



FARMERS' SUICIDES AS REFLECTED IN THE KANNADA PRINT MEDIA – A CONTENT ANALYSIS STUDY

N. Kavitha

Research Scholar in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Mysore.

Abstract

Coverage of farmers' suicides in the media has drawn lot of attention from all spheres. There are varied opinions, from serious critic that the mainstream media do not give adequate space, to the point that the media sensationalize the farmers' suicides. To set the background, status of agriculture, policies of the Centre and State Government and the condition in which the farming is done have been studied. Role of media and the way it is managed has also been studied. Various research studies on the farmers' suicides and also on coverage of farmers' suicides have been analyzed. The change in the agricultural situation with dismantling of State support which fuelled the Farmers' suicides for the last 10 years has been captured. In 2015, the year in which the highest number of farmers' suicides were recorded in a decade, the coverage and content analysis of the same in the Top Kannada dailies, weeklies and Tabloids have been done. The coverage and content analysis of farmers' suicides as reflected in the Kannada media is weighed vis-a-vis recorded number of farmers' suicides in the government department and the actual scenario of the diseased families through field work.

Introduction

The farmers' suicides have captured the nation's attention. It is shocking to note that from 1995 to 2012, about 2,84,763 farmers' have committed suicides in the country.¹ Karnataka state is in the top two position in this with 13.64% in the country's share.²

Various research studies on farmers' suicides give wide ranging reasons and depict the scenario in varied forms. Emile Durkheim looked at, not the beliefs of why someone commits suicide, but at the social factors that may influence a person to commit suicide. He focused on the level of: Cohesiveness within a society. ... A person's standing within the religious, social and occupational groups of the society.³

It is in this background that the real roots of the farmers' suicides posited in the heart of farming crisis needs to be understood. Liberalization policies pursued since 1990s have pushed the marginal and small farmers into the new terrain which is dictated by the market forces with almost no State support. Prof. M.S Swaminathan led Farmers' Commission while documenting these causes, recommended that farming should be made sustainable by massive State support.⁴

The role of Kannada media in the coverage of agricultural news and farmers' suicides is studied. An attempt has been made to understand how the media works? How it generates operating costs? What are the factors which determine the coverage farmers' suicides?, etc.

Studies on media coverage of farmers' suicides

Various research scholars – A.R. Vasavi⁵, Prof. R.S Deshpande⁶, Institute for Socio-Economic Change, Dr. Veeresh⁷ led committee which is constituted by Government of Karnataka, Prof. S. Nagaraj⁸, Madras Institute for Development Studies and many others have done good number of studies on farmers' suicides.

As regards to research work on farmers' suicides as reflected in the media and content analysis of the same, very few studies – P. Sainath, Centre for Media Studies⁹, etc.- have been undertaken. CMS have done very good analytical study on how the mainstream media covers farmers' suicides. There is no research work on farmers' suicides as reflected in Kannada media and content analysis of the same.

Methodology

Important Research Studies on farmers' suicides have been reviewed. Record of farmers' suicides in the last 10 years and the changing agricultural scenario is studied. In the study period, 2015, content analysis of Top 3 Kannada dailies – Prajavani, Vijayavani and VijayaKarnataka for 90 days, 2 Weekly – Sudha and Taranga for 3 months, 2 Tabloids – Agni and Lankesh Patrike for 3 months, were studied for June to August.

The content analysis was compared with the Field studies undertaken in 3 villages each in 3 districts – Ganada Hosuru, Sanaba and Panakanahalli of Mandya District, Kannavalli, Kurugunda, Chowdaiah Danapura of Haveri district, Lakkanahalli, Kotta and Tayappana Hatti of Tumakuru District. The content analysis method adopted here is the Relational Analysis type with both quantitative and qualitative tools¹¹. MS-Excel Software was used for analyzing and computation of data generated.



Media Content Analysis of farmers' suicides

About 3,722 farmers committed suicide for the years from 2003-04 to 2015-16 (excluding 3 years preceding 2015-16 as the data is not available)¹⁰. The data on number of farmers who committed suicides varies from State to Central Government. The number of farmers' suicides for 2015 June, July, and August recorded in State Government are 25, 208, and 217 respectively and data recorded by the Central Government are 20 and 152 for June and July respectively and the data is not available for August.

In the content analysis of 3 Kannada dailies, the reports, special report/opinion page, editorial page and front page covered are captured for the study period. In this again, total column centimetre space given and the number of farmers' suicides reported on a daily basis have been captured. For this period, a detailed content analysis of why the farmers' committed suicide, whether the media narrates the factual details and causes, how much space the media gives, etc. are studied. In the case of Kannada Weekly and Tabloids, the space provided for farmers' suicides are measured along with content analysis.

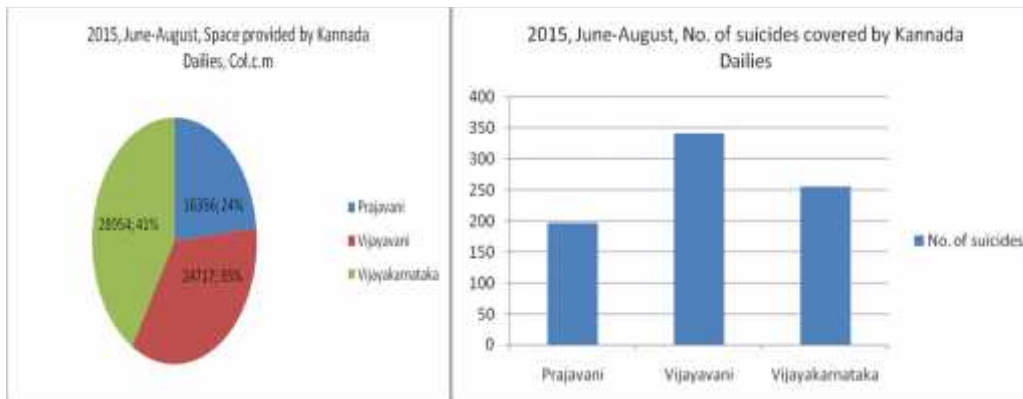
The content analysis was weighed vis-a-vis factual situation in which the family of the farmers are living and reasons for which he/she committed suicide were done in the field studies in various families in 9 villages of 3 districts – 1 in North Karnataka and 2 in South Karnataka.

Further relative analysis of the media content was done in a series of interaction held with various Leaders of Farmers's Organizations, Media experts, Agricultural Experts, Economists, Academicians and Activists.

Results and Discussions

Coverage in dailies

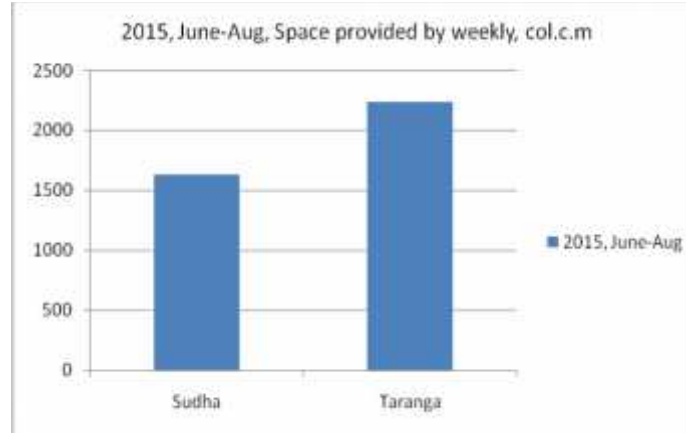
In 2015 (June-August)	Front page	Editorial	Special Report	Report	Total	Space (col.c.m)	No. of suicides covered
Prajavani	5	5	28	35	73	16356	196
Vijayavani	6	7	43	24	80	24717	341
Vijayakarnataka	24	4	25	35	88	28954	255
Total	35	16	96	94	241	70027	792



- In 2015 June-August, out of three Kannada dailies, Vijaya Karnataka, VijayaVani and Prajavani have provided 28,954 col. c.m (41%), 24,717 col.c.m (35%) and 16,356 col.c.m (24%) space respectively.
- In the same period, Vijaya Karnataka, VijayaVani and Prajavani have reported 196, 341 and 255 farmers' suicides respectively and published 73, 80 and 88 reports/ editorials, etc.

Coverage in Kannada weekly

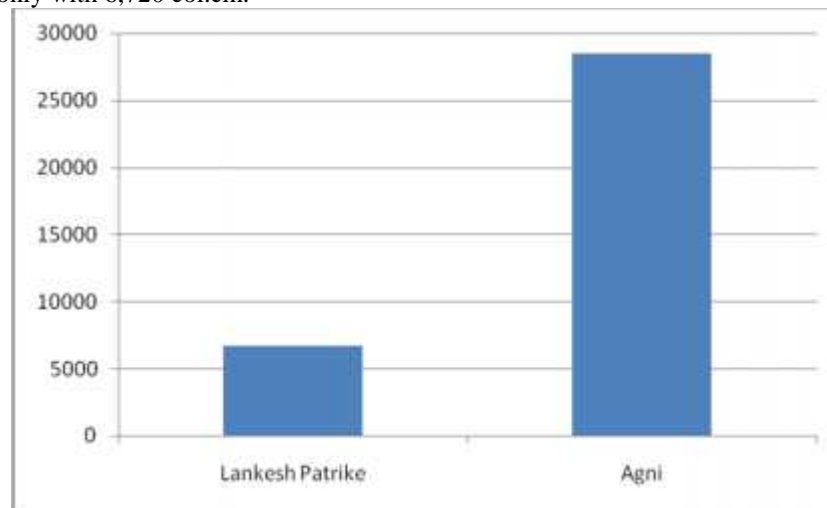
- In 2015 June-August, Kannada Weekly, Taranga has provided 192 col.c.m, 408 col.c.m and 1632 col.c.m for June, July and August respectively. Whereas, Sudha has provided a space of 1632 col.c.m for the month of June and not provided anything for the months of July and August.



- It should be noted that the space provided by Sudha magazine is only related to Agricultural news and not on farmers' suicides. In case of Taranga, the space provided is not entirely for the farmers' suicides but the issue is mentioned in articles which talk about general political situation.

Coverage in Kannada Tabloids:

- In 2015 June – August, Agni Tabloid has covered 32 articles with 28,464 col.cm, whereas Lankesh Patrike has covered 8 articles only with 6,720 col.cm.



2015, June-Aug, Space provided by Tabloids, Col.c.m

- It should be noted that Agni Tabloid has been able to give a comprehensive picture of the status of agriculture in Karnataka, reasons for the farmers' suicides and the policy orientation required to arrest the same.

Relative Analysis of Content Analysis with Field Studies and Interaction with Experts:

- The relative analysis points out that the main stream Kannada media has not been able to cover the all the farmers' suicides recorded by the Government. As regards to comparison of content analysis with the factual conditions of the diseased families, there have been efforts to present the reality except on three occasions out of 9 reportings. However, the important aspect of report coverage points out that the main stream Kannada media fails to present the factual aspects in its entirety with comprehensive coverage. Agni Tabloid is an exception to this.
- The Experts from various sphere presented the argument that the media's role as fourth pillar of democracy is getting diminished as the focus of the mainstream media is getting shifted to trivial issues and sensationalism.

Conclusions

- Kannada Daily Vijaya Karnataka stands atop in terms of providing more space to farmers' suicides with 41% whereas in terms of coverage of no. of farmers' suicides, Vijayavani stands first with 450. Vijaya Karnataka also stands first in terms of publishing more number of reports i.e 88.



- Among Weeklies, Taranga has covered farmers' suicides with relatively lesser news on this. Among Tabloids, Agni weekly's efforts are laudable as they have been able to publish few good reportings/ special articles.

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