

BREAKING DOWN OF SOCIAL SUPPORT PATTERNS IN AGRARIAN PUNJAB: A SOCIOLOGICAL LIGHT ON FARMERS' SUICIDE IN PUNJAB'

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Abstract: Over the decades agriculture and problems related to farmers is widely discussed. For the survival of livelihood, the food grain production is important and as so the farming community. Therefore it is indispensable to ease the problems related to farmers and farming. This article makes an attempt to understand the increase in phenomena of suicide among farming community from sociological angle. Modernization, mechanization and economic factors are always being blamed for crisis and breakdown of farming community but these are the surface factors beneath these the reason is very much social. Breakdown of joint family culture, social support system from kinship, decreasing social tolerance and formalization of the social transactions and cultivating culture played big role in cropping of crisis situation and giving impetus to problems. Hence suicide is on increase among farming community.

Keywords: Punjab, farming community, culture

1.0 Introduction

Agrarian system is given priority in research and in framing policies of the nation. Food grain production has gone through many significant changes with introduction of new technologies. Simultaneously it brought changes in other spheres like crop selection, cultivating pattern and in social institutions too. When we trace Punjab's agriculture history then mode of production and relation of production has gone through significant changes with time. Production had increased manifold and become food basket of India.

With production the total gamut of social setting also changed. Now it is evident from various research reports that in agrarian settings maintaining social stability is at stake. Living conditions is upset with rising competition and with unequal access to vital resources, leading to the exclusion of poor communities and marginalized groups from agriculture. Increasing suicide rate is one of the results of crisis situation in agrarian society .

Number of studies stated that the turn around in Punjab's agriculture has been so unsettling that it has earned the name of 'crisis' from the mid-eighties (Singh, 2004; Siddhu, 2002; Singh, 2000). Profit margins of the farmers have come down dramatically (Singh and Kolar 2001)

Durkheim defines that suicide is an individual act but the rate of suicide is a social fact that is a reflection of society's condition.

Society is developing as so its institutions. As Auguste Comte defines development from one stage to another is accompanied by moral development with several changes in social institutions as well.

Manifestations of agrarian distress can not only understand from economic lens. The economic factor does not play role in isolation. As Mohanty (2005) discussed the Durkheim types of Suicide and described farmer suicides in India in context of egoistic type and anomic type that anomie is the effect of egoistic. Somehow he explained it in losing social integration. But author lack in understanding the other side that is the role of support and affection farmer getting from primary relations. **2.0 Situation in Punjab**

Punjab is trapped in many problem so its farmers. Farmers take loans from formal as well as from informal sector. This process is ages old has become a custom but now what went wrong that farmers are getting stress and opting the path of suicide. Where is the collapse taken place? The rate of increased phenomena of farmers' suicide indicates that something has gone wrong. Credit system is ages old. As M Darling said farmer born in debt, live in debt and die in debt but why now farmer committing suicides because of indebtedness. Scholar blames debt as cankerworm in farming and recognized as major reason for suicides and distress in agrarian society of Punjab.

According to study commissioned by the Government of Punjab in 2011, a total of 6926 persons (3954 farmers and 2972 labourers) committed suicide in the state during 2000-11. The total outstanding farmers' debt in the state is about Rs 52438 crore with the average farm household debt at Rs 4.98 lakh for the year 2012-13.

Punjab farmers feel proud in farming and feel very much attached with their land. It is a well-known fact that the net returns from agriculture has reduced considerably. But the other side of reality is that depeasantisation, leasing out land, shrinking land holding size and indebtedness among farmers has also increased.

The agrarian sector of the country has undergone a process of rapid capitalistic change during liberalization leading to concentration of land in few hands and proletarianisation of small peasantry (Haque 1996). Intensive agricultural production in the state has caused environmental degradation such as fall in water table, deterioration in soil health, perpetuating pest problem and eroding bio-diversity, apart from imbalanced use of farm resources and associated social problems, etc. (Singh et al., 1997).

According to Deshpande and Arora (2010) pointed the reasons behind farmer suicides are indebtedness, illiteracy and lack of basis support facilities related to health and education.

3.0 Objectives of the study

The issue of agrarian distress is acute and it is turning more intense with time. In this prospective the present paper is aim to understand the social situation of farmer who committed suicides from sociological angle. To know the social support from primary relations to the farmers facing stress.

The efforts in the study would be to understand if there is some social relations and social dependency.

4.0 Methodology

Since the Problem demands qualitative research thus the case study method is used for collection of data and through primary and ethnographic study the details of the cases are find out. Cases from Sangrur district was taken and only those families of those small landowner (less then 2.5 acres) was selected who committed suicide in past one year.

5.0 Data and Understanding from sociological angle

Farmer L. Paviter singh aged 52 the landowner of 2 acres of the land it was observed that Paviter Singh was the only son and having debt of 8 lakhs. He has 3 daughters and one son. He was not earning much from agriculture. Arthiya and cooperative society was his source from whom he took credit. He did not own big agriculture implements. He hires all those by giving cash when required. His wife looked after the cattle and all 4 childrens were studying. Paviter

Singh mother and father died since long time ago. He had very good reputation the village. He was very social and kind person. From last four five years his agriculture was not giving him any profit. Agriculture supported him in providing food grains and vegetables for the survival of the family. For fulfilling the other basic needs of the family he kept on taking credit from the arhtiya. One day Paviter Singh did not come home and after two days his body was found from the canal (nehar). His wife is uneducated and she even does not know amount the debt as paviter singh never discuss any thing with her. She was in shock position that thy have 8 lakh of debt on their head. Paviter Singh wife mentioned that if her husband would have discussed the problem then might her parents would helped them. He was the only son and his other relatives lives in rajasthan.

Neighbours of the family also mentioned that farmers from last few ever talk less to villagers. He even stopped attended village functions.

6.0 Analysis: it was observed that Paviter Singh did not discusse his stress and economic situation with his wife and also with any other social relation. He even did not have any friend in the village. Those who are in talking terms with Paviter Singh mentioned that Paviter Singh was sincere person and they were ready to help him if he would have approached them.

2. Ranjit Singh is a cultivator and inherited the 3 acres of fertile agricultural land 1998 after division of ancestral land. He was able to cultivate the crops of his own choice. In kharif season he cultivated rice and cotton whereas in rabi season he cultivated wheat. Ranjit Singh was three brothers. Ranjit Singh was the eldest of all and got the responsibility of parents to look after them after breaking of joint family. After breaking of joint family all the brothers ended the relations with one another and started living their lives peacefully.

Ranjit Singh was very simple and hardworking farmer. He had good terms with his neighbours at farm. He hires instruments and tractor from neighbouring farmer in exchange of cash. He spent money in updating the standard of living. Ranjit Singh has two daughters and two sons. He also had cattle"s which was cared by his wife. He during peak seasons hires labour and rest of the work in the field he did himself with the support of family. With time his parents got old and died. He continued his agriculture which was not much profitable. Attachment to the land and lack of any other skills were the main reasons because of which Ranjit Singh continued his agriculture profession. He wanted to send his sons abroad for their better future. He even planned to leased out his half of the land to neighbouring landowner.

Ranjit Singh elder son Sonu dropped school and joined father in farming. Ranjit Singh took loan from bank and Arhtiya for sending him abroad. Sonu went abroad and never turned back. Ranjit Singh wife mentioned that after reaching abroad sonu stopped calling them. Sonu even never send any money to them.

Ranjit Singh was under debt of 18 lakh. Still he somehow managed to married his second son name Happy. The situation changed when Happy his son got separated from father Ranjit Singh and started living with his in laws. Ranjit Singh felt very sad from his step. Ranjit Singh wife mentioned that Ranjit Singh health deteriorated after separation of son. On one winter night ranjit Singh body was found from the fields. After diagnose it was found that he consumed pesticide. **Analysis**

Ranjit Singh was enjoying comfortable economic situation after owning land. He having cordial relations with his fellow villagers. On social occasions and on religious day entire family go to Gurudwara together.

It was observed that Ranjit Singh did not get any support from his sons. His wife mentioned that he was happy when his son migrated abroad but all dreams broke down when he stopped calling them and never sent them money too.

3 This is the case of Nichhater singh a small cultivator with 2.5 acres of land. He had a Kuchha house and very simple living. He had 3 daughters. He had good terms with his brother too. Village sarpanch house is just next to his house. He had very good terms with him. For installation of pump he took loan from arhtiya. Later he again took credit from sarpanch for his daughter marriage. Wife does have cordial relations with relatives and kins. Both husband and wife had very good reputation in the village. One day Nichhater singh was very depress because of mounting rate of interest on his loan from arhtiya. He discussed with his wife about amount of the loan. Further his other two daughters were turning to age of marriage. One day he went to arhtiya for discussing the loan amount and after coming back home

nichhater and his wife and big fight over the mounting loan. Nichhater Singh asked his wife to sell his gold ornaments for repaying the loan but she refused and in anger Nichhater Singh drank pesticide bottle.

Analysis

Simple living and agriculture as only source of income are still not sufficient for peaceful life. When husband and wife fought on some point and no other member of the family helped in settling the dispute then situation turned worst from that point. Somehow even husband and wife did not able to solve the problem. None from his relative's sides were called for solving the problem and for support, in such a situation Nichhater Singh took such a big step and ended his life.

In many other cases it was observed that lack in support from primary relationships instigated the situation to turn to worst. Lack of social support from family members was very much common now days.

In another case of Manpreet Singh, it was observed that he had a dispute with his brother over division of land. None of the relative supported Manpreet Singh for getting fertile piece of land during family partition. He was younger to Amanpreet Singh. Parents gave fertile land and pump to Amanpreet Singh and in anger Manpreet Singh committed suicide. Though in division of ancestral land he was getting equal share of land but he was not getting the land of his choice. Amanpreet Singh was elder and parents were living with him so parents gave more fertile land to Amanpreet Singh as he had more influence on his parents. Earlier both brothers and father were cultivating the entire land together and Everything was going very well but with time, females in the family had a dispute with each other so the parents decided to separate the brothers and divide the land to end daily dispute into equal share. Amanpreet Singh was educated and having good terms with all uncles (Chache and taye). Manpreet Singh was youngest in the family and also had temper issue's.

Analysis

Just because of lack of social support from parents Manpreet Singh took the wrong step. His wife and children left alone. Now his wife leased out their share of land to Amanpreet singh. When Manpreet Singh choice did not get fulfilled then he got angry. In such situation his wives did not able to control and pacify frustrated Manpreet Singh. It was observed that Manpreet Singh felt bad and frustrated that his parents did not support them. He not able to take this and at lack of supporting system from wife and cooperation from parents Manpreet Singh committed suicide.

This is the case Keval Singh a small illiterate farmer. His wife left him because of poor financial condition. His wife took his only son with him. He was left with no one in the family. He did not have money to spend on improving the productivity. Later he faced an accident and got some physical problem. He had debt from non institutional sources for his treatment. So he could not able to do maintain his farming because of health issues and also because of less profitability thus he leased out land to his one of the big land lord. He became a drunker. He got discarded from his relative because of his drinking problem. His wife tried to posses his land. In all such dispute he hanged him.

Analysis

After discussing his case with his relatives and neighbour it was found out that Keval Singh was left with no social relation. He even got social boycott from the society because of his drinking problem. He was not tolerating any one in his neighbours. He usually fights on petty things with all. Even the Land lord who took his land on lease for cultivation did not pay him rent on time. His debt was increasing year after year. He had no one to talk about his social as well as his financial problems. Thus he took the step of suicide.

7.0 Result and Conclusion

The present study has helped in understanding the role of social supporting system in the facing the problem. Social changes are taking place within social relations which somehow disturbing the old fabric and social bonds among

relationships as well as in with fellow society members. *Lihaj* system and *saanjh* system are loosening their hold in the close relations. It also highlighted that joint family system was a big regulating factor during crisis situation. The role of social factors like social insitutions (family, kinship), cooperation in social life and in mitigating the stress situation is observed.

Social discrimination is also one of the social problems faced by indebted families. Frustration because of not fulfilling the social aspiration and not getting support from social relations create a gamut of distress in living condition. It is imperative to understand that how the changes in social settings and in social relations are affecting farmers. Social factor behind agrarian crisis and increasing rate of farmers' suicide is observed. Lack in Social support, social Tolerance and cooperation from close relations are important determining factor in aggravating the farmers for committing suicide.

While asserting that the externalities of economic crisis were also present in the cases but lack in social regulating factors was also found in the cases. Traditional settings and culture has been replaced by new artificial and superficial relations. It was ensured from all the cases that affection and love for near and dear ones to the farmer who committed suicide were quite weak. Farming community is finding hard to survive in economic distress and a situation where social stigma of indebtedness and social conflict with closes ones are acting as fuel in the fire.

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