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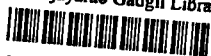
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University of Lucknow: Studies in Economics
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FIELDS AND FARMERS IN OUDH

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INTRODUCTION

THERE is no field of human life and relations which is not touched by economics. It is, however, amusing to find that when our science emerged, it rested upon the assumption of an abstract creature, still cherished in the class-room, whom we call the economic man. It was not before the social psychologist came upon the field dominated by the theorist, and confronted him with the criticism that the economic man is a mere figment of imagination and does not exist in the real world, that economics became humanized, ceased to be labelled as a dismal science and came into close grips with social realities.

Nowhere has there been a greater neglect of the realities of economic life than in the curriculum of economics in Indian Universities. The Indian student can hardly find in his text-book a description of the economic environment in which he lives. The systems which are built up for him are 'castles in the air.' When he comes out of the University, his theories instead of helping him towards interpretation and concrete achievement are a handicap to him. I believe that this to a large extent is responsible for the fact that we have many social visions and utopias in India and few constructive programmes which the masses can understand and work out for immediate benefit.

We look upon an Indian School of Economics and Sociology to correct this divorce between the academy and the market place, to relate the social sciences to the needs and ideals of Indian life and labour. We have also to train our students in the technique and method of economic and social investigation of problems which press us from day to day, and the country expects the departments of economics at the different Universities to give the lead in this matter. We must endeavour to give

a practical bias to economic teaching, attempt a solution of those problems of agricultural and social economics, for instance, which demand an urgent solution in India. Above all, we must encourage a rustic outlook among our graduates. The Universities have to give a lead in a rural reconstruction movement. This has been recognized by the Royal Commission on Agriculture. In their report we read:—

‘Universities are commonly situated in large centres of population, and those of their members who are attracted by the call of social service naturally tend to apply themselves first to the problems of the town. We wish strongly to press the claim of the rural areas upon the time and interest of the best of India’s youth. It is upon the homes and fields of the cultivators that the strength of the country, and the foundations of its prosperity must ultimately rest. We appeal to both past and present members of Indian Universities to apply themselves to the social and economic problems of the countryside and so to fit themselves to take the lead in the movement for the uplift of the rural areas.’

In the Universities there has been a change of emphasis in the different disciplines. Hitherto we have been accustomed to the cultivation of the different attitudes of mind by different bodies of systematized knowledge. Broadly speaking, a study of the Classics and the Humanities was expected to give us a wide liberal outlook, sympathetic understanding and keen sensitiveness. On the other hand, science would give us habits of analysis, accurate observation, clear thinking and precise mode of expression.

Recently, thanks to the rise of a new group of studies that are intimate with Life in its origin and development, such hypothetical divisions of knowledge and discipline have broken down. At such a juncture, the need for a new standpoint is strongly felt. Now this standpoint must rest on an appreciation of human values. These must be based, in the first instance, on a rigorous, scientific analysis of human motives and behaviour.

Secondly, such values find a different institutional expression in different environments and thus a historical and statistical study of the region becomes necessary. Lastly, these values must be compared and co-ordinated, and we have to rise to the plane of philosophically conceived *ideals*. Economics as the first and foremost of the social sciences ceases to be the ledger-book of a self-seeking shop-keeper. It deals with the activities of normal human beings in a milieu of social co-operation, and normal men are relatively impervious to the concept of law and their activities in their very nature evade complete schematization. Economics thus viewed becomes a philosophical discipline, dealing with ends and ideals which the non-moral economic man could never cherish.

In the Indian economic world, in the village communities and guilds, in the rules and regulations relating to labour and craftsmanship, in payment in kind in rural economy, human values and obligations were interwoven with economic transactions. As a result of the operation of world-forces, India is thrown into the vortex of Industrialism. Industrialism has come to stay in India. No doubt it has brought material prosperity unknown before, but it has also given a rude shock to and unsettled the social fabric. It is the task of economics in India to smooth the adjustment of the new economic method to old conditions so that there might not be any social misfits. The disparity between urban expansion and rural decay, between the old social cleanliness and the sordidness and impurity of the new industrial town, between the time-honoured social harmony and the new class consciousness, all these exhibit unintended social changes in India which the economist must reckon with. Practical schemes can be considered only when we have carefully collected and sifted the materials. Thus the method by which we can reach them must involve a careful study of all economic problems in their regional relation. Definite surveys and enquiries in special areas and occupations have already begun in India and these are found to be the best correctives of economic abstractions of the past, and will also help towards economic

renewal. Such surveys, again, must be informed by the primary consideration of social and human values, which alone can raise economics to the plane of a truly liberal culture.

In the following surveys offered as theses by the graduates of the Lucknow University for their M.A. Examination in Economics, we have similar data gathered for Oudh as those presented in the intensive enquiries of Mann, Slater, Calvert and Jack for the other provinces. The cultivator's time-table, costs and profits, the size and distribution of his holdings, his poverty and indebtedness have all been subjected to a meticulous examination. As in other densely peopled areas in India, the great majority of the villagers are found to occupy plots the size of which is less than that of an economic holding. In one village more than sixty-six per cent of the tenants cultivate under-sized holdings, the great majority of such holdings being divided into small and scattered plots. The average size of holdings is only four acres, which is much smaller than the typical holding in the north-western part of the province. The inadequacy of the uneconomic holding to maintain the peasant family along with a large measure of agricultural unemployment has created a growing class of agricultural labourers, which has been the subject of a separate detailed inquiry. The land system is not without its economic drawbacks: the discrimination of tenants according to caste, the levy of *nazars* and *bhents*, the concealment of rents, absentee landlordism, all have their share in depressing the position of the small tenant. The progress from life tenancy to the full status of the Bengal occupancy *ryot* is a long and difficult march though with education the outlook of both landlords and tenants is changing. Moreover, the protection afforded by law is counteracted by the ignorance of the peasantry, and by the delay and costliness of justice in the courts. Agricultural indebtedness is, as expected, heavy and cumulative. A close and systematic survey of indebtedness has been undertaken, and the data collected must give food for reflection to the economist and statesman alike. The decline of the ancient communal organization and the introduction of a money

economy have been vividly portrayed. Such changes have been far-reaching in their character affecting the entire social fabric. A local study of the movement of rural prices and wages shows why the ancient customary payment in kind is now being superseded by money-wages. Agricultural labourers have improved their lot but they have multiplied themselves faster than the land, even under any elaborate system of multiple-cropping, can maintain. Thus there are part-time agricultural labourers, who tenaciously adhere to holdings too small to maintain them and who therefore supplement their income by working on other men's fields. With labour uneconomically distributed as between minute holdings of one's own and inefficient operations in the fields of others who despise manual labour, agricultural cost constantly rises, trenching upon the low standard of living of the people. Agricultural cost has also risen as a result of fractionalization of holdings due to expansion of population. In spite of the onslaughts of famine and disease, population continues to multiply. It is time now for the economists of the country to initiate and organize a propaganda of birth-control and preach the new gospel to the masses.

A new feature of such investigations has been the emphasis of sociological material. We have here the beginnings of social surveys. The relation between caste and occupation in the villages; the disparity of the proportion of sexes in different castes and its effects upon the economic status of women; the recreations and diversions of the cultivating classes, folk-culture and the system of village and caste government have all been touched upon, linking economics up with much else to give a picture not so much of abstract economic forces at work but of men and women in homes and fields, at work and in leisure. Such studies are on the whole vivid, and human.

Investigations which had been undertaken by students during only one academic session when they had also to attend regular lectures at the University must have their limitations. Such enquiries were in the beginning confined to Oudh. We hope to publish soon another

series of village studies relating to other parts of the Provinces.

The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh may be marked out easily into distinct agricultural regions. The whole area lies at the meeting point of the two chief rain currents of India and thus has been liable to irregularity of rainfall as well as scarcity from ancient times. In the north-west canal irrigation, and in the north-east and east *jhils*, tanks and wells have secured comparative immunity from famines and help to maintain a high density of population. Most of the districts in the western, central and eastern portions of the Ganges Plain, however, have now reached more than 80 per cent of the net cultivated to the cultivable area. More and more the proportion of double-cropped area, i.e., the quality of intensive farming, governs the increase of the density of population. It is only by systematic economic enquiries in villages in different parts of the province that we can ascertain what effects the extension of irrigation, the introduction of a new and a more heavy-yielding crop or of a fresh rotation, etc., have in relieving the excessive pressure of population upon the soil and bringing about a rise in the standard of comfort. Where agriculture still depends a great deal upon rainfall and where all varieties of soil are met with, sand, loam and clay, as in this province, the scattered holding may not be the bogey it appears in the text-book. Scattered holdings are an insurance against the uncertainties of agriculture under the peculiar conditions of Indian rainfall; and it is only by systematic field enquiries that we shall find out the size of the economic holding as well as the limits of both consolidation and scatteredness.

Further, we are now on the eve of a phenomenal canal development that will add about 1.7 million acres to the total irrigated area of the province. The Sarda Canal now under construction will revolutionize the agricultural economy of the districts served by it. The Sarda Canal tract in transition will offer excellent opportunities for comparison between canal agriculture and high farming with the aid of well irrigation. The net gain to the areas served by the canal system from an introduction of a new

crop or a change in the system of rotation which will accompany canals, can only be estimated after a careful scrutiny into the size of the economic holding, normal agricultural costs and outturn, normal profits, etc., in typical areas and over a number of years.

This province is agriculturally speaking, the most unique area on the surface of the earth. It is an area, in the first place, which is subject to enormous vicissitudes of rainfall. Secondly, this area comprises the world's greatest canal system which is responsible for altering the whole character of its cropping and distribution of population. Canal irrigation which benefits at present over three million acres of cultivated land may be said to have reached its limit in the Upper Ganges Plain, and the growth of agricultural prosperity here has now been eclipsed by the progress of agriculture in the Eastern districts with superior advantages of rainfall and well irrigation coupled with an arranged succession of leguminous crops with rice. Thirdly, the middle and central plain exhibits the most phenomenal well system in the world. In normal years wells irrigate four to five million acres representing over half the irrigated area of the province, while in dry years the area increases twice or three times that which is irrigated from canals. Fourthly, some of the most striking instances of crop adaptations to the conditions of soil and water-supply have been seen in this area. Lastly, modern agricultural research and experiment have improved upon long established crop and agricultural usage, and to-day we find some striking applications of science to agriculture spread broadcast in a densely peopled region. The area under two new wheats, Pusa 12 and Pusa 4 discovered in the laboratory alone covers over half a million acres.

This province, indeed, offers unique opportunities for field survey with reference to conditions of climate and soil and the factors of agriculture and population in their mutual action and interaction. The lines of such surveys may be briefly indicated as follows:—(a) an ecological survey of the region with special reference to types of vegetation and their succession in their relations to

edaphic and climatic factors, and as affected by cattle and human population ; (b) a survey of the distinctive agricultural regions with special reference to the relation between cultivation and water-supply ; and (c) lastly, a statistical study of correlation between rainfall, agricultural productivity and density of population, and of seasonal or cyclical fluctuations of agricultural and social phenomena. Such surveys, ecological, agricultural and economic, must be carried on at the same time in selected areas and the tools and technique of investigation of the different sciences must be brought together in order that we can consider and inaugurate schemes of rural improvement, not separately, but as parts of a systematic programme of regional reconstruction. Throughout the densely populated valley our natural forest formations have practically vanished and the vegetation is savanna-like due *inter alia* to the enormous pressure of both human and cattle population. The problems of the supply of fuel, manure and the materials of rural housing are intimately bound up with the retrogression of vegetation due to intensive biotic interferences. A forward policy of afforestation will materially assist agriculture and rural life, but the mischief wrought by indiscriminate grazing, cutting of forest timber and the ascent of fields to the heights cannot be easily repaired. On account of the expansion of the arable area and uncontrolled grazing of countless herds and flocks of animals, the forest belt along the banks of large rivers in the plains, such as the Jumna and the Chambal has disappeared, and sterile, ravine lands are gradually forming and encroaching upon surrounding cultivation. The total area of such desert-like and inhospitable ravines in this province is between half a million and a million acres. In a district like Etawah where four hundred bighas of good cultivable land are annually lost to cultivation due to the encroachment of ravines, agriculture is found inextricably interwoven with wider ecologic conditions.

Again, throughout the province, in spite of the marvellous progress of irrigation, the fluctuations of rainfall have enormous reactions on cropped areas.

The *Kharif* crop is very uncertain. Out of seventeen years, 1908-1925, the normal *kharif* area could not be sown for ten years. The *rabi* crop is protected adequately by canals and wells, but drought from September to November or an early cessation of rain leads to large shrinkages of the *rabi* area as well. The irregular distribution or diminution of rainfall leads to sudden decline of cropped areas, and a whole series of movements, of prices, wages, labour, follow in more or less orderly sequence.

Ecological and agricultural surveys will enable us to measure the agricultural security and economic stability in different areas. Such surveys should be compared and collated, generalized as far as possible, and utilized towards applications in regional tasks. Scientific agriculture, afforestation, as well as judicious terracing and construction of embankments which protect riverine soil against erosion, gradual cultivation of defensive vegetation in sand dunes and reclamation of alkali land by suitable cropping are man's recent efforts to use an alliance with ecologic forces for the improvement of a difficult agricultural situation. Similarly the study of hydrographical conditions in the different parts of the river basin gradually leads to a more scientific well and canal irrigation, the improvement of drainage, the regulation of rivers and minor streams, or the development of fisheries,—all of which react favourably upon rural economy.

When there are full soil and drainage surveys the promise of canal irrigation will no longer be clouded by fears of salt-encrustation and water-logging, nor the sinking of wells rendered futile by the decline of the water-table. Similarly, a scheme of improvement of fodder supply will become sound and effective only when it is preceded by a study of ecologic succession in the grass-lands. Or, again, a policy of consolidation of agricultural holdings will become practical only when the distribution of fields has been carefully surveyed in relation to the conditions of supply of water and manure in the different zones of village settlement. It is one of the chief ambitions of the social sciences to

forecast social phenomena. Now, the outstanding social phenomenon in this part is famine. As there are periodic fluctuations of rainfall, there are similar fluctuations in related agricultural, economic and social series. The study of economic cycles has just begun, and nowhere is the technique of Harmonic Analysis expected to yield better results than in this region. With the application of the statistical method to the seasonal or cyclical fluctuations of rainfall, crops and outturns, we shall be able to anticipate famines and probable deficiencies of crop area and outturn region by region. A famine is the gravest disaster that can befall an agricultural people; and, if economic surveys give accuracy and verification in this field such a method in sociology amply justifies itself. The late Lord Asquith once said, 'The test of every civilization is the point below which the weakest and the most unfortunate are allowed to fall.' Field description and statistical inference not only make economic theories more realistic, but lead to a precise understanding of standards or principles of economic progress which would greatly assist a backward region to pass from poverty to comfort.

THE UNIVERSITY, RADHAKAMAL MUKERJEE,
LUCKNOW,
August 10, 1928.