

Land Transactions and Socio-cultural Changes in Rural India

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It has recently been proclaimed that the Indian village is withering away as a way of life (Gupta, 20015). It may be an overstatement: nevertheless it takes notes of the ongoing fundamental changes in rural social life of India. Village India has often been described as static and quiescent. The concepts of little community and little republic have frequently been used for analyzing Indian rural society. Charles Metcalfe (1832) describes village communities as little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations, dynasty after dynasty tumbled down many revolutions occurred but the village community remained the same. Karl Marx also reflected on Indian society as such and Indian villages in particular. According to him aggressors came vandalized and went back, but Indian society remained the same, untouched from any change. These observations acted as the point of departure for the sociological understanding of Indian rural life that it is primarily well settled, stable and having a centripetal system of social stratification.

Naturally, the earlier sociological studies also emphasized this feature of Indian society; the ontological emphasis necessitated the use of logically relevant theoretical models such as functionalism, indological and structuralism in the village studies. Consequently, the stability and integration of rural life was celebrated at the cost of discrimination, conflict and change. Though some of these studies took note of some dimensions of cultural mobility (Srinivas, 1972) but it was peripheral to their foci and main thesis. However there are some studies which have focused on change and mobility. Mukherjee (1957) studied the dynamics in West Bengal villages using the Marxian framework of analysis. After identifying nine occupational groups, he described how they formed three classes and indicated mobility in class structure which was induced by the British rule. Desai's (1948) study was a side attempt in this regard. While discussing the socioeconomic basis of the rise of nationalism in India, he tried to explain the changes induced by the East India Company's rule particularly its administrative, economic and agrarian policies in India's village economy and society. It is, in fact, an extension of Marx's thesis on India that the imperial British rule initiated the forces of change, unconsciously and unwittingly, in relatively stagnant Indian society, though they aimed the extraction of wealth and riches to propel industrial capitalism in Britain. Profoundly informed by Marx's insight and standpoint, both of these started a distinct trend of probing the dynamics of rural society and economy.

Attempting a macro level analysis of the agrarian class structure in India, Thorner (1962) after studying Indian society classified the entire agrarian population into Maliks (landlords), Kisans (Cultivators) and Mazdoors (Wage labours); he further subdivides each of the categories into subcategories. Dhanagre (1983) in his study of Indian peasants identified five classes and described

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the main ideological and organizational factors which motivated peasants to participate in these movements along with mentioning the nature of movements and the agrarian classes which participated in them. F. G. Belly (1960 second ed.) illustrated what happens when the village is made part of the wider economy of the country and ultimately of the world and how the village is initiated into the causes of land selling. He enumerates some causes which forced people to sell off their agricultural land.

Beteille (2012 [1965]) examined stratifications at a micro level he identifies mobility in three aspects—caste (social), class (economic), and power (political). He reveals that an interwoven relationship among them in a south Indian village gradually develops into an independent set of economic and political and social forms of stratification. Both Desai and Mukherjee's analysis of the changes which occurred in village society after British rule, seems to be influenced, with the Marxian logic that aggressors came and went, but ultimately Indian villages remained the same and whatever change was introduced in villages it was by the British only. Even later on Dhanagare (1983) was also predisposed with this reflection. With the end of the British rule the processes such as democratization, urbanization, and industrialization started and now the process of globalisation has set in. Changes unleashed by these processes are required to be studied to understand the nature of emerging rural India.

The impact of this urbanization is also visible in peri-urban or fringe areas of the city. The fast pace of residential and commercial development is replacing agriculture and other underdeveloped land around them (Dutta, 2012). When the city expands it expands both geographically and socio-culturally. In the recent years due to increasing urbanization agricultural land is rapidly getting changed to non-agricultural uses. The ever increasing price of land is encouraging peasants to sell their agricultural land and as a result of that economic as well as socio-cultural changes are taking place in the village community, which needs to be analyzed sociologically. This paper attempts to examine the socio-cultural changes as an outcome of land transactions particularly in two villages near Lucknow Metropolis.

Methods & Techniques

Lucknow has been undergoing a process of urbanization like other metropolitan cities (Census 2011), consequently a large chunk of land in nearby villages is being acquisitioned and/or being sold voluntarily for settlements/colonies and industries, commercial and educational organizations. This has resulted in the incredible price rise of land. Moreover, Lucknow being the capital has become the centre of political, administrative and economic activities and thereby growing very fast, thus, Lucknow may be considered more appropriate for studying the impact of increased prices of land and subsequent consequences of affluence among peasants. Unlike the rural area of National Capital Region, villages adjoining Lucknow are being assimilated into the city over a period of time providing enough scope for the study of a non-going process of mobility and change in social structure.

There have been two types of land transactions near Lucknow; (a) through land acquisition mainly by the government for developing residences, and (b) voluntary selling of land by villagers largely for financial gains. Lucknow the capital city which is now a metropolis is spreading quite fast on its peripheral areas and encroaching on adjoining fertile agricultural land of rural blocks. Lucknow city along with cantonment area was occupying only 50 sq. km. in 1950; in 2001 it was about 450 sq. km. During the last 13 years, i.e. between 1994-95 and 2007-08, the growth rate of land put to non-agricultural uses in the neighbouring rural areas of Lucknow metropolis were recorded 45.1 percent. It is the least in Bakshi-ka-Talab Block 21.5 percent (Jafri et al 2011), making it the fit case for the study. Two multi-castes villages of the block have been selected for the study where villagers belonging to every caste have been selling land. 87 respondents have been purposively

selected from varied castes. As the study was of a village and dealing with property the qualitative method of research by means of intensive interviews was considered to be more appropriate. For the sake of validity, data has also been corroborated by observation and informal conversations with the villagers. The secondary data has also been collected from the Block office, the Statistical Diary of U. P. (2008), the village school and the Aanganbadi records.

A Brief Profile of Two Villages

Navikot Nandana is both a *Rajasvgram* and *Gram Panchayat* village which is divided into two villages namely Kotava and Nandana, located 18 and 16 km away from Lucknow. Kotava is historically more old and big in population in comparison to Nandana which is relatively small in population. Historically the formation of both the villages is interconnected. Thakurs of this area are Manpuri Chauhan, who settled in these villages after defeating the Mughal Governor of Oudh (Majumdar 1958). Both are multi caste village resided by 16 castes. Kotava village was a centre of trade in earlier times and was in deep interaction with its neighbouring villages. The economy of both the villages is mainly dependent on the multiple things as agriculture, transport and business.

Land Transactions and Socio-Cultural Mobility

In the village society, where traditionally peasants have been considered as its characteristic feature, because of urbanization and land transactions villagers have not remained peasants neither socio-culturally nor economically. After selling their land they are adopting middle class occupations and even if they have small plots of agricultural land they are not interested in doing agriculture.

Except agriculture some new occupations have also emerged in the village. Many people have started working as broker or middleman in the business land exchange and few have opened shops which provide timber for house construction on hire, one person has opened his own ice cream parlor, and supplies ice cream not only in the village but even to the city. Some of them are earning by hiring their homes to some agency workers and other outsiders who need accommodation in the village. Hiring and driving taxi and cars for commercial purposes are on increase in the village. Drivers are also hired from outside the village for operating taxi services. This tendency shows that besides agriculture other new occupations are being adopted by the villagers and agriculture as occupation is increasingly becoming one of the occupations. People are selling their lands in large number and others who have land are least interested in engaging themselves in it. The structural occupational mobility can manifestly be observed in the village, indicating a change in the homogeneous character of the occupational structure of the village and thereby in the nature of its social structure.

The middle class socio-cultural patterns and lifestyle has become a reference point for all the classes including rural populace. The affluence has been bringing about changes in the community life as now they are moving from folk culture to the urban middle class culture. There is explicitly observable shift from a public/community to private in the day to day interactions. Women spend their leisure time watching T.V. rather than gossiping with their neighbours on different issues. These kinds of changes are also visible in some low caste families, women in their families do not visit fields frequently and some have stopped it totally. A shift from traditional towards a modern pattern of dressing among women and girls can also be observed. Out of 87 respondents who were interviewed, 47 said that they visit Lucknow frequently for watching movie, picnic and marketing in the malls, which reflects the increasing attraction of adopting the middle class values and lifestyle. Buying clothes from city markets and Malls is also getting popular and people flaunt their branded cloths and other items, which are considered prestigious by others. They prefer to buy their cloths only from Lucknow. Some of them buy cloths both from Lucknow and local market, but the local market is visited by them occasionally. Mainly local market is preferred by those who either could

not get much money from their sold land to afford costly city markets or they are less bothered about buying clothes from outside and are satisfied with the local market.

All features of urban consumerism can be witnessed, as they have in their homes refrigerator, fan, cooler, colour/LCD T.V., gas stove and water tank, fridge, washing machine, European style bathrooms, marble floors, designer doors etc. Villagers spend on goods which are considered as status symbol which in turn has induced conspicuous consumption. Brands like Red Chief, Bata, Levis etc. are getting popular among affluent peasants. Out of 87, 85 people constructed new houses after getting money from their sold land. Many of them construct their house only after consulting the architect and even some of them hire contractors from the city to make it the middle class homes. Even the way of welcoming guests is increasingly becoming urbane. The India Rural Development Report 2012-13 also indicate that the number of rural households living in *pucca* houses has increased from 36 per cent in 2002 to 55 per cent in 2009. This indicates the increasing income of rural people to afford *pucca* houses. In both the villages under study the new affluence brought about by land transactions have enabled them to afford a multi storied house with all modern facilities, which means that their income has gone up multifold.

The newly constructed houses of the village are like city houses with channel gates and boundary walls contrary to the earlier which were open enough for free entry of neighbours. This in turn has lessened interaction and communication among neighbours. Now their frequent visits to each other are limited. Out of 87, 81 people accepted that they feel hesitant in visiting their neighbours without any work. This is now well accepted. Many respondents told that they were too busy to have any extra time to gossip with neighbours rather they like to spend their free time with family members. Even fewer of them have constructed shops adjoining their houses on the pattern of Indian town houses. The house structure is getting planned and modified and especially like houses in the market areas of towns.

Conspicuous consumption has increased so much that villagers compete with each other in buying luxury vehicles. One can find latest models and brands of Cars, for example Ford, Icon, Tata Indigo CS, Hyundai I-10, Mahindra Zylo, and Toyota Innova, parked in front of multi-storied houses. Even one person has brought a horse of 60 thousand and he flaunts his horse to show himself different from others. He uses his horse to roam around in the village and other neighbouring areas. Out of 87, 71 people have purchased motorcycle or car after selling their land. Some have purchased scooters for their daughters for going colleges. Village people, including some low caste families have started sending their children in English medium schools by giving higher payments as school fee and for school vans. After selling their land, 44 people out of 87 changed the school of their children from the Hindi medium to the English schools and from the government schools to private schools. They even send their children outside the village for better education just like the educated middle class. The number of girls pursuing higher education has increased. People are now willing to send their girls outside for higher education. There is a case where the girl was sent outside of the province to get medical education in a college where large amount of donation is required. It all shows that they are spending on education of their children like the urban middle class. This is the example of reference group behaviour and thereby embourgeoisement.

The individualistic values, rights and privacy are being emphasized. Parents want to live independently and separate from their offspring. Many people have constructed separate houses both for themselves and for their independent adult offspring and in many low caste families who could not afford separate houses have reserved separate portion and rooms in the houses. Out of 87, 65 people started living in nuclear families after selling their agricultural land. The land which had attached them together the selling of it has weakened the personal ties between parents and children resulting in nuclear families. This is again a shift in middle class culture from folk culture.

This is a different finding in comparison to the study of the affluent workers of Britain (Goldthorpe et al 1967). Workers of Britain could not have preferred the middle class norms and culture but the affluent villagers in India are undergoing a process of embourgeoisement. They are shifting from community to individualistic behavior patterns and turning into more bourgeois in comparison to British affluent workers. The affluence has been bringing about changes in the community life and socio-cultural values as now they are moving from folk culture to the urban lifestyle.

It can be concluded that in rural society, especially in those villages which are adjacent to the city, the process of social, economic, political and cultural transformation is going on. Not only capitalist market and other economic processes have entered in rural society significantly but along with urbanization they have been critically affecting rural society. Villages in modern India, particularly in the neighbourhood of cities, are no more homogeneous, simple and integrated communities, rather they have been changed into a mobile, heterogeneous and a complex society from where the processes of urbanization, globalization and corporate capitalism pass through affecting their social structure and character which ultimately induces many socio-cultural changes.

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