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Book Review: Kavitha Iyer, *Landscapes of Loss: The Story of An Indian Drought*

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ABSTRACT :

Kavitha Iyer, *Landscapes of loss: The Story of An Indian Drought*. India: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2020, 248 pp., Rs. 600 INR (Hardback). ISBN: 978-9-39032746-1.

Introduction :

Kavitha Iyer, the author of this book, discussed the very flamboyant matter of the Marathawara, a central region in Maharashtra state in India. Kavitha Iyer has worked really hard on this project. She addressed the problems of farmers and labourers faced by aboriginals due to the scarcity of water and droughts in the region, as well as their political scenario. This book's subject is the recurring droughts in the Maharashtra area of Marathawara and its effects on farmers. She analyzed the societal problem through the geographical, historical, and sociological lens of understanding, which underscored monetary problems, food & lodging issues, leader's limitations, inability to make burning issues (which it should be), political representation, the suicide of inhabitants, including farmers, children, and women, etc. She completed this extensive ethnographic work and covered several dimensions such as chain of droughts, lack of resources, lives from hand to mouth only, searches and struggles for water, exclusion of inhabitants, feeling in and out, ingroup and outgroup in the context of home, and never-ending desire of drought-proof region.

Marathawara is vulnerable to periodic droughts. Because of these droughts and the uneven distribution of water resources, farmers in the region also deal with several other issues, including a rising suicide rate, low levels of education, hunger, bankruptcies, and migration. The eight areas that make up Marathawara are vulnerable to periodic droughts. The primary water sources in these areas are dams and bore wells, which farmers mostly use for irrigation. These areas are home to sugarcane and liquor manufacturers, which together use 60% of the water in the area. In order to eliminate the uneven distribution of water, the high court issued an injunction requiring liquor firms to limit their water usage by 60%. The situation grew worse as a result of unrestrained groundwater resource use. The Marathawara region has a high concentration of sugarcane cultivation despite the crop's extreme fertility for farmers and excessive groundwater use. Drinking water in the Marathawara area is a paid service. Municipal corporations' tankers primarily meet their daily water needs. A water tank vendor in 2016 earned one crore rupees in a single day. Water shortage has turned into a political issue and is not only a problem for farmers. The well-known political disputes between states in the southern region of India include the water disputes in the Krishna River between Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, as well as the Kaveri River between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The effects of the drought on the Marathawara people are not limited to the agricultural classes. Although Maharashtra is the economic hub of India, the Marathawara area within Maharashtra is extremely impoverished, with a relatively low per capita income. The region is experiencing a shortage of water due to its commercial use. Political parties also failed to deliver on their pledges regarding the water crisis. The BJP government's Jal Yukt Shivar Abhiyan is a well-known program, yet it hasn't addressed the issue. The issues facing women farmers are also covered in this book; they work in the fields in addition to running side businesses in horticulture and handicrafts. For the study, Kavitha Iyer conducted in-depth interviews and participant observation. This report gives us a thorough examination of the issues that Marathawara residents face on a daily basis.

This book consists of 10 chapters, and the content has been forwarded by P. Sainath, Mumbai. This five-year comprehensive, critical and in-depth investigation sheds light on the sensitive issues with great understanding. Political parties and their agendas, NGOs, and the government have avoided the pertinent inevitable issues. Even though the selected regions belong to the central part of the Maharashtra state.

Chapter 1

serves as an introduction of the project, delving into topics such as cyclical droughts, farmer agitation, and agricultural crises. Due to water shortage, Marathawara is prone to drought, which causes farmers to experience difficulties with deftness, losses in agriculture, etc. Farmers cannot make a great profit from agriculture because they must pay for the water they use for farming. Water shortage is not only a Marathawara concern; it has spread worldwide and is now an issue in places like Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, New Zealand, Germany, and other sections of Europe that experience drought. Research on drought has been done scientifically. The Marathawara area of India experiences periodic drought. Farmers confront the issue of debt, and they want the government to forgive their debt. The Economic Survey of India for 2018–2019 reports that in 2015–2016, marginal holdings increased

from 62.9% to 68.5%. In 2015–2016, the area utilized by marginal farmers increased as well, rising from 38.9% to 47.4%. Since the Indian government demonetized cash in 2016, things have become worse for farmers. In particular, they are unable to reach ATMs in distant areas. Due to their financial dependence on merchants, they are forced to sell their agricultural products for extremely low prices. An enormous number of people are forced to relocate each year in order to make a living. The historical significance of Marathawara is illustrated by its depiction as a bustling route during the era of the Delhi Sultanate, the Ajanta rock during Vakataka control, the Pitalkhora caves constructed during the reign of Satvahan, and its former reputation as a centre of culture. Currently, however, the Marathawara region is regarded as the most backward due to farmer suicide, malnourishment, socioeconomic regression, dexterity, and other factors. Additionally, government policy is insufficient to solve their issue.

Chapter 2

examines the effects of the periodic drought that Marathawara experiences on farmers. Groundwater and rainfall are the two major resources used in agricultural activities. Taps, communal hand pumps, and bore wells frequently run empty. They use a water tanker provided by the government for their daily requirements and a camp that serves as feed for their animals. The government is keeping an eye on water tanker pricing because they are an important supply of water in Marathawara. Farmers must deal with water shortage in their agricultural methods. Purchasing a water tanker is necessary for them to maintain their crops, which raises farming expenses and renders agricultural methods unprofitable. The lack of suitable restrooms and personal amenities for women and children living near the fodder camp is extremely taxing. At 42 years old, Satish Ghagde Patil makes 6,000 per month working for BSNL on a temporary basis. His grandparents had 100 acres of land in 1970, but due to a land ceiling regulation, he was forced to give it up. As a result, farming ceased to be viable for him. His kids don't want to be farmers as a result. The cyclical drought is having a negative effect on Marathawara's economy. Marginal and landless farmers are forced to relocate to the cities, where they are employed as unskilled labor. Because of its vulnerability to climate change, Marathawara has infrequent and brief rainfalls. In this region, crop damage assessment is not well implemented, and farmers do not fully benefit from it. The government launched the Jal Yukt Shivir Abhiyan, however the CAG expressed concerns about the policy and it was unable to address the Marathawara issue. Numerous communities were also developed when the drought-affected land was assessed. They claim that drought is nothing new to this area. The historian added that similar hunger incidents may be located in historical records from Shivaji's and other rulers' reigns. The Suthankar Committee suggested that jobs be provided in areas hit by the drought. Although the government waives agricultural loans as well, it is insufficient. Farmers have an extremely low credit proportion, according to banks.

Chapter 3,

The first part of this chapter explores the Nath Shashthi ritual, which involves a large gathering on the Godavari River near Aurangabad district, mostly performed by the Warkari community. Devotees sing devotional songs and carry a holy basil plant on their heads. However, in 2019, the Godavari River ran dry, so Jayakwadi Dam released water so that devotees could dip into the river. This chapter gives us a thorough understanding of the plight of farmers and the amount of stress they experience when searching for water for their agricultural use. Rohilgad is known for producing sweet limes, and farmers suffer significant losses in orchard farming due to water scarcity. A large farmer named Babasaheb Khadelbharad possessed 2,500 pomegranate and sweet lime plants. For a water tanker, he must pay nine thousand each day. Because it is connected to the state's employment guarantee program, the government encouraged horticulture and orchard growing in Marathawara. In the area, cotton is yet another widely grown crop. Drought in 2018 forced farmers to remove mature fruit trees from their properties as wells were drying up. The Osmanabad area is facing the most concerning circumstances following a significant decline in water levels between 2017 and 2019 (GSDA). The paucity of water in Marathawara is increasing daily as the water level drops. In 2016, India used 89% of its groundwater for irrigation, according to ADB. Water consumption like this is not sustainable. As far back as 1972, the government had to deal with the shortage of water. Because to its formation by basaltic lava and clever rock, Marathawara's geology does not retain rainwater. Aurangabad district historians claim that Malik Amber popularized and created the *nehar* system. The second capital of the Tughlaq dynasty was declared Marathawara. Ancient Marathawara has experienced drought. A sustainable use of water initiative called Atal Bhujal Yojna is being implemented by the union government with support from the World Bank. The country that uses groundwater the most is India. It exceeds both China's and the United States' in size. By 2050, the problem will worsen as a result of global population expansion.

Chapter 4

majorly relies on the societal as well as political aspects of the selected region and observes that due to a lack of water, Marathawara is seeing an increase in suicide rates. This study has examined a number of suicide events. Kajal, a native of Beed district's Sonimoha hamlet, learned that her father killed himself because to ongoing setbacks in farming and skill. Economic downturns have led to a spike in drug and alcohol addiction among farmers, which is making resources increasingly scarce. Losses in agriculture are not limited to financial issues; they also have an impact on people's mental well-being. The government launched the Prerana Prakalp program, which diagnoses mental health issues, in order to solve this issue. Since agriculture is no longer lucrative, farmers would have to relocate in order to make a living, leaving women, children, and senior citizens behind at home. It is hard for young men to locate a spouse who wishes to reside in a region affected by drought. Over half of the female population is reluctant to seek help from medical experts for mental health concerns. An NGO called Praray assists widows. They organize a self-help group, and this NGO offers legal assistance when necessary. It has been giving homeless widows a place to stay. Latur and Marathawara appeared on television in 2016 in response to the issues people are having with water scarcity. A 12-year-old child passed away from dehydration while attending school, and a 19-year-old also killed herself because she was having financial difficulties. Following such an occurrence, the government offered eight drought-prone districts free transportation to pupils. Another initiative to prevent farmer suicide was launched in 2015 and is called Krishi Samridhi. The public health department has promoted mental health awareness through the use of professionals. Additionally, the Baliraj Chetna program was started to address mental health concerns. This program encourages farmers to be optimistic by using books, devotional hymns, and theatre music. Additionally, ASHA employees have received training in diagnosing and assisting individuals in 14 districts with mental health concerns. However, because ASHA workers are poorly trained, that does not

function well. In the district of Osmanabad, Vyasan Mukti Kendra has also been created. District hospitals handle data on mental health concerns inadequately. The Arunoday program was also started to raise awareness of mental health issues among farmers and to address the issue of drug addiction.

Chapter 5

gives an in-depth understanding of migration in this chapter, which is common in Marathawara. During the cane-cutting season, which runs from October to November, people move to other regions. People migrated mostly for cane-cutting work in Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, and the rich sugarcane belt in western Maharashtra. Although the government has decided to give these labourers minimal support, Marathawara labourers are still considered employees or contract workers. They don't have job security, health insurance, or medical help because they aren't considered official workers. They are paid relatively little for the labour they do. The labourers were forced to live in tents constructed out of big cloth, plastic sheets, tarpaulin, discarded saris, other materials, and bamboo poles. Their standard of living is poor. During the winter, they dwell in the open, which is very exploitative. Not even the most basic amenities like drinking water, bathrooms, and cleanliness are available to them. There are some unfounded rumours that women are being sexually exploited in tents, but no police reports have been made about this. For labourers, there are no set working hours. If necessary, they must labour both days and nights. Children of labourers suffer academically as a result of migration. Numerous NGOs are devoted to promoting their education. Graduate-degree-holding girls' chances of getting married aren't improved unless their dads can afford to pay a dowry. Teenagers are more likely to marry early because married couples are more productive in the cane fields. 2009 saw the mandated attendance of children in schools. They are kept in dorms, midday meals, health care facilities, etc., which the government provides for schools. Girls have to miss school when their parents don't leave them at home for their protection. For cane workers, social security is essentially non-existent. The fifty-five-year-old contractor Hanumant Ngaroje is from Beed district. He used to work as a cane laborer as well, but once he began cultivating wild vegetables, he began to make a respectable living. He's got two sons. One serves in the paramilitary, and the other has training in the pharmaceutical sciences. Maternity leave wasn't offered to women. There is no insurance security for laborers. A welfare board for cane workers was established by the government. Legislation pertaining to labor on sugarcane is desperately needed.

Chapter 6

shows the intricate interplay between farmers and government; they keep farmers off their land. For farmers, government-owned land is the main source of income. In Marathawara, caste conflict is also present. Nashik-based leader Bhaurao Krishna "Dadasaheb" Gaikwad insists that Dalits be allowed to attend temples and make good use of the community. In addition, a number of communist leaders demonstrated in support of Dalits, Adivasis, and other landless groups' claim to land. A Dalit family began farming "Gairan" land. Dalit groups seized 1,08,000 hectares of land between 1978 and 1990. Despite its pledges, the government was unable to provide the occupants with legally obtained land. Land rights and caste hierarchies are connected in rural India. Veteran land rights campaigner Vishwanath Todkar, along with a number of other NGOs and activists, are fighting for the Dalit community's land rights. Tribal people struggle with identity. As a result, other communities make use of the reserves granted to Native Americans. Using occupied acquired areas, the government started a forestry initiative in 2014. The government is then forced to back down and provide farmers land rights once a PIL is filed against them. Due to their lack of legal protection, farmers cannot participate in government programs or subsidies, get insurance or crop loans, or receive compensation for crop losses.

Chapter 7

emphasizes the farmers' migration and livelihood, including small-scale industries, agriculture, and the role of NGOs. For economic reasons, the residents of Marathawara are forced to leave their hometowns. They are mostly workers and lack expertise. The state administration is not aware of any precise data on migrant labourers. They were forced to relocate in order to earn a living, so they left their parents and kids behind. Their children's education is insecure because of their precarious financial situation. Workers in manufacturing must put in a lot of overtime. There is no health security for them. If they need to take a leave of absence, their pay will be deducted. Due to the unreliability of agriculture as a source of income, they are forced to deal with economic hardship, which exacerbates other issues. This place has a very well-established dairy business. Its unorganized milk market, which has 50,000 milch cows, is conducted every two weeks on Mondays and Fridays. Fresh milk is purchased directly from farmers by everybody. Some farmers sell the milk *khoya* they prepare. The Kelkar Committee on Animal Husbandry claims that milk processing may significantly increase their revenue. In Marathawara, children with low GER in primary education are a common issue. Several NGOs, like Sankalp Manav Sanstha, constructed a temporary dormitory for females in order to address this issue. Their parents leave their daughters in transient hostels when they depart to pursue their careers. Young people who were employed in agriculture quit their employment and moved to other areas in search of work due to recurring cycles of crop failure.

Chapter 8,

For farmers, cropping has become a riddle. Canals are vital for agricultural operations. Water tanks are the primary source of daily water supply for the residents of Marathawara. In Marathawara, cane is a widely grown crop that requires a lot of water. Economists and environmentalists recommended against growing cane in Marathawara because of its susceptibility to drought. Because marginal farmers lack enough water tankers, bore wells, and canals, cane crops are exceedingly costly. Because it is a cash crop, the cane crop is profitable. Historically, Marathawara has had less rainfall than other states. Rainfall in Marathawara is steadily decreasing. In Marathawara, the sugarcane industry is growing. The South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers, and People advocates for shared and equitable access to water resources. Additionally, the Maharashtra government has regularized water consumption for both commercial and residential use. Cane output decreased from 2016 to 2017 as a result of Marathawara's groundwater depletion due to water constraints. Groundwater was used for 80 per cent of cane irrigation in 2018, as reported by NABARD and ICRIER. Thombre is the head of the Western India Sugar Mills Association and the man who established the cane business in Marathawara. In 2018, he received the esteemed Krishiratna Award for his suggestion of water-saving techniques with natural sugars. Thombre claims that since cane is a crop that returns, farmers should water it to keep it

constant in the face of market price fluctuations. The Regulatory Agency for Water Management, MWRA, proposed in 2011 that sugarcane fields should not take up more than 10% of a dam's command area in order to maintain fair water sharing. The Kelkar committee's recommendation that sugarcane be a broad crop is causing agricultural imbalances in Maharashtra's drought-prone districts. The Gangakhed case rose to prominence in 2017. A CIBIL report states that the farmer is the subject of an outstanding unpaid debt without their consent. The manufacturing owner has deceitfully acquired this debt.

Chapter 9

explores the role of women in work and agriculture in the selected region and their dynamics. When crops are in season, women labour in the fields. They are also employed by the MGNREGA plan as labourers on building sites. Since women do not legally own land, their suicides are not classified as farmer suicides. After great effort, the Maharashtra State Women's Commission passed a resolution in 2019 granting widows of farmers who committed suicide ownership of their farms. Farmer widows are having difficulty obtaining the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna benefit of a home. WCD assists farmer widows in obtaining government assistance and supports their property rights. Additionally, ATMA NGO advocates for women's rights. Marathawara women began organic gardening in 2011. Women farmers started to make additional money by selling their goods. The government's Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal Maharashtra project for women's empowerment was launched in 2013. Women deal with problems related to their diet, reproductive health, etc. The government runs a number of programmes specifically for women, including the Ujjwala plan, widow pension scheme, and PDS.

Chapter 10,

Australia is experiencing the worst drought phase. Nonetheless, the prime minister made the decision to introduce water regulatory legislation the next year. This ground-breaking Murray-Darling River Basin initiative is implemented to promote the sustainable use of water. Marthawara is dealing with a comparable drought. Additionally, the Indian government intends to send water to the underdeveloped Marathawara basin from the excess river basins of the Konkan. During the rainy season, 400 millimetres of water were obtained from Marathawara and 600 millimetres from western Maharashtra. In addition to the rains that cropland receives, the Godavari River delivers 3,000 cubic meters of water per acre of land through reservoirs and canals; yet, this is insufficient for drought-prone Marathawara. We almost got stuck on the Mumbai-Kolhapur Mahalaxmi Express in July 2019, which is only 60 kilometres from Maharashtra. The report is ready for the river water transfer. For Marathawara, this water connection project holds great significance since it has the potential to address the water crisis. Another project was also underway to address the drinking water issue. This water grid project links 11 dams spread over 8 Marathawara districts. This water grid initiative is a game-changer in Israel; it originated there. Water scarcity is a problem in Israel. They use cutting-edge domestic technology to address the water crisis. The Maharashtra chief minister introduced the Jal Yukt Shivar program; however, due to cyclical drought and a lack of awareness of water, the program was not very successful. In order to maintain the beautiful greenery of western Maharashtra, the Maharashtra government plans to link the Konkan and Krishna basins and supply tap water to every family in Marathawara. Jeevan Pradhikaran of Maharashtra is having trouble acquiring land. The Krishi Vigyan Kendra, which was founded by ICAR and Vijay Anna Borade, launched a successful watershed development initiative in Kadwanchi in 1995–1996. This is beneficial to Kadwanchi farmers. They planted grapes, ginger, and chillies, and they also included pomegranate. Farmers in Kadwanchi practice sustainable farming practices. In Marathawara, farm ponds and horticulture are well renowned. The only way to address the farmer's dilemma in Marathawara is through agricultural allied activities.

Conclusion :

Kavitha Iyer has critically investigated the project with interdisciplinary approach that accumulate many issues together related to the theme of project. Suggestively, students studying sociology, tribal studies, development studies, and agricultural studies should all read this text. This research offers an authentic portrayal of farmers and their predicament. They have numerous tremendous issues as a result of the recurrent drought. However, the scope of this investigation is somewhat limited to selected regions in Maharashtra only. It just paints one image of the issues and leaves out another. Such are challenges with health, education, and other drought-related difficulties. The author should broaden her perspective in contrast of Marathawara's drought situation with that of another city and limited water resources, such as Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh. Nevertheless, this book gives us a thorough grasp of the Marathawara drought issue. This research delves into the policies and programs put in place by the government to address the issue of drought and fair water distribution for domestic, agricultural, and business purposes. This book is crucial for research academics who wish to do ethnographic investigations.

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