

Fossilized Economic Paradigms and Farmer Suicides: Examining Kota Neelima's Fictional Critique of Indian Agriculture

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Abstract

This paper explores post-truth aspects of Indian farmer suicides through ecological concerns in select works by Kota Neelima. It analyses how the shift from organic to chemical farming contributed to agrarian distress. Applying Vandana Shiva's concept of a fossilized economic paradigm to Neelima's texts, the study traces vested interests and hypocrisy of authorities responsible for the post-truth scenario of farmer suicides. The research examines how indigenous knowledge and ecological interventions could mitigate the crisis. It maps ecological issues stemming from genetically modified seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The paper argues that mere accumulation of data does not reveal the truth of farmer suicides, and explores how fictional representations can uncover hidden realities. Through a close textual analysis of Neelima's novels *Death of a Moneylender*, *Shoes of the Dead*, and *Riverstones*, the study reveals the complex interplay between ecological degradation, economic policies, and social factors contributing to the agrarian crisis. It concludes that returning to sustainable agricultural practices may offer solutions to the ongoing agrarian crisis, while emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that addresses both ecological and socio-economic factors.

Keywords: Post-Truth; Farmer Suicides; Ecological Issues; Agrarian Crisis, Green Revolution.

Introduction

The post-truth condition emerged in the 21st century with the rise of social media coupled with declining trust in traditional media. Oxford Dictionaries defined post-truth as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” (McIntyre, 2018, p. 5). This definition underscores the shift from objective reality to subjective interpretation in shaping the public discourse. In India, the spread of misinformation intensified alongside the rapid dissemination of information, driven by the advent of affordable 4G data plans (Mitra, 2021). The proliferation of smartphones and inexpensive data plans created an environment where unverified information can spread rapidly, often outpacing fact-checking efforts. This paper examines the post-truth aspects of Indian farmer suicides through an ecological lens, focusing on selected works by Kota Neelima. The choice of Neelima's works is significant, as she brings a unique perspective to the issue, combining her experience as a journalist with the narrative power of fiction. Her novels provide a nuanced portrayal of the agrarian crisis, offering insights that go beyond statistical data and news reports. While debt burden, crop failure and financial losses are cited as primary causes of farmer suicides, a deeper analysis reveals issues related to chemical farming practices introduced by the Green Revolution (Shiva, 2016). The Green Revolution, which began in India in the 1960s, promised increased agricultural productivity through the use of high-yielding variety seed (HYV) chemical fertilizers and pesticides. However, this shift in agricultural practices had far-reaching consequences beyond mere productivity gains. Farmers who were once organically connected to their land suddenly felt disoriented when comparing crop yields before and after the use of chemical fertilizers and genetically modified seeds. This shift not only affected agricultural practices but also disrupted traditional knowledge systems and social structures in rural India (Gupta, 2017). The introduction of chemical inputs and mechanization altered the relationship between farmers and their land, creating a dependency on external inputs and market forces. This study posits that literary representations in Neelima's texts bring forth ecological interventions and indigenous knowledge that could help sustain agriculture by using non-GMO seeds.

By applying Vandana Shiva's concept of a fossilized economic paradigm to Neelima's works, this study traces how post-truth manifests in ecological deviations leading to agrarian distress.

The research aims to bridge the gap between quantitative studies on farmer suicides and the lived experiences of affected communities as portrayed in the literary study. The significance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining literary analysis with ecological and socio-economic perspectives. By examining fictional narratives, the study aims to uncover aspects of the agrarian crisis that may be overlooked in purely statistical or journalistic accounts. Furthermore, the focus on post-truth aspects provides a timely lens through which to examine the complex interplay of information, misinformation, and policy decisions in the context of farmer suicides.

The agrarian crisis in India is a complex issue with a long and fraught history, intricately linked to economic policies, social structures, and political realities. Scholars like Beena Agarwal have extensively documented the gendered dimensions of land ownership and access in South Asia, highlighting how women are systematically disadvantaged within existing agrarian structures (Agarwal, 2016). These studies underscore the urgent need to move beyond aggregate statistics and engage with the lived experiences of those most affected by the crisis.

The rise of post-truth discourse adds another layer of complexity to understanding and addressing the agrarian crisis. Lee McIntyre, in his foundational work *Post-Truth* (McIntyre, 2018), argues that this phenomenon, characterized by a disregard for objective facts, eroded public trust in traditional sources of information, creating fertile ground for the spread of misinformation and the manipulation of narratives. Scholars like Jayson Harsin have examined the role of media and communication in perpetuating post-truth discourse, highlighting the need for critical engagement with the information we consume (Harsin, 2018). Within this context of post-truth, the manipulation of data, or “data politics,” becomes a powerful tool for shaping public perception and policy decisions. Miruna George and Jaya Selvi D, analysing Kota Neelima's *Shoes of the Dead* (George & D, 2019), argue that data is often wielded to reinforce existing power structures and silence dissenting voices. They highlight how Neelima's novel exposes the gap between official statistics on farmer suicides and the lived realities of those impacted, particularly women (George & D, 2019). This manipulation of data serves to obscure the true extent of the crisis and maintain the invisibility of those most affected.

Neelima's works, alongside those of other contemporary Indian authors, demonstrate the power of literature to challenge dominant narratives and amplify marginalized voices. Through her unflinching portrayal of farmer widows in *Widows of Vidarbha* (2018) and *Shoes of the Dead* (2013), she provides a platform for their stories to be heard, challenging readers to confront the human cost of post-truth discourse and data politics. By engaging with these literary works, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the agrarian crisis in India, one that recognizes the gendered realities of those most impacted and the urgent need for social and political change.

Despite extensive studies on the agrarian crisis and the role of post-truth politics in India, little attention has been paid to how literary works, such as those by Kota Neelima, uncover the nuances of ecological degradation and its impact on farmer suicides

There is a critical need for interdisciplinary approaches that combine literary analysis with ecological and socio-economic perspectives to fully comprehend the multifaceted nature of the agrarian crisis in India. While quantitative studies provide valuable data on the rates and patterns of farmer suicides, they fail to capture the lived experiences and emotional toll of these tragedies, an area where literary works like Neelima's offer profound insights. This study seeks to fill the identified gaps by examining how Neelima's novels offer a unique lens on ecological interventions and indigenous knowledge systems, thus providing a deeper understanding of their potential to mitigate the agrarian crisis. This study employs ecocriticism and Vandana Shiva's ecological perspectives as its conceptual framework. Ecocriticism, as defined by Glotfelty (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996), analyses texts through the lens of environmental concerns and sustainability. It examines how human life is affected by and affects the environment, considering the interconnectedness of all living systems. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how literary texts represent and engage with ecological issues. In the context of this study, ecocriticism provides a framework for analysing Neelima's novels not just as social commentary, but also as texts that reveal the intricate relationships between humans and their environment. This allows us to explore how the narrative portrayal of farming practices, land use, and rural life reflects broader ecological concerns. Vandana Shiva's work focuses on ideals of Indian native culture that view the Earth as a family, encapsulated in the concept of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” (Shiva, 2015). This worldview sees the planet as an interconnected family, challenging the dominant paradigm of exploitation and commodification of nature. Shiva proposes alternatives to anthropocentric worldviews, advocating for reclaiming public resources, livelihoods and identities. Her work critiques market economies, particularly capitalism, and emphasises the value of small producers, local economies, and indigenous knowledge. Shiva highlights the

negative impacts of globalisation on developing countries, arguing for “Earth Democracy” that prioritises ecological sustainability and social justice (Shiva, 2015). This concept of Earth Democracy provides a framework for understanding how local, sustainable practices can challenge global systems of exploitation. It emphasises the importance of biodiversity, indigenous knowledge, and community rights in achieving ecological balance and social equity.

In *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, Shiva (2010b) critiques the shift in agricultural production that promised to solve hunger through high-yielding seeds, pesticides and fertilisers. She argues that this led to an ecological and social breakdown, impoverishing India's soil and causing violence. Shiva contends that the new agricultural system was capital-intensive and irrigation-intensive, replacing sustainable indigenous practices and fostering dependence on markets. Shiva's analysis provides a critical lens through which to examine the agrarian crisis depicted in Neelima's works. It allows us to see how the shift to chemical farming and market-oriented agriculture disrupted traditional ecological knowledge and social structures. Moreover, Shiva's concept of a “fossilized economic paradigm” helps us understand how current agricultural policies and practices are rooted in outdated, environmentally destructive models of development. This theoretical framework, combining ecocriticism with Shiva's ecological perspectives, allows for a multifaceted analysis of Neelima's texts. It provides tools to examine how the novels represent the ecological impacts of agricultural practices, the social consequences of economic policies, and the potential for indigenous knowledge to offer sustainable alternatives. By foregrounding the narrative and ecological critique in Neelima's works, this study introduces a novel approach to the agrarian crisis, uncovering the often-overlooked interplay between literature, ecology, and social justice.

While Shiva (2016) positions the Green Revolution within a framework of ecological degradation and socio-economic distress, some scholars present a nuanced perspective. For example, Mark Lynas argues that Shiva's alleged link between farmer suicides and GMOs are misleading, considering that the suicide rates among farmers have not increased with the adoption of GMO crops and attributing these tragedies to factors like lack of crop-insurance, and social safety nets. Lynas asserted the vitality of associating farmers' access to innovative agricultural technologies that could improve their livelihoods and furthermore blames Shiva of romanticizing traditional farming methods disregarding scientific evidence. (The Breakthrough Institute, 2020). Kavin Senapathy's critique of Vandana Shiva likely challenges the scientific basis of Shiva's anti-GMO claims, aligning with the broader scientific consensus on agricultural biotechnology (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). The accusation of cultural appropriation suggests Shiva may misrepresent Indian agricultural traditions, echoing concerns about the romanticization of traditional farming (Herring, 2007). This criticism contributes to ongoing debates in Science and Technology Studies regarding cultural narratives' role in shaping biotechnology perceptions (Wynne, 2001). Senapathy's challenge to Shiva's GMO stance aligns with agricultural economists' arguments that biotechnology is crucial for food security in developing nations (Qaim, 2016). The critique highlights the ethical implications of anti-GMO activism in the context of global agricultural development (Paarlberg, 2009).

Mapping Post-Truth and Power

Applying Shiva's concept of a fossilized economic paradigm to Neelima's texts reveals how post-truth manifests in agrarian distress. This paradigm, as Shiva describes it, is characterized by an outdated economic model that prioritizes short-term profits over long-term sustainability, ignoring the ecological and social costs of agricultural practices. In Neelima's novels, we see this paradigm reflected in the policies, practices, and attitudes that contribute to the farmer suicide crisis. In *Death of a Moneylender* (2009) the character Desraj shatters stereotypes of exploitative moneylenders. His staged suicide exposes the plight of indebted farmers and challenges corrupt practices.

Desraj had written instructions like how his dead body must be lowered from the room and hanged on the lamppost revealing his ingenuity in its purest form and intentions. It was meticulously planned so that the police case must paramount to murder and not suicide. (Neelima, 2009, p.156)

This illustrates the complex nature of truth in the agrarian crisis, where even acts of protest become entangled in layers of deception. Desraj's actions can be seen as a desperate attempt to expose the truth of farmers' suffering, using the very tools of deception that have been used against them. This reflects the post-truth environment where truth is obscured by layers of manipulation and misinformation. The novel illustrates how chemical farming ruptured farmers' organic relationship with the land. Sky-rocketing prices of GMO seeds and agrochemicals have devastated marginal farmers, driving them to

suicide. Neelima depicts this through the character of Madhav, a small farmer trapped in debt due to the high costs of inputs. The narrative explores how the promise of increased yields through chemical inputs led to a cycle of debt and dependency:

“Madhav's helplessness and Laxman's power weave the structures of exploitation. The role of Brihadeshwar's men and their muscle power cannot be ignored. He used his 'suicide' as an example for other exploitative and capitalizing moneylenders.” (Neelima, 2009, p.178) This reveals the power dynamics at play in the agrarian crisis, where small farmers like Madhav are caught between exploitative moneylenders and the pressures of a market-driven agricultural system. The reference to “muscle power” highlights how physical force and intimidation are used to maintain these exploitative structures, reflecting the violence inherent in the fossilized economic paradigm.

The illegal land-grabbing portrayed further exemplifies blind spots in addressing the crisis, reflecting Shiva's critique of the commodification of natural resources. “The selfish motive of Laxman to grab Madhav's land which was very close to the main road served the purpose, Madhav's helplessness and Laxman's power weave the structures of exploitation.” (Neelima, 2009, p.180)

This illustrates how the commodification of land, a key aspect of the fossilized economic paradigm, leads to the dispossession of small farmers. The focus on land near the main road highlights how development projects often prioritize commercial interests over the livelihoods of rural communities. *Shoes of the Dead* depicts Gangiri's struggle for representation amidst agrarian turmoil. The demonization of his brother's suicide as stemming from alcoholism rather than debt reveals attempts to obscure the truth “Dr Daya and Videhi falsely claimed that these chemicals were sprayed disproportionately to increase yields, their overuse had been deteriorating the fertility of the soil.” (Neelima, 2016b, p.7) This demonstrates how false claims about chemical overuse and urban lifestyle influences demonstrate how facts are manipulated to serve vested interests, aligning with McIntyre's analysis of post-truth politics. The attribution of soil degradation to farmers' misuse of chemicals, rather than the inherent problems with chemical-intensive agriculture, reflects a common tactic of blaming victims for systemic issues.

The novel also explores how the fossilized economic paradigm manifests in the bureaucratic handling of farmer suicides. “Keyur Kashinath, the corrupt politician of Mityala district strategically monitored the suicide reports. He tactfully tailored his messages in a way that gained the sympathy of the journalists who had gathered for an informal meeting.” (Neelima, 2013, p.12)

This reveals how political figures manipulate information about farmer suicides to maintain their power and deflect responsibility. The strategic monitoring and tailoring of messages reflect the post-truth tactics used to obscure the real causes of the agrarian crisis.

Examining the Economy of Survival

Neelima's works highlight the invisibility of farm widows and their struggles for compensation. The texts portray how these women embody post-truth experiences, carrying traditional knowledge while facing oppression. Their narratives expose the devaluation of humans in chemical farming and survival struggles against patriarchal and exploitative systems. This aligns with Shiva's argument in *Staying Alive* (2016) that women have been invisible plant protectors through their work in organic manuring. In *Shoes of the Dead* (2013) Neelima portrays characters like Varada amma, Sujata, Laxmi Seetal amma, and Bimala bai to illustrate the invisibility of widows. These women carry the burden of their husbands' suicides emotionally, socially, psychologically, and financially while being excluded from policy decisions.” These women bore the burden of the husband's suicide emotionally, socially, psychologically and financially and continued to hide the 'truth' as expected by the rich and politically influential authorities.” (Neelima, 2013, p.156)

While Vandana Shiva is a prominent advocate for traditional agriculture and biodiversity, her critiques of modern agricultural practices, particularly the Green Revolution, have faced counterarguments. Critics argue that the Green Revolution significantly increased food production and helped combat hunger in developing countries, providing essential food security during crises. Additionally, some contend that Shiva's rejection of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) overlooks their potential benefits, such as increased resistance to pests and diseases, which can lead to higher yields and reduced reliance on chemical pesticides. Furthermore, her emphasis on local knowledge may inadvertently dismiss the advancements in agricultural science that have been developed through global collaboration, which can enhance food production efficiency. Lastly, while her ‘Navadanya’ Movement promotes biodiversity, skeptics question the scalability of traditional farming methods in meeting the demands of a growing global population

Private land conservation programs often exacerbate social justice issues, particularly as articulated by Vandana Shiva, who emphasizes the importance of equitable access to resources and the rights of marginalized communities. These

programs, such as conservation easements, primarily benefit wealthier landowners through financial incentives like tax breaks, while simultaneously limiting access to land for poorer populations, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities. In the Global South, large-scale land acquisitions under the guise of conservation often lead to the dispossession of indigenous and rural communities, undermining their rights and exacerbating vulnerabilities. Additionally, the commodification of nature through carbon offset markets often benefits elite groups, sidelining the voices of marginalized communities. Thus, these conservation strategies frequently conflict with the ideals of justice and equity that Shiva advocates.

This reveals how the fossilized economic paradigm not only exploits farmers but also renders their widows invisible, forcing them to bear the consequences of a system that failed them. The expectation that these women will “hide the truth” reflects the complicity demanded by those in power, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation and e. The novel also explores the bureaucratic hurdles faced by farm widows in claiming compensation. Neelima describes “The arduous process farm widows had to go through to claim compensation including lengthy questionnaires, producing documents like ration cards, and scrutiny by multiple officials like sarpanch, police, and agricultural officers. Several suspicions were often raised over their claims.” (Neelima, 2013, p.201) This illustrates how the fossilized economic paradigm manifests in bureaucratic processes that further marginalize already vulnerable populations. The suspicion raised over widows' claims reflects a system that prioritizes gatekeeping over providing support, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and despair. The representation of these women in Neelima's work echoes Shiva's argument that development has often been an exclusion project, depriving women and tribal communities. By giving voice to these marginalized characters, Neelima's novels challenge the dominant narratives about agricultural development and progress, revealing the human cost of the fossilized economic paradigm.

Ecological Concerns in Textual Contexts

Riverstones (2016b) demonstrates the power of responsible journalism in exposing agrarian issues. It questions why a farmer's death is necessary to awaken the ruling elite's conscience. Neelima's depiction through the lines “The story that is running on the television is that you are an activist with a difference. You are not political, not doing it for any corporate lobby, not regionally biased, and most importantly not deriving any mileage from it.” (Neelima, 2016b, p.212) reveals power and politics. This critiques the media's role in shaping public perception of agrarian issues, reflecting Herman and Chomsky's analysis of media manipulation in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988). The characterization of the activist as “not political” and “not deriving any mileage” highlights how genuine activism is often distinguished from self-serving political maneuvering, reflecting the complex landscape of advocacy in a post-truth era. The novel explores the tension between traditional farming practices and the push for modernization. “A farmer Kapil had gone on a 7-day fast and the protagonist journalist Arihant Mohan's continuation of the protests brought into the limelight the issues that plagued farmers over a period of time.” (Neelima, 2016b, p.45) This illustrates how individual acts of protest can bring attention to systemic issues, challenging the fossilized economic paradigm that ignores the plight of small farmers. The continuation of the protest by a journalist highlights the role of media in amplifying marginalized voices and exposing hidden truths.

The text offers practical solutions like self-managed village systems, rainwater harvesting and restoring soil fertility using traditional methods. For instance, Neelima describes “They desired that these projects have a deadline and be utilised to create something the villages might benefit from. They requested an audit of these projects by the village.” (Neelima, 2016b p.250) This emphasis on local control and accountability aligns with Shiva's concept of ‘Earth Democracy’ (2015) which advocates for grassroots decision-making in resource management. The call for village-level audits reflects a desire to reclaim agency in the face of top-down development policies that often fail to address local needs. “The locals produced a very detailed list of demands for soil conservation. All of the modifications were to be undertaken with consideration for the environment. rainwater collection, watershed initiatives, and afforestation through welfare programmes that exchange food for labour.” (Neelima, 2016a, p. 252) This highlights how local communities possess valuable knowledge about sustainable practices that are often overlooked in mainstream agricultural policies. The emphasis on soil conservation, rainwater harvesting, and afforestation reflects a holistic approach to agriculture that stands in contrast to the reductionist methods promoted by the fossilized economic paradigm.

Representations of Truth Vs the Truth

The texts highlight discrepancies between advertised benefits of GMO seeds and the debt burdens farmers face. Neelima exposes the state's capitalistic stance in promoting agrochemicals over protecting farmers and land. In *Riverstones* (2016b) the farmer representative from Telangana questions:

“And why must you allow wheat imports at a higher price and not give us a better price for our produce?” (Neelima, 2016b, p. 215) This reveals the economic policies that disadvantage local farmers, aligning with Shiva's critique of globalized agriculture in *Oneness vs the 1%* (2010a). The question posed by the character exposes the contradictions in agricultural policies that claim to support farmers while simultaneously undermining their livelihoods through unfavorable trade practices. Neelima's novels consistently challenge the official narratives surrounding farmer suicides and agricultural policies. In *Shoes of the Dead*, “28 farmers had committed suicide in the previous 48 days due to the burden of unpayable debts, buying fertilizers and pesticides.” (Neelima, 2013, p.7) This stark presentation of facts contrasts with the often-sanitized official reports, highlighting the human cost of agricultural policies. The specific mention of fertilizers and pesticides links these suicides directly to the chemical-intensive farming practices promoted by the Green Revolution, challenging the narrative of agricultural modernization as unequivocally beneficial. The novels also explore how the truth about farmer suicides is often manipulated or obscured. In *Death of a Moneylender*, the position of Falak is exemplified through these lines.

Falak framed the story that had then turned into multiple narratives. After Shambhu revealed his father's letter, Falak understood the clues to the data, facts, and information that drove news. (Neelima, 2009, p.203)

This illustrates the complexity of reporting on farmer suicides, where multiple narratives compete for attention. The revelation of the father's letter suggests that the truth is often more nuanced than initial reports suggest, highlighting the importance of in-depth investigation in uncovering the real causes of agrarian distress. Farm widows' testimonies reveal the hardships of agriculture despite supposed state support. Their experiences demonstrate how the state fails to address farmers' risk factors. For example, in *Widows of Vidarbha* (2018) she documents the struggles of women like Mira Dhike and Manjubai Rathod, who face bureaucratic hurdles in claiming compensation. “The hypocrisy of the corporate companies that advertise genetically modified seeds for an increase in production, high yield, protection from pests and so on, but the burden of debt that the farmer been levied with does not guarantee the return on investment made.” (Neelima, 2018, p.167) This exposes the gap between the promises made by agribusiness companies and the realities faced by farmers. The use of the term “hypocrisy” directly challenges the truthfulness of corporate advertising, highlighting how post-truth narratives are used to promote products that may ultimately harm farming communities. Neelima's works also explore how the truth about ecological degradation is often obscured by economic interests. In *Riverstones* (2016b) the effect of harmful chemical fertilizers is mapped through the following.

The issue with the land in the Punjab region in particular was that it was gradually becoming parched and dry because of the excessive use of chemical fertilizers and the high cost of seed purchases for the farmers. (Neelima, 2016b, p.178)

This observation challenges the narrative of the Green Revolution as an unqualified success, highlighting its long-term ecological consequences. By linking soil degradation directly to chemical fertilizers and expensive seeds, Neelima exposes how the fossilized economic paradigm prioritizes short-term yields over long-term sustainability. The novels also explore how indigenous knowledge is often devalued in favor of “modern” agricultural practices. In *Shoes of the Dead* (2013)

The farmer who was once organically connected to his land suddenly felt uprooted and disoriented from his traditional knowledge when he compared the produce before and after the use of chemical fertilizers and use of genetically modified seeds (GMOs). (Neelima, 2013, p.23)

This highlights the psychological and cultural impact of the shift to chemical farming, suggesting that the loss of traditional knowledge is as significant as the economic and ecological consequences. The use of terms like “uprooted” and “disoriented” emphasizes the profound disconnect experienced by farmers forced to abandon traditional practices. Throughout her works, Neelima consistently challenges the dominant narratives about agricultural development and farmer welfare. By giving voice to marginalized farmers, widows, and rural communities, she exposes the gaps between official truths and lived realities. Her novels serve as a form of counter-narrative, revealing the complex web of ecological, economic, and social factors that contribute to the agrarian crisis.

Towards a More Equitable Future: Policy Recommendations and the Need for Systemic Change

Based on the analysis of Neelima's works and the application of Shiva's ecological perspectives, this study proposes several recommendations for addressing the agrarian crisis and challenging the post-truth narratives surrounding farmer suicides. The research recommends probing indigenous knowledge systems for agricultural practices. This involves not just documenting traditional farming methods, but actively integrating them into agricultural policy and education. For example, the traditional practice of crop rotation, as mentioned in *Riverstones* (2016b) could be promoted as a sustainable alternative to monoculture farming. The distinctive problems of these marginalized farmers are discussed here. Sakshi posited that the state should let go of two seasons of loans without interest. (Neelima, 2016b, p.214)

This suggests that policy interventions should be tailored to the specific needs of marginalized farmers, taking into account traditional farming cycles and practices. A return to cooperative farming models, though challenging, could be achieved through crop rotation, companion planting, organic fertilizers and reintroduction of cooperative solutions. This aligns with Shiva's advocacy for biodiversity and soil conservation. Neelima's novels often highlight the strength of community-based approaches. In *Shoes of the Dead*, she asserts ecological concerns through the lines. "The locals produced a very detailed list of demands for soil conservation. All of the modifications were to be undertaken with consideration for the environment." (Neelima, 2013, p.250). This demonstrates how local communities can develop comprehensive, environmentally-conscious solutions when given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. Constant interaction with farmers and inclusion of their perspectives in policymaking is crucial. This could involve creating platforms for dialogue between policymakers and farming communities, ensuring that agricultural policies are informed by on-the-ground realities. Neelima's portrayal of the hunger strike in *Riverstones* (2016b) illustrates the power of amplifying farmers' voices: "Ari demanded immediate relief from loans causing the increasing number of suicides, but to Waman, the senior editor, all this seemed like a commercial enterprise." (Neelima, 2016b, p.211)

This highlights the disconnect between farmers' urgent needs and the media's tendency to sensationalize their struggles, suggesting the need for more direct channels of communication between farmers and decision-makers. Active involvement of urban youth in rural farming sectors and application of minimally invasive technology integrated with traditional knowledge is advised. This could bridge the growing urban-rural divide and bring fresh perspectives to agricultural challenges. In *Riverstones* (2016b) Neelima suggests "The urban youth of the nation must be mitigated to interact with the rural youth. The author suggests this could help in exchanging information and adapting to modernization with the realization that life in the cities is as much of a struggle as it is in the villages." (Neelima, 2016b, p.8) This recommendation acknowledges the potential for mutual learning between urban and rural communities, challenging the notion that modernization is a one-way process. Emphasis on ecological sustainability and protection of biodiversity and indigenous practices is needed to address the agrarian crisis. This includes promoting organic farming methods, preserving native seed varieties, and investing in agroecological research. Neelima's works consistently highlight the importance of ecological balance. In *Shoes of the Dead*, (2013) she brings this forth through Sakshi's character "Sakshi from Telangana district voiced her support and expressed that if Ari had lost hope in the fast, it would be dimming the motivation and desire in the hearts and minds of countless farmers across the country." (Neelima, 2016b, p.215). The minister who had visited Ari to address his demands was pleased and shocked at the same time to receive practical recommendations as they coincided with the promises he made during one of his elections. He commented that the wish-list of farmers was a list of requirements for survival. An elaborate plan for soil rejuvenation through research-based projects. Plans like rainwater harvesting, watershed projects and afforestation through food-for-work welfare schemes with time-bound village audits would be used to build something useful for the village and also reward the states that perform well. Also making sure that ration-distribution is in the hands of self-selecting programmes targeted for the below-poverty-line villagers. (Neelima, 2016b, 263). This underscores the interconnectedness of ecological and social sustainability, suggesting that hope for environmental restoration is closely tied to farmers' motivation and well-being. These recommendations aim to challenge the fossilized economic paradigm by prioritizing ecological sustainability, community empowerment, and the integration of traditional knowledge with modern practices. By addressing the root causes of agrarian distress, rather than merely treating symptoms, these approaches offer a path towards a more resilient and equitable agricultural system.

The research also raises important questions about the role of media and information dissemination in shaping public understanding of the agrarian crisis. Neelima's portrayal of journalists like Falak in *Death of a Moneylender* (2009) and Arihant in *Riverstones* (2016b) highlights both the potential and limitations of media in exposing hidden truths. These narratives suggest a need for more responsible and in-depth reporting on rural issues, as well as greater support for independent journalism that can challenge dominant narratives. Furthermore, the study's focus on literary representations of the agrarian crisis opens up new avenues for exploring the intersection of culture, ecology, and economy. Neelima's novels demonstrate how fiction can serve as a powerful tool for raising awareness and fostering empathy around complex

social issues. This approach suggests potential for using literature and other cultural forms as part of broader educational and advocacy efforts around sustainable agriculture and rural development. The research also points to the need for more nuanced policy approaches that take into account the diverse realities of rural communities. The characters in Neelima's novels represent a range of experiences and perspectives within the agrarian crisis, from small farmers struggling with debt to widows fighting bureaucratic systems. This diversity underscores the importance of developing flexible and responsive policies that can address the specific needs of different groups within rural populations. Looking forward, the study suggests several areas for future research. One potential direction is a more in-depth exploration of the role of technology in shaping agricultural practices and rural livelihoods. While Neelima's novels touch on the impacts of genetically modified seeds and chemical inputs, there is room for further investigation into how emerging technologies like precision agriculture or digital platforms might influence the future of farming in India. Another area for future study is the potential for urban-rural partnerships in addressing the agrarian crisis. Neelima's suggestion of engaging urban youth with rural issues points to the need for bridging the growing divide between urban and rural India. Research into successful models of urban-rural cooperation could provide valuable insights for policymakers and activists working to build more integrated and sustainable food systems.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Neelima's fictional works expose hidden truths about farmer suicides that mere data accumulation fails to reveal. Through close textual analysis of *Death of a Moneylender*, *Shoes of the Dead*, and *Riverstones*, we have uncovered complex narratives that challenge dominant post-truth discourses surrounding the agrarian crisis in India. The research highlights how the disconnect between economy and ecology serves elite interests at the expense of farmers. Neelima's novels consistently expose the contradictions between official narratives of agricultural progress and the lived realities of farming communities. As seen in *Shoes of the Dead*, the manipulation of suicide statistics and the bureaucratic hurdles faced by farm widows reveal how truth is often obscured to maintain existing power structures. The indigenous shift towards sustainable agriculture, as portrayed in Neelima's works, offers potential solutions to the ongoing crisis. The novels highlight the value of traditional knowledge and community-based approaches in addressing ecological degradation and economic exploitation. Characters like Sakshi in *Riverstones* demonstrate how local communities possess valuable insights that are often overlooked in top-down policy interventions. The struggle for representation begins with data fabrication, as local authorities and middlemen synthesize a web of indebtedness. Neelima's narratives reveal how post-truth manifests in data reporting discrepancies, invisibility of widows, and denial of justice and representation rights. The character of Gangiri exemplifies this struggle, challenging corrupt systems that seek to obscure the truth about farmer suicides. By examining these issues through the lens of literature, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complex factors driving the agrarian crisis in India. Neelima's novels serve as a form of counter-narrative, giving voice to marginalized communities and exposing the human cost of agricultural policies that prioritize profit over sustainability. The research highlights the need for a holistic approach to addressing farmer suicides, one that considers ecological, economic, and social factors. It suggests that returning to sustainable agricultural practices, informed by indigenous knowledge and supported by responsible policies, may offer a path forward. However, this transition requires challenging entrenched power structures and reimagining the relationship between humans and nature. Neelima's works demonstrate the power of storytelling in challenging post-truth narratives. By humanizing statistics and giving voice to those often silenced, her novels create empathy and understanding that can drive social change. The characters in her books – from the self-sacrificing Desraj to the resilient farm widows – embody the complex realities of rural India, forcing readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the costs of agricultural “modernization.” Future research could explore the potential of collaborative storytelling and participatory action research in amplifying farmers' voices and developing community-based solutions to the agrarian crisis. Additionally, comparative studies of literary representations of agricultural issues across different cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into global patterns of ecological and economic exploitation in farming communities. This study demonstrates the vital role of literature in exposing and challenging post-truth narratives surrounding the agrarian crisis.

Moreover, the study's focus on post-truth aspects in relation to ecological concerns reveals the complex interplay between information, power, and environmental degradation. Neelima's narratives expose how misinformation and manipulation of data can lead to the perpetuation of harmful agricultural practices. The research also highlights the importance of storytelling and narrative in shaping public perception and policy responses to complex socio-ecological issues. Neelima's novels demonstrate how fictional narratives can make abstract statistics and policy debates tangible and relatable to a wider audience. This suggests potential for leveraging creative forms of communication – including literature, film, and other media – to raise awareness and foster public engagement with issues of agricultural sustainability and rural development. Furthermore, the study's analysis of the fossilized economic paradigm in relation to Indian agriculture opens up broader questions about the global food system and its sustainability. While focused on the Indian context, the issues raised in

Neelima's novels – including the dominance of corporate agribusiness, the marginalization of small farmers, and the ecological impacts of industrial farming – resonate with challenges faced by rural communities worldwide. This global relevance underscores the need for international cooperation and knowledge-sharing in developing sustainable agricultural models that can support both human livelihoods and ecological health.

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