

Agrarian Crisis In Tamil Nadu- Declining Production & Productivity, The Emerging Twin Issues

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ABSTRACT

Tamil Nadu, with a strong agricultural tradition is among the foremost States in India. It is the most urbanized state in the country. The modernization and the notable expansion of the urban centres besides contributing to the economic progress of the State has also negative trends, especially with reference to the income of people in rural areas and the relegation of agriculture. Though the decline in the share of agriculture to the Gross domestic Product of India is considered as an indication of economic growth, it has far reaching consequences in the socio economic life of the people. The widening gaps between urban and rural incomes, regional inequalities within and among the states have become inevitable. It is to be borne in mind that still half of the population of India relies on agriculture for its livelihood. The situation in Tamil Nadu seems to necessitate more concern as the contribution of agriculture to the State GDP is less than 16% ,compared to the all India average of 18%(Economic Survey,2016).

1. INTRODUCTION

The declining importance of agriculture could be attributed to numerous problems within the sector besides the faster growth in the service sector seen throughout the country. The longstanding issues of inadequacy of water resources & irrigation management, unpredictable rains, practice of cultivating traditional crops, lack of timely availability of institutional finance, inadequate storage & marketing facilities, contract farming, lack of insurance coverage are but a few of the problems which are yet to be solved. In recent times two major issues have emerged which will aggravate the agricultural situation in the state. They relate to the steady decline in the cultivable area and the decline in the productivity of principal crops such as paddy, which would further affect the already low farm income in the days to come.

THE CURRENT INDIAN AGRARIAN SCENARIO

Agriculture and allied activities still continue to be the major source of livelihood for close to half of the Indian population. The share of agriculture in employment was 48.9 per cent of the workforce [National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), 2011-12] while its share in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 17.4 per cent in 2014-15 at constant (2011-12) prices(Economic Survey 2016, Vol.2, Page. 98).

During the last three years, the growth rates in agriculture have been fluctuating at 1.5 per cent in 2012-13, 4.2 per cent in 2013-14, and (-) 0.2 per cent in 2014-15. According to the CSO (Central Statistics Office) estimates released on 8 February 2016, the growth in the 'agriculture, forestry and fishing' sector is estimated at 1.1 per cent in 2015-16. Food grains production during 2015-16,

estimated at 253.16 million tonnes, is expected to be higher by 1.14 million tons over the production of 252.02 million tonnes during 2014-15(Economic Survey 2016). It is to be noted that the output of 253 million tons in 2015-16 is 12 million tons less than the record output of 265 million tons two years before, in 2013-14; certainly a matter of concern with more than 12 million added to our population every year.

THE AREA, PRODUCTION & PRODUCTIVITY CONUNDRUM

The relegation and slowdown of agriculture has many forward and backward implications. The macro picture reveals that the total area of cultivation for food grains was 122 million hectares in 2014-15, a decline of a staggering 3.1 per cent over previous year (2013-14); the corresponding output of 252.6 million tons for the year showed a even higher decline of 4.6 per cent compared to 2013-14. The decline in output among other causes was reflected in the overall food grains yield of 2070 Kgs/ha, a 1.5 per cent decrease in 2014-15(Economic Survey 2016). A matter of serious concern is the 7.3 per cent decline in production and 6.6 per cent decline in the yield of wheat, second major crop in the country. The acreage under several crops also declined substantially in 2014-15 compared to 2013-14.

The largest decline in the areas of gram and groundnut of around 20 and 15 per cent respectively, resulted in a decline in production of gram and groundnut by 27 per cent and 32 per cent in 2014-15 compared to 2013-14. The decrease in yields of groundnut (20 per cent) and cotton (13 per cent) need urgent measures of correction. Only in two crops, jowar and bajra, the change in the yield of crops in 2014-15 over the previous year shows an increase in yield.

International comparisons suggest that India has significantly lower crop yields than a number of other countries. China has an average cereal yield of above 5800 kg/ ha while India has less than 3000 kg/ ha; USA has the largest average cereal yield of more than 7000 kg/ ha. The average yields of wheat and rice in India are much below that of China's – 46 per cent below in the case of rice and 39 per cent in the case of wheat. In wheat, India's average yield in 2013 of 3075 kg/ha is lower than the world average of 3257 kg/ha. Although both Punjab and Haryana have much higher yields of 4500 kg/ha, most other Indian states have lower yields much below the world average. India's best state, Punjab, has paddy yield close to 6000 kg/ha whereas China's yield is 6709 kg/ha(Economic Survey,2016).

The negative consequences of low agriculture yields extend from precarious incomes of farmers to large tracts of land locked in low value agriculture, despite growing demands for high value products such as fruits, vegetables, livestock products because of consumption diversification with rising incomes and urbanization.

According to NSS data, the average annual income of the median farmer net of production costs from cultivation is less than R20,000 in 17 states. This includes produce that farmers used for self consumption, valued at local market prices.

AREA, PRODUCTION & YIELD IN TAMIL NADU

Agriculture in Tamil Nadu is truly the way of life in almost all the regions of the State, despite the ongoing proliferation and expansion of urban centres owing to ever increasing information technology business, educational institutions, new avenues in service sector, wide dispersal of

manufacturing at various levels etc., Most of the typical Tamil citizens have their moorings in the traditional villages. It may be noted that even the techno savvy younger generation has a yearning to return and experiment novel agricultural innovations.

The central focus notwithstanding, it is a fact that agriculture in the State is at cross roads. The large scale destruction of traditional water bodies, the hundreds of years old tanks, indiscriminate pumping of ground water through tube wells, lack of sufficient structures to retain rain water, perpetual squabbles with neighboring States to sustain the riparian rights, loss of traditional seeds, clash of modern verses traditional cultivation methods, plus and minus of fertilizer use, small size of farms, persistence in following mono crops especially paddy, inability to hold farm produce, lack of storage facilities, various forms of contract farming, continued domination of middlemen and moneylenders, the inadequate support prices, hassles in getting institutional credit.....the list of hardships faced by the farmers of Tamilnadu continues. No wonder there is a strong debate amidst the farming community on continuing their divine vocation.

The State is privileged to have one of the oldest agricultural Universities in the country, well known agricultural research institutes and a fairly strong department of agriculture providing extensive services throughout the State. It is gratifying to note that Tamil Nadu won the Krishi Karman award for its achievement in food grains production for 2011-12(The Hindu dated, May 12, 2013)

Yet farming is still an unreliable and inevitable venture for most rural folk in the State. The decline in the area of cultivation and the fall in yield of major crops aggravate the situation, raising a serious question on the future of agriculture in the state.

The data relating to the area under food grains in Tamil Nadu, provided by the Ministry of Agriculture for the period 1980-81 to 2012-13 show the trend with reference to the net sown area in the State over the period. In 1980-81 Food grains were cultivated in a total area of 5487 hectares. It increased to a peak level of 9641 hectares in 2011-12. In the next year (2012-13) the area under cultivation dropped to 6294 hectares. There seems to be not much of increase in the last three years.

The exhaustive information given by the Department of Economics and Statistics for the period 1950-51 to 2012-13 exhibit the variations in the total food grains output and the yield of our principal crop, paddy. The food grains production was 44.99 million tonnes in 1950-51; it reached to a record level of 101.5 million tonnes in 2011-12. In the next year, 2012-13, the food grains output declined steeply to 56.05 million tonnes. Similarly the yield of our Principal crop, Paddy which was 1114(kg/ha) in 1950-51 increased to 3164(kg/ha) in 2011-12. In the following year it declined to 2117(kg/ha).

The above seen trends reveal the dismal trend of the course of agriculture in Tamil Nadu. While conversion of farmlands for nonagricultural purposes have a detrimental effect on crop cultivation, a host of other factors such as lack of farm labourers, delay in release of water, vagaries of monsoon, dwindling water resources, high cost of cultivation, obsolete technologies, imperfect adoption of innovative technologies and marginal returns pose a challenge to the primary sector in the State(The Hindu dated, May 12, 2013).

In the words of Professor S. Janakarajan of Madras Institute of Development Studies, “Acres and acres of wet land in many districts, including the delta districts are converted for nonagricultural purposes. You can see the trend mainly in Namakkal, Karur, Tiruchi and Thanjavur districts. Thermal power plants and educational institutions are gobbling up wet lands”. In his opinion, though rules would not easily permit conversion of farm lands for other purposes, farmers deliberately avoided cultivation and made the land fallow; After sometime, they can use the land for other purposes with the connivance of officials(The Hindu dated, May 12,2013).

A report in Times of India(dated,22.1.15) reflects a similar situation in Coimbatore district: data from the agriculture department of the district administration shows that more than three lakh hectares were under cultivation in Coimbatore and Pollachi in 2000-01, which has dropped to 99,319 hectares in 2013-14. From food crops to cash crops, the decrease in area has been observed in all 20 listed crops. The shortage of labour and lack of mechanization has made farming harder and agriculturalists are slowly selling land to real estate developers in and around the city, according to the report.

2. CONCLUSION

The Agricultural advancements over the last fifty years have turned India, a food grains surplus economy and also among the leading nations in the production of Milk, Vegetables and Fruits. Time and again experts reiterate unless the surplus labour in the farm sector is effectively shifted to the other sectors, the benefits of economic progress may not be available to all people. Over the years, nations with strong ‘Food Security’ will become stronger in the world. In such an eventuality India needs a stronger agricultural sector. It must also have a balanced growth within the country. In such a context, Tamil Nadu has to regain its strength in the farming sector. The various schemes, measures and incentives should bring a revival with expansion in the area of cultivation and enhancement in the yield of all crops. The dictum of “more from less” must become a reality. It will go a long way in promoting the standard of living of all sections of people equitably.

3. REFERENCE

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