



The Concept of Rural Development and Poverty in India - A Study

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Abstract

The Rural development generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic welfare of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a “Silver Bullet” for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment, by way of generating demand for productive labour force in villages. It provides an alternative source of livelihood which will have an impact on reducing migration, restricting child labour, alleviating poverty, and making villages self-sustaining through productive assets creation such as road construction, cleaning up of water tanks, soil and water conservation work, etc. For which it has been considered as the largest anti-poverty programme in India.

Keywords: Rural development; Employment Guarantee Act; self-sustaining; Development projects.

Introduction

India is predominantly an agrarian country with 72 per cent (about 80 crores) of its population living in more than five lakh villages. Agriculture is the predominant livelihood occupation and the rural population largely consists of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. A large part of this rural population (more than 200 million) is still living below the poverty line and is the

focus of rural development programmes. From the pre-independence era of Mahatma Gandhi, every government after the Independence of the country in 1947 has committed itself to rural development. Rural: As per the Webster’s dictionary rural means “open land” and according to the United States census rural includes all persons living outside urban area and who live on farm. Agriculture is generally the main occupation in rural areas. Development: It refers to growth, evolution, and stage of inducement or



progress. According to Ensminger (1974) rural development is a process of transformation from traditionally oriented rural culture towards an acceptance and reliance on science and technology. Lela (1975) defined rural development as an improvement in the living standard of the masses of low-income population residing in rural areas and making the process of self-sustaining. According to Agarwal (1989) rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural poor. Rural development can be defined in several ways but for all practical purposes it means helping the poor people living in the villages in their economic development. The major objectives of the rural development programs are:

- To achieve enhanced production and productivity in the rural areas
- To bring about a greater socio-economic equity
- To bring about a spatial balance in social and economic development
- To bring about improvement in the ecological environment so that it may be conducive to growth and happiness, and
- To develop broad based community participation in the process of development

Pre-Independence Experiments in Rural development Prior to the independence in

1947, various individuals and institutions made experiments in rural development from time to time. The model village in Sunderban (Bengal) by Sir Daniel Hamilton in 1903, the Sriniketan experiment of Thakur Rabindranath Tagore in 1920, Brayne's Gurgaon experiment in 1921, Krishnamachari's Baroda Reconstruction Movement in early 1930s, Gandhiji's experiment in Champaran (1971) and Sevagram in 1936, and The Firka Development Scheme in madras State in 1946 are a few prominent initiatives that had substantive bearing on the future rural development programmes. The information available on these early projects is scanty and is mostly based on the recollections of the social workers involved in these experiments.

Post-Independence Rural Development Programme

Several experiments in rural reconstruction undertaken by official and nonofficial agencies in the past contributed towards new thinking about reorganizing the setup for rural development. Albert Mayer's Etawah project of 1947-48 for Rural Planning and Development played a key-role and can be regarded as a forerunner of the Community Development Projects in



India. After an initial period of trial and error lasting over a year and 3 a half, an administrative pattern was evolved which, for the first time facilitated extension activities to percolate to the village level. The activities of different development departments were channelized through one common agency and the concept of a multipurpose Village Level Worker emerged.

The importance of the Rural Development:

The people of India live mostly in rural areas (villages). Therefore, it is in the heart of the villages that the nation lives. Indeed, “the soul of India is in the toil of the rural areas”. The welfare of India depends upon the prosperity of the villages.

Ways and Means of Rural Development:

After our independence, the conditions of the villages have been improved. The problems of our villages are many and various. For their solution, intelligent guidance of both the government and the people is needed.

The ways and means of rural development:

- ✓ Education of the masses

- ✓ Establishment of night schools for adults
- ✓ Improvement of sanitation
- ✓ Provisions for cheap medical aid
- ✓ Construction of good roads
- ✓ Establishment of co-operative credit societies

Educated people should go to the villages and settle there. Mass education should be introduced to remove the ignorance of the villagers. It should be made both compulsory and free. Night schools should be set up for the adults to teach them elementary Hygiene and scientific methods of cultivation. For the improvement of sanitation, jungles should be cut down. Arrangements should be made for supply of pure drinking water on a large scale. Tube-wells should be sunk; new wells and ponds should be dug. Every village should be equipped with a hospital and a charitable dispensary for providing proper medical aid to the villagers. Roads and other means of communication in the rural areas should be improved. The government should teach the farmers scientific methods of cultivation and supply them with implements of agriculture. Co-operative Credit Societies should be set up to advance loans to the peasants. Arbitration boards should settle



disputes and differences. Cottage industries should receive encouragement. Educational films should be exhibited. Good libraries should be provided in every village. In this way, each village should be developed into a self-sufficient unit. It is a happy sign that our government is doing its best to improve the condition of the villages through various schemes of rural uplift. It's the progress hitherto made has not been up to the mark. (Muskan 2016)

Rural Life in India

The rural people live in their small huts surrounded by trees and vegetables. They breathe pure air. The rural people grow their own vegetables. From early morning to night, nothing sensational happens. The village looks beautiful in the rural setting. There are fruit trees. There are tanks and ponds. There are paddy fields that spread to the horizon. There are very few buildings and small markets.

The rural society mainly consists of middle class people, peasants, artisans, potters, blacksmiths, barbers, and washer men. There are priests who worship at the different houses. The relations among them are friendly and personal.

In rural areas, everyone is everyone's friend and relation. However, in a town each lives for himself and cares little for his neighbor.

Every man is free to live his life in his own way. The cultivators go to till the land or gather harvest. The small artisans do their work nicely. If there is a village school, the young boys and girls do their lessons in the morning and go to their schools.

In the free atmosphere of the village, **the children become bold, frank, and healthy.** They learn to respect the old men of the village and obey their orders. The older people look upon the younger men as the children of their own house.

There is great scope for outdoor enjoyment in rural India. They play football, cricket, kabaddi, etc. Kite flying is an exciting passion of the village.

The food they take is fresh and pure. They eat fresh vegetables. They drink the milk of their own cows. Naturally, they grow healthy and strong.

The life of the rural people rests on the lap of Nature. The green grass and trees surround them. Open space is all about them. Paddy fields and vegetable gardens lie about them. Nature in all her charming



aspects pleases the eyes and delights the hearts.

Causes of Rural and Urban Poverty in India

Rural and urban poverty in India

Inspite of all efforts, **Poverty** has remained in both Rural and Urban India. The potent causes of Urban and Rural Poverty in India are as follows:

Over-population

Both rural and urban India suffers from the problem of over-population. This has been and remains an overriding cause and the social conscience, somehow, has not got aroused in the manner and proportion as it should have been, to combat this menace.

A large proportion of our population, at least those who lack education and enlightenment have not yet taken the birth-control as seriously as they should have.

Among the educated and the elite class, a two-child norm seems to have become a rule but nothing of that sort seems to get into the head of the rural uneducated class.

The democratically formed government cannot dare make stringent rules to enforce family-planning as they have done in China – more than one child and the man and woman lose their jobs. The explosion of population scenario makes the

imbalance in demand and supply and causes poverty in Urban as well as Rural India. There have been a lot of production-oriented schemes launched and the country's production in all fields has been boosted up, still that does not meet the needs of one billion population marks which also must have long been crossed after the last number to make it one billion. Draught, floods, and other natural calamities

Draught, floods, and other natural calamities have also been occurring and re-occurring that has also been diverting the country's material and financial resources to meet the adverse situations. The inability to combat with sudden natural disasters has further contributed for the growth of poverty in rural and urban India. We have yet not been able to evolve any natural-calamity combating mechanism and the sufferings of people have been wide-spread and enormous and the resources are limited.

Terrorism and War conditions

War conditions and even wars fought with Pakistan during the last sixty years and keeping up the preparations for the impending one are also draining away quite a sizeable resources of the country. Country's independence, its integrity and



solidarity has to be the prime concern and no relaxation in that field can be permitted, whatsoever be its fall out. This has also been a cause for the country not being able to combat its poverty which should have been fought at the war-level. (Ankita Mitra 2013)

Poverty as a Challenge in India

Since the dawn of human history, the problem of poverty has been an inherent and perpetual characteristic of any type of class or society based on private ownership of the means of production. Poverty is the chief target of socialism. It can be defined as a social phenomenon in which a section of society is unable to get even its basic necessities of life. When a substantial segment of a society is deprived of the minimum level of living (to use the phrase of classical economists, “a bare subsistence level”) that society is said to be plagued by mass poverty.

Poverty is sheer-want – want of food for a growing family, want of clothes, and want of a shelter and want of medical help. Poverty is still prevalent among millions of people in India. People living in abject poverty constitute 40 to 50 per cent of the total population.

Various estimates have been made of the number of poor people. The existence of mass poverty on such a large scale is incompatible with the vision of an advanced, prosperous democratic, egalitarian and just society implied in the concept of socialistic pattern of development. Despite the implementation of several plans and programs, poverty seems to have expanded. The growth strategy adopted by the planners left more than two-fifths of the population below the poverty line. Glaring inequalities of wealth and income, both in urban and rural areas, industrial and agricultural sectors, resulting in a vast difference in the standards of living of the people were quite noticeable. The countries of the Third World exhibit invariably the existence of mass poverty, although pockets of poverty exist even in the developed countries of Europe and America.

Attempts have been made in all societies to define poverty, but all of them are conditioned by the vision of minimum or good life obtaining in society. The concept of poverty is relative and subjective. No universal index of poverty has yet been evolved nor does this seem possible. The poverty index for the USA, for instance,



would be quite different from that for India, although the poor in both countries would certainly be poor. It does not seem as if even a more widely applicable index, such as standards of minimal good, clothing and shelter requirements, would help us; for the luxuries of one society's poor may well be considered necessities by the poor of a more affluent society. Each society's poor would therefore have to be defined in relation to its own rich. There can be no absolutes.

In India, the definition of the poverty line emphasizes a minimum level of living rather than a reasonable level of living. This attitude is borne out of realization that it would not be possible to provide millions of people even the minimum basic needs for some decades; therefore, to talk about a reasonable level of living or good life may appear to be wishful thinking at the present stage. Thus political considerations enter the definitions of poverty because programs of alleviating poverty may become prohibitive as the vision of a good life widens.

The deprivation of a significant section of society of minimum basic needs in the face of a luxurious life for the elite classes makes poverty more glaring. More than 65 years have passed since we attained

political independence; still most of the people lead a sub-human life, while a microscopic minority lives in excessive luxury.

Conclusion

The deep-rooted and traditional poverty of India poses a colossal problem which cannot be solved by any magic wand. Gradual eradication of poverty has been the aim of five-year plans, but the disparities between the rich and the poor have increased even as the Government sought to bridge the gap.

Attempts to launch "crash plans" against unemployment and poverty have often crashed, and this is a lesson that has to be constantly kept in mind.

Implementation of the various planks of this programme has already made a notable impact on the poor people and has helped to improve their lot. For instance, the very first item – fighting the challenge on the price front by stimulating production and distribution of essential commodities – has brought much relief to people, especially in the lowest income brackets. Similarly, the series of measures to ensure relief to rural people – agriculture laborers, through distribution of surplus land, liquidation of



indebtedness, provision of housing sites, ending the barbarous practice of bonded labor, supply of books and essential commodities to poor student, and more employment opportunities through development – all help to relieve poverty. The battle goes on. (Vikash Mehra 2014)

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