

## Post-Independent Agrarian Crises in Selected Indian Fiction

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### Abstract:

The Indian agrarian crisis is a complex, multifaceted issue with deep historical roots, especially since the country gained independence in 1947. Land rights, debt, low agricultural output, environmental degradation, and governmental indifference have been issues affecting Indian farmers despite promises of land reforms and agrarian development. The situation has only worsened over time, leading to an increasing number of farmer suicides, despair in rural areas, and general poverty. This article analyses the causative factors, impact, and literary presentations of the post-independence Indian agrarian crisis. It follows the methodology of close textual analysis while focusing on Shiv Kumar's *Kashi Ka Assi* (1997), an account that focuses on socio-economic issues of rural India. The protagonist of the tale is Raghunandan, a middle-aged teacher from Varanasi, struggling with his inner demons related to spirituality, religion, and the commercialization of faith. He questions religion's place in modern life when he sees the increasing materialism and hypocrisy in the religious rituals of the city.

**Key Words:** Agrarian, Culture, Economy, Farmers, Society, etc.

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### Introduction:

The agrarian crisis in post-independence India is a complex issue that has deeply affected the country's socio-economic structure. After independence in 1947, promises of land reforms and economic justice for rural communities were largely unfulfilled, resulting in a decline in the agricultural sector. The crisis is characterized by poverty, rising debt, exploitation by moneylenders, inadequate land reforms, and environmental damage. Shashi Throor's *The Elephant's Shadow* (1990) presents, "The agrarian crisis in India is not just an economic issue but a matter of systemic exploitation where the rich, feudal landowners continue to thrive at the expense of the marginalized

farmers.” (Tharoor, 56). This crisis leads to rural migration, as many young people sought better opportunities in urban centers, contributing to the erosion of traditional farming practices and deepening the crisis.

Hence, the agrarian distress include rising farmer suicides, social unrest, and growing disillusionment with political promises. In literature, like Shiv Kumar’s *Kashi Ka Assi*, highlights these struggles and exposes the gap between political rhetoric and the harsh realities faced by rural communities. The agrarian crisis is not merely an economic issue but one deeply intertwined with social, political, and cultural factors, requiring comprehensive reforms.

**Text:**

Shiv Kumar’s *Kashi Ka Assi* (2001) is a satirical novel that presents a vivid portrayal of life in Varanasi (Kashi) during the 1980s and early 1990s. The novel is set primarily in Assi Ghat, a well-known area in Varanasi that is home to intellectuals, pilgrims, and local residents. It reflects the city’s spiritual significance as well as its chaotic, vibrant everyday life. The plot unfolds from the experience of the protagonist, Pandit Laxman Prasad, a middle-aged teacher and philosopher who is caught between the socio-political and cultural turbulence of the times. So it’s a man caught between the past and the present. His life revolves around the rituals, practices, and intellectual debates that have defined the city for centuries.

But this all serenity of his world is soon destroyed by political and social changes. In India, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was an era of great political upheaval, marked by the rise of Hindu nationalism, the influence of the BJP, and the eventual Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which started to split secular and religious forces.

Pandit Laxman Prasad’s life becomes more and more entangled in these larger events. Around him are all sorts of characters, each one representing a different aspect of society. There are his fellow intellectuals, political activists, students, and even tourists, who come to Varanasi to experience the spiritual and cultural significance of the place. The characters are eccentric and funny but reflect the complexity and contradictions of the changing times.

In the novel, personal and the political are very intricately braided. Laxman Prasad faces all this radical politics, the changing natures of religious identity, and increasing communal tensions afflicting the country. He often fights his battles of reconciling modernization of Varanasi as a city, the commercialization of its spiritual essence, and the ever-rising religious polarization of the people around him.

As the political movements gain ground, Laxman’s traditional values are challenged by the assertive and radical forces of the new political order. His world once centered around deep spiritual practices and philosophical thought, now feels alien and at odds with the realities of the time.

### Literature Review:

Since independence, Indian literature has served as a window into the agrarian problem, capturing the profound socioeconomic hardships that farmers suffer. Whether they are novels or journalistic narratives, these literary works have examined the profound effects of economic inequality, environmental degradation, feudal systems, and governmental policies that have made rural India's situation worse.

R. K. Narayan's *The Painter of Signs* (1976) subtly attacks the social and environmental implications of the Green Revolution: rising economic inequality and soil degradation. Amitav Ghosh's *Circle of Reason* (1986) and *The Shadow Lines* (1988), which often interlace farmers' activities into greater historical and personal narratives, cast light on the complex links between poverty, marginalization, and the socio-political forces that shape rural communities. Ghosh's texts demonstrate how rural hardship and the subsequent collective political action can be precipitated and how these turnings are ineluctably interconnected with larger dynamics of globalization and migration.

One of the key themes in works such as Sashi Tharoor's *The Elephant's Shadow* (1990) is the feudal system, which still affects rural India many years after colonialism. In this region, farmers are further socially and economically marginalized as powerful landlords continue to dominate labor and land. Similarly, Vasant Moon's 1991 novel *The Long Road* portrays how the rural crisis results in mass migration, causing families to be torn apart and increasing alienation in urban areas.

Even though it is a journalistic book, P. Sainath's *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* (1996) presents an engaging portrayal of rural upheavals and farmer demonstrations within the framework of neoliberal reforms. By showing how grassroots movements oppose firmly established political and economic interests—a recurring issue in post-independence literature—it enhances the fictional works. The economic downfall of Banaras due to social injustice, failed policies, and climatic change is also reflected in Shiv Kumar's *Kashi Ka Assi*, 1997, that gives a poignant portrayal of rural suffering.

*The Dance of the Monsoon* by Nirmal Verma (1998) and *The Minister of the Unfinished* by Keki N. Daruwalla (2003), both of which discuss disillusionment, fragmentation, and unequal shares of the benefits of modernization, effectively convey the emotional toll that the agrarian crisis took on rural communities. These articles examine how government programs and the Green Revolution failed to reach the poorer segments of the rural populace, hence sustaining poverty and long-term exploitation.

*A Farewell to Arms* (2006) by S. H. Vatsyayan examines the psychological strain that causes farmer suicides, a terrible result of crop failures brought on by climate change and economic exploitation. Similarly, Urmila Pawar's 2008 book *The Weave of My Life* explores the sociopolitical movements that emerge in rural areas in reaction to agrarian injustices, emphasizing the strength of group action in the struggle for social change.

Last but not least, books like Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) give a complete social critique as the growing farmer movements that resist unjust government policies and corporate dominance of agriculture have expanded. These movements are spurred by the desperation

of the rural communities, who resist not only the increasing commercialization of agricultural resources but also the neglect of the needs of the state.

In a nutshell, post-independence Indian literature has contributed much to portraying and analysing the agrarian crisis and exposing the plight of farmers enmeshed in a net of social injustice, governmental negligence, and economic exploitation. The pieces critique the greater forces that be shaping Indian society while giving a peek into the experience of rural India. An agricultural crisis of the kind reflected in these pieces would require looking into land reforms, economic fairness, and strategies sustainable enough for overcoming the crises which farmers are made to face.

### **Methodology:**

This study applies close textual analysis to present the socio-economic realities that surface during the post-independence period in India and particularly concerning agrarian crisis and how it hurts people residing in rural villages through the selected text. The approach applied is one of political commentary, cultural critique, and social realism to the work. This approach discusses themes, characters, and narration techniques to unearth Kumar's critique of the agrarian and cultural dynamics of rural India, specifically in Varanasi (Kashi). The research will provide an elaborate comprehension of the complex socio-economic and cultural problems presented by the novel by looking into the use of language, symbolism, and narration. This analysis has revealed critical insight into the lives of the people living in the rural regions of India in the post-independence period.

### **Post-Independence Agrarian Crisis in *Kashi Ka Assi*:**

In *Kashi Ka Assi*, Shiv Kumar portrays the intense agrarian distress experienced by the rural population. He writes, "The agrarian crisis, with its repercussions on the lives of the farmers, is a painful reality that affects the very soul of Kashi" (Kumar 45). This paper illustrates several themes regarding the agrarian crises in Post-independent India.

#### **1. Debt and Poverty**

A central theme of the novel is the crippling debt and poverty that many of the characters, especially farmers, face in rural India. Particularly in emerging countries like India, the relationship between debt, poverty, and agrarian crises poses a serious problem for rural economies. These interconnected elements exacerbate the struggles that farmers and rural communities endure and help to deepen the agricultural crisis. Therefore, poverty and debt are major contributors to this issue because they form a vicious cycle that is hard to break when combined with a faltering agricultural system and a lack of financial stability. The situation worsens as poverty and debt increase, making it more difficult for rural communities to thrive. In order to alleviate the financial burden on farmers and guarantee the long-term sustainability of rural economies, this issue necessitates fundamental changes, enhanced loan availability, sustainable farming methods, and all-encompassing policy support.

"The farmers in the surrounding villages were drowning in debt, their lives controlled by the ever-present shadow of moneylenders, with no hope of escape" (Kumar 45).

This quote highlights the economic struggles of rural farmers, linking them to the agrarian crisis caused by debt.

## **2. Land Alienation and Economic Exploitation**

Land alienation and the exploitation of farmers are recurring themes in the novel. The agrarian crisis is more or less triggered by economic exploitation and land alienation, which is a typical feature in the rural sector. These factors thus weaken the economic underpinning of agriculture and cause great hardship to farmers, making the situation worse. As a result of loss of land and exploitation by moneylenders, middlemen, and major landowners, farmers remain in a cycle of debt and poverty forever. This leads to the degradation of the environment and a drop in agricultural productivity. Addressing these problems and ensuring long-term viability in agriculture calls for comprehensive land reforms, establishment of fair pricing regulations, expanding availability of finance, and development of more equitable economic structures empowering farmers. Shiv Kumar explains:

“Land, once a source of pride and sustenance, had become nothing more than a commodity to be sold at the whims of rich men and politicians” (Kumar 78).

The loss of land and its transformation into a marketable commodity is a major aspect of the post-independence agrarian crisis in India.

## **3. Rural Migration to Cities**

The migration from rural areas to urban centers is another key theme in the novel, which reflects the wider agrarian crisis. Here's a possible citation:

“The youth no longer saw farming as a future; their eyes were fixed on the city, where they believed life would be better, far from the barren fields and old struggles” (Kumar 112).

This quote reflects the disillusionment of rural youth with agriculture, a core part of the agrarian crisis, and their desire to escape to urban centers in search of better prospects.

## **4. Political Failure and the State's Apathy**

Political apathy towards the agrarian crisis and the failure of land reforms are critical in understanding the prolonged agrarian distress. The primary reasons for the chronic rural misery are political apathy and lack of land reforms. Politicians often fail to address the root causes or provide feasible solutions, even when issues such as debt, land dispossession, and poverty worsen. Lack of secure land rights is widespread among the rural communities mainly due to weak enforcement or the delays in the implementation of reforms on land supposed to benefit the farmers, to make resource endowments less concentrated and distribute land equally. This situation worsens without proper political will towards the formulation of fair economic policies and rural investment. This neglect, which prolongs exploitation, rural poverty, and stagnation, makes the agrarian issue

impossible to resolve without significant governmental engagement and significant reforms. Here's the text explains:

“Politicians made promises, but the farmers saw none of the land reforms they were promised; the system continued to grind them into poverty” (Kumar 156).

The broken promises of land reforms by the Indian government contribute significantly to the agrarian crisis, where farmers are left to suffer from inadequate support and policies.

## 5. Traditional Farming Practices and Modern Challenges

Shiv Kumar presents that the novel also touches on the decline of traditional farming practices due to modern pressures, “The old ways of farming were dying, replaced by new methods that demanded money they didn't have, and knowledge they couldn't access” (Kumar 189). The novelist highlights the impact of modernization on traditional farming, a key issue in the agrarian crisis, where farmers face increasing challenges with outdated farming methods and limited resources.

The agrarian crisis in post-independence India, marked by increasing debt, land alienation, and migration, is a central theme in *Kashi Ka Assi*. Shiv Kumar highlights the grim reality faced by farmers in the rural areas surrounding Varanasi that reflects on the constant burden of debt; “The farmers in the surrounding villages were drowning in debt, their lives controlled by the ever-present shadow of moneylenders, with no hope of escape” (Kumar 45). It presents the critical role that financial exploitation plays in deepening the crisis.

Another aspect of the crisis is the widespread land alienation, where land is no longer seen as a source of sustenance but as a commodity to be sold for profit: “Land, once a source of pride and sustenance, had become nothing more than a commodity to be sold at the whims of rich men and politicians” (Kumar 78). As a result of these economic pressures, rural youth are increasingly migrating to cities in search of better prospects: “The youth no longer saw farming as a future; their eyes were fixed on the city, where they believed life would be better, far from the barren fields and old struggles” (Kumar 112).

The novel also critiques the political failure in addressing the crisis, with promises of land reforms never materializing: “Politicians made promises, but the farmers saw none of the land reforms they were promised; the system continued to grind them into poverty” (Kumar 156). This neglect is compounded by the decline of traditional farming practices, which were not suited for the modern economic realities that farmers faced: “The old ways of farming were dying, replaced by new methods that demanded money they didn't have, and knowledge they couldn't access” (Kumar 189).

The agricultural crisis in the novel has grown into a more significant problem that affects the social, cultural, and economic makeup of the area. The entire community suffers as farmers deal with mounting debt, land loss, and subpar crops. Once a center of intellectual and spiritual life, Kashi has seen its traditions erode as a result of growing economic hardship. The farmers are forced to abandon

their farms. As a result, rural-to-urban migration takes place, changing the socioeconomic and demographic character of the region. The rural life of old Kashi is disrupted with this movement and stretches the urban resources. With the decline in agriculture, the social fabric based on farming erodes, causing mass disillusionment and cultural disintegration. Therefore, the agrarian crisis becomes a threat to Kashi's prosperity as a hub of agricultural activity. Shiv Kumar presents, "The agrarian crisis is not just a local issue; it has affected the very fabric of society in Kashi" (Kumar 72).

In *Kashi Ka Assi*, Shiv Kumar has vividly portrayed the agrarian crisis in post-independence India with its focus on Kashi, where economic exploitation, debt, and land alienation have drastically affected both the rural economy and the social fabric. The interlinked issues of poverty and rising debt trap farmers in a vicious cycle of financial distress, as presented in the novel. Land alienation turns to be a major issue as land changed from source of survival to something bought and sold among the elite: "Land, once the pride and lifeblood, was now only something to be bought and sold to rich men and politicians' at the mercy of whims" (Kumar 78). The weakening agricultural base pushes rural youth to cities for better prospects, thus further destabilizing the community: "The youth no longer saw farming as a future; their eyes were fixed on the city, where they believed life would be better, far from the barren fields and old struggles" (Kumar 112). The crisis worsened when the political promises were not kept especially on land reforms and when the traditional methods of farming were crumbling: "Politicians made promises, but the farmers saw none of the land reforms they were promised; the system continued to grind them into poverty" (Kumar 156), and "The old ways of farming were dying, replaced by new methods that demanded money they didn't have, and knowledge they couldn't access" (Kumar 189). The agrarian crisis in Kashi is not just an economic issue but a deeper blow to the region's cultural and social identity. The narrative further underlines that if meaningful political action and reform are not implemented, the agrarian crisis will further degrade the region's future, turning the prosperous agricultural center of Kashi into a symbol of rural decay.

### **Conclusion:**

The agrarian crisis in post-independence India, as vividly depicted in Shiv Kumar's *Kashi Ka Assi*, is a very complex and multifaceted issue that continues to afflict rural communities, especially in regions like Kashi. Through the novel, Kumar masterfully explores the profound social, economic, and cultural repercussions of this crisis. The three central themes of debt, alienation of land, and rural migration paint a bleak picture of rural India where the farmer is stuck in a vicious cycle of poverty and exploitation. The commercialization of land, the failure of political promises, and the erosion of traditional farming practices are seen as pivotal factors that have contributed to the decline of rural life. The novel also depicts the desperation and disillusionment of the rural youth, who view migration to urban centers as their only escape from the hardships of agrarian life. As the crisis deepens, the very fabric of rural communities begins to unravel, leading to a loss of cultural identity and a shift in social dynamics. By Kashi, once a commercial nursery of agriculture, Kumar turns the narrative into a symbol of rural decay, underlining the far-reaching consequences of the agrarian crisis. Finally, *Kashi Ka Assi* stands as a poignant critique of the systemic issues plaguing Indian agriculture. It demands immediate political intervention, comprehensive land reforms, and

sustainable agricultural practices that can address the root of the crisis. Otherwise, the future of rural India, particularly areas like (Varanasi) Kashi, seems very bleak as the crisis not only threatens economic stability but also the social and cultural structures that have been the identity of these communities.

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