

RURAL SOCIETY & DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: THROUGH A SOCIOLOGICAL LENS

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Abstract

The central aim of this research paper is to gain an understanding of the concept and context of rural society and development in India. The rural society has always been central to India's identity. Villages are the nation's backbone, and many scholars believe that the soul of India resides in the villages. Thus the primary goal of this paper is to investigate rural society through a sociological lens. In addition, the paper discusses various government initiatives to develop rural India. The paper provides us with a comprehensive understanding of the complex pictures of rural India in the present day. Because the paper attempted to study, discuss, and analyze the overall structure of rural sociology, rural society, and rural development, it may be significant from a policy standpoint. The paper also contributes to the literature, research and the knowledge production.

Keyword: Rural, Society, Sociology, Development, India

1. INTRODUCTION

India has always been known as the land of villages. According to the 2011 census, India has 649,481 villages, with 68.84% residing in rural areas and 21.16% residing in urban areas. A village is regarded as a unit of social, political, and economic organization in the Rig Veda. Many scholars have spoken about villages; for example, poet Premchand pointed to British rule and stated that during the industrialization phase, the structure of villages changed dramatically. Rabindra Nath Tagore said that villages are the backbone of the nation and built Santi Niketan Ashram far from Calcutta, whereas Gandhi said that villages are the soul of the nation and

built Sabarmati Ashram far from Ahmadabad to think and meet with village peoples.

When India gained independence, a greater emphasis was placed on villages, agriculture, and rural India. The first five-year plan (1951-56) was centred on agriculture, irrigation, and village community development. It primarily addressed the agricultural sector, including dam and irrigation investment. The third five-year plan (1961-66) focused on agriculture and wheat production improvement. Panchayat elections were instituted in order to bring democracy to the grassroots. The twelfth five-year plan (2012-17) aimed to improve infrastructure and provide electricity to all villages.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014, he emphasized the importance of villages, citing Gandhi's statement that the soul of a country resides in its villages. As a result, if you want to make this country complete and self-sufficient, you must start with the villages. The Modi government has implemented a slew of policies and programmes aimed at rural development. Because of the importance of rural India, the focus on villages has always remained on the agendas and policies of various governments in India.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE PAPER

In India, the study of rural society and development has become a major concern for policymakers, academics, and social scientists. India has always been associated with agrarian or peasant society, and more than 65% of the population has a relationship to rural areas or agriculture. The paper attempted to comprehend three critical concepts. One is about the history and nature of rural sociology in India. Two, it investigates the history and scope of India's rural society. Third, it explains

India's rural development. The paper provides a detailed analysis of rural society and development in India and attempted to make a significant contribution to the literature and research

3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology is a process that investigates any social phenomena by employing various methods, tools, and techniques and makes the study more systematic. It all starts with the epistemology, and then uses theoretical framework and methodology. In this manner, the entire methodological framework has been used to conduct the present research study. The paper has prepared on the basis of secondary literature. In the preparation of the research paper it has consulted all the policy related documents, relevant books and articles published on rural sociology, rural society and rural development in India.

4. INTERPRETATION, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

One it discusses the history and nature of rural sociology in India. Two, it investigates the history and scope of India's rural society. Third, it explains India's rural development. In this way the paper provides a detailed analysis of rural society and development in India and makes significant contributions to the literature and research.

4.1. Origin and Nature of Rural Sociology

Rural sociology is a relatively new branch of sociology, with studies dating back to the nineteenth century. Among the prominent rural sociologists of the time were Sir Henry Maine, Etton, Stemann, Baden Powell, Slater, and Pallock, among others. Rural societies in America faced many socioeconomic problems between 1890 and 1920, attracting the attention of the intelligentsia and establishing rural society study as an academic discipline. The appointment of the Country Life Commission by American President Theodore Roosevelt was a watershed moment in rural sociology history. At the time, rural life in America was impacted by widespread poverty and an economic downturn. The rural social problems in the United States had grown significantly, and the CLC was to study these rural social problems and make recommendations for improving

rural life. The American Sociological Society established a separate department of rural sociology in 1917. For the first time in the United States, a journal called Rural Sociology was published in 1935. In the United States, the Rural Sociological Society was founded in 1937. Renowned sociologists like James Michel Williams, Warren H. Wilson, and Newell L. Sims made significant contributions to the study of American rural society (Doshi and Jain, 2021).

Sir Henry S Maine, who published two books, *Ancient Law* (1861) and *Ancient Society* (1861), is credited with establishing rural sociology as a discipline in India (1877). He wrote extensively about Indian villages, but Dumont later chastised him for his European bias and centralism. "Sir Henry Maine hardly ever looked at the Indian village in itself, but only as a counterpart to Tutonic, Slavonic, or other institutions. Dumont argues that to him, India was merely a historical repository of veritable phenomena of ancient usage and legal thought. A systematic study of rural sociology in India, on the other hand, began after the promulgation of the Indian Constitution and the implementation of the Community Development Programmes. Sociologists and social anthropologists began conducting extensive and numerous studies in the field of rural sociology in the early 1950s. The primary focus of these studies was the examination of the interrelationships between various aspects of rural organisation. M.N.Srinivas (1960), McKim Marriott (1955), S.C.Dube (1955), and D.N.Majumdar (1955) contributed to the field of rural sociology (1955).

Rural sociology is a subfield and branch of sociology that studies rural social life. The study of rural society, social structures, and institutions is known as rural sociology. Rural sociology is also concerned with peasant society because rural society is primarily dependent on agriculture. Rural sociology focuses on rural community life. As a result, rural sociology was developed specifically to investigate rural phenomena, and it is a systematic examination of the various aspects of rural society.

It is the study of rural social networks and how they function for the smooth operation of society. The rural society is generally rooted in villages, and rural sociology studies the various aspects of villages, how

they function, the various problems they face, and how they deal with the looming challenges. Rural sociology provides viable solutions and methods of mitigating the problems that plague villages.

Rural Sociology's nature generally indicates whether it belongs to the natural sciences or the arts. Sociology was dubbed the "Queen of Sciences" by its founder, Auguste Comte. Some sociologists have compared sociology to natural sciences. "Sociology appears to me to have all the properties that define science," writes Pierre Bourdieu. All sociologists worthy of the name agree on a common heritage of concepts, methods and verification procedures". Most sociologists believe that sociology possesses all of the characteristics of science and that it is, without a doubt, a science. Rural sociology is a science because it is a specialized branch of sociology.

Many scholars have discussed about Rural Sociology; According to Sanderson, "Rural sociology is the sociology of rural life in the rural environment". "Rural sociology is the study of human relationships in rural environments," says Bertand. Another scholar A.R Desai defines rural sociology as, "the science of rural society....It is the science of laws of the development of rural society".

Thus, rural sociology studies the social interactions, institutions, and activities, as well as the social changes that occur in rural society. It investigates the structure and operation of rural social organizations. Rural sociology reflects rural social life and establishes the norms and values that govern rural society. It paints a clear picture of the rural population and how they differ from the urban population.

4.2. History and Scope of Rural Society

Agriculture is the mainstay of rural society (Desai, 2019). The terms "rural society" and "villages," "countryside," and "folk society" are almost interchangeable. The village is the most commonly used term in sociological literature. In India, a village is defined as a community with a population density of less than 500 people per square kilometre, at least 3/4 of the population engaged in primary occupation, namely agriculture, and a village panchayat.

For sociologists, the term "rural society" refers to a small society with a small population and a smaller physical area; the density of the rural population is very low, and it may be clustered according to social status criteria. It is an agricultural society with traditional moral customs (mores), folkways, and culture.

Many sociologists and anthropologists have studied Indian villages, including Dube, Lewis, Srinivas, Marroit, Bailey, Gough, Berreman, Epstein, Andre Beteille, T.K. Oomen, and K.L. Sharma. Rural society is one that is connected to nature and has an impact on their entire life. The population is more homogeneous. They have a small community and an agricultural-dominated economy.

Although not all farmers are equally impacted by the rural economic crisis, the majority of lower and middle class farmers are compelled to send their sons and brothers to the cities in order to find new jobs. Due to a lack of education and appropriate training, the underprivileged rural population is compelled to live in slums and work as daily wage earners in cities. The rural farmer's standard of living is extremely low, and they are exploited to a much greater extent by large landlords, middlemen, and lenders. The other issues in rural areas arise from the fact that there are few specialised services available to them because they do not live in large, populated areas.

Thus, people in rural areas are generally at a disadvantage and face numerous social issues such as unemployment, the breakdown of rural joint families, migration, poverty, health-related issues, developmental issues, a lack of awareness and information, and fewer facilities than those in urban areas.

4.3. Rural Development in India

In this section, we will look at rural development in India. All policies and programmes for rural India were initiated after independence and the establishment of the constitution. As a result, it will focus more deeply on the government's policies after 1950. Maheswari (1995) rightly said rural development is an important aspect of

development in India. Programmes and policies play a vital role in development (Maheswari, 1995).

In India, rural development has seen a lot of experimentation. The trajectory shifted from community development to integrated development and, more recently, to inclusive development. The 'Sevagram' (1920) effort by 'Father of the Nation' Mahatma Gandhi, the rural reconstruction institute at Shantiniketan by Rabindra Nath Tagore in 1921, the Marthandum project by Spencer Hatch in 1921 under the auspices of Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), and The Indian Village Service (IVS) established by Mr. Arthur T. Mosher of New York and Shri B.N. Gupta in 1945 had These rural upliftment programmes were largely philanthropic works carried out by individuals with selfless interests (Kumar, 2014).

The Community Development Programme (CDP) was launched in 1952 to promote rural development and people's participation. The Intensive Agriculture Development Program (IADP) was introduced in 1960-61 to provide farmers with loans for seeds and fertilizers. In the years 1964-65, the Intensive agriculture area programme (IAAP) was introduced to develop special harvest in agriculture. To boost productivity, the Green Revolution was implemented in 1966-67. The Rural Electrification Corporation was established in 1969 to provide electricity to rural areas.

The accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) was implemented in 1972-73 to provide drinking water in villages. The Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE) for rural employment was established in 1973. Marginal Farmer and Agriculture Labor Agency (MFALA) were established in 1973-74 to provide technical and financial assistance to marginal farmers. In 1975, the Command Area Development Programme (CADP) for better utilisation of irrigational capacities and the Twenty Point Programme (TPP) for poverty eradication were introduced, with the overall goal of raising the standard of living. The National Institution of Rural Development Training, Research, and Advisory for Rural Development were established in 1977.

The Desert Development Programme (DDP) was introduced in 1977-78 to control desert expansion while

maintaining environmental balance. TRYSEM (Training Rural Youth for Self Employment) was established on August 15, 1979, for educational and vocational training. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was launched on October 2, 1980, for the overall development of the rural poor. The National Rural Development Program (NREP) was launched in 1980 to provide employment opportunities for rural residents. The Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) programme was introduced in 1982 to provide women from rural families living below the poverty line with sustainable opportunities for self-employment.

Other important policies and programmes include the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), which was introduced in 1983 to provide employment to landless farmers and labourers, the Council of Advancement of People's Action & Rural Technology (CAPART), which was introduced in 1986 to provide assistance to rural people, self-employment through credit and subsidy, and the National Drinking Water Mission.

In 1988, the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna (JRY) was introduced to provide employment to rural unemployed people, and in 1989, the Nehru Rozgar Yojna (NRY) was introduced to provide employment to urban unemployed people. In 1991, the Rural Drinking Water Mission was renamed and upgraded to the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission, and the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) was introduced to provide at least 100 days of employment in villages and District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) financial assistance to rural people by district level authority. In 1993, the Mahila Samridhi Yojna was introduced to encourage rural women to deposit in Post Office schemes.

In 1994, the Child Labor Eradication Program was introduced to redirect child labour from hazardous industries to schools. In 1995, the Midday Meal Scheme was launched to provide nutrition to primary school students in order to improve enrolment, retention, and attendance, as well as a national Social Assistance programme to assist BPL people. The Ganga Kalyan Yojna was launched in 1997-98 to provide farmers with financial assistance for exploring ground water resources. The Kastooba Gandhi Education Scheme was implemented in 1997 to establish girl's schools in areas

with low female literacy (at the district level). A rural self-employment programme called Swaran Jayanto Gram Swarojgar Yojna and a village infrastructure programme called Jawahar Gram Samridhhi Yojna were both implemented in 1999.

In 2001, the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojna was implemented to provide employment and food security to rural people; in 2005, the National Rural Health Mission was implemented to provide accessible, affordable, accountable, and quality health services to the poorest of the poor in the country's most remote areas; and in 2006, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme NREGS was implemented to provide 100 days wage employment for development work in rural areas.

The National Rural Livelihood Mission/Aajeevika (2010) initiative was launched to create efficient and effective institutional platforms for the rural poor (Self Help Groups) to increase household income and improve access to financial services (Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India).

The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, a component of the National Livelihood Mission, aims to meet the career aspirations of rural youth while also diversifying rural families' income. The scheme, which was launched on September 25, 2014, is primarily aimed at rural youth from low-income families aged 15 to 35. Another Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) is a rural development project launched by the Government of India in 2014 in which each Member of Parliament will be responsible for three villages' personal, human, social, environmental, and economic development. This would significantly improve the villages' standard of living as well as their quality of life.

Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin)/ Indira Awas Yojana, renamed Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana in 2016, is an Indian government welfare programme designed to provide housing to rural poor people in India. The scheme's goal is to provide housing to all citizens by 2022.

Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) "Sabki Yojana, Sabka Vikas" scheme funded by Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI) and Common Facility Centers (CFCs) focusing on Bamboo, Honey, and Khadi products as a cluster-based approach. During 2019-20, this Scheme promoted rural industry

and entrepreneurship, developing 75,000 entrepreneurs in agro-rural industry sectors (Mohapatra & Prusty, 2021).

The Swamitva Yojana scheme used advanced technology to promote land ownership. The Union Government's Panchayati Raj ministry tested this scheme as a pilot study before launching it on April 24, 2020, on the eve of Panchayati Raj Diwas. This scheme was successfully launched by the Ministry of Rural Development and the Panchayati Raj department (Ibid, 2021).

Since 1947 the government of India has initiated various policies, programmes and initiatives to strengthen rural social system. In almost all the five year plans the various governments has recognized the importance of self reliant villages. Therefore to make village more self sufficient the government should coordinate and initiate more welfarian schemes.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper contends that rural society will always be the heart and soul of India, and that we will not be able to fully understand India unless we understand it systematically and scientifically. More than 65% of the country's population lives in rural areas, and those who live in cities have mostly migrated from rural areas. The paper concluded that rural sociology as a discipline was created specifically to understand rural social structure, rural social institutions, issues, and challenges in Indian villages. The paper emphasized that villages have always been the backbone, social, and political organization in India's civilizational history. Finally, the paper argues that the government has focused on rural development since 1947, and many policies and programmes have been implemented to strengthen villages. The paper also suggests that more comprehensive and welfare-oriented initiatives are needed to strengthen rural society, rural economy, and overall rural social structure. Because of the nature and scope of rural society and development, it will always be a major concern for policy makers, scholars and government institutions.

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