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From Known to Unknown: Socio-Cultural understanding of farmers in adopting Input Dealer's Knowledge

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Abstract:

Recent trends in agriculture clearly show unprecedented things happing in Indian agriculture. Farming is still primary and largest profession in rural India, where 52% of the population depended on it. Indian agricultural system is known for its multifunctional role of providing employment, livelihood, food and nutritional securities. It contributes nearly 14.2% of the gross domestic product (GDP) to the country economy. The advancement of scientific temper, technological expansion and involvement of private agri-business players in agriculture sector playing crucial role in the present's day's agriculture. With the advancement of science technology in agriculture, there is a wide range of different varieties of seeds and pesticides for high yielding's with a potential to overcome crop diseases are overflowing at the market by attracting the farmers to overcome their financial debts in their life. The present study conducted in Warangal District of Telangana State in South India, where cultivating multiple crops with having different landholdings, with different farming experiences among the farmers are seen in the village. Study paper attempts to present the conditions and experiences of farmers in receiving, adopting and practicing new or unknown agricultural practices from the input dealers to make some certain changes in the socio-economic and cultural changes in the agrarian scenario in the study village.

Keywords: Agricultural Practices, Farmers, Green Revolution, Input Dealers.

Introduction

Agriculture, which is the main economic activity of any state, is as ancient as human civilization. Civilization started with the emergence of agriculture. Agriculture is defined as an art of cultivating land. Agriculture refers to the sector of human activity between environment and human culture, which has grown in and from it (Lenka, 2000). Farmers' in India are following traditional way of cultivation practices in their cultivation process, which are intuitive and passing through generations to generations from the one person to another person in the process of cultivation. After independence, most of the states in India in their developmental plans have given high priority to programs of increasing agricultural production in order to bring about a tremendous change in its cultivation process. As a results of which, India witnessed the Green Revolution in the late 1960's, which entered with new technology in the form of High Yielding Varieties (HYVs) of seed, developing

irrigation system, usage of chemical fertilizers and mechanization in the cultivation process. Green Revolution started drastic changes in cultivation practices from traditional way of cultivation to modern methods or scientific methods in the cultivation process. The technological change as experienced in the wake of the green revolution has about changes such as use of high yielding variety seeds, chemical fertilizer, farmyard manure and better water management. These changes have led to marked changes in the output per acre. It is opined that though the high yielding variety programs has increased the demand for labor, wage rates have not raised, as the supply of labor was quite elastic. It is also seen that the medium and large farms have intensified their agriculture by double and multiple cropping. This has led to the mechanization of farm operation and a decrease in employment of farm labor. A feature of the new technology is that skilled labor is needed to perform the water, soil and crop management practices and to maintain the machinery (Shah and Singh, 1970).

Green revolution also opened its doors to changing of cultivation patterns from traditional forms to modern or scientific forms of cultivation patterns resulted deviations in the cultivation process. Which influenced farmers to shift from traditional farming practices to modern practices in their cultivation process resulted need for agricultural extension services to the farming communities to learn new scientific cultivation patterns in the cultivation process. For implementation or practicing of new cultivable practices, which are new to the farming communities needs more information to achieve increase in farm productivity, improved product quality and standards, and understanding of value addition opportunities in their cultivation process. Vyas (2004) reports changes in the Indian agriculture, such as small farm character, spread of modern technology and source of different inputs like fertilizers, insecticides, mechanical power and improved seeds from external sources. The input dealers functioning without adequate regulation often suggest a wrong crop and excessive input usage, and they also sell spurious inputs. Declining returns, increasing cost of cultivation and thereby indebtedness pushed farmers into stress resulting in suicides. Revathi (1998) in her study on 50 deceased farmers in Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh, points out that the foremost cause of the problem of agrarian distress was irrigation as wells were the largest source of irrigation for about three fourths of the farmers in the region. Generally, farmers had to bear the expenses for digging of bore wells in the region. Due to the depletion of ground water the cost incurred for deepening on bore wells ranges on an average anywhere between Rs. 50,000 to Rs.1, 00,000. 50 percent of the farmers in her study had obtained loans for improvement of wells and about 20 percent incurred debt for digging wells. In case of crop failure, debt burden forced many farmers to commit suicides.

Today the agricultural practices are promoted by market forces and multi-national companies. Modern agricultural agenda in India has led to 'Taylorisation of agriculture'. It supports the erosion of the local practices of agriculture and agrarian culture and promotes state and agri-business directed agendas making farmers dependent on market (Vasavi

2012). There is lack of sufficient field level staff and the apparent absence of systematic dissemination of important information regarding appropriate cropping pattern, inputs, and cultivation practices and so on. In this context with their locational advantage and easy access, input dealers efficiently became the most important source of such information to farmers. Credit availability, quality of the product, availability of preferred brand, price of the product and malpractices significantly influenced the dealer's loyalty among farmers (Padmanabhan, 1999). Input dealers' are a traders who is running business activities with or without a technically qualification and a service provider with the intension of profit making. Input dealer are the key agents to the farming communities in the present days of cultivation process. Input dealers are the key and primary opinion adviser to the farming communities due to lack of availability of agricultural extension agents in the society. Marginal and Small farmers are the main approaches to the input dealers at the rural society. They are the important linkage between the manufacturers and the farmers and they shares and disseminate latest farm technologies, new crop seeds and pesticides to the farming communities.

Objectives of the study

Farmers' aspiration for upward mobility and the need to raise their income levels may be considered as another factor pushing farmers to adopt new agricultural technologies, new crops without adequate knowledge. As a result the intensity of risk is increasing inversely with the extent of land holding. In, traditional agriculture collective decision making at the community level absolved risks to a greater extent. However, modern agriculture pushed for transformation from collective to individualized agriculture than leading to anomalies (Rizov 2004). As individuation intensified the extent of risk magnified. This is witnessed in significant proportions at the marginal and small farmer level when compared to semi-medium and large farmers. The present study aims at understanding of socio-economic conditions of farmers in adopting of new cultivation practices from the input dealers in their cultivation process and what are the issues and challenges facing by the farmers due to adopting new cultivation practices from the input dealers.

Methodology:

The present paper is based on the findings of the study conducted in a village named Nainala in South Indian state of Telangana. Study village is located in Warangal district of Telangana, which falls under the semi-arid tropical climate. The village has a long history of agriculture as its major occupation. It is located about five kilometers from the lowest revenue headquarters indicating the greater amount of exchange of communication with the outside world. For decades, farmers in the village have been cultivating multiple crops in semi dry and dry land. Major crops grown in the village are paddy, maize, cotton, turmeric. Crops are cultivated in both seasons, namely Kharif and Rabi. Using the constructivist method, data was collected from 100 farmers on their socio-economic and their landholdings; out of 100 the researcher has collected in-depth interviews from 30 farmers based on their farming categories. Field work was carried out in

the village for a year from 2012 to 2013 covering both the crop seasons and researcher visited field again in the month of March in 2016. The study includes Research techniques like focus group discussions, observations, and key informants employed in the study.

Study village Agriculture:

The primary occupation of a majority of Nainala villagers is agriculture. Village revenue records suggest that the total cultivable area of the village is 1550 acres, out of which 1143 acres of land is cultivable. 1143 acres include 740 acres of dry land and 403 acres of irrigated land. Sources of irrigation are village tank, and tube wells. During the Kharif season depending on the rainfall village tank is used for irrigating crops under its command area. Otherwise, in both Kharif and Rabi seasons there are complete dependence on tube wells which work on electricity. Over the years, even in non-command areas the area under paddy cultivation has been rising sharply. It is not that paddy is an alien crop in these regions. Historically, almost every village in Telangana region has been cultivating paddy either under village tanks or by drawing irrigation water using animate sources of power from open wells. However, the extent of area used to be very low. Sociologically stating, these paddy cultivable holdings were under the control of upper castes to a large extent. With the spread of GR which made a heavy impact on paddy making it as a remunerative crop, other farmers belonging to other backward classes and scheduled castes in the villages of Telangana begun to convert their dry holdings to irrigated holdings by digging open wells and subsequently tube wells. Tube wells have been a revolutionary as the advanced technology enabled farmers irrespective of farm size to dig one. Most of the tube wells dug in Telangana region have been aimed at converting dry land into irrigated land for cultivating paddy.

Table No: 1: Major crops cultivated in the village

Crop	Area under cultivation in acres (percentage of crop area to the total cultivable area)	No. of farmers*
Paddy	300 (26.24)	220
Cotton	380 (33.42)	140
Turmeric	190 (16.62)	189
Chili	140 (12.24)	80
Maize	70 (6.12)	35
Other crops	63 (5.51)	50
	1143 (100)	278

Source: *Survey conducted in the study village during 2012*

* Each farmer may grow more than one crop in a particular season. This data is for Kharif season.

The study village is a typical of Telangana villages. The cropping pattern, as given in Table 1 suggests that paddy is grown in 300 acres, accounting for 26 percent of land. Not only in terms of acreage cotton ranks high, but also in terms of number of farmers, paddy is

placed on top with as many as 220 farmers out of a total of 278 farmers cultivating it. It is not just a staple crop, but as mentioned above, has become a remunerative crop. Cotton, which can be grown under rain fed as well as irrigated conditions (semi-dry), has emerged as the important non-food commercial crop. In the study village cotton is cultivated in 380 acres (33 percent) by 140 farmers (58%) out of 278 farmers. The average cotton acreage is 2.71 acres, while average acreage under paddy is 1.36 acres.

Changing of Decision process and Knowledge Conflict:

Over the years, the private companies engaged in inputs for agriculture have started using the services of the input dealer for pushing their products. By offering attractive margins (in terms of percentage) and other benefits similar to that of, for example, consumer durables, over the sale proceed the private companies have been keeping the input dealer in their control. Today, agricultural input market is one of the competitive markets, albeit besieged with problems of manipulation, malware and illegal practices. As the input dealer is interested in making more profit s/he seldom bothers about the veracity of the product being sold. In a way it may be said that input dealer has emerged as the important linkage between farmers on one hand and the state Department of Agriculture and the private companies on the other. However, it was observed in the study that the control of private companies is more about the input dealer than the state. In fact, the input dealers attempt to circumvent or by pass the regulations of state for seeking more profits.

Input dealer is the one who sells products that are used in cultivation. Seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, growth and pest control products, bio-fertilizers, etc. are sold by the input dealers. What once used to be procured by the farmers in their own villages, now are being sourced from the input dealers. The input dealer is a person who runs it on a commercial motive seeking a percentage gain from the sale proceeds. S/he could be one who is capable of maintaining stocks in the store, handling cash and dealing with farmers. This implies the fact that the person need not be familiar with cultivation. Although some farmers turned as input dealers, in most of the cases the input dealers are those who are young, seeking profits by engaging in market related activity. The input dealers have to procure license from the Department of Agriculture for setting up the shop. They have to work as per the guidelines of the Department of Agriculture enforced at the Mandal level by the Agricultural Officer. The Agricultural Officer is responsible for controlling the sale of spurious seeds, fertilizers, pesticides. Unauthorized products are also checked by the Agricultural Officer. Sometimes, the government subsidies are routed through the input dealers. Particularly, in the case of fertilizers the input dealer provides fertilizers on subsidy by claiming the difference from the state. Thus input dealer has emerged as the important linkage between the state and farmers as well.

What is important from the point of view of the present work is that the input dealer has emerged as the important

source of information to the farmers in the village. In the absence of state extension services or because of the limitations of the state extension services farmers have started relying on the input dealer like never before. In fact input dealer is the primary source of information to the farmers. It was observed in the study that a majority of the respondents (43 percent) source information from the input dealers. A large majority of the marginal farmers (about 35 percent) and small farmers (about 67 percent) approach the input dealer for suggestion at the time of buying the product, whether to control a pest or disease or about the quality of seed or fertilizer. Interestingly, none of the medium farmers among the respondents rely on the input dealer for making a decision about cultivation. As the Agricultural Officer and other state functionaries of extension are inaccessible to the small and marginal farmers it may be said that the input dealer has emerged as the alternative source for these sections of farmers. Not only that the input dealer is available for most part of the day and the season, credit purchases are also offered to the small and marginal farmers. The input dealer provides inputs on credit, which is recovered after the harvest with a high interest rate.

It was observed in the study that the farmers, particularly the marginal and small, do not have a very good opinion about the information provided by the input dealers. At least five marginal farmers and two medium farmers suggested that they were either misinformed amounting cheating or disillusioned by the input dealers. *Akula Sarvaiah*, 48 years of age, medium farmer belonging to the backward caste, narrated his experience of buying seed from the input dealer at the Nellikudur,

"*While buying the paddy seeds, the input dealer said that the brand of seeds is of good quality as it was a new seed variety which gives high yield and has higher resistance to certain pests. He even gave me hundred percent guarantee for the seed, saying that it would fetch good yield. On his advice, I bought that brand of seeds and sowed. But the seeds never geminated even after taking care of the nursery well. When I went and asked him about the non-germination of the seeds and demanded compensation the input dealer blamed me saying that I didn't know how to cultivate and the problem lies with my field. He even said that there is no complaint against that brand of seeds though it was sold to many farmers. What I understood from his words was that he was blaming me and my field, rather than owning up the responsibility. In what way could I check with other farmers about the quality of that brand?'*

Summary:

The transactions with the input dealer and the farmers are based on trust. Most of the respondents observed that they go to a particular input dealer who is trustworthy when compared to others. Trustworthiness and allowing credit purchase are the two factors influencing farmers in choosing a particular input dealer. In some cases, farmers resign to their fate when the particular inputs like seeds or pesticides fail to perform. It was clearly evident in the field that the input dealers are in unison in reacting to the issues of failure of seed or pesticides. They all blame the farmer for his/her lack of knowledge in the usage of the input. They throw the blame on the farmers'

inability to understand what they (the input dealers) have said at the time of sale of the input about its usage. It was observed that farmers do take this blame thinking that it is their lack of knowledge that caused the failure of input. Even in the cases where farmers are aware of the spurious nature of seed or pesticide and dubious act of the input dealer they seldom claim compensation from the input dealer. As mentioned, a large majority of the farmers who take advices from the input dealers are marginal and small. Because of the lack of social capital and political power they don't act against the dubious practices of the input dealers. However, it was observed in the field that, when an input fails to perform the farmers belonging to upper castes and medium category claim compensation from the input dealers.

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