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Performance of Agriculture since Independence

by

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Agriculture is considered as the backbone of the Indian economy. A vast majority of our total population still earn their livelihood from agriculture. The agricultural sector plays a very vital role in the development of our economy. The agriculture in India was totally backward at the time of independence. Due to the application of age-old and traditional techniques applied in agriculture, the productivity was very poor. In 1950-51, there were only 7 tractors, 62 oil engines and 16 irrigation pumpsets per lakh

hectares of gross cropped areas of the country. A very negligible amount of fertilizer (0.66 lakh tonnes in 1952-53) was also applied on agriculture. Due to its low productivity, agriculture could manage only subsistence livings to Indian farmers and the agriculture was not at all commercialised. Some of this sorry state of affairs are still continuing in Indian agriculture.

A lot of efforts have been done by the government of India for development of the agricultural sector since independence. Its outcome can be broadly classified into food crops and commercial crops. In India the major food crops include rice, wheat, pulses, coarse cereals etc. Similarly, the commercial crops or non-food crops include raw cotton, tea, coffee, raw jute, sugarcane, oil seeds etc.

In India, total agricultural production has been increasing with the combined effect of growth in total cultivated areas and increase in the average yield per hectare of the various crops. The following Table reveals the trend in total agricultural production in India since independence.

Table
Trend in yield per hectare of principle crops in India since independence

Items	1949-50	1964-65	2011-12	Annual Growth rate (%)	
				1949-50 to 1964-65	1967-68 to 2011-12
1. All foodgrain (m tones)	55	89	257.4	3.2	2.7

Rice (m tonnes)	24	39	104.3	3.5	2.20
Wheat (m tonnes)	6	12	93.9	4.0	5.0
Coarse cereals (m tonnes)	17	25	37.7	2.2	0.6
Pulses (m tonnes)	8	12	17.2	1.4	-0.2
2. All non-foodgrain	-	-	-	3.5	2.6
Oil seeds (m tonnes)	5	9	30.0	3.3	1.9
Sugarcane (m tonnes)	50	122	357.7	4.3	2.5
Cotton (m bales of 170 kg. each)	3	6	35.2	4.6	1.4
Potato (m tonnes)	2	4	46.6	4.3	4.9
3. All Crops				3.1	2.4

The Table reveals that total production of foodgrains had increased from 55 million tonnes in 1949-50 to 89 million tonnes in 1964-65 and then increased to 176 million tonnes in 1990-91. But in 1991-92, total production of foodgrains came down to 167 million tonnes mainly due to fall in the production of coarse cereals and in 1993-94, the production was around 184 million tonnes. In 2002-2003, total production of foodgrains has further decreased to 257.4 million tonnes. As per advance estimates, total production of foodgrains has again increased to 241.6 million tonnes in 2011-12. Thus, in the pre-green revolution period (1950-65) the foodgrains production had experienced impressive annual growth rate of 3.2 per cent and in the post-green revolution period (1967-2012), the same annual growth rate was to the extent of 2.7 per cent.

Cropping Pattern: The cropping pattern which shows the proportion of the area under different crops at a definite point of time, is an important indicator of development, and diversification of the sector. Food crops and non-food or cash crops are the two types of crops produced by the agricultural sector of the country. As the prices of the cash crops are becoming more and more attractive therefore, more and more land have been diverted from the production of food crops into cash or commercial crops. This has been creating the problem of food crisis in the country. Thus, after 50 years of planning the country has failed to evolve a balanced cropping pattern leading to faulty agricultural planning and its poor implementation.

Absence of crop rotation : Proper rotation of crops is very much essential for successful agricultural operations as it helps to regain the fertility of the soil. Continuous production of cereals on the same plot of land reduces the fertility of the soil which may be restored if other crops like pulses, vegetables etc are grown there. As the farmers are mostly illiterate, they are not very much conscious about the benefit of crop rotation. Therefore, land loses its fertility to a considerable extent.

Instability and fluctuations : Indian agriculture is continuously subjected to instability arising out of fluctuations in weather and gamble of monsoon. As a result, the production of foodgrains and other crops fluctuates widely leading to continuous fluctuation of prices of agricultural crops. This has created the element of instability in the agricultural operation of the country.

Great *diversities* have been found in agriculture *across different zones* of the country. Presence of agricultural diversities is another notable feature of Indian agriculture. Different regions of the country are having lot of differences in their natural conditions such as soil content, magnitude of rainfall, water availability, etc. Some areas are facing draught conditions whereas some other areas are facing occurrence of floods. Some more areas are facing the problem of water logging and salinity. Moreover, there exists a considerable difference in land tenure system and labour relations among various states of the country. In respect of sub-division and fragmentation of holdings, substantial regional disparities still exist. Thus, in presence of such large diversities in Indian agriculture, it is quite difficult to generalise a problem and to adopt a common single policy on agriculture for all different regions. Thus, while formulating an agricultural policy all these diversities in local geographical, economic and social conditions must be taken into account.

It is, thus, obvious that in a less developed country like India, agriculture has been considered as the primary occupation. In a country like India, agricultural practices followed by most of the peasants are not managed on commercial lines. Rather, it is still maintained at the level of subsistence farming so as to meet the requirement of food for the entire family throughout the year. Although about 69 per cent of the working population are engaged in agriculture but the sector is not yet organised in a rational manner. Most of the working units are still maintained at the

