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Rural Development and Change in India: Some Reflections

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Abstract

India is basically and largely a rural society. It predominates in India in terms of no of habitats, percentage of total population, social structure, cultural ethos and life styles. However, it is predominantly characterized by under development & backwardness with problems like, illiteracy, ignorance blind faith, poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and ill-health, conservatism and social immobility. Such rural society is being developed and changed through planned development and change implemented in post-independence period. Planned development is carried out by series of programmes implemented by govt. & non govt. agencies as well as cooperatives and Panchayati raj institutions. Similarly, change is effected through the process of migration, urbanization, industrialization, modernization, globalization, modern education as well as internal structural contradictions of village community itself. The present paper reviews the process of rural development and change in India with primary focus on its actual status, static and dynamic related and mechanisms for the same. The paper concludes that both the processes are going on with relatively slow pace and limited influence. Secondly though there is considerable physical development in terms of agricultural growth and development of infrastructure facilities, rural India is still lagging behind in terms of social development, particularly in field of education and health. Similarly, the benefits of development programs are not evenly distributed and have not reached to weaker sections of rural society.

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Thirdly, socio-political awareness and empowerment of rural people have been increased due to their educational development and participation in Panchayati Raj institutions and other developmental agencies. However the election for the same has created unhealthy competition for capturing power-position leading to social tensions and caste conflicts. Similarly, despite the development of many good modern values like liberty, equality, secularism, many good traditional cultural ethos like mutual cooperation, group living, simple nature-oriented life style, strong sense of belongingness and community pride have been eroded. Thus a balanced growth with functional change is needed in the contemporary process of rural development and change.

Rural Development and Change in India: Some Reflections

- I) **Introduction:** India is basically and largely a rural society. Majority of Indian population resides in rural society comprising of over 5,50,000 villages. Rural life predominance in terms of living condition, problems and cultural ethos prevalent among Indians. Majority of Indian villages are predominantly characterized by backwardness or underdevelopment with problems like illiteracy, ignorance, blind faith, malnutrition and ill-health, poverty and unemployment as well as conservatism and social immobility. However, during contemporary time, notable development is taking place in Indian rural society due to planned development consisting of several village development programmes and schemes. Similarly many changes are taking place in rural India under the influence of migration, urbanization, industrialization, modernization, globalization, modern education. Again, several internal structural contradictions (dialectics) have also brought changes in village community. With such background information and theoretical framework, the present paper gives some important reflections on developing and changing rural Indian society with primary focus on its actual present status, statics and dynamics related with rural development and change, mechanisms for and forces behind the same.
- II) **Development and Change defined:** development is universal socio-economic process taking place in a society or a community characterized by backwardness or underdevelopment. It is Primarily defined and measured in term of economic and physical improvement in the living conditions of

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people. As per conventional approach, development is strictly defined in economic terms i.e. economic growth implying increase in G.N.P., National Income and Per Capita Income. In this connection, S K Mishra and Puri (2005:23) say that Economic development implies a sustained annual increase in G.N.P. at rates varying from 5 to 7 percentage or more together with such changes in the structure of production and employment that the share of agriculture declines in both, whereas those of manufacturing and tertiary sectors increase.¹ The new welfare oriented approach propounded by Jacob Viner viewed economic development in broader perspective implying reduction of mass poverty inequalities and unemployment. In this context, Charles. P Kindleberger and Bruce Herrick say (1977:1) "Economic Development is generally defined to include improvements in material welfare especially for persons with lowest incomes, eradication of mass poverty with its correlates of illiteracy disease, early death etc." ² L.T. Hobhouse (1924) in the similar context has defined development in much inclusive and sociological séance. He says "Development has four components such as (1) Social Relations Network, (2) Efficiency (3) Mutuality or Reciprocity and (4) Freedom. Sociologist views development as social development and focus upon the starting or original state of society, stages of development in between starting and ending (present) point, goals or targets of development, casual factors (socio-cultural) behind it and socio-cultural consequences of the same. The concept of rural development has two components namely rural and development – former referring to non-urban life style, occupational structure, social organization and settlement pattern whereas latter refers to quantitative and qualitative changes of relative and subjective nature. Rural development, in the social change context may be defined as desired change in the economic, social, technological and natural atmosphere of rural community." ³ Similarly, Sign M (1992:272) defined rural development as multi dimensional concept which involves all kind of development in rural area through collective government and voluntary agencies' efforts.⁴

¹ Mishra S.K & Puri U.K. "Economic Development and Planning" Himalaya Publication House, New Delhi, 2005 pg no 23

² Charles P Kindleberger & Bruce Herick "Economic Development" McGraw Hill, New York, 1977.

³ Urs D.V. & Mishra R.P "Rural development policies and their implications for technology development in India" (ed.) Mishra & Sundara, "Rural Area Development: Perspective and Approaches" Starling Publication, New Delhi, 1959, pg no. 47

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The concept of social changes is very important and it is defined by many social scientists. H M Johnsons (1977) defined it as change in social structure particularly institutional network and values. Kingslay Davis (1965:622) said that change in social organization and its functions is called social change. T K Oommen raises four methodological issues while studying social change: (1) Nature of Unit being analyzed, (2) Points of Departure, (3) Process of Displacement and (4) Direction of change. Social change is generally classified in two types 1) Lineal and 2) Cyclical. Both development and social change are complimentary and interdependent processes. These two collectively imply improvement in economic and physical conditions of people as well as change in their social structure, values, social relations and overall life style. Both the process may be classified and studied in two broad types: (1) Planned and Directed (2) Spontaneous. Rural development and change may be studied in terms of their types, stages, programmes approaches/ strategies, direction, causes and consequences. Sociologist while studying rural development and social change mainly focus on socio-cultural factors (facilitating and inhibiting) and social implications, particularly social cost such as displacement and deprivation, unequal distribution of the fruits of development, environmental degradation, pollution etc.

III) Rural Development and Change in India A Comprehensive

Review: The Process of development and change in Indian Rural Society started during British rule and continue up to now. British government developed some infrastructure and physical facilities particularly transportation and educational facilities in many villages. Similarly it brought villages under its direct, centralized administration and through new laws brought some reforms in Land owning patterns, revenue system and overall Eco-Political system of village India. Again by enacting new social legislations about child marriage, widow marriage, dowry system,

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⁴ Sing M. *"Rural development in India – current perspective"* Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997 pg no 272

untouchability, Sati Pratha, etc. it tried to reform the socio-cultural life of rural people. The process of development and change accelerated during post-independence period. Through planned development and community, development programme, govt. of India is developing and changing Indian rural society. Apart from this government approach in some regions, Gandhian and Sarvodaya approach have been adopted for developing and changing Indian rural society. Apart from rural community development scheme at present 13 major programmes are being implemented for rural development. These include (i) Mahatma Gandhi national rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. (ii) Complete Rural Employment Scheme (iii) National Food For Work Programme (iv) Prime Minister Rural Road Scheme (v) Rural India Avash Scheme (vi) Golden Jubilee Rural Self-Employment Scheme (vii) National Social Assistance Programme And Annapurna Scheme (viii) Water Shade Development Programme (9) Rural Drinking Water Supply Scheme (x) Central Rural Sanitation Programme (xi) Local Area Development Scheme of Member Of Parliament (xii) 20 points programme (xiii) Computerization of Land Records. All these development programmes are addressed to meet the development needs of the rural people pertaining to agriculture & irrigation development, educational development health and sanitation, employment, housing, construction of road, water shade and other public infrastructure and physical facilities. For implementation these development programme, apart from govt. three other agencies are working such as (i) Panchayati Raj institutions (ii) cooperative and NGOs. These development programme are evaluated and found quite ineffective in delivering good and services to the actual beneficiaries targeted due to centralized defective planning, corruption, redtapism, limited involvement and cooperation from village people and their traditional mind set and resulting non-receptivity of programmes.

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IV) Changing Nature of Rural Society: Any society and Community can be studied in terms of its nature implying its characteristic features. Indian rural society may be studied in terms of its structure and nature. The change in the same may be examined in terms of these features. Some of the major changes observed in its structure and nature may be outlined as bellow.

- 1. From closed social system to open social system:** Rural society is basically a closed social system in which vertical social mobility in the social status of individual and groups was absent due to fixed ascribed social status by birth. Similarly, it is least open, exposed & receptive to outside influences of global trends. Its traditional social structure particularly traditional values and behavioral patterns also developed conservative attitude on part of rural people not accepting of modern values and changed behavior patterns. Here considerable change has taken place. Due to the improved transportation and communication facilities the physical and socio-cultural isolation of villages has been reduced. Daily or frequent visits and migration to cities also exposed village people to outside urban and modern influences and subsequently brought changes.
- 2. From agriculture to non-agriculture sector & modern urban industrial occupation:** Rural society is primarily and largely an agricultural society as most of village people are engaged in agriculture, agriculture labor and agri-related occupations. However recently proportion of people dependent on agriculture in India has reduced and came down to 54%. They have left agriculture and adopted modern industrial & service occupations and there by falling in trade, industry, commerce & service sector, Government's policy of acquiring agriculture land and giving it industrial houses for industrial development also explain this shift from agriculture to industry. Similarly, village people engaged in traditional caste occupations have left the same and adopted modern industrial occupations. The existing agriculture occupation has been commercialized, modernized, and market-oriented from its subsistence from. The agriculture products exported to faraway places in other countries and there by integrating village economy with world economy. On the wholly

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the simple, small village occupational structure had been complex, expanded and diversified.

3. From traditional social structure and culture to modern ones:

The process of rural development and changes in India also implies socio-cultural transformation. Especially it is transforming traditional social structure in to modern one. Accordingly, the position of individual and groups in social stratification is also being determined by achieved status particularly his new occupational and educational achievements as well as improved financial position and political power, similarly traditional hereditary Jajmani relations have become more contractual and cash based. The earlier patterns of power and subordination characterizing family and agrarian relations is being changed and increasingly become more contractual and cash based. The earlier patterns of power and subordination characterizing family and agrarian relations is being changed and increasingly become more open, egalitarian and need-based. Finally, earlier personalized and informal pattern of social relations among village people are becoming more and more impersonal and formal. The traditional culturae of village community primarily emphasizing spiritualism, renouncism, emotionality, fatalism, ascription, inequality, blindfaith, groupism, undue social control, casteism, communalism, etc. have been reduced and given place to materialism, consumerism, rationality, achievement-orientation, individualism, liberty, equality. Similarly, nuclearity in family, contractual form of marriage relations, narrowing circle of kins and declining significance of kins and caste fellow are also taking place to some extent in traditional social institutions.

4. From backwardness to forwardness and development: The Indian Rural society is characterized by socio-economic backwardness, poor infrastructure facilities particularly roads, electricity, water works, illiteracy, ignorance and poor educational facilities, very limited health facilities leading to ill health, lower and insufficient income, poverty, unemployment and under employment, poor housing conditions, etc. are characteristic features of socio-economic backwardness. However,

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recently due to various development programme, infrastructure facilities including health and educational services in rural India have been developed substantially. Because of improvement in irrigation and other inputs like fertilizers, improved seeds, pesticides, modern agricultural implements good agricultural development & increased income flow are noticed in rural India. Similarly, cooperatives and NGOs have also added to socio-economic development particularly of poor sections of village community like small and marginal farmers and landless labour as well as artisans and service caste people by providing credit, training and marketing facilities to them.

5. **From Cooperation to conflict:** With the development and change, the Indian rural society is moving from cooperation to conflict in social interaction situation. With the greater emphasis on self-centeredness, personal achievements, the traditional interaction patterns of mutual help, cooperation as evidenced in Jajmani relations, kinship relations and caste relations are declining and increasingly being replaced by competition and conflict. The election for Panchayats and cooperatives have further caste and communal tensions and conflict within village community which was earlier characterized by cooperation, harmony and for getting benefits of development programmes has further deteriorated social relation and led to conflicting situations in village community. Thus so called eco-political development has dysfunctional effects on traditional social structure of rural society famous for its unity, harmony and tranquillity.

- V) **Conclusion:** A review of the process of rural development and change in India suggest that development and change of substantial magnitude are taking place in rural India due to development programmes carried by govt. agencies, NGOs cooperatives and Panchayati Raj institutions. This development process has increased agricultural production substantially, literacy and education developed, Infrastructure facilities particularly road, housing, electricity drinking water have been improved considerably. However, the benefits of development are not percolated downward and reached to lower and poor sections of village community. Secondly, the paces of physical and

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economic and social development are quite different which causes cultural lag and problems related with the same. Secondly, Development of industry and service sectors at the cost of agriculture has further deteriorated the conditions of farmers, artisans of village community. Thirdly though there is peoples' empowerment due to educational development and their occupancy of power position and role playing in Panchayati Raj institutions, unhealthy competition for capturing power has led to social tension and caste conflict in village community which was formerly characterized by its harmony and unity. Finally, through there is development of modern values like, liberty, equality, secularism, political and social awareness, many good traditional ethos of village community like natural cooperation, group living, strong sense of belongingness and community pride, simple and natural life style have been eroded and its original charm has been lost. The balanced growth with necessary functional change is the need of hour for current process of rural development and change.

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