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Kavitha B
Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Mangalore University, Konaje, Karnataka, India

Corresponding Author:
Kavitha B
Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Mangalore University, Konaje, Karnataka, India

National agricultural policy: An overview

Kavitha B

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Abstract
Agriculture is described as the backbone of the Indian economy. It contributes a significant share in the generation of the country's national income. More than half of the nation's workforce employed in the agriculture sector. Agriculture is essential not only to achieve self-reliance but also considered as a way of life. Agriculture shaped thought, outlook, culture and the economic life of the people of India. Therefore it may be said that agriculture lies at the core of socio – economic development and progress of Indian society. The Agricultural Policy is mainly formulated to increase the productivity and also raise the agricultural income and improve the standard of living of the farmers. But there was no clear cut agricultural policy till 1919. This paper throws light on the evolution of agricultural policy, positive and negative impact of policy on agriculture and challenges before agricultural policy in the present globalized period. The paper is conceptual in nature and based on secondary data.

Keywords: Agricultural policy, government, fertilizers, pesticides, green revolution

Introduction
According to the Tenth five year plan, "Agricultural development is central to economic development of the country". Agriculture is one of the oldest occupation and human activity. It is one of the balanced profession between the individual and environment. Agriculture emerged as one of the strongest and important industry in India. It provides a means of livelihood for about 60% of the country's workforce. It contributes large share to the national income more than 28% to the national income.[1] Agriculture and its allied activities contribute about a fifth to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture not only provides food security to the vast majority of the people, but also provides raw materials to the factories and industries and provides employment opportunities to the large section of the society directly or indirectly. India ranks 15th from the bottom, among developing countries, on the basis of per capita income, which is around U.S $180 (World Bank). The growth of other sector like industry, transport, communication etc in the economy depends on the performance of agriculture.

The history of agriculture in India traced back to the Indus valley civilization. According to the records agriculture system was developed in India around 9000 BC. Wheat, barley and jujube were cultivated during this period. In the Neolithic period along with barley and wheat cultivation people were rearing cattle, sheep and goat. The new techniques developed during the Neolithic period like cotton spinning, threshing, storing grains in granaries etc provides strong base for further development of agriculture in India. During the Indus valley civilization farmers were cultivated different crops like peas, sesame, dates and rice.[2] The idea of mixed farming and rainfall harvesting was developed during these periods. Along with the cultivation of cereals, vegetables and fruits animal husbandry was the main source of livelihood of the people during Vedic period. There was a common saying that those farmers who are near to nature they must be exceptionally close to god. The Greek diplomat Megasthenes in his famous book 'Indica' he describes Indian agriculture as follows," India has many huge mountains which abound in fruit trees of every kind and many vast plains of great fertility. The greater part of the soil is under irrigation and consequently bears two

[1] Ishwar, C Dhingra. (2011). The Indian Economy Environment and policy. Sultan Chand and Sons.
[2] Bheembai, S. Mulage. History of Agricultural system in India. International Journal of Humanities social Science and Education. Vol -4, Issue -7 July.

crops in the course of the year. In addition to cereals, there grows millets and different sorts of pulse and rice throughout India. Since there are two monsoons in the course of each year the inhabitants gather in two harvests annually".

Agriculture Policy describes a set of laws relating to domestic agriculture and imports of foreign agricultural products. Governments usually implement agricultural policies with the goal of achieving a specific outcome in the domestic agricultural product markets. Agricultural policy of a country is mostly designed by the Government for raising production and productivity and also for raising the level of agricultural income and standard of living of farmers within a definite time frame. This policy is formulated for all round and comprehensive development of the agricultural sector.

Policy formulation is not an easy task in India. Formulation of policy in agriculture is very complicated process because there are many hurdles involved in the agricultural policies. According to the seventh schedule of the Indian Constitution agriculture is mentioned in the state list. This means that the responsibility for agricultural policies, practices and regulation generally lies with the concerned state government. But other matters like agricultural marketing, food security and agricultural education policies relating to the pesticides etc are falls under both central and state jurisdiction. Climatic conditions of the Nation also influence the agricultural policy of the Nation. Compared to the other sector flow of information in agricultural sector is not quick.

In India most of the time agricultural policies are formulated by the central government. In all other policies particular department are involved in the policy formulation as well as implementation. But in agricultural policies there are several department are involved in these process. The Union ministry under the guidance of the Planning commission (presently known as NITI Ayoga) prepared the agricultural policies. But the implementation and administration of agricultural policies are lies in the hands of respective state governments. But again state depends on center for the funds to implement these policies at the state level. The Central Government allocates the funds to State Governments according to the directions of Finance department. The other agencies like RBI, NABARD, Commercial Bank, Rural Banks, Ministry of Finance etc are responsible for the formulation and implementation of various agricultural policies.

In India, the main objectives of agricultural policy are to remove the major problems of agricultural sector like improper and inefficient uses of natural resources, predominance of low value agriculture, poor cost benefit ratio of the sectoral activities and insignificant progress of co –operative farming and other self–help institutions.

Agriculture Policy in the Pre–Independent Period

According to Businessmen's Commission on Agriculture, "Agriculture is not merely a way of making money by raising crops, it is not merely an industry of a business, it is essentially a public function or service performed by private individuals for the care and use of land in the national interest and farmers in the course of their pursuit of living and private profit are the custodians of the basis of the National life. Agriculture is therefore, affected with a clear and unquestionable public interest, and its status is a matter of National concern calling for deliberate and far – sighted National policies not only to conserve the nature and human resources involved in it, but to provide for National security, promote a well-rounded prosperity and secure social and political stability".

The evolution of agricultural policy is not new in India. From time to time, Government has been formulating some policies relating to agricultural development. The evolution of agricultural policy in India is pre- occupied almost exclusively with the problems of revenue, police, judicial administration etc. The famine in Bengal and Assam in 1866 not only gained the attention of the Government but also forced the Government to take adequate for the solution of the problems of starvation and need to reform the agriculture. Hence for the first time in the history of agriculture the British Government decided to constitute a commission in the year 1866. The commission recommended constituting a special department of agriculture at the Centre. Accordingly the department of revenue of agriculture and commerce was created in 1871.[3] Many useful suggestions were made by the successive famines and irrigation commission for the development of agriculture in India. On the recommendations of the Famine commission 1880-81 a separate department of revenue and agriculture was revived in 1881.

But this organization was failed to fulfill its objectives. In spite of this progress could not make to reform the agriculture. The first serious effort was made to frame the agriculture policy in the year 1889. A famous agricultural scientist Dr. JA. Voelcker was brought over India to conduct the enquiry in to the character of soil and agricultural conditions. Later many steps had been taken to reform the agriculture such as appointment of Inspector General of Agriculture in 1889, Empirical institute of Veterinary Research in 1889 and Botanical and Zoological the Report of the Famine Commission 1891. According to the recommendation of Famine Commission Empirical Agricultural Research Institute was established at Pusa. The first organized research was started through this institution.

There was no clear cut policy on agriculture till 1919. Through 1919 Reforms act agriculture became the transferred subject. One of the landmarks in the history of Indian agriculture was the recommendation of Royal Commission. The Royal Commission was appointed in the year 1926 mainly for the promotion of agriculture, Veterinary research, experiment etc. The main aim of the policy was to make agriculture a profitable industry rather than a mode of living. The recommendation of the commission was considered a reference publication on agricultural policy.

During the period of Second World War, village community spirit had been considerably weakened. The discouragement to village and cottage industries created economic imbalance in the country. The Second World War and the Bengal famine, the first concrete step for introducing food control was taken by the Waval Government. To handle the acute shortage of food problem the Food Grain committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Krishnamachari. This committee popularly known as Krishnamachari committee. The committee recommended to initiate Grow more food campaign. Accordingly Grow more food campaign was started in the year 1943. But this campaign was not become successful and unable to bridge completely

[3] Sahay, B.R. & Shrivastava. M.P. National Agriculture policy in the New Millennium. Anmol Publications.

the gap in food production. The second food grain committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Thakurdas in 1947. The committee recommended to decontrol food and removal of restriction on movements of food grains. But the recommendation of this committee could not be achieved due to the persistent shortage and large imports.

Agricultural Policy of India in the Post Independent Period

After the independence it was realized that a systematic agricultural policy was essentially required during post Independent India to deal the following issues.

1. Quantitative issues – Inadequate supply of food grains
2. Qualitative issues – Lack of nutritive elements in food or lack of protective food.
3. Low purchasing power of the people – particularly of rural and poor people.
4. Administrative issues – They are
   a. Increasing population but less area under cultivation
   b. Increasing importance to the non- food crops. The shift of area from food crop to non-food crops had also affected the food situation.
   c. Separation of Burma from the domain of India- Till 1873 Burma was a part of India which commanded surplus rice.
   d. Partition of India also made the position of India was very worse. Because the rich food surplus areas of Punjab and Sindh were included with Pakistan.

After Independence vigorous efforts were undertaken to prepare plans for the development of the country. In July 1951 Planning Commission had prepared a plan draft. The final version of the first plan was submitted to the Government on December 7, 1952. The five year plan in India aimed at building a technologically progressive economy and a society based on justice and equal opportunity to every citizen. Planning usually involves program and actions for each and every sector of the economy. But planning for agriculture in India is quite difficult. Because of uncontrolled actions by the farmers and the nature of agriculture as it depends mainly on monsoons.

For the first time in India a detailed survey of the agrarian relations prevailing in the country was made by the Congress Agrarian Reform Committee under the chairmanship of J.C. Kumarappa in the year 1949. For the first time in the history of India an attempt was made a detailed survey of the agrarian relations prevailing in the country. The committee report covered all the major issues relating to the land reform. The committee recommended in the context of agrarian structure that the main principles which should govern the agrarian policy of the country are:

a) Agrarian economy should provide opportunities for the development of farmers personality
b) No scope for exploitation of one class by another
c) There should be maximum efficiency of production
d) The scheme reform should be within the realm of practicability.

Subsequently Maitra Committee (1950), Mehta Committee (1957) were constituted. The report of these committees influenced the agricultural policy in the later years. In the initial years of independence 'Grow more food campaign' was started. Accordingly the government gave more importance to the food production. Hence agriculture was given top priority in the first five year plan. But agricultural sector was totally neglected in the second five year plan. In the second five year plan more emphasis was given to the development of industrial sector. Consequently agricultural output declined in the second five year plan. Hence the government of India decided to invite the Agricultural Production Team sponsored by the Ford foundation in the year 1959. On the recommendation of this team, the Government implemented a program known as Intensive Agricultural District Program (IADP) also known as package program in the year 1960-61.[4] In the later years the government launched another program called as Intensive Agricultural Area Program (IAAP) in the year 1964 – 65. Both IADP and IAAP were concerned with promotion of intensive agriculture. Further the two droughts in 1965 – 66 and 1966- 67 and the biological revolution necessitated the new strategy for agricultural development

The new strategy of agricultural development is based on the concept that the state efforts should be directed in the integrated manner in the first instance to those areas which were best endowed for food production. Though the policies of agricultural development adopted since the beginning of the first five year plan the agricultural production had been stagnant in India. Hence, the strategy for agricultural growth adopted since the middle of the sixties known as new strategy or green revolution. It introduced high yielding variety of seeds, the use of fertilizers and pesticides. The optimum and balanced use of fertilizer and pesticides are important for achieving the objectives of raising the productivity level of land and to protect the crops from pests and diseases particularly with reference to high yielding varieties. While explaining the importance of fertilizer National Commission on Agriculture said, "It has been the experience throughout the world that increased agriculture production is related to increase consumption of fertilizers."

The seventh plan emphasized that while seeds and fertilizers are the basic inputs to increase agricultural production, plant protection measures are required to save the crops from the pests and diseases. However the use of pesticide has to be judicious and need based. In the initial years of independence the consumption of pesticides in agricultural sector was very low, it was only 100 tones. At present the country is consuming 92000 tones in the agricultural sector alone. The greatest success of green revolution was the attainment of self – sufficiency in food grains. Because expansion of area was the main source of growth in the pre – green revolution period. This was diminished considerably in the green revolution period and increase in productivity became the main source of growth in the green revolution period. Hence wheat and rice production between 1965 – 66 and 1971 – 72 witnessed an increase of 30 million tones which is 168% higher than the total achievement in the fifteen years of following 1950-51. The two important institutions like Food Corporation of India (FCI) and Agricultural Prices Commission (APC) were created during the green revolution period.[5]

[4] Sahay, B.R. & Shrivastava. M.P. National Agriculture policy in the New Millennium. Anmol Publications.

[5] Ramesh Chand & M.S.Swaminathan. (2005). India's Agricultural Challenges – Reflections on policy, Technology and other Issues. Centad Publications -2005.

Green revolution mainly concentrated on the growth of agricultural production. But it did not mean that green revolution not affect the commercial crops or cash crops. The production of commercial crops was also increased much higher in the later years. Because high yielding variety of seeds were used in all types of crops. Green revolution is considered as one of the milestone as for as Indian agriculture is concerned. The Green revolution helped many nations to face the scarcity of food problem and it save the billions of people from starvation.

A new phase was started in India's agricultural as well as economic policy in 1991. Central Government launched a new economic policy which involved liberalization, privatization or globalization measures. Though these reforms were not directed at the agricultural sector, but it affected indirectly. At the International level GATT Agreement eliminate International trade barriers through negotiations. The main concern of this agreement on agriculture is on domestic subsidies, public distribution system, Indian market accessibility to foreign suppliers and patenting of seeds. But due to the poor technological and market accessibility the developing countries will suffer much in the hands of the developed countries. Apart from this the establishment of World Trade Organization and its policies also affected the agricultural sector both in positive and negative way. Post WTO trade liberalization helped India to achieve small in agricultural efforts; whereas it resulted in continuous increase in import. This has adversely affected self – reliance in agriculture.

Some critics also says that Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) will have a disastrous effect on two main areas in our country i.e., agriculture and pharmaceuticals.[6] But in India majority of the farmers were illiterate hence they did not know about the procedure of patent. According to the Patent (Amendments) Bills and Seeds Act (2004) seed growers should get their seeds patented. In case, this is not done the farmers will not be allowed to exchange their seeds with other farmers.

Conclusion

Agriculture is a major sector in India and continuous to be lifeline for the Indian economy. The growth of all other fields depends on the growth of agriculture. Agricultural policy contributed to the economic progress, economic stabilization, economic justice and economic freedom. Since the independence to till today government has taken several steps to increase agricultural production and productivity. Through the five year plan emphasis will be given to increase the agricultural production. But no five year plan helped to achieve the target fixed by the policy makers. Sometimes the lack of cooperation between the central and state government also affect the proper implementation of plans or policies. Though the Green Revolution helped to increase the productivity in one hand, on the other hand it created many problems. It means in order to increase food grain production and other planning objectives, the Government encouraged to use huge quantum of chemical fertilizers and pesticides which would have adverse effects on ecology, environment and health conditions of both human beings and animal species on earth. The economic liberalization has thrown new challenges to Indian agriculture. To face these challenging it is necessary to prepare the farmers to compete in the world market through domestic policy reforms.

All these developments raised new challenges and provided new opportunities which required appropriate policy from the government side. There was a strong pressure on the government to make an agricultural policy which provides a new direction to agriculture in the contemporary period.

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