

# Essay on Rural Development in India

*"Even after 56 years of Independence, right from the Nehru era to the Vajpayee era, the rural India of today still short of basic amenities, like drinking water, electricity, roads, housing, food, and clothing".*

Once Gandhiji told the renowned author Mr. Mulk Raj Anand that we can't build India unless we build villages. Gandhiji wanted to make the villages independent republics, independent in governance and for routine requirements, governed by the people of the villages, and self-sufficient for financial needs. In India, seventy percent of our population live in villages, but the developmental schemes, for the development of the rural segment are not given the required priorities.

Our economy is developing fast, Industries and big corporations are going globalized, with liberalization, tremendous changes are being felt in IT, manufacturing, Service sector, but nobody thinks of the rural development to make it as fast as in these sectors. Then what all this progress and development mean? Benefitting to 30% of the total population, already developed and above poverty does not mean actual development.

Visiting a village we find even today houses made of mud, bamboos, and grass, have no protection against rains, storms, moisture, and fire. Supplying of adequate drinking water is a tedious problem in which housewife and girls are devoting a sizable part of the daily routine, fetching enough water from the far-flung areas or standing in the queue for hours waiting their number at the public tap. Illiteracy and particularly among the girls is the main peculiarity of our rural India. A few States tried to enroll and attract children

in schools with the incentive of a mid-day meal scheme, but all the same, universalization of elementary education is still a dream and there is no let-up in the number of annual dropouts. Rural poverty and illiteracy have given our country the dubious name where the highest number of child laborers in the world are on the job to feed these bellies. Health care is just rudimentary and few doctors are willing to work in rural areas. Villagers are mostly dependant on Vaidyas or other RMPs for their medical needs. Lack of proper infrastructure like roads, transportation, electricity, water, proper housing, educational schools demotivate a person, whether a doctor, engineer or any educated personnel to go to villages and stay their with his family. The high rate of migration from villages to nearby cities or metros is also the result of a lack of proper infrastructure in rural areas. These migrated people build slums, Juggies, Chawls or Cherries in cities to live not so comfortably but have no option as in cities they could find jobs, and could earn to fill their starving stomachs.

The present government realized the gravity of the situation and has taken some important measures to develop infrastructure in the countryside. The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) launched on Dec. 25, 2000, seeks to provide road connectivity through good all-weather roads to all unconnected habitations having a population of more than 1000 persons by the year 2003 and those with a population of more than 500 persons by the end of the Tenth Plan i.e. 2007. An investment of about Rs. 38000 crore has been made so far in the water supply sector. According to government sources, more than 15 lacs of rural habitants have been covered by the provision of drinking water facilities. The revised Rural Water Supply Programme envisaged :

(1) The involvement of the people in the choice of scheme design, control of finances, and management arrangements.

(2) Shifting the role of government from direct service delivery to that of facilitator.

(3) Partial cost-sharing either in cash or kind or both.

(4) 100% responsibility of operation and maintenance by end-users.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY), it is proposed to tackle quality-related problems like fluorides, arsenic, and iron contamination, blackishness, and also the sustainability of drinking water sources. The States are also being encouraged to promote schemes of water conservation, rain water harvesting ground water recharge in respect of regions where programs such as Desert Development Programmes, Drought Prone Area Development Programme are running.

A centrally sponsored sanitation program for the rural areas was launched in 1986 to improve the quality of life and to provide some kind of privacy to women particularly. The concept of sanitation was further extended to include personal hygiene, home sanitation, pure drinking water, garbage and excreta, and waste water disposal in 1993. The programme includes construction of individual sanitary toilets for families below poverty line, conversion of toilets, construction of village sanitary complexes for women, setting up of sanitary marts, intensive campaign for awareness generation and health education among the rural people with greater emphasis on community involvement. Till 2001, approximately 90 lacs toilets have been constructed under the program.

Indira AwaasYojana was launched in 1985, to provide dwelling units to the people below the poverty line, belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, freed bonded laborers, and others. Since 1995-96, benefits under the schemes have also been extended to widows or next

of kin of defense personnel killed in action, and ex-servicemen, and retired members of paramilitary forces as long as they fulfill the eligibility conditions of Indra Awaas Yojana. Selection of beneficiaries under IAY is to be done by the Gram Sabha. As per the reports around 80 lacs houses have been constructed under Indira Awaas Yojana up to 2001. Other schemes for rural housing include the Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana, credit cum subsidy schemes for Rural Housing, and Samagra Awaas Yojana.

SGSY (Swaranajayanti Gram Swaraj agar Yojana) was also launched on April 1, 1999, to support the family income of the rural poor. The scheme aimed at establishing a large number of micro-enterprises for individuals or groups or self-help groups, in order to bring every assisted family above the poverty line. Four or five activities identified in each block based on the resources, occupational skills of the people, and the availability of markets. With the start of SGSY, all the old rural development programs like IRDP, DWCRA, TRYSEM, etc. have ceased to operate. In addition to discussed programmes and schemes there are so many other programmes like employment assurance programme, Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana, National Social Assistance Programme, Annapurna Scheme and the like, for the development of the rural area.

The point is, in spite of many programs launched earlier and presently what real impact, quantitatively and qualitatively these have on the progress and prosperity of the rural areas. We have to evaluate each program, the funds involved therein, and the result derived there from. The most challenging task is to see whether the funds have been properly utilized. It is paradoxically that before the Panchayats were made self-sufficient and strong we have been accusing the bureaucrats of their corrupt practices, now corruption has gripped the Panchayats also and it has destroyed the very concept of rural democracy / rural republic as envisaged by Gandhiji. The

funds are swindled away by the local leaders and officials who are supposed to implement them in the right spirit.

Though a lot of initiative has been taken by the present government to improve the economic conditions of the rural people and providing infrastructure to boost the rural economy, yet much more is needed keeping in view the peculiarity of our rural areas in the field of education, electrification, drinking water and health and hygiene sector, etc. The implementation is to be properly checked to bring the required result.