

Social Transformation in Rural Society and Social Unrest in Punjab

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Abstract

Punjab is a border state which contributes in a big way to ensure the food security of India. As an agrarian society, it had to pass through the various economic as well as social phases. The model of the development of agriculture has its own achievements as well as limitations which has posed the serious questions. The agrarian crisis created the sound ground for the emergence and growth of agrarian struggles which could not achieve its goal due to several reasons. The failure and fragmentation of agrarian movement pushed the entire farming community in a unique dilemma. The sense of "alienation of work" and form the "self" is resulting into suicides which indicates the severity of widespread depression in the working community of rural India. Drug addiction and alcoholism has made its grip on the large youth population. In such a situation, there has been a proliferation of "deras" which are working as "counseling centres", expanding their base among the lower segments. These "deras" are enjoying name, fame, huge income and property without any fear in the wake of no appropriate politico-legal mechanism to check them. The present paper makes a modest attempt to highlight socio-economic crises being faced by the lower segments of the rural society which has become the cocktail of "drugs", "deras" and "gangsters".

Keywords: Rural society, Drug addiction, Youth, Punjab

JEL Classification: R58, Q19, J13

Introduction

Society is not homogeneous, it is full of varieties and variations which provides dynamism to it in the form of progress, development and change. Maclver and Page (1949) opined that it is always changing. No aspect of social life is more challenging than the process of change. Rejection and replacement of old and emergence and development of new one, is the universal law

which provides motion to the matter in form of change. This phenomenon of change occurs at the individual as well as the social level. The changes occurs in the structure and style of functioning at the macro level, is known as social change but social transformation implies a fundamental change in the society which can be contrasted with social change viewed as a gradual incremental changes over the period of time. It encompasses a wide range of institutional and cultural changes in the society (Khondkar and Schuerkens, 2014).

Social transformation is viewed as a process of transfer over a period of time in the positions and performances of the different segments of the society in term of economy, technology, ideology, culture and polity. In the context, law attains it's importance as a distinct subject which is deeply concerned with society, not only as a tool of stability and sustainability, but also as a force of social transformation.

“Law and transformation” has it's own importance which need to understand the problems of the society and their solution through legal mechanism. There are two modes of changing law. Firstly, law as an instrument of socio-legal force compels the society to push for social transformation which can be seen as “Judicial Activism”. Secondly, society change its law according to the requirement of the existing social order in which the legislation play a major role as a constitutional body which operates through the formulation and enactment of new laws or amendments, while judiciary operates through the interpretation according to the rule “Rule of law” and “Law of Land”. In this way, the process of social transformation goes on both ways.

The transformation occurs in the technological and economic fields very fast as compared to culture, ideology and law. In the context, it would be useful to analyze the changes and issue emerging rural society and need to discuss the role of law and an instrument in process of social transformation. In the first section of the paper, an attempt is made to capture the transformation occurring in the agrarian sector and the second section discusses the role of subjective forces to understand the emerging social scenario in the state.

Data Sources and Methodology

The first section which deals with the agrarian situation at the macro level is based on the secondary sources i.e. Statistical Abstract of Punjab, Agricultural Census of Punjab and studies of research scholars published in journals. The consequences of the model of development of the agrarian sector in the form of suicides are discussed in the profile of victims and causes / reasons are explained on the basis of empirical studies conducted by scholars over the period of time. The second section which deals with the socio – political response of rural community is explained on the basis of empirical studies of individual scholars and institutions, journals and data published in the newspapers.

Results and Discussion

On the basis of quantitative and qualitative data analysis, it has been brought forth that the agrarian crisis is deepening in wake of structural crisis and socio – economic disparities due to the lack of socio- political will. Punjab as a border state shares 1.53 percent in the geographical area of India and produced 27.92 percent of the total wheat and rice produced in the country in 2014-2015. Punjab is known for its contribution towards India's food self-sufficiency.

With the advent of “green revolution”, there is a considerable change in the cropping pattern. The area under wheat has increased two and a half times since 1970s. The area underwrits which occupied only 6.87 per cent of gross cropped area during 1970-71 rose to around 36.30 per cent in 2013-14. Wheat and paddy cropped rotation has been established over the period of time. Both rice and wheat together contributed 31.6 percent towards the production in 1966-67, which touched the highest during 2010-11 (84.2 percent), before

resting at 76.9 percent in 2014-15. The contribution of wheat which was 27.9 percent of the total production during 1966-67, increased to 47.5 percent in 1980-81, and thereafter, remained between 43 percent and 50 percent. Surprisingly, rice which contributes only 3.8 percent to the total production during 1966-67 saw a gradual increase in its contribution towards total production. In spite of the fact that paddy and wheat provide very low value of output per hectare, in Punjab 81.3 percent of the total cropped area is under rice and wheat. One of the major reasons which keep the farmers engaged for cultivation of wheat and rice is their assured procurement at the Minimum Support Price, which is not available for the other crops. In addition to it, the “green revolution” catalyzed multi-dimensional rural economic development. Due to that very reason, Punjab became a model state for a capitalist development of agriculture and in terms of per capita income. But it started showing signs of stagnation in returns by the late 1970 and early 1980s. The government's new economic policies further disrupted the fragile economy. The inability of a workforce shifting from agriculture to industry, and the increasing pressure of a growing population on agriculture and land. In addition, other factors

such as crop failure, lack of research and extension services, mounting indebtedness, an interlock credit/input-output product market, and a mismatch in the input costs and the prices of produce have deepened the crisis.

Although, state government offers various benefits to the farm sector such as subsidies for power and fertilizers, and credit to augment productivity and profitability which could not cater the needs of small holding peasants. The other subsidies have the similar story because small holdings are not viable without the support of supplementary income (Chandra 2001). This situation has pushed the peasantry in the crisis which can be seen in the form of the process of “de-peasantization”. The macro data which is given below establish this fact (Table 1).

The above table clearly indicates the process of “de-peasantization” which took momentum in the era of "New Economic Policy". 10.35 percent poor peasants, had to leave the agriculture as their occupation between 1990-91 to 2010-11. They have to shift towards the other occupations for their livelihood. The study conducted by PAU has established the fact that the phenomenon of de-peasantization has pushed the poor peasantry into downward occupational social mobility in

Table 1. Distribution of operational holdings in Punjab

Year	(per cent)			
	Upto 2 ha	2-4 ha	4-10 ha	>10 ha
1980-81	38.61	27.98	26.20	7.21
1990-91	44.74	25.88	23.37	6.01
1995-96	35.44	29.30	27.93	7.33
2000-01	29.70	32.89	30.19	7.22
2005-06	32.61	31.80	29.51	7.08
2010-11	34.39	30.86	28.40	6.65

Source: Agriculture at a Glance, Directorate of Agriculture, Punjab

the form of construction and factory workers, petty shop keepers, milkmen etc. (Singh and Bhogal, 2014). This downward occupational social mobility pushed them in socio-psychological pains because in our society, the prestige dignity and honor have deep connection with the issue of ownership and cultivation of land. The loss of dignity due to the shift in the relatively low level of occupation greatly harmed their social status in the society.

The another important aspect of the agrarian sector of Punjab is that it has to depend on the institutional and non-institutional sources. Among the non institutional sources of finance, commission agents were the most widely accepted sources (Singh *et. al*, 2009) because of their easy accessibility due to reciprocal economic relations. The commission agents popularly known as arhtiya, katcha-arhtiya, or moneylenders, now act as a crucial link between farmers and buyers. For a commission they offer to sell agricultural produce in the market. Farmers have become increasingly dependent on commission agents for a steady flow of cash not only for farming, but also for other vital needs. They have

become the exploitative alternative for supply of credit, farm and domestic inputs as well as sale of produce.

These agents are an integral part of the state's agricultural marketing system, wherein farmers are under obligation to sell their produce to buyers channeled through them for which they charge a commission receive payment and then disburse the same to the farmers after deducting outstanding loan amounts (Singh and Dhaliwal 2011). The farmers remain at their mercy. There is no check and balances on them because not even a single commission agent was registered as a moneylender in Punjab in violation of the rules of Punjab Registration of Money- Lender's Act 1938.

The entire peasantry is suffering from indebtedness, the total debt of Punjab farmers during mid 1990s was Rs. 5700 crores with an average of Rs. 51029 per farm household (Shergill 1998) which reached to Rs.21064 crores with an average of Rs. 1,78,934 per farm household in 2005-06 (NSSO, 2005).

The process of impoverishment and indebtedness has become the major problem for the peasantry which is resulting into rural

Table 2. Profile of suicide victims

Particulars	IDC (1998)	AFDR (2000)	Iyer & Manick(2000)	PAU (2009)
No. of Districts	4	4	1	2
No. of Villages	14	29	11	875
Cases of Suicides covered	53	79	75	2890
Percentage of cultivators	55	84.8	66.66	60.8
Percentage of agricultural labour	45	15.2	33.33	39.2
Percentage of small and marginal farmers	25	65.7	84	86

Source: Data published in the above mentioned studies/reports

distress and psychological stress in the form of suicides. The phenomena of rural suicides came into the light in mid 1990s which was very unique in itself. Before the discussion on its causes, it would be useful to study the profile of suicide victims prepared from the studies conducted by Institute for Development and Communication (IDC) (1998), AFDR (2000) Iyer and Manick (2000), and PAU (2009) to understand the phenomenon prevailing in the rural Punjab.

The above table indicates that the farmers who committed suicide were mainly poor peasants and landless laborers who suffer from maximum burden of debt. They were unable to meet even domestic needs and their debt was more than that of their annual income which created the phenomenon of acute stress, this fact is well established in the figures of Table 2. In this way, the majority of peasantry and labourers are in grave economic crisis (Manick, 2015)

The economic factors like decreasing productivity, falling profits and the social factors like heavy expenditure on house construction and social ceremonies have pushed the farmers in debt trap, some of whom feel forced to commit suicides. (Singh, Sukhpal *et.al.* 2007) The major reason behind the suicides in the state were economic hardship indebtedness and crop failure, investment on house construction, social ceremonies and illness (AFDR 2000, and Iyer and Manick 2000, and PAU 2009, Mohanty and Papesh, 2019.) which worked as causative factor. The issue of warrants, police arrest and custody, humiliation by the lender in the public, announcement in the public for the acquirement of land and assets, cracks in the family etc. worked as precipitating factors.

The constant pressure of causative and

precipitating factors pushed the victims into mental illness and depression which ultimately become the reason for suicide. (IDC, 1998; Iyer and Manick, 2000 and Mayer, 2016). Unfortunately, mental illness and depression is not socially recognized as a disease in our society in which person loses control over his brain which guide all organs of human body. The entire chemistry of human body goes in a bad shape and the victim considers himself as a liability on his own life. So such type of psychiatric distress creates the suicidal tendencies in human mind. The cracks in the marriage, family, kinship and system of fraternity boost this phenomenon in a big way. The constant pressure and feeling of loneliness and isolation is pushing the peasantry into the river of suicides. The studies conducted in various countries has established the fact that farming is a high stressed profession. The farming community has in a high risk of the of mental health, physical environment, family problems, economic stress and uncertainties which are becoming the cause of suicides even at the global level. (Fraser *et al.*, 2005). While on the other hand, India ranks 19th among 180 countries, exposed in the cache of 13.4 Million documents known as "Paradise papers" in the term of number of individuals and companies who have skirted taxes and invested in offshore companies in tax havens. International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) identified 714 rich and powerful Indian who have stashed their wealth abroad to evade legitimate taxes in which lot of politicians, businessmen and celebrities have been involved (*The Tribune*, Nov. 7, 2017). These are the two sides of harsh realities of our country in which the hardworking toiling masses of "Bharat " are in severe distress and stress and on the other hand the "Smart Icons " of "India" are enjoying "Progress and Prosperity" which needs serious attention.

Socio-Political Response

Punjab peasantry has a long history of struggles. Though the various organizations* are active in their respective pockets but these are unable to maintain the base among the masses because of various reasons like: - (i) inter and intra organizational conflicts (ii) the blames and counter blames (iii) narrow political orientations (iv) inability to understand social relations and reciprocal social responses (v) Un-democratic functioning (vi) professional permanent pet projected so called peasant leadership (vii) criticism for the sake of criticism of policies without any alternative suitable suggestive model. The huge army of different shades of leadership could not mobilize even a single effective successful mobilization in the past two decades which has demoralized the farming community in a big way.

These are reasons which have put entire peasantry into flood of loneliness and sense of alienation. On the other hand the political parties come in power with the support of farming community by propagating the false promises in form of "election manifesto", which is known as their policy programme to deal with the emerging problems but after capturing the state power no political party bothers about it. The political exploitation exacerbates the phenomenon of alienation at the macro as well as micro levels. So the "election manifesto" of each and every political party may be considered as legal document if any party violates it the party must be answerable to court of justice.

No farming family wants to sell out its land willfully because the land is not a mere peace of land, it is very livelihood of not just the farmer but also of the entire family and moreover the emotional bounding that the

farmer and his family share with the land make it doubly hard to part from the land. But sometimes due to unavoidable circumstances the farmer is forced to sell his piece of land due to certain compulsions of which he has no remedy. It would be worth to mention here that the colonial law "Land Acquisition Act 1894" that was used for forcible acquisition which came as "Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013" with certain positive amendment again amended it through an ordinance to dilute it to serve the interest of non agricultural forces by the present government. (*The Tribune*, January 4, 2014) The all ruling class parties in other way, are working to protect and promote the interest of non-agrarian forces which is resulting into frustration among the working people

The phenomenon of drug addiction and alcoholism is not more hidden to the people and the state which has pushed the entire youth into physical and psychological slavery. Various studies have established this fact that huge proportion of youth has come in this trap (Manick 2013; Neerja and Goyal 2001; Sandhu 2007). The people who believed in struggles moving towards the path surrender. The majority of youth is becoming addicts. A study of GNDU found that 70 percent of Punjab's youth could be addicted due to easy availability of drugs in border areas. Entire agrarian sector is under severe stress due to

*1.BKU (Ugrahan)2. BKU (Dakonda)3.BKU (Sidhupur)4.BKU (Krantikari led by Shinderpal Singh)5.BKU (Karantikari led by Surjit Singh Phool)6.BKU (Kad ian)7.BKU (Mann)8.BKU(Rajewal)9. BKU (Lakhowal)10.B KU (Behru)11.Kirti Kisan Union12.Punjab Kisan Union13.Punjab Kisan Sabhal4.Kisan Sabha Punjab15.Jamhuri Kisan Sabha 16.Kisan Sangharsh Committee (Satnam Pannu)17.Kisan Sangharsh Committee (Kanwaljit Pannu)18. Kisan Sangharsh Committee Azad (Harjinder Tanda)19.Kirti Kisan Union Punjab

loss of employment, income, status and honor. The survey had claimed that among the drug addicts, 75.8 percent were in the age group of 16-35 year age group and they included 3 percent who were six to 10 years old. A total of 85.6 percent of the addicts were matriculates while agriculturist (37 percent) and laborers (27.5 percent) made the other big group. Though Punjab Health Department and Psychiatry Department of PGI are not agree with the findings of the study but both departments accept the prevalence of drug addiction in the state. Punjab Government has now taken up the matter with India Council for Medical Research (ICMR) to sanction funds for the survey. (*The Times of India*, January 5, 2015).

The land of struggle was captured and hijacked by the so - called spiritual shops in the form of "deras" of different shades which emerged out of frustration due to lack of income, jobs, status and honor, social space, disintegration of families, fractions in the institution of marriage, cracks in the kinship system and disappearance of the institutions of fraternity etc. Apart from the mythic value the personal charismatic appeal of 'babas' offer a sense of belongingness and security to the followers of the lower segments of the society suffering from the alienation of 'self'. The constant stress resulting into the psychological disordering in the form of depression which has open the flood gates of the suicides. There "deras" which are not rigid and dogmatic as compared to traditional religion, working as counseling centers for the depressed and stressed population. In 2006- 2007, there were 9000 "deras" are operating in the state which are Sikh and non- Sikh "deras" centered around person and peace, faith and trust, desire of followers. Though the culture of "dera" is a world - wide phenomenon but they are different from the " deras" of developed

countries because the majority of the followers belong to lower segments of the society which are neglected by the dogma and rigidity of religions. The owners of 'deras' are enjoying all facilities including wealth, fame, name, honor and power. There is no specific law to deal with these autonomous " deras". These "deras" are playing a big role in the sociopsychological and political life.

There is a huge army of unemployed youth in the state. About 35 million people were unemployed in the state during 2006 out of which about 24 million people belong to rural areas (Singh *et.al*,2007). Another aspect of the emerging scenario is that 17.71 percent of the total farmers who left farming became idle or not engaged themselves in any kind of profession after leaving farming (Singh and Bhogal, 2014). The idleness, alienations and non-availability of suitable jobs opened the gates for undesirable tendencies among the upcoming youth which is easily influenced by the gangsters. The incidences of 'gang wars' are not the healthy sign for the society of Punjab which has a long history of struggle against the oppression and exploitation. There are 70 active gangs and more than 500 gangsters are active in the state having sophisticated weapons. The majority of them are student leaders with 300 of them are lodged in different jails. There is a huge involvement of sports persons and land lords having the links with the politicians and the police operating as gangsters in the state. (*The Tribune*, May 4, 2016). They are engaged in killings, kidnappings, drug smuggling, extortions, land grabbing, sand mining, real-estate, loan recoveries, etc. They also work as the hired killers for drug mafia, politician and even businessman. The unemployment is pushing them down to lure of the gun which can be seen as manifestation symptom of

frustration prevailing in the rural society without any vision or perspective. The violent cultural traits of Punjabi society are being transformed from "collectivity of organized action" to "individual oriented heroism" which denies the historic cultural ethics of social collectivity, accountability and responsibility. The land of struggles now has captured by "deras", political dynasties, drugs cartels and deadliest gangs.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Punjab has been known for its fertile lands, agricultural development, rich human culture and natural resources. After the independence of India, Punjab agrarian economy underwent the process of transformation in wake of legislations such as Land Reforms Act, 1972 to check the forces of feudalism and give the proprietary rights to the tillers. This was the result of agrarian unrest and mobilization of toiling masses. The said Act gave impetus to the process initiated by the "green revolution" which was based on the package of new biological and mechanical technologies to increase the production for food security. The "Model of Optimum Use of Resources" created new chapter of successes and failures. The emergence of farmers' movement and peasants movement came on surface with new issues. The rich and middle peasants went into the folds of ruling class parties for structural adjustments and poor and landless labor has to face frustration, distress and stress due to unfavorable government policies and disappearance and fragmentation of peasant movement. The farmer community in general and poor peasantry in particular have become the victim of indebtedness which is resulting into suicides. The loan waiving methods can be useful to deal with the emergency situation but the problem of the agrarian sector cannot be solved without any suitable alternative

effective policy framework. The loan waiving policy of the state government cannot be credit worthy for the poor peasantry and landless labor which are dependent on non-institutional informal credit market. The studies have established the fact that due to structural crisis, the phenomenon of distress and stress is resulting into suicides. The structural crisis needs political will for the solution and it cannot be solved through the mechanism of "spiritual individual introversion" which is done by "deras" of different shades. Further there is no rule and regulation or legal mechanism to deal with "earnings" and "governing" of these spiritual institutions which are attracting the lower segments of the society and enjoying names, fames, games and huge mobile and immobile properties. The sufferings of the toiling masses are being snubbed under the cultural chaos through so called popular songs which promotes glamorization of wine, weapons, violence and insensibilities. The youth is going into the "clutches of gangs" which has hastened the process of criminalization in the state. The entire state has become the victim of "deras" "drugs" and "deadliest gangs" in face of lack of socio-political awareness. The proliferation of these forces has become the major threat to the human and other rights of the people of the state.

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