

RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: THE CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses various concepts like Rural Development, Rural Development in India, the Role of the Panchayati Raj system in Rural Development, the Concept the of Model Village, Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana, and the Model Village scheme in Jammu and Kashmir for bringing progress in rural areas. This chapter also includes a list of Model Villages in Jammu and Kashmir and an explanation of selected Model Villages in the Jammu District.

Keywords: Rural Development, Panchayati Raj system, Model Village, Adarsh Gram Yojana.

Introduction

The concept of Rural Development has gained significance all over the world (Madon, 2009); (Woods, 2011); (Pain & Hansen, 2019). Its significance lies mostly in the realisation that countries cannot develop as long as their rural areas and communities who live within those areas remain underdeveloped. Underdevelopment in most cases refers to poverty in rural areas and hence, governments who wish to bring rural development to their countries started attacking rural poverty with innumerable poverty eradication programmes. In this sense, rural poverty and rural development are interrelated. The relationship can be better understood with the definition of the terms associated with these concepts.

Rural Development is also defined in terms of agricultural development as agriculture is the main occupation of rural people. In fact, it is the amount of agricultural production and productivity that determines not only the development of both rural and national economies. The definition of rural development in terms of rural poverty and agricultural development is only partial. Rural development embraces several other aspects other than economic development. It not only includes social aspects such as social equality, social justice, and social development but also includes the personal development of individuals along with economic development.

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide the conceptual framework of Rural Development. It begins with an epistemological understanding of the words associated with the concept, it also defines and discusses various nuances associated with rural development. The chapter also provides a historical perspective of rural development in India and gives an anecdote of the myriad efforts of governments for developing rural areas in India. It also provides a detailed description of the Model Village Scheme in general. Particularly, it provides an account of the design and implementation of various versions of the model village scheme in Jammu and Kashmir.

Rural Development

It is important to understand the etymological meaning of the terms Rural and Development before attempting to understand the concept of Rural Development. The term Rural came to medieval English from the old Latin word – ‘ruralis’ which refers to an open area spread outside the town or urban area with enclosed and defensible spaces (Woods, 2011). It is also referred to as countryside, country life, countrymen, and a characteristic of the country (Dictionary.com). In this sense, the term rural is referred in a geographical connotation in which a region is divided into the binary of urban and rural. This approach is meant to explain the popular assumptions about the relative geographical characteristics of

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both urban and rural areas. Rural areas are assumed to be places where one can find agriculture, forests, and other landscapes. These are also the places where isolated households live in small settlements (Pain & Hansen, 2019). But over a period of time, this categorisation started gaining social and political overtones. As a result, urban areas began to be viewed as centres of learning, communication, and development. On the other, rural areas were viewed as places of backwardness, ignorance, and limitation (Woods, 2011).

There is no precise definition of rural. Some people define it as a place outside cities and towns. Some define it as a place where there is a limited population in comparison with urban areas. Some people define it as a place where the majority of people are engaged in agriculture. Malcom Moosley defined rural as an area that is characterised by "low population density containing scattered dwellings, hamlets, villages and small towns" (p. 1). For Micheal Woods (2011), rural areas are characterised by wilderness, bucolic idyll, scenic landscapes, natural environments, and pre-industrial ways of life devoid of modernisation. Due to these multiple perspectives, arriving at a precise definition of rural becomes a challenge. Therefore, rather than defining rural, Michael Woods has summarised various dimensions of rural for a comprehensive understanding of the term. They are: One, rural as a place of imagination; Two, rural as a place of exploitation; Three, rural as a location of consumption; Four, rural as a location of development; Five, rural as a place to be regulated; Six, rural as a place to live; and Seven, rural as a location of performance (Woods, 2011). Not all the dimensions can be found in the rural areas of each country. Whereas dimensions of exploitation, regulation, and development are commonly found in the rural areas of countries of the global south, the dimensions of imagination, consumption, living, and performance can be vividly found in the rural areas of countries of the global north (Pain & Hansen, 2019).

In the rural context, traditionally, development used to involve the employment of physical, financial, and human resources for the progress of rural economies by increasing agricultural production (Rauniyar & Kanbur, 2010); (Pain & Hansen, 2019). The narratives on rural development are not the same for the developed countries and developing countries. In developed countries, rural development entails general welfare programmes of government that aim at improving agricultural production and other social measures. Although rural areas of developed countries are relatively backward when compared to their urban counterparts, they are not poor. Rural areas in developed countries are characterised by large-scale agricultural landholdings and the ability to use technological advancements. Hence, the main focus of rural development in developed countries is not poverty eradication. Unlike developed countries, rural areas in developing countries are characterised by poverty, small agricultural landholdings, primitive technologies, rural debt, ignorance, faulty agricultural policies, and poor implementation. Most of these countries were colonies of European countries that suffered a severe breakdown of rural economies due to the 'drain of resources'. Rural economic reconstruction by reforming and rejuvenating agriculture and local industries became the topmost priority of governments as the majority of the rural population was dependent on agriculture. Over a period of time, the focus has been shifted to social dimensions that include the eradication of poverty and the provision of basic amenities through state intervention (Woods, 2011); (Pain & Hansen, 2019).

Strategies of rural development vary from country to country depending upon the nature of the polity. Socialistic governments engage in direct state action by providing them with welfare, social security, and other benefits. Neo-liberal governments encourage the development of markets that can take care of rural development through market-based solutions such as entrepreneurship, competition, etc. Although the present strategy of rural development mainly focuses on provision of basic amenities, better livelihood opportunities, poverty alleviation, and infrastructure facilities through innovative programmes in most countries, this list is not exhaustive (Majumdar, 2002). At a general level, all efforts that aim at the development of rural areas must consider the following three conditions. They are: One, a clear discretion and construction of the problems faced by the particular rural area; Two, evaluation of the capabilities of that rural area to address those problems and Three, setting out a vision for the rural area and how it should become possible. These conditions are fundamental for the design and implementation of any rural development strategy.

Rural Development in India

India has been a land of villages since ancient times and will continue to be one in the future as well. Villages were the basic unit of administration and remained the backbone of the Indian economy. Around 65% of India's population lives in villages and is engaged in agricultural and allied activities. In a predominantly agricultural country like India, the development of rural areas is an absolute necessity for

overall development. Despite of the dramatic increase in the contribution of secondary and tertiary sectors to GVA, agriculture is still a dominant sector of the Indian economy. Around 60% of India's workforce is employed in agriculture and allied activities and the share of the primary sector to India's GVA is 18% (Economic Survey, 2021-2022). Hence, the presence of a vibrant agriculture sector is a prerequisite for rural development. But unfortunately, the agricultural sector in India is in crisis. Despite of the positive growth of agriculture and allied sectors in the past two financial years (3.6% in 2020-21 and 3.9% in 2021-22), farmers in India are still facing challenges like high input costs, inadequate subsidies, and minimum support prices, lack of encouragement to crop diversification, farm debt, absence of a state of the art processing, storage and marketing facilities, complicated and rigid government regulations, adverse and erratic weather conditions, etc. Moreover, the expansion of urbanisation into rural areas has caused a shrinking of agricultural land and productivity. The promotion of secondary and tertiary sectors by governments is also another reason for the neglect of the primary sector. These are the major factors behind the underdevelopment of rural areas in India. The rural areas suffer from poverty, illiteracy, low productivity, overpopulation, unemployment, lack of medical facilities, and lack of essential minimum living standards. Due to all these problems in rural areas, there is growing migration toward urban areas. However, since independence, many efforts have been made at individual and governmental levels to improve the living standards of rural people.

Of the individual efforts at rural development, the concept of rural development given by Mahatma Gandhi Ji is of particular significance. Mahatma Gandhi attached so much value to villages and their development for overall national development. He followed a holistic and people-centered approach towards rural development. He believed that India's progress lies in the development of its villages, development of the rural economy, development of small-scale industries, and the development of villagers' skills, as the majority of the population in India lives in villages. He wanted to build India from the lowest and the weakest level. So, he asked people to work for village reconstruction. He gave a famous statement in his book *Harijan* regarding the development of villages.

Rural Development as Sustainable Development

Rural areas are no longer backward when compared to urban areas in terms of the exploitation of natural resources for development. Rural areas are now open to many sectors such as tourism, mining, leisure activities, etc. There is increased mobility of information technologies and human resources that resulted in economic development, social transformation, and community development. All these factors, directly and indirectly, contributed to the deterioration of the environment and questioned the very logic of development at the expense of nature and natural resources (Guha, 2014). Sustainability and sustainable development became important words in development literature that view all the rural development efforts from an environmental perspective. In this sense, rural areas are considered no longer safe as they are facing challenges like land degradation, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, poverty, social exclusion, environmental injustice, etc. All these issues necessitated the concept of sustainable rural development.

Sustainable rural development is "the call of maintaining sustainability and continuity of rural areas while exploiting their opportunities in the global scene" (Akgun, Baycan, & Nijkamp, 2015). It involves a holistic approach that advocates for the promotion of socio-economic and technological development efforts in a responsible manner that doesn't lead to the deterioration of environmental resources. This approach has become popular with the Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Governments at the national and state level in India have begun devising means of incorporating the goals of sustainable rural development approach in their development programmes.

Rural Development Programmes in India

But even after implementing the Panchayati Raj Act in India, panchayats are still not functioning properly as a local self-governance system. Some of the reasons are the lack of adequate funds, lack of accountability, interference of area MPs and MLAs in the functioning of *Panchayats*, proxy representation in the case of women and S.C./STs representatives, respectively, and lack of participation of people in the functioning of panchayats. Although the central and state governments have introduced various schemes and projects for the development of villages, the basic needs of villagers such as food, clothing, and shelter have not been fulfilled. Some difficulties in rural development are:

- The financial, manpower, and managerial resources for implementing rural development programs are inadequate.

- Lack of awareness and knowledge leads to inadequate participation of rural people in plans, schemes, and rural development programs.
- Lack of technical knowledge creates a hurdle in implementing various development programs.
- Even after various programs launched by the government for rural development like Provision of Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA), National Ru-urban Mission, etc., migration of people continues from rural to urban areas.

In order to accelerate the process of rural development, these problems must be addressed. Much needs to be done and it is possible only if the governments work in this direction. The Rural Development Department of the Government of India is entrusted with such responsibility of ensuring rural development by devising and implementing rural development schemes.

Concept of Model Village

Adarsh Gram or Model Village is an ideal village in all aspects of rural life that can be replicated by other villages. A conceptual model village is "a village where villagers act as decision-makers, partners and beneficiaries with multi-sectoral, multifunctional and integrated development to achieve holistic and sustainable development backed up by futuristic and progressive skills leading to higher levels of productivity and improvement in overall quality of life" (Prasad, 2016). It aims to ensure the overall development of the village, improvement in the standard of living and quality of life of all sections of the population, and make them self-sufficient by providing them all the basic facilities like health, education, sanitation, employment, communication, internet, electrification and technological advancements in agriculture.

The concept of Model Village is not new. Since pre-independence India, this concept of the Model Village exists in the works of Mahatma Gandhi's "Wardha village (Sevagram)," and Rabindra Nath Tagore's "Sriniketan". Mahatma Gandhi was a champion of participatory development at the grassroots level and advocated the concept of a self-sustained, self-reliant, and self-contained village. He wanted village swaraj (self- rule). He created a village called Sevaram near Wardha and implemented the concept of rural reconstruction on an experimental basis (Jana, 2017). Recent "Info village" model by M.S. Swaminathan research foundation are examples of Model Villages (N. Chandra Hema Sarat, 2017). N. Viswanadham and S. Vedula described a model village as a smart village that delivers a bundle of services to its residents and businesses effectively and efficiently (Viswanadham N., 2010). Dr. Pritesh Shukla has described the features of a model village in terms of a smart village. He said that "the smart village is just like a smart city which is interactive and multi-functional. There should be active participation of people in various activities. A smart village is one that will automatically link-local production with local procurement and local distribution. A smart village will also have power, knowledge, healthcare, technology, entrepreneurship, and internet connectivity" (Shukla, 2016). In simple words, a model village is an ideal rural area that exhibits progress in all vital aspects required for a decent standard of living for rural people.

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