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C. Subramaniam: The Politician Who Planted India’s Green Revolution

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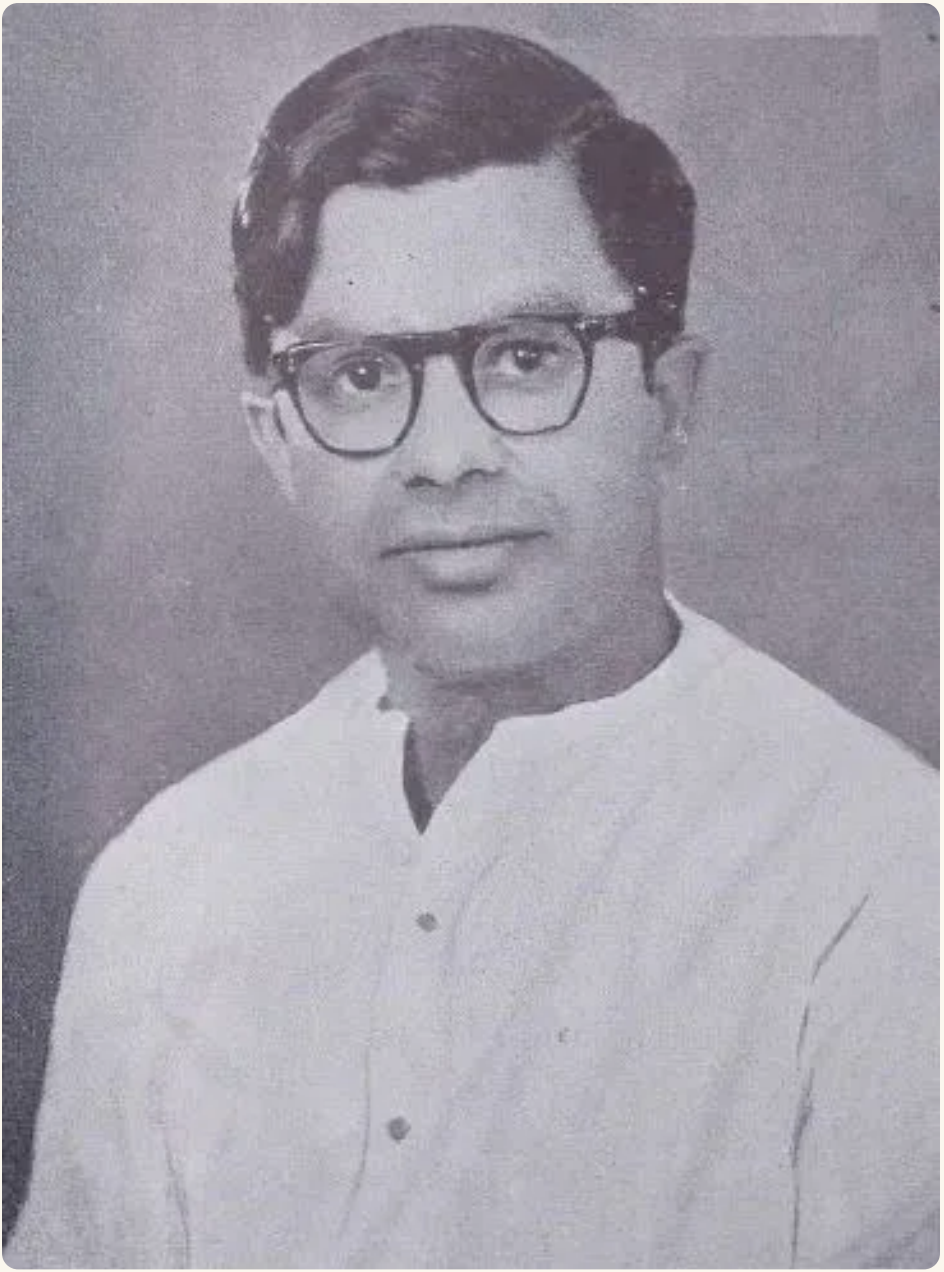
C. Subramaniam: The Politician Who Planted India’s Green Revolution

Why do we call one minister the political father of the Green Revolution? Because he made the hard decisions that let scientists and farmers succeed.

This lesson follows C. Subramaniam from a Tamil village to the Union Cabinet. It explains what he did, why it mattered, and what the exam may ask.



Chidambaram Subramaniam. Government Open Data Licence – India.

The idea in brief

- **Who:** Chidambaram Subramaniam, known as C.S. (30 January 1910 – 7 November 2000).
- **Known for:** Political leadership of India's Green Revolution as Food and Agriculture Minister.
- **Key years:** Agriculture and Food Minister from June 1964, under Shastri.
- **Other posts:** Steel and Mines, Agriculture, Finance, Defence, and Governor of Maharashtra.
- **Honour:** Bharat Ratna, 1998.

The Agriculture Minister Behind the Green Revolution

Who was C. Subramaniam?

Chidambaram Subramaniam was a leader of the freedom struggle. People called him C.S.

He served as Finance Minister and Defence Minister in the Union Cabinet, and later as Governor of Maharashtra.

He is best remembered as the Minister for Food and Agriculture who ushered in the Green Revolution.

When did he lead agriculture?

Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister in June 1964. That month he asked CS to take over Agriculture and Food.

CS had been a successful Steel Minister and did not want the change.

Shastri had found no other taker, so he leaned on CS.

How did he get the job?

Shastri asked CS to take over the ministries of Agriculture and Food in June 1964.

A biography of M.S. Swaminathan describes him as a supporter of science-led farm policy.

On 9 June 1964, Shastri phoned him at 10 pm with the offer. In May 1965 he brought in B. Sivaraman as his agriculture secretary.

Sources: scroll.in

> **Quick check 1.** Subramaniam first became Agriculture Minister in 1964. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Why is he called the political father of the Green Revolution?

M.S. Swaminathan is the scientific leader of the Green Revolution. CS was the political force behind it.

A scientist can breed a seed, but only a government can buy it, spread it and protect the farmers who try it.

CS supplied that political will.

What did CS ask the scientists?

In August 1964 he called about twenty agricultural scientists to Krishi Bhawan in New Delhi. He asked each of them how to solve the food shortage.

Swaminathan told him about the dwarf Mexican wheat seeds sent by Norman Borlaug. They had worked in trials but needed money to reach farmers.

He also pointed out that India kept importing PL 480 wheat from the United States.

Why did he trust science?

Shastri and CS both believed that the future belonged to science, in the Nehruvian tradition.

CS wanted science used in every area, not only in farming.

This belief made him listen to the scientists when others had ignored them.

Why was his meeting with the scientists unusual?

He was the first minister to seek out the farm scientists and ask for answers.

Before this, scientists often sent proposals that the ministry turned down for lack of funds.

CS reversed that habit. He took the country's problem to the experts.

Why were food imports a problem?

India kept buying PL 480 wheat from the United States. PL 480 was an American food-aid programme.

Swaminathan argued that importing food meant supporting farmers in other countries.

About 70 per cent of Indians then worked in agriculture, so the point hit home.

Why not breed new seeds only in India?

A new seed variety usually takes about a decade to develop. It must give more grain and resist disease.

India could not wait that long. So the scientists tested seeds that Borlaug had already bred.

The next step was to grow them in the fields of real farmers.

Who else shaped the Green Revolution?

Records credit a team: CS, M.S. Swaminathan, B. Sivaraman and Norman Borlaug.

Swaminathan led the science. Sivaraman, as secretary, ran the administration. CS made the political decisions.

Why did India need a revolution in farming?

In the early 1960s India relied on imported grain to feed its people. A bad monsoon could bring hunger.

Leaders wanted a farm system that gave the country food security without begging abroad.

The Green Revolution was the answer, and CS was the minister in charge when it began.

Why does teamwork matter in this story?

No single person made the revolution. A scientist found the seed. A secretary ran the plan. A minister took the political risk.

Exam writers like this point because it separates the roles of CS, Swaminathan, Sivaraman and Borlaug.

> **Quick check 2.** Subramaniam was the plant scientist who bred the new wheat varieties. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

The New Seeds and the Hard Decision

What changed in farming?

The Green Revolution brought high-yielding varieties of seeds, more fertiliser and better irrigation.

The aim was simple. India should grow its own food.

Wheat and rice were the main crops.

What did CS do as minister?

He brought in high-yield seeds and used more fertiliser.

These steps raised grain output. They led towards self-reliance in food.

Higher output of wheat and rice was the visible result.

Where did the Green Revolution begin?

The Green Revolution first took hold in Punjab. Punjab came to be called the breadbasket of India.

Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh followed.

Why Punjab first?

The new seeds work only where water is assured. Punjab, Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh had good irrigation and other facilities.

So they gained first and gained most.

What was the downside?

Villages and regions without enough water were left out. This widened regional differences between adopters and non-adopters.

Small farmers also found that the new seeds needed costly irrigation and pesticides.

Quick check 3. The Green Revolution spread equally to every region from the start. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Early Life and the Freedom Movement

Where was he born?

He was born on 30 January 1910 in Coimbatore, in what is now Tamil Nadu.

His later career began in Madras State.

Sources: constitutionofindia.net

What did he study?

He took a degree in physics at Presidency College, University of Madras. He then studied law at Madras Law College.

What was his role in the freedom movement?

He was a Gandhian who took part in the Quit India movement. The British jailed him for it.

The freedom struggle shaped his view of public service.

Did he help frame the Constitution?

Yes. He was elected to the Constituent Assembly from Madras and took part in drafting the Constitution of India.

How did Kamaraj connect to his rise?

In Madras he was minister for education, law and finance in the cabinets led by C. Rajagopalachari and then K. Kamaraj.

He then moved to the Union Cabinet.

The two men belonged to the same Tamil Nadu Congress world, which is why both appear in Modern History questions.

> **Quick check 4.** Subramaniam was imprisoned for taking part in the Quit India movement. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Many Portfolios in Madras and Delhi

What posts did he hold in Madras State?

He was minister for education, law and finance in Madras State. The chief ministers were Rajaji and then K. Kamaraj.

So he learnt how to run a government before he reached Delhi.

Why is the Steel ministry worth remembering?

Before Agriculture, CS was a highly successful Minister of Steel, Mines and Heavy Engineering.

So Shastri was asking a respected minister to take a less glamorous job.

That is why the move surprised him.

Who nearly took Agriculture before him?

Neelam Sanjiva Reddy had almost accepted the ministry but changed his mind at the last minute.

So the post was open when Shastri turned to CS.

The story shows how little prestige farm ministries carried at the time.

Why is the story of one minister not enough?

A policy needs a minister, a scientist and an administrator.

CS lobbied in Parliament for the scientists. Sivaraman handled the details.

Swaminathan worked in the laboratory and the field.

How did he reach the Union Cabinet?

He won a Lok Sabha seat in 1962. Nehru made him Minister of Steel, Mines and Heavy Engineering.

He went on to Agriculture in 1964.

How long was he in the Lok Sabha?

He was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1962, 1971 and 1977. The last election was from Palani.

He held the Steel and Mines, Agriculture, Finance and Defence portfolios in the Union Government.

Why do finance and food policy connect?

Finance decides how much money a government can spend on seeds, fertiliser and irrigation.

CS held both Agriculture and Finance at different times.

So his career links food policy and money policy.

What is the order of his big posts?

Madras ministries, then Steel and Mines, then Agriculture and Food from 1964, then Finance, then Defence, and finally Governor of Maharashtra.

A timeline like this is easy to remember for the exam.

> **Quick check 5.** Subramaniam was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1962. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Institutions and Price Policy

Why do crop prices matter for a revolution?

A farmer will adopt a new seed only if the crop sells for a fair price.

Good prices turn a technical advance into a stable income.

Who worked with him on the science side?

M.S. Swaminathan led the scientists. B. Sivaraman, the agriculture secretary, handled the details.

CS lobbied for them in Parliament.

All three came from Tamil Nadu.

Why was the secretary so important?

Sivaraman was an experienced civil servant with field work in agriculture and irrigation in Orissa.

CS recruited him in May 1965.

A minister sets the policy, but a secretary makes sure that the orders reach the districts.

> **Quick check 6.** Subramaniam recruited B. Sivaraman as his agriculture secretary. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Why does a farmer need a fair price?

A new seed only helps if the crop sells for a good price. Otherwise farmers lose money and stop using it.

For this reason a Green Revolution needs price policy as well as science.

A support price tells the farmer what the Government will pay. That lowers the risk of trying something new.

So seeds, water and prices have to move together.

Later Years and Honours

Was he a Governor?

Yes. He was Governor of Maharashtra between 1990 and 1993.

When did he die?

He died on 7 November 2000, two years after the Bharat Ratna.

What honour did he receive?

He received the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, in 1998.

What did he write?

His key writings include War on Poverty and The New Strategy in Indian Agriculture.

> **Quick check 7.** Subramaniam received the Bharat Ratna in 1998. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Angle

What may a PYQ ask?

CAPF (ACs) 2020 asked which states got high-yielding varieties in the first phase of the Green Revolution. The answer was Punjab and Haryana.

Both had assured irrigation, which the new seeds needed.

Do not call Subramaniam the scientist. He was the minister.

Do not mix up the Steel ministry he held first with the Agriculture ministry he got in 1964.

Bharat Ratna came in 1998, two years before his death.

Think of the trio. One is the scientist. One is the minister. One is the secretary.

The minister is CS. The scientist is Swaminathan. The secretary is Sivaraman.

The seeds came from Mexico. The plan came from Delhi. The crops grew in the fields. India needed less food from abroad. That is the story in short.

Practice MCQs

1. Which two ministries did Shastri ask C. Subramaniam to take over in June 1964?

A. Agriculture and Food

B. Finance and Defence

C. Steel and Mines

D. Education and Law

See answer ↓

2. Why is Subramaniam called the political father of the Green Revolution?

A. He gave the political will behind the new seed policy

B. He bred the high-yielding wheat

C. He drafted the Constitution alone

D. He founded the Food Corporation

See answer ↓

3. Whom did Subramaniam recruit as his agriculture secretary in May 1965?

A. B. Sivaraman

B. M.S. Swaminathan

C. Verghese Kurien

D. Norman Borlaug

See answer ↓

4. In which year was C. Subramaniam first elected to the Lok Sabha?

A. 1962

B. 1952

C. 1971

D. 1977

See answer ↓

5. Which Constitution-making body was Subramaniam elected to from Madras?

A. The Constituent Assembly

B. The Drafting Committee chair

C. The Planning Commission

D. The Rajya Sabha

See answer ↓

6. In which year did Subramaniam receive the Bharat Ratna?

A. 1998

B. 1988

C. 2000

D. 2010

See answer ↓

7. Of which state was C. Subramaniam Governor between 1990 and 1993?

A. Maharashtra

B. Tamil Nadu

C. Punjab

D. Kerala

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **A.**
   Shastri phoned him on 9 June 1964 with the offer.
   ↑ Q1
2. **B.**
   The science came from Borlaug and Swaminathan.
   ↑ Q2
3. **C.**
   Sivaraman was the detail man of the trio.
   ↑ Q3
4. **D.**
   He won a seat in 1962 and joined Nehru's cabinet.
   ↑ Q4
5. **B.**
   He took part in drafting the Constitution.
   ↑ Q5
6. **A.**
   He died on 7 November 2000.
   ↑ Q6
7. **C.**
   He later became Governor after his cabinet career.
   ↑ Q7

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** Shastri offered him the ministry on 9 June 1964. ↑ 1
2. **False.** He was the minister. Borlaug and Swaminathan led the science. ↑ 2
3. **False.** It spread mostly to irrigated and high-potential areas. ↑ 3
4. **True.** He was a Gandhian who joined the movement. ↑ 4
5. **True.** He won a seat that year and joined Nehru's cabinet. ↑ 5
6. **True.** He did this in May 1965. ↑ 6
7. **True.** It recognised his role in ushering in the Green Revolution. ↑ 7

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