

VISTA FOR CONTINUOUS SURVEYS TO MONITOR PROGRESS IN RURAL WELFARE PLANNING*

BY
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the Secretary of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics for inviting me to deliver this address to commemorate the services rendered by Rajendra Prasad, my life-long colleague and leader in the service of the rural people of our country. It was Rajendra Babu's comradeship with Mahatma Gandhi during the historic Champaran Kisan Struggle which inspired me to take up the cause of the much exploited and unorganised peasants and labour of rural India. It was also their triumph against the powerful English Indigo planters backed by the British Government which infused confidence in my heart that we would and could achieve success, if we organised our peasants and fought for the redressal of their grievances. He was good enough to inaugurate the very First All-India Conference of Kisan Organisers held under my Presidentship in 1936 in Madras. He was also responsible to withdraw the hated controls over producers of food grains in 1947.

I also had the privilege of being one of the founders and first Vice-President of this Society, with Rajendra Prasad who was then the first Minister for Agriculture as its first President. So I cherish this opportunity proffered to me by the Present cadre of Statistical Scientists working for the all-round welfare of Agriculturists to address your Conference in the name of our national leader and sincere Gandhian.

Beginning of our Studies

More than half a century ago, I commenced my researches in rural economics, began to develop statistical studies of economics

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of cultivation of paddy, cotton, tobacco and of cattle breeding, dairy farming, marketing and processing as also rural employment and consequences of under-employment on agro-industries, rural arts and crafts, notably hand-spinning and weaving. My studies helped me to realise the extreme relevance of Gandhijee's movement for Rural Development, Village uplift, Harijan and Girijan uplift. Ever since, I have been a devotee and ideologue of total Revolution of Gandhian era.

Agricultural statistics is an important aspect but only an aspect of the scientific study of agriculture as a whole. Agriculture is a science and the statistical study of various aspects of agriculture, more especially in its application to scientific, biological, meteorological and all other observational developments, experimental researches is a vital and indispensable arm, needed to help the rank and file as well as leaders of Agrarian Science, as a whole.

I was one of the first batch of researchers invited by the Oxford Institute of Rural Economics in 1924 to initiate general as well as statistical studies in Indian rural economy, and the results of my statistical study of the economics of farming, cattle-power of six villages in Andhra were embodied in the first volume of *Economic Conditions of Indian Villages*. It was published in 1926.

I found out that more and more peasants of those villages were descending to the level of marginal peasant and landless tenants, obliged to pay more than 60 per cent of the produce as rent. Then I began to study the conditions of peasants and workers in dry or upland villages and compared and contrasted their socio-economic conditions with those of deltaic villages. I drew the conclusion that the quickest means available for improving their conditions, at least to the level of the former would be in extending irrigation for their lands. Therefore, the economics of irrigation projects had to be viewed from the angle of additional employment made possible for rural folk, their cattle, and greater income per annum per acre and per worker. So the earlier criteria of what interest would be yielded on the capital invested on any irrigation project, was not conducive to all-round rural progress.

Then I proceeded to study the possibilities for internal migration of peasants and workers from over-populated delta villages to the sparsely populated and less developed areas within the same State (the then Madras) or neighbouring Indian State

(the then Nizams' dominion). My survey* revealed that tenants and marginal peasants of deltaic villages could raise themselves to the status of small farmers by purchasing low-priced lands in other areas and introducing their better methods of cultivation etc.

What were then the possibilities for landless Harijans to improve their socio-economic conditions by migrating to towns? At that time very few but bold rural workers were venturing to migrate to towns such as Guntur, Vijayawada, Madras. Neither they were able to improve their economic conditions, nor was their social status enhanced, though they liberated themselves from the stifling day-to-day caste-wise social depression. Their slum life was proving to be almost an incurable urban disease. Many of them were obliged to live on the city pavements and hovels put up on the road in margins.

I turned my attention also to the possibilities of additional employment and larger earnings for the socially backward groups, whose main sources of employment and income lay in crafts from handloom weaving to cobblery. I found that if Government would encourage them by way of training them in use of better tools, by supplying improved tools and machines and by providing cheaper and timely credit and marketing facilities, there were immense prospects for increasing their employment and income. This proved the incorrectness of orthodox economic teaching in our Universities of that era (1890 to 1920) that there could be no future for our cottage industries. These results were published in a series of papers in the then *Indian Economic Journal* from Allahabad and *Mysore Economic Journal*, and eventually embodied in the volume *South Indian Labour of 1931*.

I have ventured to give these few details of my first essay in laying foundation for Indian Rural Economics and Agricultural Statistics to indicate how we can discern potentialities for discovering new paths for improving the plight of our rural masses, especially the poorer sections who are being debilitated by low earnings, unemployment, under-feeding and consequent social and economic listlessness. I must add that Mahatma Gandhi blessed our campaign for the abolition of *Zamindari* system only after he was convinced by his careful perusal of our survey on Economic conditions of *Zamindari Rayots* published in 1933. As you all know, he led the way for all of us by conducting similar studies of the conditions

**Economic Conditions of Indian Villages*, 2nd Vol. (1928).

of the Bardoli and Champaran peasants in 1916, 1917 and 1918. Therefore I hail Gandhiji as the greatest of the founders of Indian Rural Economics and Agricultural Statistics. His disciples, Puranik and Dwivedi have been publishing bi-lingual Monthly *Rural India* on all our behalf since 1936.

Agricultural Prices

We are proud of our agronomists and other associated scientists as well as our peasants for having achieved 'Green Revolution'. They have enabled us to get out of the most depressing era of food deficits and demoralising threats of hunger on the 1943 Bengal Famine scale and recurring food imports from USA and other western countries. Have we however taken adequate steps to see that the 'Green Revolution' has spread its uplifting and profitable sun-shine, more or less uniformly over almost all the States, more especially the chronically depressed areas in all States, tribal and mountainous regions? Whose fault has it been and to what extent for their continuing backwardness; the Scientists or those in-charge of demonstration or financing agents or politicians or else administrators?

We have been clamouring ever since 1944 for the establishment of all India price-fixation agency for agricultural products, notably food grains. We in Central Legislature have demanded the fixation of minimum price level to be maintained by Government and also steps to make it possible for our peasants to obtain remunerative prices. The then British Government conceded the justness of our demands. The Bengal Famine Commission that pontificated over the Bengal Famine deaths also suggested that these protective measures have to be taken, if peasants are to be expected to put their best efforts into agriculture and if such famines were to be averted. Have our Economists and at least Rural Economists made any studies as to how far, in what manner and with what results the succeeding administrations at the Centre and States have attempted to implement those recommendations or acceded to our *Kisans'* demands?

The Late Rafi Ahmed Kidwai took tentative steps to assure support prices first for wheat, then for paddy in some States. Then we complained that those price levels were inadequate and demanded a more or less scientifically justifiable price levels. We also wanted that such price levels should approximate to remunerative price levels. Government conceded the justness of our demands. How far have the subsequent administrative

steps taken by Government been satisfactory? At long last the Agricultural Prices Commission (A. P. C.) came to be established in answer to our demands. But we complained that its terms of reference and instruments of instruction tended to favour the urban and professional consumers. We challenged further that it was meant more to assure the industrial, commercial and professional classes that the Commission would try to compensate them for the withdrawal of the earlier anti-peasant controls over the prices of food grains, storing, transport and disposal of the surpluses over and above the permitted portions of peasants production garnered by their families from their own holdings. It has taken fifteen to twenty years, that is, till after the 1980 General Election to Lok Sabha, for Central Government to reorient the instrument of instructions to A.P.C. to enable or to oblige the A.P.C. to estimate and suggest the price levels for food grains from the peasants-side.

Invisible Drain of Rural Wealth

Has any study been made by our Scientists in the Laboratories or in the University Faculties of Economics in any one year or over a Five year (quinquennium) period as to how much of peasants' hard-earned wealth had been unjustly diverted into the coffers of urbanites? I have called it invisible transference of wealth into the pockets of urban classes in my book *Credo of World Peasants*. What is more, how much more production, better production, could have been achieved, if such denudation of peasants wealth had not been allowed?

What about the personnel of the A.P.C.? Have we not had to wait for so many years to persuade Government to include in it, just one representative of peasants as its member? Now we are to have one more. How long are we to wait to ensure adequate representation for agricultural workers and also for dry-crop economy? Have our economists ever cared to study the possible impacts upon agricultural production that a better paid, less underfed and better educated agricultural workers could have made? How are the levels of support prices, and remunerative prices to be calculated? What all out-of-pocket expenses are to be covered by the support price levels? It is only in 1981 that the Central Government and the Planning Commission realised the need to provide for seasonal risks inherent in agricultural production and the interest charges on the capital invested in land and working capital—either owned or borrowed. Should they not have thought fit to include annual input of working capital in estimating costs of production? What about the investment made or contribution

offered by all members of cultivating peasants and their families? Can any economist say that the cost of cattle services have ever been fully estimated? In all such directions good old Dr. Mann in Poona, Dr. Gilbert Slater of Oxford and the economists of Indian Peasant Institute, started by me and inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi so long ago as 1933 have made some studies. Unfortunately our agricultural economists have yet to explore further avenues for studies in helping our peasantry to argue with Governments and urban economists for adequate prices.

The lab-to-land campaign is the latest and most effective development of the decades-long activities of Demonstration Farms and State Agricultural Departments and their Staffs. It would be well for the Planning Commission and Government to make it a permanent feature of the marriage between Science cum Laboratory with the Farm.

It is also good that the I.C.A.R. and Agricultural Universities have undertaken the responsibility of studying how far, in what manner and with what monetary and family enrichment and benefits, the adoption of not only specific achievements of the laboratory but also multi-faceted improved farming can be demonstrated on the small holdings, back-yards around the living quarters of marginal farmers, small farmers and even enterprising landless agricultural workers. Some effective studies are being made into the socio-economic benefits thus derived by these peasants and their results and are published in the Rural India. More and more such experiments, and studies into their results have to be made year after year indicating the follow-up benefits. I hope the students and post-graduate scholars of all our Agricultural Universities and colleges and rural development services will continue to work out their findings and their lessons would be sedulously broadcast through the Radio and other avenues of popular education.

Beware of One-sided suggestions, Solutions

We are grateful to our Scientists and Planners for their sincere studies, inventive and enterprising achievements and advices. But our administrators and cabinets have also to be vigilant, selective and democratic-minded in making their choice out of the passionate tentative suggestions or plans sponsored by our experts. Take for instance, the Linlithgow Commission's heavy accent, reinforced by our Planners up to 1962 in favour of large scale farms. So many of us had to fight hardy battles before we could persuade our political leaders to give up their support of the *Zamindari and Talukdari*

systems, and proposals, for large scale and cooperative farming which were supposed to make valuable contributions to agricultural productions, because of their huge land-holdings and large scale farming.

Let us remember that the scale of minimum prices to be supported and minimum wages to be prescribed and enforced would have to be related to the general price-levels and rising standard of living of the people as a whole. Therefore, it is the duty of our agrarian statisticians to be studying the trends of general levels of prices and wages in the country as a whole and also in rural areas, so that results of their studies can be utilised by all concerned, within the Ministries of Agriculture, Labour and Finance. So far not [enough attention has been bestowed to these aspects of the socio-economic life of our agriculturists.

Small farms have come to stay

Parliament had to struggle hard between 1964-66 to so amend the Planners' proposal embodied in the Seventeenth Amendment (Bill) to the constitution, proposing to include peasants holdings also in the definition of the term *Estate* in Article 31 by which feudal rights of *Zamindar and Jagirdars* were abolished as to save, peasants' holdings, below the ceiling limits. Thus the self-employed peasantry were saved from the contemplated compulsory merger or their holdings into large-scale farming, on payment of nominal compensation.

If only our Planners had taken the trouble to study the socio-economic aspects of our small holdings in our Indian demographic and socio-political atmosphere, they would not have obliged our political leaders to rush into that painful campaign and controversy for or against cooperative farming. So many of us had to champion the cause of our crores of peasants who had emerged as independent peasants, paining ownership over their small-holdings, free from the strangle-hold of feudalist landlords.

Thank God, the Narora orientation programme of twenty points has settled that controversy over the size of farm by persuading Government at all levels to accept the small-farming as an effective and creating type our rural economy, best suited to our overpopulated peasantry, suffering from seasonal unemployment and also under-employment with the most urgent need for growing contact between their land and labour; extracting every additional day of useful and meaningful employment in order to minimise their under-employment, and maximise agricultural produce ounce-by ounce.

Similar were the suggestions coming from some of our most eminent and well meaning experts such as the need for fixing crop

targets and control over irrigation-water supplies. Looking at them from the planning or laboratory angle such suggestions may not be opposed but there are the more important social and political overtones, which cannot be overlooked. So our researchers and scholars and their deans and professors have to be careful to study the socio-economic conditions also, before they venture to proffer such projects and approaches. The time has gone by when economics had been so irresponsibly divorced from politics and both could be insulated from demography and its explosive social detonators.

Slave Production ? Employment

Coming to demography, have our planners and agricultural and rural scientists and economists begun to make adequate studies into the evil ramifications of population explosion, which has come to be such an unmanageable and cumulative multipronged social cancer ? For long we have been complaining that despite astronomically burdensome planned expenditure on development and march towards welfare society, the poor are becoming poorer. We now know it is mostly due to population explosion. Is it not high time for our Agricultural Universities not to speak of other Universities and Institute to study on a larger as well as smaller compasses, village or *Samiti* or *Zilla* levels, how much of employment by days, in different seasons is becoming available for rural labour on land, in agriculture in agro-industrial or craft activities and how much labour can be ploughed into family centered self-employment through vegetable gardening, horticulture, poultry keeping, pisciculture, seri-culture, dairy-farmings etc ? Have they studied as to how much of feeding, under-feeding, leading to partial starving are being experienced by agricultural workers, men, women, children and old folk and with what effect on their labour-efficiency, social behaviour, distempers ? Apart from a few such studies made by some of us, way back and a few isolated partial studies by a few now and then within or without the orbit of Planning Commission our scholars, not to speak of statisticians, have not so far made any worthwhile studies. Let us not forget that unless and until such studies are made in a systematic manner, we cannot come to any genuine estimate of basic wage in real terms of energy, needed by our crores of rural workers. It is only when we are able to provide for more than 70 per cent of the essential needs of our workers within the support price levels, we can hope to free agricultural activities and production from the stigma of slave production.

Further, it is high time that the prescription, fixation and enforcement of minimum agricultural wages are carefully enquired

into. Have all our State Governments done their minimum duty in this regard. If not, what are the processes of agricultural or rural work which are yet to be coupled with the wages to be paid for them? It took us sixteen years of agitation in Central Assembly before National Independence, to get the idea of extending minimum wage legislation to agriculture, accepted after the advent of *Swaraj* Government. During the past 25 years after the Central Act permitted the State Governments to prescribe and enforce minimum wages for agricultural workers, only a small sector of agricultural and rural work-life has come to be embraced by such regulation, not to speak of being protected.

Here is a vast field of human existence of more than one third of our rural labour certainly more than five crores of adults who are yet to be brought within the sphere of protected labour. Is there any wonder, that there still prevail the evils of 'bonded labour', though some of us thought we succeeded in getting forced labour outlawed 40 years ago.

So long as our agricultural prices do not provide wages yielding minimum and humane basic wages for labour and minimum family incomes for both self-employed peasants and labour, our non-agrarian urban middle classes as well as working masses cannot escape from the charge of enjoying their wages, salaries and incomes by exploiting the more numerous rural labour and peasants. It is the duty of our agrarian scientists to awaken the conscience of our society as a whole through their continuous researches and sincere studies with the aid of this latest army of Agricultural Statisticians.

Communications

Rural roads and road transport, canal communications and electrification of villages, pumping sets to tap underground water are all worthy of study, in their comparative economic viability and national availability. Lining of canals by R.C. or by bricks, prevention of losses through percolation, provision of drainage facilities, fighting inundation, soil erosion and deforestation all deserve careful studies. Many a time, estimates for an irrigation dam are presented without providing similar estimates for its surplus waters. Railway and Road bridges are proposed at sites unmindful of consequent submersion of cultivated lands. Similarly environmentalists think only of the birds, beasts, trees and soil without bothering how peasants economy is also to be protected. Thus such pulls and counter-pulls have all to be assiduously studied by trained and conscientious economists and statisticians.

Fertilizers and Pesticides

The spread of the use of fertilizers and other chemical inputs as between different states and crops, their comparative advantages or disadvantages when compared to the traditional or modernised utilization of organic manures by peasants in deltaic and dry areas, for different crops have to be studied, so that the nation would know why some states are continuing not to use the fertilizers or pesticides and with what results. Most extra-ordinary is the failure of our scientists to study the positive contribution being made by birds and such trees as Banyan, Mango, Tamarind, Neem which harbour birds in hopping upon worms and other pests infested lands and killing them, thus minimising peasants need for pesticides.

For quite some time, most of our Economists have given all support for the growing mechanisation of agriculture, notably through tractorisation. Now prices of petrol and diesel oil have sky-rocketed. Is it not time for our Economists and Statisticians to work out the comparative economics of bullock and buffalo power for ploughing and transport? Then the economics of cattlefeed, chicken-feed *vis-a-vis* their alternative use for fish, oilcake and oil extraction have also to be studied. The rising cost of the use of cement has to be weighed against that of reinforced earth, brickquilns etc. Can our peasants, at the bottom rural level afford to keep bullocks or is it possible for them to hire other's bullocks, just the way tractor can be hired?

Rural Credit

Credit is the most vital input for all aspects of agriculture. The economics of credit supplies and available means to control their supplies, periodical repayments and their adhesive social pulls have to be continuously studied. I have found during these six decades of my study and fight for liberalisation of supply of credit that agriculturists are troubled most in their efforts at economic betterment, by the continuing scarcity and cost of credit at all stages. So our Rural Economists have to be ever on the alert to spy the mischief played by the suppliers of credit, whether they be Scheduled Banks, Cooperative Banks, Finance Corporations, Chit Funds etc. The comparative cost of credit offered to peasants by scheduled Banks, cooperative banks and other democratic means available for reducing the cost of cooperative credit need constant study.

Cooperative service Societies have a pivotal role to play in the spheres of credit, purchase, distribution of fertilizers, pesticides and other agricultural inputs and also the vital consumers' essential goods.

Neither state or national level studies, nor sectorwise studies have been made in a systematic manner, at definite periods as to how far these cooperatives have succeeded in lessening the burdens of inputs, or the prices of consumers goods when compared to the usual channels of trade. Continuous studies have also to be made about the cost of the services rendered by different types of the cooperatives, both agrarian and trading.

In response to half-a-century long agitation by *Kisan* Movement the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development is coming to be established. It is the duty of Agricultural Statisticians and Rural Economists to be on the look out to survey and report how far this Bank would be helping the agriculturists and rural artisans, their arts and crafts, through various channels such as the State Cooperative Banks, including the Refinance, Marketing cooperative agencies. Handloom weavers finance and Marketing cooperations and such other financing agencies, catering to the other artisans.

Equally important is the study of the operations of the Warehousing Corporation and Food Corporation in their relations with peasants in different areas; that is how do their services prove to be timely, economical and productive? Our Statisticians have also to aid the rural folk as well as the Governments concerned by conducting periodically surveys as to the results achieved by the Development Scheme financed or undertaken by the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP).

Rural Employment-Welfare

They have also to monitor the achievements of Employment Guarantee schemes such as what is being experimented within Maharashtra, Bihar and Kerala and also by the Public Distribution programmes in all the States. They have also to study the impact of population rise upon the activities of employment generation programmes undertaken at Block-Levels.

There is need to study toil-reducing or energy saving (energy conservation) on the part of our labour in-put by peasants, workers, and their women in different operations in agriculture by the adoption of better implements and improved methods of work. Labour saving machines, like tractors are needed in some areas, for some processes. But their effect on the total employment available to the local workers (Block, or Zilla or Region) seeking employment has to be carefully studied from year to year and from crop to crop.

Periodical studies have to be made into the comparative suitability, seasonal and agronomical and financial advantages of

devoting peasants' holdings, either partly or wholly in different regions to the production of single-crop like paddy, wheat, cotton, jute or double-crops, or even successively three crops on the same land in the same year, including pisci culture, as in Japan or rice and pulses.

Special studies have to be made into the economics of marketing of our agricultural products, such as wheat, rice, corn, pulses, oilseeds, cotten, jute and other fibres, oil-cakes, coffee, tea, spices fruit, dairy products, poultry, timber, chillies, tobacco, turmeric, goats, sheep and the success or failure of peasants in obtaining remunerative or minimum prices and the differences between the prices obtained by them and degree of variation found in the prices charged to consumers.

In heavily or over-populated countries, priority has naturally to be given to labour intensive or employment yielding operations, while the back-breaking or enegy consuming work has to be minimised.

New Economic Order

Invisible transference of wealth from South to North through unequal terms of trade has enriched the industrially and commercially advanced countries, mostly in Northern Hemisphere and pauperised the mainly agrarian, industrially backward and commercially weaker countries, situated mostly in Southern Hemisphere. I have drawn the attention of the Parliamentary leader of the Commonwealth, Inter-Parliamentary Conferences, General Assemblies of World Food and Agriculture Organisation (F.A.O.) and I.L.O. and recently United Nations General Assembly to this enervating drain of the annual production of wealth from the Southern to the Northern hemisphere. My thesis, exposing that this process of exploitation has been unjustly sanctified by the so-called equal exchanges working through world markets and buttressed by Imperialism in the pre-war world, were published first in 1946 and also in my books *Colonial and Coloured Peoples Freedom Front* and *World Role National Revolution* in 1946 and also *Challenge of World Peasants* in 1956.

Now our Prime Minister has drawn the attention of the leaders of the 21 countries, including U.S.A., U.K. assembled in Cancun in Mexico in November, 1981 to the continuing and growing poverty of the masses of the South when compared to those of the North and strengthened the plea of the Brandt Commission

for less unequal terms of trade. She re-iterated the demand of the Non-Aligned nations for a New World Economic Order.

Such unequal terms of trade prevail in the commercial transactions between the agriculturists on one side and industrialists and commercial classes on the other within all our underdeveloped countries also, thanks to the same mischief of markets and suppression of agricultural masses. So many of us have been demanding since 1946, that there should be parity in the evaluation of the products and services offered by the agricultural masses and non-agriculture urbanites, and less unjust or unequal terms of trade as between ruralites and urbanites. Detailed studies are needed to strengthen our demands for higher levels of prices, based upon humane standards of living needed by agriculturists, both peasant proprietors and landless workers.

It would be their privilege to be educating our public and warning our administrators about the successes or failure of the present welfare-oriented schemes for the benefit of scheduled castes, tribal peoples, women, people of hilly and other backward areas, in such special fields as elementary education, health, water supply, house-sites and houses and slum-clearance in rural areas.

So our Rural Economists and Statisticians have a vast vista of problems to be studied, public needs to be considered and rival claims for national resources to be weighted. They have to be sociologists in their attitude and public workers in their approach. Their work would find social fulfilment in the measures in which peasantry and workers, landed and landless, come to rise as honoured and happy humanity equal to all others, ensuring Social Justice between Rural and Industrial World.

Thank you.