

Agricultural Extension in South Asia

Skilling Indian Agriculture

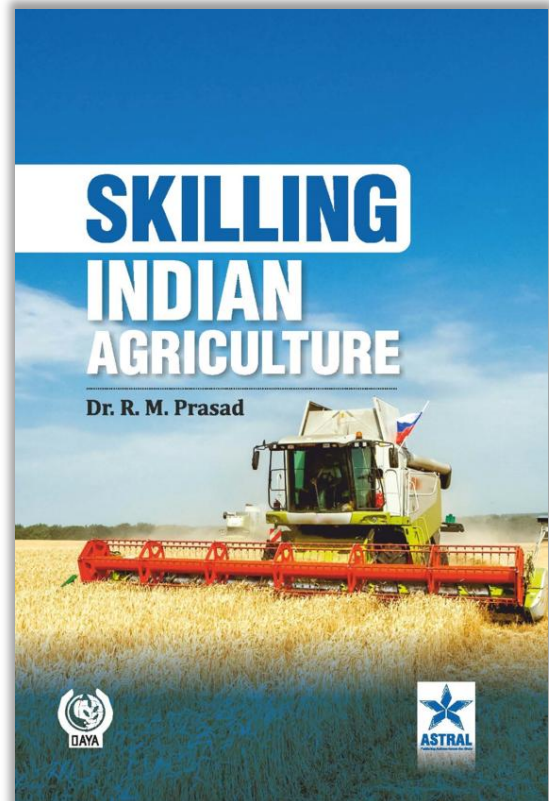
R M Prasad (2025)

Publisher: Astral International Pvt Ltd**Pages:** 306**ISBN:** 9789359194844**Price:** INR 2149 (Amazon)

The question of how India can equip its vast agricultural workforce with the skills required for a changing agrarian economy is both urgent and complex. The book *Skilling Indian Agriculture* by Dr R M Prasad addresses this challenge with analytical depth, situating the issue of agricultural skill development within the broader framework of economic transformation, technological change, and policy reform. The book is a timely intervention that explores how the skilling agenda, long dominated by industrial and service sector narratives, must be reimagined to include and prioritise agriculture, which still employs nearly half of India's workforce and anchors rural livelihoods.

The book's central aim is to critically examine the conceptual, institutional, and policy dimensions of skill development in agriculture. It interrogates the persistent mismatch between the skills required for modern, market-oriented, and climate-resilient agriculture, and the outdated training and extension systems that currently dominate. Organised thematically, the chapters address vocational education, the role of agricultural universities and the ICAR-Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), public-private partnerships in skill delivery, and the growing importance of digital learning tools. The author situates his analysis within the national skilling ecosystem, linking agricultural skill development with flagship initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF).

A key argument advanced in the volume is that skill development in agriculture must go beyond traditional notions of "training" to embrace the broader concept of employability skills. These include not just technical know-how, but also transferable capabilities such as problem-solving, decision-making, entrepreneurial orientation, and adaptability to technological change that enable individuals to find and sustain meaningful livelihoods. The book convincingly argues that in a sector undergoing rapid structural transformation, the future of agricultural employment will depend on how effectively skill systems can integrate these employability dimensions into curricula and pedagogy.



However, as the author notes, this transition faces numerous challenges. The fragmented institutional landscape—comprising multiple ministries, agricultural universities, private training providers, and state agencies—often results in duplication of efforts and a lack of coherence. Inadequate funding, absence of standardised curricula, weak monitoring systems, and poor industry linkages further undermine outcomes. Moreover, most training programs under PMKVY and related schemes tend to focus on short-term certification courses with limited attention to contextual learning or field-level mentoring. The book's critical insight is that agricultural skilling cannot be reduced to certification alone; it must build long-term competence and confidence among farmers, rural youth, and agri-entrepreneurs.

In this context, the discussion of training providers is particularly insightful. The book highlights that India's skill ecosystem relies on a network of public and private actors—ranging from agricultural universities, State Agricultural Management and Extension Training Institutes (SAMETIs), and KVKs, to private academies and non-governmental organisations accredited by the Agriculture Skill Council of India (ASCI). While these institutions play a vital role in delivering training, the coordination between them remains weak. The author calls for a more integrated approach that aligns training modules with local agro-ecological contexts and labour market needs, supported by dynamic partnerships between academia, government, and industry.

The analysis of the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) provides another critical dimension. The NSQF was introduced to standardise competencies and link them to a hierarchy of qualifications, theoretically enabling vertical and horizontal mobility across skill levels. Yet, as the book notes, its application in agriculture remains limited. The complexity and diversity of agricultural practices resist rigid standardisation, and the experiential nature of farming often falls outside the measurable competency framework envisaged by NSQF. The authors argue that while NSQF offers a necessary structure for quality assurance, it needs to be adapted to capture localised, practice-based skills and indigenous knowledge systems that are central to Indian agriculture.

Importantly, the book situates India's skilling efforts in a global perspective. It points out that countries like Germany and Australia have successfully institutionalised strong linkages between vocational training and industry needs through dual education systems; China has invested heavily in rural vocational schools to align agricultural skilling with modernisation goals; while the UK and Japan emphasise continuous upskilling and technological literacy through flexible, lifelong learning frameworks. These international experiences underscore the value of integrated governance, strong industry partnerships, and lifelong learning cultures, all of which offer valuable lessons for India's agricultural skilling ecosystem.

A major strength of *Skilling Indian Agriculture* lies in its interdisciplinary approach. Drawing from agricultural economics, rural sociology, education policy, and extension science, the volume situates skill formation within the broader rural development discourse. The chapters that examine regional skilling initiatives and sectoral models are particularly informative. For example, discussions on how Farmer-Producer Organisations (FPOs), cooperatives, and agri-startups can act as decentralised learning hubs illustrate how innovation in institutional design can foster both productivity and inclusivity.

Equally compelling is the treatment of gender and youth inclusion. The book emphasises that women, despite constituting nearly half of India's agricultural workforce, remain largely excluded from formal skilling programs. Similarly, rural youth who are often educated but unemployed face barriers to meaningful skill utilisation due to inadequate placement support and the poor linkages between training and enterprise opportunities. By foregrounding these issues, the book expands the debate on skill development beyond productivity enhancement to encompass questions of social equity and empowerment.

The chapters on digital agriculture and emerging competencies are timely and forward-looking. They examine how technologies such as remote sensing, artificial intelligence, and data analytics are reshaping the skill landscape, while cautioning that digitalisation alone cannot address deeper systemic gaps. Without strong institutional support, locally relevant training content, and a functioning extension network, digital tools risk reproducing existing inequalities rather than bridging them.

Methodologically, the book strikes a thoughtful balance between conceptual clarity and empirical grounding. The combination of policy analysis, case studies, and field evidence makes for a comprehensive understanding of the skilling ecosystem. However, certain sections could have benefited from a more critical examination of policy implementation—particularly regarding PMKVY's agricultural components and the uneven performance of ASCI-accredited training partners across states.

Stylistically, the volume maintains academic rigour while remaining accessible to practitioners and policymakers. Its well-structured arguments, clear organisation, and use of data lend credibility to its conclusions. Some chapters, especially those dealing with institutional mapping and framework design, are dense and data-heavy, which may challenge casual readers. Yet, this level of detail enhances its value as a reference work for scholars and institutions working on agricultural education and human capital development.

In terms of its scholarly contribution, *Skilling Indian Agriculture* fills an important gap by placing human capability at the centre of agrarian transformation. The book not only critiques the inadequacies of current skilling policies but also offers a vision for reform anchored in inclusivity, local relevance, and institutional collaboration. By linking employability, innovation, and sustainability, it provides a holistic framework for rethinking skill development in rural India.

In conclusion, *Skilling Indian Agriculture* is a rigorous, policy-relevant, and forward-looking volume that should be essential reading for academics, policymakers, extension professionals, and development practitioners. It deepens our understanding of how skill formation can serve as a bridge between traditional livelihoods and the emerging knowledge-based agricultural economy.

Aparna Radhakrishnan



Dr. Aparna Radhakrishnan is an Assistant Professor (Agricultural Extension) at the College of Agriculture, Vellayani (Kerala Agricultural University), Trivandrum, India. She focuses on participatory approaches, climate-resilient agriculture, and empowering farming communities through research, training, and policy engagement. She also designs experiential learning modules to bridge academic knowledge with grassroots practice (aparna.r@kau.in).

AESA Secretariat: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP)
Road No 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India

www.aesanetwork.org

Email: aesanetwork@gmail.com