

NOTE

Raut's Suicide

R S writes :

Suicide notes in Vidarbha are at times addressed to the Prime Minister, the desperate last cries of voices that went unheeded when alive.

Seeking authenticity for his letter to the Prime Minister and the President, Ramachandra Raut composed it with care on a Rs 100 non-judicial stamp paper. Then he added a few more addressees, including his village sarpanch and the police, in the hope that it got home some place. Then he killed himself. A mere digit in the nearly 250 farm suicides that hit Vidarbha in four months; but a villager desperate to be heard on the reasons for his action: "The two successive years of crop failure is the reason." Yet, "bank employees came twice to my home to recover my loans". (Despite a government order to go slow on recovery in a region hit by crisis, crop failure and more recently, drought).

Raut's suicide being the third in a month in Dhotragaon in Washim district, the village wants to see it spreads no further. "We try and meet every evening for an hour, all of us, anyone who will come," says Nandkishore Shankar Raut from Dhotragaon. "The idea is to keep people's morale up." So Dhotragaon counsels itself. Ramachandra Raut's letter was also an appeal not to be misunderstood. "Don't trouble anyone in my home," it tells the police. "I am fully responsible for my action." The stamp paper suicide note carries the seal of the deputy treasury officer of Mangrulpir tehsil dated March 29, and that of the stamp vendor who issued it to Raut on April 7. Raut filled it in and took his life the same day.

The family owes the banks Rs 1.5 lakh. His village pooled money to observe his 13th day ritual, sparing Raut's indebted family further expense.

Of the five states that account for two-thirds of all of India's farm suicides, Maharashtra is by far the worst. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) the State logged 41,404 farm suicides between 1997 and 2008. That is, more than a fifth of the national total of nearly 200,000 in that same period. Of those 12 years, NCRB data show, the years 2006-08 have been the very worst. Within the State, Vidarbha has been the focal point of the tragedy. □□□