

Development or end of Agriculture? Implications on Agriculture

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Abstract

A agricultural policy developed by the state and the central governments is of much important for the economic growth of a country. It depends of many factors like soil quality, water facility, utilization of fertilizers etc., The farming community in India was well aware of the qualities of the soil in this country. The agriculture was essentially responsible for lending self-reliance to the lives of millions of Indians. Agriculture and allied occupations have been the source of livelihood for more than 80% of the population. The agriculture in this country is facing a crisis. In western countries the agriculture is considered as an industry and as such it has been heavily mechanized. Hence, efforts must be taken by government in all forms to make mandatory reforms in order to protect this field from crisis and to sustain the economic development.

Keywords: Agricultural produce marketing act, Multinational companies, Green revolution.

Introduction

When one examines the agricultural policies developed by the state and central governments and the development that has been achieved in the field of agriculture, it becomes evident that the so called progress has only been superficial. An impression has been created that the production has been increased. At the same time it has created situations that force farmers to commit suicide which is assuming alarming trends in recent years. At present agriculture is facing a huge crisis.

The farming community in India was well aware of the qualities of the soil in this country. The agriculture was essentially responsible for lending self-reliance to the lives of millions of Indians. Agriculture and allied occupations have been the source of livelihood for more than 80% of the population. They were able to lead an independent life. They were following a community life where they adopted barter system as a means of exchange. The British left our country after converting this fertile land into dry and uncultivable land. They experimented with various forms of chemical fertilizers and were successful in selling them to the Indian farmers by convincing that it was going to increase the productivity. They dealt a deadly blow to the

fertility of the soil of this country through the introduction of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Realizing that the farmers would not use fertilizers for their conventional crops they brought about suitable policy changes to promote cultivation of commercial crops by holding out incentives to the farmers. They created an artificial demand for commercial crops much against the wishes of the farming community. The international capitalists who have been waiting for opportunities like these ensured that the fertility of the soil deteriorated gradually in this country. The qualities of the Indian soil were sacrificed to protect the interests of global powers who promoted chemical fertilizers. The productivity fell sharply leaving the farmers bankrupt.

Some groups in India took advantage of these conditions and the bureaucracy was trained in international models in order to encourage them to frame policies to suit their interests. The development of agriculture became synonymous with international models. In this manner the agricultural policies were framed in stages to suit the foreign interests. As a result green revolution was ushered in raising false hopes of development in agriculture. The conventional methods were

given up in preference to foreign technologies. The indigenous methods were portrayed as unscientific. Since then, the agriculture has been on a disastrous path of gradual deterioration. The international agencies introduced chemical fertilizers, pesticides (Edward Said, 1993). This paved the way for complete deterioration of the fertility of the soil in this country. Initially they gave good yields. The government projected this as a major achievement of the green revolution. The production went up. The farmers who were growing crops according to their needs soon got trapped by the international interests to adopt fertilizer based, mechanized farming. The fertility of the land took a severe beating due to indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides. The productivity registered gradual deterioration (Appu, 1997).

Next, the international agencies succeeded in getting the government to withdraw the subsidies that were being given to agriculture as it was getting projected as an unprofitable venture. This was made a pre-condition at the time of sanctioning loans to third world countries. Based on this condition the concessions and subsidies that were being given to the farmers were withdrawn. After this the prices of the farm equipments and fertilizers went up. They further misguided the farmers by offering loans. By this time the fertility of this land has completely deteriorated that no crops were possible to be grown on this land. Unable to repay the loans due to the falling production the farmers began to end their lives day by day. In Vdharbha region on an average 5 to six farmers are ending their lives daily. The government is holding out doles in the form of waiver of debts. But it has not taken any initiative to empower the farming community.

The agrarian crisis is not confined to any single area. It is a crisis of complex dimensions. The problems related to the agriculture are closely connected with globalization, free market and liberalization, social, political and cultural factors. Any strategy to address this crisis must invariably take into consideration the socio-cultural aspects. But the agricultural policies of Karnataka have

been formed by the bureaucracy and international brokers. Karnataka became a state 50 years ago. It has a land area of 19049836 acres, out of which 12307416 acres are agricultural land in which all kinds of crops are being grown. 64.61% of the entire population of this state is entirely dependent on agriculture. Out of this there are 5161131 small and very small farmers.

In 1995 a new agricultural policy was announced by the government. The evaluation of its implementation was supposed to be the basis for the present policy. But it does not appear to have been done. It was stated that the agricultural production was to be doubled in 10 years apparently as per the dictates issued by international agencies (Fall seedi, 1990). Therefore, conservation of the fertility of the soil, conservation of natural resources and timely disbursement of agricultural loans, integrated post harvest management and speedy transfer of technology from the labs were made the focus areas of the new policy. The forces that were responsible for the deterioration of the fertility of the soil are coming up with new models and methods to revive the fertility (Alvin Toffler, 1991). The Chairman and the managing committee of National Commission for Agriculture came up with a five point programme to achieve these goals. These programmes may succeed in increasing the production but not productivity.

The myth of green revolution

Agriculture in this country is facing a crisis. In western countries the agriculture is considered as an industry and as such it has been heavily mechanized. Therefore India too must adapt new techniques with a view to achieve development in agricultural sector. The green revolution heralded the beginning of the industrialization of agriculture. But it is progressing at a slow phase. Today the western interests have initiated a change process on war footing. The Indian Scientists and thinkers completely ignored land reforms and misguided the people by offering technical solutions to the agrarian crisis. The fact that this is an international

conspiracy not a technical problem was completely lost on them.

Even though the production has witnessed some improvement in various sectors due to a series of programmes such as “green revolution” in agriculture; “white revolution” in dairying and “blue revolution” in fisheries, there has been no corresponding improvements in the conditions of the farmers (Alvin Toffler, 1980). A situation has been created where the farmers continue to remain poor in spite of the increased production. They have worked hard at every stage of the production. But they are continuing to end their lives in large numbers. The gains from the increased production went into the pockets of the owners of the fertilizer, pesticide and seed manufacturing factories. The brokers in the agricultural markets are pocketing the profits from the increase in production. The conspiracy to destabilize the food security of this country appears to have accomplished its mission. Karnataka government went a step ahead by presenting statistics which were doctored to highlight the increase in the agricultural reproduction. But all that has been achieved thus far is an increase in the suicide rate among the farmers. We have seen that 10% of the budget is being earmarked for agriculture. With 64.60% of the population are entirely dependent on agriculture in this state is a mere 10% far less for a vital sector?

It has been planned to introduce foreign investment into the field of agriculture by making appropriate amendments to Agricultural Produce Marketing Regulation Act (APMC Act). The brokers representing Multinational companies (MNCs) and large companies made large scale invasions into this field. They went on evicting millions of farmers from their lands and rendered them destitute and slum dwellers. Agriculture is the sole source of livelihood for 64% of the rural populace. This amendment has been brought about with the sole intention of displacing these people who are not capable of taking up any other work.

Bowing down to the pressures from international agencies, our government encouraged the farmers to grow commercial crops. This has reduced conventional crops as an unmarketable commodity. When the farmers began to demand support price for their produce the government went into silence. It has not come up with any policy regarding storage and marketing. The APMCs were portrayed as inefficient entities. The government justified the amendments to the APMC Act by stating that the support price would not help the farmers.

Decks have been cleared for the entry of private companies and traders into farming sector. It has been widely advertised that this move would benefit the farmers. But this is nothing but a conspiracy to exploit the farmers and the consumers by creating artificial fluctuations in the prices of agricultural produce (Andrew Webster, 1997). This policy is silent about the government’s intervention in matters of issues related to the farmers such as marketing, protection against sudden slump in the prices etc. This has paved the way for the entry of multinationals and big traders into the agricultural field. The government has not given any assurance of its intervention at the time of buying and selling done by the small and marginal farmers. The amendments have created opportunities for artificial price fluctuation and profiteering by the private companies.

APMC Act is very significant legislation in India. If the 70% of the farming community in this country were able to lead a life all these years it is due to APMC Act. The international forces which have left a trail of destruction in all spheres of economic activity in India have finally reduced the Indian land unfit for cultivation (Amitendu patil, and Subhomoy Bhattacharjee, 2008). The government of Karnataka safeguarded the interests of the capitalists by framing a new agricultural policy which has dealt a devastating blow to the 64% of the population which is entirely dependent on agriculture and allied occupations. It encouraged private investment for growing commercial crops with high export potentialities. Maharashtra too

followed suit and with this the agriculture policy of the entire country went for spin. In this manner amendments were made to the APMC Act in the year 2003 to suit the interests of the international agencies and MNCs. All the states have been pressurized to implant the amendments. Already it has been enforced in 21 states in the country. Karnataka too has consented to implement them. If these amendments are implemented the entire food security of country will be thrown into jeopardy and the lives of the farmers will be at the mercy of private companies. In the days to come the country will have to depend on other countries for the supply of food grains (Geeta Das, 2009). It is almost certain that India will soon go with begging bowls to the doorsteps of western countries.

The lobby behind the amendment to APMC Act

The APMC Act was reframed through amendments made in 2003 by bowing down to the pressures of international agencies. The models developed by these interests were used as a guideline for the amendments. The officers who provided the framework for these amendments were trained in International Institutions. In order to protect the interests of these forces the government made these amendments to the Act. Establishment of private markets, contract farming system, centralization of the powers of APMCs in the states, changes in the decision making and regulation, establishment of retail markets, opportunities for direct foreign investment in agriculture, pricing based on the quality, farming through the companies, etc are some of the features of the amendment (Amartya Sen, 1996).

Establishment (monopoly) of private markets

So far the marketing in India is being done by the government and the farmers through traders. But this legislation permits establishment of private markets as form of industry. As a result of this, millions of traders will be thrown out of business. The daily wage earners will be deprived of their livelihood. The capitalists have the complete powers to regulate this market. International

agencies can also establish markets. They can directly buy the produce from the farmers (Arunachalam, 2008).

With the establishment of private markets, 114 APMCS and 350 subsidiary markets which are being run by the farmers will go defunct. Millions of traders will lose their business (Jock Woods, 1977). The landless labourers who are working in the APMCs have originally worked as bonded labourer escaped this tyranny and APMCs provided them employment as stevedores. These sections of the population will be rendered unemployed (Jogdand, 2008). What kind of governance is this which sacrifices the lives of its toiling sons for the sake of making the capitalists richer and richer?

Contract farming a dangerous move

These developments portend grave consequences to the millions of people who are dependent on agriculture. The government and international agencies have joined hands and have come out with the findings that the present system of farming is not correct. The collective farming will bring more profits. So the stage has been set for the entry of private companies. The amendments made to the APMC Act permits any company to pool land in a village to carry out farming. Because of this provision of the Act the presence of the private companies in the farming sectors is increasing in several states of the country. The MNCs and private companies are making use of this provision and take the land forcefully from the villagers through 10 year leases with the farmers (Joshi, 1987). This has wrecked havoc to the cultural life of the villages and is responsible for the increase in rural unrest and unemployment. The farmers have been reduced to agricultural laborers in the pay of the companies. The areas where contract farming has been introduced, the crops that are not required by us are being produced (Joshi, 1982). Only export oriented commercial crops are being grown in such areas to the detriment of indigenous crops (Fidal Castro, 1999).

Decision making and regulation in the hands of market forces

In addition to the introduction of contract farming, establishment of private markets is one of the major aspects of the amended version of APMC Act. Due to this, the farmers can no longer grow any crops of their choice. The companies decide what is to be grown. Only those crops which have been decided by the companies have to be grown by the farmers. Besides the pricing, quality and crop wise prices, etc are also decided by the marketing companies. This has enslaved the self-respecting and independent farming community of the country.

Centralization of the powers of APMCs in the state

As per the amendment to the APMC Act the powers of the APMCs will be centralized. But it will be done along democratic lines – an officer will be appointed by the government and this officer will regulate the market. In a country where the elected representatives who have been voted to power to protect the interests of the people have abandoned their constitutional responsibilities, is it possible for a government official to keep the interests of the farmers? If so what will happen in the future?

All these changes have been made only to safeguard the interest of a few individuals and companies. The number of people whose lives have been sacrificed for this purpose cannot be reduced to mere statistical data. This democracy has suddenly become a big question mark to millions of labourers, footpath vendors, and small traders.

APMC amendment-handiwork of capitalists

The government is washing its hands of its responsibility by stating that the farming community will have representation in the markets that are going to be set up as per the amendment. But only those farmers who supply their produce to the market for two years in a row can become the members of the market committee. If he stops the supply he will have to forfeit his membership from the committee. The intention becomes very clear:

only the representatives of the companies will dominate the market to the exclusion of the farming community. The entire farming community will be covered by this contract farming.

The tragic consequences of the amendment to APMC Act

If contract farming comes into practice as envisaged by the amendment, 64% of the population will lose their only source of livelihood. They have been dependent on agriculture for generations. The government which has given permission for the establishment of private markets with the sole intention of introducing contract farming has not thought about the millions of workers and traders who are dependent on APMCs (Edward said, 1978). The entire amendments and the recent agricultural policies of the government represent the anti-farming lobby that has been active and working as extra-constituional entities. All these policies were framed under the label of the development of the farmers (Kaushik, 2005). But in reality they continue to protect the interests of the MNCs and other capitalists. If one makes a careful reading of the agricultural policies that were framed so far, one will find them mutually contradicting. The sum result of all these contradictions is the destabilization of the 70% of agriculture based activities. The international agencies have realized that our government has become impotent and found a convenient ally in this government to initiate a systematic destabilization of the farming sector in our country. This has serious implications for the food security of the country. The entry of private companies and encouragement that is being given to direct foreign investment has created havoc in the agricultural market. The efforts to provide legal sanctity to these destructive developments are indeed a disturbing trend.

All the amendments and changes brought about by the government have served the interest of a particular class of people in this country. Even in the face of wide scale protest against this trend, the

government went about implementing its policies. As a result the entire land has been reduced to chemical dump yards –no longer fit for cultivation. But surprisingly the same land is giving fantastic yields to the export oriented commercial crops.

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