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Horticulture: The Harbinger of Change

If you want to see culture of India, see its agriculture. If you want to see the colours of India, see its horticulture, it is wisely said. The diversity of horticulture in India is possibly greater than Europe or the Americas. Every fruit, flower or the vegetable grown anywhere in the world is grown in one or the other part of India. From the days of acute scarcity to a situation of bountiful plenty, horticulture has played its role in farm profitability, food and nutrition security and farmer prosperity. Horticulture has grown more rapidly during the last 20 years from area of 16.59 million hectare, production of 145.78 million MT and productivity of 8.79 million per hectare in the year 2000-01 to the production zooming to 3.26 million MT and area to 27.1 million hectare.

This has been the result of the focused policy approach adopted by GOI by launching diverse horticulture missions, from Horticulture Technology Mission (HTM) to National Horticulture Mission (NHM) to Mission on Integrated Horticulture (MIDH). But even now, the export potential of Indian horticulture @ Rs 200 billion remains largely untapped. While there is need to raise horticulture export substantially, there is also need to educate the population to move up in food value chain. We need to shift from largely grain consumption to higher intake of fruits and vegetable for improved nutrition and health.

Plants have enough spirit to transform our limited vision, it is said. With a wide variety of climates and soils on which a large range of horticultural crops can be grown, India serves as the breeding ground for opportunities to grasp. Owing to better irrigational facilities, technological improvement, involvement of small farmers, agronomic practices and many more factors, India has a growth rate of 2.7 per cent per year and stands at the second position worldwide in the production of fruits and vegetables.

We also face several turbulences in his sector. The dearth of market facility, lack of processing facility, lack of skilled manpower, improper post harvest management and inadequate planting material often pose challenges. We also need to address the problem of land fragmentation, lack of urbane technical centers for horticulture, data management, a keener sense of agri-business etc. Over the past few decades, advancements in science have brought to us the incredible integration of Global Positioning System, Geographical Positioning System and Remote Sensing, in addition to planned monitoring. These technologies shall serve the larger agriculture sector, as also horticulture.

