INTRODUCTION

Although regular agricultural education started in the beginning of the 20th century, yet the importance of agricultural education in India, to meet the requirement of the farming community and food security of the country, was realized only after the independence of the country in 1947. The Government of India appointed an Education Commission in 1948, under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, which recommended the establishment of rural universities in the country. The two Joint Indo-American Study Teams headed by K. R. Damale (1955) and M. S. Randhawa (1959) later on, also recommended the establishment of agricultural universities on the Land Grant Pattern of USA. Consequently in 1960, the Government of India appointed an Agricultural University Commission, headed by Dr. Ralph W. Cumings from the United States, which prepared the
blue-print and guidelines for the establishment of agricultural universities in different States. The first agricultural university thereupon was established at Pantnagar in Nainital District of U. P. in 1960 which was a landmark in the history of agricultural education in India. It was a significant innovation and turning point for higher agricultural education system in the country. The appointment of another Education Commission by Government of India under the Chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari (1964-66) was yet another landmark in the history of agricultural education in India, since the commission stressed the need and importance for an agricultural university in each State of the country. By 1968 there were eight agricultural universities in India. These universities received massive assistance in terms of technical guidance and equipment through different agencies like USAID, Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation etc., and developed close linkages with some of the well-known State Agricultural Universities of USA.

Presently, the country has 29 State agricultural universities, four Deemed Universities and a Central Agricultural University. The State of Maharashtra has four agricultural universities, the Uttar Pradesh has three, and the States of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh have two each and the remaining States have one each. These universities are autonomous in nature and are being governed through their Acts, Statutes and Regulations. Vice-Chancellor is the Chief Executive of the university and Chairman of the Board of Management. In addition to Board of Management there are other bodies like Academic Council, Research Council
and Extension Council entrusted with specific functions under the Act. Administration and Coordination of the teaching programmes rests with the Deans of respective colleges/faculties while that of research and extension with Director of Research and Director of Extension, respectively. Registrar looks after the general administration of university while the Comptroller is responsible for financial management.

Besides agricultural universities and ICAR institutes, there are three central universities, viz., Banaras Hindu University, Aligarh Muslim University and Vishwa Bharti having faculties/institutes of agricultural sciences. In addition Calcutta University and Annamalai University also have faculties/departments in agricultural sciences. Further, there are about 35 privately managed colleges affiliated to general universities like Gorakhpur University, Kanpur University, Agra University, Meerut University, Rohilkhand University, Bundelkhand University, Rajasthan University and Chitrakoot University which offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in agricultural sciences. These colleges have limited resources and have no regular research and extension activities.

In pursuance of the recommendations of the Review Committee of Agricultural Universities (1977), ICAR appointed, in 1979, five Deans’ Committees in various subjects which suggested modern curriculum and common guidelines for undergraduate education. Earlier, in 1976, a Central Staff College for Agriculture, later named as National Academy for Agricultural Research Management (NAARM) at Hyderabad was established
for orientation and training of scientists and need-based courses in management of research and education. In view of the changing scenario, another Deans' Committee was appointed by the ICAR in 1992 to look into undergraduate as well as postgraduate education in agriculture to reveal experiences and suggest a revised model.

Agricultural universities at present have 171 constituent colleges with different branches of agricultural sciences offering undergraduate programmes in various fields of specializations. In these institutions teaching, research and extension education functions are integrated for the mutual benefit of each other. Teachers are directly involved in deciding the course contents depending on the changing needs, methods of teaching and also the evaluation mechanism. Most of the universities are following semester system with 10-point grading and internal evaluation while some, of late, have switched over to external evaluation or external plus internal in some proportion. These agricultural universities have made significant contributions in the field of education, research and extension justifying the investment of public funds in them. They are serving as pivotal heads of new knowledge, instruments for increasing agricultural production and transforming the rural life.

These universities together are training about 11520 graduates every year. Whereas, majority of these graduates in agriculture, veterinary sciences, animal sciences, agricultural engineering, horticulture, forestry and home science take up some or the other job to earn their livelihood, the others, mostly the articulate ones, go for specialized higher education. The proportion
of students passing during the year 1991-92 at Graduate, Masters and Doctoral level was in the ratio of 14:5:1. Thus, there was one Ph. D. for every five Masters and for every 14 Graduates (Anonymous, 1991-92).

The research in agriculture has taken rapid strides after the Green Revolution of late Sixties. The specializations, thereafter, developed tremendously, and so developed the job opportunities. The planners, policy makers and managers today want specialists as per the job requirements. This naturally calls for development of curricula as per the need of the specializations and the jobs that await the specialists.

As a result of continuous research, the agricultural sciences have become highly complex and specialized. It is not possible for a single person to possess the latest knowledge and skill in all the scientific disciplines broadly encompassed to agriculture, such as plant protection, horticulture, agronomy, soil sciences etc. The diversification of agriculture and related business has resulted in the creation of jobs, which require specialized expertise in respective areas of work. For example, the organisations engaged in manufacturing and sale of insecticides and fungicides required persons with special training in plant protection. Similarly, those engaged in production and sale of fertilizers required manpower having deep insight into the properties of soil vis-a-vis fertilizer use. Processing and storage of agricultural products required knowledge and skills in post-harvest technology.
The development of Specializations State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) entrusted with the task of developing specializations, face the problem of admissions due to limited seats available in different specialization streams and more so due to huge and varying demands for the specializations. Every specialization has some preconditions also. The SAUs will not be doing justice with state exchequer by spending huge amounts on training of students under different specializations if they admit students with negative attitude or aptitude towards the said specialization. The learners also, will be misfit. Deouskar (1976) has highlighted that for higher agricultural education, subjects should be given to students, according to their interests.

The choice of field of specialisation is a crucial decision in the career learner. The choice may depend upon a number of considerations like personal preferences, aptitude, future career plans, family background etc. At this stage students need to be given proper guidance so that they can make a correct choice in accordance with their interest and capabilities. In order to make such a guidance more effective, a knowledge of the reasons which motivate the students to choose different subjects is very important. Mohanty and Satapathy (1983) have rightly stated that self-decision, parental choice, influence of friends and relatives are the major motivational factors for students taking admission in a university. They have further pointed out that assured job, self-interest and financial aids were the other reasons for which students are motivated to take admission in a university.
At present, the criteria for admission is not the attitude and aptitude but reservation quotas mainly and the merit (O.G.P.A.) for the remaining seats. Similar is the plight of jobs that the graduates ultimately land into. Often, the graduates are not the choosers. Most of them do not get the jobs of their preference or interest and have to compromise with whatever job they are able to manage for themselves. Kaur (1961) concluded that career preferences among undergraduate (girl) students were not much related to their subjects or hobbies but careers which paid more and worthy of respect, were liked most. The above two situations will ultimately lead to unsystematic growth of specializations, expertise unwilling specialists and finally loop sided growth and development of research and education and the poor job performance.

The planners should feel concerned about it and should be interested to know:

- the profile of farm graduates going for higher agricultural education/ for specialization;

- the preferences of the farm graduates for specialization and the perceived logic behind it;

- attitude towards higher education vis-a-vis employment after bachelor's degree;

- the kind of jobs that which they wish to enter after graduation and their relationship with socio-economic and personal profile; and finally
the desired specializations to be made available with matching curricula to suit the requirements of the jobs available for the farm graduates and those going for higher agricultural education.

It is to provide a research-based objective reply to these questions that the present study into "Farm Graduates' Perceived Preferences and Priority Pattern for Specialization in Higher Agricultural Education and Employment" was taken up with the following specific objectives:

1. To assess farm graduates' attitude for higher agricultural education vis-a-vis employment.

2. To ascertain the graduates' preference pattern for specialization in higher agricultural education.

3. To ascertain perceived preferences and job priorities of the farm graduates.

4. To find out association between background (socio-cultural and personal) variables and attitude, preference pattern and job priorities.

5. To suggest specialization strategy for higher agricultural education based on perceived preferences and priorities of the graduates to be adopted by SAUs.

The study suggests specialization patterns for higher agricultural education preferred by graduates of varying profile strata and graduates' preferences for preferred nature of jobs/employment. The study also enables
the SAUs in developing the specializations according to needs and develop curricula for different specializations as per the job preferences and demands of the jobs. The study may give a lead to future investigations into magnitude of jobs available with various specializations at varying levels of hierarchy and the matching quality of training needed for efficient performance of available jobs in waiting.