life.

Suresh Sathe promises Madhu to help in getting a government job by bribing government officials through Uttam Thokare, the P. A. of MLA Malpani. Madhu goes on a hunger strike and demands that his parents give him 2 lakh rupees. He insists that Subhanrao gives the *kalyani* farm to Dagadusheth Mahakal for year on contract and they will pay the money back after getting the job and will get hold of the land back, and meanwhile the crop will be taken by Dagadusheth. Initially, his parents resist but they had to succumb to the tactic of hunger strike used by Madhu. It proves to be worst for Madhu and his family that Uttam Thokare runs away grabbing money from many young people to whom he promised to help in getting government jobs. Eknath goes to meet the MLA but he explains his inability to help them by saying that he has also been cheated by his PA. Dagadusheth demands that only after receiving his full money of Rs. 2 lakhs he will return the land.

### Poverty:

Whatever crisis and conflict agrarian families and society face are offshoots of poverty. Dr. Sunil Mayi<sup>1</sup> has listed causes of poverty among rural community (Mayi, p. 52). Some of them are:

1. Excessive religiosity, succumbing to customs and traditions
2. Influence of *tantrics* or self-proclaimed god men
3. Influence of gender discrimination
4. Unwillingness for migration to better the economic condition
5. Use of old technologies in agriculture
6. Tendency to take loans from banks, societies and moneylenders
7. Stress to repay the debts

All these causes leading to poverty are witnessed in the misery of Tanpure family. Subhanrao is a god fearing *Varkari*. Whatever lot he has to live into, he accepts it as God's wish. Madhu and his gang had to take help of a *mantrik* to find hidden treasure. It is not that the *tantric* has some supernatural power, but it is his presence that gives them a spiritual support. In traditional families daughter-in-laws has to obey meekly to mother-in-laws. Women are discriminated in the families. Even an educated woman like Alka does not want to give birth to a baby girl. Farmers generally inherit land from their forefathers. Therefore, they are emotionally attached to it. Subhanrao is against the idea of selling the land inherited from his father. Being elder son Eknath has to look after farming and he does not agree with Alka's advice of selling a patch of land and migrating to a town and starting a small business there. Because of scarcity of financial resources, ignorance about new technologies and less possession of land, the farmers can't afford to introduce new technologies in farming. As discussed earlier farmers find it difficult to get credit from banks and they have to turn to moneylenders. The rates of interests of such money lenders are so high that they find it difficult to repay the debt. And, farmers like Raosaheb commit suicide with fear of being disgraced.

**Sum Up:**

Dr. Munawali Maijoddin M.<sup>2</sup> rightly remarks that Baromas is not just a tragedy of farmers but it is also a tragedy of rural community and nature (M, Munawali: p. 71). The crisis that hovers over the agrarian community is not just financial. The cultivators' families enjoyed a special privilege and status in village society and it all depended on their financial well being. All other communities and castes in villages that provided different services depended on them. The loss of prestige and dignity has created a psychological breakdown among farmers. Sadanand Deshmukh, in the introduction (Deshmukh, 2002, p. iii) to his Marathi version, rightly says that it is easy to call a farmer a coward when he kills himself. Actually, it is his body that he kills but his soul is already killed by crushing it under the burden of debt. A perennial solution waits to bring the cultivators out from this crisis.

**Note:** 1. & 2. These are Marathi texts. The excerpts from the texts are translated by the author.

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