

The quarter million suicides recorded so far call serious attention to the reality of lakhs more peasantry, especially agricultural labourers, on the brink of devastation in this country. The suicides of agricultural labourers continue to go unreported in almost all studies or news reports on peasant suicides.

Studies on peasant suicides and indebtedness continue to render invisible the family and the household, with the agricultural labourer or farmer viewed solely as a producer of food, selling his or her labour or produce. Yet a peasant – male or female – does not enter debt for the sake of agricultural inputs alone. Those dependent on agriculture depend on it to fulfill several needs even as they produce food for society at large – food for their own families, education or jobs for their children, marriage expenses, health care, along with dreams of a more dignified life for their near and dear ones.

This book is an attempt to bring to the fore the subjectivities of the survivors of “suicide families”, as they are called in the Punjab. The tyranny of statistical data, of realities depicted in tabular format, renders individuals invisible, while the fetish of narratives, images and voices that soars high in popularity often obliterates socio-economic contexts. The author has successfully sequenced the facts from a vast variety of sources into one cogent and accessible volume. The book has six chapters and chapterisation of the book and sequencing of the articles is very apt.

The author’s analysis manages to capture the subjective experiences of women and thereby refuses to turn the suicides into mere statistics erasing the realities of lived experiences. So, among the many strengths of the book is its powerful documenting of women’s lives, its incredible archival value for history, even as its own stated focus is to find way to struggle against the agrarian crisis in the Punjab where too many have killed themselves and others desperately try and resist death.

This book will be invaluable for students, researchers and journalists interested in probing the genesis of the peasant misery in Punjab and other similar States.

Dr. P. Kesava Rao

HIV / AIDS Patients and Their Rehabilitation by Dr. Shekh Belal Ahmed, Department of Sociology & Social Work, AMU, Aligarh, Published by Serials Publications, 4830/24, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi – 110 002. Price ₹ 495.

The author makes a very profound statement in the preface that 95 per cent new HIV cases occur in developing countries which are least equipped to cope with. In the past we have seen celebrities like Rock Hudson (Hollywood Actor) and Magic Johnson (Basket Ball Star) contracting this. But now good awareness of this disease is preventing new cases in the West. The author must be congratulated for writing this book. The author is very correct that this problem is not the responsibility of Health Sector alone but it should be tackled by a multi-sectorial approach.

The authors’ statement on gender inequality is true that the women are supposed to be innocent, passive and economically dependent which makes them vulnerable. The author’s opinion on Poverty and Aids needs more authentication. Also he says that the school enrolment has fallen 365 per cent in Switzerland, I think it should have been Swaziland, an African Country where AIDS is rampant.

The author correctly pointed out the impact of economic burden for AIDS as it not only puts more burden on the government to treat the opportune infections but also reduces the working force as many would die by 40. The write-up on AIDS impact on health care workforce is very neatly done (P 24). The increased risk for women in African countries who sell beer to male customers who may be

coerced to have sex makes an interesting reading (P 27).

The author did a good job in enumerating the Policy Actions for HIV prevention (P 37).

Delhi : Mother to fetus transmission of infection is almost twice the national average and also of contaminated blood shows the failure of system (P 44). The write-up on rehabilitation was good – 45. A challenge for us. Involvement of private sector should have been dealt with more. MNC and many big business houses can do a lot. Failed to mention the role of Bill Gates foundation and their contribution. A word of appreciation for the Indian Pharma who are making ART drugs at a lower price is missing.

Many African countries are using medicines manufactured in India.

The author wrote nicely on discrimination and about stigma of HIV and AIDS patients. He should have mentioned about celebrities like Shabana Azmi who used to come on TV holding HIV kids to dispel the myth that HIV spreads by touch. Gender inequality is quite informative and made a very interesting reading. Very effectively pictured the plight of women who are at the receiving end. The author should be appreciated for this topic. He correctly mentioned about the high risk behaviour of migrant workers and youth working in call centres and misses out another important group, truck drivers who visit different places.

Lot of spelling mistakes and errors in grammar in case studies. Too much of use of the word “her” was confusing. An Indian face is missing on the cover photo.

Dr.D.S. Manohar Paul
NIRD Health Centre