

## BOOK REVIEW

**Paul, Sujit Kumar. 2015. *Rural Development: Concept and Recent Approaches*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd. [ISBN-13:978-93-5125-162-0 (HB)], pp. 416. Price INR 1500.**

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All individuals, communities and nations, irrespective of culture, religion and spatial location, cherish development. Most commonly, development refers to growth or evolution, i.e. stage of advancement, however the term or notion of development is also a hotly contested one. In the context of rural areas, development can mean developing better physical, social and economic conditions for populations. Despite having the second largest population and third largest economy (on purchasing power parity basis) in the world, two-thirds of the Indian population live in rural areas and face the problems of development in their daily struggles for a better quality of life. Yet agriculture and its allied sectors, upon which the rural masses rely for a good part of their livelihood base, contributes less than one-fifth of India's present GDP. Hunger, poverty, disease, illiteracy or poor quality education, lack of even basic infrastructure such as sanitary, medical, and transport facilities, are still very common incidences in rural India. This raises some serious questions about the rural development praxis adopted by our country since independence. Any discussion on rural development has to be situated within the above context.

The book *Rural Development: Concept and Recent Approaches* is helpful for those who want to grasp rural development so far as its principles, issues and recent practices are concerned. The book comprises seven chapters, which focus on sustainable rural livelihoods, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and decentralization, self-help groups, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), tribal development, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It presents a coherent set of arguments and understanding about rural development in India.

The first chapter (pp. 1-57), "Concept and importance of rural development", deals with the components, nature and scope of rural development; the principles of rural development programmes; and the history of rural development in India. It reviews the most important

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rural development efforts started by eminent nationalists and social reformers in the pre and post independence period, such as the rural reconstruction programme at Sevagram, Wardha by Mahatma Gandhi; the Sriniketan experiment by Rabindranath Tagore; the Martandam experiment by Dr. Spencer Hatch of YMCA; the Gurgaon Experiment by F.L. Bryne; the rural reconstruction programme in Baroda by the Maharaja of Baroda; the Firka development scheme by the Government of Madras; the Etawah Pilot Project by Albert Mayer; the Nilokheri experiment by S. K. Dey, former Minister for Community Development and Cooperation; and the Bhoodan Movement by Acharya Vinoba Bhave. This chapter also discusses the problems of rural India and various approaches for rural development. Some important strategies to accelerate rural development including the role of civil society are also deliberated.

In the second chapter (pp. 58-108), “Sustainable rural livelihood”, rural livelihood issues from the point of view of adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs is discussed. The chapter deals with topics including the definition and concept of livelihood, sustainable livelihood framework, poverty, employment and income, and livelihood vulnerability context. For understanding the livelihood scenario in the country, agriculture, agriculture based micro-enterprises, the rural non-farm sector, gender, migration, and climate change and its impact on rural livelihoods are discussed. The evolution of livelihood promotion by the Government of India through its various programmes – NREP, RLEGP, NRY, JRY, NREGS, IRDP, DWCRA, TRYSEM, SGSY, NRLM, PMGSY, DEAP, TADP, RSVY – is outlined. Finally, the chapter talks about decentralization, PRIs and rural livelihoods. The author concludes that although GDP growth has accelerated, it has not been accompanied by a commensurate growth in employment, leading to a worsening in the employment situation in the post-reform period.

The third chapter (pp. 109-195) provides a comprehensive introduction to “Panchayati Raj Institutions and decentralization”. The evolution of the concept of decentralization and PRIs in India both at Centre and State levels is explained. The provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional Amendment Acts are dealt with at length. In the post independence period, various committees, commissions and Five Years Plans are linked and interdependent with the PRIs and rural development work. The last part of the chapter provides a fascinating example of the structure and functioning of the PRIs and decentralization process in West Bengal. The author concludes that rural development plans are good on paper but rarely well implemented (p. 191).

Self help groups (SHGs), covered in chapter four (pp. 196-245), have emerged as a successful strategy in the process of participatory development and empowerment of the majority of the rural population in India. However, it is a matter of great concern that the social character of SHGs have been taken over in a rush to consider them more as vehicles for microfinance. A detailed account is provided of the structure and function of self help groups in terms of need, emergence, membership criteria, goals and objectives, rules of formation, selection of leader and other post bearers, rules and regulations; and group management and their common problems, causes for dissolution, formation of emergency fund and its uses, capacity building process; and how they contribute in bringing a significant change in the living standards of SHG members in terms of increase in income levels, assets, savings, borrowing capacity, and income generating activities. Some emerging issues are also discussed. The author concludes that the group approach helps to remove the social limitations faced by women, such as superstition and subordinate role in decision-making, and inculcates a great confidence in the minds of rural women to succeed in their day-to-day life.

Chapter five (pp. 246-288) on “MGNREGA and rural development” deals with the history, objectives, funding pattern, nodal agency involved in execution, permissible works, steps and procedures for obtaining membership, responsibilities of Gram Panchayats, convergence, accountability and social audit, and other related aspects of MGNREGA. It also talks about MGNREGA as a rights-based approach. The progress and impacts of MGNREGA in terms of employment, income and livelihood security; high involvement of marginalized communities; impact on gender and social empowerment; creation of durable assets; reduction in migration are also delineated. Thereafter, it deals with some of the emerging challenges in the implementation of MGNREGA in terms of lack of awareness about the Act, poor capturing of demand, unemployment allowance, timely and full payment of wages, leakages and misappropriations, lack of public transparency, accountability and participation, corruption, muster roll, sale of job cards, work culture, and political interference. The author concludes that proper utilization of available natural resources through MGNREGA in an integrated and holistic way can surely change the landscape of poverty in specified areas and ensure overall development and peace.

Tribals are an integral part of Indian civilization. Since independence, and considering the general economic conditions of most tribal communities, the Government of India has planned and launched programmes to develop and integrate tribals with mainstream society.

The sixth chapter on “tribal development” (pp. 289-342) discusses the process of tribal development in India. Beginning with a brief introduction, it deals with the concept and definition of tribe; region, language and ethnicity wise classification of tribal population in India; historical background of tribes; and features and economic situation of Scheduled Tribes. Some fundamental characteristics of tribal economy like forest based economy, simple technology, absence of profit making in economic dealing, community as cooperative unit, unit of production, consumption and pattern of labour, gift and ceremonial exchange, periodical market, interdependency are outlined. It also deals with various constitutional provisions for the improvement of tribals’ lives and to protect them from oppression caused by other sections of society. Various tribal development approaches in India in terms of administrative reforms and committees, such as the Elwin Committee (1959), Dhebar Commission (1960), Shilu Ao Committee (1969) are highlighted. Similarly, various Five Year Plans and Tribal Development Programmes, schemes for development of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) like Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP), Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED), Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), Modified Area Development Approach (MADA), National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSCFDC), etc. are discussed. Using ethnographic method, the author provides a detailed account of educational development; transition of livelihood pattern; government efforts for tribal development; and specific changes in sources of credit needs; changes in agriculture trends, income and employment generation, expenditure pattern, house types, family structure, health and hygiene, cosmopolitan aspects, indigenous rituals and agro-ecosystem among the Santhals. The author concludes that despite their integration with the larger society, the Santhals are found to live in a world of considerable isolation and perpetuate a distinct socio-cultural identity of their own (p. 340).

The seventh chapter is on the “Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and rural development in India” (pp. 343-383). The MDGs, which have now been replaced with the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, constituted a set of 12 thematic consultations to tackle the world’s major development challenges, namely on conflict and fragility; education; environmental sustainability; governance; growth and employment; health; hunger; food and nutrition; inequalities; population dynamics; energy; and water. The chapter also deals with the strategies used by the Government of India to achieve the MDGs. For the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, programmes like MGNREGA, SGSY, NRLM, IAY, SSRY, JNNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) and TPDS (The Targeted Public

Distribution System) have been implemented, while programmes like RTE, SSA and MDM have sought to improve education. For promoting gender equality and women empowerment, programmes like Girl Education through SSA, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), National Programme for Education of Girls for Elementary Level (NPEGEL), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), Balika Samridhi Yojana, Saakshar Bharat Mission (SBM) have been implemented; for reducing child mortality, Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses (IMNCI), Home-Based Newborn Care (HBNC), New Born Care Scheme (NBCS), Promotion of Infant and Young Child Feeding Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) including Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP) have been implemented; for improving maternal health, programmes like Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) and maternal care under ICDS have been implemented; for combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, programmes like National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) and the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP) have been implemented; for ensuring environmental sustainability, programmes like National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP), support fund, Water and Sanitation Support Organization (WSSO), and Nirmal Gram Puruskar (NGP) have been implemented; and for developing a global partnership for development, programmes like National Knowledge Network, National e-Governance Plan, State Wide Area Network (SWAN), and Information Technology (IT) for the masses have been implemented. The author concludes that despite the launching and implementation of various programmes, policies, and laws to address the targets for achieving the MDGs, progress was slow in most of the areas and required more intensive effort (p.381). Part of the problem has been government resource constraints, especially lack of committed, honest, visionary and educated people with an attitude of social service. NGOs, civil society and branded corporate houses have also been actively involved in the struggle to achieve economic growth and meaningful social and human development.

The author has attempted to compile in one book, for the basic understanding of readers, the various dimensions of rural development in India. With considerable effort and based on his extensive practical experiences in the field, the author presents a coherent set of arguments dealing with both theoretical and empirical aspects of Indian rural development. However, the book has certain shortcomings. Moreover, the different sub-themes covered under each chapter could have been presented in a more sequential and logical manner keeping in mind the main theme. The verbatim used in the text of the chapters could

have brought more understanding and clarity were they translated into English side-by-side to maintain uniformity. The in-text citation style has not been followed uniformly in the entire text of the book. Nevertheless, the book provides a comprehensive bibliography on the subject matter. One major observation is that – although the title of the book has been kept as “rural development – concept and recent approaches”, the book has nothing new to say. Moreover, the author has not dealt with the new approaches or practices like - modern agricultural techniques and development, role of GIS for planning, rural marketing, information and communication technology (ICT), livestock rearing, training and extension, renewable energy, water resources management, Prime Minister’s *Jan Dhan Yojana*, and PM’s *Mudra Bank Yojana* (micro units development and refinance agency bank). One may find a number of scholarly books and government reference materials on rural development, such as *Communal Unity* by M. K. Gandhi (1951); *M. K. Gandhi on Rural Reconstruction* (1965); *Rural Sociology in India* by A. R. Desai (1969); *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* by R. Chambers (1983); *Rural Development: Principles, Policies and Management* by K. Singh (1986); *Anthropology, Development and Nation Building* by A. K. Kalla & K. S. Singh (1987); *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* by A. Sen & J. Dreze (1996). Despite this, the author has collected and arranged some of the components of rural development along with some of his empirical experiences in this book. Furthermore, the title of the book could have been “Rural Development in India”, as much of the literature and text relates only to the Indian setting and context. However, and in spite of these criticisms, this book will be useful to students, researchers, teachers, academicians, development workers, planners, policy makers and various development organizations for gaining a basic understanding of and exposure to rural development in India.