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Research Article

Agricultural Development In Mysore State: Early 20th Century

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ABSTRACT

This research article explores the significant agricultural development in Mysore State during the early 20th century, a transformative period marked by progressive reforms and policies. Under the enlightened rule of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV and the administrative acumen of Sir M. Visvesvaraya, the state embarked on modernization efforts that profoundly impacted the agrarian economy. Key initiatives included the establishment of agricultural research institutions, the construction of major irrigation projects like the Krishna Raja Sagara Dam, the promotion of the cooperative movement, and comprehensive land revenue reforms. These efforts led to increased agricultural productivity, socio-economic upliftment of farmers, and the introduction of modern farming techniques. This article delves into these pivotal developments, highlighting their lasting legacy on the agricultural landscape of Mysore State.

Keywords: Mysore State, Agricultural development, Early 20th century, Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, Sir M. Visvesvaraya, cooperative movement, Irrigation projects, land revenue reforms, Krishna Raja Sagara Dam, Mysore Agricultural School

Introduction:

Agricultural development in the early 20th century in Mysore State (now part of Karnataka) was marked by significant reforms and policies aimed at improving agricultural productivity and the socio-economic conditions of the agrarian population. This period saw the implementation of various initiatives under the rule of enlightened monarchs, particularly during the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV and the administration of Sir M. Visvesvaraya, the Diwan of Mysore. This article explores the key policies, major dates, and their impacts on agricultural development in Mysore State.

The erstwhile princely state of Mysore in South India emerged as an autonomous province under the rule of the Wodeyars following the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire in the early 17th century. This princely state roughly encompassed the central and southern districts of present-day Karnataka, including the commercial and production hub of Bangalore.

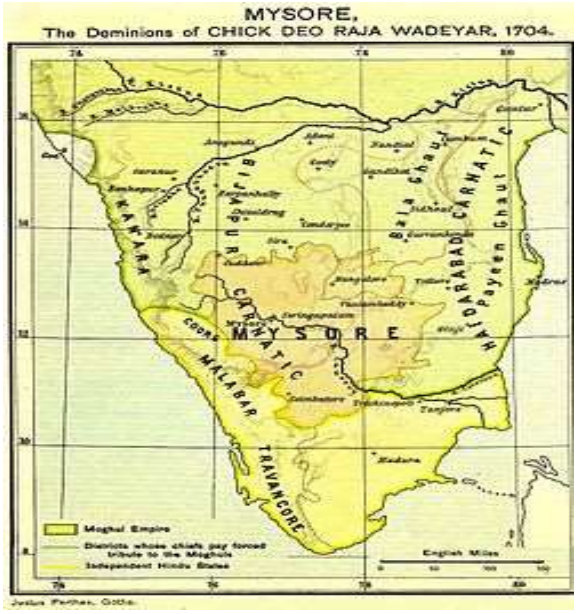
Mysore spanned multiple agro-ecological zones, such as the hilly regions of the Western Ghats, transition zones, and eastern and southern dry zones, each exhibiting a diverse array of soil types, cropping patterns, and agricultural systems. The hilly zones were characterized by areca plantations, spice gardens, and wetlands cultivating paddy. In the transition and dry zones, a variety of field and plantation crops were cultivated based on the soil type and available irrigation sources. These crops included jowar, ragi, various millets and pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, fruits, mulberry, and cotton. Where irrigation was available, plantations of arecanut and coconut, paddy, and wheat were grown (C. H. Rao, 1927, pp. 70–72). These regions were also notable for a network of small dams, tanks, and irrigation canals, meticulously built and maintained by the kings, local Palegars, and other gentry (Buchanan, 1807; Wilks, 1810; C. H. Rao, 1927).

Control of the land-locked state was assumed by Haider Ali and his son Tippu Sultan in the latter part of the 17th century. After tumultuous decades of conflict with the British, Marathas, and the Nizams of Hyderabad, Tippu Sultan was killed in 1799, and Mysore became a suzerainty of the British at the beginning of the 19th century. Parts of the province were ceded to the Marathas, Nizams, and the British Madras Presidency (Wilks, 1810).

After Tippu's death, the Wodeyars were reinstated as the royalty of Mysore. Purnaiah, a minister under Tippu Sultan, was appointed as Diwan of Mysore for the first decade of the 19th century. Following British practices

in other princely states, a resident was stationed in Srirangapattana, the capital of Mysore, who wielded considerable influence over the state's administration. By this time, the influence and control of the Palegars throughout Mysore had begun to wane (P. B. R. Rao, 1944). The British took over administration in 1831 due to a rebellion in the Western Ghat region and governed Mysore for the next 50 years, introducing Western administrative principles. The Wodeyars were reinstated as the kings of Mysore in 1881, and the state remained a princely state until independence. They continued the modernization processes introduced by the British, with the Diwans acting as operational links between Mysore and other provinces of British India (Manor, 1975; Chandrasekhar, 1985).

On the eve of Indian independence, Mysore was regarded as a benevolent, modern bureaucratic state that promoted industries, irrigation, higher education, and the welfare of women and Dalits. The state had functioning departments for public works, irrigation, agriculture, horticulture, plant and livestock improvement, life insurance, and public health. The progressive policies of Mysore, including women's education, industrialization, and welfare initiatives, were strategically developed to project an ideal image of the state to British authorities and national leaders of the Congress, as well as in national and international media (B. I. Rice, 1908; Chandrashekar S, 2002).



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Historical Context:

The Wodeyar Dynasty and Modernization Efforts

The Wodeyar dynasty, which ruled the princely state of Mysore, played a pivotal role in the modernization of agriculture. Under the rule of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1894-1940), often referred to as the "Rajarishi" (saintly king), the state embarked on a journey of modernization and economic development. His reign was characterized by a progressive outlook and the implementation of various reforms.

Key Policies and Reforms:

Establishment of Agricultural Research Institutions

University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore: Although established later in 1964, the roots of agricultural research in Mysore can be traced back to the early 20th century when efforts were made to improve agricultural education and research.

The agricultural development in Mysore State during the early 20th century has been a subject of extensive historical research and analysis. This literature review examines key sources that provide insights into the policies, reforms, and impacts of agricultural development during this period.

Agricultural Education and Research

The establishment of agricultural research institutions was a significant aspect of Mysore's agricultural development. **Aiyer (1930)** documents the early initiatives in agricultural education, highlighting the establishment of the Mysore Agricultural School in 1913. This institution aimed to train farmers in modern agricultural techniques and conduct research on crop improvement. **Sharma (1966)** further elaborates on the importance of these institutions in disseminating scientific knowledge to the farming community, which played a crucial role in improving crop yields and farming practices.

Irrigation Projects

The construction of the **Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS)** Dam was a landmark event in Mysore's agricultural history. **Dharwadkar (1955)** provides a detailed account of the dam's construction under the guidance of Sir

M. Visvesvaraya, emphasizing its transformative impact on the region's agricultural productivity. The KRS Dam enabled reliable irrigation for the fertile lands of Mandya, facilitating the cultivation of paddy, sugarcane, and other cash crops. Visvesvaraya's (1951) memoirs also offer personal insights into the challenges and achievements associated with this monumental project.

Impact:

- **Irrigation Coverage**: The dam provided reliable irrigation to over 120,000 hectares of farmland in the Mandya district and surrounding areas. This significantly boosted agricultural productivity, particularly for water-intensive crops like paddy and sugarcane.
- **Crop Diversification**: The assured water supply enabled farmers to diversify their crops, reducing dependency on traditional rain-fed farming and improving resilience against droughts.
- **Economic Growth**: The increased agricultural output led to economic growth in the region, improving the livelihoods of farmers and contributing to the overall prosperity of Mysore State.

Expansion of Canal Systems

Following the success of the KRS Dam, Mysore State expanded its canal systems to further enhance irrigation coverage. Key canals included the Visvesvaraya Canal and the Mandya Canal, which distributed water from the KRS Dam to farmlands across the region.

Significance:

- **Extended Irrigation Reach**: The canal networks extended the reach of irrigation to more remote areas, ensuring that even small and marginal farmers benefited from the water resources.
- **Improved Agricultural Practices**: The availability of water throughout the year allowed for the adoption of better agricultural practices, such as double cropping and the use of improved seeds and fertilizers.

Minor Irrigation Projects

In addition to large-scale projects, the state also focused on minor irrigation schemes, including the construction of tanks, wells, and small dams. These projects were crucial in regions where large-scale irrigation infrastructure was not feasible.

Impact:

- **Localized Benefits**: Minor irrigation projects provided localized benefits, ensuring that water was available for smallholder farmers and reducing their vulnerability to droughts.
- **Community Participation**: These projects often involved community participation, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among local farmers for the maintenance and management of water resources.

Environmental and Social Considerations

While irrigation projects brought numerous benefits, they also posed challenges, including displacement of communities and environmental impacts. The construction of dams and canals required the relocation of villages and altered the natural flow of rivers, affecting ecosystems.

Mitigation Efforts:

- **Resettlement Programs**: The state implemented resettlement programs to compensate and rehabilitate displaced communities, although the effectiveness of these programs varied.
- **Environmental Management**: Efforts were made to manage the environmental impact through measures such as afforestation and the construction of check dams to prevent soil erosion.

The development of irrigation infrastructure in Mysore State during the early 20th century was a transformative process that significantly enhanced agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. The visionary projects, particularly the KRS Dam, set a precedent for integrated water resource management and laid the foundation for sustainable agricultural growth. While challenges remained, the overall impact of these irrigation initiatives was profound, contributing to the socio-economic development of the region and cementing Mysore's legacy as a leader in agricultural innovation.

Cooperative Movement

The cooperative movement in Mysore was initiated with the enactment of the Mysore Cooperative Societies Act in 1905. Faruqui (2012) explores the broader context of cooperative movements in India, noting Mysore's pioneering role in this regard. The act encouraged the formation of cooperative societies for credit, marketing, and other agricultural activities, providing farmers with access to credit and reducing their dependency on moneylenders. The Government of Mysore's Gazetteer (1965) also details the growth and impact of cooperative societies, highlighting their role in empowering farmers and fostering rural development.

Land Revenue Reforms

Land revenue reforms were another critical component of Mysore's agricultural development. Aiyer (1930) discusses the efforts to streamline land revenue assessment and collection, aiming to reduce the burden on farmers. The introduction of scientific methods in land measurement and revenue assessment contributed to a more equitable system. Sharma (1966) also examines the long-term effects of these reforms on the agrarian economy, noting improvements in agricultural productivity and farmer welfare.

Socio-Economic Impacts

The socio-economic impacts of agricultural policies in Mysore are extensively covered in the literature. Dharwadkar (1955) and Sharma (1966) both highlight the improvements in the economic conditions of farmers resulting from increased agricultural productivity and access to credit. The cooperative movement and irrigation projects played a significant role in reducing rural poverty and fostering socio-economic development. The Government of Mysore's Gazetteer (1965) provides statistical data supporting these claims, illustrating the positive trends in agricultural output and farmer incomes.

The literature on agricultural development in Mysore State during the early 20th century underscores the transformative impact of the policies and reforms implemented during this period. The visionary leadership of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV and the administrative acumen of Sir M. Visvesvaraya were instrumental in driving these changes. The establishment of agricultural research institutions, construction of irrigation projects, initiation of the cooperative movement, and implementation of land revenue reforms collectively contributed to the modernization of agriculture and the socio-economic upliftment of the agrarian population. The insights from these sources provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shaped Mysore's agricultural landscape and continue to influence its legacy.

Land Revenue Reforms

Land Revenue Assessment: During the early 20th century, the Mysore administration undertook significant land revenue reforms. The assessment and collection of land revenue were streamlined, and efforts were made to reduce the burden on farmers. The introduction of scientific methods in land measurement and revenue assessment contributed to a more equitable system.

Major Dates and Events

- 1905: Enactment of the Mysore Cooperative Societies Act, fostering the cooperative movement.
- 1913: Establishment of the Mysore Agricultural School in Hebbal.
- 1924: Completion of the Krishna Raja Sagara Dam, revolutionizing irrigation in the region.
- 1930s: Continued efforts in land revenue reforms and the promotion of modern agricultural practices.

Impact of Agricultural Policies

The agricultural policies and reforms implemented during the early 20th century had a profound impact on Mysore State's agrarian landscape:

Increased Agricultural Productivity

The construction of irrigation projects like the KRS Dam led to a significant increase in agricultural productivity. The availability of water for irrigation allowed farmers to cultivate multiple crops and adopt more intensive farming practices.

Socio-Economic Upliftment

The cooperative movement empowered farmers by providing them with access to credit and reducing their reliance on exploitative moneylenders. This, in turn, improved their economic conditions and contributed to rural development.

Education and Research

The establishment of agricultural research institutions laid the foundation for scientific research and the dissemination of modern agricultural techniques. This knowledge transfer played a crucial role in improving crop yields and farming practices.

Infrastructure Development

The construction of dams and irrigation canals not only facilitated agriculture but also contributed to the overall development of the region, including improved transportation and trade.

These efforts collectively contributed to the modernization of agriculture, improved the socio-economic conditions of the agrarian population, and laid a strong foundation for sustainable agricultural practices. The state's proactive approach in addressing various challenges and leveraging available resources played a crucial role in transforming Mysore into a model state for agricultural development.

Economic Policies and Reforms

Agricultural Marketing Reforms

Event: Introduction of regulated markets for agricultural produce. **Significance**: To ensure fair prices for farmers' produce, the state introduced regulated markets. This system aimed to eliminate exploitation by middlemen and ensure that farmers received a fair share of the profits from their produce.

Introduction of Agricultural Credit Systems

Event: Establishment of agricultural credit societies. **Significance**: These societies provided farmers with easy access to loans for purchasing seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs. This reduced their dependence on informal moneylenders who charged exorbitant interest rates, thereby promoting financial stability among the farming community.

Social Reforms and Impact

Empowerment of Marginalized Communities

Event: Implementation of policies aimed at uplifting marginalized communities, including tenant farmers and landless laborers. **Significance**: The state introduced social welfare programs and land reforms to redistribute land to landless farmers. This helped in reducing social inequities and improving the living conditions of marginalized communities.

Education and Training Programs

Event: Establishment of farmer training programs. **Significance**: In addition to the Mysore Agricultural School, the state set up various training centers to educate farmers on modern agricultural techniques, pest management, and soil conservation methods. These programs aimed to improve agricultural practices and increase productivity.

Technological Advancements

Introduction of New Crop Varieties

Event: Research and development of high-yield crop varieties. **Significance**: Agricultural research institutions in Mysore focused on developing high-yield and disease-resistant crop varieties. These new varieties helped increase crop production and reduce losses due to pests and diseases.

Mechanization of Agriculture

Event: Introduction of mechanized farming tools. **Significance**: The state promoted the use of mechanized tools such as Plows, seed drills, and threshers. This mechanization helped in reducing labour costs, increasing efficiency, and improving the overall productivity of the agricultural sector.

Environmental Impact and Conservation Efforts

Soil Conservation Programs

Event: Implementation of soil conservation measures. **Significance**: The state introduced measures such as contour ploughing, terracing, and the construction of check dams to prevent soil erosion and conserve soil fertility. These efforts were crucial in maintaining the long-term sustainability of agricultural lands.

Afforestation and Reforestation Initiatives

Event: Launching afforestation and reforestation programs. **Significance**: To combat deforestation and environmental degradation, the state initiated programs to plant trees and restore degraded forest lands. These initiatives helped in maintaining ecological balance and ensuring the availability of forest resources for future generations.

Policy Implementation and Administrative Reforms

Strengthening Agricultural Institutions

Event: Establishment of the Department of Agriculture. **Significance**: The state created a dedicated Department of Agriculture to oversee the implementation of agricultural policies and programs. This department played a crucial role in coordinating research, extension services, and the dissemination of agricultural knowledge to farmers.

Decentralization of Agricultural Administration

Event: Decentralization of agricultural administration to district and taluk levels. **Significance**: To ensure effective implementation of agricultural policies, the state decentralized agricultural administration. This allowed for better coordination and communication between the state government and local agricultural bodies, ensuring that policies were tailored to the specific needs of different regions.

Infrastructure Development

Rural Infrastructure Development

Event: Development of rural infrastructure, including roads and storage facilities. **Significance**: The state invested in building rural roads, storage facilities, and market yards to support agricultural activities. Improved infrastructure facilitated the transportation of agricultural produce, reduced post-harvest losses, and provided better market access to farmers.

Electrification of Rural Areas

Event: Electrification of rural areas. **Significance**: The state promoted the electrification of rural areas to support agricultural activities. Electrification enabled the use of electric pumps for irrigation, reduced dependence on traditional energy sources, and improved the quality of life in rural areas.

Conclusion

The early 20th century was a transformative period for agricultural development in Mysore State. The visionary leadership of the Wodeyar dynasty, coupled with the administrative acumen of Sir M. Visvesvaraya, brought about significant reforms that laid the groundwork for modern agriculture. The policies and initiatives implemented during this period not only increased agricultural productivity but also contributed to the socio-economic upliftment of the agrarian population. The legacy of these reforms continues to influence the agricultural landscape of Karnataka to this day.

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