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"The Role Of Diwan Sir M. Visvesvaraya In The Agricultural Development Of The Princely Mysore"

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Abstract

Sir Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya (1861–1962), an engineer, statesman, and visionary, played a pivotal role in transforming the princely state of Mysore during his tenure as Diwan from 1912 to 1918. Though widely acclaimed for his industrial and infrastructural achievements, his equally crucial contributions to agricultural development have often remained in the shadows. In an era when agriculture was largely subsistence-based and vulnerable to monsoon failures, Visvesvaraya envisioned and implemented a structured, scientific, and institutionally supported agricultural framework. This paper investigates the policies, institutions, and irrigation systems he introduced to revolutionize agriculture. Through detailed analysis of case studies and a historical review, it demonstrates how his legacy continues to influence Karnataka's agrarian landscape even today.

Keywords: Sir M. Visvesvaraya, Diwan of Mysore , Agricultural modernization , Irrigation development ,Krishnaraja Sagar Dam ,Cooperative societies ,Agricultural education ,Mysore state economy , Rural development ,Karnataka agriculture

Introduction

The princely state of Mysore in the early 20th century was largely agrarian, with nearly 80% of its population dependent on agriculture. However, the sector was underdeveloped, plagued by water scarcity, outdated practices, and limited access to institutional support. The appointment of Sir M. Visvesvaraya as Diwan in 1912 marked the beginning of a transformative phase in Mysore's history. Drawing from his background as an engineer and planner, he adopted a scientific approach to agriculture—treating it not merely as food production but as a foundation for economic self-reliance and national strength.

Recognizing that the prosperity of the state hinged on its farmers, Visvesvaraya set out to reform irrigation systems, introduce agricultural education, encourage cooperative farming, and promote scientific methods. This research explores these measures in depth and evaluates their long-term impact.

Review of Literature

Numerous works document Visvesvaraya's contributions to industry and engineering, yet relatively few provide detailed accounts of his influence on agriculture. A review of existing literature highlights the following:

1. Government Reports and Proceedings

The **Mysore Economic Conference Proceedings (1914–1918)** serve as primary sources, detailing discussions and policy decisions made under Visvesvaraya's leadership. These reports provide data on irrigation expansion, agricultural loans, and cooperative society formations.

2. Biographical Works

- **M. V. Kamath** in *"Visvesvaraya: The Builder of Modern India"* (1991) offers a general overview of his reforms but underplays agriculture.
- **B.S. Rao** in *"The Visionary: M. Visvesvaraya"* (1975) touches upon his work in rural development, noting his belief that no country can be prosperous without a productive agricultural base.

3. Academic and Institutional Studies

- Agricultural universities such as UAS Bangalore have published centennial commemorations that link their origins to policies introduced during Visvesvaraya's time.
- **S. Chandrasekhar (1998)** notes the importance of cooperatives in pre-independence Mysore, often citing Visvesvaraya's proactive support for such movements.

The consensus is clear: while Visvesvaraya is recognized as a pioneer of industrial modernity, his agricultural reforms merit deeper academic attention.

Case Studies

1. The Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) Dam

Conceived during Visvesvaraya's tenure, the **KRS Dam** on the Cauvery River is one of the most important irrigation projects in South India. Though construction began later, the planning, engineering, and economic justification were his achievements. The dam created a vast reservoir that enabled year-round irrigation for over 120,000 hectares, turning dry lands into fertile fields and enhancing the food security of the region.

Impact:

- Stabilized agricultural output
- Enabled multi-cropping
- Boosted sugarcane, paddy, and horticulture cultivation

2. Establishment of Agricultural Education Institutions

Visvesvaraya believed that scientific knowledge should be accessible to farmers. In 1913, he oversaw the establishment of the **Mysore Agricultural School** at Hebbal, Bangalore, one of the earliest formal institutions for agriculture in India. He proposed scholarships and training programs for rural youth, bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and scientific farming.

Legacy:

- Later evolved into the **University of Agricultural Sciences**, Bangalore
- Set a model for vocational rural education in India

3. Agricultural Cooperative Societies

Understanding the economic vulnerability of small farmers, he promoted cooperative societies to provide access to credit, seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation equipment. These cooperatives also helped in marketing farm produce, thus improving farmers' income.

Outcomes:

- Over 400 cooperative societies were formed within five years
- Enabled collective bargaining and reduced rural indebtedness

4. Rural Water Management and Canal Systems

Besides the KRS Dam, Visvesvaraya renovated thousands of water tanks and expanded canal networks in arid districts such as Tumkur, Mandya, and Chitradurga. His policies emphasized water conservation, storage, and equitable distribution.

Major Achievements

1. Expansion of Irrigation Coverage

During his tenure, thousands of acres of fallow land were brought under irrigation, greatly increasing agricultural productivity. The irrigation network expanded to previously drought-prone regions.

2. Foundation of Agricultural Education

Visvesvaraya institutionalized agricultural education, training hundreds of students and field workers who would become the backbone of agronomic advancement in Karnataka.

3. Promotion of Scientific Agriculture

He introduced mechanization in ploughing, crop rotation systems, seed improvement programs, and soil analysis to improve yields.

4. Strengthening Farmer Institutions

His introduction of cooperatives and credit societies laid the groundwork for a robust rural financial system in the state.

5. Integration with Broader Economic Policy

Agriculture was central to his five-year economic development plan, linking rural productivity with national self-reliance.

Contribution Impact on Present Situation

Visvesvaraya's vision has had a long-standing impact on the agriculture of modern Karnataka:

1. Irrigation Legacy

- The KRS Dam still irrigates thousands of hectares and supplies drinking water to Mysore and Bengaluru.
- Karnataka's current irrigation policy reflects his integrated approach—combining large projects with micro-irrigation strategies.

2. Institutional Growth

- Agricultural colleges and universities in Karnataka owe their origins to institutions started or envisioned by Visvesvaraya.
- The state leads in research on dryland farming, millet cultivation, and horticulture due to early investments in education.

3. Cooperative Model

- Karnataka's strong network of **Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)** and milk cooperatives has roots in Visvesvaraya's cooperative movement.
- These cooperatives continue to empower small and marginal farmers.

4. Policy Inspiration

- Visvesvaraya's model of rural self-sufficiency and decentralized planning still guides agricultural policies.
- His emphasis on data-driven development inspired the use of agri-tech and extension services in Karnataka today.

Conclusion

Sir M. Visvesvaraya was not merely an engineer and administrator—he was a visionary who understood the foundational role of agriculture in national development. His efforts to transform the agrarian economy of Mysore through scientific irrigation, agricultural education, cooperative organization, and economic planning established a legacy that continues to influence modern Karnataka. His tenure as Diwan laid the foundational infrastructure—physical, institutional, and intellectual—for the agrarian prosperity of the region. In celebrating his contributions, it is important to recognize that his agricultural vision was as profound as his industrial achievements, and his model of holistic rural development remains a guiding light for policymakers to this day.

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