



RESEARCH PAPER

An Invisible Universe of Evil: Supernatural Beliefs and Practices
among Farmers in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

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The current study intends to investigate the presence of supernatural beliefs and behaviors in crop cultivation and animal management among Punjab's rural agriculturalists. The study also makes an effort to comprehend the cultural connotations that Punjabi farmers connect to these paranormal activities and beliefs. The researchers used a qualitative research technique to perform an exploratory study in order to meet these study aims. Using a semi-structured interview guide, information was gathered from rural agriculturalists. Both male and female rural agriculturalists were subjected to interviews. Additionally, a few interviews with rural spiritual healers, livestock and agricultural professionals, and religious academics were done. The breeding and raising of cattle among the rural agriculturalists was shown to be closely related to superstitious beliefs and behaviours. These attitudes and behaviours are thought to be beneficial for boosting agricultural productivity and rearing livestock at a higher profit. The main activities mentioned by the rural agriculturalists include visiting shrines, using ashes, flowers, and salt as antidotes, and distributing the share for pirs, or spiritual figures, and shrines.

Introduction

Every community has some form of supernatural beliefs and behaviour (Petrus, 2006). For a variety of reasons, people in many walks of life embrace supernatural rituals that are tied to their beliefs in various ways. Magical and occult rituals make up a larger portion of supernatural practises (Jensen et al., 2016). People frequently engage in a variety of paranormal activities in which they strongly believe. These customs consist of the conviction that certain events will either have positive or unfavourable results, as well as the conviction that some events will either bring good or bad fortune. For instance, many cultures have beliefs about the luckiness or unluckiness of particular colours, days, and occurrences. However, religious activities that are a component of a belief system also alter how people in rural and urban regions think and act. Although belief in supernatural practises is widespread,

different cultures place varying amounts of emphasis and confidence in them (Tahir et al., 2018). Supernatural practises may involve religious rituals. Throughout documented history, these methods have been crucial to the advancement of agricultural and animal management. McCleary and Barro (2006) assert that there is a direct connection between religion and agriculture. Religious practises have the power to mould people's minds in such a way that they embrace cutting-edge agricultural methods in accordance with their beliefs. Additionally, it has been asserted that religion transformed farming (Falvey, 2005). Therefore, it is probable that religious belief systems have a greater impact on supernatural behaviours in religious communities. Every aspect of life involves supernatural beliefs and behaviours, and farming and animal management are not an exception. There are several supernatural agricultural practises and beliefs that people follow for a variety of reasons. The bulk of these paranormal activities, however, are predicted to boost livestock and farming output while safeguarding plants and cattle against the negative impacts of paranormal energies. There are also rumours about supernatural farming methods used by Filipino farmers to increase the output of both crops and cattle. They don't plough the ground much deeper because they think that crops' roots are terrified of the dark. Additionally, removing hair during the planting season will result in less output. They also think that seeds should be sown simultaneously because doing so keeps pests away from the seeds; otherwise, bugs would come to the land in great numbers and damage the crops (Yule, 1919).

Due of their contextual similarity to Filipino farmers, individuals in Pakistan's rural areas are more inclined to engage in paranormal rituals. They may also engage in paranormal agricultural techniques in rural regions to boost livestock and farming output. However, no research has been done to examine the superstitious behaviours and beliefs that rural agriculturalists use for farming and animal management. In order to address this vacuum in the literature, the current study will: i) examine whether or not rural agriculturalists engage in any supernatural beliefs or activities in the course of their everyday lives. ii) examining the cultural connotations that the rural agriculturalists associate with the supernatural activities; and iii) forms of supernatural practises to boost livestock and farming productivity.

Literature Review

Possibly older than mankind itself, superstition is a widely held belief. Since the supernatural and belief in it have played a significant role in human civilizations throughout history, they can be regarded as cultural universals (Petrus, 2006). Because they are cultural constructs, these differences are not always universal. Other cultural and subcultural systems may not necessarily conceptualize phenomena in the same ways that we do when we describe them as supernatural or paranormal (Hunter, 2016). Spirituality and religion are seen from an anthropological perspective as being an element of the superstructure of a cultural system, which was previously described as the set of ideas, beliefs, and values that a people make sense of the world and their role in it. Anthropologists work hard to maintain their objectivity when studying various religious and spiritual practises and beliefs. Instead, they look at spirituality and religion in the context of a society's worldview, or the set of beliefs that people in a culture commonly hold about the nature and essence of reality. (Stump, 2008). One of the most evident aspects of religion is belief in the paranormal, especially gods. Black magic, witchcraft, and evil eyes are examples of supernatural powers that humanity have traditionally had a difficult time overcoming. Black-

magic and witchcraft are comparable concepts that can be used interchangeably in certain contexts. Witchcraft is viewed as the use of magical abilities permitted by God's will. Witchcraft typically involves using magic to control someone else's resources (Ashforth, 2002). Another type of supernatural energy is the "evil eye," which is said to have the power to injure and even kill those it touches (Qamar, 2016). Early humans were perplexed by paranormal occurrences like floods, illness, droughts, the evil eye, and infant deaths that they were unable to address (Malinowski, 1948).

Farming and preserving ranking hierarchical connections among rural residents in every society depend heavily on supernatural activities (Cennerton, 1989). As labour tills the ground, irrigates the land, and plants the seeds, agricultural practises and rituals also contribute to the production of crops. Rituals offer "a manner of focusing and signalling the cultural goals that eventually direct all labour" (Paponnet, 1996). According to Pham, the majority of the ethnic groups living in Vietnam, from the central highlands to the northern mountains, practise the rites of *Cau mua* (Praying for a Fertile Crop). In Vietnam, the *Cau mua* rites are often performed in the spring, when planting and germination are in full swing and farmers are hoping for a bountiful and abundant harvest. However, because of the diversity of the surrounding surroundings, cultural practises, and experiences of various societies, ritual practise differs (Pham, 2017).

Material and Methods

The current study investigates the use of the supernatural in farming and animal management among rural agriculturalists. The researchers employed a qualitative research technique and based their analysis on inductive reasoning because the study's goals are exploratory in nature. In other words, an exploratory research design was used in the study to accomplish the study's objectives under the qualitative research technique. To choose the study venues, equipment, and methodologies for data collecting and analysis, the researchers used qualitative tools and techniques. In one of Punjab province's districts, which is located in the middle Punjab area, the researchers purposefully chose a research location. The district's limits connect to the province's South and North regions. As a result, it is also planned that the district would mirror the traditions of the province's South and North. Three small towns with a large proportion of farmers as residents were chosen. Using a non-probability sampling approach, these rural agriculturalists were specifically chosen. However, it was made an effort to choose the participants – both male and female – from the three age ranges of 18 to 35, 36 to 50, and above 50. This grouping was done on purpose to make sure that both sexes and various age groups were represented. To highlight their perspective on the existence of supernatural beliefs and behaviours, religious experts including pirs, imams from mosques, agricultural field mobilizers, and veterinary field mobilizers were also selected in the sample. These parties are significant major opinion leaders and sources of information for rural farmers. Additionally, they frequently interact with rural agriculturalists, therefore it was anticipated that their perspective would give fresh perspectives to the study's findings. The research participants were interviewed in-depth utilising a semi-structured interview guide. A pilot research that wasn't connected to the real sites was carried out to create the interview guide. However, two local key opinion leaders, two agricultural field mobilizers, and two veterinary field mobilizers also helped researchers create and prepare the interview guide. Because the subject of the

current study is rather delicate because it relates to long-standing customs that also have religious roots, the researchers had to exercise extra caution and apply good judgement when conducting their fieldwork. The power dynamics in Punjab's rural settings also necessitated particular planning and execution of the fieldwork operations. As a result, the researchers travelled to the fields with the aid of a prominent academician from the area. To ensure impartial data collection, it was also made sure that the local gatekeeper was kept apart from the fieldwork activity. Interviews were done by a female research team with the female study participants and a male research team with the male research participants. Ethical consideration and field input processes were also given importance in order to ensure data quality and no harm to participants. Information was acquired during the interviews from both the interviews and outside observers. After the subjective data had been translated into English, results were drawn using thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

The following preset and emergent topics are used to present the outcomes of the current study:

Supernatural beliefs and practices in everyday life

According to this study, there are many instances of supernatural activities and beliefs in rural areas, manifesting themselves in all facets of village life. The majority of supernatural activities are founded on the traditional and religious supernatural beliefs held by rural farmers. It was discovered that various supernatural beliefs with a long local history surround the lives of the rural agriculturalists. In addition, the study discovered that agriculturalists pursue various techniques according to their individual religious beliefs. Taveez dhaga, dam Darood, and making promises and declarations are routine home rituals that are done for blessings, according to one research participant. Additionally, the villagers hold superstitious beliefs about curing physical ailments, mental diseases and disorders, infertility and sexual dysfunction, and offering protection from the evil eye. One of the study's participants said the following:

"My brother was contagious with a fever. We went to several physicians, but in vain. I was finally instructed to see a pir in a neighbouring hamlet by one of my relatives. Two varieties of taveez that Pir offered us worked wonders for relieving the fever.

The survey discovered that seeking treatment for psychiatric illnesses from pirs and other spiritual healers is widespread among rural agriculturalists. When my mother was having convulsions, one of the middle-aged rural farmers recalled. I followed my murshid's advice to pray for Dam while reading a few lines of the Qur'an for her for twenty-one days. The rural agriculturalists attend shrines to address issues in their families, their health, and their social relationships in addition to addressing psychiatric disorders. The two of these rituals that the rural agriculturalists frequently engage in are promising and declaring at shrines for various causes. Shrines are visited, vows are made, and shrine shares are declared. These actions are said to be beneficial for healing infertility as well as for conquering physical and mental ailments. Infertility and sexual dysfunction were cited by the majority of female rural agriculturalists as the two main problems that drive rural

women to shrines and pirs, where they also pledge and proclaim their portion of the pirs and shrines' offerings.

Visiting shrines for agricultural crops and livestock management

Rural agriculturalists frequently visit the shrines of well-known pirs, religious academics, and spiritual leaders to reap a variety of advantages. It was discovered that rural agriculturalists visited the shrines of their pirs to increase the yield of their crops and to make money from raising animals. Women and more senior agriculturalists are more inclined to visit shrines. On the other hand, younger and more educated rural agriculturalists visit shrines less frequently. One of the 55-year-old male research participants said in response, "My murshid advises me to attend the shrine every Thursday night. If you worship at the shrine while staying the night, your requests will be quickly fulfilled. However, a female farmer asserted, "I attend the temple every Thursday for milk distribution. Milk is distributed at the temple to keep animals healthy and to extend lactation".

Additionally, rural agriculturalists go to shrines to get sanctified items for their farming and animal-rearing endeavors, which have a variety of advantages. Typically, they take flowers, salt, and ashes from the shrines. It's thought that these relics are frightened. For oral antidotes, farmers offer ashes, salt, and roses to animals to prevent and treat certain physical imbalances. "My father advises to give this blessed salt to animals for healing fever, stomach difficulties, and for foot and mouth ailments," said one of the male participants (aged 48). "Our pir instructed us to administer an oral dose of few grammes of sanctified ashes or salt from the shrines," another participant (30-year-old man) said. My animals are protected from several ailments by the salt and roses I feed them on a monthly basis. . Similar to this, a 60-year-old female farmer in a rural area stated, "I have collected flowers from my murshid's shrine that I offer to my sick animals in case of any health-related issue." On the other side, farmers in rural areas also go to shrines to raise crop yield. The rural agriculturalist in this case reported two sorts of activity when they visited shrines. The rural farmers first offer prayers at the shrines to increase their output. They think that because to the reverence of the pirs interred there, prayer at shrines increases the likelihood that it will be heard. Second, it was discovered that the farmers were taking flowers, salt, and ashes from the shrines to employ as remedies for various agricultural ailments. Additionally, crops were protected from mice, jackals, and porcupines using these antidotes.

Promising and declaring for agricultural purposes and livestock management

The rural farmers engage in the practise of promising and declaring an increase in their agricultural output and animal husbandry. The rural agriculturalist believed that promises and declarations should be kept as made because they are a form of self-promise. In any event, harm can befall any member of the household, as well as the animals and crops, if these pledges and statements are not kept. In order to treat medical ailments in my animals and extend their lactation time, one of the research participants (a 37-year-old man) stated, "I have a pledge to send milk of my buffalos to the shrine once in their lactation period for distribution." Similar to this, a 50-year-old female participant stated, "I vow to make dalgula and deliver it to the kids. Since the day I got married 30 years ago, I have kept my word. There are many ways to promise and declare, including by preparing food, giving out milk, and

celebrating Gayarwainsharif, among other things. We frequently celebrate gayarwainsharif, said one of the female rural farmers. Every moon's eleventh is observed as Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani Day. We provide milk to the locals on this day in the hope that our dairy cow would be blessed. The farmers in the countryside also mentioned the custom of guaranteeing a cut of the harvest. One of the male farmers stated, for instance, "I had a pledge to give 1/12 of the yield of my crops for the needy in the name of Holy Prophet for blessings in my crops and animals." In conclusion, rural agriculturalists engage in promising and announcing because they feel that doing so boosts the yield of their crops and raises the income from selling livestock.

Allocating the share of pirs and shrines

According to the results of the current study, rural farmers distribute a portion of income from both the output of their crops and their livestock. This portion varies from one farmer to the next. Distinct agriculturalists reported three different share amounts. First, they were distributing 1/11th of their whole crop yield. Second, farmers distribute 1/12th of their total output. A handful of the rural agriculturalists also cited the third and twenty-first parts. They thought that this distribution was a godsend. Allocating the share of pirs and shrines follows two separate procedures. The vast majority of farmers who distribute their pirs were of the opinion that they should provide their allotted part to them. According to a 53-year-old male rural agriculturalist, "my father advised me to apportion the part of our earnings from crops and livestock. I give them a portion of 1/12. I divide the allotted portion at the conclusion of each season and take it to the pir sahib or shrine. A 50-year-old female participant said, "I distribute the share of profits from my crops and animals. At the conclusion of every season, my mushid instructed me to prepare rice and pork to give to the kids. This implies that the rural agriculturalists distribute the allotted portion of shrines in a number of ways, such as by making food items and giving them to children, giving out wheat and rice in their raw form, and assisting the destitute by selling the allotted share. During the local shrine's yearly fair celebrations, I make rice by selling a certain portion of my crops and animals, according to another participant. In conclusion, there are several ways for rural farmers to employ their allotted share of pirs and shrines in order to get blessings for their livestock, crops, and homes.

In the framework of agriculture and livestock management, the present study investigated the occurrence of various supernatural practises and beliefs in rural agricultural communities. The farmers in rural areas hold the belief that supernatural rituals like visiting shrines, making promises, making declarations, and assigning the share of pirs and shrines promote crop output and boost the profitability of their animal-rearing operations. The results of the present study, however, differ with the bulk of the scientific studies done to manage livestock and boost agricultural output. Academics have previously argued that supernatural practises and beliefs cannot be scientifically demonstrated (Ali et al., 2011; Gruber, 2017; McAfee & d'Entremont, 2017; Watts et al., 2015), and as a result, these practises and, more importantly, the beliefs, are useless for increasing production in the farming and livestock management industries. The empirical data gathered for the present study suggests that the supernatural practises are an integral part of both farming and livestock management among the Punjabi agriculturists, so it is impossible to ignore the contributions of this study in exploring the supernatural beliefs and practices.

The study also showed that rural agriculturalists engage in superstitious behaviours, such as visiting shrines, making declarations and promises, and assigning pirs and shrine shares that they believe will help prevent and treat illnesses in crops and animals. The study's results also stand in stark contrast to those of previous scholarly research on disease prevention and management in plants and animals. For the prevention and treatment of various diseases in plants and animals, agricultural scientists and veterinary health care professionals rely on modern techniques (Hoshide, 2002; Neethirajan et al., 2017; Nguyen Chau & Scrimgeour, 2021; Maruod et al., 2013; Muzari et al., 2012). But these discoveries provide a singular literary contribution to the fields of agricultural sciences and sociology of religion. Academic literature mainly ignores the existence of supernatural beliefs and behaviours among rural agriculturalists. The current study is therefore anticipated to close the gap in the body of knowledge about the use of superstitious beliefs and behaviours in agriculture and animal management.

The usage of ashes, flowers, and salt from shrines for boosting agricultural productivity as well as for preventing and curing animal ailments has not been the subject of any scholarly research. The rural agriculturalists' view of such artifacts as ashes, flowers, and salt as a remedy for various ailments in plants and animals is another novel addition to the literature. However, the material that has already been written supports assigning the share of shrines and pirs. Christians and Hindus both give a portion of their harvests and livestock to the church and the temple, respectively (Barnett & Stein, 2012; Brooks, 2004; Gruber & Hungerman, 2007; Thaut, 2009). Similar to this, Sikhs engage in such acts because they think they would benefit from them (Singh, 2006). This study also supports the existence of these traditions of awarding shares for shrines in rural Punjab, Pakistani communities. This shows that based on contextual parallels in rural parts of Pakistan, India, and other South Asian cultures, a preliminary extrapolation of the findings of the present study may be conceivable.

Conclusion

The current study investigated Punjabi farmers' superstitious habits and beliefs. The existence of supernatural beliefs and behaviours in rural Punjabi communities, which agriculturalists feel to be advantageous for them, was underlined through qualitative analysis of the data. The supernatural techniques may specifically be traced to agricultural cultivation and animal husbandry. These customs include visiting shrines, making declarations and promises, and assigning pirs and shrines' fair portion. The farmers in rural areas feel that using these procedures will raise crop output and profit from the breeding of their animals. The empirical data presented by this study on how supernatural practises and beliefs constitute an essential component of agricultural farming and animal operations in Punjab, even if these findings are not supported by any existing literature, cannot be ignored by academics, in my opinion.

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