UNIT 12 : RURAL LEADERSHIP

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12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the meaning of leadership and rural power structure
- explain the characteristics and types of rural leadership in India
- identify the determinants of rural leadership
- explain the significance of leadership in rural society
- understand the importance of studying about rural leadership

12.2 INTRODUCTION

We have learnt about social structure, social relations, rural and urban society, institutions and the various other aspects of human society.

In this Unit we will apply this knowledge base to understand some specific aspects of rural society in India. Our focus here will be on rural leadership. We will explore the meaning of leadership in its general and specific Indian rural contexts. In this regard we will dwell on the characteristics, determinants and types of rural leadership in India. As part of the exercise on understanding rural leadership we will briefly deal with the meaning of rural power structure as well. This is because leadership is a part of power structure. The learning of this Unit will enable the readers to comprehend the significance and role of rural leadership in a rural society. Alongside this, the readers will be able to understand the sociological significance of studying rural leadership.

12.3 MEANING OF LEADER AND LEADERSHIP

In any form of group life, some kind of leadership is traceable. It may be well defined or amorphous (without any structure). You have already learnt about rural society in Unit 2. A rural society may have a number of interests groups and factions which play important role in the social life of the village in its totality. While *interests groups* and *factions* may be informal, i.e. without any well defined form, there may be some well defined structures as the Panchayati Raj Institutional (PRI) structures in India's villages where leadership plays significant role in the village social life. Now, let us delve into the meaning of leader and leadership.

12.3.1 Meaning of Leader

A leader is anyone who influences a group towards obtaining a particular result. Leader is a person who guides, inspires or rules others. In other words, he/she has a considerable following and he/she exerts substantial influence upon his/her following. He/she has the ability to organize their behaviour towards the fulfillment of their interests and goals.

A leader is one who comes to prominence among a group of people by virtue of some traits and qualities and/or situations. It is because of these qualities and situations that the people respect, obey and follow the leader.



ACTIVITY 1

- Note down two of the groups of which you have been members.
- Who did your group members consider as their leader.
- What were the reasons for which he/she became the group leader?

There are four essential elements that distinguish a leader from a non-leader. These are:

- Leader is a member of the group
- He is voluntarily accepted by the members of the group in that role
- He influences the members of the group
- He leads the group towards the fulfillment of their shared goals and interests.

12.3.2 Meaning of Leadership

D.K. Dash defines leadership *"as a process of interaction among the persons of a group, large or small, which moves it in the direction of a high degree of acceptance of (1) shared values and goals (2) situation in which the member interact (3) the leader and one another."*

H.P. Fairchild defines leadership in the Dictionary of Sociology as "*the act of organizing and directing the interests and activities of a group of persons, as associated in some projects or enterprise, by a person who develops the cooperation through securing and maintaining their more or less voluntary approval of the ends and methods proposed and adopted in the association."*

Ordway Tead defines leadership as *"the activity of influencing people to cooperate towards some goal which they come to find desirable."*

Thus, leadership includes the total process of the rise of a leader, the influence he wields on his followers, organizes and directs the interests and activities of a group of persons, and the ways by which he gathers power around him and tries to perpetuate his achieved position.

The above definitions highlight the following **characteristics** of leadership.

- Leadership is the result of a group phenomenon. Group is a result of certain context and situation. Hence, as the situation changes, leadership also tend to change.
- It is a process of interaction. While leader is a person and so also are his followers, leadership is a process. Process is a continuous course of action involving many elements that work upon each other.
- A process of interpersonal relations underlines leadership. Just as a group is characterised by interpersonal relationship, in leadership there is interpersonal relationship between the leader and his followers and among the followers of the group. This process of relationship and interaction has some specific features.
    - The leader influences the ideas and opinions of the people who become his followers.
    - They come to identify themselves with some common needs and goals.
    - The leader organises the activities of the followers. He is able to work on the individual differences of the followers and organise them.
    - The followers perceive the leader as the satisfier of their needs.

- In this process, the behaviour of one is generally influenced by the behaviour of the other.

- "In leadership power is created through the integration of diverse purposes and the intelligent use of individual differences. In this process people automatically comes to obey and follow the leader. Power thus develops automatically. Leadership is also a process of gathering power by the leader. " Here a distinction is made with domination which is defined as "a process of control in which by the forcible assumption of authority and the accumulation of prestige a person regulates the activity of others for purposes of his own choosing."

- The interpersonal relations are influenced and structured by the nature and structure of the social system in which the group is placed. In other words, the social environment of which the group is a part, influences the nature of the group, the leadership and the interpersonal relations. For example, the nature of the college/ university environment and that of the wider society will shape the nature and specific aspects of the students' union body. The nature of the students' union body of Cotton College in Guwahati is different from that of the Oxford University students' union body.

This characteristic makes obvious the specific nature of rural leadership. As we have already learnt that a rural society is different in nature from the urban society, the nature of rural leadership will therefore tend to have some specific attributes. These qualify it to be dealt separately under the heading of rural leadership.

By now you have come to gain a fair understanding of the concept of leadership; and now we can move further in the understanding of rural leadership. But before dealing with rural leadership let us understand the meaning of rural power structure. This is because leadership occurs in power structure.

12.4 RURAL POWER STRUCTURE

Power structure implies all the structural elements that relate to power. To understand the concept of power structure let us have a brief and basic understanding of the concept of structure and power.

As we have already learnt **structure** includes all the stable social relations and interactions. It, therefore, includes norms, rules, institutions, and socially accepted behaviour and positions.

Power implies an ability to do things and a capacity to produce effects. It involves somehow getting others to do something they would not otherwise have done. It may be forced on people by imposition or spontaneous and voluntary acceptance on the part of the followers. In other words, it is the ability to impress one's will on others. Power may or may not be backed by authority.



LET US KNOW

According to Steven Lukes, power has three faces.

- Decision making
- Non-decision making
- Shaping desires (ideological power)

Decision making power is associated with those in government. Non-decision making power is the power to set agenda and therefore limit what is being discussed. Ideological power is the power to manipulate what people think they want. Powerful groups can make people think what they want or consent to something which is actually not in favour of their interests.

Power structure thus includes the norms and rules that are related to power, the groups and the institutions where power is centred and how power is distributed in the society under consideration. In this Unit, in relation to rural power structure, we will study structure by focussing on groups in

which a leader emerges and on the institutionalised positions where a leader emerges.

In India, we have both the traditional and modern structures of power. The modern rural power structures include:

- the Panchayati Raj system or the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) at the village, block and district level.
- Officials as Block Development officer, Extension officers, Goan Burha, village level workers, etc. who have constant interaction with rural people.

Apart from the village level power structure, there are at the elective structures, at the level of the Legislative Assembly and Parliament to which general elections are held from time to time.

The traditional structures of rural power are:

- Village leader
- Caste panchayat
- Tribal councils, youth dormitory, assistance groups etc.

Apart from these, factions, interests group, etc. act both as formal and informal structures found both in modern and traditional power structures. Clubs, self help groups, etc. are characteristic of modern power structures within which leadership emerges.

12.5 CONCEPT OF RURAL LEADERSHIP

12.5.1 Meaning

After having gone through the above, we can now conceptualise rural leadership. In this section we can sum up by stating that it is leadership that is characteristic of a rural society.



ACTIVITY- 1

- Make a list of three of the rural leaders that you are aware of.

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- What according to you are the bases of their leadership?

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- What are the activities that they perform in their group?

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The rural society is characteristically different from an urban society, in terms of social relations, economy, educational status, demographic situation, health situation, etc. Apart from these aspects, the social structure of a rural society is based on caste and/or tribal *egalitarianism*, peasantry and agrarian relations, emphasis on religion, conservatism, traditions and customs, and hence many important statuses tend to be ascribed. These are some of the basic and general elements of Indian rural society. These make the social structure and social relations typical of rural society shaping its power structure and leadership.

In order to understand rural leadership in India let us now examine its types, determinants and characteristics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

Q.1. Note down four characteristics of rural society in India.

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Q.2. What do you understand by rural leadership?

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Q.3. Define rural power structure.

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12.5.2 Types

On the basis of a number of corresponding criteria as source of power, the nature of power wielded, pattern of arriving at decisions, status, etc.; rural leadership can be classified into a number of types. Let us now examine these types.

➢ Based upon the *nature of the structure* leadership may be classified as informal and formal.

❍ **Informal** In any group situation some people come to play a more influential role in the group life. Their opinions are acknowledged and acted upon. They may even organize the activities of people. For example, in a village, some person may have better educational status or well acquainted with official procedures of the government. They are approached, sought advice, etc. by the common rural folks in their interaction with the government offices and even in many other spheres of life. Although they do not hold any formal status as a leader, their decisions and opinion come to play a vital and effective role in the society. Empirical studies have shown that within political parties and political institutions in villages some person come to play an active role and despite not having an official position become a leader.

❍ **Formal** This is structured (having a definite form and structure) and the status is institutionalized. It has the formal backing of sanctions. In other words, the leaders have authority. This implies that the requisite qualifications for the position of the leader are

well laid down in the society. Persons having the requisite qualification (may be ascribed or achieved) acquire the position and are required to perform the socially stated responsibilities of the status of power. For example, at the village level there are panchayat bodies where positions to be filled by elected members, their minimum qualifications and the responsibilities of local development are laid down by an Act of the State Legislature. These are formal leadership structures.

- Taking the criterion of inclusiveness and exclusiveness in *decision making*, leadership may be democratic and authoritarian.

  - **Democratic** In this type decision is taken collectively involving the people who will finally be affected by these decisions. The leader(s) assists in the decision making process. This is characteristic of the Panchayat bodies where the decisions are made collectively by the members of the Panchayat sanctioned by the rural electorates in the Gram Sabha. Major decisions are taken in a general assembly (Gram Sabha) where all the adult citizens are entitled to have their say. Here, decisions tend to be taken for the perceived benefit of the people at large. In informal leadership also decision making can be democratic. An example is the village tribal council, which is partly informal, where the village elder arrives at the decision through consensus of the office bearers and the rural folks (traditionally the male members) in the general meeting.

  - **Authoritarian** This type is characterized by individual decision making without the involvement of others in the group. Sometimes, a person may elevate himself to a position of power by sheer strength of wealth or muscle power and with a small following may rule over others. Such a leader tends to be authoritarian, taking decisions all by himself. In villages, basically prior to the functionalisation of the Panchayat institutions in the villages, a village would have a leader, usually a traditional position. He exercised power in an authoritarian way. The villagers had to comply

with those decisions. The landlords usually became village heads and exercised authoritarian rule over the rural folks.

- Based upon the *source of power* leadership may categorized as traditional, rational-legal and charismatic. This classification was made by Max Weber.

  - **Traditional** In this pattern, the source of power is traditional norms and customs. They are not based on sanctions of law. But because these are traditions, they have a strong social base. India being a traditional society there are many kinds of traditional leadership. The authoritarian leadership we just discussed above is also an example of traditional leadership. The Indian Hindu society is caste based. Each caste across several villages used to have, and even now in certain parts of India, have a panchayat body (different from the statutory Panchayat Raj Institution) which serves as the caste panchayat. It takes important decisions on preservation of caste norms and caste solidarity. In rural tribal communities tribal council is a traditional body. The traditional leadership may be formal/ informal/partly formal and democratic/ authoritarian.

  - **Rational – Legal** The basis of this power is law. It is formal and based on the principles of rationality. Its structure and its various important aspects can be amended and modified according to the requirements of the situation on rational lines. But the amendment needs to be done in a formal manner. Minimum qualification is ascribed. The PRI is an example of rational legal institution and leadership.

  - **Charismatic** Some person gets elevated to the position of a leader because of some personal traits, their views and actions which appeal the people and attract them making them the followers. Charisma implies charm and magnetism. An example of charismatic leadership in world context is Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi. In the Indian rural context, people ascend to the

position of a leader mainly because of their spirituality and wisdom. There are such local leaders.

- Taking into consideration the *nature of the source of power* leadership can be ascribed or achieved.

- **Ascribed** Where ascendance to leadership is based on ascribed qualities, it is categorized as ascribed leadership. In the context of rural India, affiliation to a caste, a particular family, a clan, sex, age, etc. becomes basic consideration for leadership. As for instance, the leader of the tribal council has to hail from a particular clan and should be of the male sex and preferably of age. Even in matters of leadership in religion and rituals only people of certain, caste/ clan/family can claim the position of a leader. While these are examples of traditional leadership, ascribed status plays a significant role in the ascendance to the position of a leader even in formal, rational-legal leadership. In election to Panchayat bodies, caste plays a dominant role in India.

- **Achieved** Where qualities which can be achieved as educational qualification, skill, wisdom, wealth, citizenship, etc. becomes the basis of leadership it is termed achieved leadership. In rational-legal leadership achieved qualities play the prominent role. Often however, in leadership both ascribed and achieved qualities interplay. For instance, as we have already discussed, in election to panchayat bodies while minimum eligibility is being an Indian citizen he/she needs to be not less than 25 years of age. In winning the election qualities as education, wealth, ability to manipulate (all achieved qualities), tribe and caste, family, (ascribed) etc. may become deterministic.

- Again, we can classify leadership as individual or collective.

- **Individual** When the decision is required to be made by only an individual it is individual leadership. For example, in many traditional type of leadership the leader alone has the power to decide and

organize activities. However, the leader may include the other people who will be affected by the decision in the decision making process.

- **Collective** While the decision is made not by an individual but by a group of people it is collective leadership. Panchayat bodies are examples of collective leadership. Decisions are made by the members of the Panchayat body in a collective manner. Collective leadership may behave in an authoritarian manner by not involving the people who will be affected by their decisions. In villages there are factions and village 'gunda' who rule the roost.

We can also add hereditary and elective and also political, religious, spiritual, social leadership based upon the area of one's wider social life the leadership is involved with.

Thus, an analysis of the various types of leadership shows that leadership has many facets and characteristics. Some of these facets are the structure, decision making inclusiveness and exclusiveness, sources of power and authority, the nature of the qualities and involvement of people in power distribution, the area of social life it involves with etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

Q. No.4. State whether the following is true or false :

a) The panchayati raj system represents an informal mode of leadership.

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b) The village tribal councils are modern structures of power.

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12.5.3 Determinants

The above discussion on the various types of leadership has given you an ample idea also on the determinants of rural leadership. In this subsection let us rearrange this information accordingly. To make it easier to understand let us consider these variables i.e. determinants from the angle of achieved and ascribed qualities, because in the final analysis a person becomes a leader in a particular situation based on certain qualities: acquired or achieved. Situation and qualities interplay in leadership. In different situations different qualities elevate one to leadership.

In modern India both traditional and modern power structures operate with inter-relationship between them. In both these structure both ascribed and achieved qualities/ variables determine leadership.

- **Ascribed**

  - **Caste :** Most of the Indian villages are caste villages, and generally are multi castes villages. In such villages certain castes ascend to the position of a dominant caste. In the traditional power structure such caste plays the dominant role. As a corollary, members of such castes become traditional leaders. In the modern power structure as the PRI, the caste having numerical strength tend to get their representatives elected as leaders.

    With reservation for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe in Panchayat bodies, caste has its centrality even in modern political institutions.

  - **Sex :** This is an important variable in traditional leadership. In traditional societies, the men folk participate in the public spheres of life and as such play important roles in the public decision making and implementation processes. Thus, in traditional power structures men come to occupy the position of the leader.

  - **Age :** Likewise, age is an important variable in traditional power structures. Senior men having the necessary qualification are selected as leaders. They are supposed to be well versed in social

customs, norms and possess wisdom to lead the people. But in modern times, both in informal leadership and in Panchayat institutions, age as a variable has become less significant with other variables (achieved qualities) becoming more important.

- **Kinship :** Members of clans, lineages and families which have a higher status in the villages, may be on account of its numerical strength, wealth or reputation tend to become leaders, both in the formal and informal power structure, and also in traditional and modern structures.

➢ **Achieved**

- **Wealth :** This has been an important variable of power, almost always and everywhere. In earlier structures of rural power, the landlords had wielded power (authoritarian) over the villagers. Villagers having wealth had importance in the society. People either respected or feared them. In the modern day democratic power structures, wealth has become a very important variable. It becomes all the more important in the higher tiers of Panchayat bodies as Zilla Parishads.

- **Occupation :** Certain occupation places the members at an advantageous position. It differs from region to region. In some villages the rich peasants, while elsewhere educated professionals become leaders. Again, almost everywhere, in case of administrative leadership, the bureaucrats and in developmental governance certain professionals gain leadership.

- **Education/ wisdom and awareness :** It becomes a most desirable quality, both in traditional and modern power structures. The has come to assume more importance in modern elective as well in development oriented leadership.

- **Administrative ability :** The role of bureaucrats and professionals involved with developmental schemes makes imperative administrative ability.

- **Oriented to service and development :** The initiatives of development of rural society has been gaining significance since Independence and the rural folks have become aware of the benefits of the development process. Thus, the people having orientation to service and development tend to become rural leaders

Other significant determinants are :

a) **Political parties and Affiliation Faction**

b) **Social status and family**

c) **Citizenship**

d) **Regional affiliation**

e) **Connections at important places**

All these variables act in combination, the ascribed in combination with achieved qualities. These variables interplay in a person's ascendance to leadership in both formal and informal leadership as well leadership in traditional and modern structures. Thus, in traditional leadership those belonging to a particular caste or family and being educated, with orientation for development and possessing wealth may have the balance more in his favour to become a leader. The same variables may become significant in modern democratic leadership.

With the structure of Indian society and villages changing the power structures also are undergoing changes. Consequently, leadership pattern is undergoing changes. In reference to these changes let us now focus on the characteristics of rural leadership in India.

12.5.4 Characteristics

- The existence of both traditional, modern elective and bureaucratic leadership.
- The traditional pattern of social hierarchy with the supremacy of the higher castes still prevalent, yet with decreasing dominance.

- Democratisation and growing egalitarianism of rural society and hence emergence of leaders from secular background, lower caste, scheduled caste and tribes, etc.
- Combination of ascribed and achieved qualities as variables of leadership.
- Emergence of leadership of the young. Majority of the rural leaders belong to the middle age group.
- Growing consciousness for reforms among the leaders and the people
- Existence and operation of both formal and informal leadership.
- Transition from individual to collective, from hereditary to elective and ascriptive to functional type of leadership.
- Growing importance of education and literacy in rural leadership.
- Greater differentiation in the rural elite structure with significant increase in the number of persons belonging to the middle class.
- Dominance of political elite and leadership.
- The leaders tend to be drawn from various professions.
- Articulation of the regional and interests groups.
- Political cultural ideologies play important role.
- Role of political parties and affiliation to political parties and factions.
- Politicisation of rural leadership.
- Lack of women leadership.

These characteristics highlight the modernization of Indian political structures, primarily, as we have studied here, in the rural socio-political structures. Yet, Indian society being a traditional society and moving towards a modernity of its own making, it has a rural leadership pattern having both traditional and modern characteristics.

12.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY OF RURAL LEADERSHIP

- The leaders are the catalyst of change. They form public opinion, organize collective energies through collective behaviour, become important modifier of organizational behaviour and act as agencies of social change.
- Leaders that are part of the government can play a more proactive role in social change by determining values that shall be expressed in public policy and values that shall be implemented.
- "by looking at the actions of *'elites'* (and leader), therefore, one can get a synoptic view of the working of the entire society."(Karl Mannheim).
- The Government of India has taken up massive programmes of social and economic developmental changes. It therefore, becomes important to understand the sociological process of leadership.

These are some of the basic reasons for which the study of rural leadership becomes important to a student of Sociology.



12.8 LET US SUM UP

- The rural power structure of India is characterized by the traditional and modern power structures, both interacting with each other. Amidst this power structure leadership emerges.
- India's rural leaders' presents a combination of ascribed and achieved qualities which serve as the determinants of rural leadership.
- Based on an analysis of the types, characteristics and determinants of rural leadership we can surmise that India is moving towards modernization and at this stage it presents a modernity of its own making.