

Chapter-4

Change and Development in Rural Society

Facts That Matter

Indian society is primarily a rural society

- The majority of India's people live in rural areas, approx. 67 per cent.
- They make their living from agriculture or related occupations. This means that agricultural land is the most important productive resource for a great many Indians.
- Land is also the most important form of property. But land is not just a 'means of production' nor just a 'form of property'.
- Nor is agriculture just a form of livelihood. It is also a way of life. Many of our cultural practices and patterns can be traced to our agrarian backgrounds.
- For example, most of the New Year festivals in different regions of India – such as Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Bihu in Assam, Baisakhi in Punjab and Ugadi in Karnataka to name just a few – actually celebrate the main harvest season and herald the beginning of a new agricultural season.

Agriculture and Culture

- There is a close connection between agriculture and culture.
- The nature and practice of agriculture varies greatly across the different regions of the country. These variations are reflected in the different regional cultures.
- One can say that both the culture and social structure in rural India are closely bound up with agricultural and the agrarian way of life.

Rural life

- Agriculture is the single most important source of livelihood for the majority of the rural population. But the rural is not just agriculture.
- Many activities that support agriculture and village life are also sources of livelihood for people in rural India. For example, a large number of artisans such as potters,

carpenters, weavers, iron smiths, and goldsmiths are found in rural areas.

- Rural life also supported many other specialists and crafts persons as story-tellers, astrologers, priests, water-distributors, and oil-pressers.
- The diversity of occupations in rural India was reflected in the caste system, which in most regions included specialist and 'service' castes such as Washermen, Potters, and Goldsmiths.
- Some of these traditional occupations have declined. But increasing interconnection of the rural and urban economies have led to many diverse occupations.
- Many people living in rural areas are employed in, or have livelihoods based in, rural non-farm activities. For instance, there are rural residents employed in government services such as the Postal and Education Departments, factory workers, or in the army, who earn their living through non-agricultural activities.

Agrarian Structure

- Depends upon the land holdings amount of land a person holds.
- There is unequal distribution of land some people have lots of land and some people don't have any.
- The agriculture structure is how the land holdings have been distributed among people.

Types of Landholdings:

1. **Large Landers:** Own large amount of land, earlier known as zamindars.
2. **Medium landowners Small landowners:** Have small amount of land and can make a profit.
3. **Marginal landowners:** These along with small family grow just enough for consumption of their family and do not have enough land to get surplus to sell in the market.
4. **Landless landowners:** Have no land of their own, work for others.
5. **Tenants:** Take land on rent and give the landowner a share of the profit.

Positions of women

- Woman's position is low, they can't own land.
- Women are usually excluded from ownership of land, because of the prevailing patrilineal kinship system and mode of inheritance.
- They have equal property rights as the son but they are woman or they are scared to

voice their oppose.

Class and Caste Structure in Rural Areas

Interrelated

- Upper caste were considered to be upper class. But the issue in rural areas is complex
- Brahmins are the top most caste but not necessarily the wealthiest. The kshatriyas are upper caste as well as upper class.

Dominant Caste

- After independence, land reforms introduced land ceiling. It set a limit of land holding by each individual.
- Large land owners sold away their land to medium land owners as they moved to urban areas to set up factories.

Proprietary Caste

- Upper caste, rich people, large and mediums land owners controlled the resources and labour force in that particular areas.
- Begar-bonded Labourers: were illiterate and did not know how to do any skilled work.

Zamindari System

- Zamindars collected the kind- rice, wheat, sugar etc. as tax from the farmers of the village
- For maximum exploitation of farmers, zamindars collected extra taxes.

Royal/Raiyat/Ryotwari System

- One member of the family (joint family) was selected to collect the tax from the family and give it to the British.
- There was some exploitation, but very less-It was very successful in some areas.

Mahalwari System

- Headman of the village collected the tax - It was much better than zamindari system.

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- There were three problems the Ministers often faced:

1. Poverty
2. Imported grains
3. Less productivity

Poverty and less productivity was during colonial period and imported grains was after independence. They came up with land reforms to solve these problems as well as to ensure social justice.

- After independence the gap between the rich and poor was very large.

Abolition of Zamindari System/intermediary System

- The exploitation of farmers by zamindars led to a lot of problems.
- The first land reform introduced was that the farmers would directly pay their tax to the government.

Land ceilings (productive land law ceiling, unproductive-high)

- A limit as to how much land a person could own.
- If a farmer had 300 acres of land, 80 acres were given to the small, marginal farmers as 220 was the limit.
- The government imposed upper limit on the amount of land a person can own.
- Ceiling varied region to region depending upon how fertile the land is.
- In a productive area there was low ceiling limit, more land was taken from farmers.
- It was a big task for the government to visit each region and judge the ceiling according to facility level.
- In some areas it was successful, but not so in some areas due to **Benami transfer** the landlord wanted land to himself, thus he would put the land in the name of the women, accountant, distant relative only on paper it was so, but actually he owned the land.

Tenancy Reforms

- Tenants are those who take land on rent.
- If the land has good productivity, the landlord wanted the land back.
- Government made lives of tenants secure by
 - (i) Security for tenants: For certain period, owner cannot take the land back, before

period.

(ii) Regulation of rent: A certain amount of the profit was to be given to the landlord either he would pay or in the beginning he would not agree to paying money.

- Even if he made a loss and said he would give it to the landlord he would have to pay.
- One of the policies was that if the tenant showing production over a period of time and was regular in giving a part of his profit, he would buy the land.
- If he was unable to pay, at times the landlord could take away the land from the peasant.

Consideration of Land Holdings

- The whole rural area was divided into sectors and each sector had various facilities provided by the government.
- A person from another sector could not use the facilities of another sector. They have to use the facilities of their sectors.

Land Records

- During the colonial rule, there were barely any records.
- Later they were registered, maintained and was computerized.

Green Revolution

- Green revolution was a revolution started in 1960's and 70's had a drastic change in the productivity.
- Introduced in those areas where there was a possibility of a water source and fertile land.

Social Consequence of Green Revolution

Advantages:

- First time India started exporting grains (rice and wheat), surplus.
- It was a great achievement for government but also for Indian scientists who created seeds.
- Employment opportunities increased, demand for agricultural labour went up.

Disadvantage:

Increased inequality in rural areas

- Only rich landlords who could afford the HYV seeds could make profits.

- Lower class (agri- subsistence) did not have resources to produce surplus to sell in market for profit.

- Land taken away from tenants by landowners as they wanted to make extra profit rather than paying them. This was the displacements of tenants.

Displacement of service class

- All work which used to be done by manual labour was replaced by machines (harvesters etc.)

Rich became richer and poor became poorer

- Payment was shifted from land to cash.
- Instead of increase in wages, they decreased as there was so much demand for agricultural labour.

Green Revolution in Arid Areas

- The crops shifted to multi crop from new crop. So that the profit was more (irrigation, HYV seeds).
- If the crop failed the farmer had nothing to fall back on in case of crop failure.
- Everything grown for commercial purposes.
- Increased insecurity of the farmer.
- It is divided into Andhra and Telengana. Andhra has two rivers - Krishna and Godavari Land is fertile. Landlords in Andhra Pradesh are prosperous.
- Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh is in the center of Telengana and all development is done there only. Farmers of Andhra have sold their products in Hyderabad.
- Different regions have regional inequalities like UP and Haryana.

Diversification

- There is a new class of people that has caused up entire pressure.
- Group of landowners who invest agricultural money into small factories, invest in machines.
- They started: sending their children to school in urban areas, providing education.
- The hybrid seeds, pesticides have an effect on ecology.

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- Fertility of soil is decreasing.
 - Farmers prefer organic farming or natural products.

Transformation of Rural Society

Several profound transformations in the nature of social relations in rural areas took place in the post-Independence period, especially in those regions that underwent the Green Revolution. These included:

- an increase in the use of agricultural labour as cultivation became more intensive;
- a shift from payment in kind (grain) to payment in cash;
- a loosening of traditional bonds or hereditary relationships between farmers or landowners and agricultural workers (known as bonded labour);
- and the rise of a class of 'free' wage labourers'.

The change in the nature of the relationship between landlords (who usually belonged to the dominant castes) and agricultural workers (usually low caste), was described by the sociologist Jan Breman as a shift from '**patronage to exploitation**'. Such changes took place in many areas where agriculture was becoming more commercialised, that is, where crops were being grown primarily for sale in the market.

Commercialisation of agriculture

- The transformation in labour relations is regarded by some scholars as indicative of a transition to capitalist agriculture.
- Because the capitalist mode of production is based on the separation of the workers from the means of production (in this case, land), and the use of 'free' wage labour.
- In general, it is true that farmers in the more developed regions were becoming more oriented to the market. As cultivation became more commercialised these rural areas were also becoming integrated into the wider economy.
- This process increased the flow of money into villages and expanding opportunities for business and employment.
- But we should remember that this process of transformation in the rural economy in fact began during the colonial period. In many regions in the 19th century large tracts of land in Maharashtra were given over to cotton cultivation, and cotton farmers became directly linked to the world market.

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- However, the pace and spread of change rapidly increased after Independence, as the government promoted modern methods of cultivation and attempted to modernise the rural economy through other strategies.
 - The state invested in the development of rural infrastructure, such as irrigation facilities, roads, and electricity, and on the provision of agricultural inputs, including credit through banks and cooperatives.
 - The overall outcome of these efforts at ‘rural development’ was not only to transform the rural economy and agriculture, but also the agrarian structure and rural society itself.

Alteration of rural social structure

Areas with rapid agricultural development

- One way in which rural social structure was altered by agricultural development in the 1960s and 1970s was through the enrichment of the medium and large farmers who adopted the new technologies.
- In several agriculturally rich regions, such as coastal Andhra Pradesh, western Uttar Pradesh, and central Gujarat, well-to-do farmers belonging to the dominant castes began to invest their profits from agriculture in other types of business ventures.
- There was rise of new entrepreneurial groups that moved out of rural areas and into the growing towns of these developing regions, giving rise to new regional elites that became economically as well as politically dominant.
- The spread of higher education, especially private professional colleges, in rural and semi-urban areas, allowed the new rural elites to educate their children – many of whom then joined professional or white collar occupations or started businesses.
- Thus, in areas of rapid agricultural development there has been a consolidation of the old landed or cultivating groups, who have transformed themselves into a dynamic entrepreneurial, rural-urban dominant class.

Areas like Eastern UP and Bihar

- The lack of effective land reforms, political mobilisation, and redistributive measures has meant that there have been relatively few changes in the agrarian structure and

hence in the life conditions of most people.

Kerala

- Have undergone a different process of development, in which political mobilisation, redistributive measures, and linkages to an external economy (primarily the Gulf countries) have brought about a substantial transformation of the rural countryside.
- Far from the rural being primarily agrarian, the rural in Kerala is a mixed economy that integrates some agriculture with a wide network of retail sales and services, and where a large number of families are dependent on remittances from abroad.

Circulation of labour

- The commercialisation of agriculture has led to the growth of migrant agricultural labour.
- The ‘traditional’ bonds of patronage between labourers or tenants and landlords broke down, and the seasonal demand for agricultural labour increased.
- In prosperous Green Revolution regions such as the Punjab, a pattern of seasonal migration emerged in which thousands of workers circulate between their home villages and more prosperous areas where there is more demand for labour and higher wages.
- Labourers migrate also due to the increasing inequalities in rural areas from the mid-1990s, which have forced many households to combine multiple occupations to sustain themselves.
- As a livelihood strategy, men migrate out periodically in search of work and better wages, while women and children are often left behind in their villages with elderly grandparents.
- Migrant workers come mainly from drought-prone and less productive regions, and they go to work for part of the year on farms in the Punjab and Haryana, or on brick kilns in U.P., or construction sites in cities such as New Delhi or Bangalore.
- These migrant workers have been termed ‘footloose labour’ by Jan Breman, but this does not imply freedom.
- On the contrary, landless workers do not have many rights, for instance, they are usually not paid the minimum wage. It should be noted here that wealthy farmers often prefer to employ migrant workers as can be paid lower wages.

Impact of larger scale circulation of labour

- Cultivation has become primarily a female task.
- Women are also emerging as the main source of agricultural labour, leading to the 'feminisation of agricultural labour force.'
- The insecurity of women is greater because they earn lower wages than men for similar work. Until recently, women were hardly visible in official statistics as earners and workers.
- While women toil on the land as landless labourers and as cultivators, the prevailing patrilineal kinship system, and other cultural practices that privilege male rights, largely exclude women from land ownership.

Globalisation, Liberalisation & Rural Society

- In late 80's and 90's globalisation came to India.
- This led to competition among farmers.
- The organisation in charge for rules and regulations was the WTO, which led rules regarding prices, wages, taxes, aspects of trading, reduction of barriers.
- Indian trades are facing competition. Fruits, vegetables, clothes whole structure of rural area changed.
- A new concept was introduced in rural areas known as 'contract farming'

Contract Farming

- The MNC's go to different villages and tell the farmers about their requirements.
- Some products which are popular such as potatoes, tomatoes, flowers, etc.
- The MNC's gave the Indian farmers seeds, fertilizers and the know how as to how they were to be used.
- These products were only produced for the MNC's either sold, made into sauces, jams, carved food (by being processed).
- The farmer is assured of an income and a profit.
- Very popular in some states (Punjab) and the land is fertile.

Disadvantages:

1. Farmers are growing the items, wanted by that MNC and if there is a crop failure there the farmer has nothing to fall back on.

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2. Insecurity among the farmers.
 3. Product will not be bought by MNC if product is not up to the mark. Only if it is up to the mark it is good.
 4. There is insecurity as there is total dependence on the MNC.
 5. We are moving away from production of grains, rice to producing tomatoes, potatoes.
 - Once you grow tomatoes etc you cannot go back to producing grains.
 - The knowledge that the traditional farmers have is of no use, as the know how about growing there crops is given by the MNC'S.
 - Ecologically the soil gets eroded not very feasible and people are switching to organic farming.

MNC'S as agents:

1. Now MNC's are providing seeds, fertilizers to the farmers.
Seeds etc are expensive but farmers have to buy them for contract farming.
2. Though the profits are high, the insecurities all is also high.
In case there is a crop failure, they do not have the government to fall back upon.
3. The government cannot give loans at low interest rates as the MNC's are induced and they take charge.

Farmers' Suicide-Small and Marginal Reasons:

1. The Green Revolution belt, small and marginal farmers wanted to increase productivity by increasing the use of advanced technology including tillers, tractors.
2. Unfortunately there may be a setback due to many reasons which can lead to farmer suicide.

Factors:

1. Withdrawal of subsidies and support price by government from farmers.
2. Now they have to borrow from other sources leading to debt traps. When they are unable to pay the money, at times they commit suicide.
3. Crop failure-Natural or manual failure, drought, heavy rain, pests, insecticides, etc.
4. Totally dependent on the market - when there is a crop failure, they have nothing to fall back on insecurity.
5. Besides production costs, there are other expenditures to be incurred. Education, dowry, medical care etc.