

The Role of Agriculture in Rural and Economic Development in Darjeeling Hills: A Case Study

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Abstract—Agriculture plays an important role in India's economy as it not only generates income but also provides employment opportunities to most of the rural people. Agriculture is the only means of living to almost 75% of India's population. Darjeeling Hills which covers mostly rural areas depends on agriculture for day to day living and generating economic growth. Agriculture has been able to provide food grains, income and livelihood to local rural people. Agriculture, rural crafts, cottage industries, small business and services are the mainstay of the rural economy. Provision of credit; input supply; technology dissemination; value addition through diversification favoring high value agriculture, agro-processing and warehousing facilities; and creation of marketing network and infrastructure play a pivotal role in economic transformation in the villages and rural development. The present study examines the role of agriculture in rural and economic development of 2 villages of Darjeeling namely Aaloobaari and Rammam. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be applied to examine the present scenario of agriculture and rural and economic development of the study area.

Keywords: Agriculture, income, rural economy, economic growth, rural development

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is an important part of India's economy and at present it is among the top two farm producers in the world. Over 70 per cent of the rural households depend on agriculture. Agriculture is an important sector of Indian economy as it contributes about 17% to the total GDP and provides employment to over 60% of the population. Indian agriculture has registered impressive growth over last few decades. Agriculture is the only means of living for almost two-thirds of the employed class in India. Long before saying of Mahatma Gandhi that India lives in its villages (rural areas) still holds true. As per 2011 census sixty nine percent i.e. 833 million people live in rural areas of India. The growth rate of rural population has declined substantially to about 1.2 per cent during 2001–11 from 1.7 per cent per year during 1991–2001. Urban population growth, in contrast, was about 2.8 per cent per year during both periods (Census 1991; 2001; 2011). The main reason behind this growth variation is large scale migration from rural to urban areas. Agriculture lies at the heart core of rural livelihoods. Despite its declining share in

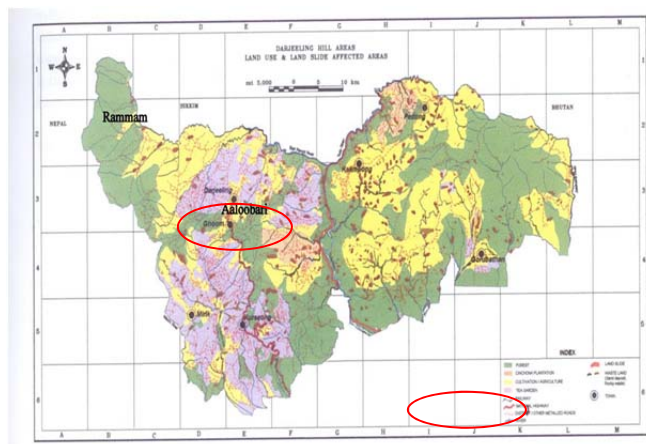
the total GDP, agriculture continues to engage around half the country's total workforce and over two-thirds of the rural workforce. Most of India's poor also depend on agriculture, making the agricultural sector a vital focus area in attempts at growing at a reasonably high growth rate of about 8- 10 percent during past decade except a few years. But these sectors were not in a position to provide jobs and employment to unemployed persons hence termed as jobless growth.

The paper will discuss the common role that agriculture sector is playing and can play for rural development and will present a case show of various linkages through which agricultural growth can be transformed to rural development and overall economic growth. Almost all the studies related to agriculture and development enshrines that agriculture sector has prime hand in the growth and development transformation of any country. The paper will like to describe how agriculture sector will lead to rural growth and development but for that it is mandatory that agriculture sector itself must grow and develop at a steady and consistent reasonable growth.

2. STUDY AREA

The proposed area of the present study comprises of the two villages from Darjeeling Hills. Darjeeling lies between 26° 31' and 27° 13' north latitude and between 87° 59' and 88° 53' east longitude. It is the northernmost district of West Bengal. It is located on the lap of the Himalayas. The district comprises of three subdivisions namely, Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong and Siliguri. Darjeeling Himalaya forms a part of the Eastern Himalayan range and is bounded by Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan on the north, west and east respectively. The area covered by Darjeeling Himalaya is about 1721 Sq. Km. while the total area of the district is 3202 Sq. Km. The two case study areas of Darjeeling Hills are Aaloobari and Rammam. Aaloobari is a small village located 5 kms from Darjeeling town and Rammam is a typical agricultural village located at Singalila Range between Siri Khola and Gorkhey.

3. MAP SHOWING CASE STUDY AREAS:



Source: Department of Tourism, GTA, Darjeeling

4. OBJECTIVES:

- i) To analyze the role of agriculture in rural development of the study area.
- ii) To analyze the role of agriculture in economic development of the study area.
- iii) To examine the contribution of local people for rural and economic development of the study area.
- iv) To examine the initiatives taken by government to promote agriculture.

5. METHODOLOGY:

The methodology that has been adopted for the proposed study is analytical, descriptive, comparative, evaluative and interpretive. Both Qualitative and Quantitative data has been used for the study. Secondary data has been collected from the previous studies in agriculture, rural development and economic development. Various publications, newspapers, journals, magazines have been studied. Specific Internet portals and websites have been browsed to get more information.

6. CASE STUDY:

Agriculture and Rural and Economic Development in Aaloobari:

Agriculture plays an important and vital role in any economy. It is directly and indirectly linked with the economic activity, growth and development of other sectors in an economy and to overall welfare and development of an economy. India is an agrarian economy and agriculture sector has still lot of

bearings on the overall growth and development of the country generally and rural development particularly. Although, the economic contribution of agriculture to India's GDP is steadily declining with the country's broad-based economic growth, still agriculture is demographically the broadest economic sector and plays a significant role in the overall socio-economic fabric of India. Agriculture, with its allied sectors, is unquestionably the largest livelihood provider in India, more so in the vast rural areas. 69% of India's population lives in rural areas, and three-fourths of the people making up these rural populations depend on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihoods.

Aaloobari: Aaloobari is a small village located 5 kms from Darjeeling town. The total geographical area of Aaloobari village is 34.8 hectares of which 40% is tea garden and rest agricultural land and settlement area. According to the study, the total population of Aaloobari is 116 people with 60 male and 56 female population. Agriculture is practiced with traditional as well as modern inputs. Almost every member of the household actively participates in cropping and harvesting crops. The main types of crops grown are Maize, potato, cabbage, squash, millets, carrot, pea, beans, varieties of vegetables, saag, etc. The agricultural production not only has generated surplus income but also has attracted tourists from different parts of nation but also foreigners. Tourists visits not only to enjoy the beauty of raised crops but also to enjoy organic agricultural products. Co operatives has opened up in the area to provide loans. Agriculture has paved the way for infrastructural development of the area.

Pema Tamang, a native and a farmer of the area viewed that the agricultural production has generated him ample of income which not only runs his families' livelihood but has given a chance to send his children to private school. His agricultural products mostly peas, bean and maize goes to market areas of Darjeeling town, Ghoom, Jorebunglow, Sonada and even to Sikkim. It's a great contribution to the development of economy as well. He has built a concrete house for his family with the income gained through agriculture. Vehicles are available to export his products to the markets since the area is well connected by metalled roads which are an indicator of rural development of the area.

Bikash B.K., a native and a labor by profession grows vegetables. Tomato, peas, beans, cabbage and maize are the crops which gives him more income compared to his income from labor work. Sprinkle irrigation provides water to the field which gives him quality vegetables. The improvement in field has influenced the government to introduce Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which provided The 100 days programme in village which offered labors to build cemented steps towards village within 100 days and to earn their livelihood at least for short term.

The need of literacy for efficient agricultural production has motivated farmers to send their children to private as well as government schools. Junglebusty School and Aaloobari

Primary School has served the purpose. Co operatives and Community hall has been established for the villagers. Roads have been established and maintained. Water harvesting points has been introduced in the village. Sprinkle irrigation is given due emphasis for providing all round water supply to agricultural fields. Dispensary and primary health centre has been established for medical treatment. Street lights have been installed at a spacing of 10 meters within village. All this shows that Aaloobari is developing with economic as well as rural development.

Rammam: Rammam is a typical agricultural village located at Singalila Range in Darjeeling hills. Around 60% of land has been devoted to agriculture. Terrace farming is a predominant type. Out of 84 people 46 are engaged in agriculture.

Lucky Sherpa, a 45 year old lady works as farmer. She not only run livelihood of her family but she has been able to build a house of her own. Government too has helped her providing tribal fund. She grows vegetables mainly potato and peas on a leased land. Other crops she grows are beans, tomato and saag. She owes horse to transport her agricultural production mostly to Rimbick which gives her fine market to sale her products and earn profit. Her effort has motivated other farmers to grow varieties of crops and earn profit which has developed their village economically.

Arjun Rai, another villager and a farmer is a literate one who knows the use of different variety of seeds, use of pesticides and insecticides. He knows the proper management of technics, inputs, use of manures which he shares with other farmers. Thus the village has prospered in agriculture and has developed economically.

The area thus has achieved rural and economic development. Different homestays and shops have opened up. Tourists from different parts of the world arrive at Rammam to enjoy the beauty of agricultural farm. They offer the village with extra fund and ideas. Rammam Higher Secondary School has been serving the rural people with better education. Agriculture, upto some extent has been able to remove poverty and unemployment in the area.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that agriculture up to some extent has played a great role in providing rural and economic development in the study area. Farmers have managed to get the fair and remunerative prices clearly and not managed by cartels of traders. As the nature of farming has changed from subsistence to market oriented so the demand for infrastructure like roads, nearby markets, cold stores etc. has

increased and has become of immense importance. Farmers has been able to get money in advance to hire certain inputs like fertilizer, labor and other inputs which banks hardly provide to them because of certain hard and fast preconditions to be fulfilled before lending by institutions like banks. The facilities like check on spurious fertilizers and chemicals should be made common to all rural areas and certain oriental programmes should be launched to aware the farmers how they can shift from traditional farming to modern profitable and employment oriented agriculture with scientific way.

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