Bari Village to Bari Farm

Bari is a small village of about 1500 people located in the district of Udham Singh Nagar and part of Kichha tehsil. Situated near Sitarganj on Haldwani-Khatima Highway, this tiny village is however famous in the entire terai region for something special: this is where Ajmer Singh, a Sikh flower cultivator ushered in a sort of floriculture revolution some two decades back, much before India adopted new liberal economic policies. Ajmer Singh's name is synonymous with Bari and is popularly referred to as 'Phool bale Ajmer Singh' even after his death a decade ago. Like any traditional Terai region village Bari and its farmers were content with the kind of security which 'wheat-rice-sugarcane' cycle of cultivation had provided them. The conventional crop pattern had given a sense of 'self-reliance', but also brought along an attitude of complacency. The attitude prevails even till today amongst the non-floriculturists or the non-agripreneurs.

Ajmer Singh was a visionary (Durdarsi, as the villagers would call him) who could foresee the possibility of dwindling sugarcane cultivation based fortune, owing to monopolistic and imposing sugar mill lobby and hence tried his luck with gladioli (referred to as glad or gladula by the farmers in this part), a cut flower which is less susceptible to decay and weather effect. He reaped a rich harvest of fortune for many years by cultivating bulb of gladula and its flowers.
His success story became part of Terai region folklore. Yet the practice remained restricted to a few families only, mostly kin of Ajmer Singh. Others simply waited for the 'good news' of failure of the new experiment. This aspect of agribusiness is extremely critical as it throws light on the intra-village dynamics responsible for either sustaining or putting obstructions to the agribusiness currents. Agribusiness endeavors, as a result, continue to follow a fluctuating trend in the region. 'Pockets of prosperity' as I would like to call these farm houses in a village, face a gamut of processes at work which range from traditional 'neighbor-envy' to communal/religious based identity formations at work.

While floriculture gradually almost vanished in Bari, of late it has once again experienced the revival in the tendency for experimentation and for market friendly crops. The transition of Bari village to Bari farm owes it to late Ajmer Singh and his family for bringing prominence to this village by providing an identity on the map of Terai region of Uttarakhand. Most floriculturists in the region agree that it is Bari where it all started.
I visited my field villages including Bari in the Terai area intermittently owing largely to the fact that personal as well as professional responsibility of teaching and earning my livelihood had its own constraints. But this proved to be a boon in disguise as I happened to see the tides of agri-business current with a different perspective every time I visited these villages over a period of time. During my visit of 2001, for instance Harjinder Singh of Bari was the only farmer who was cultivating gladula on his land. By 2003 he stopped growing gladula owing to reasons which were significantly social and communitarian in nature, rather than merely an economic decision. In 2001 it was drizzling when I visited Bari Harjinder Singh a small land holding farmer (4 acre) was busy with his two sons and wife trying to cover the ready-to-be cut gladula with a plastic sheet. I could see how the entire family was virtually on their toes till the drizzle stopped.

Harjinder Singh came across as an ambitious farmer who had the urge to make the most out of his land. His understanding of the multifold returns of gladula in a few acre compared to Sugarcane cultivation was so convincing that he persisted with it despite constant 'ridicule' from his neighbours. When I asked one of his neighbors, a rich large land owning farmer, to explain as to why he was not growing gladula, he said:

'Maine M.A. kiya Hai, Dusre mujhe inki (referring to Harjinder Singh ) tarah apni bibi betiyo ki din-rat Bailo ki tarah kam nahi karwana hai, Kya faida aisi kheti ke paise ka'.

(I am a post graduate; secondly I don't intend to make my wife and children work in the field round the clock like bullocks. What is the charm of that farming and its extra returns?).
The response reflects characteristic rural societal value orientation, especially within the traditional setup which forbade active female participation amongst the rich land owning groups. To this neighbor of Harjinder Singh agriculture and its profit is a means to good status as he succinctly put it:

‘Kheti hamare liye hai, na ki hum kheti ke liye’
(agriculture is for us and not vice versa).

One reason behind this explanation of course is the fact that his engagement with conventional crops such as wheat, rice and sugarcane provided him with sufficient food and other securities and that he was holding a post graduate degree made him more reluctant and even opposed to such experimentations given its highly demanding regime involving labour and sweat. This attitude is also a product of the culture that has been prevalent in Indian villages that the large land owners very seldom worked on the land themselves; instead they depended on hired labor mostly from the lower castes. Large land owners, not to talk of their womenfolk, considered it demeaning to work on the land. That questioned their status in the upper echelon of the social hierarchy. In other words, while amassing of land was considered an indication of upward mobility, working on the same land was seen as a mismatch or unbecoming of his higher status dispositions. This phenomenon has been even observed by social anthropologists like Andre Beteille as he noted, ‘...a high value was in general placed on pursuits which did not involve manual work. Within agriculture, the dominant productive activity, one sees clearly the inverse relationship between the extent of manual labour performed and the degree of control over the land. There were some sections of the village whose members were required by custom to abstain from all manual work on the
farm; there were others who were required by custom to perform the most onerous form of manual work; there were yet others whose customs allowed the men to work on the farm, but not the women' (Beteille 1980: 111).

That this well qualified Sikh neighbor of Harjinder Singh belonged to a large land owning family did add to the complacency. Secondly, it seems such behaviour from educated people is informed by the perception about level of education to different professions. In rural areas, as in case of Bari, agriculture is commonly seen as a vocation of the less educated and higher education is seen as the one meriting white collar jobs. In such cases hypotheses that higher educational level always or necessarily leads and adds to entrepreneurial trends, do not seem to work. But for a small land holders like Harjinder Singh, gladula-cultivation is a route to good money and that is important even though it means total involvement of the family round the year.

On my visit to Bari in 2003 I found Harjinder Singh had stopped growing gladula and thus came to an end the revolution that Ajmer Singh had ushered in this village. Harjinder Singh however was as hospitable as last time when
he had offered me a sumptuous lunch of Ghee-laced paranthas followed by some stems of gladula in the end as I was on my way back to my residence. This time around his family looked more content. Reason was his eldest son had got a job in military and this government job had provided the family enough sense of security. Harjinder however, appeared apologetic when I reminded him of his promise of not giving up floriculture in the face of neighbour's negative attitude. It is, however, clear that for a small landholding farmer like Harjinder the engagement with floriculture was a desperate attempt to earn some cash and the moment his son joined a government job he yields under pressure of constant 'ridicule' from his village men for engaging his wife and children in the field.

Harjinder confided that he wants to restart it. He attributed the reasons behind complete elimination of gladula farming in the village to 'hostile and non cooperative' attitudes of the people in the village and inter-familial rivalry (he had requested his brother to sublet some of his adjoining land in lieu of a distant land so that he (Harjinder) could grow more flowers at one place but was denied), other than of course the lack of market-connectivity and state support etc.. For the non-agripreneur neighbour of Harjinder Singh, Harjinder's withdrawal was the vindication of their stance vis-à-vis such agri-business activities. This in turn emboldens the stereotypes like 'old is gold' and 'Time-tested' dimension of elements of agricultural universe which has far reaching implications as far as the progression of, what I have been referring to as, agri-business currents is concerned. It in turn creates an environment which is inimical to the dissemination of any new concepts or ideas in a village. Needless to say lack of any support system like agricultural scientists
or experts and other rural extension activities in such areas makes the task of decision making of individual farmers in favour of promising innovation and experimentations difficult. Farmers recognize the importance and role of Agriculture University like Pant Nagar but there is consensus on its almost negligible accessibility to the ordinary problems of the farmers.

Harjinder Singh narrated an instance of 1984 which seems to have really proved to be a major psychological bottleneck for the growth of floriculture in the village, when due to anti Sikh riot in Delhi, truck load of cut flowers had to be abandoned en route to Delhi as flowers got rotten. Those were the early years of floriculture in Bari and given the fact that majority of the flower growers were Sikhs this was perceived by many in the community as bad omen. Also for the villagers this was the first major encounter to the fragility and tenderness of such crops. The risk involved in venturing into anything which is not part of the 'tested' universe of rural set up was further emboldened by the massacre that took place in Delhi, major market for cut flowers. Result therefore was not merely immediate economic losses suffered by the farmers. Since then all, but a few, reverted to their traditional sugarcane cultivation; to the 'certain', 'loyal' and 'time-tested' world of agriculture even if it meant economic status quo for the middle and small land holders. The tragic mishaps in the 1984 and its recoiling impact on the floriculturists could be seen as a mere coincidence from a rationalist view point but it left an indelible mark of fear and insecurity about such crops among the first adopters. What many villagers referred to as bad omen actually was nothing but verbalization of that setback.
After hearing Harjinder Singh’s version on the success and failure of floriculture experiment in Bari, my interest in Ajmer Singh’s family grew. Of three brothers of Ajmer Singh, Ranjit Singh the youngest brother followed Ajmer’s dream project for some years till late 1990’s and then gave it up. Ranjit Singh though attributes this to lack of networking structure in the Delhi Mandi and to the 1984 fiasco. It however, seems reason are far more cumulative in nature. As I sat with the family one afternoon interviewing Ranjit Singh he took me to his nearby land where he had started growing ‘sweet corn’ (much in demand recently in various five star hotels as one of the ingredients of veg-salad) and planned to grow safed musli (Chlorophytum Borivilianum); a type of medicinal plant to prove his credentials as a ‘progressive farmer’. His strong insistence in showing me his new experiments made it evident that he prided on being called a ‘progressive farmer’ of Bari. While Singh’s wife generously served us tea at regular intervals, further probing elicited some more observations and understanding of agriculture in rural India and how they are increasingly being seen as a sign of backwardness. Ranjit Singh commented:
‘Kheti hamesha ghat ti hai, naukri hamesha badh ti hai. Naukari me Jo chain hai wo kheti me kaha hai. Kheti ka koi thikana nahi kabhi bahut achha to kabhi bahut kharab. Naukari me kam se kam jo bhi amdani hai wo lagatar milti hai aur badhti hi hai.’

(Agriculture always declines. But job in non-agricultural set up always grows. Jobs, govt. or private, provides a life of comfort which is simply not possible in agriculture. Agriculture is untrustworthy, sometimes it is very good and sometimes it is very bad. At least in jobs there is permanence and sure increment)

This shows the extent to which the uncertainty factor, not merely in terms of weather but also in terms of lack of market linkages and investment over the years has affected the understanding of even the seasoned farmers. The Agriculture in village weltanschauung and their rearranged hierarchy figure at the bottom. Engaging oneself with agricultural activities, no matter how lucrative and economically rewarding is the enterprise is perceived to be a wrong choice. This perception is understandable among the lower and even middle level peasantry but the prevalence of this understanding among even the rich segment is baffling. It is therefore not surprising that Ranjit Singh, though he is only ‘10th pass’, spent quite substantially on his children’s education. His only daughter is settled in Bangalore as a medical practitioner; eldest of the two sons Jitender Singh Kler did a course in merchant navy but has come back to his village after a short stint with some shipping company owing to health problems and the youngest is pursuing hotel management.
Jitender’s following comments demonstrates the disillusionment with agriculture and the village life among the younger generation:

‘Sir, ek to jamin ko to ghatna hi hai. Parivar badhega to jamin  ghatega hi. Abhi hamare paas itna jamin hai par aaj ya kal ye ham dono bhaiyon me batega. Phir aise cheez me haath hi kyon dalna.Dusre kheti ko backward ka kaam mante hain. Ham bhi sahar me rahkar badhna chahte hain.’

(Sir’ land share per individual has to decrease in any case. Today we may have substantial land but tomorrow it will be eventually divided between us brothers. So what is the point in trying out such a risky proposition which is from the beginning itself a losing idea. Secondly agriculture is considered to be a backward profession. I also want to live in cities and prosper.)

While Jitender argued about certain fragmentation of land with a more certain assumption that population will keep increasing with each offspring having at least two sons, Sr. Singh kept nonchalantly listening to his son’s arguments. Jitender explained it further as he talked about the luxury of city life and how boring it is to live in villages. Talking to Jitender and his friends of the same age group, one realizes the formidable role being played by the mass media especially the television (henceforth TV) in creating an unrealistic hype about the possibilities in cities. Ranjit Singh though toes the line of his son in his
anti-village, anti-agriculture understanding, is somewhere not quite convinced.

As he opines:

Ye log bhi thik hain, par kheti me abhi bhi jaan hai.
Aaj ka generation sahar me rahna aur kam karma achha samajhta hai. Ladke to gaon me rahna hi nahi chahte. Ye sab TV ke karan bhi hua hai, pahle radio tha jankari mil jati thi, par ab TV me tadak bhadak dekh ke sab udhar hi Jana chahte hain. Har ghar me TV hai, yahan tak ki harijan basti me bhi adhe se adhik ke yahan hai.

(They, meaning jitender and his friends, are right but there is still so much left in agriculture. Today's generation wants to live and work in cities. Television has contributed in this pull towards cities. Earlier we had radios and it used to give us relevant information but now television has hyped the glittering side of the city so much. Today every household has a television set; even some harijans also have it.)

Clearly Ranjit Singh 's observations have interesting takes on the changes in the attitude of the young generation towards village life in general and agriculture in particular and the role played by mass media such as television in this. Also it is not to be missed here that Ranjit Singh, even though sounds disillusioned earlier on the prospects of agriculture, continue to show optimistic bent of mind about the possibilities in agriculture. His dilemma as
the first generation agriculturist can be understood and the perpetual negotiations with the demands and the changing world view of the younger generation can be felt in the way he contradicts himself in his articulation about the prospects in village.

The Labour dynamics:

What is evident, however, is agribusiness as an option therefore gets a bad start; given that agriculture itself is considered an unattractive option. An important facet of these flori-farming is its increasing dependence on migrant labourers from Bihar and UP. Migrant labourers are mostly settled on the lands of rich land owning farmers. Dalits, the conventional labour force in the village, on the other hand are a minority in numerical terms; mostly landless they live on the outskirts of the village, typical of traditional Indian village’s landscape which is territorially divided/segregated within the dichotomized spaces of purity and pollution notion of caste. Ranjit Singh’s traditional family labourers from the dalit community feel sad about the decline of interest towards agriculture among the chhote sahibs (meaning new generation of large landholding farmers). Those who had worked with Ajmer Singh during his hey days of gladula farming nostalgically recount the economic benefits which ‘phool ki kheti’ had bestowed on them. Floriculture and other agribusiness activities had not just ensured them round the year wage-security but also increasingly involved women and children as plucking, cutting and sorting work related to gladula farming required soft handling. women were found to be better at these jobs than the men.
Mardon ka fasal (Masculine crop)

Nag bai, about 50, and who had worked on Ajmer’s farm had this to say:

‘wo (meaning gladioli) to badhia tha ham auraton ke liye. Dhan, gehu aur ganne to mardon ke fasal hain. Mazdoori to waise bhi hame kam milta hai jabki kam hamse utna hi lete hain. Phool ki kheti me kam Milne se hame aur mausam me bhi kaam mil jata tha.’

(That, meaning gladioli, was good for we women, wheat, rice and canes are masculine crop, meaning these crops employ more men and they are more labour centric crops. In any case we get paid unfairly less even though we work same and sometimes more. Floriculture used to give us work even during off season)

It is interesting to note in this context that conventional crop pattern provide on an average only 15 days work in a month to an adult landless labourer. Rest of the time they have to really struggle to ensure for their families two meals a day.
Entry of migrant workers further marginalized their bargaining power. Even though large land owners still claim to bestow their traditional patronage to their erstwhile dalit labor force, it seems that migrant labourers were encouraged and their entry into the village facilitated by these farmers to dislodge the monopoly of local dalit labor force. The benevolence that the families of rich farmers show about their traditional workforce seem mere posturing. Claims like the one made by Ranjit's family that they abandoned the practice of mechanized digging of potato for they felt bad about the way this left so many people wage-less, seemed highly unlikely.

Socially, politically and economically these dalits remain marginalized as benefits of prosperity have not percolated to them. Nathulal, the community leader from dalit basti blames this to 'surplus of labour' phenomenon. To the question as to why they never protested for wage hike, Nathu had this to say:

'Yahan haath ki kami nahin hai. Yadi ham nahi jayenge to koi aur jayega. Aakhir me loss to hamara hi hai. Hamara purana rista bhi inke parivar se kharab hoga aur jo bhi rojgar milta hai band ho jayega.'

(There is no dearth of working hands here. If we don't go some others would. Ultimately it would be our loss. We will lose the trust of our traditional patrons and whatever that we get we will lose that as well)

During a visit to the 'harijan basti' of Bari I could feel the simmering discontent among the youth. Pyare, a young man in his twenties and illiterate verbalized the mood:
'Yaha kuchh nahi rakha hai, mauka mila ki sahar bhag jaung. Kheti me kya fayada hai. Mere baap dada dusron ki kheti kiye, dusre to ban Gaye hame kuchch nahi mila.'

(There is nothing for us in this village; I will flee on first opportunity to cities. My father and grand father worked on others' field but what did we get in return. While others became richer, we remained pauper)

Quite a few families in the basti have TV sets and pakka two-room houses constructed under govt. schemes. Rattan lai's house in whose verandah we were sitting was half kachcha and half pakka and the kachcha portion was plastered with posters of almost all the political parties where pictures of Sonia Gandhi, Mayavati and Atal Bihari Vajpayee jostled to get the center stage. This in a way symbolized the political confusion that exists among this section. There was also voice of disillusionment with the local BSP leadership and Mayavati. While Nathulal still tried to be politically correct as he expressed his allegiance to the ideology of the BSP, the younger dalits seemed least affected by his lecture in defence of his party. Added Ramesh, 21, and a school drop out:

Gaon ham logon ke liye nahi hai. Sahar me Jo bhi karengi izzat se rahenge. Yahan to kuchh bhi Kama lo, log abhi bhi naukar hi samajhte hain. Gaon me kitna bhi Kama lo ya suvidha mil jaye par ham yahan mazboori me hi rahte hai
(Village is not for us. In cities whatever we earn we live with honor. No matter how much we earn in the village, upper caste land owners still treat us as their servants. No matter how much we earn or how much facilities comes to village we still live here only out of compulsion)

Other friends of Ramesh of about the same age echoed similar concern and aversion for village life. It seems 'honour' has emerged as an important social capital for the young dalits unlike their previous generation. There is a marked transition from economic negotiation tactics to concern and quest for social honour among the younger generation dalits. They would settle for even lesser economic returns but not by compromising on their social honor. As Radhe, 30, says:

Paisa kuchh kam bhi mile to chalega. Kheton me kam karne me bhi koi burai nahi hai. Par jab we mujhese mere baap dade ki tarah ji hazoori chahte hain to bura lagta hai.

(We won't mind lesser wage. Infact there is no harm in working on others field. But when they expect me to obey their dictates as they got from my father and grand father I feel bad and insulted)

Clearly the village India is witnessing a different kind of revolution. This urge for honour and to move away from the familiar social set up in the village among the segment which has been a traditional reservoir of labour in villages
can have serious implications for the fate of agriculture or agribusiness.

Not that the conditions of migrant labourers are any better. Most of them, poor and landless Muslims from Bihar lived on small piece of land given by their landlords in their temporary mud made huts. Socially unacceptable in the local social universe, even the local Muslim population treats these migrants with disdain and contempt. Role of these migrant labourers can not be emphasized more in the dissolution of any collective protest against the rich farmers for higher wage.

In fact the first impression about the spatial distribution of various communities in the village does suggest an all India reprint where physical distance between the communities follow the much perceived pattern of Hindu-Muslim relations as somewhat strained, in fact the latter being considered as impure as harijans while Hindus sharing much in common with the Sikhs. Then how does one explain the existence of a small pocket of Muslim migrants on the land of Ranjit Singh? One realizes behind these prima facie humanitarian gestures to these migrants there were strong calculative thinking and design. This act of prima-facie benevolence served two interests: one, they provided them with a constant reservoir of conformist labor force and secondly this also made their traditional dalit labor force loose its teeth in any future negotiation on wage with their traditional patrons. Rise of dalit politics in U.P. in the last decade did bring in some awareness among these dalits and hence the shield in the form of these migrants used by rich landholders to counter any possibility of demands for due. However the complete disappearance of gladula-experiment which had raised hopes of
better economic condition because of increase in their man days at farm for these landless wage earners further pulled them back. Still Ranjit Singh's attempt at sweet corn and safed musli gives them some hope of return of the fortune.

A cluster level informal interview session with the non-flower growers (non-agripreneurs) who cultivate conventional crops like rice—wheat—sugarcane, despite agreeing that agribusiness activity like floriculture offers much higher economic returns, brings forth the following reasons behind this apathy to agribusiness. First, lack of unity and consensus on the idea of agriculture among various communities namely Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs. Bari as a village has heterogeneous community set-up with communities namely Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs occupying three distinct but opposed spatial location in the village topography. In other words, Hindus and Sikhs share the one side of the village territory opposite to muslims-harijns location. Not that this in anyway reflect any extra warmth or cooperation between the Hindus and Sikhs but there is distinct and palpable attitude of indifference that underlines the inter-community life of Bari. Sikhs and the Muslims who are prone to agribusiness lures, however, share close ties in terms of agricultural know-hows and materials. Interestingly, all the atta chakki (flour mills) and petty kirana shops (grocery) of Bari are owned by the Hindus. Thus spatial location seems to reflect only the sacred dimension of inter-community life while in the profane world of economy it is calculus of the deal that matters. This also demonstrates the flexibility of these Sikh farmers when it comes to forging
economic alliances. For an elaboration it is important to listen to what Ranjit Singh had to say:

Hamara aur hinduon ka riwaj aur rit-vyavhar kafi milta hai. Mussalmanon ka sab kuchh alag hai. Par hinduo ne dekha hai kheti nahi karma chahte hain. Mussalmano me kheti ka phir bhi thoda rujhan hai, aur isiliye hamara milna julna hai.

(We share many rituals and cultural habits with the Hindus and culturally also there are much in common unlike Muslims. But Hindus are not quite interested in agriculture. Muslims, on the other hand show interest in agriculture and related activities. For this reason we share occupational relations with them)

Secondly, stories of failures and losses in such experimental crops, such as floriculture, tend to attain mythic proportion as it has overbearing presence on the collective psyche of the village community. It would be apt to say that it seems the stories of success trudge like a bullock cart while the stories of failure moves with the velocity of light in the villages of India. In contrast the success stories are shrouded in controversies and mysteries around. This is mostly because the villagers have this strong tendency to hide the success mantra for the fear of being replicated. Especially the notion of Najar lagna (black magic/ spell) is so deeply associated with any form of conspicuous consumption that even in words to mouth, day to day conversations in the
male domain and in female gossip circles the success is deliberately undermined by the practicing family.

Another peculiar dimension to this secretive attitude towards success of such crops or enterprise is that individual farmers fear that if the news of success is circulated, there will be too many growers leading to more competition. Furthermore they would not mind an unknown competitor from a distant place than from their vicinity. This process though vexing appears as one of the factors contributing to the disappearance of floriculture from Bari.

*Tukke ki kheti vs. Pakki kheti*

Thirdly, there is strong fixation for the old and tested methods and practices among the villagers, especially among the middle peasantry with 10 -12 acre of land. Traditional agriculture and crop choice ensures these families enough food and surpluses to take care of their monetised needs. This is demotivating as there is no urge to try and experiment further economic betterment. Fourthly, the notion of pakki kheti and tukke ki kheti. The way the common villagers refer to different kinds of crops and attach meaning to them is sociologically very important. Crops with cash orientation in general is largely perceived as “agriculture by fluke”( tukke ki kheti) while the conventional crops like wheat and rice etc. are frequently referred to as “pakke ki kheti”; thereby meaning such crops which do not need much pampering but assures consistent returns. Also the non-growers think of themselves as ‘Normal’ and consider the adventurous farmers who persist with say floriculture despite hiccups off and on as ‘deviants’. Hence the typical response of a non grower to a crisis faced by the agripreneur would be ‘see that is what we told you’. It is not so much the lack of support from the community as the loss of face of
these innovators in the event of crop failure or losses because of some other reasons makes the proposition of enterprises like floriculture a difficult one.

That just how much the level of community homogeneity and support is critical in either success or failure of agribusiness activity was narrated by one Swaran Singh (70 yrs) of Ruddarpur who was here in the village to visit his daughter who was married in Bari during one of my cluster meetings with the conventional farmers of the Bari. As I was enquiring about the possibility of sunflower in Bari Swaran Singh who was till then quietly observing came forth with this:

Bari me surajmukhi ugana sambhav nahi hai. Iske liye apas me bahut sahyog chahiye. Bari me alag alag kaum ke log hain aur inme kheti ki itni sajhedari nahi hai. Surajmukhi me sabse bada adanga ya dushman no. ek tote hote hain Jo faslon KO kharab karte hain. Jab tak adhik se adhik kisan ek gaon me saath hoke kheti nahi karenge, surajmukhi nahi ho sakta ahi. Toton KO kaun udayega. Hamne fasal lagaya aur mere padosi ne nahi to WO tote udane me koi dilchaspi nahi lega. WO bhala tin baja kar tote kyo udayega.

(It is simply not possible to grow crops like sunflower in village like Bari which is so fragmented and divided. Sun flower requires a degree of homogeneity to ward off birds like parrots, for instance, its enemy no.1. Now unless a large section of farmer have a stake in
a common crop like sunflower, cultivation it is not possible for a few families to grow such crop as divided community do not provide that community based traditional mechanism like beating the tin boxes etc. to drive away the parrots)

This was an enriching experience which could not have been possible with the conventional sociological tools of field work such as set questionnaire and schedule method of data collection.

Hindus, both pahari and non-pahari, though the majority community of Bari in terms of population and in terms of land holding (Sikh possess about 100 acre, Hindus 125 acre and the Muslims 80 acres) show lukewarm response towards agriculture based entrepreneurship. Failure of Ajmer Singh's flori experiment and Magoom Ahmad's dairy project are frequently referred to justify their complete insulation to such tukke ki kheti. Most of the Hindu farmers of Bari have engaged themselves with conventional crops and have opened petty grocery shops and flourmills etc. as one Hindu farmer from the community quoted from a Sanskrit text: 9

'nischit ko chhod kar anischit ki taraf jane bala, anischit ko to khota hi hai, nischit ko bhi kho deta hai.'

(That is if one tries to run after something which is uncertain leaving behind something certain he is bound to loose both)

What this very articulate villager said was characteristic of general collective Hindu psyche, at least in Bari, which comes across as non-agripreneurial,
tradition-bound and loaded with justification for their conformist behavior pattern from sources both imagined and authentic texts. In Bari these cultural contrasts can be felt very prominently as three communities are located in the village with mutually contrasting and also contesting work culture owing to both religious and their historical moorings in the village. However further research informs that it would be wrong to explain the phenomenon of lack of pro-agribusiness currents among the Hindus of Bari solely to religious cultural ethos and tradition as it was later found that the best of high land and irrigation friendly areas has been possessed by the Sikhs since they were the first settlers here and this could be a contributing factor, even if marginally. This becomes very significant given the dominant opinion as it has existed in sociological literature (for instance, Weber 1958) that the cultural values and traditional institutions associated with the Hindu religion have acted to hinder economic growth and development. Many, though, had disagreed. Argues Milton Singer, "The alleged contrast between the 'spiritualistic east' and the 'materialistic west' though no doubt valid but may have been over emphasized. The pursuit of wealth and material power represents a distinct motif within the hindu tradition, exemplified by the worship of lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and the existence of 'Artha' as one of four roads of salvation. (Singer, Milton, 1956). Still it seems in comparison to others, namely Sikhs for example, the Hindus of Bari show lesser inclination towards experimentation in their agriculture and there is feeble urge for prosperity through agriculture, and Bari field experiences and also findings from other villages from this area agree with this view, albeit, partly. One comes across many individual Hindu farmers with entrepreneurial attitude but as a
collectivity when talks of a collective Hindu psyche one finds diminishing impact of what Weber calls 'spirit of capitalism' as one moves from the migrants Sikhs who moved in to this area after partition to Muslims and Hindus of Bari. The complacency and lackadaisical approach which defines Hindu community life in Bari is in sharp contrast to Sikh pocket of the society.

Migrant Muslims laborers from Bihar: life in abject and deplorable condition at Ranjit Singh’s Farm in their huts

It is also reflected in the way the average Hindu villager would resort to 'justification of irrationality' saying:

'Agar sab log phool ugane lagenge to khana kaun khilayega.'

(If every body starts growing flowers imagine what will happen. Where will we get our food from?)

This is followed by very typical reference to some religious texts which the villagers are not even aware of:
'Anna paida karne se bada punya koi nahi hota'

(There is no better act of good karma than engaging in food producing activity)

In contrast the non floriculturist farmers from Sikh community will come up with serious and pointed reasoning to explain their lesser inclination to such crops. Interestingly there is no reference to any divinity in their very this-worldly understanding of the issues. They would talk about lack of government support; poor infrastructure in defense of their poor entrepreneurial disposition but seldom would bring god or destiny in between, which the Hindus would invoke quite generously.

The Muslim area of Bari in terms of its spatial setting occupies the opposite side of the hindu-sikh territory and share it with the Hindu harijans; the later being the most marginalized in every sense owing to its almost complete landlessness. Most of them have therefore been traditionally working as wage labourer. Margoom Ahmad was introduced to me as the pradhan of the village by Jitender, Ranjit Singh's son, which later was found to be incorrect information. Apparently Ahmad was supported by the Sikhs but lost the panchayat election to a Hindu candidate and hence this refusal to accept the change of guard by the defeated arrangement. Ahmad, himself part of rich farmers of Bari, tried his hand at dairy project but failed owing to lack of support from the community. As he pointed:

'Log dudh late the par kafi adulterated dudh late the. Dusre kabbhi late the to kabhhi nahi late the. Hame gaon balon ki madad nahi mili. Ulta unhone hamare
aginst hi kaam kiya. Gaon ki politics ke karan hamara ye project band hua.’

(People would come with their milk but used to add so much water. And secondly they were so inconsistent. I did not get the required support from the village. Rather the village politics ruined our project.)

Amidst a mixed and highly ambiguous set of processes at work there is one element which is uniformly singular about Bari and that is in its new hierarchy agriculture is being relegated to the bottom. Especially the young generation seems to be not so keen to the idea of staying in village and pursuing agriculture. Reasons, however, may vary. While a rich young Sikh villager will be worried about the possibility of getting a good girl from a good family if he continues to do the land, for a harijan youth escape to city would mean ensuring an anonymous, caste-neutral space with regular income and possibility of making big. For city to this generation of ruralite spells backwardness, cesspool of dreaded deprivation and degeneration.

This mythic image of city and its hype about possibility of achieving impossibility has to be largely attributed to the media boom, especially television in the last decade. Come evening and it is a common sight in harijan basti of Bari to see little group formations not around the axis of age or gender but around the common denominator of ubiquitous television. In television, out chaupals of yore. And there you realize why rural India is fast getting denuded of its social capital.
THE RETURN OF GLADIOLI

The winter of the year 2005 saw the return of gladioli days in Bari in a big way. After a lull of about a decade the first family of gladioli farming in the region, the family of Ranjit Singh led by the younger generation seemed determined to recreate the magic and colour of flowers in the village. It is interesting that this family and also the village itself continued to be identified with floriculture despite the fact that for long time floriculture had been given up. Jitender Singh kler, son of Ranjit Singh, is a man with a mission now, convinced of the prospects in floriculture. I did not believe this was the same young man who had earlier predicted that ‘village’ and ‘agriculture’ were doomed.

The family is cultivating gladioli on some 12 acre of their prime land which is the largest in the area. I learnt from telephonic conversation with Jitender’s mother that they have decided to grow gladioli on a large scale in collaboration with their long lost partners in Delhi mandi who one fine morning suddenly appeared at their door steps to convince them to try it again. They argued that today is the best time to do flower business. I immediately decided to visit Bari and see what transpired in a few months and what the factors which brought this turn around were. I reached Bari early in the morning and I could feel the din and bustle from a distance as I approached Ranjit Singh’s house. Once there I was surprised to find that the house wore a deserted look, unlike my earlier visits when I would invariably find Jitender’s mother busy in her daily household chores and Ranjit and Jitender would be relaxing on a ‘charpoy’ under a tree. This time around however there was none out there. All of them I later found were busy since morning in the near
by gladioli field where weeding and watering of the saplings were being done. I was greeted by the family with the usual warmth but the broad smile that Ranjit Singh wore was distinctively fresh this time. Jitender looked a bit shy and apologetic when he encountered me perhaps because of his extremely negative opinions on agriculture expressed to me during my last visit. He however later explained to me the circumstances which motivated him to take up gladioli cultivation at such a large scale.

Workers working on the land were mostly young except one old man, who appeared to be there in a supervisory role. Ranjit Singh informed me that many of these young workers were from the families of his traditional clients and many of these young workers were children when their fathers worked during the first gladioli phase on Singh's farm. The oldest of the workers Sunder was though physically no more as agile but he is still been employed. Ranjit though was initially not convinced about this but Jitender had this as explanation:

(I needed his experience. Others though are young and hard working but this is a different kind of agriculture which requires different sets of guidelines and techniques and supervision. Sunder though is not a qualified person but he understands the 'jaroorat', the needs, of flowers very well as he has seen all this for a long time on our farm only. So we have a bunch of about 10 labourers, half of them women, whom we have employed as 'regulars' especially for the gladioli farming. Sunder's job is to supervise the work on the field and manage the work force. This also gives us some respite from its extremely hectic schedule)

Ranjit Singh kept nodding his head in agreement as Jitender explained to me the reasons behind this volte face. It may be reappearance of gladioli on Ranjit's farm but it is very clear that Jitender's orientation to agriculture is different. As a young man who had a stint, albeit short, with the merchant navy. With the exposure to the professionalism of a modern organization Jitender clearly seemed more focused, more market aware and inspired with newer ideas to excel in his flower business. As he says:

'Maine dekha hai market KO aur main janta hun ki aaj iska market sirf desh me hi nahi videshon me hai. Papa logon ne bhi kheti ki par inhe market ka itna andaaja nahi tha, ye adhatiyon par depend karte the. Main to apne employee rakhunga aur yaha se Delhi mandi tak khud hi dekhunga pure network ko. Akhir
jab mihnat karenge to profit par hamari puri najar hogi.

(I have seen market and I now know that flower has market not just in the country but also abroad. My father and uncle must have started it but this time around it is different as it is taking place in a changed environment. My father did not have much idea about the market functioning and they depended on the middle men. I am not going to do that. I am going to supervise the entire process from farm to mandi myself. I am also planning to employ my own people for all this as well. After all if we will put in so much of hard work then our focus would be on profit.)

As it became evident that the factors which primarily brought about this change were the following: 1-Jitender had recently visited Bangalore to meet his sister and brother and there he had visited a few floriculture farms. Impressed by its growth potential and returns he spent quite some time meeting concerned farmers and other people involved in sales and marketing of flowers.

2- for want of anything better in terms of job alternative he decided to give it a try.

3- Co- incidentally his father's former acquaintances in Delhi mandi contacted him with the idea of joint venture. They promised to supply top variety of gladioli bulbs and also promised to share the burden of its marketing and sales.
Ranjit Singh is a happy man. Not merely because of the return of gladioli on his farm but also because of the fact that some one in the family has decided to carry on what has been the mainstay of their economy for generations and that is agriculture. Ranjit’s wife echoed similar sentiments when she said:

Sach puchcho to mujhe bada dukh tha ki itni mihnät se ye jamin banai aur aaj koi karne bala nahi hota. Do bachche chale gaye dusre career me aur Jitender bhi kheti ke bare me achcha nahi sochta tha. Par wahe guru di kirpa hai ji kheto me sab din hariyali rahegi. Ham to bahut khus hain. Jab ghar me hi itna kuchch ho sakta hai to bahar kyon jayen.

(Honestly I was very anxious and sad that we slogged with our sweat and blood to create this land and there was none interested in it. Jitender when came back from his failed attempt at merchant navy our hope hinged on him. Thank god now that he is back. Our field will remain green for ever now. When we have so much to do and earn at home why go looking for petty jobs to cities).

Ranjit Singh is also thankful to his old acquaintances in Delhi mandi for their help. Jitender however is not very pleased with this partnership arrangement, as he wants to sever the ties after some time. As he puts it matter of factly:

‘Dekhiye sir ye baniya log hain, inka fayada jab tak hai tab tak hamare saath hain. Dusre profit me bhari.
share ye banayenge. Mihanat aur khet hamari aur profit me itna share ham kyon de unhe. Thik hai unhone start me help kiya par ye jaroori nahiki ham ye jointly karte hi raha. Ham apna faida nuksan bhi dekhenge.'

(Sir these baniyas, meaning middle men, have their eyes on profit alone. They will invest or be with you only till it serves their purpose. We will slog on the field and they will come and get a fat share in profit just because they helped us with initial support. So it is not necessary that we will continue with this tie-up. We may review it).

Ranjit Singh interrupts him with a word of caution:

'Bete abhi suruat hai, unhe saath leke chalne me phayada hai. Waise bhi unhone hame madad ki hai. Ye kaam akele ka nahi hai'

(My son, this is our beginning and it will be sensible to take them along. in any case they have helped us. This type of agriculture is not possible single handedly.)

Jitender, however, remained non-committal on this. As he privately quipped:

'sir father logon ka purana hisab kitab tha kaam karne ka. Ab duniya badal gayi hai. Emotional hone se to business nahi ho sakta. Ab to phayada nuksan sab
dekhte hai. Aur sahi bhi hai jab ham raat din mihnat karenge to phir profit bhi puri chahenge’

(Sir my father and others had different style of functioning. Now the world has changed. You can not let your business be guided by emotions. Today everybody is interested in profit making and there is nothing wrong with it any one who works hard would like to get the best deal out of it.)

Jitender comes across as a person whose agriculture is completely guided by economic reasoning. His reference to ‘ab duniya badal gayi hai’ is suitably reflected in the way he looks at the ties that they had established with the ‘baniyas’ from Delhi mandi. Contrary to his father he looks at this as pure economic arrangement where there was no favour like thing involved from either side.

The second innings of gladioli as Jitender reasons is taking place in a changed scenario. Media and communication boom has made the youth like Jitender become ‘aware’ about the happenings around. The expansion of hindi news papers in the region have done wonders for the people in villages as they have become far more aware not merely in terms of their socio-political knowledge but also in the way they would redefine their economic pursuits through agriculture.

As Ranjit Singh explained:

‘Pahle kabhi kabhi aise faslon ke bare me WO bhi radio par sunte the. Par koi vishesh jankari nahi hoti
thi. Ab to lag bhag har mahine aisi faslon ke bare me, unke bazaar ke bare me, unke beej aur taknik ke bare me akhbaron me jankari hoti hai. Jankari ki koi kami nahi hai ab. Pahle ikke duke gharon me akhbar aate the wo bhi saam tak par aaj to hamare majdoore ke yahan bhi aapko akhbar aur television mil jayenge.'

(Earlier only rarely we used to hear about such cash crops, that also through radio. They used to give not much information. Now almost regularly atleast in a month there would be articles on such crops in the newspapers which will give information about the seeds ,the techniques and the market etc. there is no dearth of information anymore. Earlier news paper used to come to only one or two houses that also late in the evening but today you will find even our labourers have access to television and news papers)

Last time I talked to Ranjit Singh and Jitender, they informed me over the phone that others have also started showing interest in gladioli. Baljit Singh has also restarted gladioli on a substantial portion of his land and others are also taking cue. Jitender feels encouraged as he feels this broad basing will help in minimizing the risk. He is already discussing with others to form a group of those farmers in Bari who would be interested in floriculture. Seems gladioli have finally arrived in Bari for a longer inning this time. The latest from Bari (2007) is that Jitender has started a flower shop in Gurgaon centre in collaboration with the Big Bazaar group and plans to shift from gladioli to more
hi-end products like gerbera. For that he is in consultation with some companies to invest in polyhouses on a larger scale in his village. Though still there are not too many who are willing to follow the path. Says Ranjit Singh:

Sabse bada problen logon ke soch me hai. Log turat returns khojte hain. Dusre hamesha profit hi chahte hain. Ek bar jahan kuchh kami Hui ya thoda nuksan hua turat chhodne ki baat karne lagte hain. Aaj jab mera fulon ka karobar thik chal raha hai tab bhi log nahi badalte hain. Ulte jab raat me bas me gladioli ke bundle rakhne bus stand pe jata hun to log bag mazak karte hain ki kya fayada do paisa jyada kamake aisi mhnat karke.

(Main problem is with people’s attitude. They want instant results. Also they always want profit. Sometimes when for some reasons there are fluctuations or dip in the returns they would immediately talk of leaving it. Even though today I am doing well in floriculture others do not want to join. In fact now days when I go to the nearby bus stand to send the gladioli bundles to Jitender’s shop in Gurgaon, others from my village would comment and make fun as to what is the charm in making some more money with so many headaches)

Clearly if the success story of Ranjit Singh’s farm is to be replicated by a significant number of farmers in Bari, it is not enough to have a few
enterprising farmers around. The possibility of revival, return and innovation will perhaps always emanate from the farmer families like Ranjit Singh but how to create conditions so that smaller farmers like Harjinder Singh are encouraged to participate and pursue their agribusiness dream is a crucial question. Bari, therefore, needs investment and support from the state and the private players in terms of seeds, technology, market networking, extension service centres and social scientist in the midst of these villages. The change in Jitender’s attitude towards agriculture could be possible because of his networking and realization about the possibility that a market-oriented agriculture can offer. It indicates that there is nothing inherently wrong with the villages still, if only they are seen not as remnants of backward India but a vital, indispensable and green end of the rural-urban continuum. The challenge, therefore, lies in how to convert these individual stories, such as that of Jitender kler of Bari, in to a collective movement. The fluctuating current or trajectory of floriculture in Bari with all its complex and sometimes even contradictory tones of its actors, reflect the moment in a society under tremendous change and flux.