# Understanding Rural Society

## SEMESTER 1

# Rural Development

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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## COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course titled 'Undersatnding Rural Society' offers an in-depth exploration of rural life, focusing on the structures, institutions, cultures, and transformations that define rural societies. It examines key aspects such as caste, class, gender, economy, livelihoods, so on and so forth in rural areas. It is a 4credit course comprising of 14 units.

Unit 1, Introduces key concepts, characteristics of rural areas, its deifference from and inderdependence on urban society ;Unit 2 discusses about Rural demography by higlighting on the sex and age composition of rural population in india, fertility, mortality, migration patterrns, marital status etc; Unit 3 discusses the roles of caste, class, family, and kinship in shaping rural communities; Unit 4 explores traditional and modern forms of power and leadership in rural settings; Unit 5 discusses the influence of religion and rituals on rural life, values, and institutions; Unit 6 discusses the basic features of rural economy, the primary economic activities, land use, and occupational patterns in rural areas. Unit 7 explains the emerging changes in the rural economy like growth of non-farm sector, rural urban migration etc; Unit 8 discusses the major issues and challenges of rural economy such as poverty, unemployment, indebtedness, and agrarian distress; Unit 9 discusses the issues pertaining to access to education, literacy levels and skill developmentin rural regions.Unit 10 deals with healthcare services, nutrition status, and public health issues in rural areas; Unit 11 explores the interdependence of natural resources and rural livelihoods; Unit 12 highlights the various social issues and problems in rural society ; Unit 13 discusses the socio-economic, political, and cultural changes affecting rural life; Unit 14 discusses the roles of government and government agencies, NGOs, and other local bodies in rural development.

While going through the units, you will find that unit is further divided into certain sections and sub-sections, wherever necessary, for your better understanding. Again, the units carry certain *activities* after a particular section where needed. These “ACTIVITIES” will provide you the opportunity to practically apply your own thoughts based on the knowledge gained from reading the text in a particular section. Besides, in order to give you additional information on certain relevant topics, you will find a category called “LET US KNOW” after the sections in each unit. Another category that has been included at the end of each section of a particular unit is “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS”. The purpose of this category is to help you to asses for yourself as to how thoroughly you have understood a particular section. You may then match your answers with “ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” given at the end of each unit. The section “FURTHER READING” in each unit contains the names of a few books which you might want to consult if you are intereted in learning more elaborately about the concepts discussed in a particular unit. Furthermore, the category called “MODEL QUESTIONS” is intended to give you a hint of the type of questions you are likely to get in the examination.

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# UNIT- 1: UNDERSTANDING RURAL SOCIETY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


1.1 Learning objectives

1.2 Definition and characteristics of rural society

1.3 Rural social institution and practices

1.4 Peasant economy

1.5 Changing rural structure

1.6 Rural Urban interdependence

1.7 Let us sum up

1.8 Answers to check your progress

1.9 Further reading

1.10 Model questions


## 1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of this unit is comprehending the term rural society and rural social structure. This chapter explores the distinct characteristics of rural society and distinct social institutions and its practices that prevail within rural society or rural social structure. The unit also discusses the peasant economy within the rural social structure and its core characteristics. Lastly the chapter focuses on changing pattern of rural social structure and influential factors behind it. By the end of the unit readers will able to –

- Define the concept of rural society and its characteristics.
- Understand the rural social structure
- Examine the role of social institutions and practices in rural society.
- Elucidate the peasant society and its characteristics.
- Grasp the changing pattern of rural social structure.
- Understanding the differences between urban and rural society

## 1.2 DEFINITION OF RURAL SOCIETY

The term "rural" originated from the Latin words "ruralis" meaning countryside or open land. In general rural society refers a demographic entity encompassing features of small population, close relationship among individual and nature, where population depends on agriculture in terms of economy. However, sociologist doesn't consider rural society merely a demographic or geographic entity, rather it is a board area of study that have distinct socio-cultural system shaped by values, norms and pattern of social life. Different sociologist from different time period conceptualised rural society through distinct perspectives. Let us look on it

### 1.2.1 Ferdinand Tonnies

Through his seminal work Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft (1887) Tonnies made a classic base on understanding rural society. The term Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft are two ideal type to understand community and society. Gemeinschaft (community) refers small, kin based cohesive group made up of personal and enduring relationship rotted in sense of belongingness, shared traditional values, norms and belief. In contrast Gesellschaft (society) refers modern society having urban and industrial characteristics made up of impersonal and contractual relationship rotted in sense of self-interest. Here social cohesion maintains through formal institution, codified law and market based interaction. To understand the rural context, Tonnies framework stands as an instrument to differentiate the rural and urban society. The ideal type Gemeinschaft reflect the rural society and its core characteristics. It encompasses high level of social integration among people, mutual understanding, collective moral consensus, kin-based relationship among people. Additionally, here economy is closely related with subsistence agriculture, horticulture and small scale production. This conceptualization has been followed by later sociologist to conceptualised rural society and identify its key characteristics.

### 1.2.2 Emile Durkheim

The founding figures of sociology, Emile Durkheim made his significant contribution to understanding rural society, using concept or theories including social solidarity and division of labour. To understanding different form of society Durkheim introduced two form of social cohesion namely, mechanical and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity encompasses small, homogenous communities sharing similar occupation, values, norms and belief such as traditional rural society. In contrast organic solidarity found in complex societies with high degree of division of labour and interdependence. In the conceptualization of rural society, characteristics of mechanical solidarity aligned with it. In this particular setting of society collective conscience is strong and pervasive. Here individual behavior guided through shared values, norms and moral orders and social control is largely informal and law tends to be repressive. Moreover, here division of labor is limited and primary economic activity is subsistence agriculture. Rather than interdependence, closed integration is prevail among members of the society. However, this social setting resist towards change and have limited adaptation to modern economic and political transformation. As society grew in size and complexities mechanical solidarity gives way to organic solidarity, where cohesion is maintained through interdependence among people with specialised roles (Durkheim, 2014). Durkheim this theoretical insight give a new way to sociologist and scholar understanding the process of social changes in rural areas and its nature.

### 1.2.3 Max Weber

Max Weber the classical sociologist doesn't directly contribute towards treaties of rural society, however, his work such as social action, authority structures, and the relationship between economy

and culture offer a comprehensive ideas for interpret rural structure or society. Weber's typology of authority although highly relevant for understanding power structure, it can also use to understand rural society. The type of traditional authority highly relevant in pre-industrial or rural context where long-standing customs, hereditary status, and community norms legitimised the leadership. This authority often embodied by village headman, landlords, elders and so on. It reinforcing a social order rooted in tradition rather than codified law.

### 1.2.4 Sorokin, Zimmerman & Galpin

Pitirim A. Sorokin, Carle C. Zimmerman, and Charles J. Galpin were pioneering figures in the establishment of rural sociology as a distinct field in the early 20th century. They viewed rural society as spatial, demographic and occupation setting characteristics by small size, low density of settlement pattern, homogenous identity and tradition- oriented. In economic context rural society primarily dependent on agriculture, fishing, and forestry. Their key contribution to study rural society was rural-urban continuum in which they argued communities could be placed along a continuum based on variables such as population density, occupational diversity, mobility, and the degree of formal institutionalisation. This new insight challenge the earlier rigid dichotomy of rural and urban. Their works reflect a new path in which interdependence present between rural and urban areas, particularly through flows of goods, services, people, and ideas. Additionally they demonstrated rural life was not static rather they are transform under the influence of technological change, migration, and market integration. This framework relevant for understanding rural society and rurality with due course of time.

Based on the discuss we can identify the characteristics of rural society-

- Population density of rural society is low as compared to urban society.

- Economy of rural society predominantly depends on subsistence agricultural production.
- Social structure of rural society is traditional rotted in norms, customs, practice and belief.
- Occupational homogeneity prevails in rural society.
- Mutual understanding and close community ties prevail among rural social life.
- The pace of social and economic changes tends to be slow as compared to cities.
- Mechanical solidarity exists in rural social life.

## 1.3 RURAL SOCIAL INSTITUTION AND PRACTICE

Social institutions are integral part of rural social structure as it form the backbone of rural life. The rural social institution and practice generally refers organised system and pattern that regulate the rural social life. Sociologist Mac Iver and Page often recognised the importance of social institutions to fulfil societal needs by offering organized pattern for group behavior (Mac Iver and Page, 1950). Rural social institutions of India primarily rooted in culture, norms, values, moral orders and so on. Hence, M. N. Srinivas mentioned institutions of Indian rural society are culturally specific (Srinivas, 1966). Caste, family, kinship, religion, education, local governance, economic organization etc are dominant social institutions of Indian society. Alongside these institutions maintain their everyday practices through rituals, festivals, hierarchy, agricultural routine, informal norms, sign and symbols and so on that sustain community life within rural context. Moreover, these institutions also deeply embedded with socio-economic and cultural fabric of rural society. To understand how social order reproduce within rural society, how cultural values are transmitted and society adapt change, sociologist study different institutions. Srinivas (1952, 1966) works on caste institutions highlight its centrality in structuring of rural social life. His seminal ethnographic work *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (1952) Srinivas introduce two innovative theoretical concept namely "Sanskritization" and "Dominant Caste" to understand rural social life and

practice of caste institution. Srinivas demonstrated caste as an institution in Indian society encompasses both the characteristics including ascriptive and dynamic institution. Ascriptive because it assigned status, occupation and marriage network among people. And dynamic because it adapt socio-economic and political transformation. Srinivas mentioned "rural caste is not an isolated cultural relic but an evolving system" (Srinivas, 1976). In his field work on Rampura village, Srinivas illustrated how caste regulated village governance, resource allocation, dispute resolution, and rituals. Moreover, his concepts of Sanskritization and dominant caste often showed how through imitating customs, rituals and lifestyle of upper caste and through acquiring numerical strength, education and political power lower caste sought upward mobility. Even in the post-independence era, rural caste remained a powerful determinant of access to resources, education, and political representation.

To understand the family and kinship institutions and its practices in Indian rural life Iravati Karve made her significant contribution. She argued kinship structure formed the backbone of Indian rural social organization. Within this structure marriage alliance and rules and lineage play central role in regulating economic, ritual, and political life (Karve, 1953). She categorised Indian kinship organization into four zone based on linguistic and geographical division. These are the Northern Zone (Indo-Aryan), Southern Zone (Dravidian), Central Zone, and Eastern Zone. These four zone has distinct kinship terminology, marriage practices, descent rules, inheritance and post marital residence. Karve (1953) discussed family was not merely domestic unit but a social institution embedded in a larger kinship network. She discussed about two types of family which refers distinct characteristic of both rural and urban society. These are joint family and nuclear family. She argued joint families highly visible in agrarian, patrilineal communities of rural Indian and in contrast nuclear family are more visible in urban industrial society. In rural setting joint families ensured the collective ownership of land, pooling of labour, worship the same deity and maintenance of social status. Additionally, Karve discussed two family system namely patrilineal and matrilineal systems. In patrilineal families'

lineage and property passed through male line, for instance patrilineal joint family in North India. Contrast in matrilineal families' lineage and property passed through female line, for instance Nair community of Kerela. Karve mentioned these systems are not static, it evolved with the influence of education, law, economy etc. Karve works highlighted kinship and family in rural society not only a biological relation but also it determines caste norms, controlling marriage alliance, property transmission, ritual obligations and so on. Through these rural social life determines land ownership, labour exchange, dispute settlement, and alliances. Therefore both the family and kinship are two central institutions of rural social setting.

Moreover, religious institutions and practices also central to maintain integration among rural population. These practices mainly include collective rituals, festivals, temple management. Yogendra Singh (1973) also mentioned although religious institutions reinforce social hierarchy, in the same vein it also create unity among the members of the society through shared beliefs and traditions. Moreover, in rural social life religious practices often tied with agricultural cycle. Distinct religious rituals performs during sowing and harvesting period, ensure social integration within village structure.

Despite this, political institutions significantly village panchayat historically been most important rural social institutions. It embodied with eldest village members, serve not only as a political organ but also a custodian of local norms. In rural context village panchayat play significant role in the matters including enforcing caste-based norms, customary laws, and behavioural codes, mediating disputes related to land, marriage, and resource use. And organising collective labour, managing common resources, and overseeing rituals and festivals. S.C. Dubey in his ethnographic work at Shamirpet village near Hyderabad mentioned village life as total system with the panchayat at its institutional core (Dubey, 1955). Dubey argued traditional village panchayat has close relation with institutions such as caste and kinship. Based on caste and kinship network leadership, membership and decision making authority was determined (ibid). in many villages panchayat was dominated by locally powerful caste group, that's

why Dube (1955) argued although the panchayat was theoretically representative, but in practice power asymmetries deeply embedded with it. Moreover, Dubey (1955) mentioned adaptive capacity of panchayat with many customary practices persisted in the day-to-day governance of villages, although legal reform introduce. Dubey demonstrated both tradition and modernity intersect with panchayat, as here formal rules often coexisted with customary practices, and decisions were often influenced by both democratic ideals and traditional authority.



**Check your Progress---- 1**

1. What is the definition of rural society?

.....

.....

2. What are the major social institutions of rural society?

.....

.....

## 1.4 PEASANT ECONOMY

Peasant economy is a core identity marker of rural society. The term 'peasant' originates from France word 'paisant', meaning country or land. Overtime, the word peasant refers to those who works as agricultural labour. As an economic system peasant economy generally described a system predominantly depends on agricultural production maintain through small scale, family- operated farms. However, rural sociologist doesn't view peasant economy merely as a economic arrangement, they demonstrated it as a social system in which kinship, community relations and cultural practices are embedded with it. Peasant economy encompasses characteristics of both capitalist and purely subsistence economy. Within this economic system production are used for both household consumption and also a portion supplied to the regional market to some extent. Hence

both economic rationality and traditional norm embedded with this economic system.

Russian agricultural economist and sociologist Alexander Chayanov's seminal work, *"Theory of Peasant Economy"* offer systematic explanation on peasant. Chayanov argued consumption- labour balance driver of peasant economy, meaning peasant's household needs primarily shaped the production system than the market competition. Moreover, he argued logic of profit maximization has less influence on peasant economy system. Additionally, he argued demographic composition has a huge influence on peasant economy in rural society. He stated household with many working-age members and fewer dependents could produce more surplus than those households having high dependent family members.

Karl Marx provides different view on peasant economy. According to Marx peasants are transitional class (Marx, 1976) because their existence shaped by feudalist and capitalist. Marx discussed about peasant economy through his framework of historical materialism and class relation under capitalism. Marx viewed peasantry as a part of pre-capitalist mode of production exhibit features of owned small plot of land and family members direct engagement with cultivation with production primarily used for subsistence. But under capitalist system peasantry were unrecognized under its commodity relation, market dependency and growth of large-scale capitalist agriculture. Moreover, unlike industrial workers peasant has no collective organization and class consciousness, hence Marx considered 19th century peasant from France as "a sack of potatoes". As peasant resided in rural areas, focusing more on household production and consumption and also politically fragmentated which limited their ability to act as a unified revolutionary class. In his work *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) Marx stated peasant were manipulated by ruling power. Marx' analysis on peasantry later influenced the debates on agrarian change, class differentiation etc.

In Indian context sociologist D. N. Dhanagare made his substantial contribution to peasant economy by arguing peasant economy not a static and subsistence-based system, but a dynamic arena shaped by class

relations, caste hierarchies, and the influence of the state and market forces. Dhanagare discussed "dual character" of peasant economy. One is rooted in traditional modes of production, kinship ties, and community-based reciprocal arrangements and other is rooted on increasingly integrated market networks, money-lending systems, and political movements (Dhanagare, 1983). This integration further lead to subordination of peasant within exploitative structure determine through mechanism like landlordism, bonded labor and indebtedness. Dhanagare also emphasis on regional diversity in the context of peasant economy. He argued ecological variation, distinct cropping pattern, distinct caste configuration, colonial policies produce different agricultural system and production rate across India. In his work *Peasant Movements in India, 1920-1950* (1983) drew an idea of "peasant consciousness". He stated cultural values, caste norms, political mobilization etc aligned with economic deprivation of peasant which further shape their collective action. In this work Dhanagare showed peasant movements not only a response towards economic exploitation, but also expressions of aspirations for dignity, autonomy, and social justice. Thus, Dhanagare illustration reflect peasant economy not only a economic system but also aligned with social and political fabric of the society.

S.C. Dubey the pioneering figure of Indian sociology made his significant contribution to rural society by examining peasant economic structure. His work on *Indian Village* (1955), demonstrated peasant economy embedded with local institutions of rural society including kinship networks, the panchayat system, religious practices and so on. That's why he considered peasant economy as an organic component of rural structure. Kinship ties not only provide emotional and social security to kin members, but also form the basis for cooperative labour arrangements such as reciprocal work exchange during sowing and harvesting seasons. Political institution panchayat also has significant function within peasant economic setting. It regulates access to communal resources like grazing lands, irrigation water, and village commons. Additionally, panchayat resolute disputes that arise over resource use. Similarly, religious practices, festivals, rituals are interwind with agricultural cycle, has influenced on timing of

cultivation, sowing and harvesting and foster a sense of mutual obligation, community solidarity and served as mechanisms for redistributing surplus within the village. Dube's work thus highlight peasant economy not only limited within production and exchange system but it extended towards social, cultural and political arena of rural structure.

By analysing all these works done by different sociologist we can identify some characteristics of peasant economy-

- Peasant society is subsistence oriented as its production primarily used for fulfil household needs rather than maximize profit.
- Structure of peasant society embedded with caste, caste, kinship, religious practices, local governance and so on.
- Household agricultural labour, labour exchange system, informal resource sharing are common survival strategies of peasant economy.
- Peasant economy relies on local traditional knowledge, animal and manual labor and limited use of modern technological input.
- Peasant economy doesn't follow the logic of profit accumulation rather focus on minimizing risk.
- Peasant economy encompasses the characteristics of intergenerational continuity of agricultural occupation.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - 2**

3. Who considered 19th century peasant of France as a sack of potatoes?

.....

4. Who wrote the book Peasant Movements in India, 1920-1950?

.....

5. Discuss the characteristics of peasant economy.

.....

.....

## 1.5 CHANGING RURAL STRUCTURE

Rural structure refers overall pattern, organization, institutional practice, social, economic and political life of rural society. Change is the universal process; over time every aspect and element of social and individual life has changed. Similarly, the structure of rural society undergoes change over past few decades, historical process, economic force, socio-political movement, technological advancement, cultural adaptation, western education shaped the changes in rural structure. Traditionally rural structure was identified through some typical features such as caste-based society, kinship and family based social organization, subsistence oriented agrarian economy, occupational division of labour, mechanical solidarity among people (Durkheim, 2014) and so on. With due course introduction of process like urbanization, industrialization, globalization, liberalization, economic development, state lead new policy transformed the socio-economic fabric of rural structure.

A significant evident of green revolution is considered as a turning point of changing rural structure of Indian society, as discussed by A.R.Desai (1969). Green revolution creates intensified class differentiation in rural areas. Green revolution introduces the practice of using high yield seeds, mechanisation in agriculture, irrigation facilities and more, however, these facilities often benefited the wealthier farmers and small, marginal farmers suffered in indebtedness and often out of agriculture. This emerging class differentiation in Indian rural structure further penetrates the capitalist relation within agricultural system. Despite this technological changes due to green revolution Desai argued that long run traditional rural structure underwent changes due to British introduce land tenure system, including three class i.e., Zamindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari. This system creates new form of stratification within Indian rural society. Nonetheless, political economy of the state further brought changes into rural structure. Development policies, credit institution, rural governance etc linked with class interest and benefited economically and politically powerful group of society, reinforcing class differentiation which were not present in traditional rural society. Within same

Marxist vein V. M. Dandekar discussed about expansion of non-farm rural employment further bring changes to the rural Indian structure highlighting shift from traditional agrarian based occupational structure to integration of rural economy into broader capitalist market.

Moreover, M. N. Srinivas conceptual framework of dominant caste, Sanskritization and westernization further bring changes to caste rigidity of rural society. By adopting cultural element from other social strata, educational qualification, political power etc people of a particular caste group able to change their status within the rural structure of the society. It further leads social mobility and shifts in value systems.

The process of migration and feminization of agriculture further accelerate the changes in rural social structure. With time passes societies are more oriented towards money economy, resulting individual engaged with distinct activities not limited to agriculture only. The process of urbanization and modernization further attracted individual from rural areas to urban centre for non-farm industrial activities. This process creates a new movement of people from rural areas to urban areas conceptualised as rural-urban migration process. As male figure of the family migrated to urban centre for non-farm activities, the left behind women of the household later singlehandedly maintains agricultural activities within village. This process introduces a new concept of feminization of agriculture which further attracted interest of sociologist to study this. This process changes traditional division of labor that prevailed in rural society. In addition to household and reproductive role village women now engage with traditional male driven tasks including ploughing, sowing, irrigation, and marketing.

Despite this, introduction of new legal institution also brings changes to the rural structure of Indian society. Traditionally, Indian society was maintained and regulated through local institution such as kinship, family and religion. But after independence introduction of new institutions including Panchayati Raj institutions bring changes to rural structure as discussed by S.C. Dubey in his work *Indian Village* (1955). With 73$^{rd}$ constitutional amendment rural governance structure underwent new changes, this amendment opened political space for women and marginalized group of

the society. Moreover, it introduced three tier system of Panchayat system made new strata within it.

Thus, the changes of rural structure of Indian society are the result of dynamic interaction between economic diversification, caste and class realignments, gendered labour shifts, and institutional reforms. These changes often create new opportunities for mobility and empowerment of the rural people irrespective of caste, class and gender.

## 1.6 RURAL URBAN INTERDEPENDENCE

Foundational reality of society constitutes through the concept of rural or rurality. With the time the emergence of urban centre often result from the rural areas later encompasses the characteristics of urban. Henceforth, there is always an interdependence exist between rural and urban society. Andre Gunder Frank's core-periphery theory often reveals the rural- urban interdependence. Frank's *core-periphery* theory discussed how through the unequal exchange and dependency of periphery region core country posits their economic development (Frank, 1967). In the context of rural urban interdependence urban centres are considered as core because political power, economic development, financial capital, non-farm productions are concentrated here. While, rural areas are considered as periphery as it provides supply of raw material, agricultural production and labour to the urban areas. Through the rural-urban migration process rural areas supply labours to urban industrial centre. However, This interrelationship between rural and urban not always exploitative; it also mutually constitutive. In terms of raw materials, agricultural food production, urban market depends on rural areas, while in turn, for manufactured goods and services, rural society depends on urban centre or the urban markets. Notwithstanding, these exchanges are typically unequal leading to rural underdevelopment and urban-centric growth, as urban centre accumulate profits through adding high value of rural raw materials in urban market helping in growth of financial capital while rural producers often remain trapped in low-income cycles, reinforcing the structural dependency on urban centres and market described by Frank. Thus, rural urban

interdependence reflects a persistent asymmetry that underpins spatial and economic inequalities in developing economies.

## 1.7 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN SOCIETY

Rural and urban society represent different kinds of characteristics that were shaped by distinct factors including population density, population size, infrastructure, economy, solidarity, cohesiveness, degree of development and many more. The classical work of Ferdinand Tonnies work of *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (association), Durkheim works on mechanical and organic solidarity highlight the different features of rural and urban society. These differences can be identified in below

- Population size and density: Unlike urban society population size is small in rural areas. Moreover, low population density, dispersed settlements, close relationship with nature and neighbour are core features of rural society. In contrast urban society having large population size and high population density, exhibit compact settlement. Additionally, physical landscape of urban society is dominate by built infrastructure than the natural environment.
- Occupational pattern: In rural society people are engaged with primary sector occupation including agriculture, horticulture, forestry, animal husbandry and related more. Therefore, occupational homogeneity is reflected here. On the other hand, in urban society people's occupation primarily related with secondary and tertiary sector including manufacturing, trade and service, industrial workers etc. exhibit occupational heterogeneity.
- Solidarity: In rural society social cohesion continue through mechanical solidarity. People were connected with each other through shared norms, belief, practices and values, having lower level of division of labour. In contrast organic solidarity present in urban society having specialization of work and high degree of

division of labour among people. Interdependence is crucial character of this society.

- Social stratification: Social stratification reflects in both society but the basis is different. In rural society stratification is mainly rigid and based on caste system, landownership and traditional hierarchy. But in urban society stratification is more fluid and determine by people's occupation, income level, educational status and political position.



## 1.8 LET US SUM UP

In so far, this unit offer detail understanding on the term rural and rural society through distinct sociological perspectives including Ferdinand Tonnies idea of Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, Emile Durkheim idea of mechanical and organic solidarity, Max weber idea of authority and Sorokin, Zimmerman & Galpin idea of rural-urban continuum. Moreover, this chapter also discussed about distinct social institutions that prevail in the rural social life, including caste, family, kinship, religion, political institution etc. and how Indian sociologist viewed these institutions applying their distinct conceptual and theoretical approach. Additionally, the chapter discussed about peasant economy as a core feature of rural social structure identifying its core characteristics. Over time distinct factor such as colonial policies, modernization, migration phenomenon, feminization of agriculture, new political institutions bring changes to the structure of rural social life. Lastly the chapter made differentiation of both rural and urban society based on their distinct characteristics.



## 1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Answer to Q. No. 1:** rural society refers a demographic entity encompassing features of small population, close relationship among individual and

nature, where population depends on agriculture in terms of economy. it is a board area of study that have distinct socio-cultural system shaped by values, norms and pattern of social life.

**Answer to Q. No. 2:** Major institutions of rural society are caste, family, kinship, religion and political institutions.

**Answer to Q. No. 3:** Karl Marx considered 19 th century peasant of France as a sack of potatoes.

**Answer to Q. No. 4:** D. N. Dhanagare wrote the book Peasant Movements in India, 1920-1950.

**Answer to Q. No. 5:** characteristics of peasant economy-

- Peasant society is subsistence oriented as its production primarily used for fulfil household needs rather than maximize profit.
- Structure of peasant society embedded with caste, caste, kinship, religious practices, local governance and so on.
- Household agricultural labour, labour exchange system, informal resource sharing are common survival strategies of peasant economy.
- Peasant economy relies on local traditional knowledge, animal and manual labor and limited use of modern technological input.



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## 1.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

1. Discuss how sociologist viewed rural society?
2. How kinship as an institution maintain its practice in rural society?

**B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300 words)**

1. Describe how D. N. Dhanagare and S. C. Dubey discuss peasant society?
2. Discuss distinct factors that shape the restructure of rural social structure?

3. How we made differentiation between both rural society and urban society?

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# UNIT 2: RURAL DEMOGRAPHY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Demographic Data Base

2.4 Growth and Distribution of Rural Population

2.5 Sex Composition of Rural Population

2.6 Age Composition of Rural Population

2.7 Marital Status of Rural Population

2.8 Fertility and Mortality Patterns

2.9 Migration Patterns

2.10 Literacy Rate

2.11 Demography and Development

2.12 Let Us Sum Up

2.13 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.14 Suggested Readings and References

2.15 Model Questions


## 2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of this unit is to discuss and understand the concept of rural demography and its growth and development in India. Studying rural demography in India is crucial for understanding population dynamics and planning for sustainable development in rural areas. Key objectives include analyzing population size, distribution, and composition (age, sex, literacy etc.), examining birth, death, and migration patterns, and understanding how these factors impact resource allocation, infrastructure development, and overall quality of life in rural communities. The unit begins with the basic understanding of rural demography from the sociological

perspective and proceeds to understand different demographic data base in relation to the growth and development of rural population followed by different demographic composition and its development in India.

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Familiarising you with the population scenario of rural India.
- Define rural demography and how it is related to development of India.
- Explain the growth and distribution of rural population in our country.
- Understand how demographic compositions of the rural populations have undergone changes.
- Discuss the changing pattern of migration.
- Analyse the changing nature of rural literacy and gender disparity.

## 2.2 INTRODUCTION

Basically, Rural demography refers to the statistical study of the characteristics, composition, and distribution of the rural population. In India, where nearly two-thirds of the population still resides in villages, rural demography plays a crucial role in planning and policymaking.

Rural sociology, a specialized branch of sociology, studies the social life of rural communities, focusing on their unique characteristics, challenges, and development processes. It examines the social structures, institutions, and cultural practices that shape rural life and explores the impact of social change and development on rural populations. Rural democracy is one of the significant areas of study of rural sociology. From the Sociological lens Rural demography in India view as a complex interplay of population distribution, social structures, and development patterns within rural areas. Key aspects include the significant proportion of India's population residing in villages, diverse social compositions, and the influence of factors like caste, religion, and traditional social institutions on daily life. Additionally, rural demography is shaped by factors like fertility and mortality rates, migration patterns, and the impact of development initiatives. Rural

demography is the study of human populations in rural areas, examining their size, distribution, composition, and changes over time.

The basic objective of this unit is to discuss the growth and development of Indian society through rural demography. To improve the quality of life and build modern nation, development of people through the development of human resources is very important. As we know, a country plans for the welfare and development its people only. While planning for overall development and for providing services to the people, information regarding the size, growth, composition and quality of population plays a significant role. Therefore, studying demography is crucial for development because it provides insights into population dynamics, which directly impact resource allocation, social policies, and economic planning. Understanding population size, structure, and distribution, including factors like birth rates, death rates, and migration, is essential for effective development strategies.

## 2.3 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA BASE

A demographic database is a structured collection of data about the characteristics of a specific population. It contains information such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, income, education, occupation, and other relevant factors. This data is used to analyze and understand population trends, demographics, and patterns, aiding in various applications like market research, policy-making, and social science research.

Let us discuss the different sources of demographic data available in India that are uses in making different developmental mission and vision. The sources of data generally utilized for demographic analysis are discuss briefly as follows.

### 2.3.1 CENSUS

The Census in India is generally conducted every ten years, making it a decennial exercise. The first Census was carried out in 1872, and since 1881, it has been conducted regularly every decade. As a comprehensive and reliable source of data, the Census offers

detailed information even at the village level.

It not only records basic demographic details such as age, sex, and marital status but also provides valuable insights into various socio-economic aspects. These include literacy and educational levels, occupation, industrial classification of the workforce, and the religion of the head of the household. Additionally, it captures information about household and community amenities like healthcare facilities, schools, banks, post offices, and housing conditions.

Furthermore, the Census includes data on the composition of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) households. This extensive information is crucial for policymakers and decision-makers, enabling them to plan and implement targeted development programs effectively. In India, Census 2011 is the 15th Census of India since 1872. According to Census 2011, 833 million Indians live in Rural areas, which is more than two-third of the total population.

## 2.3.2 CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM (CRS)

Civil Registration System (CRS), popularly known as birth and death registration system, is the recording of vital events i.e. Birth, Death & Still Birth under the statutory provisions on continuous and permanent basis. CRS falls under the Concurrent list of the Constitution of India at Sl. No. 30. Vital statistics generated from civil registration significantly contribute to the formulation of effective and efficient evidence-based policy across multiple sectors.

Objectives and uses of Civil Registration

The Civil Registration System has a three-fold objective: i). Legal ii). Administrative and iii). Statistical

These are detailed as below :

- In terms of legal and protective uses for individuals, birth registration records provide legal proof of place of birth and date of birth and death registration record required for settlement of

inheritance, insurance claims etc. Also, have evidentiary value under Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

- In terms of administrative uses, it is a legal register of locality wise births and deaths. Moreover, it is the main source of information on mortality, causes of death, to facilitate health planning and so on.
- Statistical Uses helps as a source of demographic data for socio-economic planning, development of health systems and population control. Data on fertility and mortality is essential in understanding the trends in population growth and is used for population projection.

Civil registration refers to the continuous and permanent recording of important life events such as births, deaths, marriages, and other related occurrences. It is a mandatory process carried out in accordance with the legal framework and regulations established by the government. These records are maintained as per official laws or administrative rules and are essential for both individual legal identity and national planning.

### 2.3.3 SAMPLE REGISTRATION SYSTEM (SRS)

This system was initiated by the Registrar General of India in 1969-70. The Sample Registration System (SRS) in India is a large-scale demographic survey designed to provide reliable annual estimates of birth rates, death rates, and other fertility and mortality indicators at both national and sub-national levels. It is a dual-record system, meaning it uses two independent methods to record vital events (births and deaths) and then matches and verifies the data to ensure accuracy and completeness. In essence, the SRS acts as a vital tool for understanding and monitoring the population dynamics of India, providing crucial data for policymaking and public health initiatives.

## 2.3.4 SAMPLE SURVEYS

Sample Survey in demography is a method of collecting data from a subset (sample) of a population to make inferences about the entire population's demographic characteristics. This approach is crucial for gathering information on births, deaths, migration, and other population changes, especially when a full census is impractical or too costly. Sample surveys in demography aim to provide estimates of demographic rates (like birth rates, death rates, migration rates) and characteristics (like age, sex, education) for a larger population based on data collected from a smaller, representative group.

Sample surveys are an effective method for collecting a wide range of information with reasonable accuracy, as they gather data from a representative portion of the population. These surveys have become a key tool for measuring various demographic and health-related indicators.

In India, since the 1990s, there has been a significant expansion in the availability of large-scale surveys. Notably, two rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-modeled after the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)-have been conducted. The first round (NFHS-1) took place in 1992-93, followed by the second round (NFHS-2) in 1998-99.

These surveys offer comprehensive data on areas such as fertility trends, family planning methods, infant and child mortality rates, usage of maternal and child health services, and children's nutritional status, along with general socio-economic and demographic characteristics of households. Data generated by the NFHS have proven invaluable for planners, policymakers, and researchers, contributing significantly to health and population policy formulation in India.

## 2.4 GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL POPULATION

The people are very important component of a country. India is the second most populous country after China in the world with its total population of 1,210 million (2011). India's population is larger than the total population of North America, South America and Australia put together. More often, it is argued that such a large population invariably puts pressure on its limited resources and is also responsible for many socio-economic problems in the country. Here, we will discuss the patterns of distribution, growth and composition of India's rural population.

The distribution of a population based on their respective places of residence serves as a significant indicator of economic and social characteristics. This aspect holds particular importance for a country like India, where the majority of people reside in rural areas.

| Table 1.1 Rural Population of India, 1901 - 2011 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Total Population | Rural Population | % of Rural Population |
| 1901 | 238,396,327 | 212,544,454 | 89.16 |
| 1911 | 252,093,390 | 226,151,757 | 89.71 |
| 1921 | 251,321,213 | 223,235,046 | 88.82 |
| 1931 | 278,977,238 | 245.521.249 | 88.01 |
| 1941 | 318,660,580 | 274,507,283 | 86.14 |
| 1951 | 361.088,090 | 298,644,156 | 82.71 |
| 1961 | 439,234,771 | 360,298,168 | 82.03 |
| 1971 | 548,159,652 | 439,045,675 | 80.09 |
| 1981 | 683,329,097 | 523,866,550 | 76.66 |
| 1991 | 846,387,888 | 628,836,076 | 74.30 |
| 2001 | 1,027,015,247 | 741,660,293 | 72.22 |
| 2011 | 1,210,193,422 | 833,087,662 | 68.84 |

*Source : Census of India*

Growth of Rural Population in India (1901-2011) :

The rural population of India has witnessed a steady increase over the past eleven decades, reflecting both natural population growth and demographic trends influenced by socio-economic changes.

In 1901, the rural population stood at 212.54 million, accounting for 89.16% of the total population. During the early decades, the proportion of rural population remained above 85%, with gradual increases in absolute numbers. By 1951, the rural population reached 298.64 million (82.71%), marking an increase of about 86 million over fifty years. The period from 1951 to 1981 saw a significant surge, driven by improvements in public health, agricultural expansion, and reduced mortality rates. In 1981, the rural population had risen to 523.87 million (76.66%), representing a growth of over 225 million in just three decades. By 2001, the rural population had crossed the 741.66 million mark, constituting 72.22% of the total population. The 2011 Census recorded 833.09 million rural residents, which represented 68.84% of the total population of 1.21 billion. Although the share of rural population in the total population has been gradually declining due to urbanization, the absolute rural population has consistently grown in every census period.

Overall, between 1901 and 2011, India's rural population grew by over 620 million people, even as the proportion of rural inhabitants declined by about 20 percentage points, highlighting the dual trends of population expansion and increasing urbanization.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - 1**

1. What is rural demography? Discuss its significance in understanding the socio - economic conditions of rural India.

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2. Describe the main sources of demographic data in India.

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## 2.5 SEX COMPOSITION OF RURAL POPULATION

This section outlines key aspects of demographic dynamics that shape population growth and distribution. Among these, the sex ratio stands out as a vital indicator, reflecting the level of gender equity in a society at a specific point in time. The sex ratio measures the number of males per 100 females, is an essential demographic indicator. Sex ratio is largely determined by factors such as differences in mortality between males and females, sex - selective migration, the ratio of males to females at birth, and, in some cases, variations in population counting by gender. In India, an imbalanced sex ratio has long been a pressing issue, affecting gender equality and social stability.

Table 1.2 :Sex Ratio in India (1901-2011)

| Census Year | Sex Ratio ( Females / 1000 Males) | Rural | Urban |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1901 | 972 | 979 | 910 |
| 1911 | 964 | 975 | 872 |
| 1921 | 955 | 970 | 846 |
| 1931 | 950 | 966 | 838 |
| 1941 | 945 | 965 | 831 |
| 1951 | 946 | 965 | 860 |
| 1961 | 941 | 963 | 845 |
| 1971 | 930 | 949 | 858 |
| 1981 | 934 | 951 | 878 |
| 1991 | 927 | 948 | 935 |
| 2001 | 933 | 935 | 903 |
| 2011 | 943 | 949 | 929 |

*Source - Census of India*

In 1901, the rural sex ratio was 979, indicating a higher proportion of females in rural areas compared to later years. From a regional perspective, India shows remarkable variation in sex ratios. Kerala records the highest sex ratio at 1,058 females per 1,000 males, largely due to long-standing

male-dominated migration to other regions for employment and the state's high literacy levels, which help keep female mortality rates low. States with relatively balanced sex ratios include Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Himachal Pradesh. In contrast, Haryana reports the lowest sex ratio, primarily because of widespread female foeticide driven by sex determination tests and a strong societal preference for male children. Other states with a significant shortage of females include Punjab, Sikkim, and Uttar Pradesh.

**CHILD SEX RATIO**

The child sex ratio refers to the number of females per 1,000 males in the age group of 0-6 years within a population. It's a key indicator used to assess gender balance and is particularly relevant when considering the well-being and future of a population. A declining child sex ratio can indicate gender-based discrimination and potential issues related to sex-selective practices. In India, the child sex ratio has been a cause for concern, with declining trends observed over the years, especially in the 0-6 age group. The 2011 census recorded a child sex ratio of 919 females per 1,000 males , a decline from 933 in 2001 in rural areas. As per the census 2011, Arunachal Pradesh has the highest child sex ratio among the Indian states i.e. 972 while Haryana has the lowest child sex ratio i.e.834 per thousand males.

Factors such as sex-selective abortions (where female fetuses are terminated due to societal preference for sons) and other discriminatory practices can contribute to a skewed child sex ratio.

The Indian government has implemented measures like the "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) campaign and the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PC&PNDT) Act to address the issue of declining child sex ratio and promote gender equality.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS -2**

3. Briefly discuss the factors responsible for the declining sex ratio in rural India.

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4. Define the concept 'child sex ratio'. What does the decline in the child sex ratio indicate?

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## 2.6 AGE COMPOSITION

Age composition is one of the fundamental characteristics of a population. It plays a key role in shaping not only the rate of population growth but also the socio-economic structure of society. By examining age composition, we can identify the proportion of the population that forms the labour force as well as the share that falls into the dependent category, such as children and the elderly, , helps to calculate the dependency ratio.

The distribution of population across different age groups is mainly influenced by three closely related factors: fertility, mortality, and migration. Fertility levels determine the number of births, directly affecting the size of the younger age group. Mortality rates influence how long people live, which affects both the working-age and elderly populations. Migration, depending on whether it involves younger workers, families, or retirees, can alter the age profile of both the sending and receiving areas. These three factors are interlinked and changes in one often cause shifts in the others, collectively shaping the overall age structure of a population.

## 2.7 MARITAL STATUS OF RURAL POPULATION

In India, one of the key factors contributing to the current high rate of population growth is the continued prevalence of a low age at marriage in

many states. Although the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1978 legally set the minimum marriage age for females at 18 years, in practice, the average age at marriage in several regions remains low, with some cases occurring even before the age of 15.

While there has been a gradual and consistent increase in the average age at marriage across all states, early marriages are still common, particularly in rural areas where social customs and traditional practices are more deeply rooted. The incidence of early marriage in rural India is significantly higher than in urban regions, where educational attainment, economic opportunities, and awareness tend to delay marriage age.

However, certain states such as Kerala, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir show a more uniform pattern of delayed marriages, with fewer cases of very young brides. In these states, early marriage is steadily declining in both rural and urban settings, largely due to better education, greater awareness of legal provisions, and changing socio-economic conditions. This regional variation highlights the role of social, cultural, and economic factors in shaping marriage patterns and, consequently, influencing population growth.

## 2.8 FERTILITY AND MORTALITY PATTERNS

In rural India, fertility and mortality patterns show a clear demographic transition, with both rates declining over time, though at varying paces across regions. While fertility rates are generally higher in rural areas compared to urban areas, they are still declining. Similarly, mortality rates, including infant and maternal mortality, have decreased, but disparities persist between rural and urban areas and across different states. Fertility rates tend to be higher in rural areas compared to urban areas due to various factors, including lower levels of education, limited access to family planning services, and socioeconomic conditions. Despite being higher in rural areas, fertility rates in rural India have been declining over time. This decline is influenced by factors like increased female education, access to family planning, and improved access to healthcare.

There are significant state-level variations in fertility rates. Some southern states have achieved replacement-level fertility (around 2.1 children per woman) or even below, while other states, particularly in the northern and eastern regions, still have higher fertility rates. Fertility is also influenced by socioeconomic factors such as education, religion, caste, and wealth, with rural women, women with less education, Muslim women, and women from scheduled castes and tribes generally having higher fertility rates.

In terms of mortality patterns, while the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has significantly declined in rural India, it remains higher than in urban areas. Factors like maternal health, access to healthcare, and socioeconomic conditions play a crucial role in IMR levels. Moreover, Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has also declined in rural India but remains higher than in urban areas. Access to quality antenatal and postnatal care, skilled birth attendants, and emergency obstetric services are critical in reducing MMR. Besides socioeconomic factors, access to healthcare, infrastructure, and environmental factors also play a significant role in mortality patterns.

India is undergoing a demographic transition, characterized by declining fertility and mortality rates. While rural areas are experiencing these changes, the transition is not uniform across the country. Factors like access to healthcare, education, and socioeconomic development play a crucial role in shaping the specific fertility and mortality patterns in rural India. Addressing these issues requires targeted rural health programs, women's empowerment, and better access to reproductive and child healthcare services.

## 2.9 MIGRATION PATTERN

Rural-urban migration is the movement of people from villages to cities in search of better living conditions, jobs, education, healthcare, and amenities. Push factors like poverty, lack of basic facilities, unemployment, and natural calamities drive people out of rural areas, while pull factors such as higher wages, better services, and improved infrastructure attract them to urban centres. This migration can be internal (within the country)

or external (to another country). While it often promises a better life, it can also lead to overcrowding in cities, urbanisation, and in some cases, worsened living conditions for migrants.

Some economists view migration as a process of labour reallocation in response to market demands, while others attribute it to a combination of "push" and "pull" factors-such as high man-land ratios and underemployment at the place of origin, and the attraction of higher wages, educational opportunities, and training facilities at the destination. In India, the most significant migration streams are rural-rural and rural-urban. According to the 1991 Census, 81.76% of rural-rural migrants were females, with marriage being the predominant reason for their movement from one rural area to another. In contrast, only 18.24% were males, often comprising labourers or members of service castes. Rural-urban migration, on the other hand, had a higher proportion of male migrants, primarily seeking employment. The reasons for migration are clear, that limited job opportunities in rural areas are pushing increasing numbers of people to cities and towns, contributing to the growth of slums and the broader phenomenon of urban expansion.

## 2.10 LITERACY RATE

Literacy plays a crucial role in both economic growth and social progress. It not only equips individuals with knowledge and skills but also influences demographic trends, particularly by lowering birth rates and, in turn, easing population pressure.

As per the 2001 Census, the overall literacy rate for the Indian population aged seven years and above was 65.38%, with a significant gap between the genders: 75.85% for males and 54.16% for females. Kerala continues to lead the nation in literacy, followed by Lakshadweep and Mizoram, while Bihar has recorded the lowest literacy rate.

Rural India's literacy rate has increased from 67.77% in 2011 to 77.50% in 2023-24.This progress is attributed to government initiatives and schemes aimed at improving access to education in rural areas, particularly

for women and girls. However, disparities persist between rural and urban literacy rates, with urban areas generally maintaining a higher literacy level.

States such as Bihar and Jharkhand remain at the bottom in female literacy levels. While these states have made measurable improvements in narrowing the gender gap, much remains to be done. Strategies must focus on increasing enrolment and retention of girls in schools, alongside strengthening adult literacy programs for women. This will require targeted government interventions, community involvement, and awareness campaigns to address socio-cultural barriers that still hinder women's education in rural and disadvantaged areas.

Ultimately, achieving higher and more equitable literacy rates is essential not just for individual empowerment but also for reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, enhancing employability, and fostering inclusive development across the country.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - 3**

5. How does literacy rate affect the growth of population?

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## 2.11 DEMOGRAPHY AND DEVELOPMENT

Demography and development are closely interlinked, as changes in population size, structure, and characteristics significantly impact a nation's development trajectory. Demography, the study of human populations, analyzes factors like births, deaths, migration, and age structure. These demographic shifts can influence economic growth, social progress, and political stability, making demography a key factor in understanding and shaping development strategies.

Population Growth and Development: Rapid population growth can strain resources, infrastructure, and social services, potentially hindering

development. Conversely, a stable or declining population can create opportunities for economic growth and social progress, especially if accompanied by investments in human capital.

Age Structure and Development: A young population can offer a demographic dividend, with a larger proportion of working-age individuals supporting a smaller dependent population. However, this requires investments in education and job creation to capitalize on this potential. An aging population may present challenges in terms of healthcare, pensions, and labor force participation.

Fertility and Mortality Rates and Development: Lower fertility rates, often associated with increased access to education and healthcare for women, can lead to better health outcomes for both mothers and children, contributing to overall development. Lower mortality rates, particularly among infants and children, also indicate improvements in public health and living conditions.

Migration and Development: Migration patterns can impact both sending and receiving countries. Emigration can lead to brain drain in some regions, while immigration can contribute to labor shortages in others. Understanding migration patterns is crucial for managing their social and economic consequences.

Demographic Transition and Development: The demographic transition, a shift from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates, is often linked to development. As countries develop, they tend to experience changes in population growth, age structure, and overall well-being.

In essence, demography provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities that countries face as they strive for development. Understanding demographic trends is essential for crafting effective policies and strategies that promote sustainable and inclusive growth.



## 2.12 LET US SUM UP

This unit explores the demographic features of rural India, examining population characteristics, trends, and their implications for development. It begins with the meaning of demography and the various data sources used for demographic studies, such as the Census, Civil Registration System (CRS), Sample Registration System (SRS), and sample surveys. The unit then analyses the size, growth, and distribution of the rural population at the national and state levels, including population density patterns. It examines the sex composition, highlighting gender imbalances, and the age composition, which reveals the proportion of dependent and working-age groups.

Further sections study the marital status patterns, followed by an overview of fertility and mortality trends, which are key indicators of population change. The migration patterns section focuses on rural-rural and rural-urban flows, along with the socio-economic factors driving them. Attention is also given to the size of rural settlements and how it relates to development, as well as the literacy rate and state-wise variations in rural literacy, with emphasis on gender gaps. The final section links demography with development, showing how population characteristics influence and are influenced by economic and social progress.

Overall, the unit provides a comprehensive understanding of rural population dynamics, essential for planning, policy-making, and addressing challenges like poverty, unemployment, and unequal development.



## 2.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Answer to the Q. No. 1 :** Rural demography is the statistical study of the size, structure, distribution, and changes in the population living in rural areas. It examines aspects like age, sex, literacy, fertility, mortality, and migration in rural settings.

Its significance lies in helping to understand the socio-economic conditions of rural India-such as employment patterns, educational attainment, health status, and availability of resources-which are essential for effective planning, policy-making, and targeted development programmes aimed at improving rural livelihoods.

**Answers to the Q. No. 2 :** The main sources of demographic data in India are:

1. Census of India - Conducted every 10 years; provides comprehensive data on population size, distribution, literacy, sex ratio, age structure, etc.
2. Civil Registration System (CRS) - Records births, deaths, and marriages continuously.
3. Sample Registration System (SRS) - Provides reliable annual estimates of birth rate, death rate, and infant mortality rate through surveys.
4. National Sample Surveys (NSS) - Collect data on socio-economic and demographic indicators through periodic large-scale surveys.
5. National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) - Focuses on health, fertility, family planning, and nutrition data.

**Answer to the Q. No.3:** The declining sex ratio in rural India is mainly due to:

1.Strong son preference leading to neglect or discrimination against girls.
2.Female foeticide and infanticide driven by social and economic pressures.
3.Higher female mortality from inadequate healthcare, poor nutrition, and unsafe childbirth practices.
4.Out-migration of males for work not balancing the overall gender gap due to persistent biases at birth.
5. Socio-cultural norms that undervalue the role of women in society.

**Answers to the Q. No. 4 :** Child sex ratio is defined as the number of girls per 1,000 boys in the age group of 0-6 years in a population.

A decline in the child sex ratio indicates a growing gender imbalance at birth or in early childhood, often caused by practices like sex-selective abortions, neglect of girl children, and unequal access to healthcare and nutrition. It reflects deep-rooted gender bias and poses serious social and demographic challenges for the future.

**Answer to your the Q. No. 5:** A higher literacy rate generally leads to slower population growth. Education, especially female literacy raises awareness about family planning, reproductive health, and the economic and social benefits of smaller families. Literate individuals are more likely to delay marriage, have fewer children, and invest more in their health and well-being. This reduces fertility rates, lowers birth rates, and helps stabilise population growth over time.



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## 2.15 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Short questions ( Answer each question in about 150 words)**

1) Explain the concept of migration?
2) What is fertility rate and mortality rate?

**B) Long Questions ( Answer each question in about 300 words)**

1) How does fertility rate and mortality rate affect the development of society?
2) Illustrate how demographic pattern is an important factor in the implementation of rural development programmes in India.

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# UNIT 3 - RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

## UNIT STRUCTURE


3.1 Learning objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 The Nature of Rural Social Structure

3.4 Caste

3.5 Family

3.6 Lineage and Kinship

3.7 The Village

3.8 Jajmani System

3.9 Let sum up

3.10 Further Readings

3.11 Answers to Check your Progress

3.12 Model Questions


## 3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- describe the characteristic features of Rural Social Structure and its elements.
- elucidate different components of Rural Social Structure, in particular, Family, Caste and Village.
- explain the changing nature of the structure of Family, Caste and Village.

## 3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the rural social structure which deals with India's diverse life. In developing country like India, the basic pattern of social life is rural, while in industrialized countries, the most prevalent style

is urban. Understanding of rural social structure is achieved from the work of social scientists, particularly sociologists and social anthropologists. Family, kinship, Caste and Class have been highlighted as the major components of rural social structure. These institutions, which are also present in urban areas, operate quite rigidly in rural communities. For example, India's urban family structure differs from the Rural.

Social, economic, and political institutions that incorporate all these elements comprise the Rural Social Structure. Consequently, a rural community exists independently as a distinct entity. Knowing what makes a rural community unique will help you form accurate perceptions of its social structure. This unit will help you understand the changing nature and dynamics of the structure of family, caste and village. Moreover, 'jajmani system' which is an important social institution, has also been discussed.

## 3.3 NATURE OF RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

In order to understand rural social structure, we must define and comprehend the meaning of social structure. Then we can connect this understanding to ethnographic descriptions of rural society in India.

### 3.3.1 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The basic understanding of Structure is the existence of the parts of the whole, i.e parts of the society. The term 'structure' was popularized by Herbert Spencer who was very much fascinated by the biological analogies which deals with the fact that as like the parts of the human body, society has its parts too and they should work together for the whole. In the discussion of structure there is a relatedness between Biology and Society.

Thus, there are different component units of the Social Structure starting from a person to the Social Institutions.

Individuals make up the human world. People engage in social interactions in order to satisfy their wants. They take on specific social roles and status as a result of this process, along with related

rights and responsibilities. Their societal conduct is shaped and linked to specific standards and principles, offering them direction while interacting with others. All these roles-responsibilities, rules, norms, values, standard and principles which govern the relationships and activities constitute the structure of society. For example: The standard way of our behavior towards elders-teachers-parents which are set in the specific society is the society's Social Structure.

Social Structure helps in shaping social interactions, create moral guidelines carrying different believes, values and norms. Some examples of Social Structure are Family, Economy, Polity, Education, Religion etc. If we see, in family all the relationships are clearly defined and behaviors of the members are predefined as family carries specific rules and principles which constitute the Society's structure. Likewise, Religion also offers morals and guidelines or collectiveness for its members who create the society and which are the structure of the society. In broader sense Social Structure of a society includes the study from this abstract arrangement of the society to the groups, communities, associations etc. In this context Morris Ginsberg, a British Sociologist mentions that Social Structure is the complex of principal groups and institutions which constitute a society. Here, the institutions govern people in doing their works, so the institutions work as the base or structure of the society. Again, Ogburn and Nimkoff mentions that in a society, the Organization of a group of persons is its Social Structure.

Thus, the term social structure is used by Sociologists to describe the inter-connectedness, interdependence and interrelationships between the various facets of society. Altogether, Social Structure is a framework consisting of social institutions, social practices and social groups. Every society is made up of the same components. As a result, all societies have various groups, communities, associations and institutions but each society has its own distinct group dynamics and composition.

### 3.3.2 RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Rural Social Structure can be defined by all the components discussed above in the discussion of Social Structure. Rural Social Structure is formed by all social institutions present in rural which govern people's lives-relationship and activities, all the practices and its governing norms and principles, Social Groups etc. Rural social structure connects the social and economic lives of people living in rural areas, acting as the fundamental machinery of the rural social system. The major Social Structure of rural social system are the family, the village community, Religion and caste. Understanding the nature of society is essential to understanding this social structure and all of its operations. A society can be classified into multiple categories, with individuals, groups, institutions, organizations, and communities being its constituents. The result of multiple communities coming together is the group known as society.

## 3.4 CASTE

Caste is one of basic form of Social Stratification and works as a major Social Structure in Rural India.

Caste is derived from the Portuguese word *'casta'*, meaning race or breed. The caste denotes the groups created by birth and each caste group has its own position in Indian Hindu Society. The rigidity of Caste system is so crucial in Indian Society which attracted the eyes of the Western scholars too. Many foreign scholars try to understand Indian society which is divided into various *jati* and *sub-jati.* For example: Louis Dumont, the French Anthropologist defined caste groups on the basis of its purity and pollution. *Jati* is derived from Sanskrit, similarly used for 'Caste', meaning 'to be born'. Only birth is the medium to achieve the status of any caste group. So, *Jati* is an endogamous, hereditary social group that has a name and a combination of attributes which are to be followed by its members sharing the *jati'*s status in the social hierarchy of one's village.

Caste is the social phenomena which basically creates social inequality within the Hindu religion itself because according to the Caste system all the Hindus are not equal. In this regard G.S.Ghurye, the Indian Sociologist mentions that Caste system has created segmental division in the Hindu fold itself because of the hierarchical nature of Caste. According to this hierarchy some caste groups are in top position and some castes are in the bottom position of the society.

Caste is often used interchangeably with *varna* which literally means colour. *Varna* referred to the distinction between *Arya* and *Dasa*, referring to fair and dark colours respectively. The *Satapatha Brahmana*, a part of *Yajur Veda,* describes the four categories as four varnas. The origin of the *varna* model is in the *Rig Veda* where along with the distinction between *Arya* and *Dasa*, there is a division of society into three orders, viz. *Brahma, Kshatriya* and *Vaishya*. It was later in *Purushasukta* hymn, that reference was made to four orders of society as emanating from the creator- *Brahmins* (traditionally priests and scholars) from the mouth, *Rajanya* or *Kshyatria* (ruler and soldier) from the arms, *Vaishya* (merchant) from the thighs and *Shudra* (peasant, labourer and servant) from the feet of the creator. However, these division was based on the division of labour. But in the later part of the period. i.e Vedic to Brahminic, the four Varna came into more hierarchical order where Brahmins in the top and Shudra became in the lowest position of the society. The first three castes are 'twice-born' (*dwija*) on the account of the donning of the sacred thread in the ritual ceremony of upanayana. In this varna model there is no place for untouchables. However, there are references in Vedic literature to groups such as the *Ayogava, Chandala, Nishada* and *Paulkasa* who were despised. Although many social scientists like Risely, Ghurye, Majumdar ignored the origin of Caste from Varna, however Varna can provide a framework which created a condition to the reaction towards outreach of Caste. Whatever, thousands and thousands of caste and Sub-caste groups in India have been emerged in India which are characterized by different social status (top and bottom or pure and impure) and no Hindu can escape from the system of Caste in India.

Caste has a strong hold in rural society than in urban society. Caste determines the functions, occupation, status, available opportunities and sometimes even handicaps the individual. As caste largely ascertains the ideals and ways of life of rural social groups, it also shapes the value system and worldviews prevailing in the rural society. Some of the characteristics of Castes are as follows:

1. **Ascribed Category:** Caste is ascribed at the time of one's birth and remains unchanged for the rest of the life. However, one can elevate one's position in the caste hierarchy through Sanskritization[1].
2. **Hierarchy:** Caste is based on a hierarchical relationship which is ascertained at the time of birth. All caste groups do not possess equal position; they receive unequal hierarchical position according to their functions they perform. However, there are regional variations in the hierarchal relationship between the castes. Sometimes the same jati was ranked higher in one region than in another.
3. **Traditional Occupation:** Caste fixes one's traditional occupation at the time of birth. Each caste group perform the specific activities assigned to the specific caste group. The division of labour ascertain by traditional occupation which helps in functioning of the *Jajmani* System, which is based on the symbiotic relationship between *jajman* or patron and *kamin* or client. The services provided by the *kamin* to *jajman* can be remunerated in cash or kind on daily, monthly, quarterly or yearly basis. The *Jajmani* System regulates economic and socio-religious interdependence of the castes. However, the traditional occupations on the basis of one's caste are no longer strictly followed.
4. **Endogamous Group:** Castes are endogamous group. Matrimonial alliances have to be formed within one's caste group but outside one's gotra. Inter-caste marriages are forbidden but it is relaxed now-a-days.

[1] Sanskritization is a process of cultural mobility whereby a low caste imitates the habits, customs, food pattern, dress and ways of life of upper twice born castes to move upward in the caste hierarchy.

5. **Social Restrictions:** Caste decides from which particular caste one can accept what kind of food (cooked or uncooked). It also determines the choice of utensils to offer food. Caste governs one's physical contact, social distance and social interaction. Caste determines the location and type of house in the village. These restrictions are now removed through legislations.

### 3.4.1 CHANGES IN THE CASTE SYSTEM

Migration and religious conversion, and Sanskritization were the three main ancient social mobility strategies.

Religious Conversion basically takes place among the lower caste group in Indian Society so that they get rid from the harsh judgement of Indian Caste system. For instance, B.R. Ambedkar, belonging to Mahar caste, a lower caste group transformed his religion with thousands of fellow-beings to the Buddhism where there is no existence of Caste and discrimination. Although in caste system, individual caste mobility is very rare or almost impossible, but a lower caste group can mobilize through the process of Sanskritization. A lower caste could move up to the upper caste ladder and into higher positions by gaining wealth and political power, specially adopting the lifestyle and customs of upper castes in order to emulate them, they were able to claim higher caste status; through Sanskritization. Significant changes in the caste system have occurred in rural areas in the current era due to the forces like Social Reform Movements, Provisions in Indian Constitution, industrialization, urbanization, politicalization, modern education and legal systems, land reforms, development programs, and government policy of positive discrimination in favor of the lower castes in rural areas.

Though some people continue to pursue their traditional caste based occupation, there has also been changes in this regard. Though some have chosen to work in agriculture, Brahmins may

still be priests in the future. Supervisory farmers are the usual occupation of the landowning dominant castes, which comprise members of both the high and middle rungs of the caste hierarchy. The tiny and marginal peasantry, who labor in agriculture for pay, is another lower caste that is not involved in agribusiness. One example of an artisan caste that has retained its initial occupation is that of iron and construction workers. But, people from all castes today-including untouchables-have been able to pursue non-traditional careers in fields like manufacturing and construction, trade and commerce, and service delivery thanks to migration to urban areas.

Furthermore, in rural areas, inter-caste marriage is an extremely rare occurrence, almost nonexistent. Due to the prevalence of tea shops in villages, which are visited by people from almost every caste and religion, inter-caste restrictions on food, drink, and smoking still exist, but to a reduced extent. There has been some relaxation of the untouchability sway. In recent times, socioeconomic position has played a greater role in determining differences in attire than caste. Though this is no longer entirely true, the higher castes were historically thought of as belonging to the upper classes because in recent years, new work opportunities have arisen in rural areas that allow for income enhancement. In order to make money to contribute back to their homes, people relocate to cities. This has had the effect of changing the conventional social structure.

## 3.5 FAMILY

Alongside the caste system and the village community system, the joint family is said to be one of the three foundations of Indian social structure. Joint Family is the ancient type of family system where people (minimum three generation) live jointly in the same residence, cook food from same kitchen and share the property by all the members equally. They are large in size and they live under the same roof. This joint family was the one of the major characters of traditional Indian society. An individual's ties to their own family are quite strong in a country like India, where families are

important social units. Back then, the joint family system was a significant component of social and economic structures. Though the nuclear family system is gradually replacing the joint family structure in modern society, the emotional bonds of extended families still play a big role in social interactions. The structure of the family is patriarchal. The head of the family is usually considered to be the father or the oldest male member. Usually, women are cast in a supporting role. The administrative system bears several ramifications from the form and functioning of the family. It's probable that the authoritarian and paternalistic family life structure influences administrative staff members' authoritarian and paternalistic behavioral inclinations. Administrators' establishment of attitudes is influenced by the socialization process that occurs in the home. It is possible that values like impartiality, integrity, and universality will be compromised due to familial commitments.

### 3.5.1 CHANGES IN FAMILY

The traditional joint family was a significant social structure in Indian societies which have been in changing trend in modern Indian society. The principal beneficiaries of this political structure were the priestly caste and the landed gentry. On the other hand, nuclear families were also common in India. In nuclear families, lower caste households with agricultural labor as their primary source of income were disproportionately represented. Nonetheless, they gave the idea of a united family a lot of weight. Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the ways in which rising industrialization and urbanization, together with modern shifts in the economy, politics, technology, education, and law, are affecting Indian families. This problem can be approached in two ways. The first suggests that, similar to the Western world, the Indian family structure has undergone a unilinear transition from the joint to the nuclear form. According to Desai (1964), Dube (1955), Madan (1965), and other scholars, it is imperative to consider family as a process

rather than a group of people. The researchers apply the developmental cycle approach to understand changes in Indian family structure. According to their argument, houses with nuclear families should be viewed as temporary structures that would eventually dissolve and form joint families when the boys get married. According to the 'developmental cycle' theory, a family structure expands cyclically throughout time with births and marriages, then contracts with deaths and divisions. The key changes brought into the Indian Family system can be mentioned as below-

1. Change from Joint Family to Nuclear Family
2. Changing status of women in changing Indian Family System
3. Inter-caste Marriage is getting possible in Indian Family system
4. Beyond agriculture, multiple economic activities are being started to support the family economy.

## 3.6 LINEAGE AND KINSHIP

Families in the village that are descended from a common ancestor and are aware of all the connections are referred to as a lineage, and the offspring of the same generation act in unison as brothers and sisters. They get together to celebrate important ritual occasions as a group. These units are also referred to as Kul at times. Since most of these families are close, a guest of one (such a son-in-law) might be treated as such in all of them. Families may have bonded for three to seven generations. Within this community, people do not get married.

Adrian Mayer (1960) made a distinction between the **kindered of cooperation** and **kindered of recognition** while studying a village in Malwa. The first of these is the smaller unit, where participation is freely offered and accepted. The latter is a more expansive group that is brought together by invitation and information on particular days. For every caste, these relationships could exist in multiple villages. We must keep this in mind in order to comprehend how a caste or sub-caste spreads over villages and towns. Mayer researched them inside a caste and its Rural Social

Structure region. The term "horizontal spread of the caste" is another name for this.

There are certain distinctions between northern and southern India with relation to marriage laws. Irawati Karve (1965) noted these differences. They were later incorporated by American anthropologist David Mandelbaum in his widely read book Society in India (1972). He reiterates the position "broadly put, in the South a family tries to strengthen existing kin ties through marriage, while in the North a family tends to affiliate with a separate set of people to whom it is not already linked".

This is seen by the fact that **village exogamy and "gotra" exogamy** are more common in the North than in the South. Nobody is allowed to get married in their own village in the North. Marriage connections are finalized with individuals from neighboring communities who share a common caste. However, there are no similar laws in the South. Furthermore, it is forbidden to marry within one's own gotra in the North. In contrast, cross-cousin marriage-that is, marriage between a brother and sister's offspring-is favored in the South. As a result, marriage in North India has a centrifugal tendency, meaning that it tends to go outside of the group. In contrast, familial ties and marriage alliances have a centripetal tendency in South India. Put differently, marriages happen inside or among the group.

## 3.7 THE VILLAGE

Village is one of the components of the rural social structure. Here, we go over the fundamental characteristics of Indian villages and touch on some recent developments in village leadership and power structures.

The early researches on village autonomy were overstated by Maine (1881), Metcalfe (1833), and Baden-Powell (1896). It was said that the Indian village was a "closed" and "isolated" system. The Indian village was portrayed as a monolithic, atomistic, and unchanging entity by British administrator Charles Metcalfe (1833) in a report to the House of Commons Select Committee. He observed, "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves and almost independent

of any foreign relations". The village as a society always emerges "unchanged, unshakable, and self-sufficient," he continued, despite the passing of wars and the coming and going of regimes. However, recent research on history, anthropology, and sociology has demonstrated that Indian villages were rarely republics. It was never self-sufficient. It is connected to the larger community. In the past, the village was connected to its neighbors and the larger community through migration, village exogamy, travel for labour and trade, administrative connections, interregional markets, inter-village economic and caste ties, and religious pilgrimages. Furthermore, the modern era brought forth new modernizing factors that enhanced inter-village and rural-urban interaction. However, villages remain an essential social unit despite growing external links (Mandelbaum 1972, Orenstein 1965). A village's residents experience a sense of shared identity. They have social, economic, political, and cultural linkages inside the village at the family, caste, and class levels. In actuality, rivalry, domination, cooperation, and reciprocity define village life.

### 3.7.1 CHANGES IN VILLAGE POWER STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

To study about the power structure and its changes of the village system, it needs to have a look on the study of village done by M.N. Srinivas, Indian Sociologist. He studied in Rampura village of Myshore which was later contained in his 'The Remembered Village'. In the study of this Rampura, he explored new dimensions of power and leadership in the traditional village structure, basically in south India. Hence, In Rampura village also he noticed three types of leading characters such as Landlord, Village Headman and powerful enterprising landlords etc. However, Srinivas explored the concept of 'Dominant Caste' through which he has described some different attributes of groups who could rule the villages. The Caste may not be ritualistically purest, but if the particular group has the numerical strength in the village, if they possess economic power through

ownership of land as well as political power they may have the leadership in the village structure. They have the all kind of influence over other. Srinivas noticed the leadership of the Peasant Caste in Rampura Village who had the numerical strength as well as they possessed large amount of land and had political influence also. Thus, Srinivas illustrated that power structure and leadership in Indian was handed over beyond the high caste attributes also.

Following independence, there have been some adaptive but minor changes to the leadership and power structure of villages as a result of parliamentary politics, land reforms, Panchayati Raj, development initiatives, and agricultural protests. Singh (1986) asserts that upper castes now wield power through co-opting and manipulating members of lower castes rather than the more conventional method of legitimizing their dominance. There has been no alteration to the conventional power hierarchy. Specially in the village level, Panchayati Raj Institution brought a major democratic change in power and leadership structure. Even the leadership is permissible to women and lower caste as well as to the tribe through special provisions of Indian Constitution. Fresh prospects inspire the weaker class to strive for dominance. However, their lack of resources stifles their ambitions.

In his comparative analysis of twelve Indian villages, B.S. Cohn (1962) discovered a strong correlation between land ownership and the level of group dominance. Younger, more educated people are becoming more and more involved in leadership roles. Furthermore, there have been some geographical differences noted in the way that the power structure in rural areas has changed.

## 3.8 THE JAJMANI SYSTEM

The "jajmani" system is a crucial aspect of Indian traditional village life. Numerous sociologists have examined it, including Lewis and Barnouw (1956), Opler and Singh (1986), K. Ishwaran (1967), Willian Wiser (1936), and S.C. Dube (1955). The term "jajmani" refers to the whole relationship,

while "jajman" refers to the client or beneficiary of specialized services. The jajmani system refers to the network of ritualistic, social, and economic links that exist inside a village between various caste groups. Some castes are patrons of this system, while others serve other castes. Serving castes provide their services to the upper and intermediate castes who hold land in exchange for monetary and in-kind compensation. The predominant castes that hold land and are considered patrons include the Rajput, Bhumihar, and Jat in the north, as well as the Kamma, Lingayat, and Reddi in Andhra Pradesh and the Patel in Gujarat. The service castes include, among others, water carriers, barbers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and Brahmins (priests). According to Mandelbaum (1972), the jajmani relations primarily function at the familial level. In addition to a family of service caste providing services to particular families of jajmans, a Rajput land-owning family also has jajmani ties to one family each from the Brahmin, barber, carpenter, etc. On the other hand, caste panchayats uphold jajmani laws.

The ideal jajmani relationship should be multiple, exclusive, and durable, and this is typically the case. The Jajmani relationship is inherited by both the Kamin and the Jajman, or patron and client. It is also more than just exchanging cash and grains for labor instead of services. In addition to receiving customary wages, the service-castes receive gifts when they perform their jajman on ritual occasions like marriage, birth, and death. Each side attempts to rally the support of its jajmani associates in factional elections. Thus, the jajmani system entails mutual reliance, reciprocity, and collaboration between village households and jati. However, dominance, exploitation, and conflict are also features of the jajmani system (Beidelman 1959 and Lewis and Barnouw 1956). The way landowning dominant patrons and the poor artisans and landless laborers who work for them in the rural social structure exercise power differs greatly. To retain their supremacy, the wealthy and powerful jajmans manipulate and oppress the helpless "kamins" (clients). In actuality, the jajmani system combines dominance and reciprocity.

Additionally, it has been noted that the jajmani system has deteriorated over time as a result of market factors, increased urban

interaction, migration, education, and the service castes' increased social and political consciousness.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1) Tick mark the correct answer in the following multiple choice questions:

a) Why is Caste an Ascribed Status?

2) Identify the important social institutions in rural India among the following.

i) Family ii) Caste

iii) Village iv) All of these



## 3.9 LET US SUM UP

- In this unit, we have attempted to comprehend the Indian rural social structure in this unit.
- After discussing the idea of social structure, we looked at the key institutions that make up India's rural social structure, including caste, class, village, and family and kinship.
- Important characteristics and family structures in India have also been covered, along with how they have changed. There are noticeable differences between the kinship patterns in North and South India.
- The key components of the caste system have been discussed and the changes that have occurred, particularly in the modern era, are examined.
- Lastly, the topic of village autonomy, the prevalence of the jajmani system, and modifications to the village's leadership and power structure have all been covered.
- We have learned that the term social structure is used by sociologists to describe the inter-connectedness, interdependence and interrelationships between the various facets of society.

- Rural social structure connects the social and economic lives of people living in rural areas, acting as the fundamental machinery of the rural social system.
- The central institutions of rural social organization are the family, the village community, and caste.



## 3.10 FURTHER READING

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2. Chauhan, Brij Raj 1968. A Rajasthan Village. Vir Publishing House: Delhi 1988
3. Dube, S.C. 1955. Indian Village. Cornell University Press: New York
4. Madan, Vandana (ed.) 2002. The Village in India. Oxford University Press: New Delhi
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6. Srinivas, M.N. (ed.) 1978. India's Villages. Media Promoters: Bombay



## 3.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Answer to Question No. 1:** Caste is ascribed status because it is acquired by birth and hereditary in nature

**Answer to Question No. 2:** d) All of these



## 3.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Short Questions (Answer each question in 150 words)**

Q1: What is meant by social structure.

Q2: Briefly explain the Jajmani System.

**B) Long Questions (Answer each question in 300 words)**

Q1: What do you understand by Caste? Explain its features.

Q2: Explain the changes in the structure of family in rural areas.

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# UNIT- 4: RURAL POWER STRUCTURE

## UNIT STRUCTURE


4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Theorising power

4.3 Caste and Power

4.4 Class and Power

4.5 Decentralised power

4.6 Let us sum up

4.7 Answers to Check your progress

4.8 Further Readings

4.9 Model Questions


## 4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of this unit is to discuss what power is and how it operates in rural social structures.The unit begins by theorising what power is from a sociological point of view, and proceeds to understand how power is negotiated in rural societies in terms of various dimensions such as caste, class, and gender. The unit finally talks about the modern institutions of power in rural India that shapes the dynamics of everyday life on a micro and macro basis.After reading this unit you shall be able to

- Elucidate what power is on a rudimentary level
- Discuss the relationship of caste and class with power in rural societies
- Explain how power is intricately related to gender
- Note the modern decentralised institutions of power in rural India

## 4.2 THEORISING POWER

The word "power" comes from the Latin verb "potere," which means "to be able." Sociologists view power as a fundamental concept that shapes social dynamics and affects both individual and group behaviour. Power affects relationships, institutions, and structures in a complex and pervasive way in social life. Examining the sources, forms, and effects of power on social hierarchies and inequalities is necessary for understanding power from a sociological standpoint. Sociologists can shed light on the mechanisms of social control, the possibility of social change, and the routes to empowerment and justice by examining power dynamics. Let us now look at some of the important sociologists whohave conceptualised power.

### 4.2.1 Max Weber

Max Weber described power as the capacity of an individual or group to accomplish objectives in the face of opposition from others. Weber's theory of power is essentially connected to legitimacy and authority. He then continues by discussing the different types of authority (legitimate power) in three different forms - traditional authority, which is based on established customs, traditions, and long-standing practices (monarchs and priests), charismatic authority, which arises from individual personalities and leadership qualities that are capable of influencing others (Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela etc.) and rational-legal authority, which is based on formal rules and laws, and the belief in the legitimacy of these rules (government and bureaucracy). Weber's emphasis on the legitimacy of authority types highlights the fact that power is not only coercive but can also be institutionalised and recognised as legitimate by the people it is used to rule over.

### 4.2.2 Michel Foucault

The French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault

provided an alternative viewpoint on power. Power was no longer seen as something that belonged to individuals or groups, but rather as something that was pervasive in society and embedded in discourses and knowledge systems. His work highlights how power is omnipresent and frequently unseen, suggesting how it functions through language, norms, and societal expectations.

In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1990a), Foucault describes "biopower" as control of populations by a variety of structures, customs, and ideologies. With an emphasis on population welfare, biopower reflects a move away from sovereign power. It is used for the management and optimisation of life. Foucault also talks about disciplinary power (1975)[1] in panoptic institutions like schools, prisons, asylums, where constant surveillance produces docile bodies.

### 4.2.3 Karl Marx

Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism and his critique of capitalism serve as the foundation for his conception of power. Marx asserts that control over the means of production-more specifically, economic relations-are the source of power in society. The bourgeoisie, who control the means of production, hold power over the proletariat, who sell their labour in capitalist societies. Because of their economic supremacy, the ruling class is able to hold onto power by both direct exploitation and birth of ideologies that defend their privileged status. According to Marx, the proletariat wants to overturn the bourgeoisie through revolution in order to establish a communist society that is classless. Therefore, the fight for power is fundamentally a class struggle. Power, in Marx's view, is thus closely tied to economic structures and the ongoing conflict between the haves and the have nots.

[1] Foucault, M. (1975). Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison

### 4.2.4 Antonio Gramsci

Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci extended the conventional Marxist conception of power by highlighting the critical roles played by ideology and culture. The term "cultural hegemony," coined by Gramsci (1971)[2], refers to the ways in which the ruling class obtains the support of the lower classes in addition to using economic power to maintain its domination. In order to accomplish this, the ideas, values, and norms of the ruling class are ingrained all over society, giving the impression that they are natural and intrinsic. The ruling class ensures that its dominance is accepted and internalised by everyone by propagating its ideology through institutions like schools, churches, the media, and families.

Gramsci contended that effective power requires control of both political society (the state) and civil society. Rather than a direct "war of manoeuvre" to seize state power, Gramsci argued for a "war of position" to challenge the hegemony of the ruling class. This would involve a slow, strategic effort to create an alternative hegemony within civil society. He emphasised the importance of organic intellectuals in promoting critical consciousness and creating counter-hegemonic ideas as they represent the interests of the oppressed classes.

## 4.3 CASTE AND POWER

An understanding of rural India's social structures and power dynamics requires an understanding of the caste and varna systems. The social organisation of rural societies, which is primarily based on caste, naturally displays the existence of a hierarchical power. Varna as a concept has intricately influenced the ethnographic reality of caste according to MN Srinivas. Varna - in its essence means colour and the same has been used

[2] Gramsci, A. (1971). Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds.

to distinguish people in a society. This distinction in colour and appearance became reference for a hierarchical division of the society manifested in the division of labour - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Hierarchy gives rise to superiority and inferiority which is reflected in everyday practices. These practices come from the notion of ritual purity and pollution. According to Durkheim, religion in its essence carries the ideas of 'sacred' and 'profane'- whose impression is to be found in the caste system as well. For instance, consumption of vegetarian food occupies the highest strata of ritual purity. On the other hand, consumption of liquor, pig, or even the sacred cow tends to point towards lower rank of a caste. The ability or inability to share food or water, and exclusive invitation to feasts displays a power dynamic between the different castes based on hierarchy. As Andre Beteille notes in her ethnographic work in Sripuram, the Brahmins do not accept cooked food from the other castes. Interestingly, the power to restrict commensalityis also found within the Brahmins. The orthodox Sri Vaishnava Brahmins do not accept food from the Smartha Brahmins as the latter are considered lower in rank. On a similar note, there is a difference in food habits among the Adi-Dravidas of Sripuram where the Pallas do not eat with the Paraiyas. Such practices in everyday life create a differentiation of power in the social space. The notion of ritual purity, that allows or disallows individuals and groups in the domain of food reflect a hegemonic display of power.

Access to public space also shows the presence of power that caste system provides within a rural society. MN Srinivas notes how the Smiths of South India were prohibited to wear slippers inside the village or perform weddings. On the other hand, the physical layout of the Sripuram village in terms of housing, places of worship, schools and crematorium are well differentiated along the lines of caste. The power to access certain places are dictated by the caste identity of a particular community and the notion of ritual purity disempowers the subaltern's bodily movement in a social space. This control over what to eat or drink, where to go or not, reflects a form of biopower which Foucault talks about. The anatomo-politics of micromanaging the body and its movements and actions, naturally

emanates from accepted norms and social conventions rooted in Brahminical knowledge and Vedic literature. Based on this knowledge, the body even disciplines and surveil its actions in the fear of physical and social sanctions.

Apart from food and access to social spaces, caste identity exerts power in terms of language as well. By referencing to the work of Andre Beteille in Sripuram, one can understand the importance of Sanskrit language for the Brahmins. Additionally, the pronunciation of Tamil words in that village also created a distinction between the various class, as the upper caste would emphasize on their version as 'pure' and correct. Sanskrit, which is the language of the Vedic literature was exclusive to the Brahmins, who revered in their knowledge of that system. Such a hegemonic attitude of superior linguistic knowledge, correspondingly leads to a knowledge system only accessible to a certain section of the society. To paraphrase Michel Foucault, where there is knowledge, there is power, and where there is power, there is an ability to create more knowledge. Thus, access to knowledge of Vedic literature through Sanskrit becomes a tool for the Brahmins to dictate everyday life of the society as divine prescription - something the Gods have ordained. This hegemonic attitude naturally imbibes power to only a certain section of a society to shape the everyday lives of the people. Hegemony, according to Gramsci is the ideology of the dominant group of the society. In this case, the rural societies, which are primarily designed along caste identities, are designed by the ideas and ideologies of the dominant castes, using Sanskrit - a language gatekept by the Brahmins.

However, MN Srinivas, in his famous work in Rampura posits that it is not only the caste identity that gives an individual or a community the dominant status. He postulated how the peasantry caste of the Okkaligas were dominant instead of the Brahmins, due to their numerical superiority, economic and political affluence, and exposure to western education. Satisfying these conditions gave them a decisive dominance over the ritually higher caste as well. As the most important patrons of the village were Okkaligas, this tweaked the power relation one is expected to have according to the hierarchical Varna system. In addition to the increasing economic strength due to the quantity of land owned (most of which were passed on

by the Brahmins due to the stress imposed by urbanization and dowries), the Okkaligas who were 'Shudras' (Srinivas 1959, p.2)[3] had also access to western education giving rise to a non-Brahmin intelligentsia. Gaining knowledge, then, in Foucauldian sense, gave them a sense of power in the social space. The economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986)[4] of the Okkaligas were higher than the Brahmins and the Lingayats, even though the latter groups had more ritualistic dominance. But, since the Shudra community of peasants had a decisive dominance, the sovereignty of the Brahmins and Lingayats were challenged. This provides an exceptional case in the study of caste and power in rural India, whose remnants can be seen in other places in the contemporary era as well - where, economic, political, and cultural resources can overpower the traditional authority based on the rigid caste system.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - 1**

**Q.1:** In its essence, what is Varna? What are the four varnas?

.....

**Q.2:** What are the conditions of decisive dominance according to MN Srinivas?

.....

## 4.4 CLASS AND POWER

In rural India, class and power are shaped by the complex interaction of traditional caste hierarchies and changing economic conditions. While caste has traditionally determined social status and roles, economic changes, particularly land ownership and agricultural productivity, have

[3] Srinivas, M.N (1959). The Dominant Caste in Rampura. American Anthropologist61(1): 1-16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/666209

[4] Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. InRichardson, J. (Ed.), Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp. 241-58.

increasingly influenced class distinctions. Power dynamics are thus fluid, with landowners wielding significant influence regardless of caste. Scholars such as Andre Beteille and Kathleen Gough argue that, despite economic mobility, caste-based inequalities persist, and class struggles remain central to understanding rural hierarchy. This complex relationship emphasises the ongoing struggle for social and economic power in rural Indian society. Andre Beteille's seminal work, "Caste, Class, and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village,"(1965) offers a fundamental analysis of social stratification in rural India. Beteille's ethnographic study in a South Indian village sheds light on the relationship between caste and class, emphasising how the two dimensions coexist and influence power dynamics. He demonstrates that, while caste remains a significant predictor of social status, economic factors are becoming increasingly important in defining class distinctions. Land ownership and agricultural productivity emerge as important drivers of power and social mobility. Even though economic success can challenge traditional caste hierarchies, but it cannot completely dismantle them. Beteille's work emphasises the fluidity of power dynamics, which are shaped by both social and economic factors.

Kathleen Gough's Marxist lens provides a contrasting but complementary perspective on rural class relations. Her research in Tamil Nadu focuses on the economic exploitation and class struggles between tenant farmers and landlords. According to Gough, production relations fundamentally shape rural India's social structure, with landowners wielding significant power over landless labourers. She emphasises the persistence of feudalistic tendencies despite modern economic changes, depicting a rural landscape in which economic exploitation is deeply entrenched. landowners. Gough's analysis sheds light on the root causes of economic exploitation as well as the potential for transformative social change through collective action.

The historical land revenue systems and other systems of social exchanges have had a profound impact on the composition of class and power dynamics in rural India. Sociologists have studied the interplay of tradition, economic necessity, and changing social structures to understand

the enduring nature of power relations in rural society. An important framework for understanding class and power in rural India is the examination of land revenue systems and traditional systems of exchanges, especially during the colonial era.

The Jajmani system, which is central to traditional Indian village life, includes ritualistic, social, and economic ties between caste groups. It stems from hereditary service arrangements, in which service castes, such as barbers and carpenters, provide services to land-owning patron castes, such as Rajputs and Patels, in exchange for compensation. Indian sociologists such as Lewis and Barnouw (1956), K. Ishwaran (1967), and S.C. Dube (1955) emphasise reciprocity and mutual reliance, as well as inherent dominance and exploitation.The Jajmani system has weakened over time due to market factors, urban interaction, migration, and education.

Peter Blau's perspective on power and social exchange (1964)[5] sheds light on these dynamics. Blau proposed that social exchange is a process in which individuals or groups provide benefits to others in the expectation of reciprocation, resulting in social bonds and obligations. Power imbalances occur when one party can provide more valuable resources or services, gaining an advantage over the other. In the Jajmani system, dominant patrons have power over the service castes because they own land and control resources. This power dynamic allows patrons to manipulate and exploit the service castes, ensuring their reliance and upholding social hierarchy. Blau's theory emphasises that such exchanges are not only economic but also deeply embedded in social structures and power relations, demonstrating the inherent exploitation.

The Zamindari system, which Lord Cornwallis implemented in Bihar and Bengal in the late 18th century, fundamentally altered India's rural power dynamics. Under this system, zamindars were given ownership of the land and the authority to collect land taxes from peasants, apparently to fund the colonial administration. In reality, it established a class of powerful landlords

[5] Blau, P.M. (1964). Exchange and Power in Social Life. John Wiley and Sons Inc.

who owned large tracts of land and dominated the agrarian economy. These zamindars wielded considerable sociopolitical power, frequently siding with British interests to consolidate their position.The Ryotwari system, instituted in the late 18th century by Thomas Munro, was a system where the peasants or cultivators known as the 'ryots' were regarded as the owners of the land. They had ownership rights, could sell, mortgage, or gift the land. The taxes were directly collected by the government from the peasants. Failure to pay taxes usually led to eviction from the land. Since high taxes had to be paid only in cash (no option of paying in kind as before the British) the problem of moneylenders came into the picture who further burdened the peasants with heavy interests.

Blau's viewpoint is also relevant to these land tenure systems. The zamindari system involved landlords (zamindars), who collected taxes from peasants and wielded considerable power over them. The ryotwari system dealt with individual farmers (ryots), who paid state taxes but were frequently exploited by local officials. In each system, power imbalances were evident, with landowners or intermediaries using their control over land and resources to dominate and exploit the peasant class. Blau's theory emphasises how power dynamics in social exchanges create long-lasting social structures that perpetuate inequality, mirroring the other tenure systems.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-2**

**Q.3:** Who worked on the social stratification in a south Indian village by studying caste, class, and power?

.....

**Q.4:** 4. Who were the Ryots?

.....

## 4.5 DECENTRALISED POWER

In rural India, the decentralization of power through mechanisms such as Panchayati Raj institutions has been a crucial step toward achieving

grassroots democracy. Decentralization aims to transfer decision-making authority from central and state governments to local bodies, thereby promoting participatory governance and enhancing the responsiveness of the administration to local needs. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 was a landmark in this context, mandating the creation of Panchayats (village councils) at the village, intermediate, and district levels. This legislative framework has empowered rural populations, giving them a platform to engage directly with the political process and address their unique concerns.

Decentralization in rural India has had profound implications for political dynamics and electoral processes. It has brought governance closer to the people, enabling local communities to have a more significant say in developmental activities and resource allocation. This shift has the potential to bridge the gap between the governed and the governing, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among citizens. However, the effectiveness of decentralization is often influenced by local power structures and socio-economic hierarchies, which can either facilitate or hinder true democratic participation.

One of the most enduring challenges in rural India's political landscape is the influence of caste politics. The caste system, a deeply entrenched social stratification, continues to play a pivotal role in shaping political affiliations and voting behaviours. Political parties often engage in caste-based mobilization, seeking to consolidate votes by appealing to caste identities and loyalties. This practice, while offering political leverage, can perpetuate social divisions and undermine the principles of equality and inclusivity that universal adult franchise seeks to uphold.

Sociological scholars have extensively examined the interplay between caste and politics in India. M.N. Srinivas, a renowned sociologist, introduced the concept of "vote banks" (1955)[6] to describe how political parties cultivate loyal voter bases along caste lines. This phenomenon has

[6] Srinivas, M. N. (1955), "The Social System of a Mysore *Village", in Marriott, McKim (ed.), Village India: studies in the little community,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-35

been particularly evident in rural areas, where caste identities are more pronounced and influential. Political leaders often promise benefits and representation to specific castes in exchange for electoral support, leading to a form of patronage politics that can skew policy priorities and development outcomes.

Moreover, the intersection of caste and politics is not limited to electoral strategies; it also affects the functioning of decentralized institutions. The dominance of certain castes in Panchayats can marginalize lower-caste groups, limiting their access to resources and decision-making power. This dynamic can perpetuate socio-economic disparities and inhibit the realization of truly inclusive governance. According to TK Oommen (1969)[7], ex-Zamindars, Jagirdars entered into the Panchayati Raj fold to secure their economic positions. KL Sharma (1976) posits how modern rural power elites were a product of abolition of the land revenue systems as well as introduction of the universal adult franchise. These changes perpetuated the formal positions of power in the hands of the upper-caste and upper-class elites.Even though numerical superiority of many lower caste communities challenged the hegemony of the upper caste, in most cases, it was the latter groups who would continue to wield power by shifting the power-spheres. The new decentralised and democratic institutions became new arenas for the traditional power elites to extract benefits for them and their relatives.

TK Oommen also posits how the power elites would become "power reservoirs" who would manipulate the "power exercisers" (1970)[8]. They would not directly hold formal positions of power in the panchayat, but would influence those who would be formally elected to manipulate and control resources of community. In the end, even though post-independence

[7] Oommen, T. K. (1969). Political Leadership in Rural India: Image and Reality. Asian Survey, 9(7), 515-521. https://doi.org/10.2307/2642358

[8] Oommen, T. K. (1970). The Concept of Dominant Caste: Some Queries. Contributions to Indian Sociology, 4(1), 73-83. https://doi.org/10.1177/006996677000400105

attempted to decentralise power through these new institutions, the intersectionality of caste and class have nevertheless, in majority of the cases, the traditional power elites remain major determinants of the functioning of rural Indian societies.



## 4.6 LET US SUM UP

As we can see from this unit, power as a tool is omnipresent and usually resides in the dominant part of the society.Landownership, caste dynamics, and traditional hierarchies all play important roles in rural Indian society. Influential families, often from higher castes, wield considerable power over local government and resource distribution. Village councils (panchayats) and local leaders, usually from these powerful groups, wield significant power in decision-making. Social norms and customs reinforce power structures, exacerbating existing inequalities. Access to education, economic opportunities, and political connections strengthens the elite's grip on power. However, it is to be noted that grassroots movements and social reforms are gradually challenging these traditional power dynamics.



## 4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Answer to Q. No. 1:** Varna - in its essence means colour and the same has been used to distinguish people in a society. This distinction in colour and appearance became reference for a hierarchical division of the society manifested in the division of labour - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.

**Answer to Q. No. 2:** Numerical superiority, economic and political affluence, and exposure to western education.

**Answer to Q. No. 3:** Andre Beteille

**Answer to Q. No. 4:** Ryots were the peasants who were regarded as the owners of the land. They had ownership rights, could sell, mortgage, or gift the land.



## 4.8 FURTHER READING


1. Srinivas, M.N (1959). The Dominant Caste in Rampura. American Anthropologist 61(1): 1-16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/666209
2. Blau, P.M. (1964). Exchange and Power in Social Life. John Wiley and Sons Inc.
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## 4.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

1. Explain the concept of power.
2. How does M.N Srinivas explain the relationship between caste and power.

**B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300 words)**

1. Describe how Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony can be seen in the caste-based exertion of power in rural India?
2. How is decentralisation affected by traditional power elites?

3. What are different arenas of everyday life where caste identity exerts power?

**********

# UNIT- 5: RURAL RELIGION

## UNIT STRUCTURE


5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Religion: Definitions and Meaning

5.4 Social Functions of Religion

5.5 Rural Religion in India: An Overview

5.6 Significance of the study of Rural Religion

5.7 Characteristics of Rural Religion in India

5.8 Changing Scenerio

5.9 Functions of Rural Religion in India

5.10 Let us Sum Up

5.11 Answers to Check your Progress

5.12 Possible Questions

5.13 Further Readings


## 5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to -

- Explain the different definitions of religion
- Discuss the meaning, concept and typology of religion
- Analyse the functions of religion in human societies
- Trace the origin of rural societies
- Discuss the characteristics of rural life in India
- Elucidate the dimensions of rural religion in India and its role and functions

## 5.2 INTRODUCTION

We have learnt that religion is a common element of human culture found universally in all human groups. Religion is born as an aspect of the

total human need for security, not only in this world, but also in the other world; not only in our relationships to the physical and social environment, but also in relation to the unseen forces and beings. This world of unseen forces and beings constitute what has been termed as the *supernatural world*.



**LET US KNOW**

The English word "*religion*" is derived from the Middle English "*religioun*" which came from the Old French "*religion*." It may have been originally derived from the Latin word "*religo*" which means "*good faith*," "*ritual*," and other similar meanings. It may also have come from the Latin "*religãre*" which means "*to tie fast*."

At the simplest level, religion is the belief in the power of supernatural and the *transcendental.* These beliefs are present in all the societies and variations seem endless. A belief in the supernatural almost always incorporates the idea that supernatural forces have some influence or control upon the world. The first indication of a possible belief in the supernatural dates from about 60,000 years ago. Archaeological evidences reveal that Neanderthal man buried his dead with stone tools and jewellery. *Religion is often defined as people's organized response to the supernatural, although several movements which deny or ignore supernatural concerns have belief and ritual systems which resemble those based on the supernatural*. However, these theories about the origin of religion can only be based on speculation and debate. Myth, rituals, religion, magic and numerous beliefs and practices regarding the supernatural world are the domain of religion.

Though religion is a universal phenomenon, it is understood differently by different people. On religion, opinions differ from the great religious leader down to an ordinary man. There is no consensus about the nature of religion. Sociologists are yet to find a satisfactory explanation of religion.

Again, it must be remembered that religious beliefs and practices vary from society to society, community to community, and region to region. Even within the same religion, there may be some variations in terms of urban and rural situations. Before going into the details of such variations, let us recall the meaning, definitions and social functions of religion.

## 5.3 RELIGION: DEFINITIONS AND MEANING

Numerous scholars have tried to find out the feature which is common to all religions. E.B Tylor, the father of the discipline of Anthropology had defined religion as the belief in spiritual beings. Some scholars in recent times have expressed that E.B.Tylor's classic definition of religion as the *"belief in spiritual beings"* is still valid today. For James Frazer, religion concerned the "*propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man"*

Durkheim, in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* defines religion as a "*"a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them".*

James. G. Frazer, in his *The Golden Bough,* considered *r*eligion as a belief in powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.

MacIver and Page have defined religion as a relationship not merely between man and man but also between man and some higher power.

According to Ogburn, religion is an attitude towards superhuman powers.

Max Muller defines religion as a mental faculty or disposition which enables man to apprehend the infinite.

Spiro in 1966 has identified a belief in "superhuman beings" as the core variable which ought to be designated by any definition of religion. Anthony Wallace saw religion as a kind of human behaviour which can be classified as belief and ritual concerned with supernatural beings, powers

and forces. According to Surajit Sinha, religion is referred to as a system of beliefs, practices and values concerned with the **sacred.** It is related to supernatural entities and powers which are considered as the ultimate concern of all mundane existence among human groups.

Taking various definitions together, we find that all the traditional definitions of religion involve the following aspects:

- *Belief in a supernatural being* or beings in a supernatural world.
- *Dependence on the supernatural world* for help, inspiration, and strength,
- *Behaviour patterns, practices (rituals*) which express the dependence.
- Religion *unites human groups*.

There are certain religions that may not fit well with the traditional definitions of religion. Although religion is defined as the system of beliefs and practices centring the supernatural, yet certain religious groups/sects like that of Buddhism, in its original form, is devoid of supernatural elements. Such a religion however, like other religions provide a world view, explains the events around us and has means and behaviour patterns to address the crisis that occur in our lives. The basic character is that these are considered as sacred.



**LET US KNOW**

Anthony F.C. Wallace proposes four categories of religion, each subsequent category subsuming the previous. These are, however, synthetic categories and do not necessarily encompass all religions.

- **Individualistic**: It is the most basic and the simplest. For example: vision quest.
- **Shamanistic**: Shamans are part-time religious practitioner. They use religion to heal and to divine, usually on the behalf of a client. The examples of shamans are spiritualists, faith healers, palm

readers, etc. These are experts who have acquired religious authority through one's own means.

- **Communal**: It involves elaborate set of beliefs and practices. Group of people are arranged in clans, lineage, age groups, or some religious societies. People take on roles based on knowledge and ancestral worship.
- **Ecclesiastical**: It is the most complex of the categories. It incorporates elements of the previous three.

## 5.4 SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

Religion has a significant role to play, both in the life of the individual, and social life in general. This varies according to the type of society.

- To the individual, religion provides *emotional security*. It helps man to rationalize his/her sufferings and make them bearable.
- Religion *guides* the individuals in the course of life.
- It enables men to understand and *explain the events* occurring around them.
- At the social level, religion functions as a powerful *means of social control*. It controls human conduct and regulates behaviour through the ever prevailing fear of the supernatural forces. This feeling is inculcated (learnt) by individuals very early in their lives.
- Moreover, religion functions as a *bond of social union, and unity* amongst all those who follow the same religion.

However, if religion creates a sense of unity amongst those who believe in the same religion, it tends to create, at the same time, deep differences between people. This is mainly due to misinterpretation (wrong concept) of religion.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - 1**

**Fill in the blanks:**

a) The unified system of beliefs and practices that centre on the sacred is called as _____.

b) According to Tylor, religion is the "belief in _____beings".

**State whether the following ares true or false:**

c) Durkheim's study of religion focused on the role played by religion in society.

d) Buddhism is devoid of the supernatural.

e) Buddhism provides explanations of the events around us and to cope with crisis.

## 5.5 RURAL RELIGION IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

The impact of religion in rural society is tremendous. In most of the societies that we come across, religious explanations of birth, marriage, death, disease, of natural disasters as famine and flood, and of the various happenings in the world are prevalent. Most of these are associated with some rituals like the funeral rites, birth rites, etc. Even the attaining of puberty and adulthood are associated with rites and rituals that are meant to make smooth the passage from one social stage (for example, bachelor state) to another (married state), and to resolve crisis, with the involvement of the supernatural beings. Not only disease, and natural disasters, but even events in one's life as birth, marriage, illness, disease and death are considered as events. The degree of dependence on religious rituals on these issues is different in different societies. The difference is visible when we look upon these in terms of rural and urban societies. In rural societies, people follow the religious rites strictly, according to the customs and norms – but

in urban societies, due to the lack of time and opportunities, such functions are very often observed symbolically. In the succeeding paragraphs we will discuss the issues related to rural religion and its various aspects with an introduction to rural society in India.

## 5.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY OF RURAL RELIGION

India is basically a country of villages. It is true that urban centres did develop in India since the days of Indus civilization, about 3500 years ago, yet the proportion of urban centres as compared to villages have been continuously very small all throughout the centuries. According to 2001 census there were 4378 urban centres in India.

Indian civilization has both the rural and urban dimensions. Rural society is no doubt, a part of the general society, but it has certain element that makes it different from the urban society or the society in general. Throughout the millennia, there has been an interactive process going on between the city and the rural religion in India. This can be seen in the attraction or pull of the pilgrim centres of different faith, all over the country and through the ages.

The village society is well knit and has strong bonds of relations. Indian rural life is affected by land relations, family structure, caste variations, and above all religious variation. In fact, religion affects the thought and action of the large sections of humanity. The influence of religion on people's economic and social life especially in India cannot be ignored. By prohibiting certain activities (taboo) and restricting others, the injunctions (command) of religion not only regulate one's philosophy of life, but also formulate one's economic activities. For example, Buddhism, with its doctrine of ahimsa and having its followers in India, China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Indo-China, are adverse to stock-raising for meat and wool. Among the Muslims, banking institutions have not developed, because Mohammad prohibited the acceptance of interest from borrowers. They eat beef, but not pork, and hence pig rearing is quite uncommon among the Muslims.

The Hindu society is divided into different castes, to each of which, occupations and duties are prescribed by religion.

Thus, the Indian village life is grossly affected by religious beliefs and customs. According to A.R. Desai, the study of rural religion in India is important for the following reasons**:**

- It is observed that all over the world, rural **people have greater predisposition for religion than urban people**. The religious outlook of rural people over the world shapes their intellectual, emotional and practical life. This is particularly true of the societies resting on subsistence (barely sufficent to maintain life) basis. It is difficult to locate any aspect of their life which is not shaped by their religious beliefs and practises. Their family life, caste relations, general social life, economic and recreational life, arts and crafts, and festivals are more or less governed by religious norms.
- In India, **rural societies are based on subsistence economies**. The rural economy, to a large extent, is still dependent on nature. Sometimes, scientific and technological supports fail. People generally use religious means to avoid the vagaries of nature like flood, droughts, landslides, crop failure, and such other problems. Rural people often perform rites and rituals at different stages of their agricultural cycle or operations.
- **Priestly leadership in rural society**: Irrespective of their religion, the leadership of the village life in all domains was provided by the priestly groups, as the *Brahmins,* the *Maulabis* and such other priestly groups. They controlled the traditional Panchayats also. The traditions and conventions of the rural life were laid down and controlled by these religious leaders. Hence, the rural life in India, in general, was moulded by the religious spirit.
- **Rural religion is at cross roads**: The rural religious scene is changing very fast in view of the secular nationhood and the new political environment which is basically non-religious and secular.

Democratic outlook have been trying to supersede the old ones that were founded on religion.

*According to Desai, contemporary rural religion in India is a battleground between the forces of religious orthodoxy and authoritarian social concepts on the one hand, and those of secular –democratic advance on the othe*r.

These make imperative the study of religion in the context of rural India.

## 5.7 CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL RELIGION IN INDIA

The religious situation in India is very complex. It is due to the fact that the number of different religions is very large. Though India has no state religion, yet the Constitution guarantees everyone the freedom of following and practicing all religious faiths. Thus, Indian population is divided into innumerable different faiths and sects. Secondly, the social composition of the followers of these diverse religions is also diverse. They practice different customs and traditions. The different religious communities also have different types of social organizations.

At the same time, as has already been mentioned, the characteristics of villages in India differ from place to place, from region to region, and from community to community, due to the diverse socio-cultural, economic, geographic, and ecological factors. Each of these villages has a unique pattern and a mode of life. The religious life of rural India is also very diverse.

Yet, the village communities, all over the country possess certain common features iin terms of their religious institutions, beliefs and practices. Several sociologists and anthropologists have made field studies of various villages in order to understand the rural religion in India. Some of the major characteristics of rural religion are discussed below :

- **Indian religion is quite practical:** It must be remembered that religion, more particularly, Hinduism as practiced in rural India is not

the classical form of the religion. According to S.C Dube, Hinduism as practiced in the villages of India is not the Hinduism of the classical philosophical systems of India, for it possesses neither the metaphysical heights, nor the abstract content of the latter. It is a religion of fasts, and festivals, in which prescribed rituals cover all the major crises of life. The life histories reveal that, spiritualism cannot be said to be the keynote in the life of the community. Far from it, religion appears to be a practical one.

- **Religion in Indian influences almost all aspects of rural life**. The various aspects of rural life, like economic, social, political, personal, recreation, art, culture, and others are influenced by religion. All these aspects are again interrelated.
- **Neighbourhood living pattern**: Neighbourhood living pattern varies from village to village. The village may be composed of a single religious group, or a multi-religious one. There may also be differences with regard to caste composition. Different caste groups have certain distinct religious practices and rituals.
- **Coexistence of different religious groups or sects** is another feature of rural religious life in India.
- **Sacred centres or places of worship**: Rural religion centres round shrines, temples, mosques, churches and such sacred spaces. Whatever may be the religion, these are sacred places of the village. Such an area may be under a big tree, or on the bank of a river. Each village has such sacred centres. They are used for holding community rituals and festivities according to the religious traditions of the village. These centres have their own myths and stories of origin. They are the focal points of village life.

  Every places of worship, whether it is a naamghar, temple, guruduwuara, mosque, or a local shrine, is run out of the property attached to it, or from public funds and donations. Sometimes, private persons may also build and maintain private temples or shrines.

The religious focus is mainly on the shrines of the village's goddess and god.

- **Supernatural world of Indian rural life:** Rural Indians inhabit a world full of divine and semi-divine beings, such as tree spirits (yakshas), ghosts (bhootas), puranic, local, personal and ancestral gods, who co-exist in a complex hierarchy. Along with the public shrines to the gods, every Hindu home has a domestic shrine, and a veneration of sacred trees and snakes. These were attested to millennia ago, and still play an important part in the contemporary religious practices and beliefs. Unlike in orthodox puranic Hinduism, the villagers have direct access to the local gods and do not require the intercession of a priest. The Goddess also plays a larger role in local religion and rural religion is centred on specific places of perceived spiritual power. The shrines themselves are relatively simple affairs. They are usually covered and often enclosed on three sides by a low wall. Shrines with buildings on them are quite rare. The simplest form of shrine can consist of a pile of stones by a riverbank or in a field, where, at some point in the past, it is believed, a spirit had made its presence known. Villages often have a number of shrines to different deities located at the edge of the village.
- **Household sacred space**: Besides village level sacred spots, each household possesses a household shrine, however small it may be. Household deities are daily worshipped by the respective family members.
- **Sacred performances** like rituals and festivals are the life line in Indian villages. These foster unity amongst the people. Rural religion is expressed through the tradition of life cycle rituals (like birth, marriage, and death), festivals related to economic activities, ancestor worship and such others. We have discussed that rural religion in India is a practical one. Sociologists and Anthropologists have classified different forms of religious activities. Some of these

are prayers, sacrifices, rituals, fast, festivals, divination and such other forms.

- **Sacred functionaries:** Each Indian village bas a body of religious functionaries like Maulabi, Pandit, Purohit, and priest, either full time or part time religious specialists. The full time specialists generally do not have any other means of livelihood. In simpler rural systems, the part time specialists like medicineman, healers, astrologers, diviners and others, play crucial role.



**LET US KNOW**

**Shaman and Religious Leader** A shaman is a person who is not a part of an organized religion and is in direct contact with the spirit world, usually through a trance state. A shaman has spirit helpers at his or her command to carry out curing, divining, and bewitching. Shamanistic power is acquired individually, usually in physical and/or mental solitude and isolation from other humans. Spirits or some other supernatural entities are revealed to the shaman and he or she learns how to control them.A shaman is essentially a religious entrepreneur who acts for human clients. He or she intervenes on behalf of a human client to influence supernatural beings to perform some act such as curing an illness or discovering the cause of an unexpected death. The shaman essentially acts as a middleman in this. In contrast, a priest's clients are the gods. A priest tells people what to do. A shaman tells the supernatural beings what to do. However, both shamans and priests are paid for their services with material things and/or prestige. Shamans are common in small-scale societies. However, they do not completely disappear in large-scale societies that have organized religions. A religious leader who is part of an organized religion is considered to be a priest or priestess. Of course, different religions have different terms for these individuals—they may be known as

rabbis, ministers, mullahs, imams, or something else. These individuals are the keepers of the sacred law and tradition. They are found mostly in large-scale societies. Priests are authorized by priesthood, or some other religious organization, to perform religious rituals designed to influence the supernatural world and to guide the believers in their religious practices. Priests personally do not have supernatural powers at their command. Priests are initiated and ceremonially inducted members of an established religious organization. That is, they are members of a priesthood. Their rank and function results from holding a religious office held by others before them.

## 5.8 FUNCTIONS OF RURAL RELIGION IN INDIA

- **Maintaining Group identity :**

  Alongside the personal dimensions of worship and reverence, rural festivals and rituals can have a more basic social function in expressing, fixing and reinforcing the shared values and beliefs of a society. Rituals can aid in creating a firm sense of group identity. This function can be exploited for political ends. Humans have used rituals to create social bonds and even to nourish interpersonal relationships.

- **Means of social control :**

  Religion is a powerful means of social control. Each religion provides a moral code of conduct for its followers. The fear of supernatural punishment or the wrath of the god compels a person to abide by its religious norms. Thus, the fundamental function of religion, particularly in rural areas of India is to maintain social order.

- **Rural religion controls food habits**: Religion, in a rural community is very much linked with food habits. Certain items of food are encouraged while some others are prohibited or tabooed by different religions. Thus, there are religious variations.

- **Preservation and maintenance of hierarchical social order**

  Indian rural society is a stratified society. It is basically caste oriented. Caste system is not only limited to Hindus only. Sociologists have shown that castes are present among Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and religious groups in India.

  The stratification of the rural society was also maintained through the customs, tradition and rituals advocated by religion. Mc Kim Marriott has also identified that the ritual and religious aspects of hierarchical relations in the village are governed even today by the concept of purity and pollution .The *commensal* relations in the village are also governed, even today, by the concepts of purity and pollution.

- **Maintenance of inter-castes relations:** The Hindu caste society was based on an elaborate division of labour which is termed as jajmani system. Each caste has had its own hereditary occupation and each occupational caste gave their services to their clients of other castes, and received services or things on return. The village caste structure is characterised by the jajmani system. Yogendra Singh has described jajmani system as a system governed by relationship based on reciprocity in inter-caste relations in villages. According to Leach, the jajmani system maintains and regulates division of labour and economic interdependence.

- **Recreation, leisure, art and culture**

  Religious rituals and festivities provide opportunities to the rural people to relax and enjoy life. The fairs are also organised in Indian villages which are based on religion. Thus, villagers get opportunities for leisure and recreation due to religious celebration. These rituals and festivals in a village are visited by people from distant areas also. Thus, through these festivals, ritual contact between far flung areas could be maintained.



**ACTIVITY**

- Make a list of some festivals observed in the rural areas you know.
- Systematically arrange the Bihu festival according to the agricultural activity cycle.

## 5.9 CHANGING SCENARIO

Several new trends have become visible in the post independence period of India. Let us discuss the changing scenario of religion in India.

- **Rising trend of communalism and the accompanying changes:** Violence has created a feeling of insecurity among different religious groups in the villages, mainly among the religious minorities. We know that India is a country with multi-religions. Even within the same religion, we find different factions and cults. There is enough evidence in our history to demonstrate that there has been cult conflict between the followers of different cults, mainly in rural areas. However, in the urban areas the effect of cult conflict is not so severe. Communalism has been a historical occurrence. In the contemporary times, with the development of communication technology, communalism becomes more organised and politicised.
- **New forces of globalization, capitalist economy, and consumerism have penetrated the rural life in India:** Improvement in communication, mobile phone, and electronic media have become part of general village life in India. All these forces and factors have reduced the importance of religion in rural life to a great extent.
- **Effects of Politics:** We have already mentioned that religion develops group identity. At the same time politics have resulted in dividing society along the lines of religion. All over the country, the local, regional and national politics have taken religion as a force for

creating divisions in the country. If this trend of political activities continues, then the day is not far when religion would prove to be a highly divisive force in the villages of India.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - 2**

a) Mention two of the social functions of religion in rural India.

.....

b) Cite two modern changes of religious aspect of rural society.

.....



## 5.10 LET US SUM UP

Thus, from this Unit we have come to know that religion plays an important role in the various aspects of the social life of rural people. Their world view is dominated by religion. World view includes the ways a group or an individual perceives the world around and explains the events in it. As such, economic behaviour, beliefs and practices relating to health and nutrition, marriage, birth, death, etc. are influenced by religion. Religious practitioners, thus, acquire a prominent position in the society. They come to wield power in the group. Religion also binds the members of the group into a unity. Modern trends of globalisation, consumerism, capitalism, politicisation, and organised communalism, have brought changes in the religious aspects of social life bringing consequent changes in the other areas of social life of the rural as well as urban society of India.



## 5.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**CYP 1** a) religion b) spiritual c) True d) True e) True

**CYP 2** a) religion maintains group identity and serve as means of social control

b) Reducing of the dominance of religion on social life and politicisation of religion.



## 5.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Define religion. Discuss the basic aspects of religion.
2. Explain the social functions of religion. Discuss the significance of the study of rural religion
3. What are the characteristics of rural religion in India? Discuss its functions.
4. Discuss the changing scenario of rural religion in India.



## 5.13 FURTHER READING

1. Sankar Rao, C.N. *Society in India*, S. Chand & Co. New Delhi
2. Madan, T.N. *Religion in India*, OUP, New Delhi.
3. Madan, T.N. *India's Religion*, OUP, New Delhi
4. Robinson, Rowena *Sociology of Religion in India*, Sage Publication

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# UNIT- 6: RURAL ECONOMY - KEY FEATURES

## UNIT STRUCTURE


6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Agrarian Nature of Rural Economy

6.4 Agriculture and Allied Sectors

6.5 Rural Non-Farm Economy

6.6 Let Us Sum up

6.7 Answers to Check Your Progress


## 6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to -

- explain what the rural economy means
- describe what Green Revolution and its policies imply
- elaborate the rural farm and non-farm sectors
- explain the key features of the rural economy

## 6.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces the reader to the key features of the rural economy of India. Two-third of the Indian population resides in rural areas. Agriculture is the prime sector of rural occupation and income. The first section looks at the Agrarian Nature of the Rural Economy. This forms the background to understand the rural economy and the challenges of the rural economy. The second section looks at Agriculture and its Allied Sectors, particularly the livestock economy. The third unit looks at the Rural Non-Farm Economy, its emergence, and how rural industries and services can play an important role in the rural economy.

## 6.3 AGRARIAN NATURE OF RURAL ECONOMY

A rural economy is an economic system where economic activities take place in rural areas. According to the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), a rural area in India is a place which has a population density of up to 400 people per square kilometer. Further, a minimum of 75% of the male working population are involved in agriculture and allied activities.

Agriculture is the main economic activity in rural India. Agriculture and related sectors employ a large portion of the rural workforce. In 2023-24, 59.8% of the rural workforce was employed in agriculture and the sector contributes 14% of India's GDP. Further, nearly three-quarters of India's families depend on rural incomes.

Land is the primary means of production in rural India. Land ownership and access to cultivable land play a crucial role in defining social and economic hierarchies in rural areas. Issues such as land fragmentation, landlessness, and tenure insecurity are also prevalent in rural India. Land fragmentation refers to the division of agricultural land into smaller and scattered plots, often due to inheritance laws or population growth. In India, according to the 2015-16 Agriculture Census, 86.1% of Indian farmers are small and marginal. More than half of these marginal farmers live in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. The average landholding size of a marginal farmer is 0.38 hectares, and this size has remained almost the same for the past 40 years.

The agrarian economy is also very seasonal in nature. Agricultural activities are closely tied to seasons and natural factors like rainfall, climate, and soil fertility. This seasonality affects employment patterns and income stability in rural areas. There are three distinct cropping seasons in India.

(i) Kharif: This season begins with the Southwest Monsoon and is used to grow tropical crops like rice, cotton, jute, jowar, bajra, and tur.

(ii) Rabi: This season is used to grow crops like wheat.

(iii) Zaid: This is another cropping season in India.

Another key characteristic of the Indian economy is subsistence farming. Subsistence farming is characterized by low levels of technology, small landholdings, and low yields. Farmers use indigenous tools like hoes, digging sticks, and daos. They cultivate a variety of crops, including cereals, pulses, vegetables, oilseeds, and sugarcane.

**Role of Agriculture in Indian Economy :**

Agriculture plays an important role in the sustenance of the Indian economy as well as the rural economy. It provides food as well as non-food needs of the country and supplies: (i) foodgrains such as rice, wheat, coarse cereals, and pulses; (ii) commercial crops such as oilseeds, cotton, and sugarcane, (iii) plantation crops such as tea and coffee, and (iv) horticultural crops such as fruits, vegetables, flowers, spices, and nuts. In addition, agriculture also has allied activities like milk and dairy products, poultry products, and fishery which are of importance.

The second important role that the primary sector (agriculture and the allied activities) play is the contribution to GDP and employment, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter. Since the 1950s, there has been a steady decline in the share of agriculture in India's GDP from 52% in 1950 to 14% in 2023. However, the share of agriculture in employment has not declined as steadily as the share in GDP. There is another third important role that agriculture plays, which is its contribution to other sectors through linkages. Agriculture is important for the growth and expansion of the rural non-farm sector.

**LET US KNOW**



The Green Revolution led to the following positive impacts:

- Increase in production and productivity of food grains: One of the most important impacts of GR was on raising the production and productivity of cereal crops, especially wheat and rice.
- Employment generation and impact on non-farm economy: Farm machines and productivity have led to rise in employment in non-farm areas through farm-nonfarm linkages.

- Flow of public/private investment in agriculture: The new agricultural strategy required public investment in agricultural infrastructure, including investment in agricultural research, extension, power, roads, irrigation, etc. Such investments made a positive impact on accelerating the pace of private investment in agriculture. Farmers invested in tube-wells and tractors, significantly raising private investment in India.
- Land saving: GR technology is considered to be land-saving as it significantly increased the per hectare yield of various agricultural crops.

The Green Revolution also led to some negative impacts like the following:

- Decline in soil fertility: Increase use of fertilizers and pesticides has led to a decrease in soil fertility.
- Loss in biodiversity: Increase use of chemicals has led to pollution of water resources, leading to harmful effects towards acquatic life and fish production.
- Depletion of groundwater resources: The exponential growth of tube-wells has led to a decline in groundwater resources.
- Impact on small and marginal farmers: Shifting from traditional farming to monoculture had negative effects on small and marginal farmers who had to purchase farm inputs at higher prices. These farmers would often take loans to buy such inputs, forcing them into a "debt trap".
- Widening disparities: The benefits of the GR technology was mainly limited to a few crops such as wheat, rice, sugarcane and few regions with adequate irrigation facilities. This led to wide regional disparities.
- Energy problems: GR technology had high dependence on fossil fuel energy sources. An increase in the cost of energy-based farm inputs has resulted in an increase in the prices of farm products, making the GR system ecologically and economically questionable.



**LET US KNOW**

Since the independence, the agrarian economy of India has seen several changes. The First Five Year Plan (1950-1955) kept development of agriculture as one of its primary focus areas. But, increasing focus on industries saw negligence of agriculture in the subsequent years, eventually leading to severe food shortage in 1958.

Some of the changes that rural India has seen are listed below:

**Green Revolution:** The 1960s saw large investments in irrigation, fertilizer, agricultural research and development, education, and extension services. This led to growth in productivity and production in Indian agriculture, and is popularly known as the Green Revolution.

**White Revolution:** Launched in 1970, the WR was the world's largest dairy development programme, and transformed India from a milk deficient nation into the world's largest milk producer.

**Yellow Revolution:** The YR of the 1990s refer to the policies which made India self-sufficient in oilseeds, making India the 4th largest producer of oilseeds.

**Blue Revolution:** Launched in 2014, the BR focused on an integrated approach for the development and management of fisheries to ensure a sustained annual growth rate of 6-8% in fish production.

### Economic Reforms and Agriculture Sector

The 1990s saw India implementing liberalization policies. After the initial impact of the Green Revolution which increased agricultural production and productivity, the impact of the GR faltered by the early 90s. Production of food grains grew at 3.5 per cent per annum during the 1980s, which decelerated to 1.5 per cent from 1990-96 despite a run of very good, well

distributed rainfall. Many economists argue that this is because of the liberalization policies followed by the Indian State. These policies included privatization of certain state electricity boards, removal of subsidies to agricultural electrification, reduction of subsidies on fertilizers, and deregulation of rural banking, stagnation of state outlays on research and development, and reduction of investment on infrastructure like irrigation. These anti-agricultural policies further led to increase in inter-regional disparities in absolute yields and growth trajectories of states like Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh on one hand, and underdeveloped states like Bihar, Orissa, and Assam on the other hand.

**Challenges in the Agrarian Sector**

The agrarian sector currently faces several challenges which can be summed up as follows:

- Rising agricultural productivity per unit of land: One of the prime concerns for economies dependent on agriculture is that it cannot alone absorb the growing rural population. Hence, agricultural productivity per unit of land has to rise and be the main engine of growth as virtually all cultivable land is already farmed. Water resources are also limited and water for irrigation must contend with increasing industrial and urban needs. All measures to increase agricultural productivity needs exploitation of natural resources - increasing yields, diversification to higher value crops, and developing value chains to reduce marketing costs.
- Reduction of rural poverty: Poverty reduction in rural areas cannot be done through rise in farm incomes alone. A socially inclusive policy that comprises of both agriculture and non-farm employment can lead the way. Rural development has to benefit the poor, the landless, women, the social minorities, and all caste groups. We have also talked about the presence of strong regional disparities that have increased as a result of GR policies. For instance, the majority of India's poor people are in rain-fed areas or are in the Eastern Indo-Gangetic plains. Reaching such groups has not been easy. While

rural poverty has been declining (from nearly 40% in the early 1990s to below 30% in the mid-2000s), which is about 1% fall a year, there is a need for faster reduction. Poverty reduction, hence, remains one of the central pillars of rural development.

- Ensuring Food Security: The Green Revolution period saw a sharp rise in food-grain production which enabled the country to achieve self-sufficiency in food-grains and eliminated the threat of famines. Agricultural intensification of the 1970s and 1980s saw an increased demand for rural labour that raised rural wages and along with declining food prices, reduced rural poverty as seen from the above paragraph. However, agricultural growth in the 1990s and 2000s slowed down after the economic reforms, averaging around 3.5% per annum. Cereal yields increased by only 1.4% per annum in the 2000s. This slow-down of agriculture continues till date as the sector continues to witness crisis leading to drastic measures like farmer suicides. India's rice yields are one-third of China's and about half of those in Vietnam and Indonesia. This is true for most agricultural commodities. Despite that, rural poverty and rural inequality are high in Indian villages.

The Indian agricultural sector needs urgent reforms along with policy actions and public programs. This can shift the sector away from the existing policy and institutional regime that appears to be no longer viable and build a solid foundation for a much more productive, internationally competitive, and diversified agricultural sector. Agriculture provides livelihood to a little less than two-thirds of the Indian population. Rural India, however, is continuously changing as a result of political, economic, and social policies and changes. The next section of the chapter looks at agriculture and its allied activities.



**Activity 1**

What is the role of agriculture in the Indian economy?

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**Activity 2**

Explain the agrarian nature of the Indian economy.

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What are the key challenges that the Indian agrarian economy currently face?

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## 6.4 AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED ACTIVITIES

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy as well as the rural economy. Indian agriculture is characterized by agro-ecological diversities in soil, rainfall, temperature, and cropping system. Agriculture, with its allied sectors, is the largest livelihood provider in India, especially in rural areas. It contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the

country. Sustainable agriculture, in terms of food security, rural employment, and environmentally sustainable technologies such as soil conservation, sustainable natural resource management and biodiversity protection, are essential for holistic rural development. Further, in addition to the Green Revolution, Indian agriculture and allied activities have also witnessed a white revolution, a yellow revolution, and a blue revolution.

We have discussed that cultivable land in India is scarce and that majority of Indian landowners are marginal or small landholders. Cultivation, hence, cannot be the sole means of self-employment and income generating activity for people in the rural areas. This is where the role of allied activities becomes important in providing gainful employment. Allied activities reduce humans' dependence on land for cultivation. These activities also provide nutrients to rural India. For instance, mutton, fish, and eggs contain 18%, 17%, and 13% of proteins as compared to rice (8%), maize (11%), and wheat (12%). In a country like Indian where malnutrition and unbalanced diet are common features, the availability of allied activities becomes essential.

Allied activities also make cultivation efficient by providing organic manure, draught and traction power. They also play a complementary role to farm sector by providing a stable and dependable source of employment and income.

**Livestock as a Source of Income**

One of the most important allied activities in India is animal husbandry and livestock rearing. There are three key trends that can be seen in rural areas today which can explain the importance of the livestock economy. First, the share of agriculture has progressively declined to less than 15% due to high growth rates of the industrial and services sector, but its share in employment has declined at a slower rate. Nearly three-quarters of India's families depend on rural incomes, especially agriculture. Second, majority of India's poor (around 70%) are found in rural areas. Finally, India's food security depends on cereal crops as well as on increasing production of fruits, vegetables, and milk to meet the demands of a growing population

with rising incomes. This requires a productive, competitive, diversified, and sustainable agricultural sector to emerge.

The livestock economy has several features:

- Livestock rearing is a major source of income for over 70% of rural households in India.
- Livestock provides employment to about 8.8% of the population.
- India is the world's top milk producer and contributes 23% of global milk production.
- Livestock sector contributed 30% of the agricultural and allied sector Gross Value Added (GVA) and 5.73% of the total GVA in 2021-22.
- The livestock sector is important for producing organic inputs like manure, and agricultural waste is used as animal fodder.
- Livestock diversification can increase total farm production and income, and provides year-round employment.
- Livestock also helps people cope with crop failure.

India is the largest producer of milk, pulses, and spices. It also has the world's largest cattle herd (buffaloes) as well as the largest area under wheat, rice, and cotton. It is the second largest producer of rice, wheat, cotton, sugarcane, farmed fish, sheep and goat meat, fruits, vegetables, and tea. This data shows the spread of agriculture in the country. In fact, the country has around 195 million hectare under cultivation of which 63% are rainfed, which is around 125 million hectare. 37% of its cultivable land is irrigated, which is around 70 million hectare. Forests cover around 65 million hectare of India's land.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - (A)**

1. Cut in state outlay on research and development is an anti-agricultural policy. True/ False

2. The fall in the share of agriculture in GDP and employment in India has been equal. True/ False

3. Which of the following is not an agricultural allied activity?

a) Livestock b) Fishery c) Forestry d) Mining

## 6.5 RURAL NON-FARM ECONOMY

We so far saw how agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy. Along with agriculture, people in rural areas also engage in other agricultural allied activities.

However, the agricultural sector has been going through a period of crisis and farm income alone has not been able to lift rural population from poverty. Agricultural income depend on crop failure, irregular rainfall, pest attacks, and climate disasters, along with price fluctuations. There has also been increasing evidence that contemporary rural households are pluri-active households, where members are engaged in both farm as well as non-farm activities. For instance, according to the All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey 2021-22, 56% of agricultural households in India depend on 3 or more income sources. The transition in composition of output and occupation from agriculture to more productive nonfarm sectors is considered as an important source of economic growth and transformation in rural and total economy. This section looks at the non-farm sector of rural India.



**Let us Know**

In India, two-thirds of the total income of the rural people comes from non-farm sources. There have been an increasing number of rural non-farm workers accompanied by a fall in agriculture as an occupation in the villages.

The rural non-farm sector has emerged as a growing source of income for India's rural households. The traditional view that rural

households only engage in agriculture needs to be changed. Rural non-farm activities include petty self-employment, petty production, and casualization of labour. The increase in non-farm employment have also led to increasing debates around casualization of rural labour, which can be further understood with caste, class, region, and religion.

**Rural Industries and Enterprises**

Rural industries imply all industries which are run by rural people in or near their homes as a spare-time or whole-time occupation. In 1962, the Planning Commission first used the term "rural industries" to recommend a rural industries project programme. The Planning Commission in 1988 defined rural industries as "types of industries such as khadi, village industries, handloom, handicraft, sericulture, coir, and tiny and service industries situated in rural areas." Over the years, household industries have declined and small-scale, non-household industries have expanded.

There are several types of rural industries - traditional village industries, heavy industry, medium group industries, and light industries. Traditional village industries comprises of khadi, leather tanning, wood work, artisan industries, cotton cloth, handloom, power loom, handicrafts, coir, sericulture, etc. Heavy industries include fertilizer plans, pesticides, mini-steel plants, ancillary engineering, etc. Middle group industries include mini-cement plant, minor paper plant, etc. Light industries include animal feed and fodder industries and industries producing hinges, screens, etc.

There are several key features of rural industries:

- Rural industries and enterprises can slow rural-urban migration and ease the process of urbanization.
- Rural industries can absorb the growing rural labour force and provide employment in the off-season. It is to be noted that agriculture is seasonal and the nature of seasonality plays a major role in rural-urban seasonal migration.
- Rural industries and enterprises can increase rural income and generate non-farm employment sources.

- Rural industries can also accommodate women in large numbers. Small-scale household rural industries, located within the household premise, can provide additional income to rural women.
- Rural industries can promote balanced industrialization.
- Rural industries and enterprises are based on local needs and help in meeting rural consumption demands.

However, some economists and scholars have shown apprehension at the lack of labour laws and environmental concerns by some of the rural industries, located outside the urban purview. The Government of India has implemented various schemes to promote rural industries, including rebate policy for khadi, insurance cover for khadi artisans, and the National Programme on Rural Industrialization (NPRI) Scheme.



**Activity 3**

What are the key features of rural industries in India?

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**Rural Service Sector and Changes**

Service sector is the second highest contributor of income and employment in rural areas. The share of agriculture in rural areas in Net Domestic Product (NDP) has declined from 72.4% in 1970-71 to 39.2% in 2011-12. Its share in employment has also gone down, but not as fast its share in NDP.

Sectoral share in NDP and employment in rural areas (from 1970 to 2012) (in %)

| Year | Agriculture | Manufacturing | Construction | Services |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Share in rural NDP (at current prices) | | | | |
| 1970-71 | 72.4 | 5.9 | 3.5 | 17.1 |
| 1980-81 | 64.4 | 9.2 | 4.1 | 20.6 |
| 1993-94 | 57.0 | 8.2 | 4.6 | 26.8 |
| 1999-00 | 51.4 | 11.1 | 5.6 | 28.6 |
| 2004-05 | 38.9 | 11.5 | 7.8 | 37.3 |
| 2011-12 | 39.2 | 18.4 | 10.5 | 27.0 |
| Share in rural employment | | | | |
| 1972-73 | 85.5 | 5.3 | 1.4 | 7.3 |
| 1983 | 83.6 | 6.2 | 1.3 | 8.8 |
| 1993-94 | 78.4 | 7.0 | 2.4 | 11.4 |
| 1999-00 | 76.3 | 7.4 | 3.3 | 12.5 |
| 2004-05 | 72.6 | 8.1 | 4.9 | 13.9 |
| 2011-12 | 64.1 | 8.6 | 10.7 | 15.5 |

***Source:*** Changing Structure of Rural Economy of India: Implications for Employment and Growth, Discussion Paper, NITI Aayog.

The share of the non-farm sector, on the other hand, has rapidly increased as both industry (manufacturing and construction) and service sector have seen a rise in their shares. Service sector in rural areas witnessed deceleration in output as well as employment after 2004-05. An important reason for this is increased reliance of rural consumers on service providers located in urban areas.



**Check Your Progress (B)**

1. Which of the following show that the agrarian sector is in crisis?

a) Falling food prices b) Farmer suicides

b) Stagnation of rural wages d) Increasing input costs

2. Which of the following fall under the rural non-farm sector?

a) Manufacturing b) Fishery

c) Livestock d) Services

3 The post-liberalization period saw a fall in rural poverty. True/ False

4. Engagement in the in rural non-farm sector imply reduction of poverty. True/False



**Activity 4**

The share of agriculture in NDP has declined more sharply than its share in employment. Discuss why.

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**Activity 5**

Why is casualization of rural labour a negative trend?

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**Activity 6**

Can the emergence of non-farm economy absorb the growing population?

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## 6.6 LET US SUM UP

- In this unit we have learned about the key features of the Indian rural economy.
- From this unit you have come to know about the Green Revolution, one of the significant events of Indian rural economy.
- This sets the stage to understand the present rural scenario of the country.
- We have also learnt that the agricultural sector is currently in crisis.
- We have also learned about the various challenges that the rural economy is facing, and how the emergence of the rural non-farm sector is changing the rural economy.



## 6.7 FURTHER READING

1. How Lives Change by Himanshu, Peter Lanjouw, and Nicholas Stern (2018)
2. Handbook of Internal Migration in India by S. Irudaya Rajan and Sumeetha M. (2019)
3. Transforming the Rural Non-Farm Economy *Opportunities and Threats in the Developing World* by Steven Haggblade, Peter B. R. Hazell, and Thomas Reardon (2007)



## 6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

A. 1. True 2. False 3. d

B. 1. b, c, and d 2. a, b, and d 3.True 4.True



## 6.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Short Questions (Answer each in 150 words)**

1. Explain the key features of the rural Indian economy.
2. Explain the trend in rural India's share in GDP and employment over the years.

**B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300 words)**

Q1: Write an essay on the nature of rural economy.

Q2: Discuss rural non-farm economy as a source of livelihood.

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# UNIT - 7 EMERGING TRENDS IN RURAL ECONOMY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Rural Livelihood Diversification

7.4 Rural Seasonal Migration

7.5 Rural Poverty and Inequality

7.6 Let Us Sum up

7.7 Further Reading

7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.9 Model Questions


## 7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- describe the key emerging trends in rural Indian economy
- describe the concept of rural livelihood diversification and explain its role in rural poverty reduction has been
- elaborate the drivers of rural migration
- explain the various dynamics of rural poverty and inequality

## 7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the emerging trends in the rural Indian economy. The unit begins by explaining how one of the key trends of the rural economy is the emergence of the non-farm sector and how rural livelihood diversification has emerged through various push and pull factors. The unit then talks about rural seasonal migration, another important trend that has emerged in rural India. Finally, the unit explains how rural poverty

and inequality have developed over the years with the emerging trends in the rural economy in the background.

## 7.3 RURAL LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION AND EMERGENCE OF RURAL NON-FARM ECONOMY

The previous unit gave a brief overview of the rural economy and how the rural economy is changing with the emergence of the rural non-farm sector. The traditional view that rural households only engage in agriculture needs to be changed and this section looks at the emergence of non-farm activities in rural households. Rural households earn their incomes from various sources including cultivation, livestock, agricultural wage labour and other non-farm occupations. Apart from cultivation which is considered the mainstay of Indian rural household income, livestock and agricultural labour income supplement the incomes of households wholly dependent on farm based activities. As economies grow and diversify into various non-farm activities, rural households also earn a larger chunk of their incomes from non-farm casual labour, migration to other rural or urban areas and from salary based activities.

It is, hence, important to understand that livelihoods of rural people do not necessarily depend on a single source of employment. Livelihood strategies and decisions are characterized by the allocation of assets (natural, physical, financial, public, social and human), income-earning activities (on farm, off farm), and outcomes (food, income, employment, consumption, security). These factors together determine the livelihood choices of individuals.

**How do Rural Households Diversify?**

While agriculture and allied activities are the main livelihood option for rural households in India, the last 10 years have witnessed substantial changes in the pattern of rural livelihood. Dependence on agriculture as a primary source of income has reduced substantially and people are now increasingly relying on non-farm income sources for their livelihood. But

the job creation has shifted towards wage earning and self-employment with petty businesses. For the rural poor, livelihood diversification is mainly a survival strategy to cope with the adverse livelihood shocks and to manage the risky environments like floods and other natural disasters. However, for others, it can be a deliberate attempt to reap the benefits of the growing economy.

The participation of rural households in non-farm activities could be either due to "push" factors (e.g. risk reduction, land constraints, response to a crisis) and/or "pull" factors (eg. complementarities with existing income activities, higher profitability of the activities). Various factors like education, skills, caste, religion, asset ownership, household size, and credit availability influence the decision of a household to participate and also decide on the extent of participation in a particular non-farm activity. Understanding the relation between participation in rural non-farm sector and well-being of a household and relation between non-farm sector expansion and macro-economic indicators is of vital importance.

Households also face several constraints in pursuing non-farm activities. Lack of opportunities to find out an alternative livelihood in non-farm sector is one of the most important constraints. The other major constraints are landlessness or weak asset base; limited access to institutional credit; and poor irrigation and marketing infrastructure.

Hence, there are several pull as well as push factors that households face in terms of their livelihood diversification. Pull factors also include growing wages in non-farm activities and growing opportunities. The push factors also include limited expansion of job opportunities in organized non-farm sector, falling profitability of agricultural enterprises, lack of assets, etc.

Studies have found that the impact of livelihood diversification is positive on household income, employment, and consumption. Creation of off-farm and non-farm employment opportunities for rural households holds the key for a sustainable livelihood. Quality of rural livelihood can only improve if surplus labour force in agriculture is absorbed in more productive organised sectors like manufacturing or agro-processing.

**Role of Non-Farm Sector on Rural Economy**

There should be efforts to make remunerative non-farm opportunities accessible to the rural households, particularly in backward regions of the country. Education and skill development can be an effective means of increasing the livelihood diversification strategies as it relaxes the entry barriers to different remunerative non-farm activities, particularly salaried jobs.

There should be adequate focus on policies that reduce various constraints to diversification and widen new opportunities like education, market, infrastructure, credit, and social safety nets. There is a need for the government to invest more on rural roads, market, education, health, and irrigation infrastructure. Strengthening rural education, especially in backward areas can promote sustainable rural livelihood diversification.

Studies have also found a relationship between engagement in non-farm activities and its impact on household rural poverty reduction. Further, non-farm activities can also have an impact on rural inequality.

Apart from engagement in rural non-farm activities, households also engage in seasonal migration from rural India. In the absence of adequate jobs, households migrate out to cities, nearby towns, and villages looking for jobs. The next section looks more closely at rural migration.



Activity 1.

How are rural households today different from traditional rural households?

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**Activity 2.**

How can rural non-farm economy play a role in rural development?

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## 7.4 RURAL SEASONAL MIGRATION

Seasonal and circular migration of labour for employment has become one of the most durable and important components of livelihood strategies of people living in rural areas. Migration is adopted not just by the very poor during times of crisis for survival and coping, but has increasingly become an accumulative option for the poor and non-poor alike.

The National Commission on Rural Labour (NCRL) puts the number of circular migrants in rural areas alone at around 10 million (including roughly 4.5 million inter-State migrants and 6 million intra-State migrants). According to the NCRL, the majority of seasonal migrants are employed in cultivation and plantations, brick-kilns, quarries, construction sites and fish processing. Further, large numbers of seasonal migrants work in urban informal manufacturing, construction, services or transport sectors, employed as casual labourers, head-loaders, rickshaw pullers and hawkers.

Another interesting trend in rural India is the feminization of agriculture that is happening as a result of male migration. As male members move out of their villages in search jobs in the absence of adequate livelihood options, women are increasingly taking to cultivation.



**Check your Progress (A)**

1. Households in rural India migrate only to move out of poverty. True/ False

2. Construction sector is one of the highest migrant absorbing sectors in India. True/ False

3. Which of the following activities are most migrant-absorbing?

a) Construction b) Cultivation c) Information Technology d) Brick Kilns

4. How can migration change the socio-economic structure of rural India?

**Why do People Migrate?**

In the previous unit, we saw how the fall in the share of agriculture in GDP has been faster than the fall of share of agriculture in employment in the case of India. This trend of a 'stunted' structural transformation of the Indian economy where the decrease in agriculture's share in GDP has not been accompanied by subsequent accelerated growth of labour intensive manufacturing has made understanding of rural nonfarm sector extremely important. In addition to the emergence of non-farm activities, rural migration is another key trend of rural India. Members of rural households migrate to other rural or urban areas for employment and the internal remittances also become an important source of income for rural households.

This migration could be distress driven or driven by the good opportunities provided in the other areas. Hence, a growing economy with a not so fast growing manufacturing sector might see a high level of income diversification among rural households, migration being another one of them. Rural households can engage in migration because of several factors, which can be termed as pull as well as push factors.

- Migration can be involuntary in nature. This implies extreme economic and often social hardships, and is undertaken mostly by

landless or land-poor, unskilled and illiterate poor labourers. Here people do not have any choice of the place or type of work that they undertake. The main drivers of such migration are several push factors like worsening situation of dryland agriculture created by drought, crop failure and poor terms of trade.

- Migration can also be a coping strategy. Such migration is integral to people's coping, survival and livelihood strategies and not just a response to emergencies.
- Seasonal migration is also undertaken to improve the economic position of the household. Such migration can occur normally after the harvest season.

**Migration and Poverty**

The role of migration in poverty reduction is extensively debated in economic literature. However, this is not easy to measure or understand because poverty levels are not constant and the effects of migration cannot be isolated. Also, there may be a two-way relationship between income and migration and it is therefore not surprising that there are mixed verdicts on this point. Migration, on one hand, can lead to an increase in migrants' incomes. On the other hand, there are evidences of how migration can also both reduce and perpetuate poverty. Nevertheless, the dominant perception of migration among policy-makers, academics and officials in India continues to be that migration is only for survival and that migrants remain poor. The image of the migrant continues to be that of a powerless, impoverished and emaciated person who is trapped in poverty



**Activity 3**

What are the push and pull factors that can lead to migration in rural India?

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**Check Your Progress (B)**

1. Migration for coping is done by households which are below the poverty line. True/ False

2. There is a three-way relationship between income and migration. True/ False

3. Rural migration that happens to improve household income often happens after the harvest season. True/ False

4. Which of the following are more likely to engage in rural involuntary migration?

a) Land poor b) Unskilled workers

c) Households affected by floods d) All the above

## 7.5 RURAL POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Studies have shown that 70% of Indians and as many Indians live in rural areas. Agriculture constitutes the main activity of 60% of the active population in rural areas and thus, cannot be disassociated from rural poverty. Agriculture is also sometimes described as a residual activity, which is abandoned by the richest, and no longer involves the masses of rural workers of the past. As seen from our discussion above, in a context of low growth in the agricultural sector, non-agricultural jobs occupied by people living in rural areas have become the object of increasing attention. Engagement in non-farm activities has also paved the way for moving out of poverty. We have also seen that the number people engaging in non-agricultural jobs are on the rise. Studies have shown that such a transformation has led to a decrease in rural poverty, but this decline has been slow. This is nonetheless accompanied by a reinforcement of inequality in rural areas.

As seen from our discussion above, there has been a notable change in sources of income among Indian rural households over the past few decades. The predominance of agriculture-based activities in total

income has reduced in terms of employment and share of income. Participation of rural households in non-farm sector has expanded greatly over the last two decades or so. Particularly, in the decade spanning 1993-94 to 2004-05, non-farm employment in rural India grew rapidly than farm employment. In this period, 60% of the 56 million rural jobs that were created were in the non-farm sector. The share of non-farm income in the total income of rural households has also become substantial during this period.

Studies estimate that farm households earn 46% of their incomes from non-farm activities and rural households earn 48% of their income from non-farm activities. This increased diversification of income generating activities could be seen as an indicator of expanding economic opportunities and thus expected to help in reduction of poverty and inequality.

Income from agriculture is largely related to land ownership and since land distribution is highly unequal in India, we would expect this income to be highly unequal. So, an expansion to nonfarm sector could pave way for reducing income inequality. But, this may not always be true as the accessibility to non-farm opportunities are far from universal. If profitable non-farm opportunities end up being exploited largely by the already well-off or elite in the population, we could see an increase in inequality due to expansion of non-farm sector. Given such contradictory possibilities, there might also be other factors that might explain the linkage between nonfarm sector expansion and income inequality of rural households.

For instance, unequal access to non-farm economic opportunities is sometimes exacerbated by social factors like caste and religion. These factors would put constraints other than economic factors like credit and assets for a particular section of people in pursuing opportunities in the non-farm sector. There have been some recent studies though which seem to suggest that social factors are affecting occupational mobility lesser than before. Different sources of income could also contribute to inequality differently over time.

The rural poor can often be identified as landless or land-poor. They can be less skilled and less educated. Further, demographic factors like

caste, region, ethnicity, and religion also play important role in determining rural poverty. Gender can also play an important role. Studies have found that households which are female headed are more likely to be poor. Similarly, the individual characteristics of the head of the household like his/her age, education, and marital status can also determine rural poverty.



**Let Us Know:**

Income and wealth inequalities are much higher than consumption inequality, especially in rural areas. While the consumption gini is estimated to be 0.287 in rural areas, the income gini is 0.541 and the wealth gini is 0.670. Thus, income gini is around 25 points higher than the consumption gini and wealth gini is around 40 points higher, reflecting the high income and wealth inequality in rural India.



**Activity 4**

What are the determinants of rural poverty?

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**Activity 5**

How can engagement in non-farm sector reduce poverty in rural areas?

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**Activity 6**

Is increase in farm income enough to reduce rural poverty?

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## 7.6 LET US SUM UP

- In this unit you have read about the key emerging trends of the Indian rural economy.
- From this unit you have come to know about the changes that rural economy faces along with the emergence of the non-farm sector.
- The emergence of the non-farm sector plays crucial role in poverty reduction but has also impact on rural inequality, which is discussed later.
- The key push and pull factors behind the emergence of the non-farm sector are also discussed.
- We have also learnt about how season migration emerges as a livelihood diversification strategy in rural India. There are various drivers of seasonal migration as have been discussed in the unit.



## 7.7 FURTHER READING

1. How Lives Change by Himanshu, Peter Lanjouw, and Nicholas Stern (2018)
2. Handbook of Internal Migration in India by S. Irudaya Rajan and Sumeetha M. (2019)
3. Transforming the Rural Non-Farm Economy Opportunities and Threats in the Developing World by Steven Haggblade, Peter B. R. Hazell, and Thomas Reardon (2007)



## 7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

A.

1. False

2. True

3. a, b, and c

B.

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. d) All the above



## 7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Short Questions** (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1: Write a short note on Rural Livelihood Diversification.

Q2: Why do rural households migrate? What are the factors that determine rural seasonal migration?

**B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300 words)**

Q1: Why do you think income and wealth inequality are higher than consumption inequality in rural India despite poverty reduction in recent years?

Q2: Is there a growing disinterest in agriculture in the recent years? Give reasons for your answer.

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# UNIT 8: CHALLENGES IN RURAL ECONOMY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

## UNIT STRUCTURE


8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 The State of Rural Economy

8.4 Challenges to the rural economy

8.5 Challenges in the Development of Rural India

8.6 Signs of Improvement in Rural Living Standards

8.7 Let Sum Up

8.8 Further Readings

8.9 Model Questions


## 8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- understand the current nature and state of rural economy
- explain the challenges to the rural economy
- elucidate the challenges in the development of rural India
- discuss possible strategies and solutions in addressing the ground issues of rural India.

## 8.2 INTRODUCTION

contrasts, with social issues and poverty enduring alongside fast economic growth. Living standards, education, health, and the environment are all changing significantly in the rural areas, which are home to around two-thirds of the population. People and communities in rural areas face a variety of issues and difficulties that are posing significant obstacles to obtaining possibilities for a living. Poverty, homelessness, unemployment, illiteracy, and crime and violence are the main issues. Individuals are

impacted by one or more of these issues, which negatively impacts their general quality of life. In addition to these concerns, there are other factors and problems that are not discussed explicitly but have a significant influence on the rural economy, such as migration, urbanization, climate change and biodiversity loss, agricultural distress, livelihood insecurity etc. When discussing the problems facing the rural economy that require attention, these topics become closely related. These issues and difficulties not only have a negative impact on people's living conditions, but they also create obstacles in their path to advancement.

The current status of the Indian rural economy must be understood before delving into a thorough examination of the shifting dynamics of the problems facing the sector.

## 8.3 THE STATE OF RURAL ECONOMY

India's rural economy is facing a mix of old and new challenges. According to the Economic Survey of 2022-23, about 65% of the population lives in rural areas, with 47% of them relying on agriculture for their livelihood. Yet, contrary to the common belief that agriculture is the main source of rural income, around two-thirds of rural earnings now come from non-agricultural jobs, showing a shift in how people make a living in rural India. Despite this change, agriculture has grown at an average annual rate of 4.6% over the past six years, but incomes in rural areas remain under stress due to various pressures.

Before the pandemic, India's rural economy was already struggling. The National Statistical Office's 2018-19 Situation Assessment Survey (SAS) revealed a crisis, marked by low demand for goods and disruptions in supply chains. Economic difficulties were building up even before 2014, due to a slowing economy and rising costs. Farmers faced increasing expenses because of higher wages, problems with India's fertilizer subsidies, and higher fuel prices. The situation worsened with consecutive droughts in 2014 and 2015, and just as the agricultural sector began to recover, the 2016 demonetization disrupted rural markets, leaving many farmers unable

to sell their produce. These setbacks contributed to an extended economic slowdown, which was further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

After the pandemic, the economy's recovery has been slow. By 2021-22, the per capita income in rural areas had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, and overall growth between 2016-17 and 2021-22 was just 3.7%- the lowest five-year growth rate in the past four decades. This reflects the deep-seated weaknesses in the rural economy, which have been further aggravated by recent economic shocks and environmental challenges.

The Union Budget 2023-24 has brought limited relief for rural India, which is already struggling with economic distress. While rural areas are still facing challenges, this budget has not provided a strong push to revitalize growth. Instead, it has introduced significant cuts to important subsidy schemes, with only slight increases in funding for some essential areas. For instance, the budget for agriculture and allied activities, including the PM KISAN scheme, rose marginally from Rs 1.36 trillion in FY23 to Rs 1.44 trillion in FY24-a modest 5.8% increase.

In agriculture research and development (R&D), funding rose slightly to Rs 9,504 crore from Rs 8,658 crore in FY23. However, this allocation is only 0.4% of India's agricultural gross value added, lagging far behind other countries that invest 1-2% of their agricultural GDP in R&D, signaling a missed opportunity for growth in agricultural innovation.

The budget has also made sharp cuts to agricultural subsidies, with the food subsidy reduced by 31% to Rs 197,350 crore from Rs 287,194 crore in the previous year. Similarly, the fertilizer subsidy was cut by 22%, now standing at Rs 175,099 crore. Support for LPG subsidies for poor households saw a dramatic reduction of 75%, leaving it at Rs 2,257 crore. Additionally, the allocation for cotton procurement under the Price Support Scheme was slashed significantly, from Rs 782 crore in FY23 to just Rs 1 lakh.

Overall, the budget's limited increases in certain areas and substantial reductions in critical subsidies suggest that rural India may continue to face economic difficulties without adequate support to stimulate growth and provide relief.

## 8.4 CHALLENGES TO THE RURAL ECONOMY

The rural economy in India faces a number of persistent and complex challenges that limit growth and affect the quality of life for rural communities. One significant issue is inflation, which has impacted the purchasing power of the rural population. Over recent years, inflation rates have been higher in rural areas than in urban centers, eroding rural income and diminishing real wage growth. As a result, rural households struggle to afford essential goods, and this reduced purchasing power has weakened demand for fast-moving consumer goods and other consumer products. Although there are slight signs of improvement, weak demand in rural areas remains a considerable concern for the economy.

Agriculture remains a central pillar of rural life, providing the primary livelihood for a large segment of the rural population. However, the agriculture sector faces critical issues that have compounded challenges for rural households. A lack of sufficient irrigation facilities, limited access to credit, low prices for produce, and increasingly unpredictable weather have led to crop failures and declining farm incomes. Many farmers find themselves in mounting debt as they struggle to cope with these issues, especially as climate change brings more frequent droughts and irregular rainfall. For rural households dependent on farming, these issues directly impact their economic security and ability to prosper.

The scarcity of employment opportunities in rural areas has also driven significant migration to urban centers, as people seek work in more industrialized or service-based sectors. This migration disrupts rural communities, causing both social and economic dislocation as families are separated and traditional support systems are weakened. As rural youth migrate, communities face additional challenges in sustaining local economies, as the labor force in these areas dwindles and skills are often lost.

Poor infrastructure further hampers rural development. Many rural areas lack basic amenities, including adequate water supply, reliable electricity, healthcare facilities, and quality education. Without access to

these essential services, rural regions struggle to keep pace with urban development, and communities are limited in their ability to grow economically or socially. This lack of infrastructure restricts the potential of rural areas to diversify their economies or attract investment.

The absence of robust social protection mechanisms adds another layer of vulnerability for rural households. Inadequate access to health insurance, old-age pensions, and disability benefits leaves many rural families without a safety net in times of crisis, such as illness or accidents. This lack of social protection puts additional pressure on households, as they have little recourse to cope with financial emergencies.

Local governance in rural areas also faces challenges due to limited fiscal autonomy. Panchayats, or local governing bodies, have only restricted powers in setting tax rates and revenue sources, as the broader guidelines are usually set by the state government. This lack of autonomy reduces their ability to raise funds independently, making them reliant on conditional grants from higher government levels. As a result, Panchayats have limited flexibility to finance local development projects or address pressing community needs effectively.

Addressing these challenges will require targeted policy interventions. The Economic Survey 2022-23 highlights the need for a shift in strategy to respond to rural challenges like climate change, rising input costs, and low agricultural productivity. Increased investment in rural infrastructure and research and development (R&D) is essential, as is a re-evaluation of subsidies to ensure funds are being used effectively. There is also a need to diversify rural agriculture beyond staple crops, promoting high-value crops such as millets, pulses, and oilseeds, along with other agricultural pursuits like horticulture, animal husbandry, dairying, and fisheries. This diversification could offer rural communities additional income sources and make them less dependent on single crop yields.

The Survey also underscores the importance of the rural non-farm sector, which plays a crucial role in creating jobs and driving income growth. Policies aimed at supporting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs)

in rural areas could help revitalize rural economies by creating local jobs and reducing the need for migration. Furthermore, with Indian states handling a substantial share of government spending on education, health, and infrastructure, collaboration between the central and state governments is essential. By working together, they can drive inclusive growth, raise incomes, and build sustainable rural communities.

## 8.5 CHALLENGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL INDIA

India's rural areas face unique and complex challenges that hinder their development, affecting the livelihoods and well-being of millions who live there. One of the most pervasive issues is poverty and inequality, with widespread poverty characterized by low incomes, limited access to basic services, and unequal distribution of resources. The income gap between rural and urban populations, as well as disparities within rural regions themselves, create obstacles to equitable growth. This income inequality limits the resources available to rural communities, resulting in fewer opportunities for advancement and poorer living conditions overall.

Agricultural distress is another critical issue for rural India. Most rural communities rely heavily on agriculture as a primary means of livelihood. However, this dependence exposes them to various risks, such as unpredictable weather, fluctuating market prices, and frequent crop failures. Problems like fragmented land holdings, insufficient irrigation, and outdated farming techniques add further strain, reducing productivity and limiting income growth for farmers. These issues, compounded by debt, create a cycle of financial vulnerability that rural families struggle to escape. Rural areas also face significant challenges in employment, with high levels of unemployment and underemployment. A lack of non-farm job opportunities means that many rural workers are dependent on seasonal agricultural work, leading to irregular incomes. Additionally, limited access to vocational training and skill development programs prevents rural residents from securing diverse job opportunities that could improve their standard of living.

As a result, many people remain underemployed, with their skills and potential untapped.

Infrastructural gaps continue to restrict the progress of rural India. Many rural communities lack essential connectivity, including adequate roads, electricity, and telecommunications, which limits access to markets, education, healthcare, and other critical services. Basic amenities, such as clean drinking water, sanitation, and healthcare, are still lacking in many rural areas. These infrastructural deficiencies isolate rural populations, restrict economic opportunities, and hinder access to essential services that could improve their quality of life.

Climate change and biodiversity loss pose further threats to rural India. Rural communities are often the first to experience the effects of climate change, including droughts, floods, and extreme weather events. These changes harm natural resources-such as water, soil, and forests-that rural communities rely on. Farmers and pastoralists face increased challenges to sustain their livelihoods as these environmental resources diminish. Additionally, biodiversity loss, such as the decline in farmland bird populations, reflects the broader impact of environmental degradation on rural ecosystems and agricultural productivity.

Migration and urbanization bring both challenges and opportunities to rural areas. High rates of out-migration, particularly of young and educated individuals, leave rural communities with labor shortages and fragmented families. As people move to cities in search of better employment and services, rural areas face a loss of cultural identity, increased social isolation, and abandoned farmland. Yet, urbanization can also offer some benefits, such as improved connectivity, market access, and the potential for remittances, which can support rural households financially.

Each of these challenges-poverty, agricultural distress, unemployment, infrastructural deficiencies, climate change illustrates the multifaceted nature of rural development issues in India. Addressing these challenges is essential for building sustainable, resilient, and prosperous rural communities.

## 8.6 CHALLENGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL INDIA

**Enhanced Housing Infrastructure**

Improved housing is a significant indicator of rising rural living standards. Access to durable pucca or semi-pucca houses demonstrates better structural integrity, providing safety and comfort to rural families. Such housing is more resilient to natural disasters, ensuring long-term security. Government initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) have played a vital role in expanding access to affordable rural housing, offering millions of families the opportunity to live in secure and dignified conditions.

**Improved Sanitation Facilities**

The availability of toilets in rural areas has seen remarkable growth, marking a significant shift toward better hygiene and health. Improved sanitation reduces open defecation, curbing related health risks and contributing to a cleaner environment. For instance, under the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G), over 1 lakh villages have declared themselves Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus. This progress reflects a growing awareness of the importance of sanitation and its role in community well-being.

**Extended Electricity Access**

Access to electricity has transformed rural living standards by enabling improved connectivity, lighting, and economic opportunities. Reliable power supply boosts educational outcomes by allowing children to study after dark, increases productivity through mechanization, and improves the overall quality of life. Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya) have significantly expanded rural electrification, empowering communities to thrive in today's modern world.

**Clean Cooking Fuel Adoption**

The adoption of clean cooking fuels like LPG has reduced the health hazards associated with indoor air pollution. Cleaner alternatives to traditional fuels such as firewood have had a profound impact on respiratory health and overall well-being, particularly for women who spend more time cooking.

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has been instrumental in this transformation, providing millions of LPG connections to women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households under both Ujjwala 1.0 and Ujjwala 2.0 programs. These efforts promote sustainability while fostering healthier living conditions.

**Educational and Social Empowerment**

Increased access to education, particularly for girls, is another positive sign of rural progress. This reflects shifting societal norms toward inclusivity and gender equality. Educational empowerment equips rural populations with knowledge and decision-making abilities, fostering long-term development. Government programs like the Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana focus on empowering villagers with the tools and opportunities to shape their futures, creating a ripple effect of informed growth.

**Diversification of Income Sources**

Economic diversification is improving rural livelihoods by reducing dependency on agriculture. Non-farm employment opportunities, such as those offered under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), provide financial stability by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per year. Similarly, the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) aims to enhance household incomes through sustainable livelihoods and better access to financial services. These programs strengthen rural economies, ensuring resilience against agricultural uncertainties.

**Other Government Initiatives**

Several additional programs have contributed to improved rural living standards. The Public Distribution System (PDS) ensures food security for vulnerable households, while Mission Antyodaya focuses on comprehensive rural development. Together, these initiatives address the multifaceted challenges faced by rural communities, driving meaningful and sustained progress. These signs of improvement highlight a transformative journey in rural India, driven by a combination of targeted policies, community efforts, and individual empowerment.

The strategy of focusing policies of education for rural development on the expansion of agricultural education at the secondary and higher levels is now viewed as largely obsolete. To meet the challenges facing the rural world today, an integrated view of education is required, centred on access to quality basic education for all. The goals of food security, poverty reduction and meeting the needs of the rural labour market require that rural development policies give priority to basic education and strategies that fully recognize the special nature of the rural environment. Integrated rural development, thus, reflects a new understanding of the development policy framework - a solution that involves complex, multi-dimensional interaction of different actors for sustainable rural development.



## 8.7 LET US SUM UP

With enduring problems like resource shortages, migration, and infrastructure gaps, the rural economy is at a crossroads as it struggles with the combined forces of globalization and technological change. Despite their greatness, these difficulties offer a chance for creativity and fortitude. Without losing their distinct cultural and economic identities, rural areas can adjust to modern demands by encouraging sustainable practices, advancing digital inclusion, and strengthening local communities. The future of the rural economy depends on bold strategies, collaborative efforts, and a commitment to inclusive growth that leaves no community behind.



## 8.8 FURTHER READING

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6. Anriquez, G., & Stamoulis, K. (2007). *Rural development and poverty reduction: Is agriculture still the key?* (ESA Working Paper No. 07-02). Agricultural Development Economics Division, The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.



## 8.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**1. Tick mark the correct answer in the following multiple choice questions:**

a) National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) released by -

i) Planning Commission ii) National Health Commission

iii) NITI Aayog iv) MNREGA

b) The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has been instrumental in transformation of which of the following sector-

i) Clean Cooking Fuel Adoption ii) Extended Electricity Access

iii) Enhanced Housing Infrastructure iv) Improved Sanitation Facilities

**2. Answer the following questions:**

a) Describe the current challenges of rural economy?

b) Give few strategies to address the rural issues in India.

c) What is the role of NITI Aayog?

*** *** ***

# UNIT 9: RURAL EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

## UNIT STRUCTURE


9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 The Sociological Context of Rural Education

9.4 The Role of Education in Rural Development

9.5 Challenges in Rural Education

9.6 Strategies to overcome the challenges in Rural Education

9.7 Skill Development in Rural Areas

9.8 Case Studies and Best Practices

9.9 Let Us Sum Up

9.10 Further Readings

9.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.12 Model Questions


## 9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Understand the barriers in rural education and skill development
- Examine the challenges and strategies regarding skill development
- Address the concept of equitable and inclusive education

## 9.2 INTRODUCTION

Education and skill development are integral to societal progress, economic growth, and individual well-being. In rural areas, these elements are pivotal in transforming communities, alleviating poverty, and fostering sustainable development. This Unit delves into the sociological aspects of

rural education and skill development, examining the challenges, opportunities, and strategies for enhancing educational outcomes and skill acquisition in rural settings. By understanding the sociological context and addressing the unique needs of rural areas, we can develop effective interventions that promote equitable and inclusive education and skill development.

## 9.3 THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF RURAL EDUCATION

Rural areas, characterized by agricultural dependence, and limited infrastructure, often face unique educational challenges. These challenges are influenced by several sociological factors:

1. **Socioeconomic Status:** Rural communities typically have lower income levels compared to urban areas, impacting the ability of families to invest in education. Economic constraints can lead to higher dropout rates and lower educational attainment. Many rural families rely on their children to contribute to household income through labor, which can interfere with school attendance and performance. This economic pressure reflects a broader structural inequality that affects access to education.
2. **Cultural Norms and Values:** Cultural attitudes towards education can vary significantly in rural areas. Traditional views may prioritize immediate economic contributions over prolonged education, especially for boys. Girls often face additional barriers due to gender norms that favor early marriage and domestic responsibilities over schooling. These cultural norms can significantly affect educational aspirations and outcomes, reinforcing gender disparities and limiting opportunities for girls.
3. **Infrastructure and Resources:** Rural schools frequently lack adequate infrastructure, such as well-maintained buildings, sufficient learning materials, and access to technology. This deficit limits the quality of education and hinders students' ability to compete with

their urban counterparts. Poor infrastructure also includes inadequate sanitation facilities, which can particularly affect girls' attendance. The lack of investment in rural education infrastructure is a reflection of broader societal neglect and unequal resource distribution.

4. **Teacher Availability and Quality:** Attracting and retaining qualified teachers in rural areas is a persistent issue. Factors such as isolation, limited professional development opportunities, and lower salaries contribute to a shortage of skilled educators in these regions. The quality of education suffers as a result, with rural students often receiving less effective instruction. The difficulties in teacher retention are also linked to the broader social context, including lack of professional support and community integration for teachers.



**Activity 1**

Describe the sociological factors that hinder rural education.

……

……

……

## 9.4 THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Education in rural areas serves as a catalyst for social and economic development. It empowers individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to improve their livelihoods, participate in governance, and contribute to community welfare. The benefits of rural education include:

1. **Economic Growth:** Educated individuals are more likely to engage in diverse economic activities, including entrepreneurship, which can stimulate local economies. Education enhances agricultural productivity through the adoption of modern techniques and

sustainable practices. Economic diversification through education can reduce dependence on a single industry, making communities more resilient. This economic empowerment can lead to a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources.

2. **Health and Well-being:** Education promotes better health outcomes by increasing awareness of hygiene, nutrition, and healthcare practices. Educated individuals are more likely to access and utilize health services, reducing morbidity and mortality rates. Health education can lead to healthier lifestyles and better management of illnesses, improving overall community health. This improvement in health outcomes is closely linked to increased productivity and economic stability.
3. **Social Empowerment:** Education fosters social cohesion and empowers marginalized groups, including women and ethnic minorities, by providing them with the tools to challenge discriminatory practices and advocate for their rights. Education encourages civic participation and enhances the ability of individuals to engage in community decision-making processes. This social empowerment contributes to more inclusive and democratic communities.
4. **Environmental Sustainability:** Education plays a crucial role in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices. It equips individuals with the knowledge to manage natural resources responsibly and adapt to climate change. Educated communities are better prepared to implement and maintain environmentally sustainable practices, contributing to long-term ecological health. This environmental stewardship is essential for the sustainability of rural livelihoods.

## 9.5 CHALLENGES IN RURAL EDUCATION

Rural education faces significant obstacles that hinder its effectiveness. These challenges include:

1. **Access and Enrollment:** Geographic isolation and poor transportation infrastructure make it difficult for many rural children to attend school. Seasonal labor demands, particularly in agricultural communities, also disrupt regular attendance. In some regions, schools are located far from home, posing safety risks and leading to high absenteeism and dropout rates. These barriers to access, reflect broader issues of rural marginalization and inadequate public services.
2. **Quality of Education:** The quality of education in rural schools is often compromised by insufficient funding, outdated curricula, and a lack of trained teachers. This disparity in educational quality exacerbates the urban-rural divide. Rural schools may also lack access to up-to-date textbooks and educational resources, limiting students' exposure to a comprehensive education. The unequal quality of education is a symptom of systemic inequality and neglect.
3. **Teacher Retention:** Rural areas struggle to attract and retain qualified teachers due to factors such as lower salaries, limited professional growth opportunities, and challenging living conditions. High teacher turnover negatively impacts student learning outcomes. Teachers may also lack support and resources, leading to burnout and reduced effectiveness in the classroom. The challenges in teacher retention are indicative of broader societal undervaluation of rural education.
4. **Cultural Barriers:** Traditional beliefs and practices can impede educational progress, particularly for girls. Gender discrimination, early marriage, and child labor are prevalent issues that affect school attendance and performance. In some cultures, there is a preference for boys' education over girls', leading to unequal opportunities and outcomes. These cultural barriers are deeply rooted in historical and social contexts that perpetuate inequality.
5. **Technological Gaps:** Limited access to technology and the internet in rural areas restricts students' exposure to modern educational

resources and online learning opportunities. This digital divide places rural students at a disadvantage in an increasingly digital world. Lack of technological infrastructure also hinders teachers' ability to incorporate innovative teaching methods. The digital divide is a reflection of broader structural inequalities in access to technology and resources.

## 9.6 STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES IN RURAL EDUCATION

To address the challenges discussed in the above section and to improve the educational outcomes in rural areas, a multifaceted approach is required. Following are some of the ways in which we can overcome the challenges in rural education:

1. **Community Involvement:** Engaging local communities in the educational process can foster a sense of ownership and accountability. Community-based initiatives, such as school management committees, can enhance resource mobilization and ensure that educational interventions are culturally relevant and locally accepted. Community involvement can also help address specific local needs and promote parental engagement in their children's education. This participatory approach empowers communities and ensures sustainability.
2. **Incentive Programs for Teachers:** Implementing incentive programs to attract and retain teachers in rural areas is crucial. These programs can include financial incentives, housing allowances, and opportunities for professional development and career advancement. Providing support systems for teachers, such as mentorship and peer networks, can also enhance teacher retention and effectiveness. By improving teacher welfare and professional satisfaction, these programs can contribute to better educational outcomes.

3. **Infrastructure Development:** Investing in the development of rural educational infrastructure, including building safe and accessible schools, providing learning materials, and improving transportation networks, is essential for ensuring equitable access to education. Infrastructure improvements should also include sanitation facilities and access to clean water, which are critical for maintaining student health and attendance. This investment reflects a commitment to equitable resource distribution.
4. **Flexible Learning Models:** Adopting flexible learning models, such as mobile schools, community learning centers, and distance education programs, can accommodate the unique needs of rural students and provide them with alternative pathways to education. These models can be particularly effective in reaching remote and marginalized populations, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to learn. Flexible learning models recognize the diverse contexts and needs of rural communities.
5. **Gender-Sensitive Interventions:** Implementing gender-sensitive policies and programs can help address the specific barriers faced by girls in rural areas. These interventions may include scholarships, awareness campaigns, and safe learning environments to promote gender equality in education. Encouraging community leaders to advocate for girls' education can also help shift cultural norms and increase support for gender equality. Gender-sensitive approaches are essential for achieving equitable educational outcomes.
6. **Integration of Technology:** Bridging the digital divide by expanding access to technology and the internet in rural schools can enhance educational quality and provide students with valuable digital skills. Initiatives such as providing laptops, establishing computer labs, and offering online courses are steps in this direction. Training teachers to effectively use technology in their classrooms is also essential for maximizing the benefits of digital resources. Integrating technology into rural education can democratize access to information and learning opportunities.



**Check your Progress (A)**

1. Education elevates social discrimination. True/False
2. Digital divide is created by

a) Inequalities in access to subsidies

b) Inequalities in access to social security

c) Inequalities in access to technology

d) Inequalities in access to healthcare

3. Name two forms of flexible learning models.
4. In order to retain quality teachers in the rural education system, salaries of the teachers should be increased. True/False

## 9.7 SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS

In addition to formal education, skill development is a critical component which is very essential for the development of rural areas. Vocational training and skill enhancement programs can equip individuals with practical skills that are directly applicable to the labor market. This can create livelihood opportunities and economic security. Some such skills in which the rural population can be trained are:

1. **Agricultural Skills:** Given the predominance of agriculture in rural economies, training in modern farming techniques, sustainable practices, and agribusiness management is essential. This can increase productivity, diversify income sources, and promote food security. Skills in crop diversification, pest management, and soil conservation are particularly valuable for enhancing agricultural sustainability. Agricultural education can also include training in value addition and market access, increasing farmers' income and economic resilience.
2. **Non-Agricultural Skills:** Diversifying rural economies requires training in non-agricultural skills such as carpentry, tailoring,

handicrafts, and information technology. These skills enable individuals to explore alternative livelihoods and reduce dependence on agriculture. Training in trades and crafts can also preserve cultural heritage and provide niche market opportunities. By diversifying skill sets, rural communities can enhance their economic stability and resilience.

3. **Entrepreneurship Development:** Encouraging entrepreneurship through training programs, financial support, and mentorship can stimulate economic growth in rural areas. Entrepreneurship education fosters innovation and self-employment, creating job opportunities and enhancing local economies. Support for micro-enterprises and small businesses can also stimulate economic activity and create employment. Entrepreneurship development can lead to the creation of locally owned businesses that contribute to community wealth and sustainability.
4. **Life Skills:** Life skills training, including communication, problem-solving, and financial literacy, is vital for personal development and community participation. These skills empower individuals to make informed decisions, manage resources effectively, and navigate social and economic challenges. Life skills education can also promote civic engagement and enhance social cohesion. By equipping individuals with essential life skills, communities can enhance their capacity for self-reliance and collective action.

However, there are several challenges which impedes the effectiveness of skill development programs in rural areas, including:

1. **Awareness and Outreach:** Limited awareness of available training programs and their benefits can result in low participation rates. Effective outreach and communication strategies are needed to inform rural populations about skill development opportunities. Outreach efforts should be tailored to local contexts and leverage community networks to disseminate information. Ensuring that information reaches all segments of the community, including

women and marginalized groups, is essential for inclusive participation.

2. **Relevance and Quality:** Ensuring that training programs are relevant to local needs and of high quality is crucial. Programs must be designed based on market demand and provide practical, hands-on experience to be effective. Engaging local employers and industry experts in program design can enhance relevance and ensure that training meets labor market requirements. High-quality training programs should also include pathways for certification and recognition, enhancing participants' employability.
3. **Access to Resources:** Financial constraints and lack of access to training centers and materials can limit participation in skill development programs. Providing financial assistance, subsidies, and decentralized training facilities can address these barriers. Mobile training units and community-based training centers can increase accessibility and reach underserved populations. Addressing financial and logistical barriers is essential for ensuring that all community members can benefit from skill development opportunities.
4. **Sustainability and Follow-up:** Sustaining the impact of training programs requires continuous support and follow-up. Establishing networks of support, including mentorship and access to credit, can help trainees apply their skills and sustain their livelihoods. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation can also ensure that programs adapt to changing needs and continue to provide value. Sustaining the impact of skill development initiatives requires a long-term commitment and an integrated approach that includes support for implementation and scaling.

To enhance the effectiveness of skill development initiatives in rural areas, the following strategies can be adopted:

1. **Needs Assessment:** Conducting thorough needs assessments to identify the specific skill requirements of rural communities ensures

that training programs are relevant and responsive to local labor market demands. Needs assessments should involve community members and stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive understanding of local conditions and opportunities. This participatory approach ensures that skill development initiatives are context-specific and community-driven.

2. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborating with private sector organizations, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies can leverage resources, expertise, and infrastructure to expand the reach and quality of skill development programs. Partnerships can also facilitate access to funding, technology, and market linkages, enhancing the sustainability and impact of training initiatives. Public-private partnerships can bring innovation and efficiency to skill development programs.
3. **Innovative Training Models:** Utilizing innovative training models, such as mobile training units, online platforms, and community-based training centers, can increase accessibility and participation in skill development programs. These models can provide flexible and context-specific training solutions that meet the diverse needs of rural populations. Innovative training models can also include blended learning approaches that combine in-person and online training, enhancing accessibility and engagement.
4. **Integration with Formal Education:** Integrating vocational training and skill development into the formal education system can provide students with a comprehensive learning experience that combines academic knowledge with practical skills. This approach can enhance the relevance of education and better prepare students for the workforce. Integration can include the introduction of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs in schools, as well as partnerships with industries for internships and apprenticeships.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of skill development

programs ensures continuous improvement and accountability. Data-driven decision-making can enhance program effectiveness and sustainability. Regular feedback from participants and stakeholders can also inform program adjustments and improvements. Monitoring and evaluation should include both quantitative and qualitative indicators to capture the full impact of skill development initiatives.



**Activity 2**

State the effective ways to enhance skill development in rural areas.

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## 9.8 CASE STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICES

Examining successful case studies and best practices from various regions can provide valuable insights into effective strategies for rural education and skill development. Examples include:

1. **Barefoot College, India:** Barefoot College in Rajasthan, India, provides training in solar engineering, healthcare, and education to rural women, empowering them to become change agents in their communities. This model emphasizes hands-on learning and community-based solutions, demonstrating the potential of localized, skill-specific training programs to drive community development. The success of Barefoot College highlights the importance of leveraging local knowledge and resources.
2. **Kibera School for Girls, Kenya:** The Kibera School for Girls offers free education and vocational training to girls in the Kibera slum of Nairobi, Kenya. The school's holistic approach includes life skills training, health education, and community engagement, highlighting the importance of addressing multiple aspects of student well-being

and development. This model demonstrates the impact of comprehensive and inclusive education programs on girls' empowerment and community development.

3. **Rural Development Academy, Bangladesh:** The Rural Development Academy (RDA) in Bangladesh focuses on capacity building and skill development for rural populations. Its programs include agricultural training, entrepreneurship development, and women's empowerment initiatives. The RDA's comprehensive approach integrates education, skill development, and community support to enhance rural livelihoods. The success of the RDA underscores the importance of a holistic and integrated approach to rural development.



**Check your Progress (B)**

1. Vocational training and skill enhancement programs equip individuals with practical skills that are directly applicable to the labor market. True/False

2. ……. can enhance skill development initiatives in rural societies

a) Private business
b) Commercialization
c) Capitalism
d) Private-public partnership

3. Barefoot College India, provides training in:

a) Solar engineering
b) Healthcare
c) Women empowerment
d) All of the above

4. Mention two non agricultural skills to enhance skill development.



## 9.9 LET US SUM UP

- In this Unit, you have learned about that rural education and skill development are important for sustainable rural development.
- There are several barriers and obstacles which hinders rural education. Addressing the challenges faced by rural education requires a holistic and inclusive approach that considers the unique sociological, economic, and cultural contexts of rural areas.
- By understanding and addressing the specific needs and circumstances of rural areas, stakeholders can develop effective interventions that not only enhance educational outcomes but also empower rural populations to achieve sustainable development and improved quality of life.
- By implementing targeted strategies, fostering community involvement, and leveraging innovative models, it is possible to enhance educational outcomes and skill acquisition in rural settings.
- Investing in rural education and skill development is an investment in the future, paving the way for more equitable and prosperous societies.
- Through collaboration, innovation, and sustained commitment, the vision of equitable and high-quality education and skill development for all rural communities can become a reality.
- This commitment to rural education and skill development is essential for creating inclusive and resilient societies that can thrive in an increasingly interconnected and dynamic world.



## 9.10 FURTHER READING

1. Chen, Y., & Singh, P. (2021). *Education and empowerment: Rural skill development strategies.* Routledge.
2. James, A., & Roberts, M. (2018). *Transforming rural education: Challenges and innovations.* Oxford University Press.

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## 9.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**A** 1. False

2. C

3. Mobile schools and Distance Education Programs

4. True

**B** 1. True

2. D

3. D

4. Carpentry and Tailoring

## 9.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

1. Briefly mention the challenges in rural education.
2. Write a short note on barefoot college.

**B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

analyze the challenges education in rural societies.

1. Discuss the role of education in rural development
2. Discuss the constraints of skill development in rural areas.

*** *** ***

# UNIT 10: RURAL HEALTH AND NUTRITION IN INDIA

## UNIT STRUCTURE


10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Understanding Health in Rural India

10.4 The landscape of Rural health in India

10.6 Barriers and Challenges

10.7 Government Healthcare Initiatives and Policies

10.8 Nutrition in Rural India

10.8 Evolution in the nutrition system

10.9 Nutritional Indicators in Rural India

10.10 Conclusion

10.11 Let us sum up

10.12 Answers to check your progress

10.13 Further Readings

10.14 Model Questions


## 10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Understand the significance of health and nutrition in our lives.
- Define health and nutrition in the context of rural India.
- Trace the evolution of India's healthcare system.
- Examine the state of rural health infrastructure and nutrition.
- Analyses the challenges faced in rural healthcare and nutrition

## 10.2 INTRODUCTION

Health and nutrition are urgent issues that significantly impact human development and social well-being. In India, where over 65% of the population resides in rural areas, access to quality healthcare and adequate nutrition remains a pressing concern. At its core, health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, but a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. On the other hand, nutrition refers to food intake concerning the body's dietary needs. Good nutrition is not a luxury, but a necessity for maintaining optimal health and enabling the body to function effectively.

This unit critically explores the historical development, current challenges, and policy responses related to health and nutrition in rural India, emphasising a sociological lens.

## 10.3 UNDERSTANDING HEALTH IN RURAL INDIA

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as *"a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."* Sociologically, health encompasses the ability of individuals and communities to lead socially and economically productive lives.

It is known to us that the basic objective of human development is to improve the quality of life. The quality of life that the population leads ultimately decides the country's growth rate. Studies have shown that urban populations often have better access to high-quality healthcare facilities, while rural communities lack these amenities. Therefore, studying India's rural healthcare system is crucial for its development. In simple words, Rural health refers to the health status and health care access of people living in rural areas, including the opportunities for providing health care services to those communities (McGowan et al, 2016). It focuses on the well-being and access to healthcare of people in rural areas, in terms of both the challenges and opportunities of providing healthcare to these communities. We need to study this to understand and arrive at possible

solutions to improve the overall health of rural inhabitants, address their special healthcare needs, and promote equitable access to healthcare services.

As mentioned above, rural India, home to approximately 65% of the country's population, faces significant challenges in accessing quality healthcare. Despite progress in urban health infrastructure, rural areas lag due to geographical isolation, poverty, inadequate medical facilities, and a shortage of trained healthcare professionals. This unit attempts to discuss rural healthcare in India by highlighting key issues such as government initiatives, the present scenario of rural healthcare, and future directions to bridge the healthcare gap.

## 10.4 THE LANDSCAPE OF RURAL HEALTHCARE

From a sociological standpoint, health is not merely the absence of disease but a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being (WHO, 1946). Talcott Parsons' (1951) concept of the "sick role" emphasised the social dimensions of illness, while Foucault's (1973) analysis of medical power problematized institutional control over bodies. These perspectives are essential in understanding how health in rural India is shaped not only by biology but also by caste hierarchies, gender norms, and economic deprivation. Further, cultural practices, traditional beliefs, and access to resources significantly shape health in rural India. For instance, the preference for home remedies over modern medicine, the influence of caste on access to healthcare, and the lack of resources in remote areas all contribute to the health disparities in rural India. Thus, not all sections of the population have the same access to quality healthcare services. Therefore, understanding health in rural India requires an intersectional approach that considers gender, caste, class, and geography.

The health care facilities are categorised under India's state and concurrent lists. While certain items like public health and hospitals are under the state list, others like population control and family welfare, medical education, and quality control of drugs are under the concurrent list. The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (UMHFW) is the central

government agency responsible for executing different programmes and schemes in family welfare, disease prevention and control. It plays a crucial role in coordinating and implementing various health-related policies and programmes at the national level. The public health care in rural areas is based on a three-tier system, i.e. Sub-Centre (SC), Primary Health Centre (PHCS), and Community Health Centres (CHCS).

## 10.5 BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES IN ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

1. **Access and Infrastructure Deficits:** In Rural areas it is seen that health centers are often far from villages, making access difficult, especially in hilly or forested regions. Poor road connectivity and lack of reliable transportation exacerbate the problem. Many PHCS and CHCS lack essential equipment, reliable electricity, or clean water, compromising care and quality.
2. **Shortage of Healthcare Professionals:** A critical challenge is the scarcity of trained doctors and paramedical staff willing to serve in rural areas. Urban-centric medical education and better career prospects in cities discourage professionals to opt for rural postings. The doctor-to-population ratio in rural India is approximately 1:10,000, far below the World Health Organization's recommended 1: 1,000. According to the Rural Health Statistics (2021-22), India faces a shortfall of 23% in PHCS, 30% in CHCS, and a significant deficit in specialist doctors, with over 80% of posts for surgeons and physicians vacant in rural areas.
3. **Socio-Economic Barriers:** Poverty, low literacy, and cultural beliefs significantly impact healthcare-seeking behavior. Many rural families rely on traditional healers or home remedies due to affordability issues or distrust in modern medicine. Out-of-pocket expenditure, which accounts for nearly 60% of healthcare costs in rural India, pushes families into debt; delays in treatment or seek home remedies.

4. **Disease Burden and Preventive Care:** Rural areas face a dual burden of communicable diseases (e.g., tuberculosis, malaria) and non-communicable diseases (e.g., diabetes, hypertension). Limited awareness and inadequate screening facilities hinder early diagnosis. Further, preventive healthcare, including sanitation and nutrition programs, often receives insufficient focus.
5. **Gender Disparities:** Women in rural India face unique health challenges, including high maternal mortality rates and limited access to reproductive health services. Social norms often restrict women's mobility, delaying timely medical intervention.

## 10.6 GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND POLICIES

The Indian government has launched several programs to address rural healthcare challenges:

1. **National Rural Health Mission (NRHM):** Launched in 2005 under the National Health Mission (NHM), NRHM aims to strengthen rural healthcare infrastructure, improve staffing, and enhance service delivery. It introduced Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), community health workers who bridge the gap between villages and healthcare facilities.
2. **Ayushman Bharat Scheme:** Initiated in 2018, this flagship program has two components: Health and Wellness Centres (HWCS) to provide comprehensive primary care and the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), which offers up to ?5 lakh per family annually for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation. Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY): This scheme promotes institutional deliveries to reduce maternal and infant mortality by providing financial incentives to pregnant women.
3. **Telemedicine and Digital Health:** The e-Sanjeevani platform, a national telemedicine service, has expanded access to consultations in remote areas, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. While these initiatives have improved health indicators, such as reducing

the infant mortality from 57 per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 30 in 2020, gaps in implementation, funding, and monitoring persist.

There is still a lot to do in the health and health care field in India, even though it is worth mentioning that the country has improved significantly since its independence. The national average of the doctor-patient ratio stands at 1:1834. India's maternal mortality rate (MMR) has declined substantially recently. The MMR, which represents the number of maternal deaths per one lakh live births, has decreased from 130 in 2014-16 to 93 in 2019-21, according to the Sample Registration System (SRS) Report 2021. In the same way, in 2021, the Infant Mortality Rate, that is the number of deaths of infants under one year old per 1,000 live births, was 27 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to 39 in 2014. This positive trend is also reflected in the Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR), which represents deaths within the first 28 days of life, dropping from 26 to 19 per 1,000 live births during the same period. Below is a chart showing the contrast of ratios in 4 different states:

| State | Doctor-Population Ratio | IMR (per 1,000) | Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) | PHC Shortfall (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bihar | 1:28,391 | 35 | 118 | 34% |
| Uttar Pradesh | 1:19,000 | 38 | 167 | 22% |
| Kerala | 1:1,200 | 6 | 30 | 0% |
| Rajasthan | 1:18,000 | 32 | 114 | 29% |

(Source: National Health Profile 2023, NFHS-5)



**Check your progress (Part 1)**

1. What does the WHO define as health?
2. Name two major components of the Ayushman Bharat scheme.

3. What is the primary objective of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)?
4. What are the three tiers of public health infrastructure in rural India?
5. What are some factors that hinder preventive healthcare in rural India?

## 10.7 NUTRITION IN RURAL INDIA

Nutrition is a foundational determinant of human development and well-being. In rural India, nutritional outcomes are intricately linked to broader socio-economic structures, access to healthcare, education, agricultural practices, and the intersection of caste, class, and gender. Malnutrition continues to pose a significant public health challenge particularly in rural areas despite decades of policy attention and targeted interventions. This section explores the current state of nutrition in rural India, presenting key statistical indicators, analysing structural determinants, and discussing policy interventions and their efficacy.

Indian history reveals how people faced major nutritional problems. During the colonial era, nutrition in rural India was primarily dictated by local agricultural practices, caste-based food habits, and seasonal food availability. Famines were frequent, and the British agrarian policies prioritised cash crops over food grains, leading to widespread food insecurity. The Great Bengal Famine of 1943, which led to the death of over 2 million people, is a grim reminder of the colonial state's apathy toward rural food systems.

Traditional diets of people consisted of coarse grains, pulses, local vegetables, and occasional animal protein, but caloric intake was often insufficient. Nutritional knowledge was primarily conventional and community-based, lacking scientific or institutional support.

In the Post-independence period, the Indian state recognised malnutrition as a key development issue. The Bhore Committee Report (1946) laid the foundation for integrating health and nutrition in national planning. Several

government schemes, such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (launched in 1975), the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and the Special Nutrition Programme, were introduced to tackle child and maternal malnutrition.

The Green Revolution (1960s-70s) improved food grain availability in select regions but largely benefited better-off farmers in irrigated areas, bypassing large sections of the rural population. While food security improves availability, nutritional security-adequate intake of essential micronutrients-remained largely unaddressed.

India's economy grew rapidly post-liberalisation, yet rural nutritional outcomes improved only marginally. While schemes like the National Rural Health Mission (2005) and the National Food Security Act (2013) have expanded access to food and health services, disparities persist.

Recent data from NFHS-5 (2019-21) reveal alarming levels of child stunting (35.5%), underweight (32.1%), and wasting (19.3%) in rural areas, reflecting persistent deficits in both quantity and quality of diets. Contemporary nutrition challenges are now multifaceted, involving poverty, market access, food adulteration, migration, climate change, and social exclusion.

The major factors that contribute to nutritional problems in rural India at present are:

- Poverty and Food Insecurity: Income constraints limit access to diverse and nutrient-rich foods.
- Gender Inequality: Women often eat last and least, affecting their nutritional health and that of their children.
- Agricultural Practices: Focusing on cash crops over subsistence farming, or overuse of chemicals, fertilizers etc has reduced nutritional contents and food value leading to negative health impact.

## 10.8 NUTRITIONAL INDICATORS IN RURAL INDIA

The nutritional status of populations is often measured through anthropometric indices and dietary intake assessments. The National Family

Health Survey (NFHS) is the principal source of nationally representative data on these indicators.

*Table 4.1: Nutritional Status of Children under 5 in Rural India (NFHS-5, 2019-21)*

| **Indicator** | **Rural (%)** | **Urban (%)** | **National Average (%)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stunted (Height-for-age) | 37.3 | 30.1 | 35.5 |
| Wasted (Weight-for-height) | 20.0 | 17.3 | 19.3 |
| Underweight (Weight-for-age) | 34.7 | 26.6 | 32.1 |
| Anemia (6-59 months) | 68.3 | 60.2 | 67.1 |

Rural children fare significantly worse than their urban counterparts, with stunting and anemia being particularly prevalent. Anemia among rural women aged 15-49 is also alarmingly high at 57.3% (NFHS-5), indicating broader dietary deficiencies.

Further, Dietary diversity remains limited in rural households. Cereal-dominated diets, insufficient intake of proteins, fruits, and vegetables, and high dependence on seasonal availability characterize rural food consumption patterns. Many a times they rural households are incapable of consuming protein and nutrient rich food owing to widespread poverty, resulting in nutritional deficits.

*Table 4.2: Average Daily Per Capita Intake of Selected Food Groups (NSSO 2011-12)*

| | Rural (grams) | Urban (grams) |
|---|---|---|
| Cereals | 437 | 379 |
| Pulses | 32 | 36 |
| Milk & Milk Products | 97 | 129 |
| Vegetables | 271 | 307 |
| Fruits | 25 | 37 |
| Eggs/Meat/Fish | 14 | 20 |

As mentioned above, despite cereals meeting energy requirements, the low intake of proteins and micronutrient-rich foods is concerning. Such deficits contribute to chronic energy and nutrient deficiencies, especially among children and women.

## 10.9 GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS

As discussed above, various nutrition programs have been introduced to improve public health in the past half-century. Several government programs aim to address nutritional deficits:

- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):** Offers supplementary nutrition to children under six and pregnant/lactating women.
- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS):** Provides free lunches to school-going children to enhance enrolment and improve nutrition.
- **POSHAN Abhiyaan:** A flagship initiative launched in 2018 to reduce stunting, undernutrition, and anaemia by 2022.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** Provides financial support to new mothers through a conditional



**Check your progress**

6. What is the significance of nutrition in rural development?
7. Name two major historical events that shaped nutritional outcomes in pre-independent India.
8. List two major causes of poor nutrition in rural India.

## 10.10 CONCLUSION

Despite its significance for national progress, rural healthcare in India remains a critical yet underdeveloped sector. The current state of public health is inadequate, necessitating robust administrative reforms to improve conditions. These reforms should focus on regulating and enforcing public health standards, enhancing human resource development, stabilising population growth, and strengthening disease surveillance systems to ensure a strong link between these factors and improved health outcomes. By prioritising rural healthcare, India can ensure that its villages, often described as the nation's soul, thrive with access to quality medical care,

paving the way for a healthier and more inclusive future. In the same way, Nutrition in rural India also remains a deeply embedded structural challenge. Addressing this requires a holistic approach integrating food security, gender equity, education, health services, and agricultural diversification.

Improving health and nutrition in rural India requires an intersectional, community-based approach that addresses structural inequalities, strengthens health systems, ensures policy integration, and enhances service delivery. Only through sustained and inclusive development efforts can rural populations' health and nutritional well-being be ensured, laying the foundation for national progress.



## 10.11 LET US SUM UP

- In this unit we have learned that there are various challenges in rural healthcare.Rural India suffers from inadequate infrastructure, severe doctor shortages, socio-economic and gender barriers, and a dual burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- Government Interventions through programs like NHM, JSY, RBSK, Mission Indradhanush, and telemedicine efforts such as e-Sanjeevani aim to improve health outcomes, though gaps in implementation remain.
- Rural areas face high levels of stunting, anemia, and underweight children. Widespread poverty often results in lack of consumption of adequate protein and other nutrient rich food.
- Nutritional interventions like ICDS and POSHAN Abhiyaan have been initiated by the government but are hindered by poor implementation and monitoring.
- There exist regional disparities in terms of healthcare with states like Kerala outperform others like Bihar and UP in healthcare indicators, highlighting the need for tailored, region-specific policy approaches.

## 10.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Answer to Q 1:** WHO defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

**Answer to Q2:** (i) Health and Wellness Centers (HWCs), and (ii) Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

**Answer to Q3:** To strengthen rural healthcare infrastructure and improve access to quality health services in rural areas.

**Answer to Q4:** Sub-Centre (SC), Primary Health Centre (PHC), and Community Health Centre (CHC).

**Answer to Q5:** Lack of awareness, inadequate screening facilities, poor sanitation, and limited health education.

**Answer to Q6:** Nutrition is essential for human development and well-being; in rural areas, it affects productivity, health outcomes, and intergenerational social progress.

**Answer to Q7:** The Bengal Famine of 1943 and British agrarian policies prioritising cash crops over food grains.

**Answer to Q8:** Poverty and food insecurity.

## 10.13 FURTHER READING

1. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (2023). *National Health Profile.*
2. International Institute for Population Sciences (2021). *NFHS-5 Report.*
3. Dreze, J., & Sen, A. (2013). *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions.*
4. Gupta, M.D. (2022). *Public Health in India: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*



## 10.14 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

1. Write a short note on NRHH
2. Mention the key nutrition programs implemented in rural India.

**Long Questions: (Answer each question in about 300 words)**

1. Discuss the historical evolution of healthcare in India and how major policy initiatives have shaped rural health services.
2. Discuss the challenges of healthcare in rural India.
3. Discuss issues pertaining to nutrition in rural areas.

*** *** ***

# UNIT 11: ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND RURAL SOCIETY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 The Role of Environment in Rural Society

11.4 Understanding the Rural-Environment Nexus

11.5 Environmental Issues in Rural Society

11.6 A present scenario of the rural-environment continuum: challenges and opportunities

11.7 Let Us Sum Up

11.8 Further Reading

11.9 Answer to Check Your Progress

11.10 Model Questions


## 11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- understand the importance of the environment in rural society
- identify the link between environment, natural resources, and rural life
- explain the key challenges and opportunities in the rural-environment relationship

## 11.2INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the environment, natural resources, and rural society is deeply interconnected. Rural communities often rely directly on nature for their livelihoods-drawing from land, water, and biodiversity for food, shelter, and income. Their relationship with nature is shaped by

generations of traditional knowledge, local practices, and an understanding of the land they inhabit. From farming and fishing to the use of forests and water sources, natural resources are the cornerstone of rural life.

Rural life is shaped by close community ties, agricultural dependence, and limited infrastructure, with natural cycles influencing daily activities. The environment in rural regions is not just a backdrop for living- it is an active part of life that influences everything from food production to cultural traditions. Their social structures, economic activities, and cultural practices are often shaped by the natural world around them. Over generations, they have developed indigenous knowledge and local practices to manage resources in a way that supports long-term survival and community well-being.

However, this delicate balance is increasingly threatened by factors such as population growth, environmental degradation, industrialization, and climate change. These pressures jeopardize both ecosystems and the rural populations that depend on them. As challenges grow, there is an urgent need for sustainable resource use and equitable access to ensure the resilience and well-being of rural communities.

This unit aims to explore the fundamental links between the environment, the resources it offers, and the way rural societies function.

## 11.3 THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT IN RURAL SOCIETY

The environment is a backbone of life in rural areas, deeply influencing livelihoods, daily routines, and cultural practices. Natural elements such as land, water, forests, and climate are closely tied to agricultural activities, which form the primary economic base in most rural regions. Fertile soil, regular rainfall, and access to clean water are essential for crop cultivation and livestock management, making environmental health critical for rural prosperity.

Beyond farming, rural communities depend on natural resources for essentials such as fuel, housing materials, and clean water. Forests supply timber, fuelwood, and non-timber products, while rivers, ponds, and

lakes provide water for irrigation, drinking, and fishing. The environment also shapes social traditions and spiritual values, as many rural cultures integrate nature into their belief systems and community life.

When used sustainably, these resources enhance food security, provide income opportunities, and build resilience against environmental changes. Economic activities such as small-scale industries, eco-tourism, and handicrafts often rely on nature-based inputs. Sound resource management not only supports household incomes but also helps reduce poverty and environmental degradation.

Key Natural Resources in Rural Areas:

- **Land:** A vital asset for cultivation, grazing, and settlement. Fertile soil enables the production of staple crops such as rice, wheat, pulses, and vegetables, which are essential to food supply and rural economies.
- **Water Resources:** Essential for irrigation, domestic use, and sanitation. Rural areas often depend on ponds, wells, rainwater harvesting, and river systems to meet their water needs, especially in regions where rainfall is seasonal.
- **Forests:** Provide a wide range of livelihood options through the collection of timber, fuelwood, medicinal herbs, and other non-timber forest products (NTFPs). In regions like Assam, communities living near protected areas engage in eco-tourism, sericulture, beekeeping, and handicrafts tied to forest resources.
- **Minerals:** Many rural regions in India, including parts of Assam, are rich in resources like coal, limestone, and oil. Minerals such as iron ore, bauxite, and copper support rural industries and create employment in mining and related sectors.
- **Fisheries:** Inland water bodies sustain traditional fishing communities and contribute significantly to rural diets and incomes. Assam, with its numerous rivers and wetlands, supports a vibrant inland fisheries sector, as do other states like West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala.

- **Marine Resources:** Coastal rural populations rely on the sea for fishing and allied activities. States such as Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Odisha, and Kerala have thriving marine economies based on seafood, salt production, and coastal livelihoods.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1: What is the main source of livelihood in rural societies?

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Q2: Name any three important natural resources used in rural life.

.....

.....

## 11.4 UNDERSTANDING THE RURAL-ENVIRONMENT NEXUS

The rural environment nexus refers to a dynamic relationship between rural societies and the natural environment they inhabit. This connection goes beyond mere geography; it encompasses economic activities, cultural practices, social organization, and the impact of environmental change.

- **Rural Life, Livelihoods, and the Natural Environment:** Rural communities have long relied on the natural environment for both sustenance and cultural identity. Activities such as farming, fishing, forestry, and animal husbandry are not only economic in nature but also embedded in rural traditions and daily practices. These occupations are shaped by environmental factors like climate, soil type, water availability, and forest resources. In regions like Assam, the fertile Brahmaputra valley supports diverse agricultural practices, including the cultivation of rice, tea, and vegetables, with fishing and livestock rearing serving as complementary livelihoods. However,

environmental disruptions-such as floods, droughts, and soil erosion-pose significant threats to income stability, food security, and the overall resilience of rural communities.

- **Economic Impact:** The rural economy is fundamentally linked to natural resources. Forests, rivers, and arable land support a range of traditional industries and occupations. In Assam, for example, tea plantations, bamboo craftsmanship, and handloom weaving are deeply connected to the region's ecological wealth. Yet, environmental degradation, climate variability, and natural calamities can severely impact agricultural productivity and traditional livelihoods. These challenges often lead to rising poverty and migration, ultimately affecting the broader economic stability of rural regions and contributing to national development concerns.
- **Social structure, organizations and community life:** The environment plays a key role in shaping the social fabric of rural communities. Geographic and climatic conditions influence housing styles, settlement patterns, and communal activities. For example, in flood-prone regions of Assam, elevated homes like *Chang ghars* are common, and collective responses to natural disasters foster strong community bonds.

  Access to natural resources often reflects and reinforces social hierarchies. In parts of rural India, caste dynamics continue to influence land ownership and resource access, with higher castes typically holding more land and political influence, while lower castes and tribal groups depend more on wage labor or shared resources. Gender roles are also closely linked to environmental tasks, with women often responsible for collecting water, firewood, and food-key roles in both household survival and environmental stewardship.

**Common Property Resources (CPRs):** CPRs play a critical role in rural life, especially for marginalized communities. These include community pastures, village forests, water bodies, and irrigation systems. Traditionally, rural societies have maintained informal yet effective systems for managing these resources, such as communal

land use agreements and cooperative practices, promoting collective sustainability. However, these systems face challenges from forces like privatization, commercial agriculture, and state intervention. In response, Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) has emerged as a model that empowers local populations to govern and sustain their environmental resources. Examples include locally managed forests in Nepal, community fisheries in Africa and Southeast Asia, and watershed initiatives in India-demonstrating the effectiveness of community-led stewardship in preserving both resources and social cohesion.

- **Nature as a cultural and spiritual symbol:** In rural societies, nature is not only a source of livelihood but also a profound cultural and spiritual force. Forests, rivers, mountains, and animals are often regarded as sacred and are central to local traditions, folklore, and rituals. Cultural expressions-through art, music, dance, and literature-reflect this deep bond between communities and their natural surroundings. Festivals like ***Bihu*** in Assam, Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Makar Sankranti in central India, and Onam in Kerala are closely tied to agricultural cycles and seasonal rhythms. These celebrations highlight the gratitude of rural communities toward natural abundance and reinforce their dependence on the environment.

  Craftsmanship further illustrates the cultural integration with nature. In Assam, handloom weaving-especially by women-is a widespread tradition, with garments like the *mekhela chador* crafted from silk and cotton dyed using natural materials. Bamboo and cane are used to create practical and decorative items, showcasing resourcefulness and aesthetic connection to the environment.

  Spiritual beliefs often promote ecological awareness. Rivers like the Brahmaputra are revered as divine mothers, and sacred groves (than or devalaya in Assam) are protected as dwelling places of deities or ancestral spirits. This reverence fosters a protective attitude toward nature, with trees like the Peepal and Banyan, or landscapes like the Himalayas, considered sacred across India. These traditions, rooted

in spiritual respect, often lead to unintentional but effective conservation efforts.

- **Traditional knowledge and environmental wisdom:** Rural communities hold a rich repository of **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK),** developed over generations through close ties with nature. This knowledge spans agriculture, water management, herbal remedies, weather prediction, and sustainable resource use. Unlike scientific methods, TEK is holistic, experiential, and adapted to local environments. For instance, farmers may follow lunar cycles for planting and harvesting or observe animal behavior and plant growth to forecast weather. Their deep understanding of soil types, medicinal plants, and crop compatibility reflects a place-based ecological awareness. Spiritual beliefs often strengthen this knowledge-plants like tulsi and neem are valued not just for religious reasons but also for their medicinal and ecological roles. Among tribal groups such as the Bodos, Karbis, and Mishings in Assam, nature is seen as sacred, with forests, hills, and rivers conserved as homes of deities. Across rural India, this fusion of tradition, spirituality, and environmental care has enabled sustainable living for centuries. Preserving and valuing TEK is crucial for promoting resilience and ecological harmony in today's evolving world.
- **Sustainable Resource Management and rural society:** Sustainable resource management involves using natural resources responsibly and efficiently to meet current needs without endangering future generations' ability to do the same. Rural India showcases how traditional ways of life align with environmental sustainability. For instance, in Assam, farmers cultivate traditional rice varieties that are naturally resistant to floods and droughts, preserving genetic diversity and minimizing the need for chemical inputs. Across Indian villages, water conservation methods like Rajasthan's *johads* and Nagaland's *zabo* systems reflect centuries of indigenous knowledge and innovation. In Assam, fishing techniques such as bamboo traps and seasonal fish farming in rice paddies demonstrate harmony with

natural aquatic systems. Community-based practices-like shared irrigation channels (*pukhuris*), protected village forests (*gomai*), and cooperative crop protection-highlight a deep-rooted culture of collective responsibility and long-term care for natural resources.

Understanding the rural-environment nexus is essential for anyone interested in rural sociology, development studies, or environmental policy. This nexus reflects the deeply intertwined nature of human society and ecological systems. Rural communities are not just users of the environment-they are stewards, custodians, and sometimes casualties of environmental change.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q3: What are Common Property Resources (CPRs)? Mention any two types.

.....

.....

Q4: Name two traditional practices that reflect environmental wisdom in rural communities.

.....

.....

Q5: What is Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)? Give one example.

.....

.....

## 11.5 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN RURAL SOCIETY

Rural societies, often perceived as pristine and untouched, face a range of environmental challenges that threaten their ecosystems, livelihoods, and way of life. While urban areas receive much attention in discussions on pollution and climate change, rural environments are equally

vulnerable, particularly due to the intricate relationship between nature and rural livelihoods.

- **Agricultural Impact:** While agriculture is central to rural economies, it is also a major driver of environmental degradation. The overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides pollutes soil and water bodies, impacting human health and disrupting ecosystems. Practices like monoculture farming exhaust soil nutrients, leading to declining productivity and increased dependence on synthetic inputs. Additionally, clearing land for cultivation contributes to deforestation, habitat destruction, and loss of soil fertility.
- **Water Scarcity and Pollution:** In many rural areas, access to clean and sufficient water is becoming a growing concern. Overuse of groundwater for irrigation has led to falling water tables, while pollution from agricultural runoff, open defecation, and improper waste disposal contaminates rivers and ponds. This not only affects human consumption but also damages aquatic life and biodiversity. In addition, climate change has altered rainfall patterns, making water supply increasingly unpredictable. Droughts and floods have become more frequent and intense, severely impacting crop yields and livelihoods. Floods not only destroy crops and displace people but also cause soil erosion and the loss of arable land.
- **Loss of Biodiversity:** Rural regions are typically rich in flora and fauna. However, habitat destruction caused by farming, logging, and mining activities threatens many species. The use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers also impacts pollinators like bees, which are essential for agricultural productivity. Additionally, the introduction of non-native species and overgrazing by livestock can disrupt local ecosystems and reduce biodiversity, ultimately affecting the balance of nature.
- **Climate Change Effects:** Rural communities are on the frontlines of climate change. Rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, and extreme weather events like storms and droughts directly impact agricultural output and food security. Many rural areas lack the financial and

technical resources to adapt to these changes, making them particularly vulnerable. Farmers may be forced to change their crop patterns or even migrate to cities in search of alternative livelihoods, leading to socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and overpopulation in urban centers.

- **Deforestation and Land Degradation:** The clearing of forests for farmland, fuelwood, and settlements leads to severe environmental degradation. Deforestation not only causes a loss of biodiversity but also contributes to the greenhouse effect by releasing stored carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Land degradation, including soil erosion and desertification, reduces the productivity of rural lands, leading to a vicious cycle of poverty and environmental destruction.
- **Human-Wildlife Conflict:** In rural India, particularly in areas near protected forests and national parks, there has been a rise in human-wildlife conflict. As forests shrink and human settlements expand, animals such as elephants, leopards, and rhinos enter villages in search of food. This often leads to destruction of property, loss of crops, and sometimes even loss of human life.

Addressing environmental issues in rural society requires a multifaceted approach that balances development with sustainability. Solutions include promoting organic farming, improving waste management systems, conserving water resources, and enhancing environmental awareness through education. Empowering rural communities with sustainable practices not only protects the environment but also secures the future of those who depend on it most closely.

## 11.6 A PRESENT SCENARIO OF THE RURAL-ENVIRONMENT CONTINUUM: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Rural societies and their relationship with the environment are undergoing significant transformation. With growing emphasis on sustainable development and climate resilience, rural communities-often stewards of natural resources and biodiversity-are increasingly recognized

as essential contributors to global environmental sustainability. The path forward is shaped by a range of evolving factors and opportunities:

- **Sustainability and Resilience:** Rural areas are poised to lead the way in meeting sustainability targets. Practices such as organic farming, agroforestry, integrated watershed management, and renewable energy use are becoming central to rural progress. Climate-smart agriculture, water conservation, and disaster preparedness strengthen both ecological resilience and livelihood security. Participatory approaches-like community-led resource management and agroecological methods-promote both environmental stewardship and social stability.
- **Policy and Government Initiatives:** Government action plays a pivotal role in shaping rural development trajectories. Future policies are expected to emphasize integrated development that aligns environmental protection with social and economic upliftment. Programs offering incentives for eco-friendly practices and support for sustainable technologies help balance rural growth with ecological priorities. Indian initiatives such as MGNREGA, PMKSY, and the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture reflect this shift, targeting both environmental conservation and rural livelihood enhancement. Effective implementation requires transparent governance and active involvement of local communities in decision-making processes.
- **Globalization and External Pressures:** While globalization offers access to broader markets and new economic opportunities, it also brings challenges. The rise of industrial agriculture and external land acquisitions can undermine traditional practices and strain ecosystems. In response, rural communities must safeguard their cultural and ecological heritage while selectively integrating beneficial global influences. Promoting indigenous crops, local enterprises, community-based tourism, and fair-trade practices can enable rural areas to engage with global markets without sacrificing environmental integrity or cultural identity. Strengthening cooperatives and supporting local production systems are crucial for building long-term resilience.

- **Environmental Regulation:** Environmental laws increasingly influence rural development by promoting long-term ecological health. However, for such regulations to be effective and equitable, they must be implemented in ways that consider local conditions and livelihoods. Collaborative models-where rural populations participate in environmental governance-lead to more practical and accepted outcomes. India's legal framework, including the Environment Protection Act (19106), Forest Conservation Act (1980), and Biological Diversity Act (2002), seeks to safeguard ecosystems while encouraging responsible resource use. Tools such as community forest management, eco-sensitive zones, and pollution control measures help protect rural landscapes. Integrating environmental education into rural planning enhances awareness and supports sustainable decision-making.

The dynamic link between natural resources and rural society lies at the heart of sustainable development. Rural communities are not passive recipients of environmental change; they actively shape and are shaped by the ecosystems around them. Their agricultural systems, resource use, and settlement patterns directly influence ecological balance. When poorly managed, these interactions may contribute to environmental degradation. Conversely, when guided by sustainable practices, rural societies can thrive while conserving their natural surroundings. Moving forward, integrated, inclusive approaches are essential-balancing development goals with the need to preserve and restore environmental health.

In conclusion, the well-being of rural society depends on a balanced relationship with the environment. Sustainable development requires valuing natural resources for their economic, cultural, and ecological importance. A resilient rural future calls for collaborative efforts that protect nature, promote social equity, and strengthen local economies. Empowering rural communities while conserving resources is essential-not optional-for lasting well-being.



## 11.7 LET US SUM UP

- Natural resources are central to rural livelihoods, culture, and traditions. However, environmental degradation and socio-economic changes are threatening this balance, demanding urgent sustainable management.
- Rural communities rely directly on land, water, forests, and climate for agriculture, livestock, and basic needs like food, fuel, and shelter.
- Nature influences rural customs, beliefs, and social roles. Indigenous knowledge and systems like CPRs and CBNRM support resource sharing and management.
- Natural resources support rural economies through farming, fishing, forestry, mining, and small industries, ensuring food security and income.
- Rural areas face threats like land degradation, pollution, biodiversity loss, climate impacts, and human-wildlife conflict due to deforestation and unsustainable practices.
- With their ecological wisdom and nature-based lifestyles, rural communities play crucial role in climate action and sustainable agriculture.
- Sustainable rural-environment relations require inclusive policies, community governance, and equitable global development.

## 11.8 FURTHER READING

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3. Martinez-Alier, J. (2002). *The environmentalism of the poor: A study of ecological conflicts and valuation.* Edward Elgar Publishing.

4. Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action.* Cambridge University Press.

5. Sangita, S. N. (2014). *Sociology of environment.* Rawat Publications.

6. Singh, K. (2009). *Rural development: Principles, policies and management* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.



## 11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** The main source of livelihood in rural societies is agriculture, including farming, fishing, animal husbandry, and forestry.

**Ans to Q No 2:** Three important natural resources used in rural life are land, water, and forests.

**Ans to Q No 3:** Common Property Resources (CPRs) are natural resources shared and used by a community. Two examples are village forests and community grazing lands.

**Ans to Q No 4:** Two traditional practices are organic farming and mixed cropping.

**Ans to Q No 5:** Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is the deep understanding rural communities have of nature, passed down through generations. An example is using lunar cycles for planting and harvesting.



## 11.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A. Short Questions (Answers each question in about 150 words)**

Q1: Write about the role of the environment in shaping rural life and livelihoods.

Q2: Discuss the major environmental issues faced by rural societies in India.

**B. Long Questions (Answers each question in about 300-500 words)**

Q1: Explain the concept of the rural-environment nexus and its significance in rural sociology.

Q.2 Discuss the major challenges and opportunities in the current rural-environment relationship?

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# UNIT 12: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS OF RURAL SOCIETY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Economic Issues

12.4 Social Issues

12.5 Environmental Issues

12.6 Cultural Issues

12.7 Policy and Governance Issues

12.8 Pathways to Sustainable Development

12.9 Let Us Sum Up

12.10 Further Readings

12.11 Answers to Check your Progress

12.12 Possible Questions


## 12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Understand the issues and problems of rural society
- Explore the various social dynamics existing in rural society
- Explain the economic, social and cultural aspects of rural society
- Understand the concept of sustainable development in the context of rural society

## 12.2 INTRODUCTION

Rural societies, characterized by low population density, agricultural-based economies, and close-knit communities, face unique challenges that distinguish them from its urban counterparts. Historically, rural societies have been the backbone of many economies, primarily through agriculture.

However, industrialization and urbanization have drastically transformed these societies, often leaving them behind in economic development. This Unit explores the issues and problems that rural societies encounter, providing a comprehensive sociological analysis. The main aim is to highlight the intricate social dynamics, systemic issues that hinder development, and potential pathways to sustainable improvement.

## 12.3 ECONOMIC ISSUES

Economic challenges are at the forefront of rural problems and are deeply intertwined with social issues. Some of the issues are detailed below

**a) Rural Poverty**

Poverty in rural areas is often more severe and pervasive than in urban areas. Several factors contribute to this:

- **Limited Job Opportunities:** The rural economy is primarily dependent on agriculture and related activities, which are often seasonal and poorly paid. The lack of industrial and service sector jobs limits employment opportunities, leading to high levels of unemployment and underemployment.
- **Lower Wages:** Jobs available in rural areas typically pay lower wages compared to urban areas. This wage disparity contributes to a lower standard of living and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. The economic value generated in rural areas often does not translate into equitable income distribution, with profits from agricultural products frequently going to middlemen and large corporations rather than local producers.
- **Access to Resources:** Limited access to education, healthcare, and financial services further entrenches poverty in rural areas. These limitations restrict the ability of individuals to improve their socioeconomic status, creating a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break.

**b) Market Access and Infrastructure**

Rural producers face significant barriers in accessing markets:

- **Infrastructure Deficits:** Poor infrastructure, such as inadequate roads and transportation systems, hampers the ability of rural producers to transport goods to markets. This isolation limits their economic opportunities and leads to lower prices for their products. The lack of reliable transportation infrastructure not only affects market access but also impacts the delivery of essential services, including healthcare and education. Moreover, poor infrastructure contributes to higher costs for agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers and seeds, reducing the profitability of farming and discouraging investment in rural enterprises.
- **Market Information:** The lack of access to timely and accurate market information places rural producers at a disadvantage, often resulting in exploitation by middlemen who offer lower prices for their goods. This information asymmetry prevents rural farmers from making informed decisions about crop choices and market timing, leading to suboptimal economic outcomes.



**Activity 1**

Explain the various factors that contribute to rural poverty.

……

……

……

## 12.4 SOCIAL ISSUES

Social challenges in rural areas are multifaceted and include education, healthcare, and social stratification.

**a) Education**

Education is a critical factor in breaking the cycle of poverty, yet rural areas often face significant educational challenges:

- **Inadequate Facilities:** Rural schools frequently lack basic facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, and libraries. This inadequacy affects the quality of education and the learning environment. Poor infrastructure leads to overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, and limited access to technology, which hampers the learning experience and outcomes for rural students.
- **Shortage of Qualified Teachers:** Rural schools often struggle to attract and retain qualified teachers, leading to a lower standard of education. Teachers in rural areas may also lack access to professional development opportunities, further impacting educational quality.
- **Low Educational Attainment:** The lower quality of education in rural areas results in lower educational attainment levels. This limits the future prospects of rural youth, restricting their access to higher education and better job opportunities. The lack of educational attainment perpetuates a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment, as young people without qualifications are unable to secure well-paying jobs or contribute meaningfully to the local economy.

**b) Healthcare**

Healthcare disparities between rural and urban areas are stark:

- **Limited Access to Services:** Rural areas often have fewer healthcare facilities, and those that exist are frequently understaffed and underfunded. Residents may need to travel long distances to access basic medical services, creating barriers to timely and adequate healthcare. The scarcity of healthcare facilities is exacerbated by inadequate transportation infrastructure, making it difficult for rural residents to reach urban centers where specialized care might be available.
- **Healthcare Professionals:** There is a significant shortage of healthcare professionals in rural areas. This shortage affects the availability and quality of healthcare services, leading to poorer health outcomes. Rural healthcare providers often face burnout due to

high patient loads and limited resources, further reducing the quality of care.

- **Health Disparities:** Rural populations tend to have higher rates of chronic diseases, malnutrition, and mental health issues. These health disparities are exacerbated by limited access to healthcare services and health education. The prevalence of manual labor and hazardous agricultural work also contributes to higher incidences of occupational injuries and health problems.

**c) Social Stratification**

Social stratification in rural areas is pronounced and can significantly impact social dynamics:

- **Caste and Ethnic Divisions:** In many rural societies, social stratification based on caste, ethnicity, and religion is prevalent. These divisions often dictate access to resources, opportunities, and social status. Caste-based discrimination can severely restrict social mobility and perpetuate economic disparities, as marginalized groups may be excluded from educational, economic, and political opportunities. Ethnic and religious minorities may also face systemic discrimination, limiting their ability to participate fully in social and economic life.
- **Land Ownership:** Land ownership is a critical determinant of social and economic status in rural areas. Landowners typically wield significant power and influence, while landless laborers and small farmers often face economic and social marginalization.
- **Gender Inequality:** Gender roles in rural areas are often more traditional and rigid. Women may have limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, reinforcing gender inequality. Traditional gender roles may confine women to domestic duties and unpaid labor, limiting their ability to contribute to household income and participate in community decision-making. The lack of reproductive health services and education further exacerbates gender disparities, impacting women's health and well-being.



**Activity 2**

What are the different forms of social stratification prevalent in rural societies?

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## 12.5 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Environmental challenges are particularly acute in rural areas and have significant social implications.

**a) Land Degradation**

Unsustainable agricultural practices and environmental degradation pose serious threats to rural livelihoods:

- **Soil Erosion:** Intensive farming, deforestation, and overgrazing lead to soil erosion, reducing agricultural productivity and threatening food security. Soil erosion not only diminishes the land's fertility but also increases vulnerability to natural disasters such as floods and landslides.
- **Desertification:** In some regions, unsustainable practices and climate change contribute to desertification, making land unfit for cultivation and habitation. Desertification leads to the loss of arable land, reducing the availability of food and increasing competition for scarce resources.

**b) Water Scarcity**

Water scarcity is a critical issue in many rural areas:

- **Over-extraction of Groundwater:** The overuse of groundwater for irrigation depletes water tables, leading to water shortages. This depletion affects not only agricultural productivity but also the availability of drinking water for rural communities.

- **Pollution:** Pollution from agricultural runoff, industrial activities, and inadequate sanitation contaminates water sources, affecting both human health and agriculture. The use of pesticides and fertilizers can lead to the contamination of rivers and lakes, harming aquatic ecosystems and reducing the quality of water available for irrigation and drinking.

**c) Climate Change**

Rural areas are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change:

- **Extreme Weather:** Increased frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and storms disrupts agricultural activities and endangers lives and property.
- **Agricultural Shifts:** Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns affect crop yields and livestock production, threatening rural livelihoods and food security. Traditional crops and livestock may no longer be viable under changing climatic conditions, forcing farmers to adopt new practices and technologies.



**Check your progress (A)**

1. Lack of market information is an advantage for rural farmers. True/False

2. What perpetuates a cycle of poverty?
   a) Better education
   b) Lack of educational attainment
   c) Better job opportunities
   d) Better farming opportunities

3. Climate change and environmental degradation pose serious threat to rural livelihood. True/False

4. State two causes of gender disparity in rural society.

## 12.6 CULTURAL ISSUES

Cultural dynamics in rural areas are influenced by both traditional practices and the impacts of modernization.

**a) Preservation of Traditions**

Rural areas often serve as custodians of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage:

- **Cultural Erosion:** Migration, modernization, and exposure to urban lifestyles can lead to the erosion of traditional practices and cultural heritage. As young people migrate to urban areas in search of better opportunities, they often adopt new cultural norms and values, leading to a decline in the transmission of traditional knowledge and practices. This cultural erosion can result in the loss of unique cultural identities and heritage, weakening the social fabric of rural communities.
- **Identity and Community:** The loss of cultural heritage can result in a weakened sense of identity and community cohesion, particularly among younger generations who may feel disconnected from their roots. This disconnection can lead to social fragmentation, as younger generations may no longer see the value in maintaining traditional practices and community ties.

**b) Impact of Modernization**

Modernization brings both opportunities and challenges to rural societies:

- **Cultural Tensions:** The introduction of modern values and lifestyles can create tensions between generations and disrupt traditional social structures. Older generations may resist changes that threaten their way of life, while younger generations may embrace modernization and seek new opportunities.
- **Balancing Modernization:** Balancing modernization with the preservation of cultural identity is a complex issue, requiring careful management to ensure that development does not come at the cost of cultural heritage.



**Activity 3**

Explain the impact of modernisation in rural societies.

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## 12.7 POLICY AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Effective governance and policy interventions are crucial for addressing the issues faced by rural societies.

**a) Political Representation**

Rural areas often lack adequate political representation, affecting policy decisions:

- Marginalization: Rural populations are often politically marginalized, leading to policies that do not fully address their needs and priorities. The concentration of political power in urban centers means that rural issues are frequently overlooked or inadequately addressed in national policy agendas.
- Advocacy and Voice: Strengthening the political representation and advocacy of rural communities can ensure that their voices are heard in policy-making processes. This can be achieved through the establishment of local governance structures, such as village councils and community organizations, that provide a platform for rural residents to articulate their needs and priorities.

**b) Policy Implementation**

Even well-intentioned policies often face implementation challenges in rural areas:

- Bureaucratic Inefficiencies: Corruption, lack of coordination, and bureaucratic inefficiencies hinder the effective delivery of services and development programs.

- **Accountability and Transparency:** Ensuring transparency and accountability in governance is essential for the success of rural development initiatives. This can be achieved through the implementation of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that track the progress and impact of development programs.

**c) Development Programs**

Development programs aimed at rural areas often face design and execution challenges:

- **Context-Specific Solutions:** Programs need to be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of rural communities to be effective. Generic approaches that do not take into account local conditions, cultural practices, and socioeconomic realities are unlikely to succeed. Engaging local stakeholders in the design and implementation of development programs can ensure that they are contextually relevant and responsive to the unique challenges faced by rural communities.
- **Integrated Approaches:** Coordinated efforts among different agencies and stakeholders are necessary to address the multifaceted challenges of rural development comprehensively. This requires a holistic approach that integrates economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions. Collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community groups can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of development initiatives.



**Activity 4**

What are the bureaucratic inefficiencies in addressing rural development?

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## 12.8 PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Addressing the issues and problems of rural societies requires a multifaceted approach that integrates economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions.

**a) Economic Diversification**

Diversifying the rural economy is essential for sustainable development:

- **Non-Agricultural Activities:** Promoting small and medium enterprises, tourism, and other non-agricultural activities can create jobs and reduce dependency on agriculture.
- **Financial Services:** Enhancing access to credit and financial services for rural entrepreneurs is crucial for economic diversification. Microfinance institutions and rural banks can provide much-needed capital for small businesses and agricultural enterprises.

**b) Education and Skill Development**

Investing in education and skill development is vital for empowering rural populations:

- **Quality Education:** Improving the quality of rural education and providing vocational training can equip individuals with the skills needed for diverse employment opportunities.
- **Digital Literacy:** Fostering digital literacy can enable rural residents to access information and services online, bridging the digital divide. Digital literacy programs can equip rural residents with the skills needed to use digital tools and technologies, enhancing their ability to participate in the digital economy.

**c) Healthcare Access**

Improving healthcare access in rural areas requires investment and innovation:

- **Infrastructure and Staffing:** Ensuring that rural healthcare facilities are adequately equipped and staffed can significantly improve health outcomes. This includes building new healthcare facilities, upgrading existing ones, and providing incentives for healthcare professionals

to work in rural areas. Additionally, training and retaining local healthcare workers can enhance the sustainability of healthcare services in rural communities.

- **Telemedicine:** Utilizing telemedicine and mobile health services can overcome geographic barriers and enhance healthcare access. Telemedicine can provide rural residents with access to specialized medical consultations and diagnostic services, reducing the need for long-distance travel.

**d) Infrastructure Development**

Developing infrastructure is fundamental for rural development:

- **Transportation and Connectivity:** Improving roads, transportation systems, and internet connectivity can enhance access to markets, education, and healthcare, and attract investment to rural areas.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Integrating sustainable practices in infrastructure development can ensure long-term benefits for rural communities. This includes the use of environmentally friendly construction materials and techniques, as well as the incorporation of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power.

**e) Sustainable Agriculture**

Promoting sustainable agricultural practices can address environmental challenges and improve livelihoods:

- **Organic and Conservation Agriculture:** Practices such as organic farming, conservation agriculture, and agroforestry can enhance soil health, increase productivity, and reduce environmental impact. These practices promote biodiversity, improve water retention, and reduce the need for chemical inputs, making agriculture more sustainable and resilient. Supporting farmers in adopting sustainable practices through training, resources, and incentives is crucial for the success of these initiatives.
- **Farmer Support:** Providing training, resources, and support to farmers is essential for the adoption of sustainable practices. Extension services that offer technical assistance and knowledge

sharing can help farmers implement sustainable techniques and improve their productivity.

**f) Social Inclusion**

Ensuring social inclusion and equity is critical for addressing social stratification in rural areas:

- **Empowerment:** Policies and programs should aim to empower marginalized groups, such as women, lower castes, and ethnic minorities. This includes providing access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, as well as promoting legal and social rights.
- **Participatory Approaches:** Promoting participatory approaches in decision-making can give these groups a voice in shaping their communities. Community-based planning and development initiatives that involve local residents in the decision-making process can ensure that policies and programs are responsive to their needs and priorities.

**g) Climate Adaptation**

Developing climate adaptation strategies is crucial for mitigating the impacts of climate change on rural areas:

- **Resilient Practices:** Implementing resilient agricultural practices, water conservation techniques, and disaster preparedness plans can protect rural livelihoods and ensure food security. Climate-smart agriculture practices, such as crop diversification and water-efficient irrigation, can enhance the resilience of farming systems to climate variability. Disaster preparedness plans that involve community participation can improve the capacity of rural communities to respond to and recover from extreme weather events.
- **Community Involvement:** Engaging communities in climate adaptation planning can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of these strategies. Community-based adaptation initiatives that leverage local knowledge and resources can ensure that adaptation measures are contextually appropriate and widely accepted.

**h) Cultural Preservation**

Preserving cultural heritage and traditions requires concerted efforts:

- **Documentation and Promotion:** Documenting and promoting traditional knowledge and practices can help maintain cultural heritage. This includes recording oral histories, traditional crafts, and cultural practices, as well as promoting them through cultural festivals and tourism.
- **Cultural Education:** Integrating cultural education in schools can foster a sense of identity and pride among younger generations. Educational programs that teach traditional crafts, music, and languages can help preserve cultural heritage and ensure its transmission to future generations.

**i) Effective Governance**

Improving governance and policy implementation is essential for the success of rural development initiatives:

- **Local Governance:** Strengthening local governance structures and ensuring political representation can lead to more effective and responsive policies. Decentralizing decision-making authority to local governments can enhance their capacity to address the specific needs of rural communities.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Enhancing transparency and accountability in governance can improve the delivery of services and programs. This can be achieved through the implementation of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as well as the promotion of open data and information sharing.



**Check your progress (B)**

1. Digital literacy is related to skill development in rural areas. True/False
2. Name two forms of social inclusion to address social stratification in rural society.

3. Oral History can help in understanding

a) Modern knowledge system

b) Traditional knowledge system

c) Present day knowledge system

d) Future knowledge system

4. Decentralisation helps in strengthening ..... governance.



## 12.9 LET US SUM UP

- From this Unit, we have learned that the issues and problems of rural society are complex and multifaceted, and requires a comprehensive and integrated approach to address them effectively.
- Economic, social, environmental, cultural, and governance challenges are deeply intertwined, necessitating coordinated efforts from governments, non-governmental organizations, and rural communities themselves.
- Addressing rural issues requires a long-term commitment to investment in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic diversification. Sustainable agricultural practices, effective governance, and the preservation of cultural heritage are equally important. Through these efforts, rural societies can overcome the challenges they face and build a more prosperous and equitable future for all.



## 12.10 FURTHER READING

1. Desai, A. R. (1994). *Rural sociology in India.* Popular Prakashan.

2. Jodhka, S. S. (2012). *Village society.* Orient Blackswan.

3. Shucksmith, M., & Brown, D. L. (2016). *Routledge international handbook of rural studies*. Routledge.

## 12.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**A** 1. False

2. B

3. True

4. Caste and Gender Inequality

**B** 1. True

2. Empowerment and Participatory approaches

3. B

4. Local

## 12.12 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

**A) Short Question:**

Q.1: Briefly explain how climate change can impact rural economy.

Q. 2111111' Explain the issues pertaining to healthcare in rural areas.

**B) Long Questions**

Q1: Critically analyse the various issues and problems of rural society.

Q2: Discuss the various pathways for development in rural societies.

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# UNIT 13: CHANGES IN RURAL SOCIETY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Sanskritisation

13.3.1 Characteristics

13.4 Westernisation

13.4.1 Impacts of Westernisation in India

13.5 Modernisation

13.5.1 Impact of modernisation

13.5.2 changes in rural social structure through modernisation

13.6 Let Us Sum up

13.7 Answers to Check Your Progress


## 13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- describe the processes of change in the rural social structure in India
- describe the social and political transitions and transformations in the rural social environment
- elaborate and critically evaluate the processes of Sanskritisation, westernisation and modernisation of Indian traditions
- explain the constitutional provisions related to women empowerment in the rural areas

## 13.2 INTRODUCTION

India is a land of diverse cultures and traditions. A majority of the population even today resides in the rural areas. In this unit you will study

the major trends of social changes in the rural social structure. The rural environment is characterised by a dominance of agriculture-based activities, poverty and income inequality, illiteracy and backwardness. However, over the past decades one can observe transitions in existing structure. These trends are namely Sanskritisation, westernisation and modernisation. These have in turn led to different changes in the rural scenario.

## 13.3 SANSKRITISATION

The term Sanskritisation was coined by M. N. Srinivas in his book "Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India". He defined it as a "process by which a lower caste or tribe or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a higher or more often twice-born caste." It refers to a process of upward mobility whereby the lower castes emulate the practices of the higher caste to improve upon or raise their status in society. In his study of the Coorgs in Mysore, Srinivas observed that the lower castes were imitating the cultural ideals of the Brahmins such as abstaining from meat consumption in order to elevate their status in society. To explain this process of mobility, Srinivas initially used the term 'Brahminisation' but later adopted 'Sanskritisation' for a broader concept.

Sanskritisation is thus a wider concept, being neither confined to the Brahmins as a reference group nor to the imitation of mere ritual and religious practices. It now also means imitation of ideologies such as Karma, Dharma, Papa, Punya, Maya, Samsara, Moksha etc. which find place in Sanskrit literature. These are also practiced by Sanskritizing castes. As a result, many tribes have also been assimilated within the Hindu fold. Besides, the Sanskritizing castes also follow some of the secular elements. For instance, the lower castes in U.P. have imitated not the rituals or sacred customs of the upper castes but their conspicuous style of consumption and living, such as betel chewing, the wearing of gold ornaments, shoes, and other forms of dresses which were forbidden to them in the past.

### 13.3.1 CHARACTERISTICS

1. It is a process of mobility- primarily upward as the lower castes imitate the lifestyle and practices of the upper castes to improve their status.The castes which enjoyed higher economic and political power but relatively low status with respect to ritual ranking, sought to sanskritise themselves because they felt that their clain to a higher position was not fully effective.
2. Sanskritisation is a process of cultural change towards the twice-born castes. In some regions, the lower castes choose to imitate the lifestyle of not the Brahmins but locally dominant castes like the Kshatriyas to raise their status. The dominant caste refers to the group which is numerically, economically and politically strong in any region.
3. Sanskritisation is thus contextual. It does not take place in the same manner in all the places.
4. It is not simply confined to the Hindu caste groups. Tribal communities such as Bhils of Western India, the Pahadiyas of Himalayan region, the Bodos and Rabhas in the Brahmaputra valley in Assam have to some degrees been influenced by Sanskritisation. At the same time, in some regions the higher castes emulate the tribal ways of life or undergo the process of tribalisation. This is known as de-sanskritisation. For example, brahmins have started taking liquor and meant.
5. There is the concept of 'reference group' which refers to the caste group whose lifestyle is adopted for elevating the social status of the lower castes.
6. There is a positional change over time in the social status of the caste groups, but no overall change takes place in the social structure as the caste structure remains intact.

Sanskritisation has socially changed the fabric of Indian social structure. It has allowed for the lower caste groups to elevate their social status and achieve recognition. The lower caste groups who

used to work in 'defiling' jobs such as washing clothes, cleaning human and animal wastes, have given these up for other 'clean' occupations to raise their social status. On religious fronts, many sanskritised castes have adopted the 'sacred thread' and perform prayers in temples regularly. They often adorn themselves with cloths and jewellery of the upper castes, build pucca houses and keep their homes clean.

## 13.4 WESTERNISATION

Like Sanskritisation, the concept of Westernisation was introduced by M. N Srinivas to refer to a prolonged process of social and cultural change when a non-western country comes into contact with Western culture. It conveys two meanings- One is global and the other is exclusively relating to the Indian society. From a global perspective, westernization refers to the process of social change brought about in non-western countries as a result of their prolonged contact with Western culture. In the Indian context, Westernisation refers to changes brought about in Indian social life as a consequence of its contact with the British.

When compared to Sanskritisation, Westernisation is a simpler concept. It refers to the impact of British culture and lifestyle on the Indian society and culture- such as food habits, sense of style, education system, etc. Like Sanskritisation, there is a positional and cultural change that takes place in the society without an overall structural change.

### 13.4.1 IMPACTS OF WESTERNISATION IN INDIA

1. Education- modern education opened up the doors towards literature and knowledge systems in Europe, and this influenced the seeds of dissent and India's national movement. Western education also exposed the Indian middle class to more liberal and progressive ideas which in turn helped them to further bring social reforms.
2. Economy- due to impact with the West, the Indian society began

to experience changes ithe economic institutions such as production for global consumption, introduction of the class system and the emergence of the middle class who were instrumental in bringing social reforms as well as the Indian National movement.

3. Polity- many features of our Indian Constitution such as secularism, democracy, fundamental rights and so on are borrowed from the Constitutions of other Western countries. Education helped percolate the knowledge of these rights to the grassroots in India.
4. Social Reforms- social reforms such as abolition of Sati system, widow remarriage, inheritance and property rights, education of girl child, Right to Education and Food, etc. are as a result of westernisation. Our social reformers as well as crafters of the Indian Constitution took inspiration from western literature and spread awareness about the importance of education, abolition of conservative ideals, spread of liberal values and so on.

For a thorough understanding of the term, we must make a distinction between Westernisation and Sanskritisation. First, Sanskritisation refers to mobility within the caste system while Sanskritisation refers to mobility outside the caste framework. Secondly, Sanskritisation has taken place among members of the low caste groups who imitate the higher castes' lifestyle to elevate their position in society, however westernisation takes place among the upper castes who first turned towards western culture. Thirdly, Sanskritisation puts a ban upon some practices such as meat eating and alcohol consumption, while westernisation promotes them. Fourthly, Sanskritisation promotes a religious and sacred outlook while westernisation promotes a liberal and secular outlook to some degree. Fifthly, Sanskritisation connotes an endogamous change while westernisation connotes exogamous change.

Inspite of these differences, the two processes are complementary. It is not possible to understand one without the

other. Westernisation is not hostile to the process of Sanskritisation rather it contributes to the spread of Sanskritisation. Western technology in the form of the railways, the press, the radio, and the telephone, and of late social media has aided Sanskritisation. For instance, social media accounts may promote a particular type of religious pilgrimage which was only undertaken once by the twice-born castes. Again, when the upper castes westernise themselves, this is also imitated by the lower castes in an attempt to gain more social footing.

## 13.5 MODERNISATION

Modernization is one of the few terms that have come to be the keywords in contemporary discourse on the dynamics of social change. The new term 'Modernization' was evolved by the American Scholars and it gained currency throughout the world in the 1950s and the 1960s. It connotes the idea of a complex of social, political, economic, cultural and psychological transformations occurring in the west from the sixteenth century on wards and reaching its apogee in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It involves the process of industrialization, urbanization, rationalization, bureaucratization, democratization, the rise of capitalism, the spread of individualism and achievement-motivation, the affirmation of reason and science, and many other processes. Modernization as such means attaining modernity. It refers to the process through which a traditional or pre-technological society passes as it is transformed into a society characterized by machine technology, rational and secular attitudes and highly differentiated social structures.

Noted sociologist S. C. Dubey defines modernisation as a process that explains the change from traditional or semi- conventional stage to any desired forms of technology and the nature, values, motivations and social normative rules of the social structure attached to them. Daniel Lerner defines modernisation as a process of change which is mainly related to changes in the way of thoughts and attitudes, increase in urbanisation,

increase in literature, increase in per capita income and increase in political participation.

### 13.5.1 IMPACTS OF MODERNISATION

Social changes- due to modernisation, there has taken place eye-catching changes in the micro-structural framework of the Indian rural organisation. Under the impact of modernization, caste has given up its traditional occupation and dissociated itself from traditional obligation, for example, *jajmani* relation. Caste endogamy has crumbled down and the incidences of inter-caste marriages are on the increase. Caste activities are gradually expanding. The power structure of caste is also changing.

As the modernisation proceeds, the transition from the extended or joint families to conjugal forms or nuclear families has become much more accelerated. Villages are changing with respect of economic institutions and power structures and inter-caste relationships. The introduction of statutory panchayats has transformed the structure of village leadership. The emerging leadership consists of young people.

In terms of cultural change, modernisation brings along the following-

- **Industrialisation:** The process of industrialization has changed the whole social system based on the principle of ascription and a subsistence agricultural economy. As a result, the economy, the polities, the social institutions, the system of stratification of the country and the way of life of people and their standard of living have changed appreciably. Industrialism has fostered rational and secular attitudes. Traditional thoughts and actions gradually lose their hold.

Urbanisation: Urbanization brings about transformation in various social institutions such as the family, social stratification, patterns

of social interactions, value preference of the people etc. the interrelationship among urban people is directed towards meeting some specific needs. Secondary group relationships always predominate in the urbanized societies.

- **Expansion of Modern Education:** Modernization in Indian society brings about a radical change in the orientation and organization of education. Contrary to the traditional education, its content becomes liberal and it propagates modern scientific world-views. It imbibes modern themes like humanism, liberalism and secularism. It incorporates the courses in sciences, medicines and engineering. The organizational structure of education also has undergone a significant change. Teachers are being recruited on the basis of educational achievement irrespective of their caste creed and religion. Education is also imparted to all without caste bar. By educating the people, a sense of unity, the feeling of nationalism, liberalism and freedom and an urge for effective political participation have been created in the mind of people.
- **Change in legal structure:** It leads to the emergence of a universalistic legal system based on the principle of universalism, rationalism and individualism. Through law many forms of cultural changes, such as the abolition of Sati, the introduction of widow remarriage etc. were brought out. New legal system challenged the traditional system of hierarchy and holism. It contributes to the growth of multiple legal professions and establishment of rule of law.
- **Spread of transport and communication:** Modernization has led to the growth and expansion of nationwide net-work of transport and communication. As a result of transportation and communication, the barriers between regions have broken down. People become both physically and mentally mobile. The large-scale circulation of newspapers and periodicals and other easy means of communication have a double-edged impact on the

Indian society. On one side, it has modernizing effects on the other, traditionalizing effect. Mass communication has accelerated the process of industrialization and urbanization and the same time it has strengthened primordial ties like caste, religion, race etc. Cheap printing presses and easy means of communication have contributed to the intensification of caste solidarity.

- **Mass Politicization:** Only due to the process of modernization in India, the enlightened Indian elites could think of introducing political institutions based on values of democracy, equality, liberty, freedom and justice. As a result, the government of India could set up a constitution based on the democratic system. In a democratic system, the Government is responsible to people and people normally express their preference for a party through elections. The decision making, no more, remains an elite affair, but masses also become politicized. They are politically very much conscious; they participate in political gatherings, hold political discussion and evaluate the decisions of authority.
- **Change in Little Tradition:** Besides, change in the little tradition i.e., daily life, customs, and habits of people at the grass-root level also takes place. Especially changes in Dress, food habits, rituals, vocabulary, material culture, mode of travel and types of conveyance and customs become manifested. Home-made clothes have been replaced by factory-made clothes. Observation of rules relating to eating of food and drink has been abandoned. Meat eating and use of eggs have been popular among the high castes. The coat-suit, dining table, spoon eating is rapidly coming into the Indian way of life. English language, western food and dress habits are considered to be status symbols. All these changes resulted from the introduction of a fluid political structure, adult franchise and a decentralized process of decision making.
- **Technological Changes:** With the process of modernization,

the Indian society has experienced tremendous changes in the technological sphere which involve development of new techniques, new inventions, new modes of production and new standards of living. These changes have resulted in the decay of old traditional craftsmanship, and diversification of occupations and it has brought men and women to factory and office. New industrialism also brought in modern value patterns. Similarly, mechanization of agriculture in India has resulted in increased agricultural production and has affected farm economy and farmer's household life. Technological advancement resulted in greater functional inter-dependence and differentiation between parts and greater mobility of the members with respect to location and occupation.

## 13.5.2 CHANGING TRENDS IN RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE THROUGH MODERNISATION

**Panchayati Raj and women empowerment-** The 73rd Amendment to the Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1992 has constitutionally empowered the women by giving them 33% representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.At the same time, it reserves one-third of the chairperson's post in the three-tier system. Apart from that, the government adopted the National Policy for the empowerment of the women on 20th March 2001. The main objective of this policy is to bring about the encroachment, enlargement, and empowerment of women and to safeguard their effective participation in all spheres of public life and activities (Raju in Rao, 2011, p. 143).

The Act has empowered women through active participation of women collectives in activities such as Gram Sabhas, involvement in rural development programmes and so on. The main activities of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions mostly take part of as abolition of dowry and female illiteracy, reducing the domestic violence and violence against women and Dalits to stop female

foeticide, eradicating discrimination against female child, enrolment of girl child in schools and other educational institutions, to promotion of women in seeking employment in government developmental schemes, to assistance women in obtaining economic support for running small scale business, to consolidate self-help groups and co-operatives among the women, to make awareness among the women about the voting and other political rights as well as assisting better mother and child health care facilities and implementing family planning programmes and etc.

**MNREGA-** The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act involves grass-root level participation of every citizen and beneficiary through democratic process, multilayered social audit and transparency mechanism by involvement of civil society, comprehensive planning at village level towards sustainable and equitable development etc.It is a powerful instrument for ensuring inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic empowerment. The Act was notified in 200 districts in the first phase with effect from February 2nd 2006 and then extended to an additional 130 districts in the financial year 2007-2008. It provides a legal guarantee for wage employment. It is a demanddriven programme where provision of work is triggered by the demand for work by wageseekers.The Act incentivizes States to provide employment, as 100 per cent of the unskilled labour cost and 75% of the material cost of the programme is borne by the Centre.

The other stake-holders of the scheme are the Gram Sabha (GS), three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), especially the Gram Panchayat (GP); programme officer at the block level; District Programme Coordinator (DPC); State Government; Ministry of Rural Development; civil society and other stakeholders like line departments, convergence departments, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), etc.The Act has also increased visibility of women workers in the rural areas. Just as the Panchayati Raj Institution reserves a

percentage of seats in the panchayat for women, in MNREGS also there is a minimum requirement of thirty percent of women beneficiaries. Facilities guaranteed by it such as availability of drinking water, shade, first-aid, crèche at the working site enables semi-skilled and unskilled women to participate.



## 13.6 LET US SUM UP

- In this unit you have read about the key trends of change in the rural social structure.
- We have learned that the rural social structure is dominated by institutions such as the caste structure.
- Over the period, caste system has witnessed Sanskritisation which is a process of upward mobility of lower castes trying to imitate the lifestyle of the upper castes.
- The process of Westernisation refers to changes brought about in a non-western culture through contact with a western culture, such as colonialism.
- Modernisation is a complex process that involves a holistic and over all development of the society.



## 13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Who coined the term Sanskritisation?
   a. M. N. Srinivas
   b. S. C. Dube
   c. McKim Mariott
   d. Louis Dumont

2. In India, westernisation happened due to?
   a. Upper caste revolution

b. Constitutional reforms
c. Colonialism
d. Change in lifestyle

3. Social and legal reforms in India are a result of?

a. Modernisation
b. Sanskritisation
c. Green revolution
d. Burmese invasion

## REFERENCES

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/RuralWomen/ArundhatiBhattacharyya.pdf

https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1902A15.pdf

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# UNIT 14: AGENCIES AND AGENTS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

## UNIT STRUCTURE


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## 14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- understand the roles of the various agencies involved in rural development
- analyse the role of key agents in promoting rural development
- know the effectiveness of rural development strategies and initiatives

## 14.2 INTRODUCTION

Rural development is a multifaceted process that aims to improve the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas. In India, where the majority of the population lives in villages, rural development is essential to national progress. The concept includes economic growth, social inclusion, infrastructure development, and community empowerment.

To achieve a sustainable rural development, the participation of various agents and agencies is required. Central, state, and local government agencies, such as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and rural development departments, are critical to the planning, implementation, and monitoring of rural development programmes. Apart from government organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), cooperative societies, and community-based organisations (CBOs) also play important roles in rural development.

This unit will analyse the various agents and agencies involved in rural development in India, examining their roles, functions, and contributions to overall rural progress. Through a structured discussion, it will shed light on the collaborative efforts required to address rural challenges and promote sustainable development.

## 14.3 AGENCIES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In India, rural development is driven by a variety of national, state, and local government agencies. These agencies play an important role in developing policies, implementing programmes, and monitoring outcomes to ensure long-term rural progress. The primary goal of these organisations is to reduce socioeconomic disparities, improve livelihood opportunities, and provide necessary services in rural areas. They collaborate with

communities, NGOs, private entities, and international organisations to promote holistic rural development. The participation of these organisations not only improves infrastructure and basic services, but it also promotes social inclusion, gender equality, and economic empowerment.

### 14.3.1 GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Government agencies are at the forefront of rural development, given their ability to mobilise vast resources and implement large-scale programs. These agencies, functioning at various administrative levels, are tasked with planning, executing, and monitoring development schemes. Their roles include:

1. **Policy Formulation:** Government agencies play a critical role in creating policies that benefit rural communities. These policies aim to address key areas such as reducing rural poverty, creating job opportunities, developing infrastructure, and promoting social inclusion. These policies ensure that development initiatives are contextually relevant and effective by taking into account rural areas' socioeconomic and cultural diversity.
2. **Resource Allocation:** Government agencies mobilise financial, technical, and human resources through a variety of channels, including central and state budgets, international aid, and public-private partnerships. They prioritise urgent needs, ensuring equitable distribution of funds and support to underserved areas. Proper resource allocation helps to reduce disparities and promote balanced regional development.
3. **Program Implementation:** Implementation is a crucial step after formulating policies and allocating resources. Government agencies carry out development programmes through local governments, state departments, and collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They ensure that rural development programmes are customised to the specific challenges of each community. Continuous support and

supervision during implementation help to ensure programme quality and consistency.

4. **Supervision and Monitoring:** Government agencies closely monitor rural development initiatives to ensure desired outcomes. This includes tracking progress, identifying obstacles, and making necessary changes. Monitoring mechanisms, such as periodic assessments and audits, help to evaluate project performance and ensure accountability. Feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders is also used to improve ongoing efforts and programme efficiency.
5. **Stakeholders Collaboration:** Collaboration with stakeholders is key to maximising the impact of rural development efforts. Government agencies collaborate with local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector, and international organisations. Such collaborations help to leverage expertise, share resources, and foster a sense of community ownership.
6. **Capacity Building:** Government agencies must empower local and rural populations. They empower community members and local leaders through training programmes, skill development workshops, and awareness campaigns. This not only improves the effectiveness of ongoing projects, but also ensures the long-term viability of development initiatives. Capacity-building initiatives help to promote self-reliance and improve local governance, which contributes to long-term rural transformation.

**Government Agencies in India**

In India, rural development is driven by government agencies operating at the national, state, and local levels. At the national level, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) plays an important role in developing policies and implementing major schemes aimed at reducing poverty, creating employment, and developing infrastructure in rural areas. Some of its key programmes are the Mahatma Gandhi

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), and the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojan. Other central ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, also make significant contributions to rural development. Furthermore, autonomous bodies such as the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) back financial initiatives and encourage rural entrepreneurship.

At the state level, governments implement national policies through departments such as the State Rural Development Department while also developing region-specific schemes to address local infrastructure, agriculture, and livelihood challenges. Agencies such as State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) adapt national programmes to meet state-specific needs. Local Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), such as Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats, and Zila Parishads, play an important role in grassroots planning and implementation. They work with District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs), which act as operational units for a variety of anti-poverty and community development initiatives. These three levels of government collaborate to ensure holistic rural development by reducing socioeconomic disparities and promoting long-term progress.

Some significant government initiatives include:

a. **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):** Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was launched in 2005. It is a transformative rural employment scheme aimed at ensuring livelihood security by legally guaranteeing at least 100 days of wage employment annually to rural households willing to undertake unskilled manual labor. This right to work provides a consistent income source, crucial for reducing economic vulnerability in rural areas. MGNREGA's primary objective is to improve the socio-economic

conditions of rural households by offering employment opportunities and reducing the hardships caused by seasonal unemployment. Additionally, it contributes to long-term rural development by creating durable community assets like roads, irrigation canals, and water conservation structures, thus promoting agricultural productivity and water availability.

A core principle of MGNREGA is social equity, as it prioritizes marginalized groups, including women, Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST), by mandating their minimum representation in the workforce. This inclusive approach not only fosters social justice but also promotes gender equity, with a significant increase in women's participation in rural employment. The scheme has successfully reduced rural unemployment and migration by providing local job opportunities, thereby enhancing economic resilience among rural households. By ensuring wage security and creating community assets, MGNREGA has played a pivotal role in stabilizing rural economies and promoting sustainable development.

b. **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin (PMAY-G):** The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin (PMAY-G) was launched in 2016. It is an important rural housing scheme aimed at providing financial assistance for constructing pucca (permanent) houses. As part of the government's vision of "Housing for All" by 2024, it targets economically weaker sections, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), minorities, and other vulnerable groups. The scheme provides financial assistance to households in vulnerable areas. Apart from housing, PMAY-G integrates essential amenities such as sanitation, electricity, clean drinking water, and kitchen space, promoting safety, hygiene, and dignity for rural families.

PMAY-G also focuses on social inclusion and transparency by selecting beneficiaries through the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011, using geo-tagging and Aadhaar-based

verification. The scheme contributes to the local economy by creating employment opportunities for artisans, masons, and laborers, while also promoting community participation through self-help construction models. By aligning with other initiatives like MGNREGA, Swachh Bharat Mission, and Saubhagya, PMAY-G ensures holistic rural development. Its inclusive, community-driven approach not only addresses housing needs but also fosters socio-economic well-being, making it a model for rural housing programs globally.

c. **The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM):** The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), initiated in 2011, is a key program by the Government of India aimed at reducing rural poverty through sustainable self-employment and skilled wage employment. With a focus on women's empowerment, NRLM seeks to build strong grassroots institutions that facilitate access to financial services and livelihood opportunities, envisioning a poverty-free rural India. A core aspect of NRLM is the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), primarily composed of women from economically weaker sections, promoting savings, financial independence, and collective action. These SHGs are further supported by Village Organisations (VOs) and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) to enhance long-term social and economic resilience.

   NRLM also emphasizes skill development and capacity building by training members in vocational skills, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. It promotes small-scale businesses and facilitates affordable credit through partnerships with banks and microfinance institutions. A community-driven approach fosters collective decision-making and includes marginalized groups such as SCs, STs, minorities, and PwDs. NRLM's holistic strategy not only improves household incomes but also strengthens social cohesion and women's leadership within communities. By enhancing financial literacy, self-employment,

and social inclusion, NRLM has become a transformative force in fostering sustainable rural development and economic self-reliance in India.

## 14.3.2 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs)

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) play a vital role in rural development by mobilising communities, advocating for policy changes, building capacity, and delivering essential services. Acting as intermediaries between the government and local communities, NGOs address grassroots issues and ensure that marginalized groups are actively involved in development processes. Their community-centric approach fosters local leadership, builds trust, and enhances the effectiveness of rural development initiatives. By working closely with rural populations, NGOs develop tailored solutions that address specific local challenges, thereby promoting sustainable progress.

NGOs focus on diverse areas such as education, healthcare, agriculture, environmental sustainability, and women's empowerment. They conduct training programs to build skills, improve literacy, and enhance healthcare access. In agriculture, NGOs support farmers with sustainable practices and market linkages, while their environmental efforts include water conservation and afforestation. Additionally, NGOs empower women through vocational training and self-help groups, fostering economic independence and social inclusion. By promoting participatory approaches, NGOs ensure that rural development initiatives are community-driven and sustainable.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Mention two role of Government agencies in rural development.

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2. Write a short note on MGNREGA.

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## 14.3.3 INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

International development organisations such as the World Bank, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), and IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) play a significant role in promoting rural development worldwide. These organisations provide crucial support through funding, technical assistance, research, and capacity building. Their primary focus areas include poverty alleviation, modernisation of agriculture, infrastructure development, and enhancing rural healthcare. By addressing these key challenges, they contribute to creating sustainable and resilient rural economies, particularly in low-income and developing countries.

Collaborative projects initiated by these organisations often involve multi-stakeholder partnerships, bringing together governments, civil society, and private sector entities. This inclusive approach ensures that diverse perspectives and resources are mobilized for comprehensive rural development. Through long-term initiatives and strategic interventions, these organisations not only address immediate socio-economic issues but also work towards achieving lasting positive changes in rural communities. Their efforts contribute significantly to global sustainable development goals, particularly in reducing rural poverty and improving living standards.

## 14.3.4 PRIVATE SECTOR AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) INITIATIVES

The private sector significantly contributes to rural development through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Many corporations implement projects in healthcare, education, livelihood enhancement, and community infrastructure as part of their social commitment. These initiatives often align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and address critical challenges faced by rural communities. Private sector involvement not only brings financial resources but also introduces innovative solutions to traditional problems.

Moreover, private companies often collaborate with non-governmental organisations and local government bodies to ensure that their CSR initiatives effectively reach the intended beneficiaries. This multi-stakeholder approach enhances the efficiency and sustainability of rural development projects. In addition, private sector involvement fosters skill development and employment opportunities, empowering rural youth and reducing migration to urban areas. Through such collaborative and community-focused efforts, CSR initiatives contribute significantly to the holistic development of rural regions.

## 14.4 AGENTS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development is not solely the responsibility of structured agencies but also relies on agents who play a pivotal role in implementing policies, mobilizing communities, and ensuring sustainable growth at the grassroots level. These agents act as change-makers, fostering community involvement and translating development goals into practical and measurable outcomes. The active participation of these agents ensures that rural development initiatives are inclusive, community-driven, and sustainable in the long run. Below is a detailed discussion of the key agents of rural development and their roles.

### 14.4.1 PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIs)

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are fundamental to rural governance in India, functioning as decentralised units of local self-government as mandated by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992. PRIs empower rural communities by involving them in decision-making and promoting self-governance. The structure of PRIs includes three tiers: Gram Panchayat (village level), Panchayat Samiti (block level), and Zila Parishad (district level). These institutions serve as vital channels for grassroots democracy, giving local residents a voice in planning and implementing rural development initiatives. By fostering direct community involvement, PRIs help bridge the gap between government policies and local needs.

PRIs are entrusted with the following key responsibilities:

- Planning and executing local rural development projects.
- Implementing social welfare schemes like sanitation and rural housing.
- Managing local resources, including water conservation and waste management.
- Strengthening infrastructure through public works projects, such as road construction and community centers.
- Promoting social justice by addressing local grievances and ensuring the inclusion of marginalized groups.
- Facilitating awareness programs on health, education, and sustainable practices to uplift rural communities.

PRIs enhance community participation and ensure transparency in the implementation of government schemes, thereby making rural development more community-centric. By involving local stakeholders in governance, they promote accountability and responsiveness, which are essential for sustainable rural development. Additionally, PRIs play a key role in mobilizing local resources and fostering collaboration among various community

groups, thereby strengthening the overall governance framework at the grassroots level centric (Singh & Kumar, 2021).

## 14.4.2 COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) are grassroots organisations formed within communities to address local issues through collective action and participatory efforts. CBOs are critical components of rural and urban development, mobilising community resources, advocating for social change, and cultivating local leadership. They frequently work in a variety of fields, including health, education, water management, livelihood development, women's empowerment, environmental conservation, and disaster preparedness.

By taking a participatory approach, CBOs promote social cohesiveness, strengthen local governance, and foster a sense of community ownership. Their inclusive strategies allow them to address socioeconomic challenges more effectively while strengthening community resilience.

Functions of CBOs:

- **Resource Mobilization:** Community-based organisations (CBOs) mobilise resources to address local challenges. They encourage community members to contribute their time, skills, and financial resources, establishing a sense of shared responsibility and ownership.
- **Advocacy and Awareness:** CBOs promote social rights, justice, and welfare through campaigns, workshops, and meetings. They empower marginalised groups by disseminating information and promoting social inclusion, resulting in increased community participation.
- **Implementation of Local Initiatives:** Community-based organisations (CBOs) implement projects to address local

needs, such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. They frequently work with government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private companies to increase the impact and sustainability of these initiatives.

- **Capacity Building:** CBOs aim to enhance community skills and knowledge through training programmes, workshops, and educational sessions. These efforts aim to strengthen local leadership, increase self-sufficiency, and prepare the community to effectively address emerging challenges.
- **Crisis Management:** During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health crises, CBOs coordinate relief and support efforts. They use local networks to mobilise volunteers, distribute critical resources, and aid in recovery efforts.
- **Bridging Community and Institutions** Community-based organisations (CBOs) bridge the gap between communities and formal institutions, ensuring that local voices are represented in policy-making. They facilitate communication, advocate for community needs, and assist in the implementation of government programmes at the grassroots level. By acting as a bridge between the community and government agencies, CBOs ensure that development initiatives reflect the genuine needs of the community (Rao & Verma, 2020).



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

3. Mention two functions of Panchayatiraj institutions.

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4. Mention two functions of the Community-Based Organisations

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### 14.4.3 SELF-HELP GROUPS (SHGs)

A Self-Help Group (SHG) is a voluntary organisation of people who come together to address common challenges, improve their social and economic well-being, and support one another. SHGs provide a platform for members to pool their savings, obtain credit, and engage in income-producing activities. They also encourage skill development through training and empowerment through group decision-making.

SHGs, which are primarily concerned with uplifting marginalised communities, particularly women, work to alleviate poverty by providing financial services, encouraging income-generating ventures, and providing livelihood opportunities. These organisations aim to empower women by improving their social and economic standing, promoting gender equality, and facilitating collective action.

Furthermore, SHGs play an important role in promoting financial inclusion by providing marginalised communities with access to savings, credit, and banking services.These groups often receive support from the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and other developmental agencies.

Major functions of SHGs include:

**Financial Inclusion:** Provide members with collateral-free microcredit, allowing the economically disadvantaged to access financial services.

**Empowerment and Skill Development:** Improve the socioeconomic status of marginalised communities by encouraging income-generating activities and skill training. Social cohesion is promoted through group meetings and mutual support.

**Savings Promotion:** Encourage members to save regularly, thereby increasing financial security and self-reliance.

**Community Mobilisation:** Serve as a forum for collaborative problem-solving, decision-making, and social change efforts.

SHGs have significantly contributed to improving rural livelihoods and social status, particularly by enhancing women's economic independence (Sharma, 2022).

### 14.4.4 ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist)

ASHA workers are community health volunteers under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) who serve as intermediaries between the healthcare system and rural populations. They play an important role in improving maternal and child health, raising healthcare awareness, and mobilising communities to achieve better outcomes.

ASHA workers' primary responsibilities include

- Providing maternal healthcare services, including antenatal and postnatal care.
- Increasing awareness of immunisation, family planning, and nutrition.
- Teaching families about preventive healthcare and hygiene practices.
- Assisting with disease surveillance and community health monitoring.
- Coordinating with primary healthcare centres to ensure access to essential medical services.

ASHA workers make healthcare more accessible in rural areas by fostering community trust and promoting preventive healthcare practices (Gupta & Choudhary, 2023).

### 14.4.5 EXTENSION OFFICERS AND SOCIAL WORKERS

Extension officers and social workers contribute to rural development by disseminating knowledge and promoting social welfare. Extension officers, who are frequently associated with agriculture departments, teach farmers about modern farming practices, sustainable agriculture, and the use of new technologies.

Social workers, on the other hand, work to empower marginalised communities and advocate for social justice.

Their primary responsibilities include providing agricultural extension services to increase crop productivity and income.

- Providing community education and vocational training for skill development.
- Activating communities to address social issues such as child labour, gender inequality, and health rights.
- Connecting community members with government programmes and social security benefits.
- Raising awareness about human rights and social inclusion.

Extension officers and social workers both serve as change agents, promoting socioeconomic progress and encouraging community involvement in rural development initiatives (Desai & Patel, 2021).



**Check your progress**

5. Mention two major functions of Self Help Groups.

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6. Write a short note on ASHA workers.

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## 14.5 LET US SUM UP

- Rural development is a multifaceted process that aims to improve the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas.

- To achieve a sustainable rural development, the participation of various agents and agencies is required. These agents include government organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), cooperative societies, and community-based organisations (CBOs), among others.
- In India, rural development is driven by a variety of national, state, and local government agencies. At the national level, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) plays and important role in developing policies and implementing major schemes. Some of its key programmes are the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), and the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojan.
- At the state level, governments implement national policies through departments such as the State Rural Development Department while also developing region-specific schemes.
- Local Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), such as Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats, and Zila Parishads, play an important role in grassroots planning and implementation.
- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) play a vital role in rural development by mobilising communities, advocating for policy changes, building capacity, and delivering essential services.
- International development organisations such as the World Bank, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), and IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) play a significant role in promoting rural development worldwide.
- The private sector significantly contributes to rural development through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.
- Rural development is not solely the responsibility of structured agencies but also relies on agents who play a pivotal role in implementing policies, mobilizing communities, and ensuring sustainable growth at the grassroots level.
- Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) are grassroots organisations formed within communities to address local issues through collective action and participatory efforts.

- A Self-Help Group (SHG) is a voluntary organisation of people who come together to address common challenges, improve their social and economic well-being, and support one another.
- ASHA workers are community health volunteers under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) who serve as intermediaries between the healthcare system and rural populations.



## 14.6 FURTHER READING


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## 14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Answer to Q No 1**

i. Policy Formulation

ii. Program Implementation

**Answer to Q. No 2 :** Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was launched in 2005. It is a transformative rural employment scheme aimed at ensuring livelihood security by legally guaranteeing at least 100 days of wage employment annually to rural households willing to undertake unskilled manual labor. This right to

work provides a consistent income source, crucial for reducing economic vulnerability in rural areas. MGNREGA's primary objective is to improve the socio-economic conditions of rural households by offering employment opportunities and reducing the hardships caused by seasonal unemployment. Additionally, it contributes to long-term rural development by creating durable community assets like roads, irrigation canals, and water conservation structures, thus promoting agricultural productivity and water availability.

**Answer to Q. No 3**

i. Planning and executing local rural development projects.

ii. Implementing social welfare schemes like sanitation and rural housing.

**Answer to Q. No 4**

i. Resource Mobilization

ii. Advocacy and Awareness

**Answer to Q. No 5**

i. Financial Inclusion

ii. Empowerment and Skill Development

**Answer to Q. No 6 :** ASHA workers are community health volunteers under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) who serve as intermediaries between the healthcare system and rural populations. They play an important role in improving maternal and child health, raising healthcare awareness, and mobilising communities to achieve better outcomes.



## 14.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

**Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q1: Mention any two government schemes aimed at rural development.

Q2: Name any two international development organisations involved in rural development.

Q3: Briefly the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in rural development.

**Long Questions: (Answer each question in about 300 words)**

Q1: Discuss the role of NGOs in rural development.

Q2: Elaborate on the role of different government agencies (national, state, and local) in rural development with examples like MGNREGA, PMAY, and NRLM.

Q3: Analyse the contribution of the private sector and CSR initiatives to rural development.

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