



Politics of power and knowledge: Redefining agriculture in India

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Abstract

This paper has made an attempt to analyze and show the situation of agriculture (especially farm based) in India. It shows how the agriculture has been affected by the politics in terms of knowledge and power. The self-sustained agriculture is becoming dependent to the market for each activity. Subsistence farming has been transforming to commercial farming with higher risk. The domination of hybrid companies has increased. The 'incomings' of new knowledge has been replacing the traditional knowledge. This paper makes visualize how the government policies and strategies have failed to hold the farmers into the field. Agricultural scams, farmer suicides, agricultural subsidies and prices of the produce have been always the burning issue in India. The whole scenario is pushing the farmers to change their profession from agriculture to earn better livelihoods. This paper investigates how the most valued profession is being perceived as not profitable, where youths never aspire to choose agriculture as profession. The age old culture is withering and redefining agriculture in India.

Keywords: agriculture, self-sustained, transforming, government, profession

Introduction

As we know politics is everywhere. Politics is omnipresent like supreme power. It occupies the place from individual mind to its surroundings. It can be seen in lowest unit of the society (within household) and also in the bigger picture, i.e. taluka level, regional level, country level and global level. Politics touches every aspects of life in different form in different sector. Primary, secondary and tertiary sector of the economy are not the exceptional that sustain livelihoods of the countless population. Agriculture and allied activities that produces the edible, is the most affected sector of politics. Sometimes, it comes in the picture with the issues related to land, improved technologies, genetic modified (GM) crops, irrigation, prices, market, finance, and environment and even produces of it. Bt cotton, irrigation projects, farmer suicides, agricultural subsidies, market prices are the very known of it. Recently, sugarcane issue in Uttar Pradesh and onion prices are the prominent example of it rather than Bt cotton, farmer's suicide and restrictions to the use of many pesticides / chemicals in the agricultural crops/ field and the use of chemicals / injections in the field of animal husbandry.

In this sector of livelihoods, politics can be seen in the form of power exercise and knowledge mainly. If one's talk about market, irrigation, subsidies etc, it involves power politics but when one talk about technologies of it, involves both power and knowledge politics. For example, genetic modified crops involve both power and knowledge politics. The replacement of traditional varieties to GM crops involves knowledge politics that allow manufactured company of such seeds to dominate over farmers and make them helpless to buy such seeds in their prices. On other hand, the introduction of such crops involves lots of legislative work that state decides exercising power. The politics involved in this sector is changing the whole picture of agriculture and making it hybrid, the time and the people (A. R. Vasavi).

Objective

- To analyze how the power and knowledge politics affecting Indian agriculture
- To understand the current situation of Indian agriculture

Significance of study

The descriptive research paper aims to study the current agricultural situation, its impact on agricultural community and how it is redefining agriculture in India.

Method of data collection

The journals, articles, web links, Newspaper and books have been taken as source of secondary data collection. Coming from vegetable growing community and also work as livelihoods development professional, author is relating his experience with nationwide evidence based current situation for this study.

Knowledge politics in agriculture sector

The shift in the agricultural practices due to scientific advancement has benefited the smaller section of the society. The 'development' philosophy of successful agriculture has passed two phases and entering to 'the' third one. This is the shift from local agricultural practices to yield oriented strategies and moving to profit oriented. In short, I should say the shift from conventional to modern agriculture is not only displaces the local percept but initiates significant social, ecological, cultural and economical shift.

The agriculture is now becoming market oriented and market focused. And this all involves the politics of knowledge in this occupation. The 'incomings' of new knowledge has been replacing the local knowledge among the agricultural communities (Arjun Appadurai). This erosion of local knowledge is making them slave under the so called 'scientific new

knowledge'. They are becoming handicapped with their mind and depending on market for each and every action of agricultural practices. They used to do self-sustained agriculture by applying animals manure, obsolete seeds and traditionally associated knowledge with it for farming. The rate of risk was minimum due to conditioned knowledge of inputs and environment. This knowledge is vanishing. The agricultural communities are relying on market only. They do not have any option and likewise they are throwing themselves in the market with highest level of risk. The culture of doing agriculture is transforming (Arjun Appadurai) rapidly. Subsistence farming is transforming to commercial farming with higher risk that is resulting to farmer's suicide. Because, once they fail to cope up with the market, other no more option opened for them. For instance, the seeds used in agriculture has shifted from obsolete variety to improved variety and then to hybrid variety. Traditional variety and improved variety needs less care than hybrid one and gives at least some result during adverse condition applying low inputs; on other hand hybrid variety needs special care, conducive environment, high input cost and every favorable condition (A.R. Vasavi) but will give better yield in such condition only. The adverse condition will give zero output. For each step one has to rely on market.

The sufficient data shows that Indian agriculture has been dominated by foreign companies like Monsanto, seminis, mahyco etc. They are mainly seed and pesticide companies. They provide range of seeds like maize, cotton, chilly, brinjal, cabbage, pea etc around the country and all are hybrid seeds. Now, the market is in their hands, they supply all the seeds and they have only the technical knowledge to grow such hybrid seeds. As Vasavi advocates that farmers are use to of growing hybrid crops in this hybrid time in their field. In such critical situation, the input cost will be decided by foreign companies because farmers are dependent to such companies. This is the reason that the cost of hybrid seeds is high because no one has to say anything and cost of cultivation keeps on growing up. In this vulnerable situation, two things can happen. First, if companies withdraw from India, Indian agriculture will die. Second, companies may blackmail to raise agricultural input every year seeing the first situation.

Agriculture as Failed Aspiration

The knowledge politics of market for each activity for agriculture widening equality gap among the farmers. The better access to resources is making the farmer richer and lesser access making them poorer. Farmer's do not have any hold. If the input manufactured company increases the price of inputs farmers have to purchase. This nature of agriculture is pushing the farmer's to change their profession from agricultural farm sector to non-farm sector to earn better livelihoods (Dilruba Khatun and B.C. Roy). There are many study reveals of it that the rural-urban migration has significantly increased over the period of time. People generally migrate in search of alternative employment towards the city. The most rewarded occupation of the villages is in the stage of withering. The particular group of the village who were identified with the occupation is disappearing; likewise the culture of a village is vanishing (Dipankar Gupta). Agriculture has been perceived non-profitable profession. Talking about the rural youth, they do not want to be in old occupation if they get chance to get out of it. Agriculture has become failed aspiration

of the rural youth. They do not want to make career on it (Parth Sarthi). The demography of Indian agriculture is changing fast (Amrita Sharma). Young generations of the population are unable to understand the agricultural trend of the market.

Power politics in agriculture sector

The condition of agriculture can also be defined or is the result of power exercised by political leaders. History shows that most of the Indian political leaders are of agricultural background. They first raised the voices of farmer, involved in farmers' movement and achieve the chair but after that he forgot the community over he stepped on. This disjuncture between interest of the farmers and political representatives has also led to neglect of agriculture and farmers (K. C. Suri). In country like India where still more than 65% of its population live in villages and main occupation is agriculture; poor farmers become the prime focus of vote bank. Farmer's hardly get benefited of Indian politics. Government does little for the farmers'. As everyone knows that the cost of cultivation has increased very high after green revolution but hardly speak why it happened. The policy green revolution was itself proved as default because it was not implemented in a manner that should had and this has been revealed in many agricultural studies. The removal of fertilizer subsidies in recent year has put extra burden on the farmers. The small farmers are even helpless to leave and choose another source of livelihood rather than agriculture. The politics of vote has only earned hunger in the country. The scam related to irrigation, fodder, dams and land are not hidden to anyone. The power exercised by the political leaders is to loot the poor farmers and deceive them anyhow. The infrastructure development for agriculture, market, cold storage, wire houses etc has never been the policies of our government. They may talk about information technology (IT) sector development and industry establishment etc. but will talk hardly about market expansion, price fixation of agricultural produces etc. The price of agricultural produces is unorganized unlike poultry, fish, meat etc. that has never been considered. For example, price of vegetables fluctuates every day and varies region to region but not the price of meat, chicken, milk and other branded product and it seems similar to any corner of the country because prices of these products are fixed systematically. This is one of the important reasons that the villagers want to do rural non-farm activity rather than crop cultivation. The Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy again will help the richer farmers not the poorer due to less land holdings and poor access to resources. FDI may act as hybrid seed companies as we discussed above because if they contract to the farmers, they will grow, adopt their technologies and all.

The government strategies and policies are unable to hold farmers into the field. The minimum support price (MSP) is not remunerable as one can see in the case of sugarcane and cotton. That's why this leads to agitation time to time in the country. There is no, health security, economic security scheme for farmers like government servant that he/she gets after retirement. It seems that government wants that let the farmers poor.

Conclusion

Agriculture sector is full of knowledge and power politics which is exercised by different actors. Knowledge politics has made the agriculture dependent to external agencies or market as it has shifted from conventional to commercial practice. It has made the

agriculture market oriented and that led to high level of risk. This shift has fully transformed the culture of agriculture in villages. Political leaders have rare emphasized the agricultural development than other sectors. The policies and strategies of the government are not meeting the demand of farmers, which resulting into agriculture is being not valued as profession.

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