

RESTORATION OF DIGNITY TO THE VOCATION OF FARMING-AN ESSENTIAL PRE-REQUISITE TO ACCELERATE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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The late Poet laureate of Kerala, Vallathol Narayana Menon wrote as early as 1926 in one of his renowned pieces entitled 'FARMERS LIFE'

"Farmer, my friend, thou art a condemned lot
To many a vain glorious stylist
But it is out of your silent toil,
All the reverberations of machines fail"

The poet goes at length to drive home the message that but for the farmer and farming the whole Universe would have been a monotonous scene of disfunction, inertia and chaos. He recalls the references made about agrarian endeavours in Vedas and confirms that these are not platitudinous, but identification of farming as an unavoidable, inevitable economic activity of great piety and sanctity that sustains the material and spiritual needs of the society. Vallathol eulogises the farmer as a brave hero, who made the world worth living through his untiring efforts. He attributes nobility and greatness to the job of farming. He concludes the poem with an emphatic exhortation

"If you want prosperity, happiness
And freedom to prevail,
Redeem the life of the farmer
In tune with the changing times".

The Farmer

Those of us who go about aggressively promoting agricultural development, seems to be overlooking the most vital component of Agri-business-the farmer. He is the one who consistently and persistently fight against heavy odds like agro-climatic disfavours,

difficult terrains, natural hazards, crop enemies and paucity of resources. He used to have more failures than chances of success. Success do not excite

him nor failures deter. He does not revolt even when subjected to severe exploitation and humiliation. Recognition is something which he has never clamoured nor aspired for. He hears about new materials and methods of farming. Acceptance of these innovations is optional to him. He tries some of them, adopts those which appeal to him. He has only limited access to new technology. He dare not seek them, as he feels it is all inaccessible to him.

He prays to the 'Goddess of Farming' and seeks her blessings for the well being of his agricultural enterprise. He behaves like a contented man, cut away from all sophisticated systems and comforts-the social animal often quoted unawares as the back bone of the nation's economy.

80% of our population is like him, living in far flung villages and earning the livelihood through farming and allied occupations. Our economy is thus predominantly agro-based.

Drawbacks

It has all the built-in drawbacks of an under-developed economy such as

- (1) Low rate of literacy
- (2) Low productivity in agriculture
- (3) Low per capita income
- (4) Adherence to tradition bound practices
- (5) High density of population
- (6) Poor sanitation
- (7) Lack of adequate communication facilities
- (8) Inadequacy of food, clothing and shelter for the people etc.

Since independence there has been remarkable improvement in

The 'Farmer' who is the king pin around whom the whole gamut of prosperity and abundance revolve, has never been accorded the pride of place he deserves in society. He is being neglected by planners, administrators and decision makers. To expedite the process of development of agriculture, it is most essential that the dignity to the vocation has to be restored. For this the author suggests that the very agricultural system is to attain the due degree of modernisation. Also, it should be able to win the acceptance of new entrepreneurs. The author is the Public Relations Officer of the Rubber Board.

these conditions, yet much remains to be done.

In view of the predominance of agriculture and related occupations, modernisation of farming and increasing agricultural productivity should have been accorded the top most priority in all our development plans.

Results of research have to move faster to the field and diffusion of innovation has to be accelerated. It is commendable that within less than four decades, output of food grains has touched an all time high of 150 million tonnes, registering a three fold increase.

Could we attribute this solely to the modern technology? It is indeed a triumph of the farmer. The gains could have been still higher, had we motivated the farmer better. Farming largely remains an undignified job even now, failing to attract enterprising entrepreneurs in our country, with the sole exception of Punjab.

'Job'-misinterpreted

Everybody, particularly the educated and unemployed manpower in the rural setting refuses to choose farming as a remunerative vocation. To them vocation, job or employment means a white collar or arm chair engagement.

Their definition of a job, is an employment in a Government office, Industrial establishment or Bank, which will fetch them a three digit or four digit salary on the 1st of every month after an eight hour duty on working days. Even those who have sizable arable land, prefers to work in an office because of the status and recognition that go with such 'jobs' in the society. Farming is thus left largely as a traditional vocation to the elders at home who have been in this business for long.

History

History reveals that Agriculture in the form of settled cultivation

was started in our country around 7000 years ago in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Due to agro-climatic diversities the country is endowed with rich flora and fauna. This is precisely the reason that India became one of the early centres of domestication of several important crops including rice.

The ancients were, however, afraid of the loss of soil fertility and the devastation of crops by pests and diseases. They, in their wisdom, restored soil fertility through practices such as shifting cultivation, conservation and use of animal refuse and waste and the introduction of legumes in crop rotation. They insulated themselves from crop failures caused due to vicissitudes in weather or incidence of pests by growing a mixture of crop in the fields.

Many an effort like this, which would throw light on the originality and ingenuity of the ancient farmer, could be traced. This farmer has undergone evolutionary changes in behaviour and attitude. But his commitment to land and the arable culture stayed in tact.

Treatment to the farmer

Improvement in agricultural production and productivity attained successively could be attributed largely to the meticulous hard work put in by the farmer. The 'farmer' who is the king pin around whom the whole gamut of prosperity and abundance revolve, has never been accorded the pride of place he deserves in the society.

Planners, administrators and decision makers all alike 'look down' on him. The treatment meted out to him by the Mass Media like newspapers and electronic channels also are none different. Not even 2% of the space in newspapers care to carry some items on farming and related vocations. Out of the 12 hours devoted for broadcast over the national radio, not even 10% of the air

time is set apart for agri-business. So also Door Darsan.

In a predominantly agro-based economy like ours, should not the farmer and his craft get a better deal? The success story of an innovative farmer is not considered news worthy. Phoolan Devi, the notorious dacoit is better known in our country than many Krishi Pandits, who have literally achieved 'vertical expansion' in farm productivity.

Farming and farmer are thus pushed down. How come such a vocation, though the most noble and laudable among economic activities, be meted out a step-motherly treatment? New talents hesitate to tread into the field of agriculture because of its inferior status.

If our agricultural system is to attain the due degree of modernisation, it should be able to win the acceptance of enterprising entrepreneurs. This is possible, only if farming is projected as a 'decent job'.

Farming, which had enjoyed a pride of place even in vedic times, should restore its lost glory. This could be achieved only through an on-going and intensive drive under the auspices of Institutions of the standing of the Agricultural University.

Though it is hard to suggest a rigid course of action to achieve the objective, I may dwell on certain long-term strategies that could be discussed.

Begin with Students

Special lessons in the curriculum in schools and colleges projecting agriculture as an economic activity of rich legacy and tradition should be included. The lessons chosen should carry sufficient persuasive influence to accord respectability to the farming community.

Similarly, organising 'Young Farmers' Forum' in educational institutions should be made compulsory. The members of such Forums should be imparted

training to acquire improved techniques. Those students who opt enthusiastically for joining such a fraternity could be encouraged by granting special credits. This would create a congenial climate in academic institutions to promote a sense of respect for agriculture and allied vocations.

Exercises of these nature are likely to yield promising results, as we are contemplating to "catch them young",

State level Farm Fair

As of now there is no systematic effort to convene 'Farm Fairs' at state level for providing a common Forum for farmers from different regions to interact and share their experiences. This should be done on a regular basis in different venues from year to year. Such occasions could also be employed gainfully to project agriculturists of outstanding brilliance by instituting attractive awards either in cash or kind.

Separate awards could be presented to individual farmers with significant achievements in their respective field of specialisation like Rice, Coconut, Rubber, Tapioca, Poultry, Dairy, Fish farming, Piggery, Kitchen Garden, Ornamental gardening etc. The success stories of these award winners could be projected through the mass media as an effort at motivating the latent talents of others.

Recognition of the performance of innovative farmers and the projection accorded to them will certainly bring in a lot of respect to the agrarian community.

Cost-benefit aspects

Cost benefit aspects of the vocation of farming and allied activities are not that well known to attract new and young talents. Though we produce a lot of literature on improved methods of crop husbandry, seldom do the cost of cultivation and per hectare net return

from different crops find an authentic mention in them. An idea about the profit realisation, is perhaps, the largest single factor that could motivate and attract entrepreneurs. Unfortunately ready reckoners in this regard are grossly lacking. This is an area which should engage the immediate attention of the propagators of innovative ideas.

Incentives

Incentives offered for generating self employment among educated and jobless rural youth have to be made more attractive and liberal, particularly agro-based vocations, so as to attract new talents to take up agro-economic ventures. Once the youngsters are given to believe that farming and allied vocations are equally dignified and paying, the rush for white collar jobs would certainly come down resulting in a large section preferring to choose farm-based activities.

Communication support

Rural Development enterprises including agriculture, do not enjoy the communication support and motivational persuasion legitimately deserved by them. Mass media like newspaper, Radio and TV do not accord adequate coverage for news-worthy items of relevance to rural development. Nor they cater in a need based fashion.

Publication of a specialised daily news paper exclusively for Rural Development and related aspects would be worthwhile in a state like Kerala where the literacy is as high as 70%. There is a lot of technology that is still in the shelf, awaiting release, for want of appropriate channels and self contained media. The information seeking behaviour of the farming community in this state is immensely favourable and receptive to imbibe anything new. The farm feature pages, carried weekly once by leading news papers in Kerala, bear ample testimony to the response from

farmers. This aspect could be taken advantage of better, if a specialised news paper is started for carrying innovative items for promoting agriculture and rural development. Only then can we project the farmer and farming and accord a dignified place to both.

Past experiences show that continuous and ongoing campaigns are effective in driving home the intended message. A shining example is 'Family Planning and the concept of small family'. The educational propaganda on planned parenthood has helped in instilling sufficient awareness in the minds of couples. They have become adopters of one method or the other for arresting unwanted pregnancy.

The "we two-we have two" pattern of family size has come to stay, irrespective of caste or creed, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, employed or unemployed.

So also, the lost glory and dignity of the vocation of farming could be restored if an intensive educational campaign employing all the channels of communication is launched on a continuous basis. Besides some of the steps suggested earlier, the University could take this up also as a Public Relations exercise.

Our late Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri had coined the slogan "Jai Jawan Jai Kisan". Jawans are held in high esteem throughout the country, but Kisans are not. Dignity of Kisans has eroded over the years. It needs immediate restoration, if farming and allied activities are to flourish and prosper.

I wish the Kerala Agricultural University initiate the process of redemption and bring back the nobility, greatness and sanctity enjoyed by farming. Unless this is done accelerated development of agriculture would remain an unfulfilled dream.

The farmer has to be tamed his dignity has to be upheld, he