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Trends and Dimensions of Change in Indian Rural Society

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ABSTRACT

Due to a confluence of socioeconomic, political, and technical reasons, rural Indian society has experienced substantial changes in recent decades. Through a sociological lens, this paper seeks to examine the major patterns and aspects of change in rural India. Economic diversification, the adoption of new technologies, alterations in social structures, and modifications to customs are the main areas of change. Though these improvements are frequently unequal throughout different regions, rural areas are gradually modernizing as a result of increased access to communication, healthcare, and educational technologies. The rural economy is changing as a result of economic shifts like the expansion of non-agricultural jobs, the proliferation of digital financial services, and the surge in rural entrepreneurship. Furthermore, while deeply ingrained societal hierarchies continue to exist, the dynamics of caste, gender, and class are changing. The shifting role of women in rural areas and social mobility have become important markers of change. The full potential of rural development is nevertheless hampered by issues including migration, rural poverty, and infrastructure deficiencies. This essay critically examines the many facets of development in rural India, looking at both the improvements and the enduring difficulties. It ends with thoughts on how Indian rural society will develop in the future.

Keywords: *Indian Society, Village, Social Changes Customs, Government*

1. Introduction

The rural economy is changing as a result of economic shifts like the expansion of non-agricultural jobs, the proliferation of digital financial services, and the surge in rural entrepreneurship. Furthermore, while deeply ingrained societal hierarchies continue to exist, the dynamics of caste, gender, and class are changing. The shifting role of women in rural areas and social mobility have become important markers of change. The full potential of rural development is nevertheless hampered by issues including migration, rural poverty, and infrastructure deficiencies. This essay critically examines the many facets of development in rural India, looking at both the improvements and the enduring difficulties. It ends with thoughts on how Indian rural society will develop in the future. This shift is a result of initiatives like NREGA that have increased revenue and created jobs, yet unemployment and inequality issues still exist. Socially speaking, the traditional caste and class systems in rural India are progressively becoming less distinct. Rising educational attainment has raised awareness among young people, who are now advocating for justice and equality. Women's social status has significantly improved as a result of their growing awareness of their rights and increased involvement in school and the workforce. Individuals as well as the social structure are changing as a result of women's empowerment. There is no denying the influence of technology. In addition to improving rural society's access to resources and knowledge, information and communication technology has connected rural producers with markets. Rural residents' quality of life has improved as a result of initiatives like Digital India, which have increased access to government services. Cultural aspects are also undergoing change. A new cultural way of thinking has emerged as a result of the younger generation's preference for modernity and discontent with traditional values. Celebrations, traditions, and cultural events are evolving to represent the diversity and cohesion of society. However, environmental issues are also growing more significant in tandem with this development. The lives of rural populations are being adversely affected by land acquisition, climate change, and overuse of natural resources.

In rural society, this has made sustainable development more important in order to preserve social balance and save resources. At the political level, rural residents now have more rights and autonomy thanks to the panchayat-based local governance system. It aids in increasing the accountability and transparency of local government. Local development may be hampered by issues like political nepotism and corruption, though. When all of these aspects are considered, change in rural Indian society is a complicated process influenced by a number of social and economic variables. Considering the importance of sustainability, equity, and inclusivity in this process, policymakers must take steps to guarantee rural development.

Therefore, sociological analysis of the trends and dimensions of change in rural Indian society aids in our comprehension that this development is a comprehensive process that must be integrated with all facets and is not just restricted to economic or social viewpoints. If we can successfully steer this shift in the right direction, it will guarantee rural development and make a substantial contribution to the advancement of Indian society as a whole. To comprehend this shift from a sociological perspective, we must take a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. This will help us grasp rural society's existing situation while also highlighting opportunities for the future. Understanding the diversity and complexity that are inherent in Indian rural society's

identity and growth is crucial for the successful implementation of social policies. Therefore, it is important to remember that change in rural India is a complicated process that is influenced by a wide range of elements when researching its trends and dimensions. In addition to improving the socioeconomic standing of rural communities, this will be crucial for the advancement of society as a whole.

2. Objective of Study

This study's objective is to use sociology to examine the patterns and aspects of change in rural Indian society. It seeks to investigate how urbanization, technological development, education, and policy interventions are causing social, economic, cultural, and political changes in rural India. The goal of the project is to investigate how these shifts affect caste relations, gender roles, traditional social structures, and rural livelihoods. By comprehending these changes, the study hopes to shed light on how rural society is changing, its difficulties, and the consequences for social development and policymaking.

3. Review of Literature

Numerous sociological viewpoints on the patterns and aspects of change in rural India are highlighted via a study of the literature. In order to reflect both continuity and change in rural India, scholars also examine how gender, education, and rural-urban mobility shape rural identity and the social fabric.

- G.S. Ghurye (1960) examined the persistence of traditional rural structures despite modernization, highlighting the resilience of caste and social hierarchies.
- M.N. Srinivas (1966) introduced the concept of "Sanskritization," illustrating how lower castes adopt upper-caste practices to improve social status, reflecting change in rural society.
- A.R. Desai (2016) discussed the socio-economic impacts of globalization and urbanization, focusing on rural migration and livelihood changes.
- Rajendra Singh (2015) explored rural India's evolving agrarian economy, emphasizing the shift towards non-agricultural sectors.
- Leela Dube (2000) highlighted gender dynamics, analyzing how women's roles are transforming in rural contexts due to education and employment opportunities.

4. Research Methodology

Secondary data analysis is the foundation of this study's research technique. It entails examining previously published works, official publications, census data, and research on rural India. To comprehend patterns in caste relations, gender roles, socioeconomic shifts, and rural livelihoods, the secondary data will be subjected to both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Through the use of previously gathered data, surveys, and scholarly publications, this method enables a thorough knowledge of rural developments.

5. Discussion and Data Analysis

Significant changes in rural India are shown by the data, including a decrease in reliance on agriculture, an increase in rural-to-urban migration, an improvement in literacy, and a change in gender roles and caste. Data indicates that conventional structures are changing as a result of growing government interference and technological penetration. The socioeconomic and cultural fabric of rural society is being reshaped by these movements, which combine continuity and change. Compared to prior rural development concepts, inclusive rural development is a more focused idea today. In general, it refers to raising the standard of living for all rural residents. To be more precise, inclusive rural development has three distinct yet connected dimensions: the political, social, and economic. The economic dimension is giving the impoverished, and low-income households in particular, the ability and chances to profit from economic progress. In addition to "promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and providing social safety nets for vulnerable groups," the social component aids in the social development of low-income and impoverished households. The political dimension increases the chances for low-income and impoverished individuals in rural areas to participate in village politics in an equitable and efficient manner.¹

5.1 Facets for Rural Development in India

In India, the term "rural development" refers to a variety of interrelated activities that are intended to enhance the standard of living and financial security of rural residents. Important aspects consist of:

- Agricultural Development – Enhancing productivity through irrigation, improved seeds, fertilizers, and mechanization.

¹ <https://www.epw.in/journal/2023/32/book-reviews/dimensions-rural-transformation-india.html>

- Employment Generation – Initiatives like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA)² to create rural jobs and reduce poverty.
- Education and Skill Development – Expanding access to schools and vocational training.
- Healthcare – Strengthening rural health infrastructure and services (e.g., ASHA workers, PHCs).
- Infrastructure Development – Building roads, electrification, housing, and digital connectivity.
- Women Empowerment – Promoting SHGs, microfinance, and literacy programs.
- Poverty Alleviation – Through targeted schemes like PMAY, NRLM, and PDS.
- Environmental Sustainability – Promoting organic farming, water conservation, and renewable energy.
- Social Inclusion – Addressing caste, tribal, and gender disparities in rural development.
- Governance and Participation – Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for grassroots democracy and decision-making.

5.2 Rural Development Strategies in India over the Last 10 Years

In India, rural development has been a major area of government policy for the last ten years (2015–2025), with the goals of enhancing livelihoods, lowering poverty in villages, and improving infrastructure. The following are the main initiatives and strategies for rural development that were put into place during this time:

Infrastructure Development

- Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana³ (PMGSY): • Ongoing development to guarantee all-weather road access to isolated villages.
- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin⁴ (PMAY-G): With an emphasis on constructing pucca homes with essential utilities, the goal is to provide "Housing for All" by 2022.
- Bharat Net Project⁵: To close the digital divide, every 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats would have high-speed internet connectivity.

Water, Sanitation, and Health

- Swachh Bharat Mission⁶ (Gramin): focused on constructing toilets and changing behaviors to eliminate open defecation and enhance hygiene
- Jal Jeevan Mission⁷ (2019): To ensure every rural household has functional household tap connections (FHTCs) by 2024

Agricultural and Livelihood Support

- PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana⁸ (2019: ₹6,000 annual income support to small and marginal farmers directly into their bank accounts.
- eNAM (National Agriculture Market)⁹: Online trading platform to help farmers get better prices.
- Doubling Farmers' Income by 2022¹⁰ (strategy): Focus on diversification, organic farming, value chain development, and allied activities like dairy, poultry.

Skill Development and Employment

- Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana¹¹ (DDU-GKY): Skill training for rural youth linked to employment.
- MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act)¹²: Continued as a key safety net, especially during COVID-19; increase in workdays and budget allocations.

Digital and Financial Inclusion

- Digital India Campaign¹³: Emphasis on digital literacy in rural areas through CSCs (Common Service Centres).

² https://nrega.nic.in/MGNREGA_new/Nrega_home.aspx

³ <https://omms.nic.in/>

⁴ <https://pmawasgraminlist.com/>

⁵ <https://usof.gov.in/en/bharatnet-project>

⁶ <https://swachhbharatmission.ddws.gov.in/>

⁷ <https://jaljeevanmission.gov.in/>

⁸ <https://pmkisan.gov.in/>

⁹ <https://www.enam.gov.in/web/>

¹⁰ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1883177>

¹¹ <https://www.india.gov.in/spotlight/deen-dayal-upadhyaya-grameen-kaushalya-yojana>

¹² https://nrega.nic.in/MGNREGA_new/Nrega_home.aspx

¹³ <https://www.digitalindia.gov.in/>

- Jan Dhan Yojana¹⁴: Massive financial inclusion drive ensuring access to banking, credit, and insurance services.

Sustainable Development and Renewable Energy

- KUSUM Scheme¹⁵: Promoting solar-powered irrigation pumps for farmers.
- Gram Ujala Scheme¹⁶: Distribution of LED bulbs at affordable rates to rural households to reduce electricity costs.

Decentralization and Local Governance

- Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)¹⁷: Focus on e-governance (eGramSwaraj), capacity building, and fund devolution for grassroots planning.

Social Inclusion and Women Empowerment

- Self Help Groups (SHGs) and DAY-NRLM¹⁸: Strengthening rural women's collectives, microcredit access, and entrepreneurship.
- Ujjwala Yojana¹⁹: Free LPG connections for rural women to reduce indoor pollution and drudgery.

5.3 Rural Transformation in India- Progress and Path

India, a country of inequalities, has witnessed a notable economic growth despite prevalent poverty and social challenges. The core of this paradox exists in rural development, where nearly two-thirds of the population lives. Despite rural areas traditionally struggling with poor living conditions, education, healthcare, and environmental challenges, recent trends indicate a change. As the story progresses, an updated national Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) released by Niti Aayog showcases notable improvements and provides insights into this transformative path.

Revealing NITI Aayog's National MPI²⁰: The National MPI of NITI Aayog is an essential tool for assessing a nation's poverty situation by analyzing three important dimensions – health, education, and living conditions. This composite index employs 10 factors, such as nutrition, child mortality, education length, sanitation, and other elements. Comprising two components – poverty rate and poverty severity – it thoroughly captures the various dimensions of poverty.

Positive Changes in Multidimensional Poverty: Between 2015-16 and 2019-21, India saw a notable reduction in multidimensional poverty, as highlighted in NITI Aayog's Progress Review 2023. The rate of poverty fell from 24.85% to 14.96%, and the intensity of poverty decreased from 47.14% to 44.39%. Rural areas experienced a notable decline, decreasing from 32.59% to 19.28%. These improvements can be attributed to targeted developmental initiatives spearheaded by Union and State Governments alongside several other contributors.

Indicators of Enhanced Rural Living Conditions: Enhanced Housing Infrastructure: The presence of pucca or semi-pucca homes indicates higher structural quality, ensuring safety and comfort for rural inhabitants. The Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) has significantly improved the availability of housing in rural regions.

Enhanced Hygiene Facilities: Enhanced accessibility of elevated toilets indicates a greater emphasis on health and sanitation, reducing health hazards linked to open defecation. This alteration improves community well-being and environmental cleanliness.

Broadened Availability of Electricity: Increasing electricity access boosts rural regions by enhancing connectivity, illumination, and economic prospects. This results in enhanced academic outcomes, greater efficiency, and an improved standard of living. The Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya) has been instrumental in enhancing rural electricity access.

Adoption of Clean Cooking Fuels: Using cleaner cooking fuels reduces indoor air pollution, enhancing respiratory health and overall wellness. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) initiative has played a vital role in promoting cleaner cooking alternatives.

Learning and Community Empowerment: centered on building toilets and altering behavior in order to eradicate open defecation and promote hygiene. Programs such as the Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana²¹ strive to empower local residents by offering options and chances for their engagement.

Variety of Revenue Streams: Opportunities for non-agricultural employment diversify revenue streams and reduce reliance on farming alone. This diversification increases resistance to agricultural challenges and enhances financial stability. In this context, initiatives such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) are essential.

¹⁴ <https://pmjdy.gov.in/>

¹⁵ <https://pmkusum.mnre.gov.in/#/landing>

¹⁶ <https://sansad.in/getFile/loksabhaquestions/annex/1710/AU1475.pdf?source=pqals>

¹⁷ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1909222>

¹⁸ <https://nrlm.gov.in/outerReportAction.do?methodName=showIndex#gsc.tab=0>

¹⁹ <https://pmuy.gov.in/>

²⁰ <https://www.niti.gov.in/>

²¹ <https://saanjhi.gov.in/>

5.4 Tackling Issues in Rural Development

Poverty and Inequality: Prevalent poverty remains a significant issue, marked by minimal income, limited access to services, and uneven resource distribution. Disparities in earnings between urban and rural regions, alongside inequalities found within rural areas, obstruct equitable progress.

Agricultural Hardship: Reliance on farming exposes rural areas to hazards from unpredictable weather, market fluctuations, and crop losses. Inadequate irrigation, fragmented land areas, and antiquated farming techniques also hinder productivity and income creation.

Unemployment and Underemployment: The lack of adequate non-farm employment opportunities results in seasonal joblessness and underemployment in the agricultural sector. Insufficient skill development restricts the engagement of the rural workforce.

Infrastructure Shortcomings: Inadequate rural connectivity, vital services, and limited access to markets and information hinder rural progress.

Alterations in Climate and Decline of Biodiversity: Climate change impacts rural regions through extreme weather occurrences, disrupting natural resources and ways of life. For instance, bird species populations in agricultural areas have seen a significant decline.

Movement and Urban Development: Rural areas experience considerable out-migration, leading to labor shortages and social isolation. Urban development presents benefits along with challenges.

Dependency and Psychological Well-being: Rising addiction levels and a lack of mental health resources pose difficulties for rural communities.

Waste Disposal and Hygiene Services: Waste disposal and hygiene continue to be major issues in countryside regions.

Investigating Potential Remedies: Localized Job Opportunities, Reducing Addiction, Managing Technology Use, Holistic Waste Management, and additional areas.

5.5 NITI Aayog's Involvement in Tackling Rural Challenges:

NITI Aayog plays a key role in policymaking, fostering collaborations, conducting research, overseeing implementation, and providing funding. The combination of difficulties, advancements, and possible solutions creates a compelling story as India's countryside changes. Despite ongoing challenges, progress in achieving sustainable and equitable rural development highlights India's path to inclusion and prosperity. India's rural areas are undergoing a complicated and continuous transformation. Numerous challenges have to be resolved despite notable progress in strengthening infrastructure, advancing digital connectivity, and enacting agricultural reforms. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates ongoing infrastructure investment, women's empowerment, and livelihood diversification is needed for sustainable rural change. By concentrating on these avenues, India can attain inclusive and holistic development, reducing the gap between urban and rural areas and raising the standard of living for its rural citizens.

6. Role of social welfare schemes in changes and development in rural society

In India, welfare programs are essential to rural development. The quality of rural life has significantly improved as a result of these programs, which focus on infrastructure development, social empowerment, livelihood security, and poverty reduction. Programs like MGNREGA, which aim to reduce poverty and ensure livelihood security, guarantee rural households 100 days of work, which boosts income and social security. Through self-help organizations, NRLM organizes women and gives them access to markets, capital, and skills necessary for long-term employment. In terms of infrastructure development, PMGSY has enhanced road connection, which makes it easier to access services and commercial activity. Because PMAY-G has increased the quantity and quality of rural homes, living circumstances have improved. Women, minorities, and encourage inclusivity. At the local level, community involvement guarantees accountability and ownership. Programs for skill development and employment, such as DDU-GKY, teach young people and encourage work in non-agricultural fields. Through greater access to clean water, sanitation, education, and health care, these programs have raised the standard of living in rural areas overall. At the gram panchayat level, integrated strategies like Mission Antyodaya support holistic development. Implementation delays, a lack of funding, departmental misunderstandings, and low community involvement are still problems, nevertheless. Transparency, improved coordination, financial sustainability, and community-focused planning are required to overcome issues. These changes can guarantee rural India's inclusive and comprehensive development. In India, welfare programs are crucial to rural development. They have empowered vulnerable populations, increased income levels, encouraged social inclusion, and greatly enhanced rural infrastructure. Even though there are still implementation and coverage issues, their beneficial effects on rural development can be further amplified by enhancing governance, combining strategies, and boosting community involvement.

7. Conclusion and Suggestions

The patterns and aspects of transformation in Indian rural society illustrate the vibrant interplay between tradition and modernity. Economic liberalisation, technological progress, agricultural changes, and increased access to education and media have greatly transformed rural ways of life, jobs, and social frameworks. A significant transition has occurred from economies reliant on agriculture to varied livelihoods, with migration and non-farming jobs becoming more prominent. Caste and gender hierarchies, while still existing, are slowly being contested by legal changes, awareness efforts, and empowerment initiatives. Simultaneously, rural governance has enhanced due to decentralization and the fortification of panchayati raj institutions. Nonetheless, issues like income disparity, insufficient infrastructure, and environmental decline continue to exist. The changes in rural India are not

consistent or total, yet they distinctly indicate a society undergoing transformation. Grasping these emerging aspects is crucial for creating inclusive policies that foster sustainable development and social justice in rural India

Rural progress can be boosted by better infrastructure, quality education, accessible healthcare, and modernization of agriculture. Encouraging rural businesses, sustainable energy, and skills development enhances job opportunities. Promoting self-help groups, facilitating digital connectivity, and drawing in investments from NRIs and the private sector can foster sustainable economic growth and enhance living standards in rural communities. To encourage rural entrepreneurship and address hidden unemployment in agriculture, labor-intensive methods ought to be implemented in rural industrial enterprises. Training rural entrepreneurs via workshops and seminars is crucial, particularly since many lack awareness of government and NGO programs due to their illiteracy. Financial organizations such as ICICI and SIDBI ought to provide loans at low interest rates with little collateral, and government backing should encompass infrastructure, storage, and marketing support for exports. Renewable resources such as solar and wind power ought to be utilized for electrifying rural areas. Creating supplementary units and agro-processing sectors, as well as promoting non-farm artisan enterprises, will enhance job opportunities. Microcredit initiatives like SHGs, subsidized infrastructure, and enhanced credit availability need to be broadened. Performing SWOT analyses and offering training in marketing and management are crucial for enhancing competitiveness and innovation. Innovation clubs and entrepreneurship centers in rural areas can inspire young people and returning professionals to engage in business ventures. Government programs must be rigorously implemented, with accolades acknowledging entrepreneurial achievements. Assistance should encompass modernization funding, consumer loans, and skills training. Encouraging agricultural variety and connecting small businesses via cooperative networks can improve effectiveness and increase product range. Standardization, categorization, and improved market regulations are essential for rural goods. Ultimately, motivating NRIs and affluent individuals to invest in their home villages, alongside collaborative administrative and production services, can lower expenses and enhance operational sustainability, fostering inclusive rural development

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