CHAPTER FIVE

Kundeswari Village: Agriculture with Reasoning

Kundeswari is a small village with a population of about 600 people under Kashipur block of the district of Udham Singh nagar. In my first visit to the village in the year 2000 Vijay Singh of kundeswari was already synonymous with floriculture. Floriculture makes the cultivating family and individual most identifiable name on village address list. You start meeting people who know of Vijay Singh and Chaudhary Saheb, meaning Vijay’s father from kashipur itself, the nearby block level town from where you take an auto to reach HIS farm in Kundeswari. Such is the importance of being different in the villages which has traditionally been homogeneous. Engagement with agribusiness activity, such as floriculture, displacing conventional crops like wheat, rice and sugarcane makes one instantly popular. They are constantly discussed and debated leisurely in village gossip circles. Beginners are mostly perceived as ‘deviants’, as mad caps (sarfira hai, pagal hai like references are common for those who dare to be different). More than the fear of crop failure and debt-trap it is the fear of humiliation in front of the community in case of failure which these beginners constantly dread.

Chaudhary Maharaj Singh, a Jat from Haryana, with only 7-8 acre land holding was the first one to dare in such an environment. It was in the year 1990-91 when he started growing gladula on about less than even one acre land. The result was encouraging.
Maharaj Singh recounts those early days:

You see we do not have large land holding, so it was not making any sense to us to grow conventional crops like rice and wheat on our 7-8 acre of land which did not promise anything except the bare minimum.

It was then Maharaj Singh heard of Ajmer Singh of Bari and his gladula farming. Encouraged by his sons Ajay Singh and Vijay Singh, both technically qualified (Vijay Singh with an AMIE engineering diploma in mechanical and Ajay Singh, a chemical engineer, now a lecturer in a govt. polytechnic college) Chaudhary Maharaj Singh visited Bari and Pant Nagar agriculture university to do some preliminary research about floriculture cultivation. Assured of multifold returns as compared to conventional crops he started growing gladula in the year 1990 and since than he has not looked back. My subsequent visits have been witness to...
Joint venture with a Holland farm name KF Bio plants, now known as A kumar-florists (Holland) joint venture. Boxes bearing the name of new venture can be seen at Maharaj Singh’s Farm.

His transition from open sky small scale gladula cultivation for local market to poly houses enveloped gerbera cultivation for both domestic and international market. That Vijay Singh despite having AMIE diploma did not look for any job opportunity in his area, rather he has persisted with floriculture is a clear indication of their success.

Maharaj Singh essentially hails from Yamuna Nagar in Haryana and even at the age of 80 he is actively engaged with his agribusiness activities. He underlines the significance of ‘joint family’ in such enterprises like floriculture which are to be manned round the clock and there is possibility of heavy losses if not taken care of properly.

Responding to my suggestion that he should now retire and devote more time to religious matters Maharaj Singh said:

Family profession hai to help to karna padta hai.

(Since it is a family profession everybody has to contribute)

Chaudhary’s understanding of such agribusiness activities as family profession is significant here as it highlights the role of traditional joint family system in the success of such agripreneurial endeavor.

Not that there is any compulsion but Maharaj Singh just enjoys being there on the farm. A staunch Arya Samaji Chaudhry believes and quotes Gita’s oft
quoted ‘karmanyē vadhika raste’ sloka to explain his engagement with his profession at such an old age. The term ‘family profession’ is used frequently by all the members of Maharaj Singh to define their agriculture. The strong family ties and respect for each other is what everybody says, has been their success mantra. Maharaj Singh has been a vegetarian and teetotaler in the true aryā samajī tradition and this tradition has been deep rooted in his family. With regard to his pahari neighbors chaudhary echoes the same opinion as Chadhas of Chakaluwa: ‘paharis are slow paced and not very hard working especially men’. He further adds:

Ham log suddha aryā samajī log hain. Ham log saada khane aur rahan sahan bale hain. We don’t even touch non-vegetarian food. sarab to ek dam nisedh hai. Par pahari khane pene ke saukin hain. Khashkar alcohol ka sewan wo kafi karte hain jis se we aur aalsi ho jate hain.

(We are pure aryā samajī. we do not even touch non veg and alcohol is strictly prohibited. But the paharis traditionally enjoy liquor which further adds to their slowness)

Incidentally hills of Uttarakhand face this acute problem of local liquor which is run by local mafia in connivance with political heavy weights. Local news papers report frequently about women’s protests against liquor shops that turn violent sometimes. Stories about how women chased the liquor mafia men and their agents with ‘bichchoo grass’ (a type of wild grass which when rubbed on human body produces severe itching and burning effect) in this or that place are almost regularly reported. That most of the pahari settlers in Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Agribusiness Practiões in Selected Villages of the Terai Region of Uttarakhand
this village are from army back ground with their penchant for post retirement bonhomie curtsey army canteen's generous and cheap liquor further emboldens this 'leisure culture'.

From FARM to Platform: a day in the life of Vijay Singh.

Vijay Singh works with the female workers sitting on the floor while his father Maharaj Singh looks on (above). Below, the boxes full of flowers being readied for final transportation by rail at the kashipur railway station.

Maharaj Singh's venture and its success has much to do with one Mr. Naugain, a pahari family that leased their substantial 5 acre land on a fixed return of Rs. 40,000/- per annum. That Chaudharys make lakhs growing gerbera and gladula while the Naugains makes pittance in comparison does
not bother the latter: He is happy with his 'certain' money while his sons have taken up government jobs. This penchant for pensionable government jobs speaks volumes about the particular mind set and culture which is essentially non entrepreneurial and which does not want to try and take risk for their economic upliftment. Economic betterment as an incessant pursuit does not hold any appeal in this culture especially if it is intertwined with continuous hard work and facing the intricacies of impersonal market forces and its related networking 'headache' (word was commonly used to explain their non participation by the conventionalist). Government jobs in contrast provide 'stability', there is no worry of loss or gain and most importantly it secures your future beyond 60. So even if job of a peon in a government establishment provides only a just above average life conditions there is non ending queue to embrace this lure of certainty. This explains why even today private multinational jobs with emoluments in a few lakhs per annum still does not get the kind of 'social honour' and 'respectability' that a govt. job of even half the salary. This is especially true in the villages of north India where MNCs still mean a 'private' job and any job with govt. stamp is sign of 'true mobility'. Vijay Singh who has been participating in various conferences and fairs in south India volunteers another interesting facet. For he thinks 'south india' is more adaptive to new technology than the north India. He reasoned that starting agri-business does not create that much social pressure in those states for along with IT sector growth there is increasing acceptance of the agriculture based exports like floriculture. Plus, they already had the rich tradition of flower growing as a decorative item. Vijay who has attended seminars in Bangalore surprises me with his analysis. Singh similarly explains
hill people’s fixation for govt. jobs:

Kheti ke alawe koi kaam ko white collar job mana jata hai. Jabki agar aap khet me kaam karke agar lakhon kamata hain tab bhi apko blue collar worker ki tarah hi dekha jata hai.

(non-agricultural jobs are considered ‘white collar’ jobs while if you work on the land and your income depends on agriculture, even if you are a millionaire it will be regarded as practicing some ‘blue collar’ job.)

Like Bari and Chakaluwa here also migrant labourers play a critical role in agribusiness activities. Singh’s farm represents diversity at its best. Out of 8 regular employees, 2 are Bengali, 2 Nepali, 2 from UP, one each from Panjab and Bihar. The Bihari labourer, a high school pass young man in his late 20s is the incharge of entire floriculture polyhouses related activities, who handles various instruments for measuring the temperature and humidity in polyhouses. That floriculture segment of vijay Singh’s agriculture involves mostly women laborers; it signifies the trend towards ‘feminization of work force’ as has been reported from else where in this segment. This preference for female work force, however, owes largely to the social construction of their gender as ‘soft’, ‘loyal’, ‘obedient’, ‘sincere’, ‘hard working without hassle’ and with ‘healing touch’ etc.(words in inverted coma were used by the flower growers to explain why they prefer women). This suggests that traditional role of women which required less physical labor and more skill dealing with child rearing and other household activities has worked positively in favor of women
in this type of agriculture.

Most of the work related to floriculture like cutting, plucking, weeding, sorting etc. is done by women. Also women are seen as less ambitious and less argumentative when it comes to negotiating their wages. The reasons why chaudhary prefers his labourers from distant places are two: 1- workers from distant places like Bihar, Bengal, UP are more likely to respect the contract than the locals and they are more stable which are so imperative to a successful agribusiness. 2- Local labor force is susceptible to negative local influences. Like chakaluwa what is evident in kundeswari is that chaudhary’s success has not gone down well with his neighbors and other villagemen. They are referred to as ‘selfish’, and ‘uncooperative’ people. To my provocation ‘should not you people be proud of chaudhary for giving prominence to your village on Uttaranchal’s map through his farm activities, pahari neighbors immediately demolished the whole formulation of the question itself. Their responses were dominantly of the nature of dismissal and discrediting the chaudhary family with regard to their contribution to the village. This negativity is so palpable that even the chaudharys are aware of it and his relationship to his villagers is therefore underlined by mistrust. In such a situation when ‘local’ means jealousy, envy, mistrust and negative vibes Chaudhary does not want to take any chances and hence minimization of local participation in his agribusiness activity.
Who actually belongs to this terai region or rather terai region belongs to who is an important concern in this area. Kundeswari is no exception. This issue merits attention for it impacts upon the dynamics of inter-community relationship in a village and which indirectly affects the course of and currents of agribusiness. Paharis of the region consider themselves the original owner of this area given its proximity to the hills. People from Panjab who settled here post-partition are still considered to be 'alien' (bahari log). Ironically in this game of claim and counter claims there is no mention of original inhabitants namely Tharus and Buxas, two tribal communities of this area. Historical facts would indicate that both the current claimants, paharis and non paharis are settlers here as this was once a dense forest area inhabited by tharus and buxas tribal communities. The movement for separate state of uttarakhand further sharpened the polarization of the community on pahari-nonpahari lines. A fragmented community arrangement in the villages of this area provides a not so congenial atmosphere for crops like floriculture and its expansion through any cooperative channel.

Understandably therefore in most of the cases these farm houses remain restricted to a few families and individuals. This also explains why these farm

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houses do not have any centrifugal tendency to motivate others to adopt new crops and new ventures. Farm owners won’t mind sharing their magic formulae and seeds with the people from distant places but will not appear too enthusiastic in doing so in their own village. The notion of ‘spurious seeds’ being provided by these farm owners to their own village men is so pervasive that it takes the form of a ‘social fact’ in village social life. It is difficult to check the veracity of the accusation, yet it reveals the magnitude and level of mistrust inbuilt in the inter-community social fabric. So chadhas and chaudharys are by definition ‘malevolent’, their seeds can not be but ‘spurious’. And since chadhas and chaudharys know it that howsoever they may try they will always be considered ‘villain’, this forms a vicious circle where communities seem to be interlocked in a relationship of eternal hatred and in a flux of constant negotiation for forced coexistence.

It appears that social homogeneity that an average Indian village carries along with it despite caste, class and religious distinctions is missing in these villages with a rather chequered and mysterious historical setting (most villages in India has some notion of mythic ancestry). This seems to be typical of a village occupied by ‘settlers’ with a rather brief historical moorings. These villages, in other words, lack in those ‘gemeinschaft’ qualities which are symbolic of larger cooperation, uniformity and reciprocity and are generally associated with village life.

‘Kundeswari’ for the chaudharys donot mean much except that this happens to be the territory where their farm interest lies. Kundeswari village therefore seems to be divided in to various interest-zones rather than a setting with composite cultural whole. Disdain with which the paharis talk of their lands in
these villages, ever ready to sell for better bargain elsewhere does show the
primacy of 'interest based relationship' in their agronomic discourse where
land, seeds and people are not part of an unified agricultural universe rather
splintered units of economic pursuits. Chaudhary's 'village' still exists in some
part of Haryana where all his kins are settled, this is where his roots lie and
this is where he goes looking for brides for his sons. In matters relating to
marriage, kinship, rituals and other value systems chaudhary's reference point
happens to be that distant land which he left behind years ago in search of
greener pastures. This naturally has a deep bearing on his understanding of
his 'adopted' village.

His (chaudhary) response to my question 'what has he done for the welfare of
kundeswari?' was interesting. He first talked in length about the virtues of
generosity, 'if you are in a boat and it develops a hole and water starts
entering the boat an intelligent person will immediately start throwing water
out of the boat with his both hands'. That is if there is surplus of money it must
be passed on to the needy people. But he immediately then adds: 'if one is
generous towards the undeserving this noble act can in fact prove
counterproductive'. Simply put, since in chaudhary's immediate surrounding
there can hardly be any deserving people, so he seldom indulges in generous
activities. This was quite smart I thought. Chaudhary's behaviour is again
representative of the same kind of 'appropriative tendencies' and 'under
consumption' which was there with the chadha.
Chaudhary's farm activities, however, are poised for greater heights as Vijay Singh informs you about his future plans of gerbera expansion on more acres of land which he is working out with a few farmers for sub contracting. He has downloaded literature and other related information from Holland through internet (see appendix-III; his leaflet with e-mail id) which he considers has come as a boon enabling small farmers like him to access information which hitherto would have been impossible to even think of. Incidentally Vijay Singh’s constant reference to himself and his family as ‘small farmer’ carries a deep sociological meaning. And as I remind him of his new status as a rich agribusiness farmer he shrugs it off saying:

Sab upar bale ki kripa hai. Ham to crorepati bhi ho jayenge to apne ko chhota hi samjhenge.

(All this is because of the almighty god. Even if we become a millionaire, we still consider ourselves small farmers)
This constant under profiling of one's class position by these farmers indicates the same trend where farmers practicing agribusiness in a rather hostile local surrounding tend to discourage the impulse of 'conspicuous consumption'. As vijay Singh clarifies:

Aise hi log sochte hain ki ham jamin se paise khoob Kama rahe hain. Aur agar upar se vinamra bhi nahi honge to vidwesh badhega

(As it is people think we are minting money from the land and on top of it if we do not show humility it would further exacerbate the hostility)

Vijay Singh is also planning to install a breeder on his farm based on Holland technology and a tissue culture plant. He is also networking with National Horticulture Board (NHB), Government of Uttarakhand and Allahabad Bank for loans for more polyhouses of uv-stabilised sheets. Allahabad bank which was initially reluctant but as the chaudharys established their credential through successive successful agribusiness activities the bank this time around seems more than willing to co operate. Vijay Singh now also wants to add a cold storage facility on his farm

Back home two daughters-in-law of Chaudhary Maharaj Singh, both graduates, take care of their households and kids so that men of the family could give their 100% to the farm. Assured of agribusiness prospects in future chaudhary family would actually be happy if the new generation joins their agribusiness, but before that they want them to get proper education. 'Hame achha hi lagega agar hamare bachche bade ho kar ham se behtar kheti
karenge’ (we would like it if our children join our farm activities after their education) says Vijay Singh.

During my field work in these villages I was all the time a ‘concerned’ researcher (no matter how much I tried to be neutral) who was not looking at the ‘field’ as ‘problem’ alone but at the same time trying to work out a solution, questions such as possibility of co-operative agri-business farming, self-help group initiative (SHG), role of NGOs etc. kept haunting me. Visit to Kundeswari was significant as it was here I came across a SHG initiative essentially in response to Chaudhary’s farm. What followed later on as I tried to understand the dynamics and processes which led to the emergence and downfall of the initiative was an eye opener and a realization as to how the task of rural reconstruction is strewn with a seemingly non-ending and non-negotiable complex set of social processes at work.

Meet Kailash Maithani’s family, barely at a distance of 2 km from Chaudhary farm. This garhwali family has substantial chunk of about 12 acre land in
kundeswari but are mainly engaged in conventional crops. Maithani’s other brother is engaged in petty garment business and essentially caters to the nearby Kashipur market. Kailash Maithani, 45, a graduate, comes across as more of a social activist than agriculturist. As you talk to him you realize he is well versed with the NGO functioning and its activities. More importantly he seemed to be aware of its ‘economic benefits’ as spin off what prima facie appears an act of social welfarism. In fact he already has an NGO registered under his name called ‘uttarakhand jaivik utpadak kalyan samiti’ (See appendix). This works for the awareness about organic farming in the area and also in procuring and distribution of various new seed varieties introduced by district horticulture authority. It was vijay Singh only who suggested me the name of Mr. Maithani when I showed eagerness to meet some other progressive farmer of the village. Maithani, however, expectedly, turned out to be a staunch opponent of Chaudharys. He castigated chaudhary for ‘selfishness’, ‘individualism’ and ‘frugality’. Maithani complains that instead of encouraging other farmers about the benefits of agribusiness activity chaudharys discourage and demotivate the villagers by only talking of the problems and risks involved with such agriculture.

In the year 2002, 12 farmers under the leadership of Kailash Maithani formed a self help group which interestingly had all its members from pahari community except one Muslim member who was a close pal of kailash. They started gladula cultivation with the spirit of proving a point to Chaudhary but could not sustain it beyond a couple of seasons. Private one-to-one interaction with some of the members later revealed that it was essentially Maithani’s brain child who floated the group keeping an eye on some liberal
govt. assistance especially from DAPS (diversification of agriculture projects).
Other members were taken for a ride, it seemed. Maithani's own tattered poly houses bore testimony to his commitment to the idea of agribusiness. It appeared as if he just wanted to make the most out of these new ventures where govt. was liberally doling out money and other technical assistance to individuals. Maithani also showed me his participation certificate which he received on attending a training course on 'hi-tech floriculture' organized by Indian institute of horticulture research (IIHR), Hesseraghatta, Banglore in the year 2003, again courtesy DAPS where he represented Uttaranchal along with Vijay Singh.

Maithani, on his part, accepts that his attempts of invoking agribusiness streaks among his caste men failed. As he says:

Hamare log kam nahin karna chahate hain, ye sab inke bas ka nahi lagta
(Pahari men donot relish working. It seems all this is beyond them).

This statement of Maithani castigating his own people shows his frustration only borne out of his own failed attempts. That his SHG initiative started with a parochial ethnic angle to it rather than with any objective of economic emancipation of villagers was a bad start anyway. Maithani's neighbor Jagat Singh a rather forthcoming villager had this to say about Kailash:

Ye to khud kuchch nahi kar paya, dusron ko kya updesh dega
(He himself could not do anything, look at his own agriculture, what right he has to preach to others)
Maithani therefore as it appeared from my discussion with his neighbors and other villagers did not carry impression of a sincere, well meaning and committed to the cause of village transformation. He is rather looked upon as a shrewd (chalu) man who wants to make money through various government schemes of the new state encouraging cash-crop oriented agriculture. Even if one gives the benefit of doubt to Maithani, one thing which has really worked against him and his entire campaign was his own failed attempts at various agribusiness projects which some villagers said were mere eyewash to fulfill the official requirement. Maithani it must be mentioned that had tried his hands on gladula and honey bee projects, but both failed.

That Maharaj Singh's farm fortunes have hit gold or at least been successful so far is amply evident in the fact that on every visit I found addition of new blocks of polyhouses or increase in total acreage of land taken on subcontracting. During my last visit (2007) to kundeswari as I reached their farm house I was pleasantly surprised to meet vijay Singh's mother at the farm supervising the activities. Maharaj Singh sitting on a charpoy (cot) as usual was giving general instructions to the ladies who were making bundles of gerbera which was to be sent to Lucknow and Delhi in the evening by train. It was early in the morning and barring Maharaj Singh's daughters-in-law and grand children all the members had reached the farm which is good 5 to 6 km from their residence close to the railway station. This showed their 100% involvement to their new agriculture. As I accompanied Vijay to his newly constructed poly houses his mother also came along. She appeared to be a keen observer of the activities related to floriculture. She has been a witness to this transition from conventional agriculture to agribusiness like floriculture.
Today she is very proud of her son and their entrepreneurship:

Jindgi bhar gehu, chawal ki kheti karte rahe par kuchch nahi mila. Mehnat to utni hi padti thi par barakkat nahi tha. Navi kheti se jindgi behtar hui hai.

Ghar me sab log isme madad karte hain.

(All life we grew wheat and rice but got nothing much in return, there was no improvement in life. Today with same amount of work we lead a better life. So everyone in the family wants to chip in)

This observation by Mrs. Singh is significant as it underscores the role of resultant cash-flow in household economy, because of floriculture which motivates other members of the family to involve themselves in family's new foray. Even women of the house seemed more interested in the farm activities.

It was quite evident after spending almost a whole day with the family. Mrs. Singh appeared be an equal and active partner in her family's floriculture business. At 60 she Oversees household chores along with her two daughter-in-laws and also visits the farm regularly. She also carries lunch for her husband and sons who reach the farm early morning. She also actively interacts with the lady laborers of the farm which make them feel at home. Sometimes she surprises everyone with her everyday wisdom especially during plucking or cutting of flowers. On occasions when it is getting late and bundling of flowers is not done before they are properly packaged and transported to the railway station she also helps out.
In contrast though it is widely believed that the pahari women are the backbone of the hill economy but there is a class angle to it which is important here to highlight. The latent value orientation when it comes to women's participation in extramural work. As one would observe that mostly it is among low income group pahari families where women participate actively in activities such as working on the land, collecting fodder, fetching water from a distant nawla or gadhera (local kumaoni words for natural water sources in the hills). Their participation in such activities gets restricted as soon as there is sign of economic well being. Among the paharis across the caste lines this phenomenon is distinct. Lesser the women seen of a particular family, better the ranking of the family in social hierarchy. In contrast among the floriculturist families from Panjab and Haryana background women especially the elder ones nurture no such inhibitions. Economic prosperity and security does not seem to have any negative or restricting impact on the movement of women in public space such as participation in agriculture. As one would recall in chakaluwa village also the participation of Sudhir chaddha's mother and wife in agricultural field was a matter of village gossip among the paharis.

In kundeswari among some of the rich pahari families that I visited I found the movements of women quite liberal in the sense that there was nothing like 'behind the veil' situation as they actively participated in my informal interactive sessions with their other family members. Yet the critical point was when I enquired about how many times in a day or a week they visit their agricultural field, the response was almost nil. Agriculture is a male domain and even here rich pahari farmers will behave like 'gentlemen'. This word was used by Vijay Singh while describing the way some of his pahari neighbours
would relate to land and labourers. As he puts it:

Aap inhe dekhiyega ye kheto me aise jate hai jaise 'golf' khelne ja rahe ho. Khet me bhi ye majduron se baat nahi karte. Kheti me haath batane ki baat to chhod dijiye. Aise to kheti ho gayi, khaskar phoolon ki kheti

(You closely watch them and their body language. They would visit the field as if they were going to play 'golf'. Even on the field their interaction with the laborers is minimal. And participating in agricultural activities is simply out of question. It is difficult to be successful in floriculture like activities with this sort of temperament.)

POLY HOUSES AS POWER HOUSES

The sight of a poly house like structure at some distance from Vijay Singti's farm caught my attention. My interest grew in this as I was told that it was being owned by one pahari family, a rich and influential one in the local circle. As I reached there I could relate to what Vijay Singh meant when he described the 'gentlemen' like behavior of some farmers. I could realize he was talking about people like Mr. Mayank Joshi who was the owner of that poly house. The condition of the poly house was no different from the one we saw at Mr. Maithani's residence. Maithani and Joshi happened to be close friends. They were active members of that self-help group initiative to popularize floriculture among the pahari farmers which never took off beyond paper works.
A Brahmin by caste Joshi successfully runs an enterprise by the name 'Uttaranchal packaging' where he manufactures and supplies corrugated rolls, sheets, boxes and all types of cartons in the workshop adjacent to his sprawling house well equipped with all the modern gadgets of luxurious life. He vehemently counters my submission that 'paharis are not as entrepreneurial as Maharaj Singh'. As he argued:

aisi koi baat nahi hai. Ham hi lambe samay se gate (corrugated rolls) ke business me hain. Meri tarah aur log bhi hai jo is tarah ke economic activities me lage hain. Ye hai ki ham ab Maharaj Singh ki tarah apne mulyon ko tak par rakh kar paisa kamana nahi chahte

(There is nothing like that. We have been engaged in economic pursuits for a long time. I myself have been engaged in the business of corrugated rolls and sheets for a long time and we are successful in this. Yes we can not be like Maharaj Singh who has no value-considerations when it comes to making money)

Two things are important here. One that paharis like Joshis won't mind pursuing 'artha' in non-agricultural sectors. It is therefore not surprising that most of the grocery shops, flourmills and petty paan and nukkad chai shops in the villages of terai region are all owned by paharis, at least in the villages where I have traveled. Hence it would be wrong to argue that paharis are not 'profit-driven'. They are, but not through agriculture related practices. This just does not appeal to them. Perhaps the possibility of 'gentlemenesque'
behaviour is not much there when it comes to agriculture. It is here that I realized the appropriateness of word like ‘agripreneur’ in place of ‘entrepreneur’ to make a distinction between people like Joshis and say Maharaj Singh’s. The former may be ‘entrepreneur’ but not ‘agripreneur’ and this has much to do with the kind of value system that prevails among average people from the hills vis-à-vis agriculture.

Secondly, Joshi’s strong assertion about his value system and its moral correctness in contrast to Maharaj Singh who he thought would do anything for money only describes the former’s envy and hostility on ethnic lines. Also one thing is very clear here that the ‘business ethic’ and a kind of ‘professional’ attitude towards agriculture found among the members of Maharaj Singh’s family is not quite approved by people like Joshis and Maithanis. In other words the understanding about the culture of agriculture in hills which is defined as non-monetised, not-for-profit and and a sort of sacred vocation is in contrast to the way say Maharaj Singh looks at land, seeds and agriculture in general.

Vijay Singh’s following remarks in context of a real situation which had happened recently throws more light on this contrast:

Hamare liye kheti samman ki baat hai aur hame isme koi saram nahi lagti hai ki hamare ghar ke log khet me kam kare. Abhi kuchch din pahle gehu katai ke bakt majduron ki kami ho gayi is area me. Bahut paresani thi, majdoor mil nahi rahe the aur phoolon ko bhejna tha. Aap biswas nahi karoge hamara poora parivar, bachche aur auraten is me lag gaye. Khud se phoolon
ko poly house se sorting kar, cutting aur bundling kiya aur maal bheja. Ab ye sab kisi ko kharab lagta hoga hame nahin. Balki hamare liye to ye picnic ki tarah tha

(Agriculture is a matter of honor for us. We do not feel ashamed because we and our families work on the farm. Recently during summer when cutting of wheat was on, this area had severe labour deficit. Finally we including women and children of the family decided to help ourselves. Together we did the sorting and plucking of flowers and made bundles and consignment was sent to our clients in Delhi and Lucknow. Others would feel uncomfortable doing all this but we as a family enjoyed it as picnic)

Now this sort of thing is simply out of question for the families of Maithanis and Joshis. This is the kind of engagement with agribusinesses displayed by Maharaj Singh’s family is perceived and portrayed by his pahari neighbors as ‘paise ke peechche pagal log’ or mammon-centric behaviour. Instead of acknowledging the hard work and commitment of the family the tendency would be to castigate them. Strangely these occasions will also be marked by vilification of ‘desi’ value system as ‘lalachi’ (greedy), ‘business minded’ and ‘mulya heen’ (value less). At the same time there will be no dearth of people celebrating their so called pahari value system whose preference of ‘mulya’ over ‘artha’ will be underlined repeatedly. The ‘mulya’ or value here mostly means ‘casual treatment to ‘artha’ or economic pursuits’. This shows the contrasts in the way two communities understand and treat agriculture in Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Agribusiness Practices in Selected Villages of the Terai Region of Uttarakhand
general and agribusiness activities in particular.

The government assisted polyhouse at Mr. Joshi's place and its dilapidated condition bears testimony to this 'casualness to artha' syndrome prevalent among the paharis' world view towards agriculture. As it became evident later while talking to Joshi that he was not quite happy with the way local media projected Vijay's farm as hub of progressive farming. As he says:

Ab jo bhi bahar se log aate hain chahe wo adhikari ho ya aap jaisa researcher sab poly house dekh ke vijay ke farm par jate hain. Ham bhi apni taraf se rajya ke vikas me hi lage hain, par yahan to bhend chaal hai. Aaj kal sarkar aisi khetiyon par bal de rahi hai. Par unhe sif ek hi family par focus nahi dena chahiye.

(Whenever any important people whether government officials or a researcher like you comes to kundeswari they straightway goes to Vijay's farm, thanks to so much hype created around his polyhouses by the local media. Even we are making contribution to the development of the state. But since the thrust of the government new policies is on such agriculture like flower growing there is this herd mentality and rush to Vijay's farm. They should not focus on just one family).
As is evident Joshi feels sidelined by all this attention and limelight being hogged by Maharaj Singh's farm. That the Uttarakhand government is doing nothing for its 'own people' (meaning people from hills) recurs frequently in his comments which partly exposes the strained political equations in the terai region and its ethnic colouring.

Also it appears that though the people like Joshis and Maithanis erected polyhouses on their lands but halfheartedly and only to draw people's attention and hence it did not prosper. Poly houses it seems have become new sign posts of powerhouses in these regions. Another striking difference is the level of involvement and participation of the family members of Maharaj Singh in the farm activities. On one occasion Vijay himself sat on the floor with the workers to help them make bundles of gerbera. He later explained:

Is tarah unke beech baithne, uthne se bharosha badhta hai. Unhe bhi hamari kheti se lagao ho jata hai. Saath hasi majak se 'involvement' badhta hai. Waise bhi is kheti ne mujhe paisa aur samman dono diya hai to iski seva karne me hichak kaisa.

(My participation and sharing of a few lighter moments with them creates confidence and bonding between us. It brings more involvement and in any case floriculture has given me both money and fame, so there is absolutely no hesitation in 'serving' it)

This dedication and commitment to agriculture is missing among the paharis. As one talk to the pahari young and old it becomes quite clear that agriculture in their social and cultural domain is not perceived as an honored occupation.
What is 'seva' or service to Vijay Singh; people like Joshi would much rather look at it differently. On seeing Vijay's mother on the farm, Joshi had this to say:

Bechari budhi ko is umar me kam karte dekh dukh hota hai. Ab ham log is tarah se kheti nahi kar sake. Ye unhi ke bas ka hai. Ye jat log hain ye jamin ke liye kuchh bhi kar de.

(Poor old lady I feel sad when I see her working on the field at this age. We can't even think of this kind of agriculture. These 'jats' will do anything for lands)

That 'jats' love their lands and their agriculture is amply evident in the way Maharaj Singh's family relates to it. Joshi's comments however only go to underline his own attitude which is so antithetical to the demands of modern agriculture. Even in the way he relates to his workers shows his fixated notions about social meaning attached to labour doing the land. The sharp delinking that had existed between the 'owner' and the 'worker' on the field in traditional set up is just not possible in agribusiness activities like floriculture which requires personal supervision and involvement in day to day activities. Right from the the polyhouses upkeep of flowers to marketing to quality check to the technical aspect like humidity testing in polyhouses etc require all round monitoring and this just can't be left entirely on workers. At stake is so much that no one can ignore the minutest details and requirements of the farm.

Clearly agriculture is in the 'genes' of Maharaj Singh's family, as he proudly claimed. Thereby meaning that they have had a long tradition of agriculture in the family and hence the success rate is very high in their agribusiness
activities. Incidentally this is perhaps why it would be important here to point out that the streak of entrepreneurship in non-agricultural sector, as exemplified by Mayank Joshi, does not necessarily get translated into similar degree of enthusiasm and drive for excellence in agribusiness. It seems culture and history of a community determines and indicates the extent to which a community would be positively disposed to the lures of agribusiness. As elsewhere, even in Kundeswari Maharaj Singh’s family would always try to be modest about their farm’s success. The maximum that they would say will be this: ‘bas ho jata hai khane peene ke layak. Pahle se thoda thek ho gaya hai.’ (Nothing much just that it has become a bit easier now. We earn enough to take care of our existence). On the other hand Mr. Joshi presented a completely different picture. On his residence when I broached the topic and deliberately presented an exaggerated version of economic profit being claimed by Maharaj Singh, Joshi got agitated and the next more than half an hour he laboured on an elaborate cost-benefit analysis of agribusiness only to conclude that firstly the claim of high gains in flower business is inflated and secondly whatever little profit that Maharaj Singh must be making is of no consequence given that in the labor cost he did not include the cost of Maharaj Singh’s family members labor cost. As he reasoned:

Jyada fayada nahi hai, thoda bahut hota bhi hai to unki mazdoori bhi to jodo. Poora parivar aurat bachhe tak lage rahte hai. Unke labor cost calculate karo to ulta ghata hi kaha jayega.

(I don’t agree with the assessment that there are high returns in the floriculture. And even if there is some
profit then when you add their own labor cost it comes
to nothing as they involve their women and kids also
in the farm work)

In pure economic terms Joshi's analysis may hold some water but what was sociologically more significant was his painstaking effort merely to rubbish a claim of higher returns by his fellow farmer. The reason seems to be embedded in the larger local socio-political context. Given the thrust of the new state of Uttarakhand on promotion of agribusiness activities such as floriculture and subsequent generous support, the lure of easy and low interest loans from banks and other allied agencies for this purpose seem to be a crucial factor in this tussle for the tag of progressive farmer. Plus the fact that this recognition also means state level acknowledgement, opportunity of free participation in national and International workshops and conferences on government money, proximity to bureaucrats and politicians make it worth fighting for. People like Joshi for whom creation of a new state on the line of hill identity meant natural preference in government schemes and strategies, feel disappointed at the attention being showered on these 'desis', as paharis would refer to the people from non-hill background.

While Maharaj Singh and family virtually 'eat, drink and sleep' with their farm concerns his pahari neighbors remains stubbornly uninterested with the idea of floriculture. Large land owning families, in any case, do not even entertain the idea and would simply dismiss them at the very mention of it. Experiences of talking to the ordinary farmers of Kundeswari threw up another important reason behind this indifference to cash crops such as floriculture. As an articulate pahari farmer explained:
'Purani kheti me 'local doctor' se bhi kam chal jata hai. Kuchk kharabi ayi to log apne anubhav se, aapas me salah kar de hal nikal lete hai. Par phool jaisi kheti me ye bharosa nahi rahta. Iske liye aapko sahar bhagna padta hai. Jaise chchoti-moti bimari ka ham ghar gaon me hi upchar kar lete hai, par jab serious hota hai to sahar jana padta hai

(In our traditional agriculture if there was any problem with the crop, we used to take care of it with the help of our experienced 'local doctor', based on our traditional knowledge base. only in emergency cases that we would need outside help. This is not possible in floriculture. It would require help and support from the city making us dependent on outside help).

This reference to traditional body of knowledge as 'local doctor' and the importance of the role of common agricultural wisdom in the conventional agriculture came as a very powerful expression to highlight the element of 'insecurity' that enterprise like floriculture is strewn with because of its dependence on specialized technical support system in case of any emergency. Cash crops like floriculture are like 'serious situations' for these farmers and the fact that it requires a very specialized, modern and abstract scientific and technical interventions and in-puts work as strong deterrent. This also shows how difficult it is to lure ordinary farmers accustomed to the cocooned security of traditional agriculture which is so much in sync with the rhythm of nature to the monetary incentives of agribusiness. This 'sense of
security' factor associated with the conventional agriculture is in complete contrast with the 'sense of fear and risk' that the cash crop like floriculture carries along from the start.

Vijay's farm ambitions continue to grow which is reflected in the addition of more and more acres of land on subcontract to his floriculture segment. On the other hand people like Mr. Maithani appeared to be more and more disinterested in his agribusiness activities. Pitiably sight of his polyhouse bore testimony to this disenchantment. Given the fact that such experiments especially in agriculture which is so fixated otherwise and tradition bound, have strong demonstration effect, failure of people like Joshi and Maithani prove to be a major dampener to the spirit of agribusiness among his pahari co-villagers. Maithani otherwise a very affable, articulate and aware person wore a resigned look when I encountered him in my last visit to this village. As he put it:

'Bahut koshish karke dekh liya. Ye ham pahariyon ke bas ki chheez nahi. Ye panjabion aur Maharaj Singh jaiso ke liye hai. Unme lagan hai aur Kisi tarah ka jhijhak bhi nahi kuchch karne me
(We tried our level best. But it is not our cup of tea. This can be done by only people from panjab and Maharaj Singh. They are hard working and most importantly have no qualms about doing anything for economic profit unlike us who have so much to bother about in terms of social honor)

Maithani acknowledges the industriousness of people like Maharaj Singh.
Most importantly he attributes their success to lack of 'samajik jhijhak' or social shyness, meaning thereby that the families like Maharaj Singh sweat out in the field the whole day and round the year and they do not bother about their 'status' as long as it helps their business. This stress on 'social honor' is very typical of pahari farmers of this region. It appears that the people who have come here as migrants and settled here do enjoy certain amount of 'anonymity' when it comes to engaging in their fields even as manual helper which a local pahari would find demeaning. In a typical pahari's world view 'doing the land' is not seen with any 'honour'. In fact social honor decreases with increased active, direct and physical involvement with the land. As Maithani further elaborated:

‘Inke log rishtedar kam hain yahan. Par hamare to roj aate rahte hain. Islaye khet me kaam karke unhe koi hichak nahi hoti. Hamari bahu betiyan agar kheton me kaam kare to naak ka sawal ban jata hai.

(They, meaning Punjabis farmers, don't have many relatives around here. But we have close contact with our relations in hills who regularly visit us. It is easy for their family members to work on the land. If our women visit the field to supervise, let alone working the land, it will become a question of prestige).

It seems the close proximity to hills, their roots, which are predominantly tradition bound with its agriculture being acutely subsistence, constantly demotivates the modern, cash and profit orientation in agriculture of its men in terai.
Maharaj Singh, however, refutes this observation:

Aisa nahi hai ki ham apne bahu betiyon se kheton me kaam karwate hain. Par ye jaroor hai ki ham is mamale me bahut rigid nahi hain. Bhoomi aur kheti hamare liye puja ke saman hai. Is me samajik pratistha kam nahi hoti.

(Its not that our women have to compulsorily work on the field or anything. Just that as far as women's participation in farm activities is concerned we are not that rigid. After all agriculture is like worship for us and hence we consider it to be sacred to serve the land)

The study of Kundeswari village therefore shows how a host of social and cultural factors determine the fate of agribusiness activities in a significant way. While Maharaj Singh's understanding and value system with regard to agriculture has elements which encourages the motive of profit making from the land and other related agricultural activities, his pahari neighbors like Maithani and Joshi show characteristics which are largely non agripreneurial.