

EVALUATION INDICATORS

1. Alignment Competence
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Overall Macro Comments / feedback / suggestions on Answer Booklet:

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All the Best

Indian Agriculture, is, in a way, a
victim of its own past success.

Kartar Singh, a frail man of 85
sits on his charpai in his
field in Moga, Punjab. He will
be taking the cancer train to
Bikaner in Rajasthan the next
day for his treatment.

He will be joined by many
other farmers of his district.
United by cancer, they are
all unmindful and clueless
about the reason behind their
suffering.

Meanwhile, his two sons
toil hard in their field,
praying for a better yield this
year. Their crop from the
last season failed due

to alkamisation, making them struggle to make ends meet.

While life goes on for them, they cannot help but be nostalgic of their prosperous past. Their children are not enjoying the same childhood as they did.

What ails Indian agriculture? Why is it that despite the Green Revolution's success, the ancient golden bird country still has to see farmer suicides every day? What is it that makes farmers dump the product of their hard labour on the roads?

The essay will be answering the above questions to argue that Indian agriculture is indeed

a victim of its own past success.

From Muziris to India of the 21st century

The past success of Indian agriculture goes as far back as the first century C.E. period. The natural bounty of our country was known and in demand throughout the world.

The silk route and the maritime trade routes were busy lanes of commerce. Indian agricultural produce of rich spices, silk, cotton, indigenous fruits were all demanded by people in Rome to the people in Indonesia.

The effect of this booming trade was that farmers were prosperous, and the centers of farm production were booming economies. The rural-urban

divide was not as pronounced, as the rural regions had a booming agriculture based economy.

While inequality was present, the better off comprised of peasants and weavers in large numbers. Unfortunately, the situation changed with the advent of colonial rule.

The land policies of the British were designed to achieve the economic drain of India. High rents, coupled with compulsory cropping and sale led to impoverishment of farmers. Only a handful of rich zamindars could escape from this tyranny.

Due to land being diverted for cash crops like indigo, the British rule led to many famines. Therefore, on achieving independence, the first priority of our leaders

was to achieve self sufficiency in food and agriculture.

With the contribution of Norman Borlaug, India embarked on its successful green revolution. This was coupled with land policy change.

Land ceilings were introduced, leasing was outlawed leading to smaller farm size and owners being tied to their land.

Further, the green revolution brought with it high yielding variety seeds, use of pesticides & fertilisers. Fertilisers were subsidised; and free electricity was provided to set up tubewells for irrigation.

To enhance food security, minimum support prices were

launched to ensure government procurement for grains.

The combined effect was that agriculture boomed; and India could now aim to achieve the same level of prosperity it had in ancient times. Yet, not all was going to be well.

The victimisation of Indian Agriculture

The new economic policy of 1991 shifted the focus away from agriculture. The farmers felt the shock of lower investments by the government. Adding to their woes were the after-effects of agriculture's tremendous growth in 1960s.

The strict land ceilings resulted in smaller farm holdings,

which reduced even further with inheritance. This led to poor yield and lesser scope of farm mechanisation.

Further, as tenancy was made illegal, people became tied to their lands. They could not move out by giving their lands on lease. This led to hidden unemployment, with more number of workers per farm than could be accommodated.

The trend of declaring minimum support prices for crops led to surplus production of crops with high MSPs, and deficit production of other crops. Production became linked to MSP instead of demand.

The high production of the same crop led to crash in their market prices. Unable to pay their loans back, farmers committed

suicides.

Further, subsidies in urea and DAP fertilisers along with high use of pesticides led to health & environmental effects. Many insect varieties became resistant to pesticides. Researchers have linked the prevalence of cancer in Punjab to the presence of pesticides and fertilisers in soil which has bioaccumulated and biomagnified over the years.

The use of tubewells for irrigations had led to soil salinisation and alkalisation. The problem is compounded as due to MSPs, crops that are unsuited for certain agro-climatic regions are being sown. Example would be paddy being grown in semi-arid soils of Punjab.

Further, lack of development

of rural regions in terms of credit, healthcare and education has led to poor human resource development of the upcoming generation. This further narrows down the avenues that are available, leading to continuation of farmer's children in a sector that is stagnating.

Healing Indian Agriculture

Since India still remains a highly agricultural economy, there is a huge scope for development and take-off in this field. A number of measures can be taken, in addition to the existing ones.

Firstly, access to rural credit needs to be strengthened. Terms of credit of micro finance institutions and priority sector

lending by banks needs to be made more flexible.

Secondly, the coverage of crop insurance schemes like Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana can be expanded. The scheme has been a resounding success as seen recently in Tamil Nadu.

Thirdly, the soil health card initiative can be tied up with research made in the field of agriculture technology. Research and development in this field will also provide employment to youth.

Fourthly, the government's focus on food processing industries should be embraced by the farmers as a sustainable source of better incomes.

lastly, investments must also be made in human resource development of rural regions. This will ensure diversification of rural economy takes place. Focus on health will further ensure farmers in Punjab do not have to travel to Rajasthan for cancer treatment.

The recent policy interventions of the government bring hope in the lives of Kartar Singh and his two sons. The efforts of our government to involve farmers in their decision making, and having policies with a humanistic touch will certainly help Indian agriculture regain the glory of its past.

Defence Expenditure : Necessity or Extravagance.

It is indeed an irony that at a time when India is signing multi billion dollar deals for French Rafale Jets, our healthcare sector is struggling to provide facilities to people with a meagre budget allocation of less than 2% of GDP.

After the failure of the non-aligned policy post the Indo-China war of 1962, India realised that it had to spend on its defence preparedness in order to survive in a hostile neighbourhood. Deals were signed and alliances were forged. Our success in the subsequent wars with ~~China~~ Pakistan is testimony to the dividends reaped by defence expenditure.

However, the present world is different from the 20th century. It is estimated that wars will be avoided as no country wants to ruin the economy and cities it painstakingly built. If at all, war in the 21st century will be a cyber war.

In this context, is it prudent to spend on defence expenditure? Are the dividends reaped by defence expenditure, if any, justified? Is the physical security of our nation threatened to the extent that it is advisable to cut the share of expenditure in health and education?

These are some of the questions that this essay seeks to answer.

Defence : A waste of public money

The proponents of this view point hold that realism is a

thing of the past. The Hobbesian view that countries must take all steps required to protect their borders, while important, has lost its relevance in today's inter connected world. It is said that war, for which defence equipment is brought, is no longer a possibility as countries will not want to damage their infrastructure and economy.

Further, any expenditure must be made to secure our critical information infrastructure to protect ourselves from a more likely cyber war. With data being the new oil, it is more prudent to beef up on our cyber security.

It is also said that we have enough defence equipment in store. What we need is not

more new equipment, but efficient allocation and use of existing equipment. Since there exists no imminent threat of war, buying more equipment without there being any need of it would be unwise.

Another point that lends to the view that defence expenditure is actually wasteful is based in diplomacy. Many of our defence deals are a mode of forging better bilateral ties with nations.

Irrespective of the need to purchase, most of the bilateral meetings end with India offering to purchase defence equipment from the other country.

Due to this over reliance on foreign imports, our own defence industry is hurting. It happens

very rarely that India sells its defence equipment to other nations. More often than not, we are the purchasers.

Since defence deals take a long time to be negotiated and materialise, many projects get stuck. The dividends do not show immediately. An example of this would be the French Rafale deal, which was initiated in the early 2000s. So, it is said that investing in this field is not viable.

The most prevalent argument on defence expenditure being wasteful is that a ^{lower} middle income country like India cannot afford to spend its meagre resources on defence expenditure when it is faltering on human development.

indicators.

Despite completing seventy years of being independent, the state of education in India is still not optimal. While literacy is being achieved rapidly, the same cannot be said about education. Healthcare too is abysmal, with even those with minimal resources preferring private facilities over government ones.

Our Human Development Index rankings are also nowhere as close as to being optimum. The work on realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 is also a long shot. The use and production of defence equipment worsens the environment condition even more.

Additionally, excess spending on defence expenditure is a wastage as it unduly burdens our

already weak fiscal deficit, adding to the strain on our economy.

There are many more such arguments against defence expenditure. While engaging with them, one cannot form an opinion without knowing the other side of the picture discussed henceforth.

The Necessity of Defence Expenditure

Despite all the arguments that defence expenditure is wasteful, it is difficult to deny the necessity of the same.

As the recent Doklam plateau stand-off incident shows, India's immediate neighbourhood is fraught with danger. China follows a policy of regional containment against India by favouring Pakistan.

Pakistan is anyway an enemy state with which India shares a long, chequered history.

Both India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons. The validity of the Mutually Assured Destruction doctrine, which says that two nuclear weapon states will never fight a war because of the assured destruction, is being doubted now. Further, the range of nuclear weapons being developed by North Korea is expanding day by day, and India falls within the zone of attack.

In such a scenario of uncertainty, it is wise to invest in defence equipment. It acts as a deterrent for other countries; and provides a sense of security to the country's own citizens.

Any expenditure on health, education will be unjustified and pointless if the survival of the nation itself is threatened.

Further, in light of the Sukhoi airplane crashes, it becomes imperative to modernise our defence equipment. Having defence equipment is not enough, it is also necessary to have working equipment.

By launching the Strategic Partnership in defence industries model, our government has also ensured for the indigenisation of industries. Technology transfer deals are being signed on a large scale.

In a world marred by protectionism, regionalism and the

rise of armed non-state actors, it is necessary to have defence preparedness. Further, even if the external world environment is safe and stable, internal security considerations demand that we have an equipped navy, army and airforce.

The role of defence equipment is not just limited to warfare. It has applications in disaster relief and rescue work. The display of our defence assets in the Republic Day Parade every year boosts the raw power of our nation, a country primarily known for its soft power.

Therefore, it cannot be said that expenditure on defence equipment should be done away with completely. The necessity

to spend is very real, and cannot be ignored.

Balancing the Act.

While the necessity of defence equipment is a reality, one cannot ignore the voices of those who think such expenditure to be wasteful. The need of the hour is to balance the two considerations.

Firstly, the diplomacy enhancing defence deals must be curbed. Only that equipment which the armed forces need should be purchased. This will cut down the expenses.

Secondly, instead of purchasing the entire equipment, parts that are difficult to indigenize should be procured. For the rest, technology

transfers should be effected.
This will help boost Make in
India, and lower down the
costs.

Thirdly, the recommendations
of the Shankar committee must
be followed to promote better
synergy and maintenance in the
armed forces.

Fourthly, to ensure better utilisation
of resources allocated, a permanent
non-lapsable fund should be
created for defence. To manage it
better, the demands for the creation
of Chief of Defence Staff of the
three forces post must be
implemented.

Lastly, instead of buying new
equipment, regular funding

must be provided for regular upkeep and maintenance of existing equipment.

Following the above recommendations, inter alia, will ensure that the need to lessen the burden of fiscal burden caused by defence expenditure is achieved. At the same time, it will allow our nation to not lag behind in the field of national security and defence in a highly unpredictable global environment.