

Impacts of new irrigation system on the socio-political structure of the society. A case study of village Banbhan, Southern Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract:

The present study explores the socio-political changes in the social structure of the society brought by the new irrigation system at certain locale. Transition from the controlled irrigation to canal irrigation not only brought the economic changes and improved the agriculture at locale but it also have brought changes in the socio-political changes in the social structure of the society. The political authority has been transferred from the local bureaucracy to the landlords. The voting behavior of the people has been transferred due to new irrigation system. The social status of the people has attached with control over the canal water. The kinship role also has been transformed. The marriage pattern at the locale has been changed to get the control over the irrigation system. The solution of the feuds has been made by the local landlords that has created a social harmony in one sense while put the base of new feudal system at the locale. Another interesting aspect of this paper is that it also deals with new social crimes at the locale that have been introduced after the execution of

new irrigation system at the locale. The data presented in this paper has been collected by using qualitative anthropological research techniques.

Key words: Due-e- khair, Warabandi, Watta Satta, Purdah, Dera, Punchait

Introduction:

The phenomenon of development always has been discussed in ambiguous sense throughout its origin. The objectives of the developments are always set in the positive sense but after the execution of the projects it also brings the harms for the society. Same is the case in this paper has been discussed. The irrigation system at the locale was tube well irrigation that is called controlled irrigation system. Through this system the agriculture was limited as well costly, but through such type of irrigation system society was in the form of social harmony and order. After the renewal of irrigation system from controlled tube well irrigation to canal irrigation it has brought a green revolution in village. The economic conditions at the locale have changed. The agriculture has mechanized. Barren lands of the village become fertile. The people who were living in different cities for the sake of livelihood return back to the village and cultivate their fields. Even the people at the locale who have not agricultural land got attractive earning opportunities.

This was the one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is dark. The new irrigation system has brought various economic betterments in the village, but its consequences in the form of social disorder and social discomforts are very deep. The social structure of the society entirely has been changed. The socio-political changes are basic focus of this paper. The marriage practice and the choice of selecting the spouses has been changed that closely associated with control over the canal water and agriculture land in the canal zone. The kinship ties

and their priorities have also associated with control over the canal water. Frequencies of the social crimes have been intensified. The new canal irrigation system has provided alternatives ways in the form of economic and social sense. The political authority has been transferred as well as the voting behavior in the sense of national and local level has been changed.

Locale:

The present study conducted in the village Banbhan Tehsil Taunsa Sharif, District D.G.Khan. District D.G.Khan is unique in its feature that it has linked boundaries with other three provinces than that of Punjab like linked Balochistan at Rukni, KP at Ramak D.I.Khan and Sindh at Kasmoor. The village Banbhan also has very important geographical setting in the area because it linked dozen of the village on the right bank of River Indus with Indus highway Peshwar to Karachi. The village Banbhan is situated 21km away from the tehsil Taunsa at Indus highway. The soil of the village is very fruitful for the agriculture because Indus River flow only 3km away from the village, but after the reformation of the irrigation system from tube well irrigation to Canal irrigation, the construction of the Canal has created the a boundary mark in the village geographically as well as socially.

Methodology:

The qualitative anthropological methodology which includes methods like Socio economic survey, participant observation, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews were used to collect the empirical data. Different sampling techniques were used during the research like purposive sampling, random sampling and snowball sampling. By using these sampling techniques 100 households out of 300 households have selected

as a sample of the study. Beside this structured and unstructured questionnaire and in-depth interviews have been used during the study. Modern methodologies like photography and recording have also been used during research. The research conducted in four months from February 2012 to June 2012.

Results and Discussion:

Political changes

As explained earlier that Canal irrigation brought changes in the social patterns as well as economic patterns of village. Before the Canal, there was feudal political system, because before Canal the control over village was in the hands of government employee or bureaucrats. People before Canal thought that the bureaucrats could save them from the lockup, court and other problems, thus the political control was in the hands of the bureaucrats. They have their vote bank. They arranged a *due-e- khair* with any political party without asking people's will about political decision. The contribution of the bureaucrats in the local political system was influential. In local government elections, they selected their own candidates without consulting the people of the village.

According to Allah Buksh:

This political system was very rigid because of making decision of vote with their will. But political system in village is flexible some people cast vote according to their will but some cast vote on the behalf landlords mostly those people who cultivated the lands of landlords."

After the Canal, political game turned over because 70% of the village people became independent because of their cultivation work and revenue generation for their families. According to Survey Questionnaire, 70% people were independent to cast their vote or to take political decision with their own will. But

30% people were dependent but the central authority has moved from bureaucracy to landlords and their vote bank also increased because of their control over their tenants.

According to respondent Ghulam Farid:

I cultivate land of Saith Farid at Muzirgery. Now I am dependent upon him because he is very good with me. He cooperates with me in every time of trouble. He made a house for me in his lands. So in the time of election I cannot deny him. Even he has not to say me for vote he believes that I cannot vote to anyone else”.

Another aspect relating to change in Political system of the village after the Canal was the control over Canal water, that has a great political importance, the water distribution was controlled by the landlords thus they have control over Canal water as well as on people who used water. There were two systems of water distribution in the village, first was *warabandi* and other was the water rotation system, and both the systems were under the control of landlords. So with the control over Canal water, their control was indirectly over the people of the village that increased their political role, the people were going to landlord to resolve their conflicts which were the outcome of the Can irrigation, thus the central authorities of decision making power was moved from the bureaucracy to landlords.

Marriage patterns

The marriage patterns and marriage rituals were also changed after the Canal formation; it also changed the traditional pattern of marriage which was in practice since many years in the village.

Before the Canal, people mostly practice endogamy, while social status was the main factor in the marriages, at that time endogamy was 90% in the including 10% within the

clan of father or mother. There were many reasons of practicing endogamy at very high rate:

- Children were under their control;
- Property was not transferred to other lineage;
- Easy management of disputes between the lineage;
- Due to blood relations, the relationship was smooth;
- Concept of *purdah* was necessary.

But after the Canal, practice of endogamy was reduced and exogamy was increased. According to survey conducted during the field work, exogamy increased from 10-30%. There was many reasons for increase in exogamy:

(a) After the Canal, the social power of landlords was increased and people were desirous to make marriage alliances with them because they were of the opinion that they could get property share for their daughters and sisters, while the landlords want to make relations of their daughters and sisters with small landowners or with those were less in social power because they were not in a position to claim the property share. The other reason was the small landowners or other who makes relations with the landlords because through affinal relations with the landlords to control over Canal water because the Canal water was under their control.

Some of the people were compelled to make relations with the landlords because they work at their lands as their tenants and were directly or indirectly under their control and were not in a position to refuse giving of their daughters and sisters to their sons and brothers at their demand. That were the main reason of declining endogamy in the village, but the endogamy was also practiced by 60 to 70% of influential people of the village.

Another aspect related to alteration of marriage patterns at locale was the people's consciousness about their social status, for example a landlords wanted to make alliances with landlords to match his social status and another reason

was the exchange of property, especially agricultural land in the Canal Zone. They thought that if they marry their daughters with landlords, their property was safe as a big landlord was not inclined towards getting property from the lower status landowner.

An additional marriage form practiced at the locale was *Watta Satta* (exchange marriage). Before the Canal formation, *Watta Satta* was practiced at very high rate because taking and giving of *Rishta* in between two families was the valuable norm of the society. Before the formation of the Canal, there were two basic conditions to make affinal relations with anyone:

- A boy who wants to marry must serve for the girl's family for many years. After that they make marriage alliance of their daughter or sister with him. But sometimes it happened that after serving many years, people don't make marriage alliances with the boy.
- Second condition was that people adopted way of *Watta, Satta* marriage pattern by giving and taking their sisters or daughters, it was not fixed for giving and taking sisters but giving of sister in exchange of daughter was also the part of *Watta Satta* marriage pattern. *Watta, Satta* was mostly practiced within close relative, before the Canal irrigation it was very difficult to make marriage alliances outside. So *Watta Satta* was very commonly practiced in the village before the Canal, but after Canal *Watta Satta* practice was reduced because the literacy rate was increased and people were finding out proper match for their daughters, sisters and sons, more over they faced numerous problems in exchange marriages such as if a person divorced his wife then the other family was socially forced to divorce the spouse having no fault, same was the case with the domestic violence, in exchange marriages, the domestic violence committed to a wife by her husband was

reciprocated by other family in the same way without any fault of the spouse.

Another reason of not practicing of *Watta Satta* was the population rate of female children that has reduced the exchange marriages in the village at the locale. *Watta Satta* is but was in practice in some of the families.

Another marriage pattern practiced at the locale at very high rate was cousin marriages, in the form of endogamy. Both cross cousin marriage and parallel cousin marriage were equally practiced by the villagers since long, but the pattern has been changed in the last few years, especially after the Canal formation. But in the past, the cousin marriage was mostly practiced in the form of *Watta Satta* marriage and was very popular among the villagers. It has few reasons as explained below:

- To stop the land division and keep land in the own lineage;
- It was very shameful and problem to give their sisters and daughters in other lineages and was limited to some castes like *Syeds* and religious families;
- The cousin marriage was long life and safe.

The cousin marriage concept practiced as *Watta Satta* has been reduced in the last few because of increased trend of the divorce cases. According to the data collected by the researcher the ratio of divorce case was increased from 1 to 5% percent in last ten years.

Another reason that has reduced cousin marriage pattern in the village *Banban* was the increase in literacy rate after the functioning of Canal among both the sexes; they were inclined towards the educated and civilized matches, while the transfer of property was another factor that has affected the cousin marriages in the village.

After the Canal formation, the concept of exogamy has increased, while the cousin marriage practice has reduced, but the elders of the village were more inclined towards the cousin marriages because of blood relations and understanding among the spouses being relatives. In last two years a transition in marriage patterns was observed by the researcher in the exogamy marriage pattern that was on the decline. There were many reasons of failure of exogamy:

- Due to problem of adaptation of new cultural values like *pardah* which was not observed by an educated urban girl;
- Assimilation of an educated urban girl was risky in a traditional family that was against the village norms and against the wishes of the husband and other family members;

It was observed by the researcher that people of the village were again moving towards the cousin marriages because of the increasing rate of divorce in exogamy marriage pattern.

Kinship role

Kinship role in any society is very important; it varies rejoin to rejoin according to family structure. The kinship role has changed in the village *Banbhan* after the Canal formation, while before the Canal formation, the kinship role was used at wider level at local level but after it the role of kinship was on the decrease: The significance of the kinship role that was most favorite for the marriages in the village for the reasons:

1. Disputes solving;
2. Local politics;
3. Marriage and death ceremonies;
4. Crop sewing and harvesting;
5. Intra village activities;

Disputes solving

Kinship role was very important in dispute solving at the village level, the kin relatives were immediately involved in case of indulging of their relative in any conflict or dispute to help him to resolve the problem initially local level through *Punchait* which was the local justice institution that negotiate the matter with both the parties at *Dera* of the headman and resolve the problems acceptable to both the parties. That was the role of kinship for which the inter marriages were practiced by the villagers.

Local politics

Kinship role also was very important in the local politics that was of two domains:

1. First was the selection of village headman and his cabinet to perform different tasks in the village, where the role of kinship was very important.
2. Other domain of local politics was the selection of *Nazims* and *Counselors* for the local government. Each *Biradri* has a headman which was supported by all the kin relatives in the elections; therefore the kinship role was very important in the local politics.

Marriage ceremonies and death rituals

In the marriage ceremonies, kinship role was dominating, before arranging marriage all the kin relatives gathered at bride or bridegroom house for fixing of date and time for *Nikha* ceremony. In marriage ceremony, the role of each and every kinsman was very important, while the presence of all the kin relatives at the occasion was considered the matter of prestige and honor for the host family.

Same was the case with the death rituals, where the kinship role was also important for participating in the death rituals as per the norms. In *Kafan – Dafan* kinsman performed their role; they announced the death and managed other rituals at that day. At *Kul Khowani* and *Janaza*, number of kinsman participated to show the solidarity with the grieved family and loyalty with the dead person being their relative.

Harvesting season

Kinship role in harvesting season was also of significance important. At harvesting season all kin relatives gathered for harvesting the crops of each kin in sequence. The concept of *Wingar* indicated the group activity consist of Kinsmen. At wheat harvesting season, kinship role was important. All kins gathered at fields and start harvesting in groups consisted of 15 – 20 men and women. Through the cult activity, they harvested in short time by performing kinship role.

Intra-village activities

Kinship role in intra village activities was also of an importance, on the occasions of village fair, welfare work, development of village etc. People belonging from different kinship groups performed their role in different intra village activities. Different groups consisted of kinship members were selected by the village headman to perform different tasks for the development of the village. But the kinship has changed after the Canal formation in certain ways.

- Water distribution;
- Exchange of agricultural land;
- Providing care opportunities;
- Conflict raising
- Individualism
- Social Harmony

Water distribution

The most important impact of kinship role was observed by the researcher during the distribution of Canal water. The water of CRB Canal was distributed through the method of *warabandi* that was managed by the local landowners. Kinship role was playing an important role there as the farmers belonged to the same lineage were getting maximum water share.

Another facet related to kinship role changed in the Canal Zone was that rotation of water practiced in the village, those who had kinship relations were easily managing the rotation of water with each other and also exchanged their water share.

Earning opportunities

After the Canal formation, the kinship role was very essential for providing earning opportunities. A landlord at locale who has thousand acres of agricultural land gives his land on *Patta* to any his relative to cultivate for earnings for his family by taking crop share of 1/8 ratio, thus the kinship relations were important for providing earning opportunities.

Conflict creation

After the formation of Canal, conflicts were raised between the relatives, because the concept of land division was not existed before the Canal formation but after the Canal formation land division was started that created conflicts between the members of different clans who had agricultural land in the Canal Zone, so after the Canal formation, kinship bonds were broken and kinship role was changed.

Individualism

Social coherence was very strong at the village level before the Canal formation, but after the formation of CRB Canal, people became busy to cultivation activities for increasing their productivity and no one has spare time for his relatives, while before the Canal formation, people especially close kin relatives participated in every ceremony of their relatives, but after the Canal formation and introduction of modern agricultural technology in the Canal Zone made the people busy and they just remained limited to their selves, thus the phenomena of individualism was emerged after the Canal formation.

Social harmony

Social harmony is the basic foundation of any society that works for the strengthening of the social structure. The concept of social harmony has also changed at the village level as the phenomena of individualism was emerged after the Canal formation, on the other hand social harmony was raised in certain ways. The Canal irrigation has brought harmony among the farmers especially for resisting the discriminatory distribution of water and especially for theft of water by influential farmers. The harmony was important for the peasants to protect their rights for the betterment of their agriculture produce. Another feature related to social harmony was the exchange of water share with one another with mutual consent that was the example of better kinship ties between them.

Social stratification

Social stratification is the normative characteristic of any society as the society is consisted of number of members having similar ideas and thoughts with minor differences, while some

of the people are not in harmony with the rest of the people that is creating disputes and conflicts among the people.

In the village *Banbhan*, the concept of social stratification was existed in its mixed form in the village before the Canal formation, the population of the village was divided in different occupations, 50% people were related to labor work and only 15% were engaged in agricultural activities, while 90% of the agriculture land was barren, thus there was no particular economic and social hierarchy among the people.

There were two dominating group who were governing the people, one was consisted of businessmen, while the other was government servant's group. The businessmen group was controlling the people by providing them best services; while the government servant's group was enjoying the authority backed by the government institutions and was controlling the people through their authority by solving their problems at government level.

But after the Canal formation, thousand acres of barren agricultural land became cultivable thus a major change was emerged among the landowners. They were more empowered by their social status of having vast agricultural land and more than sufficient income as in the initial five years no water bills were charged from them and their income was boasting without any burden that introduced a class system in the village after the Canal formation.

Social crimes

The phenomena of theft and robbery were not new in the village, but the nature of both inter related crimes was changed very rapidly for last ten years. The rate of theft and robbery was increased in the village after the formation of Canal because before the formation of Canal people were not economically sound. The concept of theft had existed in the village long before but the theft was limited to cattle, while the

rubbery was quite new, According to respondents rubbery was one of bad impacts of CRB Canal. There were many reasons behind the phenomenon that were the increase in the income of the landowners which was the main factor behind the increasing robberies while the water distributary was an easy access to the village through which criminals were making their way to the village and back after the robbery but mostly reasons were associated with the Canal:

- After the formation of Canal, the number of tenants migrated to the village from the hilly areas of Sulman mountain range, most of them were criminals;
- Another reason that promoted rubbery in the locale was the route connecting the village with the tribal area of Sulman mountain range provided by the distributaries;
- CRB Canal promoted the landlord due to high productivity. So now they use different people to get illegal water thus they were indulged in social crimes.

Rubbery rate was increasing day by day, during the field work, three motorbikes were have rubbed in the village. Beside the rubbery of motorbikes, kidnapping cases were also increased in the village and its surroundings. It was told by the respondents that main incidence of robbery were taken place on petrol pumps, bank branches and gold shops even on the main road including Indus high way. Snatching of motorbikes has become almost a non-news among the people. Such incidents were frequently taking place on the link roads developed after the introduction of CRB Canal. Along with the distributaries of CRB Canal, a number of link roads were the focus of robbers.

A number of factors seemed to help in promoting the incidence of robbery including possession of arms (pistols and automatic weapons), the increasing rate of unemployment in upper rejoin of Canal which has less resources and mountain area known as tribal area and higher frequency of interaction of locale with the tribal criminals due to newly established

transport, road-link and communication. The increasing incidences of drug use were formerly unknown to the youngster in the particular area but the criminals were bringing and selling the drugs from the money they attained through robbery and theft, while the defective system of police patrolling and investigation was helping the criminals.

Very few cases of theft of the animals or domestic possession like ornaments and food grains were reported in last three years. The theft has turned out as a permanent threat not for highly valued items but for cheap and petty items as well in the area as revealed through the interviews. In an interview a respondent reported that he and his family were away from the house for few days and when they return back to home the water pump which was fitted outside the house was stolen.

Another common theft at the village level was taking place normally in the harvesting season that was of cotton crop theft from cotton plant and sold in the cotton factory which was located in the Canal Zone.

According to Fuji Ramzan:

“I left my field in the evening the cotton crop was ready for plucking of Phutti. I was surprised to see harvested crop in the morning. Someone plucked Phutti from the field.”

Agricultural tools, grains and hay were reported as the most frequent theft. Beside that grass stealing from fields was the common theft in the village which was the outcome of conflicts among the local people.

Drug culture

After the introduction of CRB Canal, people from mountain area were frequently coming to the village mostly used drugs and as a result some of the people lived in the Canal Zone were using drugs easily available to them by the criminal gangs especially *Charss*, *Purri* and *Bhang*. After the Canal Zone, the

drug network also occupied the village though some of them were caught by the police by were released by the influential people of the village especially by the landlord class because they also used them for their personal gains.

Another aspect relating to emergence of drug culture at the locale was the formation of Canal, people became economically strong and to show their status they were buying vehicles and using drug. The youth of the landlord class enjoyed Honda 125 long drive by taking drugs in the evening to show their financial status and protection they had.

Conclusion:

The impacts of any developmental projects are not just limited to its prefixed objectives. The hidden aspects of such mega projects like canal irrigation has also brought many social changes that are usually not visible. Such types of hidden social aspects of the developmental projects have been discussed in detail. The political authority at the locale has attached with the people at locale who are landlords while before the introduction of new irrigation system this authority was fixed with local bureaucracy. Voting behavior of the people is now attached with the lands. The more land and more control over the canal water is the symbol of the social honor. The kinship roles have also been changed with the formation of canal. New kinship ties are being introduced through the canal irrigation system while the affiliation with old kinship ties are being weaken and strong with respect to the control and cooperate in the sense of new irrigation system.

Marriage patterns at the locale have been transformed after the introduction of new irrigation system. The practice of the exogamy and endogamy is not just limited to social customs but now it has attached with canal irrigation system to control over land in Canal Zone and canal water. New social crimes have been introduced after the formation of the canal. The rate

of the robbery has been increased at the locale. The trends of using drug in the youth at locale has been increased due to better economic condition of the people and easily availability of the drug brought by the tenants from the hilly area of Suleman mountains range. Consequently, the development is double ended sword that we must keep in mind it's both sides, while making policy for such projects.

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