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# THE INDIAN RURAL PROBLEM

*by*

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THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS  
BOMBAY

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## FOREWORD

THIS is the first publication of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics undertaken in pursuance of its new programme of activities adopted by the Executive Committee in June, 1942 and endorsed by the General Annual Meeting at Walchandnagar in December, 1943. A copy of this programme is given at the end of this book. As regards the problem dealt with in this study I need not say anything here as the relevant points are set out in the Authors' Introduction.

It is only necessary to point out that the views herein expressed are the authors' own views, and the Society as such is not committed to them. The Society is open to members from all walks of life and of all shades of opinions. It does not, therefore, as a body, subscribe to any particular views or opinions.

This publication is to be followed by several others which have already been projected. It is hoped to bring out in the near future a volume dealing with the Land Problem of India—the problem which, as the present work seeks to show, is the most vital of all our rural problems. Several scholars and experts have already started working on the problem in their respective regions, and it is our intention to bring these together in one volume so as to present a picture of the conditions all over the country. The volume will be edited by Prof. D. R. Gadgil of the Gokhale Institute of Economics and Political Science, Poona.

The Society has also planned a series of general monographs on the rural life problems of different Provinces and States and we hope to publish at least one of these, which has been almost completed, in the near future. This as well as the other regional studies which will follow have all been planned along the lines of the monographs prepared by the various European Governments prior to the calling of the European Rural Life Conference of 1939.

(Sir) MANILAL B. NANAVATI,  
*President,*

BOMBAY,  
April 1944.

*Indian Society of Agricultural Economics.*

## INTRODUCTION

(It is not difficult to say what the Indian Rural Problem is. At bottom it is none other than that of raising the standard of life of the rural masses. During the last twenty-five years, there has been a considerable growth of industries in India, but this has made hardly any impression on our standard of life, more especially in the rural areas. Industrialism in this country has been an exotic growth, superimposed upon an unprepared and undeveloped economic structure. Our industrial progress has been slow and lopsided; the few large-scale industries we have are concentrated in the cities. We have failed to develop the basic and key industries which are the very corner-stone of the industrial edifice in the advanced countries of the world, and the need for developing small-scale and cottage industries has been realised only lately and slowly. As to agriculture, it remains as backward and primitive as ever. The productivity of agriculture has not increased; in certain respects, it is possible, it has actually decreased. As India lives in her villages, and agriculture is the very backbone of her economic life, we must devote all our efforts to solve the rural problem. The objective is to increase the income of the rural population so as to improve its standards of nutrition, sanitation, housing and education, and this presupposes certain social, political and administrative changes. For one who knows our rural life and its problems, this is no easy task. Agriculture, it has often been said, is not, for our farmers, a business proposition, but a way of life. A way of life cannot be changed by half-measures and piecemeal efforts. It presupposes an all-round, well-planned and co-ordinated effort on the part of the authorities responsible for the well-being of the people.

The root cause of the low productivity of Indian agriculture is our failure to apply modern science to it, but before this could be done, extensive measures for the reform of the land system are necessary. The great economic transformation in European countries during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was brought about by the adoption of a new system of crop rotation, better methods of sowing and reaping, the use of chemical manures, and, in general, the application of new scientific knowledge to all the related aspects of the economy. In the process, new economic institutions developed and the entire way of life was altered. In this transformation, the State played a prominent part. Behind what we call the Industrial Revolution, there was not merely a new technique, but also a new spirit, a spirit of innovation, adventure and experiment. A number

of factors, political and social, conditioned the manner in which and the *tempo* with which the transformation took place in different countries, but, in essence, the motive force behind it was the same—a desire to go forward, to raise the standard of life so as to turn the economic struggle from one for bare existence into one for a competence and a surplus.

The peculiar circumstances under which industrialism was introduced into this country generated, on the other hand, a spirit of defeatism, and despair among the people. They could not comprehend these “miracles” of science. While the railway and the telegraph brought them face to face with world forces, their technique, outlook and mode of life remained generally unaffected. The old balance between agriculture and industry was destroyed; the villager found his subsidiary industries decaying; there appeared nothing in their place he could take up, no alternative avenues for employment. The result was more and more ruralisation, more and more dependence on agriculture, more and more pressure on the soil. A few cities and towns grew richer, but the rural areas generally sank into greater poverty, from which there seemed to be no escape.

Indian economists, following in the footsteps of Gokhale and Ranade, were not slow to recognise this peculiar character of the economic transition in India. They noted the peculiar difficulties of the Indian problem and tried to point out the absurdity of following in India a policy which may be good enough or just fashionable for England. The policy of the Government of India has been on the whole but little affected by the criticisms or suggestions of our economists. Even the suggestions and recommendations of their own Committees and Commissions have not been fully implemented. The various Famine Commissions of the third quarter of the last century pointed out the seriousness of the agrarian problem, but until about the end of the last war, almost nothing was done either to reorganise agriculture on a new scientific basis or to foster industries, large scale or small scale, so as to relieve the pressure on the land and to increase the national income. It is true that the Government had a Famine Relief policy and that they developed railways and irrigation which have reduced the severity of famines. Such measures were, however, quite inadequate to the needs of the situation. In 1919, agriculture became a transferred subject, but the limitations of Dyarchy, especially in the field of finance, made any radical improvements impossible. It was in 1926 that the Royal Commission on Agriculture was appointed to review the entire field comprehensively and indicate lines of progress. This

Report is a landmark in the evolution of agricultural policy in India. Its recommendations covered almost every aspect of rural life, and it seemed as though the Government of India had at last decided to take a more active interest in our rural problem. However, several important topics were excluded from the scope of the Commission's enquiry, such as land reforms, irrigation cess, and inter-departmental co ordination. It was expected that a separate Commission would be appointed later to deal with these aspects, but that was not done. During the two decades thereafter we have advanced negligibly, if at all ; for close on ten years, our agriculture was in the grips of the Great Depression. The popular ministries of 1937 in the Provinces took up the problem in all earnestness and with determination, but the war supervened and found us quite unprepared and unorganised to face its manifold problems. At a time when a country like England with a large food deficit is able to feed its people fairly satisfactorily, we in this country were confronted with a complete debacle. The Government of India hesitated between control, decontrol and partial control ; the various Provinces were unable to evolve a co-ordinated policy in the higher interests of the country. More recently, a more comprehensive policy has been formulated with reference to war-time needs. The Government of India have also appointed a Long-term Agricultural Policy Committee to go into problems of post-war reconstruction and development, but this Committee has not met so far. It is evident that so long as the Government of India do not change radically their entire outlook on and policy in respect of our rural problems, no satisfactory solution is possible. If freedom from want is going to be the basis of the new economic order after the war, it is necessary to assure at least a bare minimum to India's teeming millions.

It has often been said that agriculture in India is on a deficit economy. We find on our hands an antiquated land system which leaves no impetus for the tiller of the soil ; we have all the evils of a feudalistic system with none of its redeeming features. There are far too many people on the land ; land holdings are getting smaller and more and more scattered ; the system of agricultural finance through co-operative societies has failed to help the agriculturist substantially ; there is no adequate road system for transport, no proper grading or standardisation of agricultural produce ; land taxation is iniquitous, and no organisation exists to look after our rural problem in all its economic and social aspects. Co-operation has been tried, without much success ; there has been some piecemeal tenancy legislation in respect of a few selected areas. The Agricultural

Research Institute at Pusa, the various Agricultural Colleges, the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, the Indian Central Cotton Committee and the Central Jute Committee and of late the Agricultural Credit Department of the Reserve Bank of India have undoubtedly been doing some valuable research work. Some of the Indian Universities have courses of instruction in rural economics and their Economics Departments have, even with their meagre resources, done some amount of research work on rural problems. It is, however, symptomatic of our general apathy to this vital problem of rural reconstruction, reform and planning, that hardly any of our Universities has a Chair in Agricultural Economics with specialised staff and adequate equipment. All this contrasts very unfavourably with the work done and being done even in these abnormal times in countries like the U. K. and the U.S.A. A few public bodies and organisations, like the Servants of India Society, the All-India Spinners' Association, the All-India Village Industries Association, the Harijan Sevak Sangh and the Kisan Sabha have done some work in the field, partly of a practical nature and partly of the research type. But, research and new knowledge have not yet fertilised our agriculture or penetrated to the actual farms.

It is not the object of these preliminary remarks to point out what can be done and must be done here and now, but merely to indicate the gravity and urgency of visualising our rural problem as a whole and to make out a *prima facie* case for an active State policy in this regard. There is no better agency for the necessary comprehensive planning than the State, and this, under our conditions, means ultimately the Government of India, for this is truly a matter which concerns the "peace, safety and tranquillity" of the country.

We would also emphasize in this connection that a proper policy on the part of the State must include in it as a basic plank the question of land reform. Unless the system of land tenures and land holdings with the attendant evils of absentee landlordism, sub-infeudation and tenancies, feudal levies and exactions and sub-division and fragmentation of holdings is altered, it is not possible to increase the productivity of the land. Several European countries were faced with similar problems during the nineteenth century, and they tried to reform their land systems by suitable legislative and other measures, thus making famines to a large extent a thing of the past. Most of these countries have favoured the system of peasant proprietorship and have sought to rehabilitate the peasant so as to make him more efficient, more contented and more enlightened. The land systems in India have had a long evolution; there

are diversities and complexities as between the different parts of the country. The methods of reform will have to take all these into account. But there can hardly be any doubt that so long as the ownership, distribution and utilisation of land are not so planned as to make for economical cultivation, other reforms can hardly help the agriculturist except perhaps in a small way.

For voicing the grievances of our industrialists and businessmen there are Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Millowners' Associations and the like, which make suitable representations to Government from time to time and manage to get a hearing. Our rural masses are truly dumb. Their sufferings may be a fruitful source of sporadic agrarian riots or smouldering discontent, but there is no definite organisation of peasants themselves to mobilise knowledge, create and educate public opinion and lay down policies in the interest of an ordered growth and reconstruction. A rural reform programme must therefore include the promotion of peasants' organisations and the training of leaders from among the villagers.

A word now about the object of this study which is the first publication under the auspices of this Society. The object of this study is to review the Indian Rural Problem in its general aspects, so as to enable us to visualise it as a whole and to sketch out the general lines of the policy which the State must follow. If it is true to say "Industrialise or Perish," it is equally important also to remember that we have to modernise, rehabilitate, revitalise and rebuild our rural economy in harmony with the needs of the economy as a whole.

Indian public opinion now thinks in terms of a country-wide all-embracing planning, but we have not attempted to offer in this book anything like a definite Plan for Agricultural Development. That task requires the co-operation of experts from different fields, and one cannot think of a plan for Agriculture apart from a plan for Industries, Communications, Housing, Electrical and Engineering Development, Education, Social Services, etc. In any case, we hope, we have made in the course of this study a number of suggestions which will be useful to any representative and authoritative body which takes up the task of formulating a proper plan. We should only add here that perhaps the most essential part of any plan is the personnel. However sound a plan may be on paper, it cannot reach fulfilment unless its operation is in charge of the right kind of personnel. For this reason, we have laid ample stress on administrative reform and on the need for revitalising village life through appropriate agencies and institutions. This work can begin and ought to begin right now. "Full-dress" planning may have to wait till

we have a national Government at the Centre but there are many problems in respect of which it is possible for, nay, incumbent on, the present Government of India to take the initiative. Some of the Provincial Governments have already started building up Post-war Reconstruction Funds, and if the Government of India help them with suitable grants-in-aid and technical advice, beginnings in the right direction can be made at an early date.

This volume is divided into three parts. Part I states concisely the facts of the situation. In this part comment is eschewed or reduced to the minimum. Part II reviews the activities of the various Government Departments and public and semi-public bodies, and attempts to assess the adequacy or otherwise of the work so far done. In Part III are set out the essentials of a proper policy, embracing not merely economic but, of necessity, the broader sociological aspects of the rural problem. The approach adopted here is more practical than academic, and the suggestions made are born of the varied personal experience of one of us. There are possibly some important topics which we have left out, but that perhaps is inevitable when we are dealing with a problem so vast and intricate. To be able to do justice to many of these problems, a much more intensive study is necessary than we have undertaken here. The present volume is thus a sort of general introduction to the other more specialised studies planned to be undertaken in course of time by this Society.

Our thanks are due to Professor C. N. Vakil, Director of the University School of Economics and Sociology, University of Bombay for placing at our disposal all the facilities for research available in the institution and for also having lent us, when necessary, the assistance of his research staff. We are also grateful to the Reserve Bank of India for similar help. They have given us ready access to the books and other material available with them. The office staff of this Society has, of course, borne their share of the burden of collecting the necessary data and preparing notes on the various topics dealt with in this volume. They have also done the arduous work of going through the proofs. Mr. B. S. Mavinkurve, who has been with us from the time this work was commenced, has rendered valuable assistance at all stages, and Mr. S. Thotapalli has also not spared himself, though he joined us later, and had other work to attend to. To both these men our cordial thanks are due.

M. B. N.

J. J. A.



## APPENDIX

## INDIAN SOCIETY OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

## ORIGIN, AIMS AND OBJECTS

THE idea of organising an Indian Agricultural Economics Society was first mooted by Mr. L. K. Elmhirst, President of the International Conference of Agricultural Economists, when he was in India during the winter of 1938-39. Dr T. G. Shirname, the then Marketing Officer, Delhi, invited a number of persons interested in agricultural economics to meet Mr. Elmhirst and to discuss the possibilities of organising such a society. A meeting was held at Delhi on the 27th January 1939, under the chairmanship of Sir Bryce Burt, and it was decided to form the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics. Membership of the Society is open to all persons interested in the economic and social conditions of agricultural and rural life. Institutions, such as Universities, Government Departments and other scientific and research bodies can also become members and are entitled to send their representatives to the Conferences and meetings of the Society.

The Constitution of the Society as determined at the first general meeting held at Delhi on the 24th and 25th February 1940, is as under :—

## CONSTITUTION

*(as determined at the First General Meeting held at Delhi on the 24th and 25th February 1940)*

1. The name of the Society shall be "The Indian Society of Agricultural Economics."

2. The objects of the Society shall be to promote the investigation, study and improvement of the economic and social conditions of agriculture and rural life.

These objects shall be pursued by :—

- (a) holding periodical Conferences for the discussion of problems ;
- (b) publishing papers or summaries of papers, either separately or collectively, or in a periodical which may be issued under the auspices of the Society ;
- (c) co-operating with other institutions having similar objects, such as the International Conference of Agricultural Economists and the Indian Economic Association ;
- (d) any other means which the Society may decide.

3. The Society shall consist of (a) Members, (b) Honorary Members, and (c) Member-Institutions, who are interested in the economic and social conditions of agriculture and rural life.

Candidates for membership shall be nominated by any two members of the Society and admitted to membership on being approved by the Executive Committee.

Candidates for Honorary Membership shall be nominated by the Executive Committee and elected by a majority of members present and voting at a General Meeting of the Society.

Institutions wishing to become members shall apply to the Executive Committee and will be admitted to membership on its approval.

Members and Member-Institutions shall pay to the Society an annual subscription of Rs. 5. The composition of subscription for Life-Membership shall be Rs. 75.

Member-Institutions shall be entitled to send only one representative to the Conferences and meetings and shall not be entitled to the composition of subscription for Life Membership.

4. Except as otherwise provided in the Constitution, the business of the Society shall be conducted by the Executive Committee.

5. The Office-bearers of the Society shall be a President, three Vice-Presidents, an Honorary Secretary-Treasurer and an Honorary Joint-Secretary, if appointed.

The Executive Committee of the Society shall consist of :—

- (1) the President,
- (2) three Vice-Presidents,
- (3) an Honorary Secretary-Treasurer,
- (4) an Honorary Joint Secretary (if appointed), and
- (5) nine Members.

The President and in his absence one of the Vice-Presidents present, shall preside at the Executive Committee meetings.

The Office-bearers and the Executive Committee shall hold office till their successors are elected.

The Executive Committee shall fill any vacancies in the Committee occurring during their period of office.

6. The General Meetings of the Society shall ordinarily be held once a year. The time and place of such General Meetings shall be fixed by the Executive Committee and not less than twenty-eight days' notice of these General Meetings shall be given to all members, Honorary Members and Member-Institutions.

A Special General Meeting may be convened by the Executive Committee at any time and shall also be convened on the requisition of not less than twenty-five members. Fourteen days' notice of such Special General Meeting shall be given.

The following business shall be transacted at the General Meetings :—

- (1) Consideration of the annual report and audited accounts.
- (2) Election of office-bearers and the Executive Committee.
- (3) Election of Honorary Members if any.
- (4) Appointment of auditors.
- (5) Consideration of any proposed amendments to the Constitution, subject to clause 7.
- (6) Other relevant business.

7. Any amendments intended to effect any alteration in the Constitution of the Society, shall be submitted in the form of a written notice of motion, to be circulated to Members, Honorary Members and Member-Institutions with the notice of a General Meeting and shall be considered at such General Meeting. Amendments shall be carried with two-thirds majority of the members present at such General Meeting.

Recently the programme of the Society has been expanded so as to make the Society a more active body. The programme is as follows :—

#### PROGRAMME

##### A. Organisation

- (i) To increase membership and collect donations from the public and the Governments and the Indian States for the extended programme of work.
- (ii) To have an office in Bombay with the necessary staff and a library.
- (iii) To appoint special committees for—
  - (a) The editorial work of the Society's publications.
  - (b) The research programme of the Society.
  - (c) Similar committees to be appointed for the provincial and regional centres.

B. *Clearing House of information on Agricultural Economics and Allied Subjects.*

I. Indian :

(a) (i) To compile a list of universities and colleges that provide special teaching in agricultural economics and the nature of the studies provided.

(ii) To compile a list of agricultural colleges that have courses in agricultural economics.

To collect information from them regarding special investigations made by them or researches subsidised by them.

(iii) To collect information regarding the research institutions that specialise in agricultural economics, like the Punjab and Bengal Boards of Economic Inquiry and the Gokhale Institute, Poona, and to find out the nature of the work done by them.

(iv) To prepare a bibliography on rural life publications in India including reports of Commissions, special inquiries, etc.

(v) To prepare a list of magazines and periodicals on the subject issued in India.

(b) To collect information regarding the rural reconstruction activities of Governments in India under different heads :—

(i) Technical improvements.

(ii) Sanitation and social relief.

(iii) Education.

(iv) Local self-government.

(v) Organisation of agricultural finance, sale and purchase, marketing, co-operation, etc.

(vi) Cattle and milk problem.

(vii) Propaganda.

(viii) Subsidiary industries.

(ix) Rural life centres.

(x) Legislation passed by various Governments to help agriculturists—debt legislation, tenancy regulation, etc., control of money-lender, land alienation, rent restriction and their effects.

II. Foreign :

To get into touch with important institutions and societies or associations working on lines similar to ours. To establish contact, exchange publications and to prepare a bibliography of their publications and also of books on the subject.

C. *Publications*

(a) To prepare special monographs giving out this information for the use of the public and other workers on similar lines.

(b) To appoint provincial or regional committees or correspondents to study local problems.

(c) To prepare provincial or regional monographs on rural life problems of the localities on the lines of the monographs prepared by continental governments at the instance of the League of Nations.

We may ask Provincial Governments to prepare these, or, if they do not agree, we may ask non-officials to compile them with the assistance of Government officers.

(d) To prepare an annual review on the progress in agricultural economics in India with the assistance of provincial and regional committees or correspondents.

(e) To publish a bi-monthly or a quarterly study on any selected topic on the lines of the *Annals of the American Academy* or the *Agricultural Association of England*. It should be divided into three sections :—

(i) Topical studies contributed by specialists.

(ii) Book reviews and reviews of periodicals.

(iii) Activities of Universities and research bodies. New Publications. Information from foreign countries on the subjects in which the Society is interested.

D. *Studies and Investigations*

(a) Special studies or investigations :

(i) These may include Land problems in India, Debt legislation in India, Fragmentation of holdings, Influence of social life on economic problems, Health and Diet, Housing problems, Land Tenures, Rents, etc., Administration and its influence on the development of rural life.

(ii) Prices and production, Stabilization of prices, Currency and prices, Agricultural production and Government tariff policy, Communications, Industrial developments and rural life.

Local studies will be carried out by local agencies and the head office will confine its activities to studies and investigations that could be done from Government publications and reports.

We may engage special staff to carry out some of these studies or subsidize others to do it.

(b) To train workers for these studies.

E. *Conferences*

Besides the annual conference, we may have every third year a rural life conference with the main object of reviewing the progress of the various schemes adumbrated.

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