



Understanding Indian rural sociology – its origin, development & prospective trends

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Abstract: These days there have been several perceptible studies dealing with Rural Sociology in India. Several Indian authors have been showing awareness in multiple dimensions of Rural Sociology. Rural India accounts for continuous changes in rural society. Before Indian independence The colonial administration took several attempts at studying static, stagnant & stationary Indian village communities. After independence Indian government took to ameliorate the rural side through Five year plans. The changes that have affected the Indian rural society before & after independence have been a great source of study. It has attracted the attention of the anthropologists & sociologists to debate over the issues related to rural sociological problems. This paper examines the implications behind the intensification of study of RS & spotlights the new issues connected with RS.

Key Words: Rural Sociology, Community changes, Static Society, Colonial Experiences, future trends

Introduction-These days there have been several discernible changes that have affected the Indian rural society. These changes have attracted the sociologists to debate over the issue. The problems rural folk are undergoing the ground realities etc are to be conjectured. Several sociologists & anthropologists are trying to comprehend this changing scenario in rural society this is called as RS. (Desai. A Rural India in transition 2005).

Main Features – Indian rural scene has been under constant change due to

- 1) The problem concerning agriculture;
- 2) The problem of cottage industries;
- 3) The problem of population and the family planning
- 4) The problem of rural health and education;
- 5) The problem of the status of women,
- 6) The problem of child marriage,

7) The problem of traditionalism and conservatism

8) The problem of unemployment

9) The problem of land less labour

10) The problem of rural indebtedness

11) The problem of nutrition in villages

12) The problem of housing

13) The problem of animal husbandry

14) The problem of untouchability and caste hierarchy

During colonial administration:

India was under the colonial administration of the British till 1947. The British had branded villages as local republics. They often termed it as static societies. (Desai-A Social background of Indian nationalism 2005).There were no significant studies during this period. Even though the land revenue policy of the British in India was very much damaging to the Indian rural community, The British did not cared to undertake any serious studies about changing Indian rural communities. Sociologist



Henry Maine published his two pioneering books on Indian rural sociology which have been considered as ground-breaking books. This was considered as the primary & systematic study of comprehending different aspects of rural Indian society. These books highlighted the existence of strong brotherhood relationship & kinship in Indian rural villages.

Ancient Law 1861

Ancient society 1877

Field survey method of rural sociology

1. **Gilbert Slater** -Economists like Gilbert Slater extended the idea of economic survey of villages as a part of the academic activities of the University of Madras in 1916. These villages were resurveyed in 1936 and 1961.

2. **Harold Mann** -Harold Mann and G. Keatings in Bombay started intensive survey of several villages and attempted an assessment of their general agricultural problems

3. **E.V. LUCAS** in Punjab started intensive survey of several villages and attempted an assessment of their general agricultural problems

The report of the royal commission on agriculture

The Report of The Royal Commission on Agriculture was a pioneering & monumental work which spotlighted the problems in rural society. The reoccurrence of famine was a the initial concern of the colonial government as they had to shell out huge amount for the rehabilitation of famine victims. (Desai. A Social background of Indian nationalism 2005).This Report highlighted the issues of societal impact of changing economic policies of the government. Holt Mackenzie toured the

whole of Madras presidency & reported about the village communities & their working (1916).Charles Metcalf a member of GG council studied Indian villages. The peasantry ,the land revenue system, the position of rent holders ,the standards of contractual labor system etc were studied(Desai. A Rural India in transition 2005).

1. The Colonial economic & financial policies, the new land revenue system, the colonial administrative and judicial system and the ruin of handicrafts leading to the overcrowding of land ,transformed the agrarian structure and impoverished the peasantry.

2. In the vast Zamindari areas the peasants were left to the mercies of the Zamindar who rack-rented them and compelled them to pay illegal dues and perform beggary.

3. In the Ryotwari areas, the government itself levied heavy land revenue. This forced the peasants to borrow money from the moneylenders.

4. Gradually over large areas the actual cultivators were reduced to the status of tenants at will, share croppers and landless labourers while their lands, crops and cattle passed into the hands to landlords, trader moneylenders and such peasants.

5. When the peasants could take it no longer they resisted against the oppression and exploitation and they found whether their target was the indigenous exploiter or the colonial administration that their real enemies after the barriers were down was the colonial state.

6. These rural Indian societal problems were the major concern of the colonial administrators



1. Self sufficiency
2. Static
3. Stagnant society
4. Inadequacy of infrastructure
5. Poor livelihood means
6. Sanitation
7. Health
8. Education

Only after their departure from India there was a scholarly awakening to the problems of impact of colonial administration on rural societies which led to the RS. (-By 19th century RS became a serious Desai. A Rural India in transition 2005).

Rural changes after independence

subject of study. Scholar Sorokin Zimmerman is considered as a pioneer. Indian Society underwent several metamorphic changes during 19th century this was caused by

1. Industrialization
2. Urbanization
3. Migration
4. Agricultural transformation
5. New land revenue policy
6. Big irrigation projects
7. New forest polices
8. Technological inputs

As a direct result of changing scenario, rural issues came to be debated & this led to the study of RS in a more wider perspective . Sociologist A. R. Desai rightly observes that “ the impact of capitalist & socialist economy & its social impact forced the attention of the scholars to study trends of rural India”. (Desai. A Rural India in transition 2005).

Rural sociology as a systematic branch of study

RS developed as a systematic branch of study after independence in India. With

the emergence of Independent India national policy makers shifted their attention to rural societal aspects .(Desai. A Social background of Indian nationalism 2005). With the Five year plans rural issues were given national importance. Uplifting the rural society became the agenda of the national planning commission as well. (Desai. A Rural India in transition 2005).

Characteristics of Rural Sociology

1. RS as an empirical discipline asserts propositions and builds up theories neatly on the basis of observed facts of rural life
2. It is problem oriented as it tries to provide solutions to rural problems
3. The knowledge derived from the rural studies is directly applied in stimulating changes in a desired direction.
4. The studies conducted in the rural context are of immense help to both rural sociologists and urban sociologists in explaining the similarities and differences between the rural community and the urban community.
5. It helps in micro level understanding of rural problems
6. It is an intellectual discipline, the analysis and interpretation of data in the rural context are not influenced by any ideological orientation.

Indian Rural Sociology Scholars

The following Indian scholars have contributed to the popularization of RS

1. D. N. Majumdar,
2. N.K. Bose,
3. R. K. Mukherjee,



4. S. C Dude,
5. F. G. Bailey
6. G.S. Ghurye.

The efforts of these scholars resulted in the emergence of RS as a separate discipline of study. (Desai. A Rural India in transition 2005).

New dimensions to the study of RS:

There are several dimensions to the study of RS these days

Rural Tribes in transition

Increasing rural stratification

Agrarian unrest due to

Land reforms

Village community relocation due to big irrigation projects , water conservation projects

New land revenue policy administering tribal ,hilly , forest , barren lands

Changes in revenue collection pattern

New structural build in local governance

Increasing migration to urban centers

Changing farm product & farm culture

1. Changing trends of food conservation

2. Innovation of value added consumption pattern

Promotion of RS as Syllabi

RS is being the concern of the universities as well. Several universities in India have introduced RS. Post graduate students study RS as a specialization subjects while UG students of agriculture home science economics study it as a minor subject.

Methodology of rural sociological study – these days RS has been studied through a variety of approaches.

1. Individual Survey
2. Group Field studies
3. Local rural review
4. Assessment
5. Examination
6. Estimation
7. Appraisal reports
8. Ground work
9. Group study

Conclusion

Thus rural sociology has become the important segment of sociological study RS is cumulative amending or expanding on one aspect over other. RS helps in micro level understanding of rural problems hence the analysis and interpretation of data in the rural context are not influenced by any ideological orientation but by practical understanding. As the RS studies explains the similarities and differences between the rural community and the urban communities policy makers can focus on avoiding these similarities and differences & arrange new participatory programs.

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