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Section A

If agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will go right.

At the stroke of the mid-night of 14-15th August, 1947, when the whole world slept, India awoke to a new beginning. However, inspite of the new beginning, our leaders decided to focus on the most traditional issue - agriculture.

India's 1st FYP launched in 1951 was completely dedicated to boosting agricultural output. The next 30 years were focused on achieving food security for the country. Green revolution stands as a testament to its success.

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One might think that when the new nations was starting afresh, why could it not focus on sectors like manufacturing, services, etc? why did the services sector bloom only when agriculture was secured?

The answer was given in one single line by M.S. Swaminathan - the Father of Green Revolution. As he said, "If agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will go right."

In this essay, we will focus on the importance of agriculture in our economy. What exactly is wrong with our agriculture & how is it impacting us? Finally, we will conclude with what is needed to make our agriculture right.

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"Hunger is the worst form of violence". As stated by Gandhiji, hunger is the key cause of many socio-economic issues. A hungry person will have poor health, cannot be economically productive & might even indulge in crime to fill his stomach.

Agriculture by ensuring no one sleeps hungry targets multiple issues with one-stone. Only when India achieved food security in 1980s, the socio-economic indicators like MMR, IMR, GER started raising.

Moreover, an agriculturally secured country doesn't have to depend on other countries as for its sustenance. Being food secure in itself is a power of country.

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In developing countries like India, other sectors like manufacturing, Services often take time to bloom. Till then, agriculture shoulders the responsibility of providing employment to people. Like in India, it provides employment to 44.1% of population.

The importance of agriculture brings us to the question that if agriculture is so important, why has India - the 2nd largest producer in the world - not been able to achieve the status of super-power yet? That's because everything is not perfect.

Why is Agriculture - India's strength becoming a weakness?

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Agriculture although employs 44% of population, its contribution to GDP is mere 18%. While other sectors have grown at ~8% over last 3 decades, agriculture has been at 3%. This shows the huge problem of disguised unemployment in agriculture.

The low employment intensity of agriculture can be attributed to age old techniques being followed.

Flood farming, broadcasting of fertilizers, lack of mechanization has reduced efficiency of agriculture.

The water intensity of Indian agriculture is 3-4x that of China. Moreover, irrigated area is less than 50% leaving farmers to vagaries of weather.

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The inefficiencies are not only at production stage. NITI Aayog estimates that produce worth RS 1 L Cr is lost every year due to lack of cold storage infrastructure. How have these inefficiencies impacted India?

For one, India is food secure, not hunger secure. We ranked 101/116 in Global Hunger Index 2021 & the category of 'severe' hunger. India is facing problem of 'Hunger in the midst of plenty'.

This is due to traditional focus on wheat & rice as compared to holistic diet. Focus on grains has provided India with lots of carbs but without any nutrients & minerals needed by body.

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The second problem is with respect to climate change. Agriculture contributes 17% to India's GHG emission with 75% coming from flood farming. Indiscriminate use of urea fertilizers due to uncontrolled subsidies lead to 25% contribution of nitrous oxides.

India draws 26% of world's groundwater with 85-90% being used for agriculture. Inefficient use has led to 60% degradation in India's water table in last 30 years (CGWB).

The third problem is with export potential. Although second largest producer, India's agricultural export is just 2% of GDP v/s 4% for Brazil. Subsistence farming, huge domestic demand through MSPs, leave little for exports.

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With all these issues in agriculture, India as a whole is suffering along with farmers. To reap the full potential, it is imperative to ensure our strength remains a strength.
How can we strengthen agriculture?

To make agriculture right, utmost focus should be on the people involved in it. To reduce disguised unemployment, blue-collared jobs in agri-allied activities like food processing should be created. PM-KVY, DDUSKY are pre-existing platforms which can be used.

The second focus point should be crop diversification. Boosting it through MSP regime by providing

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more returns as compared to 60% on oilseeds, pulses, etc. can help. Generating demand by providing nutri-slice bars of millets in MDM, POSHAN, ICDS will ensure shift towards less water intensive crop.

Along with traditional improvements, there has to be perspective change in agriculture - from food production to ^{business} enterprise (ES 2021). Improvement in private participation from 0.3% to ~ 30% investments, developing cold-chain infra, will transform the sector into a modern enterprise.

The transformation will also have to be from ^{being} input intensive to knowledge intensive. Precision farming, GIS based mapping, cadastral maps, can improve productivity of agriculture.

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India has potential to grow its micro-irrigated area by five times.

The last step in transformation would be in marketing. Shifting from stock management to surplus management. While India's production has grown from 1 kg/person (1970) to 1.7 kg/person (2017), consumption has remained constant at ~ 1 kg/person.

Ensuring free & integrated markets to farmers will help in surplus management. Apart from domestic demand, diversifying basket in the form of export destination & products will increase value of agriculture. Setting up grading facilities, e-Markets, creating 'Brand India' will boost agricultural exports.

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We must remember that while our country was reeling under second wave of pandemic, it was agriculture which shouldered the economy & registered resilient growth. Middle-eastern countries, devoid of agriculture were hit much harder even with lower number of cases.

For India to achieve \$5 trillion economy, it will have to club modern sectors like ITES, BPO, automobile, pharma with the backbone sector - agriculture.

"India's place on the sun will come from combination of wisdom of rural economy & skills of urban economy"

-Verghese Kurien

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Section B .

Is inequality an inevitable outcome of growth?

The day is 1st February 2022. Microsoft office in Mumbai is all decked up to receive its Indian origin CEO, Satya Nadella, after being shut for two whole years.

As Satya lands down at Mumbai airport, he notices the world's largest slum - Dharavi surrounding him. But soon, all that disappears. As he travels the roads of South Bombay, all he sees is tall, gleaming, sky-scrappers with Mercedes & Rolls-Royce running on the roads.

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The stark contrast Satya sees within a time-span of an hour makes him wonder - is inequality an inevitable outcome of growth?

This brings us to today's topic where we will see India's growth but at what cost? Has the growth being inclusive? Was it inevitable to have some inequality? Finally we will conclude with what can be done to alleviate this inequality.

After Satya left India in 1990s, India has achieved spectacular growth. It is the third largest economy (in PPP terms) today. It has been.

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growing at $\sim 8\%$ for last 2 decades.

From being import dependent for sustenance in 1960s, it has become a major exporter in the fields of automobile, pharmaceuticals, etc. In 2021, India was the 5th largest \$FDI destination in the world.

Satya while taking pride in the growth of his origin country wonders - at what cost was this growth? Has this growth come with equity?

While India has 42 unicorns in its arsenal, 28% of its population spends less than Rs 100 everyday.

During COVID, while market capitalization of India increased by 100%, more than

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3 crore people were pushed into poverty.

The inequalities are not restricted to income. While on one hand we have Taj, Oberoi, Trident 5 star hotels, India is categorized as 'severe' hunger by Global Hunger Index.

The inequalities continue across gender - 82% of India's income is contributed by men (World Inequality Index). While female LFPR is merely at 25%, it is as high as 75% for men.

Moreover, the inequalities are spread across regions. Top 3 states - Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu contribute 3 times GDP than bottom 3 states. While MMR is 200 in UP, it is just 40 in Kerala.

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Having analyzed these facts, One might wonder - what exactly went wrong? How did India achieve such a spectacular growth but only for a set of its population?

The answer lies in growth trajectory of India. The focus of policies post 1991 was more on 'growth at any cost'. Relying on the 'trickle-down' effect, India lagged in enhancing the Human Development Indicators (HDI).

While private companies flourished offering jobs to limited section of population, no safety nets were provided for the poorest. In growing capitalism, the wedge between both these sections widened.

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The educational spending has been stagnant at 4-5% of GDP for last 2 decades. Although steps like RTE has increased GRE i.e. quantity, quality remains abysmal. Only 32% of class 5 children can solve class 2 problems (ASER).

The third indicator of HDI i.e. health has the most stark contrast. On one hand, India is a medical tourism destination while on other hand it has only 86 doctors per 1L population. Out of Pocket Expenditure (OOPE) at 60% is one of the highest globally.

The 2nd pandemic wave clearly showed the infirmities of Indian healthcare system when people died on road because they could not find a bed in hospital.

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The issue of 'Growth at any cost' is further exacerbated by age-old mentality. Low empowerment of women due to low education, not allowing them to work inhibits India's growth. As quoted by Michelle Obama, "No country can truly flourish if it stifles empowerment of its women", it is necessary to include the 50% of population in country's growth journey.

But has this been the story of every country globally? Not at all. Satya having traveled the globe by now, clearly sees where India went wrong. He also has a clear perspective as to what needs to be done to alleviate this inequality.

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First & foremost among the measures needed is empowering the marginalized. Till now, government has made decisions for them in the form of rations, health, shelter, etc.

But as Amartya Sen suggested, it is imperative to empower them such that they become capable for their own decisions. This can be achieved through education & employment.

Education should focus on learning outcomes in real life rather than memory based texts. Inculcating vocational educational on the lines of Nai Talim of Gandhiji will create job generators rather than seekers.

Having generated job creators through education, employment

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will automatically boost up. It can be further promoted by expanding SHGs, schemes like Stand Up India to poorest of poor. Regions with low connectivity like North-East or LWE regions can be equipped with foot loose industries like horticulture, food processing, etc.

The second aspect in empowerment is to improve health of population.

It starts right from providing holistic diet comprising of millets, fruits, vegetables, etc. through ICDS, MDM, etc.

China although having similar demography has been able to reduce hunger by providing 3x the nutrients that of India.

Along with nutrition, healthcare should be made more accessible through more public infrastructure. OPE

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needs to be reduced from 60% to 30%.
The Universal Health Coverage (UHC) should also include the middle class. A better education system will automatically channel more youth towards pursuing health professions.

The third aspect is to empower women. Countries headed by women like New Zealand, Germany, have handled COVID-19 much better. This demonstrates their capabilities which should be enhanced by measures like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao; Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, etc.

The another pressing issue of regional disparities should be addressed by equitable infrastructure growth. Launching of first multi-modal logistics park at Jorjigopha, Assam;

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earmarking budget for LWE districts;
FC devolution for underperforming states
will go a long way.

All these measures can help India develop more equitably in future. Scandinavian countries have shown have equal society leads to better harmony. They have increased social trust with one of the lowest corruption index.

Drifting back to reality from his thoughts, Satya realizes that India, in just 50 years is already competing with the biggest economies like the US & China.

If the country rightly focuses on equity, in no time can will it compete with the best of

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HDI countries like Switzerland, Norway, etc.
And maybe then, the next generation
of Satya in this country would not
have to leave it to achieve his dream.