

RURAL SOCIOLOGY

COURSE CODE: B21SO06DC

Undergraduate Programme in Sociology

Discipline Core Course

Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Rural Sociology

Course Code: B21SO06DC
Semester - VI

Discipline Core Course
Undergraduate Programme in Sociology
Self Learning Material
(With Model Question Paper Sets)



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RURAL SOCIOLOGY

Course Code: B21SO06DC

Semester-VI

Discipline Core Course

Undergraduate Programme in Sociology

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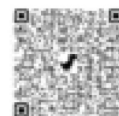
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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The UG programme in Sociology is designed as a coherent set of academic learning modules that generate interest in dissecting the social engineering process. Both theory and practice are covered using the most advanced tools in sociological analysis. Care has been taken to ensure a chronological progression in understanding the discipline. The curriculum provides adequate space for a linear journey through the historical concepts in sociology, catering to the needs of aspirants for the competitive examination as well. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.

01-02-2026

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BLOCK

Rural Sociology- Introduction



UNIT

Rural Sociology: Nature, Scope and Characteristics

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain important perspectives on the development of rural sociology
- ◆ describe the definition, nature, importance and characteristics of rural sociology
- ◆ examine the difference between rural and urban communities
- ◆ analyse the interdependence between rural and urban communities

Prerequisite

Rural sociology is an important branch of sociology that seeks to understand the social life, institutions, and processes that characterise rural communities. In countries like India, where a significant proportion of the population continues to reside in villages and depend on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihoods, the study of rural society assumes special significance. Rural sociology examines the distinctive features of rural life, including patterns of social organisation, caste and kinship relations, religious practices, economic activities, and cultural traditions. It also focuses on how rural societies respond to forces of change such as modernisation, industrialisation, technological advancement, and state-led development interventions. By studying rural life systematically, rural sociology provides insights into both continuity and change within village society.

This unit introduces learners to the foundational concepts of rural sociology, including its definition, scope, and key characteristics. It further examines the differences between rural and urban communities and highlights the growing interdependence between the two. Through an exploration of rural social structures, institutions, and processes, the unit enables learners to develop a sociological understanding of village

life and its complexities. The unit also situates rural sociology within the Indian context by tracing its emergence as a field of study and emphasising its relevance for policy formulation, rural development, and social transformation. Overall, the unit aims to equip learners with conceptual clarity and analytical tools to critically engage with rural society and its evolving realities.

Keywords

Rural sociology, Rural society, Rural population, Rural economy

Discussion

Rural sociology is the science of rural life, encompassing the circumstances in which people live and work, as well as the environment and natural resources typical of non-urban areas. A subfield of sociology, rural sociology studies human societies, social groups, and social relations. Rural sociologists describe social behaviour both domestically and abroad in rural and non-metropolitan settings. They continue to generate information pertinent to public policy, local development, and the growth of theory and knowledge. As the name suggests, rural sociology focuses on rural society, rural social structures, and rural institutions. Since agriculture is the mainstay of rural society, peasant society is another topic of interest for rural sociology. The primary focus of rural sociology is on rural community life. The social structure, processes, social dynamics, and social control in rural society are significantly different from those in urban settings. Therefore, studying rural society differs from studying urban society; rural sociology highlights the rural way of life. As a result, rural sociology is a systematic study of the many facets of rural life and has been specifically created to investigate rural phenomena. It examines rural social networks and how they function to ensure the smooth operation of society. Rural society

is typically based in villages, and rural sociology investigates various aspects of these villages, including how they operate, the issues they encounter, and how they respond to impending challenges. Rural sociology provides workable ideas and techniques to mitigate the problems affecting these communities.

1.1.1 Definition of Rural Sociology

1. A.R. Desai defines rural sociology as “the science of rural society; it is the science of the laws of the development of rural society.”
2. T.L. Smith states, “Such sociological facts and principles as are derived from the study of rural social relationships may be referred to as rural sociology.”
3. According to Sanderson, “Rural sociology is the sociology of rural life in the rural environment.”
4. Bertrand says, “Rural sociology is the study of human relationships in a rural environment.”

The aforementioned definitions unequivocally demonstrate why rural



sociology is the study of social interactions, institutions, and activities, as well as the social changes that occur in rural society. It examines the setup, structure, and social organisations in rural areas. In other words, one could say that rural sociology serves as a reflection of rural social life and establishes the standards and principles that guide rural society. It paints a vivid picture of rural residents and the distinctions they make from city dwellers.

Beginning in the early 1950s, sociologists and social anthropologists began conducting comprehensive investigations in the area of rural sociology. The focus of these investigations was the examination of the interactions between various aspects of rural organisation. M.N. Srinivas and A.R. Desai made significant contributions to the field of rural sociology, which will be discussed in the following block.

Sir Henry S. Maine wrote two works, *Ancient Law* (1861) and *Ancient Society* (1877), which marked the beginning of rural sociology as a field of study in India.

The Community Development Programmes and the establishment of the Indian Constitution, however, marked the beginning of a systematic study of rural sociology in India. Sociologists sought trends in land tenure, customary laws, and the behaviour of peasants and artisans in India during British rule. With this general background on rural sociology, we shall now address its scope.

1.1.2 Scope of Rural Sociology

In contrast to other social sciences, rural sociology is a new subfield of sociology and a distinct area with its own subject matter and research methodology. The phrase “scope of the discipline” refers to what rural sociology actually investigates. N.L. Sims describes the field of rural sociology

as “the study of association among people living by or immediately dependent upon agriculture,” highlighting its extent. It is concerned with open country and village groups and behaviours. “The scope of rural sociology is the description and analysis of the progress of various groups as they exist in the rural environment,” says Lowry Nelson. Although it examines society from a rural standpoint, its focus is primarily on rural lifestyles. Because the subjects covered by the scope are so diverse, we can confidently assert that the limits of the scope vary substantially. The scope of rural sociology has been described as follows:

- 1. Rural Society:** Rural sociology is primarily referred to as the sociology of rural society. In addition to examining rural society, rural sociology also investigates its nature and essential elements from both structural and functional perspectives. Studying rural social life is rural sociology’s primary goal. The conduct, network of relationships, social interactions, style of living, and socioeconomic circumstances of rural residents are all included in rural social life.
- 2. Rural Population:** The fundamental focus of rural sociology is on the people who live in rural areas. The field examines the nature, traits, size, density, and distribution of the rural population from a variety of perspectives. In order to better serve the interests of the nation as a whole, rural sociology attempts to investigate the causes of population explosion, its detrimental impacts on rural society, and rural-urban migration. It also aims to comprehend the social norms, prevalent practices, and folklore that govern the daily activities of the rural populace.
- 3. Rural Community:** Rural communities are regarded as one of humanity’s earliest

social structures. Therefore, the primary topics of study in rural sociology are the development, nature, traits, social qualities, and human ecology of rural communities. It also examines the consistent evolution of the rigid and traditional characteristics of past practices, traditions, folkways, mores, norms, values, and so forth in rural communities.

4. **Rural Social Organization:** Every society and social existence is held together by social organisation. Therefore, providing fundamental information regarding rural social organisation is the most crucial role of rural sociology. Rural social organisation encompasses the spiritual lives, religious activities, sacred relationships, and the divine notion of reincarnation, such as Karmaphala, which has a profound impact on the entire rural social life.
5. **Rural Social Institution:** Rural social structures reflect the patterns of established processes that govern interactions among rural residents. Therefore, rural sociology investigates the composition, traits, and purposes of rural social institutions. Rural social institutions include caste, religion, kinship, and family. The social importance of these institutions in a rural setting is studied by rural sociology.
6. **Rural Economy:** The bulk of the rural population is employed in agriculture, which is the foundation of the rural economy. Their existence and sustenance are completely dependent on agriculture. Therefore, rural sociology investigates the reasons for agricultural failures and offers a number of solutions for the advancement of agriculture in rural areas. The adoption of new agricultural technology among farming centres, the improvement of traditional farming techniques, the establishment of open marketplaces, and the provision of agricultural training to farmers are additional crucial areas of investigation into rural society. Apart from these, alternative employment as construction labourers also contributes to the enhancement of the rural economy.
7. **Rural Social Process:** The two processes of rural social interaction—conjunctive and disjunctive—are also studied by rural sociology. Assimilation, cooperation, and accommodation are all components of the rural conjunctive process. Conversely, the rural disjunctive process involves rivalry and conflict. Thus, the field of rural sociology must accurately take into account the nature, traits, and social significance of these activities.
8. **Religion:** In rural society, religion is important because it is seen as the soul of the rural population and the core of rural life. Rural inhabitants regard worship as their most important obligation and adhere to religious ideals and principles. In this context, rural sociology examines the concept of rural religion, its social significance, and how it affects rural society.
9. **Rural Culture:** Culture is the comprehensive term for all of a person's learned abilities as part of a community, including knowledge, belief, moral law, art, custom, and any other skills. Rural culture is fundamentally founded on strict, traditional dogmas and is typically highly static in nature. Old customs, traditions, folkways, mores, norms, values, and so forth are included. Rural sociology studies the intricacies of rural culture, including its various structural organisations, cultural patterns, cultural features, and cultural lag in rural situations.
10. **Rural Social Problems:** The study of issues affecting rural life is one of the key



topics in rural sociology. These issues are primarily related to socioeconomic circumstances, politics, cultural ethos, and value systems. The issues typically include casteism, untouchability, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, and population growth. Rural sociology investigates the cause-and-effect relationship of these issues and offers workable solutions. It seeks to identify the parallels and distinctions among the challenges arising from various current situations and aims to provide practical solutions.

- 11. Rural Social Control:** The power that society has over an individual is known as social control. Social control is formal and strict in rural society. The informal means and agencies of social control, such as religion, customs, folkways, mores, and norms, are extensively studied by rural sociology. Essential groupings, such as family and neighbourhood, are crucial for social control in rural society.
- 12. Rural Social Change:** Changes in social organisation, mainly regarding the structure and roles within society, are considered social change. Rural society has been undergoing social changes. The twentieth century has witnessed remarkable transformations in rural society due to modernising forces and technological advancement. Rural sociology takes the necessary actions to hasten social development in rural areas and to maintain momentum. It also conducts systematic research on the various causes influencing social transformation and endeavours to offer potential solutions for any change-related societal dysfunction in rural areas.

The aforementioned features are connected to the field of rural sociology, and as a sociology student, you can observe these phenomena in your immediate surroundings

and gather further information to fully comprehend them.

1.1.3 Characteristics of Rural Society

Both society and governing authorities look for various traits in rural communities. Although not all small villages share these traits, places without them may still be categorised as rural. Every community has some degree of individuality, and communities constantly change as members age, move, and undergo other life changes. The sections that follow provide an overview of key traits that many rural villages possess, including size and density, finances and economy, typical work habits, and demographic data. Let us examine the characteristics of rural society.

- a. Small in Size:** Village communities are smaller than urban communities in terms of area. The population is small due to the modest size of rural villages.
- b. Demographic Profile:** Due to low population density, individuals develop close friendships and face-to-face interactions. In a community, everybody knows everyone.
- c. The Predominance of Agriculture:** Rural societies are predominantly based on agriculture, mainly due to the possession of land, which garners a higher social value than its actual monetary worth. This makes agriculture the main occupation of rural residents and the foundation of the rural economy. A farmer must carry out a variety of agricultural tasks for which he needs the assistance of other team members, typically members of his family. As a result, the entire family participates in agricultural operations.
- d. Neighbourhood Relations:** The majority of the rural population's everyday activities centre on the

natural world, keeping them in close contact with it. This explains why a rural resident is more affected by nature than an urban resident. The land provides the residents with food, clothing, and shelter; thus, they view it as their true mother.

- e. **Homogeneity:** The nature of village communities is homogeneous. Even though there are residents of many castes, faiths, and social groups, the majority are employed in agriculture. The village, as a social and cultural unit, possesses a fundamentally uniform organisation and structure of values throughout.
- f. **Social Gradation:** Social stratification based on caste is a traditional feature of rural civilisation. Caste-based divisions create several strata within rural society. Rural people carry on the business of living together within a distinctive framework of caste and social custom. Caste is a dominant social institution permeating social and economic relations. The ethnic, linguistic, religious, and caste composition of a village largely determines its character and structure.
- g. **Interaction:** In contrast to urban environments, social interaction is more common in rural communities. However, the level of interaction has greater stability and continuity. Intimate relationships and interactions occur within primary groups. The family provides for its members' needs and maintains control over them.
- h. **Mobility in Rural Society:** Due to the caste-based nature of all jobs in rural areas, mobility is restrictive. It is challenging to change careers because caste is fixed by birth. Consequently, the social position of rural people is determined by the caste system.
- i. **Social Solidarity:** Compared to urban regions, villages have higher levels of social solidarity. The core of the communities' cohesion is their common origins, goals, traditions, and customs.
- j. **Joint Family:** The joint family system is another defining aspect of rural human society. The family regulates each person's behaviour. In most families, the father serves as both the leader of the household and the enforcer of rules, overseeing the family's organisation.

1.1.3.1 Features of Rural Society

According to Reddy (1985), the following features describe Indian rural society:

1. The basic unit of rural society is the village. Within a unique framework of caste and social custom, its inhabitants continue the process of coexistence. Caste is an important social institution that permeates both social and economic interactions. Traditional caste occupations predominate in most cases. Cooperative labour among different castes is necessary for both socio-religious life and agro-economic operations. In comparison to smaller villages, larger villages have populations that include members of all occupational castes and have a more integrated and self-sufficient economy.
2. Across India, the village as a social and cultural unit has a largely consistent organisational and value framework.

The family is responsible for introducing its members to the society's customs, traditions, and culture. Due to their limited interactions, they lack personality traits and have a very restricted perspective of the outside world, which makes them resistant to any form of radical change.



The rural areas of India share a number of issues.

3. A village's ethnic, linguistic, religious, and caste makeup heavily influences its structure and personality. Some hamlets and villages are populated nearly entirely by members of a single caste, as is the case with Agraharams for Brahmins. The various castes typically dwell in distinct parts of the same hamlet, even in those with a mixed population. Tensions exist between castes.
4. In a number of areas of life, women and men do not have complete equality.
5. Agriculture is the mainstay of rural Indian society. In addition to being viewed as a source of wealth, owning property has social and prestige significance. The majority of land in many villages is shared by two or more castes, a small number of families, or one large landowner and the rest of the community. A substantial portion of the population that depends on agriculture comprises tenants and landless labourers.
6. Each village has its own organisational structure, governing body, and disciplinary measures. The panchayat, which is its expanding entity and has long been rooted in local tradition, is now regularly established in accordance with Panchayat Raj regulations.
7. Social isolation or distance impacts how a village is organised and how it perceives the world. The presence or proximity to modern modes of transportation or communication also alters the landscape and structure of the village.
8. Various regional and local traditions typically regulate village communities. The design of the town, the way houses

are built, and how people dress, speak, and behave all adhere to the cultural area's predetermined patterns. There is a unique individuality in every village. While some people are renowned for their kindness, warmth, and fair play, others are known for their hostility and corruption. While some communities are well-known for their cooperatives, others are notorious for their disputes and rivalries.

Reddy (1985) summed up the salient traits of the Indian peasant as hospitality, feminist traditionalism, fatalism, religiosity frequently coupled with superstitious beliefs, a leisurely outlook on life, and a low standard of living. However, despite their past painful experiences leaving them despairing about the future, the majority of villagers are able to change and will listen to the people they trust. They stand for paternalism and are willing to learn how to help themselves.

As a sociological viewpoint, we shall conclude on the rural social structure and its nature. There are several distinctive features of rural society in India and other emerging nations. Many of these particular traits are slowly changing as a result of technological developments in various areas, including communication. However, many rural communities still exhibit a considerable number of these traits. The following is a list of some of these fundamental qualities:

1. **Exposure to the outdoors:** primarily due to job needs
2. **Profession:** Animal husbandry and related activities support agriculture, which is the primary line of work.
3. **Community Size:** Small-scale agriculture typically requires more land per person than industries do.

4. **Population density** is low, and this promotes greater familiarity among the members.
5. **Population homogeneity:** This includes a homogenous population in terms of employment, culture, customs, etc.
6. **Low levels of social stratification and divergence** as a result of their homogeneous background. Low levels of social mobility in the community, according to social mobility
7. **Social control:** Strong social control. Strict penalties for deviation, such as disapproval.
8. **Social cohesion** is stronger in rural places.
9. **Leadership style:** Usually conventional and based on the person's well-known personal traits, or occasionally hereditary.
10. **Low standard of living.**

A.R. Desai, M.K. Gandhi, and M.N. Srinivas all made significant contributions to rural sociology in India. However, a systematic study of rural sociology in India began with the creation of the Indian Constitution and the Community Development Programmes. Rural sociology encompasses rural society, the rural population, rural social institutions, and more. Rural societies tend to be small in size, dense, and predominantly agricultural in nature. They also tend to be homogeneous and have joint families.

1.1.4 Rural – Urban Differences

At some point, many families and individuals start to wonder about the benefits of living in a rural area compared to an urban one. One of the most important factors to consider when comparing rural and urban

living is quality of life. Although one may argue that either locale is the best place to live, it is important to take into account the similarities and differences between these two options—rural versus urban. Both sides of the comparison are influenced by significant elements like diversity, health, employment concerns, and the ability to make general decisions. They also appear to share an equal number of disadvantages. In terms of human interaction, rural and urban settings are comparable overall, but they diverge most when it comes to issues of choice and diversity.

1.1.4.1 Differences between Rural and Urban Communities

Differences and relations between rural and urban environments have a stronger impact on human life. Humans can live in either an urban or a rural setting. Since social life differs between the two locations, it is important to understand these variations. Additionally, as extension workers are interested in the rural environment, they need to be able to distinguish between rural and urban settings. It is important to keep in mind that both societies are part of the larger human community while comparing and contrasting them. Development transforms one society into a rural society while evolving the other into an urban one.

In essence, the two societies are similar. The distinction between the two is more intellectual and theoretical than actual. For a better examination, let us look at each one separately.

1. **Occupation:** In urban areas, all cultivators and their family members are primarily employed in non-agricultural occupations such as manufacturing, trade, and commerce. In contrast, agriculture is the most common occupation in rural society, with most family members



employed on their land and engaged in agricultural activities. Additionally, because it is a patriarchal society, each individual's life is influenced by the opinions and ideas of other members. Conversely, nuclear families and very small joint families make up the majority of urban households. Families tend to be independent and forward-thinking, with relatively little control over one another. Most urban family members are educated and hold professions that match their skill sets. Due to the high level of education and employment of women in offices even after marriage, urban households enjoy exceptionally high social standards.

2. **Specialisation of Skills:** Another contrast is the disparities in forms of production between an urban centre and a community. Agriculture is typically the only dominant occupation in villages. Because the physical and social conditions are similar, every household manages their own housework and cooking. In contrast, the city serves as a gathering place for a wide variety of people. Workers from all societal sectors, including semi-skilled labourers, skilled artisans, technical experts, artists, bankers, teachers, social reformers, and many more, can be found in any city.
3. **The Environment:** In urban centres, man-made environments predominate, leading to a greater separation from nature. Compared to rural societies, environmental protections are less strict in metropolitan settings. Direct contact with nature and a greater use of natural resources characterise rural society, which is composed of a variety of natural resources.
4. **Family Principles:** Both societies have quite diverse family cultures. Family members, particularly the elderly, exercise considerable power and influence over others in rural homes. However, all members are required to follow the family head's choices. The majority of families are large joint families and are not autonomous. One notable distinction between rural and urban communities is that the former is more traditional and dedicated to customs. In rural societies, as opposed to urban ones, conventional norms and the bonds of familial solidarity have a greater influence.
5. **Level of Education:** Urban areas undoubtedly have better infrastructure and a stronger educational system than rural ones. Urban areas boast highly developed primary and secondary educational institutions, and the educational framework is designed to provide learners with a superior experience. On the other hand, rural communities lack basic infrastructure and student support services and do not have private schools or colleges nearby.
6. **Homogeneity versus Heterogeneity:** The pattern of similarity and contrast between rural and urban civilisations is another obvious distinction. Urban centres are more heterogeneous in nature than rural areas, which are largely homogeneous. Anonymity and secondary group relationships exist in metropolitan areas. Rural areas, on the other hand, are characterised by strong group ties and more engaged environments.
7. **Social Mobility:** People in rural areas typically do not change their place of residence, occupation, religion, or political views. Young people usually work in the same field as their parents, maintaining a relatively stable social status. Tradition and customs dictate one's occupation.

- 8. Social Control:** Due to the small size of the community, social control in rural areas is primarily informal. The fundamental institutions that govern life and society are the family and the neighbourhood. Social control is exercised by primary institutions. In urban centres, social control is more formal due to the presence of more laws. Secondary institutions that regulate social life include economic and other entities.
- 9. Social Change:** Rural society has limited competition, which causes the process of social transformation to proceed relatively slowly. They do not employ the scientific approach and use basic technology and local resources. Urban areas experience rapid societal change as a result of intense rivalry and modern technologies.
- 10. Healthcare:** Medical and health systems in urban areas function better than those in rural areas. Compared to the health sector in rural areas, the health sector in cities is more modern and developed. The rural healthcare sector has insufficient appropriate medical equipment and inadequate infrastructure. For medical care, people from rural areas prefer to travel to cities.
- 11. House Structure:** Rural residents typically live in modest, simple homes with thatched roofs made from huts, mud, and other natural materials. These impermanent structures may be affected by severe weather such as earthquakes or heavy rain. In contrast, urban areas are primarily composed of large homes or apartments constructed using cement, advanced technology, and modern machinery that cannot easily damage these buildings.
- 12. Beliefs and Customs:** Urban people are generally more accepting of different religions, styles, and viewpoints. The city is governed by the arbitrary nature of the law and its sense of fashion. In contrast, ethical norms in rural society are rigid and strict. Any transgression leads to bitter alienation and, in certain circumstances, tragic personal events. While city dwellers may be egocentric and unconcerned with others, rural residents frequently lend a helping hand to one another. The main differences between the two societies are outlined in Table 1.1.1.

Table 1.1.1 Difference between Rural and Urban Society

Sl. No.	Rural - Village Life	Urban - City Life
1.	The style of life, manners, eating habits, and other aspects of daily life in rural culture are quite fundamental. In other words, life in human society is relatively simple, which is reflected in the way people dress, eat, and behave, among other things.	Living in a city is not easy; it is complex and challenging. City life is incredibly intricate and demanding, not simple at all.
2.	Due to the homogeneity of the population, everyone in society has almost the same social standing. This homogeneity results in a roughly equal social position for all.	The residents of the city do not share the same socioeconomic status because they come from various castes, creeds, faiths, and cultures. Consequently, people in the city have diverse social positions.
3.	Job mobility is quite limited in rural life. There are few opportunities for job mobility in rural society.	In cities, occupational mobility is very common due to the wide variety of available jobs.
4.	The family plays a crucial and central role in rural life, maintaining a firm grip on social dynamics.	The family unit is weaker in urban areas, with other organisations and institutions taking on many of the responsibilities that families once handled.
5.	Villages do not experience rapid change, so social flexibility is not necessary.	Cities must be mobile and flexible enough to adapt to the pace of modern life.
6.	Rural society has a strong sense of culture, cherishing tradition and cultural heritage above all.	Finding pure culture in cities is difficult.
7.	In a rural society, there is no division of labour.	In urban populations, there is always a division of labour and specialisation in job allocation.
8.	Rural society often did not treat women with the respect they deserved.	Women enjoy a relatively high social status in urban areas.
9.	People in rural society value the nature around them and its natural resources. They have a strong sense of religion and a fear of deities.	People don't have time to stand and observe nature in cities. They tend to be less spiritual and more materialistic.
10.	Very few opportunities exist for rural society to provide incentives and employment for the unemployed.	Cities offer individuals incentives and jobs, and as a result, people find solace in them when they feel frustrated in their rural communities. Cities also value ability and make judgements about worth.

is highly urbanised and industrialised. Urban areas frequently have higher living standards and better access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and other daily necessities. However, they also experience problems such as increased crime rates and crowded living conditions. Urban communities are often fast-paced and have significant levels of mobility, whereas rural communities are typically more stable and have strong social networks.

1.1.4.2 Interdependency between the Rural and Urban Community

With this understanding of the rural-urban divide, we may now discuss how the two societies interact. The lands outside of urban centres and towns are referred to as rural areas. They are primarily characterised by large farms, agricultural activity, or substantial tracts of land that are undeveloped and lying fallow. In contrast, an urban area is one that has established town centres, some of which have now developed into cities. Most of these towns began as rural areas, but due to technological advancements, industry, and urbanisation, they have evolved into what they are today. Therefore, it is clear that both urban and rural areas have points of interaction. Urban centres could not survive without the support of rural areas, particularly in the form of agricultural products that come from rural regions to sustain livelihoods there. As rural areas strive to develop into urban centres, they must learn some development strategies from urban areas. Additionally, the flow of products, people, and resources across locations maintains close ties between these two distinct regions.

This content is categorised into four categories to allow for a more thorough investigation of the connection between urban and rural areas.

1. Ecology: In this context, this essentially deals with population density. A location's population density will determine whether it is considered rural or urban. It is common knowledge that metropolitan areas have higher population densities than rural ones. However, once again, the statistics can be influenced by the country's overall population.
2. The economic factor is the second consideration when distinguishing between rural and urban locations. This factor describes actions taken with the intention of generating income. A significant portion of the activities aimed at capital generation is based on agriculture in rural areas, whereas in urban areas, these activities are predominantly non-agricultural. Various activities occur in urban environments, necessitating a labour force that is equally diverse. Consequently, there is substantial inbound and outbound traffic in and out of towns as people commute to work daily or relocate from rural to urban regions in search of employment.
3. The social component, which examines how people live their daily lives in terms of behaviour, values, and communication channels, is the third factor that differentiates the two. The challenge of defining what is urban and what is rural is particularly difficult due to the vast array of characteristics that can be categorised within the social aspects of urban and rural settings, many of which are challenging to measure.
4. The fourth aspect is health, which plays a crucial role in both an individual's life and the overall well-being of society. Health is not merely the absence of disease; it also encompasses a holistic balance and a sense of physical, social, spiritual, physiological, and mental well-



being. With this in mind, it is important to note that individuals in rural settings face more challenges and hurdles to their health than their urban counterparts. However, they must maintain their health to continue providing food for the entire country. When comparing payments made to metropolitan hospitals for similar healthcare services, payments to rural hospitals are exceedingly low. Although this means that the rural poor have cheaper access to services, it also implies that hospitals may lack sufficient funding to remain operational. Therefore, the majority of rural residents depend on urban centres and maintain positive relationships to receive better care.

As we can see from the definitions of urban and rural areas, despite their differences, these two areas rely on one another to achieve various objectives. For instance, it is necessary to transport agricultural products produced in rural areas to industrialised metropolitan centres for processing. Rural areas must supply urban areas with food products, as there are no food-producing activities taking place in urban settings. On the other hand, the economic gains made in metropolitan centres are often reinvested back into rural areas, for example, through family support provided by those who work in the cities.

Cities serve as the primary market for goods generated in rural areas. They facilitate plans for exporting any surplus. What about the goods produced by indigenous rural cottage industries? Through city centres, these industries have access to both local and global markets. On the other hand, urban areas provide a platform for developing the

regulations and norms that govern activities taking place in the countryside.

Governments have numerous options for improving the connection between urban and rural areas. For instance, there is little doubt that both private and public agencies would be more than willing to serve rural areas and, as a result, support their growth if marketing, transportation, and communications were enhanced. Thus, planning requires that all rural stakeholders be fairly represented. A socioeconomic understanding of the anticipated advantages for both rural and urban environments is essential for beneficial development. Given that no single population can thrive in isolation, there is evidence that the relationship between rural and urban areas has significant potential for improvement in the future. The likelihood of improving rural-urban relations is high, as neither population can flourish alone. Stakeholders must first recognise the possibilities for development and the challenges posed by poverty.

According to the data presented above, there are several differences between rural and urban communities. Some distinctive traits shared by both social systems form the basis of their mutual contrast. However, these disparities are diminishing due to urbanisation and industrialisation, leading to considerable assimilation between the two cultures. It is essential for metropolitan areas to evolve if they are to continue relying on rural regions for food support. For example, urban areas must provide fundamental essential services—healthcare being just the tip of the iceberg—to ensure that rural areas operate effectively.

Recap

- ◆ Rural sociology is a sub-discipline of sociology that focuses on rural life, institutions, and social relations.
- ◆ It studies rural society as distinct from urban society in structure, culture, and economy.
- ◆ Agriculture is the backbone of rural society and the rural economy.
- ◆ Peasant society is a major concern of rural sociology.
- ◆ Rural sociology examines social institutions such as caste, family, kinship, and religion.
- ◆ A.R. Desai, T.L. Smith, Sanderson, and Bertrand provided key definitions of rural sociology.
- ◆ Systematic rural sociological studies in India began after independence.
- ◆ Community Development Programmes contributed to the growth of rural sociology in India.
- ◆ Rural society is characterised by small size, low population density, and homogeneity.
- ◆ Caste-based social stratification dominates the rural social structure.
- ◆ The joint family system is a defining feature of rural society.
- ◆ Social mobility in rural areas is limited due to caste and traditional occupations.
- ◆ Rural culture is traditional, static, and rooted in customs and folkways.
- ◆ Rural and urban communities differ in occupation, education, social control, and lifestyle.
- ◆ Rural and urban communities are interdependent economically, socially, and ecologically.

Objective Questions

1. What is the main occupation of rural society?
2. Who is considered the founder of Indian rural sociology?
3. Which type of family is common in rural areas?
4. What is the primary unit of rural society?
5. What is the basis of the rural economy?
6. Which is the dominant social institution in villages?
7. What is the nature of rural culture?
8. Is the population density in rural areas high or low?
9. Which type of social control is prevalent in villages?
10. What is generally known as the nature of rural society?
11. What is considered the major cause of rural–urban migration?
12. What is the known governing body of Indian villages?
13. Which is considered a major rural social problem?

Answers

1. Agriculture
2. A.R. Desai
3. Joint
4. Village
5. Land
6. Caste

7. Traditional
8. Low
9. Informal
10. Homogeneous
11. Employment
12. Panchayat
13. Poverty

Assignments

1. Define rural sociology and critically examine its scope as a distinct sub-discipline of sociology.
2. Discuss the major characteristics of rural society with reference to Indian villages.
3. Examine the differences between rural and urban communities in terms of occupation, social structure, and social control.
4. Analyse the interdependence between rural and urban communities in the context of economic and social exchange.
5. Explain the impact of modernisation and social change on traditional rural society in India.

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UNIT

Peasant Society: Class and Caste Differences

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the concept and characteristics of peasant society from sociological and anthropological perspectives
- ◆ analyse the relationship between caste, class, and peasantry in the Indian agrarian structure
- ◆ examine the impact of colonialism on agrarian relations and rural class formation in India
- ◆ assess the role of peasantry in nationalist movements and rural social change

Prerequisites

Indian rural society has historically been shaped by agrarian relations, land ownership patterns, and complex social hierarchies. For centuries, the village functioned as the basic unit of social and economic life, with agriculture forming the core of subsistence and surplus generation. Colonial intervention fundamentally altered this agrarian order by dismantling traditional systems and introducing new land revenue arrangements, market relations, and class formations. These transformations produced new forms of inequality, intensified exploitation, and restructured the peasantry into differentiated classes such as landlords, tenants, sharecroppers, and landless labourers. Understanding peasant society thus requires an examination of both historical processes and structural changes in rural India.

This unit explores the concept of peasant society and peasantry through sociological and anthropological perspectives, particularly the contributions of scholars such as Redfield, Kroeber, Wolf, Shanin, and Indian thinkers. It examines the interrelationship



between caste and class in shaping agrarian social structure and highlights how colonialism and commercialisation transformed rural stratification. The unit also discusses peasant movements, the nationalist mobilization of the peasantry, and the continuing relevance of peasants in Indian society. By integrating theoretical frameworks with the Indian context, the unit enables learners to critically analyse the dynamics of rural inequality, power, and resistance.

Keywords

Kisan, Folk Society, Folk - urban continuum, Peasantry

Discussion

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, slightly more than 85 percent of India's population lived in villages. Both landed gentry and peasants participated in agricultural production and asserted rights to a portion of the harvest. As a result, there was cooperation, rivalry, and conflict among them. The totality of these agrarian connections comprised rural society. A significant social and economic upheaval brought about by colonialism saw the dissolution of long-standing social and economic organisations and the creation of new ones. New agrarian relations and class structures also emerged in agriculture. At the top, there were absentee landlords and moneylenders; at the bottom, there were tenants-at-will, sharecroppers, and agricultural workers. This gave rise to a new agrarian system that was neither conventional nor feudal nor capitalist. An increase in tenancy and a hierarchy of middlemen between the state and the genuine cultivator occurred on a scale never before seen in Indian history.

The study of complex civilisations by anthropologists originated because peasant societies are quite complicated. Redfield developed the idea of the folk-urban continuum as a framework for studying

complex societies. Peasants were first included in anthropology and sociology by Redfield. Anthropologists now have more opportunities to use the theories and methodologies they have created over the years for the investigation of various strata of people. In a way, Redfield was the driving force behind the decision to broaden anthropology studies to include both basic and complex communities.

1.2.1 The Peasant Society

In late medieval and early modern times, the word “peasant” first appeared in English to describe the “common” or “simple” people as well as the rural poor, locals, serfs, and agricultural workers. Various types of individuals rely on agriculture, including landowners, absentee landlords, supervising agriculturists, owner-cultivators, sharecroppers, renters, and landless labourers. They are referred to as “Kisans” in the local language. In academic work written in English, the word “kisan” is frequently translated as “peasant.”

The village served as the fundamental building block of agricultural society. Peasants lived there and carried out the various seasonal tasks that constituted

agricultural output throughout the year, such as tilling the soil, sowing seeds, and harvesting the produce when it was ready. Literally, the word “peasant” refers to a person using basic tools to till the land. Even the vast majority of rural residents, including large landowners and agricultural labourers, have received this kind of care. A peasant is an agricultural labourer or farmer from earlier times with restricted land ownership, particularly one who lived in the Middle Ages and provided services, rent, taxes, or other payments to a landlord. Since the beginning of colonial administration, both land and the peasantry have drawn the attention of colonial administrators. The majority of the government’s income came from land taxes, and the peasants were those who worked the land and occasionally rose up in revolt against both landowners and the state. The colonial authority had to keep a close watch on the peasantry since it relied on land revenue for funding.

1.2.1.1 Definition

Peasants were first defined by A.L. Kroeber: “Peasants constitute part-societies with part-cultures; they are undoubtedly rural but reside close to market towns. They are a class within a larger population that frequently includes metropolitan areas. Their small units still retain a lot of their ancient identity, integration, and commitment to soil and rituals, but they lack the isolation, political autonomy, and self-sufficiency of tribal communities” (1948: 284).

George Dalton, an anthropologist, asserts that in medieval Europe, peasants were inferior in terms of law, politics, society, and economy.

Others, like Eric R. Wolf, tried to distinguish between different social structural “types” of peasants based on whether they had secure land rights, were tenants, sharecroppers, or resident labourers on large

properties. Some scholars focused on the general cultural or “folk” characteristics of peasants.

According to Robert Redfield (1941), peasant communities are a type of folk society that lives on a “folk-urban continuum,” which has both spatial and historical dimensions.

According to Gough, peasants are people who engage in agriculture or related production with primitive means and who surrender part of their produce to landlords or to agents of the state.

According to Theodor Shanin (1987), peasant society has four distinctive characteristics:

1. The family farm is seen as the fundamental unit of a multifaceted social organisation, and production, labour, and consumption revolve around it;
2. Land ownership is the primary source of livelihood and serves as the foundation for meeting consumption needs.
3. The traditional culture related to the way of life of small communities is unique to peasant societies.
4. Peasants are seen as being in a disadvantageous position and are ruled by outsiders who wield power.

The following features make peasant societies unique:

According to Shanin (1987):

1. Peasants engage in a significant amount of self-employment, as they employ family members in their production processes. Additionally, they are in charge of their own means of production, and the majority of what they produce is for their own consumption.



2. The patterns and preferences of political organisation show a greater degree of commonality among peasants. Brokerage and patronage systems, the propensity for vertical division, and factionalism are a few examples.
3. The norms and cognitions of peasant cultures are more comparable than those of urban civilisations. With a focus on oral traditions and particular “cognitive maps,” such as the circular sense of time, socialisation patterns, training, and ideological tendencies, they are seen as traditional and conformist in their justifications.
4. The distinctive elements of social organisation and how they function also reveal similarities among peasants around the world.
5. The specific social dynamics of peasant communities, particularly those related to social production, such as the development and reproduction of social relations, patterns of inheritance, and succession, are easily identifiable.
6. The reasons for structural change and its tendencies are both universal and unique to peasants.

The Zamindars were obligated to collect revenue from the peasants. To pay the levies, peasants had to sell their produce at a loss. Farmers were compelled to cultivate cash crops. Moneylenders supported farmers in their struggle against zamindar exploitation. Under the direction of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, who established the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) in 1929 to organise farmers’ concerns against zamindari attacks on their occupancy rights, the first peasant movement in India was launched in Bihar.

Based on the information presented above, it is possible to conclude that peasants are

“settled agriculturalists who employ a low level of technology” to further their agricultural endeavours. According to Eric Wolf (1946), peasants are distinct from farmers in that they are ‘rural cultivators’ who raise crops and livestock. The crucial distinction is that, as opposed to being dependent on the market for their survival, peasants depend on the market for their produce. Peasants have always had control over their labour as well as other production and input costs. Their primary goal is to produce mostly for their own use, as well as for the dominant outsiders who do not generate anything but need to eat.

1.2.2 Caste, Class and Peasantry in Indian Context

The word “caste” is derived from the Portuguese word “casta,” which denotes race, breed, or ancestry. In the 16th century, the Portuguese were the first to use the term “caste” in relation to Indian civilization. E. A. H. Blunt (1931) defines caste as an endogamous group or a collection of endogamous groups, bearing a common name, with hereditary membership; imposing certain restrictions on social intercourse; either following a common traditional occupation or claiming a common origin.

Caste has long been considered one of the unique aspects of Indian society. The system of social stratification in India is more complex than merely an institution. Caste has frequently been viewed as the essence of India, seen as both an ideology and an institution. It serves as an institutional framework for classifying and organising social groups according to their standings and positions in the social and economic system. Based on their birth, it places people into the social order. As a set of beliefs and attitudes, caste justifies and supports the current system of social inequality.

1.2.2.1 Characteristics of the Caste System

The main features of the caste system are:

1. Hierarchy
2. Endogamy
3. Hereditary occupation
4. Restrictions on food and social relations
5. Distinctions in custom, dress, and speech
6. Civil and religious disabilities and privileges (Ghurye 1950: 50)

Hindu society is segmented into caste-based divisions. Caste is a status that is assigned. The untouchables are ritually considered the most impure people in the caste system. Consequently, the core of the caste system is the idea of hierarchy. In a ritual sense, each caste is regarded as being more pure or impure than the others. A fundamental aspect of the caste system is endogamy, or marriage within one's own caste or sub-caste, which is one of the key causes of the caste system's continued existence. Typically, people marry within their own caste, and the concept of endogamy is seen as the basis for the caste system.

Every caste has a caste council or Panchayat where its members can voice their complaints. If a member of a caste refuses to accept caste restrictions, these caste councils, often led by the elder members of that caste, have the authority to excommunicate that person. Marriage, commensality or inter-dining, and regular social engagement are all subject to caste limitations.

1.2.2.2 Social Class

A type of social group that is neither formally recognised by law nor morally

acceptable by religion is referred to as a social class. It is commonly understood to be a group of individuals holding comparable social status. Some of the fundamental factors that determine class are wealth, income, education, and occupation. It is fairly inclusive in that anyone who meets the prerequisites can join. Societies are divided into various classes, with the main factors used to rank these classes hierarchically being wealth and income. Different lifestyles and spending patterns reflect variations in wealth and income. Industrial societies are characterised by social classes.

The British rule paved the way for the creation of a class structure in India. By enacting many land reforms during the eighteenth century, such as the *Permanent Settlement*, the *Ryotwari Settlement*, and the *Mahalwari Settlement*, the British established individual ownership rights in land. Land was now considered to be private property and a marketable good that could be financed, bought, or sold. The colonisation of India's economy and agriculture had a number of negative effects, including stagnation in agricultural output, a drop in productivity, a reduction in the amount of food available per person, and an overall increase in farmer poverty. However, the changes to the agrarian class structure over the recent colonial and subsequent post-colonial periods are what we are primarily interested in here. The fixation of land revenue and its monetary payment underwent a new procedure. The transport system in India developed rapidly alongside the expansion of trade and commerce. The building of roads and railways opened up opportunities for British investment in India, enabling improved troop movement and the creation of law and order.

The British government needed a large number of educated people to staff its offices. It was unable to recruit trained workers from Britain to manage such a massive



administrative machinery. Consequently, the foreign rulers believed that the need for Western education necessitated its introduction in India. Schools, colleges, and universities were founded to meet the demands of the increasing economy and expanding government apparatus. The effects of British dominance in India had a negative impact on Indian society, leading to the emergence of new social classes in different ways.

Landlords, peasant owners, renters, agricultural labourers, and artisans comprise the majority of classes in rural areas. Among these, agricultural labourers make up the weakest group in rural society. The extensive internal divergence and stratification of the peasantry throughout the recent colonial period were key aspects of the agrarian class structure.

The social classes that make up urban regions are primarily (a) capitalists (commercial and industrial), (b) the corporate sector, (c) professional classes, (d) petty traders and shopkeepers, and (e) working classes. Pauperised peasants and failed

artisans constituted the majority of the Indian working class.

Colonialisation of the economy, administrative and legal framework, land revenue system, and the growing commercialisation of rural life created an advantageous economic and political environment for the village moneylender, who began to dominate the rural economy and expropriate both peasant proprietors, occupancy tenants, and zamindars. This led to two significant effects, including notable tensions in the countryside. The small and even large landlords could mobilise the farmers in numerous regions of the nation against their common opponent, the moneylender.

In conclusion, it may be claimed that the expansion of the relative power of the landlord, trader, and moneylender throughout the colonial period was the most significant development in agrarian relations. Additionally, they benefited from the rise in agricultural income brought on by various forms of commercialisation.

Table 1.2.1 Difference between Caste and Class

NO	CASTE	CLASS
1.	Caste is described as the passing of life through ancestry, encompassing aspects such as position, profession, and ritual purity.	The social status of a person in society is referred to as their class, influenced by a variety of characteristics, including wealth, occupation, and socioeconomic status.
2.	Hindus are divided into four distinct groups by the caste system: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras.	The five main categories of social classes are the richest class, upper-middle class, middle class, working class, and lower class.
3.	A member of a particular caste is required to carry out and adhere to certain customs, rituals, and traditions. It is a closed system.	A member of a certain class is not required to adhere to specific laws, traditions, or customs. Class is an open system.
4.	Endogamy is the essence of the caste system.	The class system is not based on endogamy.

5.	Inter-caste marriages are not permitted in India because they cause caste conflicts.	A person can marry someone from a different social class, resulting in no conflicts within the class.
6.	India's caste structure does not fully support democracy.	Because individuals are categorised according to social rank, level of education, and other factors, the class system promotes democracy.
7.	Regardless of their hobbies or desire to work in a different profession, those in the caste system are compelled to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors.	The class structure reflects occupational mobility, allowing a person to change their profession whenever they wish.
8.	The caste system has associations with religion and ritual.	The class system is not based on any one religion.
9.	People from different castes have a wide social divide, hindering the country's development.	In the class system, social distance between individuals is minimal.
10.	The caste system is rigid and unchanging.	The structure of the class system is rather dynamic.
11.	The caste system uses birth as the sole basis for division, making social mobility impossible.	Depending on a person's skills and educational background, the class system will be employed. Social mobility is thus very likely within the class structure.
12.	In India, the caste system functions as a political force, with the dominant caste benefiting the most.	Although the class structure is ineffective as a political force, the power elite still benefits the most.
13.	The caste system strongly emphasises caste inequality.	The class system exhibits diffuse inequality.

Caste and class largely refer to the same structural reality. As the upper and lower castes correlate to the high and low classes, respectively, in terms of their status in society, caste conflicts are also class conflicts.

Castes serve as interest groups and as classes simultaneously. For the benefit of their members, caste organisations engage in a variety of economic and political activities.

1.2.3 Peasantry

Now that we have a fundamental understanding of caste and class in Indian society,

let's move on to the concept of peasantry and what it means within this context. In the past, a social class of agricultural labourers and their families was referred to as peasantry. Because of this, the peasantry must produce not only for their own needs but also for those of others. They constantly seek to strike a balance between these two demands—those of their own and those of the outside world. Peasants are frequently seen as a source of inexpensive labour that can be used to strengthen the position of those in charge of them. Irfan Habib has provided a straightforward explanation. According to



him, peasantry is “a person who engages in agriculture on their own, using the family’s tools and equipment.” Rich and capitalist farmers are not included in this description.

Robert Redfield, a cultural anthropologist, was one of the first to categorise peasants as a distinct social group in 1956. He described their local identity and culture as a “little tradition,” which refers to a culture that is less unified and includes a changing mixture of customs based on oral traditions. The main traits of peasant cultures, according to him, are traditionalism in social behaviours, dependency on larger cities to determine the value of their little surplus, and loyalty to the land from which they derive their livelihood. Later research expanded on these earlier notions of the peasantry.

Peasant groups are referred to as “closed corporate communities” by Eric Wolf (1966), which describes communities that are more resistant to cultural changes brought on by migration and are more remote from urban centres. In addition, he distinguished them from farmers by observing that they produce a smaller surplus and engage in more unequal market exchanges. There is typically more opportunity for employment on the land in peasant farming. The farms are small, so using machinery becomes expensive and is consequently restricted. As a result, no labour is replaced. Furthermore, the farmer

uses his own family’s labour and considers it to be free. Working the soil was a staple of peasant life. With limited food and little comfort, life was hard. In both the peasant and noble classes, women were expected to serve as the household managers and to be subservient to males.

The peasantry in India is important in the following ways: (1) The mode of living is determined by agriculture; (2) National wealth is derived from agriculture; (3) Power comes from agriculture; (4) Status is derived from agriculture; (5) Rural stratification and land ownership.

The nationalist leadership pushed two integrative ideas to bring the peasantry into the national movement: the idea that the peasantry, or *kisan*, is a single cohesive social group or one happy family. Overcoming the caste, communal, or local divisions among the peasantry was one goal. The idea of the *kisan*, or peasants, contained some components of class consciousness and solidarity. Later, radical peasant leadership affirmed and applied these concepts. However, the nationalist leadership did not advance the idea with the intention of highlighting or promoting the class struggle against the *zamindars* and landlords. Instead, it was viewed as a tool for combating the internal tendencies that undermined the unified national struggle against imperialism.

Recap

- ◆ Peasant society is rooted in agriculture and family-based production.
- ◆ The village is the fundamental unit of peasant life.
- ◆ Colonialism transformed traditional agrarian relations in India.
- ◆ Land revenue systems created new rural class hierarchies.
- ◆ Peasants are distinct from capitalist farmers.

- ◆ Redfield introduced peasants into sociological analysis through the folk–urban continuum.
- ◆ Peasant societies retain traditional culture but are linked to markets.
- ◆ Shanin identified the family farm as the core of peasant society.
- ◆ Caste plays a crucial role in structuring rural social relations.
- ◆ Class differentiation intensified during colonial rule.
- ◆ Moneylenders emerged as powerful rural intermediaries.
- ◆ Agricultural labourers constitute the weakest rural class.
- ◆ Peasant movements arose against landlord and state exploitation.
- ◆ Peasantry produces both for self-consumption and surplus extraction.
- ◆ Caste and class often overlap in rural India.

Objective Questions

1. What is the primary occupation of peasants?
2. Which form is considered the basic unit of peasant society?
3. Which scholar discussed the folk–urban continuum?
4. What is the core unit of the peasant economy?
5. What is known as the colonial land revenue system?
6. What is the other term used for Indian peasants?
7. What type of labour is used by peasants?
8. What is the nature of peasant culture?
9. Who is considered a key agrarian intermediary?
10. What is the basis of caste status?



11. What is the nature of the caste system?
12. Who is considered the weakest rural class?
13. Who pioneered the peasant movement?
14. What is the form of peasant production?
15. On which factor of production are peasants dependent?

Answers

1. Agriculture
2. Village
3. Redfield
4. Family
5. Zamindari
6. Kisan
7. Family
8. Traditional
9. Moneylender
10. Birth
11. Endogamous
12. Labourers
13. Sahajanand
14. Subsistence
15. Land

Assignments

1. Define peasant society and discuss its main characteristics with reference to sociological theories.
2. Examine the impact of colonial land revenue systems on agrarian class structure in India.
3. Analyse the relationship between caste and class in shaping rural social stratification.
4. Discuss the distinction between peasants and capitalist farmers with reference to Eric Wolf.
5. Evaluate the role of the peasantry in India's nationalist movement and agrarian struggles.

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SGOU



Theoretical Understanding

BLOCK



UNIT

Structural Functionalism

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ describe M. N. Srinivas's biography and philosophical background
- ◆ examine Structural functional perspective in rural studies in India
- ◆ explain the changes within the caste structure in village India

Prerequisite

The intellectual legacy of M.N. Srinivas, one of India's most distinguished sociologists, shifted the study of Indian society from "book view" (textual/scriptural) to "field view" (empirical observation). Influenced by British structural-functionalism, Srinivas provided a framework for understanding how Indian society maintains its structure while allowing for internal movement. His work primarily focuses on the complexities of the caste system, village dynamics, and the dual processes of cultural change that have shaped modern India. At the heart of Srinivas's contributions are the concepts of Sanskritization and Westernization, which describe the mechanisms of social mobility. While Sanskritization explains how lower castes seek upward mobility by adopting the rituals and lifestyles of the "twice-born" castes, Westernization captures the transformative impact of British rule on Indian institutions and values. Together with his theory of the Dominant Caste, Srinivas's work offers a comprehensive lens through which to view the transition of a traditional society into a modern nation-state.

Keywords

Social change, Dominant caste, Sanskritisation, Westernisation, Culture, Upward mobility, Stratification, Structure, Function, Indology, Field work

Discussion

Early intellectuals like August Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Émile Durkheim wrote about the structural-functional approach to society in the latter half of the 19th century, and it became a major sociological tendency in the first half of the 20th century. Sociologists and social anthropologists of several generations have been impacted by

Biographical Sketch of M. N. Srinivas (1916–1999)



Indian sociologist Narasimhachar Srinivas was a well-known figure worldwide. His research on social stratification, caste and the caste system, and Sanskritisation in southern India is what made him most famous. His thoughts on the concept of the “Dominant Caste” have also contributed to his prominence. The three universities that Srinivas attended significantly influenced his intellectual development. The first was Mysore University, where he was taught social philosophy by M.H. Krishna and A.R. Wadia. Next was Bombay University, where G.S. Ghurye mentored him. Finally, he studied at Oxford University, where he received instruction from E.E. Evans-Pritchard and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. Srinivas collaborated closely with G.S. Ghurye at the postgraduate level. He is renowned for his publications on a variety of topics, including caste, nation-building, villages in India, caste systems, and the methodologies and prospects of sociological research. Let us examine a few of his important ideas.

E.E. Evans-Pritchard and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown both served as Srinivas’s supervisors. This occurred after Radcliffe-Brown left his position and Evans-Pritchard took over. Although Evans-Pritchard believed that the fundamental approach was unnecessarily dependent on Durkheim a stance he viewed as problematic he did not want to become involved with Srinivas’s work. Evans-Pritchard provided the inspiration for Srinivas’s vision, while Radcliffe-Brown influenced it. Srinivas’s interactions with Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard helped him develop his thought processes. Evans-Pritchard (1951) criticised Radcliffe-Brown’s structural-functionalism and his treatment of social anthropology as a natural science. He challenged Radcliffe-Brown’s assertion that societies are like natural systems guided by laws, suggesting instead that interpretations are more crucial for comprehending social reality. According to Evans-Pritchard, a historical perspective is also necessary for a comprehensive understanding of social life. Following Evans-Pritchard, Srinivas adopted a functionalist stance, examining social institutions in relation to the system as a whole. He argued that issues facing Indian society, such as agrarian disputes, inequality, ethnicity, communalism, and regionalism, should be viewed in the context of the interconnections that link them to other elements of daily life. This approach would enable politicians and administrators to explore a variety of solutions for addressing these societal issues. Srinivas emphasised the significance of systematically contrasting the issues, processes, and institutions of a society with those of both neighbouring and developing nations. In 1959, he was appointed to the newly created Chair of Sociology at Delhi University’s Delhi School of Economics. He served as President of the Indian Sociological Society (ISS) from 1966 to 1969 and restructured the Sociological Bulletin. In 1972, Srinivas returned to his native Karnataka state.

Srinivas's works and lectures. His predictions and observations regarding the development of Indian society seem to have become more pertinent in recent years. Before examining some of M. N. Srinivas's key concepts, we start this unit by exploring the sociocultural context that shaped his thoughts. We will then examine some of his significant works.

2.1.1 Structural Functional Perspective

Radcliffe-Brown taught Srinivas the concept of social structure, which he later recognised as vital in the study of social life. The structural-functional perspective can also be described as a “contextual” or “field view” perspective on social phenomena because it relies more heavily on the fieldwork tradition for understanding social reality. Srinivas believed that the best approach to understanding Indian society, culture, and civilisation was through village research. This marked a shift in the focus of social anthropology from tribal studies to investigations of the way of life, social movements, and societal change among peasants. Srinivas significantly contributed to the development of a practical understanding of villages, beginning by clarifying misconceptions about Indian villages. He discussed the value of caste in regulating social ties, first demonstrated in the specific context of the hamlet of Rampura and later in the broader context of the Indian subcontinent. Srinivas (1957, 1984) identified caste hierarchy as one of several rigid social stratification systems that were incompatible with individuality. Historically, there were many connections between various castes, with individuals from one caste often dependent on the goods and services provided by others. Conflict occasionally arose from competition between members of one caste for the goods and services offered by members of another caste. Peasants constituted the overwhelming majority of the population in Rampura

village, with a peasant serving as the local headman. This strengthened their status in the village's social, economic, and political spheres. Despite being members of the shudra varna, Brahmins and Lingayats valued them as well, with only the ritual domain remaining dominated by Brahmins and Lingayats. They were entirely dependent on peasants for all other forms of support. Interestingly, peasants mediated conflicts between members of high castes and untouchables.

2.1.2 Dominant Caste

According to M.N. Srinivas, a caste is considered “dominant” when it outnumbers other castes numerically and controls the majority of economic and political power. If a large and powerful caste group is not too low in the local caste system, it can more easily become dominant. The number of educated individuals and their professions also play a key role in determining dominance. Western and conventional education often influences this dominance. Srinivas refers to this aspect of western culture. He believes the most important aspects of dominance are numerical strength, economic and political power, ritual prestige, and profession in the west. Authority within a community is typically distributed among several castes. A caste is deemed dominant if it possesses all or the majority of the components of dominance. Srinivas places a strong emphasis on mobility within the caste system, identifying two factors that contributed to movement in the pre-British era: the political system's flexibility, particularly at lower levels, and the availability of marginal land that could be farmed.

2.1.3 Changes Within the Caste Structure

Srinivas asserts that the British promoted the following as major sources of mobility in modern India:

- a. A new economic structure, along with a widening of the nation's internal and international communication networks. Most opportunities for economic and intellectual advancement were available primarily to the upper castes, resulting in an increased gap between the high and poorer groups.
- b. The concept of land ownership and the economic possibilities in capital and port cities encouraged individuals from all castes to purchase land. During economic downturns, high-caste residents of cities sold their land to peasants and members of other castes in the villages, maintaining status and dignity as landowners.
- c. Construction activities on roads, railways, and canals created new commerce and job opportunities that benefited various castes.
- d. With the advancement of contemporary knowledge came new values emphasising equality, the assertion of one's rights, and the freedom to practice one's beliefs. The newly westernised Indians were prepared to change the social structure. Missionary propaganda condemned traditions such as untouchability, animal sacrifice, idol worship, complex rites, polytheism, polygyny, child marriage, and others.
- e. The permission for lower castes to use higher caste rituals and symbols encouraged them to wear the sacred thread. The dominant castes in the area often resisted this change, frequently resorting to violence and economic boycotts. While victims may file police reports and court lawsuits, such efforts are not always successful.
- f. Conversion to Christianity, Islam, and various sects like Sikhism and the Arya Samaj resulted in many converts discovering that they brought the stigma associated with their previous castes into their new communities (Mathur 2020).
- g. Upper caste aspirations for upward social mobility serve as an inspiration to lower castes.

2.1.4 Sanskritization

Sanskritization is the process by which members of lower castes collectively attempt to adopt the customs and beliefs of higher castes as a first step toward achieving a higher rank. This suggests that there is a process of cultural mobility within the Indian traditional social order. The phenomenon of Sanskritization is not new; throughout Indian history, there has been a significant process of cultural change affecting the entire Indian subcontinent. It refers to the efforts of lower castes to adopt the lifestyles of upper castes in an attempt to elevate their social standing through Sanskritization, westernisation, and modernisation. The local dominant castes' involvement in this process appears to be related.

Sanskritization was described by M.N. Srinivas in his 1971 book *"Social Change in Modern India."* He defines it as "the process through which a low caste, tribe, or other group transforms its traditions, beliefs, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice-born caste."

Upward mobility is referred to as "Sanskritization." Through this strategy, a caste attempts to gradually advance up the caste structure rather than all at once. This process may take one or two generations. Mobility associated with Sanskritization does not always result in "structural change," but rather merely "positional changes" for specific castes or subsets of castes. Sanskritization does not require economic improvement as a prerequisite, nor does it automatically follow from economic growth. It occurs in



indigenous societies as well, so it is not just a phenomenon among Hindu castes. The Gonds and Oraons of Central Middle India, the Bhils of Western India, and the Pahadiyas of the Himalayan region have all been influenced by Sanskritization. These indigenous groups are increasingly identifying as Hindus. In this context, Sanskritization is used as a “reference group.” A caste group attempts to align its ideas, practices, values, attitudes, and “lifestyles” with those of another superior or dominant group in order to gain recognition. The process of Sanskritization is one of the main methods employed by lower castes to advance up the social ladder. In different locations, Sanskritization occurs in various ways.

J.F. Stall claims that Sanskritization, as employed by Srinivas and other anthropologists, is a complicated idea or group of ideas. Given the term’s linkage to Sanskrit, its usage appears somewhat disingenuous. According to Yogendra Singh, Sanskritization is ineffective at explaining a variety of aspects of cultural development in both ancient and modern India because it ignores non-Sanskritic traditions. Some regions of the country have not experienced a nationwide Sanskrit influence. In fact, it was the Islamic legacy that served as the foundation for cultural imitation across the majority of northern India, particularly in Punjab. We encounter certain difficulties when attempting to explain developments in the area of social mobility in light of Sanskritization.

2.1.5 Westernization

Having learned so much about the broad characteristics of Sanskritization, we will now move on to the concept of Westernization. Indian society and culture underwent significant and long-lasting changes as a result of British rule. The British brought new institutions, knowledge, technology, beliefs, and values. These have become the

predominant sources of both individual and group social mobility. M.N. Srinivas coined the term “Westernization” in this context to primarily explain the changes that have occurred in Indian society and culture as a result of contact with the West through British rule.

According to M.N. Srinivas, the term “Westernization” refers to “changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of more than 150 years of British rule,” and it encompasses changes occurring at different levels technology, institutions, ideology, and values.

The concept of Westernization is simpler than that of Sanskritization. It explains the effects of contact with the West (especially British rule) on Indian society and culture. The term “Westernisation” was used by M.N. Srinivas to characterise the transformations that a non-Western nation undergoes as a result of extensive contact with a Western one. According to Srinivas, it implies “certain value preferences,” which encompass a number of values, including “humanitarianism.” This involves a proactive interest in the well-being of all people, regardless of their caste, economic situation, religion, age, or sex.

Three levels of Westernization occurred:

- ◆ **Primary:** direct contact with Western culture
- ◆ **Secondary:** interactions with the main recipients
- ◆ **Tertiary:** indirect contact with Western cultures.

2.1.6 Sanskritization and Westernization

The two main explanations for social changes in Indian society are Sanskritization and Westernization. The changes that these

two notions address are limited to the cultural sphere, excluding other key political and economic events. This means they only provide a partial justification for the social changes in Indian society. Sanskritization is also criticised for focusing primarily on social mobility within Hindu culture, despite Indian society being a heterogeneous complex made up of numerous sects and religions. Additionally, while Sanskritization

has altered the status of some castes, the caste structure as a whole has remained unchanged. This indicates that any change in a caste's or a segment's mobility has only led to positional changes and not structural ones. When Srinivas states, "To describe the social changes occurring in modern India in terms of Sanskritization and Westernization is to describe it primarily in cultural and not structural terms," (1962/89: 55).

Table 2.1.1 Comparison of Sanskritization and Westernization

Sanskritization	Westernization
Sanskritization encouraged a holy outlook.	Westernization fostered an open-minded outlook
Sanskritization is an upward mobility process through imitation.	Westernization is an upward mobility process through development
Sanskritization suggests mobility inside the system	Westernization implies mobility outside the caste system
Sanskritization made these practices forbidden	Westernization encouraged meat intake and alcohol consumption
"Sanskritization" describes the process by which a "low" Hindu caste, tribal group, or other group transforms its customs, rituals, ideologies, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently "twice-born" caste.	"Westernization" describes the changes brought about in Indian society as a result of contact with western culture, particularly the British.

In order to describe the process of societal change in India, we have covered the two highly prominent notions of Sanskritization and Westernization above.

The two procedures appear to be at variance with one another. A thorough examination reveals that they are connected. The castes most influenced by Sanskrit, starting with the Brahmins, were the first to

Westernise and drive the process in India. Westernisation also contributed to the dissemination of Sanskrit texts, ideals, and traditions. To the exclusion of other, far more important political and economic processes, the changes that these two notions address are restricted to the cultural realm. As a result, they provide only a partial justification for the social changes in Indian society.



Recap

- ◆ Srinivas conducted a holistic study of Indian society, paying attention to the way relationships are formed, how social institutions function, and other factors.
- ◆ By examining the same events in the context of a particular regional setting, he also adopted a comparative view of Indian society.
- ◆ Srinivas provided a practical interpretation of specific social issues, including caste, family, and religion.
- ◆ He believed that knowledge of the village and caste was fundamentally based on marriage, families, and thejajmani system.
- ◆ This was illustrated by his concepts of dominant caste in his research on Ramapura village and Sanskritisation in his research on Mysore's Coorgs.
- ◆ Within the framework of numerous rituals practiced by the Coorgs, he discussed the idea of functional unity and developed interpretations.
- ◆ Srinivas disagreed with colonial ideas of Indian villages' self-sufficiency and viewed them as a miniature or pattern of Indian society.
- ◆ M.N. Srinivas' structural-functionalist approach to studying Indian society offered a thorough framework for comprehending the intricate interactions between social institutions, cultural norms, and change processes in India.
- ◆ His work has had a significant impact on Indian sociology and continues to influence current studies of Indian society.

Objective Questions

1. What are the three factors used by M.N. Srinivas to determine a dominant caste?
2. The process by which members of lower castes attempt to collectively adopt the customs and beliefs of higher castes as a first step toward achieving a higher rank is termed what?
3. Who coined the term Westernisation?
4. What is the term used to explain the changes that have occurred in

Indian society and culture as a result of contact with the West through British control?

5. In which village did Srinivas carry out his study?
6. Which concept links caste with power?
7. Cultural mobility through imitation is termed what?
8. Name for Anthropologists who mentored M.N.Sreenivas.
9. In which book, M.N.Sreenivas described 'Sanskritization'?
10. Which approach M.N.Sreenivas believed as best to understand Indian society and culture?

Answers

1. Numerical strength, economic and political power
2. Sanskritisation
3. M.N. Srinivas
4. Westernisation
5. Ramapura
6. Dominant Caste
7. Sanskritisation
8. A.R.Radcliffe Brown, E. E. Evans - Pritchard
9. Social Change in Modern India
10. Village Research



Assignments

1. Examine the sociocultural context that shaped M.N. Srinivas's structural–functional perspective on Indian society.
2. Critically analyse the concept of 'Dominant Caste' as formulated by M.N. Srinivas.
3. Discuss the major sources of caste mobility in modern India as identified by M.N. Srinivas.
4. Explain the concept of Sanskritisation and assess its limitations in explaining social change in India.
5. Compare Sanskritisation and Westernisation as processes of social change in Indian society.

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UNIT

Marxist Perspective

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain how Desai propounded Marxian theories in relation to Indian society
- ◆ explain the basic principles of Marxism (historical materialism, class struggle, mode of production).
- ◆ examine capitalism, pre-capitalist and colonial modes of production

Prerequisite

Marxism offers a scientific, materialist framework for understanding society by locating social institutions, culture, and ideology within the dynamics of class relations and modes of production. Indian Marxist scholars have argued that Indian society, despite its apparent cultural and civilisational uniqueness, cannot be adequately understood without analysing the material conditions that structure it. From this perspective, the economic base, constituted by the mode of production and property relations, determines the nature of social relations and the institutional “superstructure.” Thinkers such as D.P. Mukherjee, D.D. Kosambi, P.C. Joshi, Ramkrishna Mukherjee, and A.R. Desai have applied Marxian historical materialism to examine Indian social formation, emphasising class conflict, colonial transformation, and the transition to capitalism. Their work represents a sustained critique of indological and structural–functionalist approaches that privilege culture, religion, and social equilibrium over historical change and structural contradictions.

Among these scholars, A.R. Desai occupies a central position for systematically applying the dialectical–historical method to the study of Indian society. His analyses of nationalism, the colonial and post-colonial state, agrarian relations, and capitalist development highlight the decisive role of property relations, class structure, and



state power. Desai viewed Indian history as a dynamic process shaped by conflicts between social classes across pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial phases. By foregrounding the capitalist character of the Indian state and critiquing modernization and mainstream nationalism, he sought not only to interpret Indian society but also to expose its structural contradictions. His Marxist approach provides an alternative sociological lens that emphasises historical specificity, material foundations, and the transformative potential inherent in class.

Keywords

Capitalism, dialectical-historical methodology, Asiatic mode of production, Marxist approach

Discussion

Marxism seeks to provide a class-based scientific analysis of society. Since the only reality is that of capitalism, Marxist intellectuals in India argue that the creation of Indian society and its distinctive institutions might be best studied from a Marxian perspective rather than any other approach to the material phenomenon that governs all others. The physical method of production creates the foundation of any society; the

Biographical sketch of A.R. Desai (1892 – 1954)



A.R. Desai entered the Department of Sociology at the University of Bombay in 1951 and began his teaching career there as a lecturer. He later rose to the position of professor and department head in 1969 before leaving the department in 1976. In the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Desai held the positions of Senior Fellow and National Fellow from 1973 to 1975 and 1981 to 1985, respectively. In 1988–90 and 1980–81, he served as president of the Gujarat Sociological Society and the Indian Sociological Society, respectively. For a brief time, he belonged to the Communist Party of India. Since his first years as a college student, he had been a dedicated Marxist, and he remained so until his demise in 1994.

In his sociological research, A.R. Desai pushed for the adoption of the dialectical-historical model. Desai thoroughly studied the literature of Leon Trotsky, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels. He was one of the few sociologists to continuously analyse Indian social structure and its dynamics using Marxist theories. Any interpretation of traditions that referred to religion, rituals, or celebrations was rejected by him. He employed economics to examine and evaluate social structures in his sociology, which is primarily a secular phenomenon. He researched subjects including nationalism and its social structure (1966), community development initiatives for rural economic growth, the handling of urban slums and their population issues (1972), and peasant movements (1979).

sociocultural realm of social interactions, and the 'superstructure' is made up of institutions. Scholars such as D.P. Mukherjee, M.N. Dutta, D.D. Kosambi, A.R. Desai, P.C. Joshi, and others have studied Indian society from a Marxist perspective. A.R. Desai, D.P. Mukherjee, and Ramkrishna Mukherjee are three scholars whose work from a Marxist perspective has made a significant contribution. They analyse Indian society using a dialectical-historical methodology.

2.2.1 Marxian Perspective

A.R. Desai is one of the Indian sociologists who has consistently promoted and applied the dialectical-historical paradigm in his sociological research. He studied Marx and Engels' writings in depth. He is regarded as one of the founders of the contemporary Marxist method for conducting bibliographical and field research for empirical studies. Desai has continuously employed Marxist techniques to analyse the social structure and dynamics of India.

Any interpretation of tradition that references religion, rituals, or holidays is rejected by him. He discovers that Marxism has been largely dismissed as the main sociological method in India, justified by claims that it is dogmatic, value-laden, and deterministic in nature. According to Desai, the Marxist perspective is the most relevant, as it can be used to examine government policies, the integration of caste and class into state machinery, and India's political economy.

From a Marxist perspective, he divides Indian history into three phases:

1. **Pre-colonial.**
2. **Colonial.**
3. **Post-colonial**

Marx refers to the pre-colonial mode of production as the Asian mode of production.

It has the following traits:

1. Shared ownership of land
2. The existence of political inequality
3. The lack of markets, subsistence farming
4. Reciprocal service
5. Talent trading connections.

Desai examines the various factors at play during this period, as well as the changes colonial policies imposed on the fundamental components of Indian society. He views nationalism as a historical concept, a contemporary phenomenon that arises at a specific moment in time. Nationalism developed in India when the Indian people were political subjects of the British Empire, emerging from a combination of objective and subjective reasons. The introduction of western education, the establishment of a centralised state, the creation of new forms of administration, and even limited self-rule at the provincial levels were all effects of British colonial rule that caused a profound structural transformation in Indian society. This transformation set India on a new path of capitalist development and brought about changes in almost every aspect of social life. Although these changes were implemented to further colonial exploitation, they dismantled the previous order and unleashed powerful new forces that revolutionised Indian society.

Desai also seeks to highlight the uniqueness of the caste system-based pre-capitalist social development in India. He emphasises that the 'self-sufficient' village community, a crucial element of the agrarian economy in pre-British India, lacked private property in land. He describes the social repercussions of changing agricultural practices, the decline of local handcraft enterprises, and the eradication of village



artisan industries. His assertion that "the village artisan industries constituted the industrial pillar of the economic autarchy of the village" (Desai 1976:92) is supported by the context of self-sufficient village agriculture.

The process of development is one of Desai's primary concerns, a theme that recurs throughout his writings. He connects this issue to several challenges the nation faced after gaining independence. His main critique has become a victim of the "modernisation syndrome," or growth that followed a capitalist trajectory, alongside those who support it particularly academics and social scientists who regard this as "a desirable value presumption."

His research primarily focuses on India's transition to capitalism and the State's role as a driving force behind it. He examines the relationship between the capitalist class and the State, as well as the development of various institutions, such as the legal and administrative structures and machinery that facilitate capitalist development. Major policy initiatives, the public sector, planning as a significant device, the mixed economy, and even the welfare state as a whole are all aimed at promoting capitalist development.

Desai's main goal was to analyse Indian society from a Marxist perspective and to use the Marxian approach to investigate the many contradictions within it, with the intention of effecting change. "Contradictions" refers to structural and systemic conflicts that shape the fundamental components of society, such as those between the working class and the bourgeoisie or the peasantry and landlordism, rather than simply conflicts or tensions. In his view, the Marxist approach is not only important and essential for comprehending Indian society but also a fundamental component of the fields of sociology and social anthropology.

According to Desai, the Marxist paradigm is the most relevant framework for understanding the changes that Indian society and its various subsystems are undergoing. The Marxist approach enables researchers to formulate adequate hypotheses, develop proper concepts, adopt and combine research techniques, and locate central tendencies of transformation along with their major implications. These factors all assist in directing research effectively.

To adhere to Marxist philosophy, one must grasp social reality, the nature of the means of production, the techno-economic division of labour, and social relations of production. Property relations are crucial in the Marxist perspective because they influence the goals, character, and direction of production. According to Marxist philosophy, history is fundamentally the history of class struggle, driven by the evolution of modes of production and the resulting conflicts between different social classes. This perspective necessitates that a particular civilisation be examined as a dynamic system composed of conflicting forces, some of which preserve that society while others seek to alter it.

Desai believes that the Marxist perspective provides an alternative to the Indological perspective for comprehending Indian society. He claims that the Historical Materialist interpretation of Indian history is being attempted by the Marxist understanding of India. In the second volume, *India's Path of Development*, he takes a significant interest in both the theory and practice of the communist parties, as well as the practice of Marxism in India. His criticism of the two-stage revolution a democratic stage in which the bourgeois democratic tasks would be completed, followed by a socialist stage is the main focus of his attack on the communist parties. This would require proportionally divergent social force alignments, with the former envisioning an alliance with portions

of a "progressive national bourgeoisie." Additionally, he vehemently refutes the notion of a "peaceful and democratic road to socialism." His focus in studying the post-independence developments in India was the type of path advancement that the Indian state was taking. The state that arose in India after independence was a capitalist state, following the capitalist road of growth, and Indian society was being moulded along capitalist lines. Therefore, to comprehend the processes at play and their effects on the Indian people, sociologists and social scientists need to address the issue of the route of development and analyse the class character of the Indian state.

The Relevance of the Marxist Approach to the Study of Indian Society was the topic of his presidential address to the Indian Sociological Conference in Meerut in 1980 (Desai, 1984:1–19). There are many arguments being made here. Desai emphasises the crucial advancements that must be noted since the 1950s, one of which is the enormous growth of higher education. The social sciences are becoming more important, as seen by the extraordinary rise of institutions of higher learning like universities and colleges. He states: "Knowledge generators and knowledge transmitters in the social sciences are operating on a big scale on the national scene." For him, social science investigations generally take an ahistoric, static, and synchronic stance, adopting a structural-functional and equilibrium model, despite the fact that Indian society is going through significant social transition. Sociology is not actively addressing the important issues that Indian society is grappling with, and as a result, it is unable to make a significant contribution to the development challenges. What is noteworthy is that the majority of the issues were put forth by the top sociologists and social anthropologists in the field.

According to a significant portion of sociologists, including Marxists, Desai's

sociological project remained primarily ideological and political, focused on discussions within the mainline communist movement, particularly on the issue of whether to pursue a capitalist or socialist revolution. Marxist scholars contend that Desai's analysis lacked complexity and was oversimplified, making it impossible to comprehend the variations that shape the Indian experience of capitalism and the character of anti-capitalist events.

2.2.1.1 Criticism

His work is also critiqued for lacking a theoretical framework to evaluate and explore the relationships between class, caste, gender, ethnicity, and language. Additionally, it does not establish a theoretical framework for investigating the challenges of identity development in the subcontinent. His theory of identity was based on the straightforward premise that, in order to comprehend exploitative processes, exploitative experiences must be made visible.

A.R. Desai was a sociologist and a Marxist who did not distinguish between the two (Patel, 2011). Desai's work was a critique of mainstream nationalism and its political endeavours, as he examined contemporary social development to determine how it benefited the few. Its emphasis was on the characteristics of the ruling elite, their control over public institutions, and their ongoing attempts to use development initiatives to further their own interests. Desai, in addition to being an academic, also penned pamphlets and booklets in local languages for those who were fighting and outside the scope of academia. Desai's range of sociological inquiry, which began with a consideration of country and class in the colonial era, was very broad.

When American structural-functionalism and British structuralism were both dominant,



Desai continued to write about the Indian state and society from a radically different Marxist perspective. He emphasised the value of applying Marxist techniques in the field because he believed they could aid in studying classes ingrained in the state structure and official policies of political economy in India. Property relations are important to Desai because they influence the purpose, nature, control, and goals of production. Since they determine who receives what and on what grounds, they also shape the social order and division.

In addition, they help identify the social dialectics at play rather than focusing solely on continuity and stability.

In summary, the Marxist method places the property structure at the centre of any analysis of society. It offers a historical location and specification of all social phenomena. The emphasis placed on the "mode of production of material life" is one way that the Marxist approach differs from other sociological approaches.

Recap

- ◆ A.R. Desai was a leader in introducing the Marxist viewpoint to Indian culture.
- ◆ The "Social Background of Indian Nationalism" is his most significant publication.
- ◆ In order to learn about Indian society, he applied a dialectical historical method.
- ◆ He applied a field view and gave less weight to religion and culture when attempting to learn about Indian social customs.
- ◆ He had a dialectical materialist foundational understanding of the historical evolution of Indian civilisation.
- ◆ Economic infrastructure is thought to impact Indian society and traditions.
- ◆ His primary areas of interest included the state, nationalism, village, peasant conflicts, caste, etc.

Objective Questions

1. Marxism primarily seeks to analyse society on the basis of what?
2. What, according to Marxism, is the foundation of society?
3. Which Indian sociologist consistently applied the dialectical–historical method?

4. On what basis did A.R. Desai reject interpretations of Indian society?
5. From a Marxist perspective, Indian history is divided into how many phases?
6. Marx referred to the pre-colonial mode of production in India as:
7. Which was a key feature of the pre-colonial village economy?
8. According to A. R. Desai, Indian nationalism emerged primarily due to what?
9. The destruction of village artisan industries occurred mainly due to?
10. Desai viewed post-independence India as following which path of development?
11. Which institution played a key role in facilitating capitalist development in India?
12. Desai criticised the “two-stage revolution” theory advocated by whom?
13. Which may be considered the most important book by A. R. Desai?
14. According to Marxism, history is fundamentally the history of what?

Answers

1. Class
2. Mode of production
3. A. R. Desai
4. Religion and rituals
5. Three
6. Asian mode
7. Self-sufficient agriculture
8. Colonial structural changes
9. Colonial economic policies



10. Capitalist
11. State
12. Communist parties
13. The Social Background of Indian Nationalism
14. Class struggle

Assignments

1. Discuss A. R. Desai's Marxian interpretation of Indian society using the dialectical-historical method.
2. Examine A. R. Desai's analysis of colonialism and its role in transforming the Indian social structure.
3. Critically analyse the relevance of the Marxist approach in understanding post-independence Indian society.
4. Evaluate the criticisms levelled against A. R. Desai's Marxist perspective.

Reference

1. Desai, A. R. (1960). *Current trends in Indian nationalism*. Popular Prakashan.
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UNIT

Gandhian Perspective

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the Gandhian perspective of rural development
- ◆ describe the Gandhian concepts of sarvodaya, suraj and trusteeship
- ◆ examine the Gandhian thought and its impacts in India

Prerequisite

Mahatma Gandhi's thought constitutes a comprehensive philosophical and practical framework that integrates religion, morality, politics, economics, and social reform into a unified vision of human well-being. Rooted in truth (satya) and non-violence (ahimsa), Gandhian philosophy rejects the separation of means and ends and emphasises ethical conduct as the foundation of individual and collective life. Drawing inspiration from diverse religious traditions Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam as well as from thinkers such as Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau, Gandhi articulated a universalist outlook that transcended sectarian boundaries. His ideas on religion stressed moral discipline, tolerance, prayer, and the unity of all faiths, while his critique of the modern state challenged centralised power, industrialism, and violence as incompatible with human freedom and spiritual growth.

At the social and political level, Gandhi proposed alternative concepts such as Sarvodaya (universal welfare), Swaraj (self-rule), trusteeship, decentralisation, and village-based democracy. His views on caste, women, education, and labour were deeply reformist, aiming to eradicate exploitation, inequality, and dehumanisation while preserving ethical and spiritual values. Instruments like Satyagraha and Swadeshi translated his moral philosophy into concrete strategies for social change, resistance, and nation-building. Together, these ideas form a holistic Gandhian perspective that offers a distinctive critique of modernity and a normative vision of a just, nonviolent, and participatory social order.

Keywords

Trustfulness, Socialism, Trusteeship, Sarvodaya, Caste system

Discussion

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi, is regarded as the "Father of the Nation" in India because of his crucial leadership of the country's nonviolent resistance to the independence movement. In the conventional meaning of the phrase, Mahatma Gandhi was not an academic philosopher. His writings, talks, plans, and schemes all represented his life's goal of realising truth and nonviolence in thought, word, and deed. Gandhi believed that as morality embodies the core of religion, true religion and true morality cannot be distinguished from one another. The way to find God is to love all of His creatures. Gandhian state theory questions the core foundation of the contemporary state on a theoretical level. On a methodological level, it reflects a growing discontent with how the state is run and argues that it is inappropriate for India. The religious and social values that Mahatma Gandhi promoted and developed are known as Gandhian philosophy, and his perspective will be examined in this unit. We will also explore the factors that influenced his thinking.

2.3.1 Gandhian Perspective on Religion

According to Gandhi, a common occurrence in practically all nations and communities is religion. Human nature has an unspoken, profoundly felt desire that religion satisfies, and the vast majority of people worldwide yearn for some type of religious belief. Though it is challenging to describe, it serves as the foundation for all human endeavours. Man owes his obedience to this trust in an enigmatic, unseen power.

It can provide a solution for the specific unease that man experiences, even when he has everything best in life at his disposal. No rational individual can overlook the fact that there is something beyond the current state of scientific positive knowledge. Truthfulness, love, unity, religion, and morality were one and the same in Gandhi's eyes. Without a fully formed sense of morality, it is difficult for a person to experience religion, which gives them a glimpse of God. According to him, we stop being religious the moment we lose our moral foundation. Religion never has the right to supersede morality. Man, for instance, cannot claim to have God on his side while being dishonest, unkind, or incontinent. He interprets religion as a belief in the ultimate moral rule that underlies the entire cosmos. His main area of concern was religion's ethical dimension. Gandhi believed that moral discipline of the person was required to rebuild society on a non-violent basis.

Gandhi advises that people should have a respectful and tolerant attitude toward other religions. He insisted that all of the world's major religions are equal because they are descended from the same God and lead to the same destination. Since they are all works of divine inspiration, they all represent the truth. In every religion, he discovered instances of truth and non-violence. He believed that different religions were simply different interpretations of the Truth. Every religion, he maintained, contains valuable teachings and precepts; some interpretations and comments have diminished and corrupted religion.



Gandhi seemed to give prayer significant weight and worth. According to him, "Prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and as no man can live without religion, prayer must be the very core of man's life." He claimed that prayer is a profound longing of the spirit and that it is as vital for the soul as nourishment is for the body. Its attainment of purity draws man closer to God and brings him nearer to his ultimate objective of self-realisation. The most effective tool a man has to combat cowardice and all other forms of weakness is sincere prayer. By doing this, we shall be able to strengthen ourselves and prepare to partake in the sorrows of others. Gandhi's vision of a universal religion removes divisions between different faiths. He created a notion of religion by combining the best elements of all the world's religions, which helped India and the rest of the world achieve peace, progress, and national cohesion.

2.3.1.1 Vaishnavism

Gandhi's connection to his family's traditional Vaishnava background significantly influenced his worldview. His moral and religious beliefs were primarily inspired by Hinduism. Gandhi's Vaishnavism-based philosophy of religion and ethics was founded on the idea of submitting oneself to God. He was a devout Vaishnavite who believed that redemption could be gained through devotion to God and service to others.

Gandhi almost always carried the Bhagavad Gita with him. The Gita is the piece of Indian philosophy that has had the largest impact. It explains how jnana, karma, bhakti, and margas can help us achieve the ultimate aim of moksha, or spiritual emancipation. It addresses the knowledge and devotion foundations of the philosophy of karma. The Gita's sole objective is to establish dharma and eliminate injustice. It emphasises the significance of selfless service for the benefit of the entire cosmos

and stands for the universal brotherhood of all beings. It teaches followers to carry out their duties without regard for rewards.

Gandhi recommended reading the Gita to fully understand the sublime fusion of duty, religion, and politics. He derived the idea of not cooperating with evil from the Gita, which laid the groundwork for Satyagraha. He referred to the Gita as his spiritual dictionary since it never failed him in trying circumstances, was devoid of sectarianism and dogma, and had broad appeal. As a result, it is clear that Gandhi acquired nearly all of the ideas in his moral, religious, social, and political philosophy from the Bhagavad Gita, which continued to serve as a source of inspiration for him right up to the end of his life.

Gandhi was profoundly influenced by The Ramayana. The idea of Ramrajya, as depicted in the Ramayana, attracted him greatly. His vision for an independent India was one in which both the royal and the poor would have equal rights under Ramrajya (divine raj) or an excellent democracy. The Ramayanamakes the point that everything in the universe finds its proper place if any system or order prioritises spiritual or human qualities. The globe would then become one big family, based on the great idea of "Vasudaiva Kudumbakam," and society would reflect that.

2.3.1.2 Jainism

Mahatma Gandhi spent a significant portion of his early years in Kathiawad, a region where Jain traditions were fiercely upheld, and it was here that Jainism had a tremendous impact on his life and philosophy. His steadfast belief in the worth of every life a belief influenced by Jainism and Buddhism led to the practice of ahimsa. The Gandhian idea of Satyagraha, a practical form of non-violence, was definitely influenced by Jainism. The cornerstone

of Jain philosophy is the idea of universal welfare, which impacted Gandhi's sarvodaya ideal. Gandhi was most affected by Jainism's three core principles: ahimsa from a religious perspective, sarvodaya from a philosophical one, and the institution of obligations from an ethical perspective.

2.3.1.3 The Influence of Buddhism

Gandhi's teachings share some characteristics with those of Buddha. He endorsed Lord Buddha's four noble truths and the wisdom of the eightfold path in order to contribute to the salvation of humanity. Both Buddha and Gandhi saw the folly of caste divisions, rites, rituals, and dogmas. Buddha placed a strong emphasis on the purity of the means, which in turn influenced Gandhi, who insisted repeatedly that there is an unbreakable link between the two. Buddha's teachings helped Gandhi understand the intellectual underpinnings of ahimsa, and his message of compassion left a lasting impression on him. Gandhi was following in the footsteps of these great gurus by protesting non-violently against the ills in society.

2.3.1.4 Islam

For Gandhi, both Islam and Christianity were religions of peace. He believed that Islam was no exception to the rule that all religions work to bring about peace and salvation in various ways. Since the word "Islam" is derived from the Arabic word "salam," which means "peace," it could etymologically be characterised as the "Religion of Peace." Gandhi discovered that "Islam means peace, which is non-violence" in its most basic sense. The sword is not an Islamic symbol, and he became convinced of this after hearing the Holy Quran read. Gandhi was deeply moved by the glory, strength, and rigorous lifestyle of the Prophet Muhammad.

2.3.1.5 The Christian Faith

Gandhi's life and teachings were profoundly influenced by the two major Semitic religions of Christianity and Islam. He referred to Jesus Christ and Muhammad as the two great world teachers and included prayers for both religions in his Ashram. Gandhi and Christ both cared about a person's inner completeness and purity. Their objectives were to instil a moral code in society, sanitise the political landscape, and enshrine divine law. Gandhi remained a Hindu his entire life; when we overlook all the conflicts between East and West and religions, we can see the affinity he had for the Christian faith. It is clear that Gandhi was profoundly impacted by India's rich religious legacy and that he also drew inspiration from Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Jainism.

Gandhi was a man of many influences and experiences, as demonstrated by the richness of his knowledge and ideas. His thoughts on nonviolence, civil disobedience, and labour were influenced by the writings of John Ruskin, Leo Tolstoy, and Henry David Thoreau. In addition to these figures, we should also acknowledge his debt to other Indian intellectuals of the same generation, including Tilak, Gokhale, Rabindranath Tagore, and Swami Vivekananda.

2.3.2 Socialism Under Gandhi

Gandhi was a member of the Neo-Vedanta school of modern Indian thought, and as such, Vedanta philosophy served as the foundation for his social philosophy. According to Vedanta philosophy, he believed that all people share a single universal nature; thus, any law that applies to one should also apply to all. His socialism followed the Vedanta philosophical tradition and was spiritual. The Gandhian system is founded on moral and spiritual principles, such as honesty and



nonviolence, as well as the growth of free thought and individual expression.

Gandhi has always valued the fundamental ideas of communism and the desire for a classless society. He disagreed with Karl Marx's concept of class struggle. He sought to create a classless society without the use of force. Gandhi opposed all forms of violence, including that of the state, which he saw as the personification of violence. He believed that the first priority of society should be the freedom of the individual and the opportunity for personal development, whether material, mental, or spiritual. Gandhi opposed the expansion of governmental power because he believed that when more authority is centralised in the hands of the state, the opportunity for personal spiritual growth declines.

Gandhi advised individuals to exert moral pressure on the state through nonviolent non-cooperation if the laws of the state conflict with the moral code. Individuals must cooperate if the state seeks to uphold moral principles. In conclusion, Gandhi believed that the state or society was made up of the people, and that the welfare of the latter depended upon the well-being of the former.

2.3.3 Sarvodaya

The pinnacle of Gandhian socialism is the concept of sarvodaya. It promotes the idea of organic unity, in which every person has equal value and everyone's progress depends on that of everyone else. Gandhi's concept of sarvodaya denotes universal welfare and comprehensive human development. The core principles of Indian spiritual thought can be found in Gandhi's sarvodaya philosophy. He aimed to create a new social structure based on liberty, justice, equality, and brotherhood through sarvodaya, which he described as rebuilding the country "from the bottom to upwards."

Gandhi had a distinct vision and strategy for addressing the issues that India was experiencing at the time. Deep-seated problems such as caste conflicts, child marriages, untouchability, sati, purdah, denial of education to women, dowry, and polygamy were prevalent in Indian society. As a result, it suffered from political, social, and economic decay. Gandhi used his sarvodaya philosophy to try to discover solutions to these issues. In his ideal society, the underprivileged and destitute would receive a fair and equal share of nature's gifts and be free to enjoy the rewards of their labour. His sarvodaya doctrine promotes the liberation and fulfilment of the best interests of all people. It signifies a world order founded on fraternity.

Exploitation, prejudice, inequity, and violence have no place in a sarvodaya society. The Sarvodaya society is a single, cohesive entity that cannot be divided into unbreakable social, political, and religious compartments. Gandhi advocated for the construction of a just and non-violent social structure based on self-sacrifice. The acceptance of this altruistic aspect of human nature serves as the cornerstone of the sarvodaya social order, which is built on non-violence. Every person must be prepared to give up their enjoyment for the sake of others. Everyone should adhere to the principle of giving rather than taking. Gandhi believed that we have an unavoidable moral responsibility to our fellow human beings because of our connection with them. He endeavoured to put Sarvodaya into practice while also developing the idea. His first sarvodaya community was the Phoenix Settlement in Durban, established in 1904, followed by a second community called Tolstoy Farm in Johannesburg in 1910. Residents of these villages were required to manage all agricultural tasks to become independent and self-sufficient. In fact, Gandhi sought to define a different path for development by pursuing Sarvodaya ideas.

Sarvodaya and socialism differ in far more fundamental and essential ways. Gandhi believed that sarvodaya could only be achieved through a moral and ethical approach. Sarvodaya supporters disagree with communists and socialists regarding the role of the state. While socialism advocates for nationalisation, Sarvodaya promotes villageisation and acknowledges village ownership. Furthermore, while socialism occasionally embraces the idea of violent revolution, sarvodaya rejects violence as having any place in its guiding principles. It is reasonable to assert that sarvodaya is more noble, sophisticated, and profound than socialism. As a universal ideal, it aspires to fulfil everyone's ethical and spiritual needs in addition to their basic material wants. This vision anticipates the development of a welfare state and society.

Politically, Sarvodaya has a somewhat libertarian stance. Its political philosophy is a form of anarchism, with the proposed political system for the ideal state being Sarvodaya itself. Nonviolence serves as the guiding principle of this ideal state. In such a society, each person is their own master when governmental power is entirely absent. There will not be a state in the traditional sense, as power is diffused among the people who inhabit it. Gandhi advocated for the principle of decentralisation, which safeguards individual independence, as the centralisation of governmental authority stifles personal freedom. He believed that "political power is not an end in itself but one of the means to enable people to better their conditions in every department of life," which is why he disdained the grandeur of state sovereignty. In Gandhi's view, the state is a "soulless machine" that thrives on rigidity and force, making a stateless democracy the ultimate political ideal. Conversely, a Sarvodaya society is built on the goodwill of its people and is based on voluntary cooperation. Together, these characteristics facilitate the creation of

a model of governance whose guiding principles and practical philosophy comprise the novel "Swaraj" system.

Gandhian philosophy can be found on many different levels, including the spiritual, moral, political, economic, social, individual, and collective.

2.3.4 Gandhi's Perspectives on Indian State

Gandhi sought to establish an economic system in India where no one went hungry, lacked clothing, or was without a place to live. The tenets of his Sarvodaya economy simplicity, decentralisation, self-sufficiency, and cooperation are its cornerstones. He aimed to decentralise economic authority through self-sufficient and autonomous village communities. This initiative was intended to address contemporary issues such as exploitative economics, inappropriate state power, and growing disparities. He supported the concentration of heavy industries, but only if it did not hinder the development of small-scale, local businesses. According to Gandhi, self-sufficiency means that every community should be able to meet its own needs for food, clothing, and other essentials. He believed that every town could defend itself against the entire world if it were self-sufficient and capable of managing its own affairs.

Gandhi frequently emphasised that industrialisation is not a solution to poverty. He recognised that industrialisation and mass production were responsible for the current financial crisis, and that the frantic desire for machines was leading to an unequal distribution of wealth. He was not entirely opposed to machinery; rather, he objected to the obsession with its mindless proliferation. He supported the establishment of state-run factories, provided they served the interests of humanity.



Gandhi observed that the widespread poverty of the Indian people is a result of their economic deviation from swadeshi principles. In economic terms, the word "swadeshi" refers to using goods produced by one's neighbouring families. Gandhi believes that adhering rigidly to the swadeshi ideals will benefit everyone's economic well-being. The Swadeshi ideology aligns with the law of love and humility, advocating for the preservation of local economies.

2.3.5 Trusteeship

The divine spirituality of man serves as the foundation for Gandhi's ethical-economic theory of trusteeship. According to Mahatma Gandhi's socioeconomic theory of trusteeship, the wealthy must manage their fortune like trustees, utilising it for the good of society rather than merely for their own advantage. This implies that everyone should have sufficient resources to meet their needs. According to Gandhi, wealth whether accumulated through industry or inheritance should be viewed as a trust to be used for the benefit of the community rather than as private property. The trusteeship concept seeks to prevent the concentration of economic power in the hands of the wealthy, thereby reducing the opportunity for the powerful to exploit the weak. Trusteeship was promoted as a compromise between communism (which may result in the loss of individual freedom) and capitalism (which may lead to inequality). A society without violence promotes equality for all people and creates a sarvodaya economic system. Gandhi maintained that it is the duty of the rich to use their wealth to support social justice and economic equality by helping the underprivileged and disenfranchised. J.R.D. Tata, the founder of the Tata Group, was impressed by the idea of trusteeship and applied similar principles to his commercial operations.

The trusteeship system offers a way to shift society's capitalist order towards an egalitarian one. It does not acknowledge any right to private property ownership outside of what society permits for its own welfare. Legislative control over wealth ownership and utilisation is not excluded. A person is not permitted to amass wealth out of egotistical desire or disregard for the good of society. In addition to establishing a fair minimum living wage, it is also necessary to set a maximum. It is clear that Gandhi's trusteeship philosophy is grounded in morality and love. This doctrine is nothing more than the doctrine of non-possession applied sincerely.

2.3.6 Caste System

Gandhi aimed to give the varna system in the social sphere new relevance and meaning. He promoted human well-being through varna dharma. He believed that the four basic varnas Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra convey duties rather than privileges, and that varnasramadharma is innate to human nature. He claimed that it was a law created to free up a person's energy for more noble goals in life. He supported this system on the grounds that certain social obligations are connected to one's rank or station in society. Gandhi asserted that ancient Hindu society was divided into four varnas in the spirit of labour division, allowing all members of the community to contribute to its progress. "Varnasrama, as I see it, serves the religious, social, and economic needs of a community," Gandhi said. Respect for the law ensures the most equitable distribution of wealth by eradicating social evils and entirely preventing economic rivalry. It leads to misunderstandings of varna and eventually disturbs society when people disobey the law and mistake duties for privileges in an attempt to better themselves.

He asserted that the caste system had no religious basis and was a man-made institution. Gandhi disagreed with the high and low divisions of the caste system. He contended that the concept of superiority and inferiority reveals the shortcomings of human nature. The various castes that are in use today constitute a clear contrast to the earlier varna system. It was detrimental to the welfare of society since it erected obstacles to the growth of solidarity. It promoted intricate ritualism and ceremonialism, rejecting straightforward religious feeling.

Gandhi placed a high focus on human equality; as a result, his yearning for independence and the abolition of untouchability were equally intense. He underlined the issues with untouchability and the need to root it out through his writings and lectures, referring to it as a social curse.

According to him, untouchability, as it is practiced in Hinduism, is a sin against both God and man and is like poison that is slowly eroding the very foundation of Hinduism. This demonstrates how deeply concerned Gandhi was about untouchability, which was pervasive in Hinduism under the guise of the caste system. He fervently argued that India cannot achieve true "swaraj" without the social and material advancement of those considered "untouchables." Removing untouchability entails serving and loving everyone; as a result, it becomes ahimsa. He believed that the biggest stain on Hinduism was untouchability. Gandhi regarded the practice of untouchability as immoral, unfair, unequal, inhumane, and soul-destructive. Men were not endowed by God with labels of superiority and inferiority. Gandhi referred to these individuals as Harijan, or men of God, rather than naming them untouchables. He recognised that inter-dining and inter-caste weddings would not end untouchability as long as

False ideas of superiority and inferiority persisted among the varnas. Gandhi was a realistic social reformer. He was adamantly opposed to the operation of exclusive Harijan schools or institutions, as doing so would only reinforce the Harijan people's sense of inferiority. He firmly believed that a change of heart is the only true cure. By treating them as equals, he advocated for a shift in the way society views people from lower castes. Gandhi thought that since every battle against untouchability is a religious battle, it can only be won when the majority of Hindus see that it is a sin against both God and humanity. He urged the dominant castes to embrace human principles and treat everyone fairly. He intended to ameliorate the social and material conditions of the Harijans by concentrating on the abolition of untouchability, gaining access to temples, providing education for children of lower castes, promoting the dignity of labour, and restoring villages. He attempted to close the gap between the upper and lower castes in order to accomplish this. Gandhi's stance on untouchability therefore derives from his fundamental belief that we are all one, as we share the same atman or soul. He believed that sarvodaya involved the wellbeing of Hindu society's untouchables and the restoration of their human rights.

2.3.7 Status of Women

Gandhi favoured giving women the same status as men. The fundamental mental abilities of men and women are the same; thus, women too deserve the same freedom and liberty. Gandhi's fundamental belief in the unifying nature of humanity holds that men and women cannot be seen as distinct. Men, on the other hand, have a tendency to dominate women, which has led to a negative sense of inferiority and an inferiority complex among women. Gandhi understood that a number of social norms were used to make women feel inferior to men. He spent a lot of



time and effort eradicating Indian traditions that prevented women from becoming fully empowered. Gandhi stated that a husband and wife were like two wheels on a carriage; if one wheel was in good working order but the other broke, the vehicle would not move. He desired complete protection for women in all areas of life, including the social, economic, and political. He also advocated for women to receive equal pay. He believed that since non-violence necessitates suffering, and since women are more capable of suffering honestly and bravely than men, they may contribute more to a non-violent conflict than men. He argued that it was blatant injustice to refer to women as the weaker sex. Women should be treated equally to men in all aspects of life in a society free from violence.

Gandhi believes that a woman embodies strength, endurance, and self-sacrifice, she is often unaware of the incredible strength she possesses. He emphasised a fundamental respect for her personality and advocated for women to hold the same position as men. Gandhi recognised that the nature of men and women is very different; consequently, their professions ought to differ. The characteristics that make women good, caring mothers are typically lacking in men. He would not limit women to domestic management; he wished for them to contribute in all spheres of society. Gandhi campaigned vehemently against every harmful practice that persisted in India at the time regarding women, including child marriage, purdah, sati, and dowry.

Gandhi asserted that all atrocities against women stem from a lack of knowledge and education. Women need education just as much as men do. He believed that women's low levels of literacy had robbed them of their socio-political influence and awareness of their rights. Education is the most crucial tool for bringing about the necessary changes. He advocated for women's education because he thought that, once educated, they would become aware of the obvious injustices to

which they are subjected. Gandhi believed that economic liberty could significantly contribute to the emancipation of women. He opposed women leaving the home in search of work, believing that their responsibilities at home were just as important as a man's need to work.

Gandhi promoted khadi as an addition to and co-extensive with agriculture and discussed the economy of the spinning wheel. He believed that women were best suited to take up spinning and khadi propagation. He further stated that the widow should accompany the spinning wheel, believing that the Charkha would help women maintain their virtue. He encouraged women to pursue economic independence. In fact, he advocated for women to have the self-assurance to question their husbands about the source of their income and, if it was obtained dishonestly, to refuse to share it.

2.3.8 Gandhian Educational Programme

The Gandhian Sarvodaya ideology seeks to transform society and reorient the human mind. Gandhi believes that education, as a science of personal development, should advance alongside societal progress in order to revitalise a society. The holistic development of a person's personality, including their physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects, should be the goal of education.

Gandhi disapproved of the country's current educational structure, criticising it for three reasons. First, it was entirely based on foreign culture, excluding indigenous culture. Second, it focused solely on the intellect and overlooked the cultures of the heart and the hand. Thirdly, the use of English as a foreign language made genuine education difficult. Gandhi believed that the British educational system did not promote the welfare of the Indian people or their

moral and spiritual health. Instead, it served to distance Indians from their culture and produce a well-educated elite with no ties to the nation. He declared, "Education is the growth of a child's intrinsic potentialities for a nobler and holier life. The harmonious development of the human personality should be the goal of education." In his definition of education, Gandhi stated, "By education, I mean an all-around drawing out of the best in the child and man - body, mind, and spirit." He asserted that self-growth is the only authentic development, emphasising that the fundamental goal of education is violated when the physical faculties are neglected in favour of the expression of the inner spirit. Consequently, Gandhi stressed the importance of treating the body and the mind equally.

Gandhi's "Basic Education" programme sought to conduct a quiet social revolution. The foundation for human development begins with basic education, which is of the simplest form. He coined the term "Nai Talim" to describe this fundamental education, where craft and industry served as the vehicles for instruction. Gandhi was well aware that a college degree without practical experience produces individuals who are only qualified for limited white-collar employment. This lack of practical skills prevents them from being able to support themselves, contributing significantly to unemployment in our nation. The aim of "Nai Talim" is to shape a person's overall growth, not just to teach them a trade. Pre-basic education is offered to children between the ages of two and a half and seven under the Gandhian "Nai Talim" programme. Education at this stage focuses on language and maths proficiency, health and hygiene, games, and minimal physical labour. Basic-level schooling follows, starting at age seven and lasting until age fifteen. At this level of education, students select and master a fundamental craft that they can later use to support themselves. Post-basic

education encourages youth to develop a strong desire and enthusiasm for creating an ideal community. At this stage, the growth of the head, heart, and hand can occur in harmony. The age requirement for higher education is eighteen years old. Through their actions and personality development, students learn; we refer to this as self-study.

Gandhi believed that education should have the following goals:

- ◆ **The ability to earn one's bread and butter:** Education must enable a person to do so. He supported the idea of earning as you learn.
- ◆ **Cultural Goal:** According to Gandhi, culture is a trait of the soul that can only be cultivated through education. Children's conduct, behaviour, speech, and their interactions with others and adults should all reflect the culture they learn at school.
- ◆ **Character Goal:** The development of character, which entails the nurturing of moral endeavours, should be the aim of all knowledge. He views education as a waste of time if it does not include character development. Gandhi did not see education merely as a means to make a living and ascend the social hierarchy. He believed that developing self-respect, dignity, character, and the purity of one's life were far more worthwhile goals to pursue.

Gandhi believed that basic education instructors should be creative and enthusiastic. They must be artistically gifted and possess creative genius. They should be allowed the flexibility to teach in a way that suits them. With the appropriate teachers, children will learn the value of work and how to view it as a crucial component of their intellectual development. Gandhi also adhered to an ecological view of the economy. An ecological economy is one that can protect both the environment and



human health. Gandhi's economic philosophy prioritises elevating human position and dignity over raising the average person's standard of living.

2.3.9 Concept of Satyagraha

The core of Gandhism is Satyagraha. Gandhi made a singular contribution to political theory with the concept and practice of Satyagraha. It is defined as "the unrelenting pursuit of true ends by peaceful means." It is the tool of nonviolent conflict. It essentially represents the introduction of truth into political life and is the perfect weapon for the struggle for righteousness. It directly follows from honesty and non-violence. It is the process by which ahimsa is put into practice. It always adheres unwaveringly to the truth and our inner voice, which is the voice of justice and truth. The Sanskrit words 'satya' (truth) and 'agraha' (insistence or adherence steadfastly to) are combined to form the word 'satyagraha'. Thus, "satyagraha" literally means "insistence on truth or holding firm to truth." The philosophy of Satyagraha provided the moral and religious values of truth and non-violence with a concrete form. It applied the principle of non-violence and was guided by the spirit of truth as the ahimsa technique. The English translation of this would be truth force, soul force, or love force. It created a connection between his actions and his core convictions about the nature of reality and humanity.

Satyagraha is a strategy for battling evil with all the moral and spiritual might at one's disposal. It can be employed whenever injustice and falsehood are encountered. Since Satyagraha is strength for truth, a satyagrahi engaging in non-violent struggle must be fully certain that the cause for which they are fighting is genuine. The goal of Satyagraha is to end conflicts peacefully, without causing harm to the adversary. This contrasts with violent resistance, which aims to hurt the

opponent. Gandhi compared adherence to truth through Satyagraha with adherence through force, referred to as duragraha. The international community has paid close attention to Gandhi's groundbreaking methods for resolving social and political conflict. These concepts, known as Satyagraha, have been hailed as Gandhi's unique contribution to the field of conflict resolution. He utilised this strategy to effect societal change in situations where disagreements could not be resolved with conventional persuasion techniques. It stands as Gandhi's invaluable contribution to societal dispute resolution and a progressive step towards social reconstruction.

Deep sincerity and passionate love for the truth are prerequisites for Satyagraha. It operates under the tenet that truth embodies God's will and ways. Fundamentally, love is the foundation of Satyagraha. Gandhi regards it as nearly religious, based on the notion that there is a single God who created everything and everyone. This foundation of love is essential, as one must possess this fundamental love for all people to practise Satyagraha.

The belief that every individual possesses some inherent goodness forms the basis of Satyagraha, as each person holds a portion of divinity. This aspect is often overlooked or obscured by passion, hatred, and rage, which lead to evils. Every malicious thought, lie, act of hatred, and intention to do harm challenges the nonviolent principle. The so-called adversaries' hearts can change when they are in a state of physical and mental discipline. The individual becomes aware of their own wrongdoing the moment this aspect of kindness is awakened. The satyagrahi can achieve this by willingly enduring pain in the name of truth. Consequently, the satyagrahi suffers and ultimately wins over the opposition.

The moral force of truth, justice, self-purification, self-suffering, love, service,

courage, and discipline underpins Satyagraha. Thus, the entire scope of the Satyagraha philosophy is founded on the idea that only truth, ahimsa, and morality can prevail, and that we cannot adopt immoral principles in order to establish a moral society. Gandhi clearly contrasted passive resistance with Satyagraha. Actively opposing injustice and pursuing the path of truth is the essence of Satyagraha. The distinction between the two can be summarised as follows:

Satyagraha:

- ◆ It is a tool of the powerful.
- ◆ It abstains from all forms of violence.
- ◆ It completely rejects physical force, even in challenging circumstances.
- ◆ It does not tolerate harming an opponent.
- ◆ It adopts a nonviolent stance.
- ◆ It causes a transformation in the heart and operates on the active principle of love.

Gandhi likened Satyagraha to a banyan tree, where the main stem is represented by satya (truth) and ahimsa (non-violence), with countless branches that include non-cooperation, civil disobedience, direct action, fasting, economic boycott, strikes, dharna, picketing, non-payment of tax, and more. Not all of these methods were Gandhi's favourites. He favoured civil disobedience, refusal to cooperate, direct action, fasting, and boycotts as the most effective types of Satyagraha. Thus, the Satyagraha methodology employs a variety of techniques that are used in phases and often simultaneously.

Gandhi's benevolent agenda was distinctive and applicable to everyone. It served as a sort of powerhouse for the movement, as the Satyagraha activities would not have been effective without it. Gandhi himself stated that Satyagraha without a proactive plan would be "like a paralyzed hand trying

to lift a spoon." Even when it initially appeared to be waning, it provided power and momentum to Satyagraha movements. It deployed workers to isolated areas across the country to deliver Gandhi's message and established new centres of constructive work at various locations to lay the groundwork for swaraj.

2.3.10 Gandhian Democratic Principles

Gandhi believed that a democratic government was the best form of governance. In the actual operation of democracy, he wished to emphasise the importance of nonviolence. He viewed all forms of violence as wicked, and nonviolence is the guiding principle of his ideal society, sarvodaya. Political power, which is a state function, is a form of organised violence because it affects humanity by eradicating individuality, the cornerstone of all advancement. In this system, every village functioned as a fully autonomous republic. This suggested that the village had to be a self-governing, economically self-sufficient, politically independent, and socially homogeneous entity. A council made up of five individuals, chosen annually by the village's adult residents, was to run the village's affairs. This group would consist of both men and women with the required educational qualifications. The village government would be comprised of these elected individuals. Gandhi stated, "The panchayat of five people, annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications, will conduct the government of the village." This panchayat will serve as the government's legislative, judicial, and executive branches during its term of office. Here, perfect democracy based on individual freedom exists. The individual designs their own form of governance.

A strong moral sense and a sense of reciprocal cooperation would serve as



the foundation of the panchayat. He was adamantly in favour of "the people's sovereignty based on pure moral authority." It will be a structure built on morality, love, truth, and nonviolence. Because it will guarantee complete individual liberty and encourage individual initiative, this would be the ideal democracy. Gandhi insisted that local self-sufficiency has its limitations, though. He suggested a cooperative system of production by industries for goods that cannot be produced locally by cottage industries. Gandhi himself articulated this well when he said, "My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbour for its vital wants and interdependent on many others as dependence is necessary." The government of the village republics will not be run by a higher authority and will be open to everyone on an equal basis. Gandhi's panchayati raj was therefore founded on democratic decentralisation, in which all administrative entities were to be equal shareholders and orders from higher authorities were prohibited.

2.3.11 Swadeshi Concept

The following ideas make up the swadeshi concept. The first step is for each consumer to reduce their wants; the second is to rearrange their preferences so that they are primarily for goods made in their immediate area; and the third is to work together with their local producer to make both parties successful. From an economic perspective, we may say that Swadeshi is a belief in a self-sufficient economy. It serves as a caution against eradicating indigenous knowledge and leading the country into a trap set by foreigners. It allows for the use of another's assistance in establishing one's own economy, but only with extreme caution. As a result, from an economic perspective, the Gandhian notion of Swadeshi stands for a strong belief in self-reliance, balanced growth, and human economics, i.e., the economics for a broader and more meaningful life instead of the economics for profit and market.

Recap

- ◆ One of the architects of modern India, Mahatma Gandhi succeeded in giving people everywhere in India as well as abroad new hope.
- ◆ Gandhi had a broad humanistic perspective on life's issues, and his writings, speeches, goals, and projects all clearly reflect this kind of thought. In all facets of life, he sought to realise truth and nonviolence.
- ◆ Truth and nonviolence are two of these characteristics that serve as the cornerstone of Gandhian philosophy.
- ◆ In Gandhian thought, truth permeates everything. He makes a distinction between absolute and relative truth and asserts that only God possesses absolute truth.

- ◆ Gandhi believed that Truth and God were one and the same. He also believed that if Truth were to be regarded as the source of all religions, it would unite people of all races, creeds, and religions.
- ◆ Gandhi believed that Truth could not be separated from ahimsa, or nonviolence. The manifestation of Truth in action is ahimsa. According to Gandhi, ahimsa is the sole strategy for achieving Truth as a goal.

Objective Questions

1. What is the core principle of Gandhian philosophy?
2. What was the Gandhian method of nonviolent resistance?
3. What is the concept term used for universal welfare? What was the Gandhian ideal of self-rule?
4. The economic principle advocating local production is known as?
5. What is the Gandhian doctrine on wealth management?
6. Which religious text influenced Gandhi the most?
7. What term did Gandhi use for untouchables?
8. What was the basis of Gandhian educational philosophy?
9. What was the Gandhian approach to democracy?
10. Nonviolent refusal to obey unjust laws is termed as?
11. The Gandhian ideal of a classless society is known as?
12. What is the ethical foundation of religion according to Gandhi?

Answers

1. Ahimsa
2. Satyagraha
3. Sarvodaya
4. Swaraj
5. Trusteeship
6. Gita
7. Harijan
8. Nai Talim
9. Decentralisation
10. Civil disobedience
11. Socialism
12. Morality

Assignments

1. Examine Gandhi's perspective on religion and its ethical foundations.
2. Discuss the concept of Sarvodaya and its significance in Gandhian social philosophy.
3. Analyse Gandhi's critique of the modern state and his vision of village-based democracy.
4. Explain the concept of Satyagraha as a method of social and political transformation.
5. Critically evaluate Gandhi's views on caste and the abolition of untouchability.

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Rural Social Institutions

BLOCK



UNIT

Kinship and Family in Rural India

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ familiarize themselves with what constitutes a village community
- ◆ understand the different aspects of a village as a social unit
- ◆ discuss concepts related to traditional village society
- ◆ analyse changing trends within village communities

Prerequisite

The study of rural society is, at its core, a study of the ties that bind. While urban life is often defined by temporary, contractual relationships and individual mobility, the Indian traditional village operates on a foundation of primordial loyalties connections that are deep-seated, ancestral, and enduring. In this unit, we explore how social institutions function as the architectural framework of village life, organising everything from the way a field is ploughed to the way a soul is propitiated through ritual.

At the heart of this social architecture lie kinship and family. These are not merely domestic arrangements; they are the primary engines of socialisation and the absolute keepers of cultural continuity. In the village, your family name determines your status, your kinship circle defines your access to land, and your lineage dictates your role in the ritual hierarchy. To understand the Indian villager is to understand the “Karta” (head of the household), the “Gotra” (clan), and the complex web of blood and marital ties that create a predictable social map for every individual.

We are observing these institutions at a historic crossroads. The traditional “ideal” of the rural joint family once a static, self-sufficient economic and religious sanctuary is now navigating a period of adaptive transition. Driven by the forces of modern



education, legal reforms (such as the Hindu Succession Amendment Act), and the lure of urban migration, these ancient institutions are being reshaped. This unit will trace the journey of rural family and kinship systems from their rigid traditional structures to the fluid, contemporary forms that attempt to bridge the gap between a 3,000-year-old heritage and the realities of a globalised 21st century.

Keywords

Village, Institutions, Kinship, Caste system, Endogamy, Exogamy, Purity and Pollution, Family, Joint Family

Discussion

Rural sociology identifies social institutions as the established and enduring patterns of relationships that organise social life and maintain order within a community. In the context of the Indian traditional village, these institutions are not merely formal organisations but are deeply embedded in the soil of local tradition, providing a framework for both individual identity and collective survival. Unlike urban settings, where professional and contractual associations dominate, the rural social structure is anchored in primordial loyalties. At the heart of this structure lie the institutions of kinship and family, which act as the primary engines of socialisation and the keepers of cultural continuity. They determine a villager's status, their access to land, their choice of marriage partner, and their role within the ritual hierarchy of the village.

The study of rural kinship and family involves a detailed analysis of their structure, function, and the inevitable changes they undergo. Structure refers to the complex web of descent and alliance, such as the joint family system and the *gotra* (clan) hierarchy, which dictates how households are organised. Functionally, these units serve as the village's economic engine, its

religious sanctuary, and its only source of social security. These institutions are not static; they are currently navigating a period of profound transition. Driven by the forces of modern education, legal reforms, and migration, the traditional "ideal" of the rural family is being reshaped into new, adaptive forms that attempt to bridge the gap between ancient heritage and contemporary reality.

3.1.1 Kinship

As one of the most fundamental social institutions, the kinship system plays a vital role in the socialisation of individuals and the preservation of group cohesiveness. It represents a complex web of social relationships where family, marriage, and kinship are inextricably interlinked. According to scholars like M. Stone (1997), kinship is defined as a relationship between persons based on either descent or marriage. When the bond involves descent, the individuals are recognised as consanguine (or "blood") relatives; conversely, when the relationship is established through marriage, it is termed affinal. Members are recruited into these kinship groups through marital alliances; for instance, a female is integrated into a new unit as both a wife and a daughter-in-law, thereby binding people

together into distinct social groups through these recognised marital and biological links.

From a structural perspective, Radcliffe-Brown emphasised that kinship is a core component of the broader social structure, suggesting that the study of any kinship system is essentially a study of an individual's rights and responsibilities. He argued that every kinship structure functions as a cultural system, meaning that rules, expectations, and roles tend to differ significantly from one culture to another. In the Indian context, this cultural specificity is often seen in the dual practice of caste endogamy (marrying within one's social group) and clan exogamy (marrying outside one's specific lineage or clan), which regulates social interactions and maintains the purity of the lineage while expanding social networks.

The distinction between a lineage and a clan is also crucial for understanding rural social organisation. A lineage consists of members who can trace their descent to a common, well-known historical ancestor. In contrast, a clan, often referred to as a *Gotra*, is a larger, more dispersed group that may trace its origins back to a mythical or supernatural figure. Because clan members are often spread across different geographical locations, they may share fewer daily interactions than lineage members; The bond of the clan remains a powerful regulator of marriage and ritual life in traditional Indian villages.

The scientific significance of the kinship system was first recognised by L.H. Morgan; in the specific context of India, the pioneering research of Iravati Karve remains the definitive framework for understanding this social institution. Karve highlighted that the kinship system is critically important within India's tribal and village social structures, serving as a pillar of social organisation. To understand the complex patterns of kinship across the subcontinent, she emphasised

three pivotal factors: the layout of linguistic areas, the institution of caste, and the specific organisation of the family. By synthesising these elements, she divided the country into four distinct geographical and cultural sections: Central, Northern, Southern, and Eastern allowing for a comparative study of how language, caste, and family structures influence regional social behaviour.

Karve's research demonstrates that kinship does more than just define social bonds; it establishes clear divisions in terms of property inheritance and remains a central cause of both unity and conflict within a lineage. She noted that while different local patterns emerge across various regions, the overarching hierarchy and isolation of the caste system often lead to diverse forms of caste expression. To capture the full scope of the kinship accommodation and acculturation process, Karve employed a vast interdisciplinary approach. Her analysis spanned 3,000 years of history, drawing upon a rich array of ethnic sources, folklore, direct observations, and classical Sanskrit texts to map the evolution of Indian social life.

3.1.1.1 Kinship in North India

In Northern India, the kinship system is characterised by the coexistence of both blood relations and affinal relations, structured through a highly specific and rigid terminology. This system emphasises the distinction between generations, featuring unique terms for three generations of near relatives, where terms from one generation cannot be substituted for another. The framework of North Indian kinship is defined by three primary features: territoriality, strict taboos, and clear genealogical tracing.

This regional pattern spans areas where languages such as Punjabi, Hindi, Sindhi, Assamese, Bihari, Bengali, and Nepali are spoken. Within these linguistic zones, social life is governed by the principles of clan



exogamy (marrying outside the clan) and caste endogamy (marrying within the caste). Furthermore, the system is reinforced by strong cultural taboos, particularly those surrounding primate sexual connections, which serve to maintain the traditional moral and social order of the village.

3.1.1.2 India's Central Kinship

In the northwestern region of India, which encompasses states such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, Kathiawar, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, and Maharashtra, the local languages are closely connected to Sanskrit. Within this cultural area, the kinship system maintains specific prohibitions, most notably that cross-cousin marriages are not permitted. The social structure is further defined by exogamous clans that have segmented into numerous distinct castes. In several of these castes, these exogamous clans are organised into a stratified, hypergamous rank, where marriage typically involves a woman marrying into a family of higher social standing.

It is important to note that these kinship characteristics are not uniform across all areas of North India, as local variations are common. In Rajasthan, for instance, the Jats strictly adhere to two-gotra exogamy and village exogamy. In contrast, the Banias follow the more complex four-gotra laws, while the Rajputs maintain hypergamous clans, where feudal status and social position are the primary considerations for marital alliances. Ultimately, a thorough understanding of these varying rules of exogamy is essential for a smooth and accurate analysis of the region's social fabric.

Rules of Exogamy

1. Clan Exogamy

Clan exogamy is a fundamental principle in rural social structures, as marriage practices clearly define the boundaries of one's natal descent line. Under this system, no man is

permitted to marry a daughter of his own patrilineage. In North India, lineage ties are generally remembered up to five or six generations, and marriage alliances are strictly prohibited within this range. When a descent group reaches this scale, the lineage effectively transforms into a clan, leading to the social recognition of *gotra* (clan) and *gotra-bhai* (clan mates). The widely used Sanskrit term *gotra* represents an exogamous category within a sub-caste, primarily serving to regulate marriages by ensuring that two persons of the same *gotra* do not tie the knot.

A clan is further defined as a unilateral exogamous group consisting of members who trace their origins to a common ancestor. This ancestor can be a living or non-living being, and while members believe in this shared origin, they often do not know the specific genealogical links connecting them to that ancestor. Historically, this belief system was often tied to totemism, the conviction that a group is related to a particular animal, plant, or natural object by virtue of descent from a common ancestral spirit. Consequently, a totemic clan traces its ultimate origin to a specific non-human object, such as a tiger, a bird, or even a natural phenomenon like thunder, which is revered by the entire clan group.

2. The Four Clan Rule

In Irawati Karve's *Kinship Organisation in India*, 1953 words, according to this rule, a man must not marry a woman from:

- a. His father's gotra,
- b. His mother's gotra,
- c. His father's mother's gotra, and
- d. His mother's mother's gotra.

In other words, this rule prohibits marriage between two persons who share any two of their eight gotra links. This means that the

rule of exogamy goes beyond one's own lineage.

Another related kind of exogamy, which exists in North India, is village exogamy. A village usually has members of one or two lineages living in it. Members belonging to the same lineage are not permitted to intermarry.

3.1.1.3 Kinship in South India

Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and other territories with people who speak different languages fall under the umbrella of South India. The southern areas are difficult to analyse since they are dominated by patrilocal and patrilineal systems, as well as matrilineal and matrilocal systems in some locations. When we examine southern and northern kinship, we can see that there is no difference between the family of birth and the family of marriage in the southern areas; There is a definite distinction in the northern districts. As a result, we observe how marriages are used to deepen familial bonds. There are two sets of lines in South India that guide people regarding whom one can marry and whom one cannot marry.

There are two forms of cross-cousin marriages:

- a. A man's marriage to his father's sister's daughter, and
- b. A man's marriage to his mother's brother's daughter.

The latter is the more essential of the two. Cross-cousin partners are referred to as such. Consequently, marriages are used to enhance the bonds between people, promoting family cohesion and understanding.

In kinship organisation, the terms 'phratry' and 'moiety' are frequently employed.

- ◆ The term "phratry" refers to a kin

organisation of brotherhood made up of multiple clans. It is a close-knit group. Phratry is the term for a partition of moiety.

- ◆ Moieties have certain interpersonal links and are often founded on descent and exogamous principles.
- ◆ There may be several phratry in a moiety.

In southern India, bilateral ties are valued more than territorial exogamy, which is rare.

3.1.1.4 Kinship in Eastern India

The eastern region lacks defined boundaries and is not compact. Northern languages, as well as other languages such as Mon-Khmer and Mundari, are widely spoken. Khmer, Mon, and Chain are some of the communities that may be found here.

The patrilocal or patrilineal system is used by people with Mundari linguistic heritage. Cross-cousin marriage is permitted among the Ho and Santhal, but only while the father's sister or mother's brother is alive; marriage with the daughter is prohibited.

- ◆ The Khasi people of Assam speak Mon-Khmer and practice a matrilineal system similar to that of the Nairs in Kerala.
- ◆ In the Nair community, for instance, they have a matrilineal joint family, and her husband comes to visit occasionally.
- ◆ The Khasi have a united family with a communal worship area and cemetery, but the husband and wife reside in their own small dwelling.
- ◆ Among the Khasi, caste endogamy (marriage within a caste) and hamlet exogamy (marriage beyond the community) are both common.
- ◆ Visiting kinsfolk or relatives who are outside of the hamlet entails travelling



to their homes for festivals or special events.

- ◆ Village social networks, such as caste, kinship, and marriage, suggest that villages are not socially isolated groups.

As a result, kinship is both a complex component of society and its most fundamental premise. Distinct regions of India have different forms of kinship systems, and many factors, such as migration, education, and mobility, have influenced kinship.

3.1.2 Current Trends in Rural Kinship

Modern rural kinship is characterised by a state of “adaptive transition.” While the physical structure of the joint family is declining, the functional solidarity of kinship remains remarkably resilient. We see the rise of the “Extended Family,” where related nuclear units live in the same village or street, maintaining separate kitchens but sharing agricultural equipment, labour, and social celebrations. Another significant trend is the weakening of the Jajmani system, the traditional patron-client relationship between different caste families. As market-based transactions replace ritualised gift exchange, kinship ties are becoming more focused on political mobilisation and networking rather than hereditary service.

Moreover, while Caste Endogamy (marrying within the caste) remains the dominant rule, the criteria for selecting a spouse are shifting from family reputation alone to include the educational and professional “merit” of the individual. Interestingly, the “digital divide” is closing in rural areas; technology now plays a role in maintaining kinship ties, with WhatsApp groups and video calls allowing migrated members to participate in village decision-making. The rural family is not disappearing; rather, it is reinventing itself to balance

traditional identity with the demands of a globalised world.

3.1.3 Family: Joint Family - Structure, Functions and Change

Let’s examine what members of a joint family have in common. The factors of commensality, common residence, joint property ownership, collaboration and a sense of jointness, along with ceremonial linkages such as the worship of a common deity, demonstrate their unity. We will discuss each one individually.

- 1. Commensality:** Commensality (dining together) is a defining factor in most studies of joint families. The hearth group is made up of members who cook and eat together in the same kitchen. Joint property ownership is considered by some scholars to be the essence of jointness, regardless of the form of dwelling or commensality. This is the most important factor in defining a joint family in legal terms, as it involves undivided property.
- 2. Common residence:** Various research studies have emphasised the importance of the joint family as a residential family group. Although it is conceivable to find a joint family that shares the same hearth but not the same residence, or vice versa, commensality and common housing are generally considered fundamental aspects of jointness (refer to Cohn 1961, Dube 1955, Mukherjee 1969, Kolenda 1968). The family is formed through kinship ties, and members of the family normally live together in a household and share a common kitchen.
- 3. Cooperation and Sentiment:** Jointness should be examined in terms of function, according to scholars such as I.P. Desai (1964) and K.M. Kapadia (1958). Marriage, family, and kinship are all

vital components of life. A patrilineal joint family may consist of numerous households, each managed by a male relative of the father. These households could be situated in different regions of the world and may not even share the same residence. They all identify as members of a distinct 'family,' participate in rituals and ceremonies, contribute financial and other forms of assistance, maintain a common family sentiment, and adhere to rules of joint living.

4. Ritual Bonds: The ceremonial relationships within a joint family are viewed as an important component of jointness. The regular propitiation of deceased ancestors binds a merged family

together. The oldest male member of the joint family performs the '*shraddha*' ceremony, in which he propitiates the soul of his departed father or mother by offering '*pinda*' (baked rice balls) on behalf of the entire family.

5. Common Deity: Another ceremonial relationship among joint family members may involve the worship of a common deity. In various parts of South India, each joint family has a practice of worshipping a specific clan or local deity. People make promises to these gods during both joyous and sorrowful times. Initial tonsure, holy thread wearing, marriages, and other rites occur in or around the deity's temple.



Fig. 3.1.1 A family gathering in India

The key requirements for identifying what defines jointness have been outlined in the preceding discussion of the joint family: a common kitchen or hearth, common habitation, joint rights to property, and the fulfilment of obligations towards kin and ceremonial relationships. Many experts have pointed out that co-residence, commensality, and undivided

property are three of the most readily recognisable hallmarks of a joint family. They believe that such analysis would also apply to family structures prevalent in non-Hindu societies such as Muslims, Christians, and others. It would also be suitable for families with little in the way of inherited or immovable property (Dube 1974).

Table 3.1.1 Merits and Demerits of Joint Family System

Merits of joint family system	Demerits of joint family system
The joint family is stable and long-lasting.	An impediment to the development of personality.
Ensures psychological support.	Idle people live in joint families.
It promotes economic growth.	It causes disagreements and clashes of opinions.
Workforce division	It degrades women's status.
It offers leisure and pleasure.	It restricts one's ability to move up the social ladder.
Land fragmentation is avoided	In a joint family, privacy is prohibited.
Social security.	

3.1.3.1 Changes in the Joint Family System

In order to quantify the total changes taking place in the family as an institution in India, we need to identify the key factors or reasons that have generated changes in the family structure. The family in India has been impacted by a number of interconnected factors, including economic, educational, legal, and demographic influences. Let us examine each factor separately, keeping in mind that they all affect various aspects of family life as well as the process of joint family disintegration. Furthermore, we will consider these topics in the context of India's socioeconomic changes since the British colonial period.

1. Economic Factors: Monetisation

Some of the key economic aspects that have influenced India's joint family system include the diversification of professional opportunities in different fields and technological advancements. The British economic system favoured monetisation, or the payment of money in exchange for goods

and services. Job opportunities in government service were also made available by the British. The employment opportunities and amenities provided by the British tempted many individuals to abandon their traditional vocations and relocate to cities or towns where these positions were available. Consequently, they often had to leave their ancestral homes. If they were married, they occasionally brought their wives and children with them. Since independence, opportunities and vocational diversification have increased. A new impetus has emerged to encourage women to pursue a variety of careers, thanks to a constitutional promise to promote gender equality and incorporate women into the development process. In households where both men and women work, role relationships between family members are affected.

2. Educational Factors

During the British period, there were numerous opportunities for higher education. All castes and communities had access to the educational facilities provided by the British. Some Hindu beliefs and practices



such as child marriage, denial of women's right to education, property rights, and ill-treatment of widows, were challenged by those who had access to and exposure to English-medium education. Educated young men aspired to marry at a much later age than family tradition demanded, and they also sought to marry women with a degree of education. Educated women were expected to have a different impact on domestic issues than less educated women.

3. Legal Factors

The family system has been significantly influenced by education, marriage, and property regulations. The Indian Workmen Compensation Act (1923) and the Minimum Wages Act of 1948, both implemented for the benefit of employees, served to reduce members' economic dependence on the joint family. In 1937, while the country was under British authority, a law was enacted that limited a woman's access to her husband's property. She can maintain her husband's property as a restricted owner for the remainder of her life after his passing. To curb child marriages, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was enacted in 1929, stipulating that boys and girls should marry at the ages of 18 and 14, respectively. This Act also aims to increase educational opportunities for women. In India, boys must now be 21 years old and girls must be 18 years old before they can marry. The Hindu Succession Act (1956) was enacted after independence, granting both daughters and sons equal rights to their father's property. These statutes challenged the inheritance patterns that existed in joint families prior to the Act's introduction, as well as the women's position as family dependents.

4. Urbanization

The growth of urbanisation in India has had a significant impact on family life. It refers to people moving from rural to urban

areas, as well as a shift in economic activity from agricultural to non-agricultural. It also entails a change of lifestyle to that of a city dweller. Density of population, heterogeneity, diversity and greater job specialisation, along with a complex division of labour, are all features of city life. Urban life also implies improved access to educational and healthcare resources. It is characterised by a lack of living space, impersonality, and anonymity. People have been moving towards cities in search of education, jobs, medical treatment, and other amenities, partly due to population pressure on land. What impact does migration to cities have on the families of villagers? Due to family members' transit from one location to another, residential separation affects the size and makeup of the family. A man may bring his wife and children to the city to start a nuclear family. According to numerous studies, migration from villages and small towns to cities has resulted in the rapid disintegration of large family units. These conclusions are based largely on census data, which show that cities have a high number of nuclear families (Mies 1980: 74). Due to housing shortages and limited living space, it is difficult for the average city resident to establish and support a large family in the city.

5. Industrialization

Agricultural families benefit the most from the joint family structure. With the creation of new factories in urban regions, workers from rural areas are migrating to the metropolis, resulting in a shift in the joint family structure. In his study *The Indian Joint Family in Modern Industry*, Milton Singer (1968) points out that the joint family continues to be the norm among industrial entrepreneurs, despite changes in their material conditions of living. He observes that changes have taken place, within three generations, in residential, occupational, and educational spheres. The



frequency and value of ritual observations have reduced as social mobility has grown. According to Singer, the industrial centre has simply become a new operating area for the combined family structure. In her study *Regional Differences in Family Structure in India*, Kolenda (1987) claims that industrialisation strengthens the joint family by providing an economic platform for its upkeep or by supplying additional hands for a revived family business. Without a doubt, the joint family that exists now in urban settings differs in many ways from the pre-independence, pre-industrial Indian joint family.

6. Strong Sense of Individualism

Individualism has grown at a quicker rate than ever before, thanks to the penetration of the mass media (newspapers, television, and radio), formal education, consumerist culture, and market pressures. Rural residents and members of rural joint families have begun to value their individuality more. In the past, the average family size was quite large, the kinship network was extensive, and the responsibilities were greater. Outside the scope of the family and kin group, every individual nowadays tries to improve his or her standard of living and enhance his or her status in the community.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, transportation, communication, English education, and other crucial aspects contribute to the fragmentation of joint families. In the northern parts of India and tribal villages, joint families still persist.

Many co-residential, commensal joint families in metropolitan areas continue to live together because it is the norm, it offers certain benefits, or housing is scarce. There may be a major divide in the management of household expenses such as entertainment, child education, and so on. Clothing, education, and vacations are

examples of expenses that can be considered independently. Not only do these internal arrangements differ between urban and rural homes, but they also vary within urban families.

3.1.3.2 Functions of the Family in Village Life

In the traditional Indian village, the family is far more than a domestic unit; it is the primary institution around which all social, economic, and religious life revolves. Economically, the family functions as a collective unit of production. In an agrarian society, land is rarely viewed as individual property but as an ancestral asset belonging to the lineage. Every member, from children to the elderly, contributes to the agricultural cycle sowing, harvesting, and rearing cattle rendering the family a self-sufficient economic corporation. Socially, the family is the first school of citizenship. It is here that a child learns the intricacies of the caste system, the “Dharma” (duty) associated with their station, and the complex etiquette of kinship terminology.

Furthermore, the family serves as a natural social security system. In the absence of state-sponsored welfare, the joint family provides for the disabled, the widowed, and the aged, ensuring that no member is left destitute. This is reinforced by religious functions, where the family acts as a ritual unit. The performance of *Kuldevta* (family deity) worship and *Shraddha* (ancestral rites) are not just spiritual acts but are essential for maintaining the continuity of the lineage, binding the living members to their ancestors and future generations.

3.1.4 From Traditional to Contemporary Family

The transition of the rural family from a rigid joint structure to more fluid forms is driven by several macro-socioeconomic

forces. Industrialisation and urbanisation are perhaps the most significant; as the rural economy fails to support growing populations, younger generations migrate to urban centres. This often results in “fragmented” or “distal” families, where the household becomes nuclear in residence but remains joint in terms of emotional and financial obligations. Education has also played a disruptive role by introducing individualistic values that often clash with the traditional, authoritarian “Karta” system. As literacy increases, particularly among women, the traditional hierarchy of age and gender is being questioned.

Legislative interventions have further accelerated this change. Laws such as the *Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005*, which granted daughters equal rights in coparcenary property, have fundamentally altered the patrilineal logic of the village. Additionally, the monetisation of the economy has shifted the focus from collective subsistence to individual earning. When income is earned through a salary in a nearby town rather than through collective labour on family land, the individual gains a sense of financial independence that often leads to the physical separation of the household.

The institutions of kinship and family remain the bedrock of social existence in the traditional Indian village, serving as the primary bridge between the individual and

the wider community. As we have seen, the structure of the rural family, characterised by its joint nature, patrilineal descent, and the authority of the *Karta*, is designed to ensure the survival of the lineage and the management of ancestral land. Its functions are holistic, encompassing everything from economic production and social security to the preservation of religious rites and caste identity. Through the intricate rules of *gotra* exogamy and caste endogamy, kinship does more than just regulate marriage; it creates a predictable social map that guides every aspect of a villager’s life.

The modern Indian village is a site of significant change. The traditional ideal of the large, multi-generational joint family is increasingly giving way to nuclear or extended households as a result of migration, education, and the monetisation of the rural economy. While the physical structure of the family is shifting, the “spirit of jointness” often persists through shared property and ritual obligations. The legal empowerment of women and the weakening of traditional patron-client systems like *Jajmani* further signal a move toward a more individualistic social order. Ultimately, kinship and family in rural India are not disappearing; rather, they are demonstrating a remarkable capacity for adaptation, evolving into new forms that allow rural society to maintain its cultural roots while navigating the complexities of the 21st century.



Recap

- ◆ Kinship is a social institution based on descent (consanguine/blood) or marriage (affinal).
- ◆ Radcliffe-Brown viewed kinship as a system of rights and responsibilities that varies across cultures.
- ◆ A lineage traces descent to a known ancestor; a clan (*Gotra*) traces it to a mythical or supernatural figure.
- ◆ Iravati Karve identified four cultural zones, North, South, Central, and East, based on language, caste, and family organisation.
- ◆ Kinship in the North is defined by territoriality, genealogical tracing, and strict taboos, including village exogamy.
- ◆ In the North, a man is prohibited from marrying into four specific *gotras*: his father's, mother's, father's mother's, and mother's mother's.
- ◆ Southern kinship often features cross-cousin marriages, which serve to strengthen existing familial bonds.
- ◆ It features diverse systems, including the matrilineal systems of the Khasi (Assam) and the patrilineal systems of the Mundari heritage.
- ◆ The joint family is defined by commensality (common kitchen), common residence, joint property, and ritual bonds.
- ◆ The 'Shraddha' ceremony (performed by the eldest male) and common deity worship are vital for maintaining the sentiment of jointness.
- ◆ In rural areas, the family acts as a collective unit of production where land is seen as an ancestral asset.
- ◆ The joint family serves as a natural welfare system for the aged, widowed, and disabled.
- ◆ Laws like the Hindu Succession Act (1956/2005) and the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) have significantly altered traditional family structures.
- ◆ Joint families are evolving into "Extended Families" where members live separately but maintain functional solidarity and shared labour.
- ◆ Digital tools (like WhatsApp) are helping to bridge the distance for migrated members, allowing them to participate in village decisions

Objective Questions

1. What term is used for relatives linked specifically through marriage?
2. Who is considered the pioneer of Indian kinship research for dividing the country into four cultural zones?
3. Which Sanskrit term refers to a clan that traces its origin to a common ancestor?
4. What is the practice of marrying outside one's own village called?
5. In Northern India, how many generations of lineage are typically remembered to avoid marriage alliances?
6. What is the belief that a group is related to a particular animal or plant through ancestral spirits?
7. Which term describes the practice of a woman marrying into a family of higher social standing?
8. Which scholar argued that co-residence and undivided property are the readily recognisable hallmarks of a joint family?
9. What is the eldest male head of a traditional Indian family called?
10. Which 1956 Act gave sons and daughters equal rights to their father's property?
11. What is the traditional patron-client relationship between different caste families called?
12. What specific ceremony involves offering 'pinda' (rice balls) to ancestors?
13. Which linguistic group in the Eastern region follows a matrilineal joint family system?
14. What term describes a moiety partition made up of multiple clans?
15. What is the defining factor of "jointness" related to eating together in the same kitchen?



Answers

1. Affinal
2. Iravati Karve
3. Gotra
4. Village exogamy
5. Five (or six)
6. Totemism
7. Hypergamy
8. Dube (or Mukherjee/Kolenda)
9. Karta
10. Hindu Succession Act
11. Jajmani system
12. Shraddha
13. Khasi
14. Phratry
15. Commensality

Assignments

1. Compare and contrast the rules of marriage and kinship between North India and South India. How do these differences impact the relationship between the “family of birth” and the “family of marriage”?
2. Discuss the impact of urbanisation and industrialisation on the traditional joint family. In your answer, evaluate Milton Singer’s view that the joint family continues to be the norm among industrial entrepreneurs.
3. Analyse how legislative interventions, such as the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act of 2005, have challenged the traditional patriarchal and patrilineal logic of rural Indian villages.

4. Despite the rise of nuclear households, the “spirit of jointness” remains resilient. Discuss the ceremonial, functional, and psychological bonds that keep rural families connected across geographical distances.
5. Examine how education and the rising sense of individualism are shifting the status of women and the traditional authority of the Karta in contemporary rural society.

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UNIT

Caste in Rural Society

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify how caste system operates in a rural setting
- ◆ discuss theoretical approaches to understand caste
- ◆ understand the terms “purity” and “pollution” as well as the Jajmani system
- ◆ understand caste panchayath and the changes in the caste system

Prerequisite

For centuries, the concept of “Caste” has been more than just a word in the Indian lexicon; it has been the very heartbeat of social existence. Often described as both an institution and an encompassing ideology, caste historically served as the definitive blueprint for a Hindu’s life, determining everything from one’s occupation and diet to their choice of a life partner. Unlike the “open systems” of the West, where individual merit and hard work might allow a person to climb the social ladder, the traditional Indian caste system was famously “closed” a fixed social order where birth was destiny. To understand the Indian village, one must grasp the three pillars that support it: caste, the joint family, and the village community itself. While the ancient *Chaturvarna* system provided the theoretical four-fold division of society (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra), the lived reality is found in the thousands of *Jatis* or sub-castes that govern daily interactions. Today, as we move beyond religious myths to sociological truths, we find that caste is not a stagnant relic of the past. Instead, it is a dynamic force once an instrument of ritual purity, now a powerful tool for political mobilisation and economic bargaining in a rapidly modernising nation.

Keywords

Caste, Endogamy, Sanskritization, Purity and pollution, Jajmani system, Caste panchayat

Discussion

For a long time, caste has been seen as a distinguishing aspect of Indian society. It is not only an institution that defines India's social stratification structure; "caste" has long been thought to symbolise India's heart. It has been regarded as both an institution and an ideology. In terms of social status and places in the social and economic system, "caste" provides a framework for structuring and organising social groups. Based on their birth, it fixes individuals in the social order. Caste is an ideology that legitimises and perpetuates the existing structure of social inequality through a set of beliefs and ideals. It also offers a framework for a typical Hindu to manage his or her life. Apart from being an institution that distinguishes India from other societies, caste epitomises traditional society, a "closed system" in which individuals engage in similar types of work and lead more or less similar lifestyles from generation to generation. The modern industrial societies of the West, on the other hand, are envisioned as "open systems" of social stratification, societies based on class, where people can choose their vocations depending on their abilities and preferences. In such open systems of stratification, individuals might advance up the social hierarchy and alter their class position if they worked hard enough. In the caste system, such individual mobility is not conceivable. Caste has long been thought to be the most extreme form of social inequality.

3.2.1 Caste in Rural Society: Early Explanations of Caste

The Chaturvarna system gave rise to caste stratification in Indian civilisation. Hindu society was split into four varnas according to chaturvarna: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The three essential pillars of the Indian social order are caste, the joint family, and the village.

Caste is derived from the Spanish word "casta," which means "breed" or "lineage." The Sanskrit word for caste is "varna," which means "colour." The Hindu philosophy, customs, traditions, marriage, family, food, work, and dress habits are all linked to caste. In India, it is a deeply ingrained social institution. There are about 3000 castes and sub-castes in India, each with its own set of characteristics. Various reasons concerning the genesis of caste have been offered.

3.2.2 Sociological Frameworks of Inter-Caste Dynamics

In order to understand caste within rural sociology, we must move beyond religious myth to examine the institution through observable social and material truths. Early sociological perspectives, particularly those of Karl Marx and Max



Weber, laid the groundwork for this by viewing caste as a system of economic and status-based stratification. Marx interpreted caste primarily through the lens of material production, arguing that the social rank of groups was determined by their relationship to land ownership. He categorised the village into three functional groups: those who worked the land, artisans, and service classes, noting that the division of labour was governed by “set laws” derived from material conditions rather than formal legislation. Max Weber, meanwhile, defined caste as the most extreme form of a “status group.” In his view, members were identified by their social standing and a specific “manner of life” restricted by interactional constraints. This hierarchy was maintained by the ceremonial antagonism between “purity” and “defilement,” placing the Brahmins at the pinnacle due to their “clean” priestly occupations.

The sociological study of caste is generally divided into two frameworks: the Attributional Approach and the Interactional Approach. The Attributional Approach, supported by scholars like G.S. Ghurye, J.H. Hutton, and M.N. Srinivas, focuses on the inherent characteristics that define the system. Ghurye identified six core attributes: the segmental division of society by birth, a clear hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and social intercourse (such as the distinction between Kachcha and Pakka food), civil and religious disabilities, lack of occupational choice, and endogamy (marrying within the group). Hutton reinforced these points, emphasising that endogamy and strict commensality (food sharing) rules are the “essence” of caste. Srinivas added a dynamic layer to this approach with the concept of Sanskritization, where lower castes adopt “high” traits like vegetarianism to seek positional mobility, and the Dominant Caste, which wields power through numerical strength and land ownership.

In contrast, the Interactional Approach focuses on how castes actually rank and relate to one another in practice. McKim Marriott and F.G. Bailey demonstrated that ritual hierarchy is often inextricably linked to economic and political power. Bailey’s study of Bisipara showed that when a caste loses land, its ritual status and interactional patterns, such as whose food is accepted, also plummet. Louis Dumont provided the most influential interactional theory in his work *Homo Hierarchicus*, arguing that the entire system is governed by the ideological opposition between the Pure and the Impure. For Dumont, hierarchy is a religious principle where status (the Priest) is superior to and separate from power (the King). He viewed the Jajmani system not merely as an economic exchange but as a ritual expression of interdependence.

Ultimately, while the attributional approach highlights the fixed qualities of caste, such as birth right, dialect, and dress, the interactional approach illustrates how these qualities function in a local, practical context. The two are deeply intertwined; attributes provide the criteria for identity, while interactions define the lived hierarchy. In the traditional village, this manifests as a complex system of division where every aspect of life, from one’s occupation to the distance one must maintain from others, is dictated by a shared, albeit unequal, social map.

3.2.3 Recent Changes in the Caste System

In India, there have been recent changes in the caste structure. Among the sociologists who have demonstrated that Indian society was never static are Romila Thapar (1979), Burton Stein (1968), Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1957), A.R. Desai (1987), and M.N. Srinivas (1969 and 1978). The three conventional pathways of social mobility were Sanskritisation, migration, and religious

conversion. Lower castes or tribes may climb through the caste system by accumulating wealth and political power. As a result, they may claim higher caste status while also Sanskritising their lifestyle, i.e., emulating upper caste lifestyles and practices. The caste structure in rural areas has seen considerable changes in recent years as a result of new forces such as industrialisation, urbanisation, politicisation, modern education and legal systems, land reforms, and development.

The caste system's shifting character is illustrated by the principles of Sanskritisation and Difference. In actuality, changes and mobility in the caste system as a result of multiple political and economic pressures have been one of the principal areas of study in Indian sociology and social anthropology. According to these studies, the caste system has always interacted with and responded to social pressures such as politics and economics.

- ◆ The history of caste dynamics has been divided into two parts: pre-modern and modern times.
- ◆ There were two key factors in society during the pre-modern period, i.e., before the establishment of British power in India, that caused significant population mobility. One of the most fundamental causes in society that created considerable movement in the caste system was the availability of marginal land due to a static demographic situation: 1. the fluidity of the political system; and 2. the availability of marginal land due to a static demographic scenario.

3.2.3.1 Structural Change

The British began the process of modernisation and westernisation by enacting a series of new economic and political policies that had a significant impact on social formation. As a result, the caste system underwent significant alterations, including the creation of new structures

and roles. Srinivas mentions a number of well-known and significant economic and political policies:

1. The establishment of a single governmental function that spans the entire subcontinent;
2. The establishment of bureaucratic and military organisations;
3. Land survey and settlement activity;
4. The adoption of legal reforms;
5. The introduction of private land ownership;
6. The creation of new economic opportunities in towns and cities;
7. The introduction of the notion of equality before the law for all citizens;
8. Ensuring that no one is imprisoned without cause as a result of a racial crime.
9. Establishing the right to freely practice and propagate one's religion and culture.

Because of the aforementioned factors, the conventional social structure has been transformed today. Caste has gained the power to participate as interest groups and associations in politics with the advent of representative parliamentary systems. This has been identified by M.N. Srinivas (1982) and Paul Brass (1965). Many caste groups have formed to communicate caste interests across sub-caste divisions. The Brahmins have lost their historical dominance in South India. The Kamma and Reddi in Andhra Pradesh, the Lingayat and Okkaliga in Karnataka, the SNDP and NSS in Kerala, and the Ahir, Jat, and Kurmi in North India have emerged as the new dominant castes at local and regional levels due to their economic and political strength.



The rise of castes as pressure groups and the formation of caste associations both point to growing caste participation in politics. Castes and caste groups now play a substantial and pervasive role in political processes, particularly in elections and seat distribution in government-run institutions.

Lower castes and sub-castes are more likely to meet these criteria. Political parties centred on lower castes have formed, such as the B.S.P., I.P.F., S.P., D.M.K., and others. Additionally, the emergence of anti-Brahmin movements by numerically more powerful lower castes seeking a greater role in political processes illustrates the increasing politicisation of caste. People tend to vote for candidates from their own caste, and political parties are well aware of this reality. They make every effort to field candidates from the constituency's numerically largest castes when all other criteria remain the same. As a result, it has become common practice for political parties to field candidates from the same caste in elections.

Traditional backward castes in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, such as the Nadar, Vanniyar, and Mahar, have also improved their social status. During his studies in Sripuram hamlet in Tanjore district, André Béteille (1971) noted the phenomenon of status incongruence. Traditionally, the village's land and political authority were held by the upper classes. As a result of various institutional changes, they have lost control of political affairs to intermediate Rural Social Structure castes, although they have not lost their land in any substantial way.

We can deduce that the caste system has always interacted with and responded to the economic and political forces of society. As a consequence of changes in economic and political structures and processes over the modern era, many ancient aspects of the caste system have been eliminated, and new features and functions have developed.

The preceding analysis presents a picture of caste or the caste system that aligns with Dipankar Gupta's concept of caste as a discrete category and the caste system as a structure based on the 'different' principle.

The process of modernization, prompted by the execution of several economic and political measures, resulted in substantial changes to the caste structure during the time of independence. For example: a) caste and occupation, b) the collapse of the jajmani system, c) cleanliness and pollution as decaying concepts, d) the disintegration of inter-caste power relationships, e) the creation of caste organisations, and f) increased caste political participation or politicisation.

3.2.4 The Caste Panchayat

A definitive explanation of how and when caste councils or panchayats were established is unknown. It is widely agreed that these were only formed after stable village life became practicable. Each village comprises more than one caste, and each caste has its own set of standards, rules, and behaviour patterns. The cultural texts and ethnic callings of the caste councils serve as the foundation for these rules.

Caste panchayats (caste councils) are formed by members of specific castes to adhere to caste-based social norms, customs, and religious values, as well as to resolve conflicts among their own members. Each caste has its own panchayat, which includes both upper and lower castes.

- ◆ Caste panchayats hold meetings, plan celebrations, care for their caste's ill, and serve as a type of local government.
- ◆ The caste council, also known as the caste panchayat, is the governing body of each caste.
- ◆ Caste panchayats exercised immense power over their members until recently.

- ◆ These panchayats were once exclusively in charge of a narrow area where only members of the same caste could interact.
- ◆ Today, these councils have multiple branches across the country.

The following are some of the key violations that the Caste Council was aware of

- ◆ Failure to abide by the terms and conditions of marriage.
- ◆ Divorce that is not mutually agreed upon.
- ◆ Elopement of a member of one caste with a member of another caste.
- ◆ Violations of the endogamy and exogamy norms.
- ◆ Settling quarrels between in-laws.
- ◆ Inter-dining with marginalised people.

Caste councils have long served as efficient judicial-social entities, issuing writs and enforcing fines against members who refuse to pay a membership fee. In fact, the writ or command of the Caste Council reigned supreme in all aspects of its members' lives. The usefulness of these bodies has dwindled over time. Modern courts of law do not recognise these institutions, nor do they acknowledge their judgments. Changes in circumstances, improved mobility and interpersonal connections, the development of statutory courts, the advent of secular village panchayats with legal and constitutional backing, and modern laws outlawing detrimental deeds have all been suggested as reasons for their disintegration. To sum up, the goal of the caste council panchayat is to handle cases and punish offenders among their caste members. Adultery, refusal to fulfil a marriage commitment, non-payment of debt, petty assaults, breaches of traditions, and other transgressions were some of the offences dealt with by these panchayats until their eventual decline.

The Jajmani System

The 'Jajmani' system is an integral part of India's traditional rural life. William Wiser (1936), S.C. Dube (1955), Opler and Singh (1986), K. Ishwaran (1967), and Lewis (1956) are just a few sociologists who have studied it. The patron or beneficiary of specialised services is referred to as a 'jajman,' and the entire relationship is termed 'jajmani.'

- ◆ The jajmani system consists of economic, social, and ritual links that exist in a village among distinct caste groups.
- ◆ Some castes act as patrons, while others serve under this arrangement.
- ◆ The serving castes provide services to the landowning upper and intermediate castes in exchange for monetary and in-kind compensation.
- ◆ The jajmani system is based not only on dominance but also on reciprocity.
- ◆ Interdependence, reciprocity, and cooperation among jati and village households are essential to the jajmani system.

The patron castes are the major landowning dominant castes, such as the Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars, and Jats in the north; Kamma, Lingayat, and Reddi in Andhra Pradesh; and Patels in Gujarat. Examples of service castes include barbers, carpenters, blacksmiths, water-carriers, and leather workers.

In the case of service castes, jajmani ties are not limited to the hamlet. They often provide services to populations in the surrounding area. For instance, if a settlement lacks a barber, the barber from an adjacent village may offer his services. Additionally, castes are divided into sub-castes, and certain sub-castes maintain long-term ties with patron castes and sub-castes in nearby villages.

In the last few decades, the jajmani system has undergone significant changes.



Today, this arrangement does not apply to every caste in the village. In addition to the jajmani relationship, there have always been contractual wage labour links between the castes that provide goods and services and their customers. As payments in the jajmani system were traditionally made in kind rather than money, the emergence of a cash economy necessitated adaptations. Many occupational castes have migrated to urban areas to take advantage of new opportunities that have arisen in towns and cities. The jajmani system has declined due to the effects of modern living, education, transportation, and communication. Barter is now virtually obsolete as a means of exchange, with cash being the preferred method of payment.

The journey of the caste system from the pre-modern era to the contemporary period reveals a remarkable capacity for both persistence and transformation. Sociological pioneers like Marx and Weber helped us understand caste not only as a religious mandate but also as a system of land ownership and status stratification. Meanwhile, scholars like G.S. Ghurye and M.N. Srinivas mapped the internal

mechanics of the system, from the strict rules of endogamy and commensality to the aspirational process of Sanskritisation.

The decline of the Jajmani system the traditional web of reciprocal service and the waning influence of the Caste Panchayats signal a shift from a ritual economy to a cash-based, legalistic society. As traditional barriers like “purity and pollution” decay, new structures have emerged. Caste has moved from the temple to the ballot box, with “Dominant Castes” like the Reddis, Jats, and Vanniars leveraging their numerical and economic strength to become formidable political pressure groups.

Ultimately, while the “closed system” of the past is opening up through education, land reforms, and urbanisation, caste remains a significant identity. It no longer just dictates who one can eat with, but rather who one should vote for. As India continues to balance its ancient heritage with modern democratic values, the caste system continues to adapt, proving that while its functions may change, its role in the Indian social consciousness remains deeply rooted.

Recap

- ◆ Caste, joint family, and the village serve as the three essential foundations of traditional Indian social organization.
- ◆ The word “Caste” stems from the Spanish *Casta* (breed/lineage), while the Sanskrit *Varna* (color) refers to the four-fold Vedic stratification: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras.
- ◆ Marx viewed caste as a system of material production based on land ownership, while Weber defined it as an extreme “status group” governed by a specific way of life and the concept of purity versus defilement.
- ◆ The Attributional approach (Ghurye, Hutton) focuses on fixed traits like endogamy and hierarchy, while the Interactional approach (Marriott, Dumont) focuses on how castes rank each other through ritual and economic exchanges.

- ◆ G.S. Ghurye identified six definitive traits of caste: segmental division, hierarchy, restrictions on food/intercourse, civil/religious disabilities, lack of occupational choice, and endogamy.
- ◆ Louis Dumont argued that the conflict between “pure” and “impure” is the underlying principle of the Hindu caste hierarchy, separating ritual status from secular power.
- ◆ A traditional rural economy of reciprocity where “Jajmans” (patron land-owners) exchange grain or goods for the services of “Kamins” (service castes). This system is currently declining due to the cash economy.
- ◆ Traditionally considered a “closed system,” mobility occurs through Sanskritization (adopting upper-caste habits), migration, or religious conversion.
- ◆ Caste has shifted from a ritual identity to a political interest group. Lower castes have mobilized into parties (e.g., BSP, SP) to challenge traditional Brahminical dominance.
- ◆ These traditional councils once held supreme judicial power over caste norms (marriage, dining) but have declined in authority due to modern statutory courts and secular village governance.

Objective Questions

1. Which scholar first recognised the scientific value of the kinship system?
2. According to Karl Marx, what was the primary factor that determined social rank in Indian villages?
3. Max Weber classified caste as the most extreme form of what type of group?
4. What term did Louis Dumont use to describe his thorough theory of the Hindu caste system?
5. Which French sociologist authored the famous book *Homo Hierarchicus*?
6. What is the term for kinship established specifically through marriage?

7. What is the term for kinship based on “blood” or common descent?
8. Which Sanskrit term refers to an exogamous category or clan within a sub-caste?
9. What is the rule that mandates marriage within one’s own social or caste group?
10. What is the term for the belief that people are descended from a particular animal, plant, or natural object?
11. In the context of food restrictions, what term refers to food prepared with ghee that can be accepted from other castes?
12. What term did M.N. Srinivas use for the process of a lower caste emulating the lifestyle of “twice-born” castes?
13. Which scholar divided India into four kinship zones (North, South, East, and Central)?
14. In which kinship zone is “village exogamy” a predominant feature?
15. What is the term for a marriage where a man from a higher caste marries a woman from a lower caste?
16. In the Jajmani system, what is the specific term used for the “patron”?
17. In the Jajmani system, what is the term used for the “service-providing” castes?
18. What is the name of the traditional council that handles internal caste disputes and norms?
19. What is the most severe punishment a Caste Panchayat can impose, involving the cutting off of social ties?
20. According to M.N. Srinivas, what is a caste called when it possesses numerical strength, land, and political power?

Answers

1. L.H. Morgan
2. Land ownership (or relationship to land)
3. Status group
4. “Ideal type”
5. Louis Dumont
6. Affinal
7. Consanguine
8. Gotra
9. Endogamy
10. Totemism
11. Pakka
12. Sanskritization
13. Iravati Karve
14. Northern (North India)
15. Hypergamy
16. Jajman
17. Kamin
18. Caste Panchayat (or Caste Council)
19. Excommunication (or Hukka-Pani Band)
20. Dominant Caste



Assignments

1. Define the Jajmani System as a traditional rural institution. Discuss how this system illustrates both “reciprocity” and “hierarchy.”
2. Define “Dominant Caste” and explain why numerical strength is just as important as land ownership and political power in achieving this status. Provide examples of dominant castes in both North and South India.
3. Modernity vs. Tradition: Discuss the decline of the Caste Panchayat and the Jajmani System. What role did the “cash economy” and “modern legal systems” play in breaking these traditional rural institutions?
4. Critically analyse recent changes in the caste system in India.

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BLOCK

Agrarian Relations



UNIT

Agrarian Relations and the Mode of Production Debate

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the key concepts of agrarian relations
- ◆ describe how different landownership systems shape rural social structures
- ◆ analyze the major arguments in the mode of production debate
- ◆ compare the perspectives of leading scholars working on Indian agriculture

Prerequisite

Before you begin this unit, imagine you are stepping into a village in India, where every field, every household, and every relationship tells a story about who owns the land and who works on it. To follow these stories meaningfully, it is helpful to refresh a few basic ideas. You should already have a simple understanding of how rural society works: who the farmers are, who owns the land, and how people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Think of the familiar concepts you have studied earlier, such as caste, class, and the idea of a village community. These ideas will act as guiding lamps as you enter the world of agrarian relations, where power, inequality, and everyday life are closely tied to land.

It is also useful to recall some basic sociological thinking, especially how structures and relationships influence each other. For example, you may have learned that social systems are shaped by economic activities, and people's roles depend on how resources are shared. Keep these ideas in mind as you read about the Mode of Production debate, where scholars argue about how agriculture in India should be understood: whether it is feudal, capitalist, or something unique. With this background, you will find it easier to explore how different thinkers interpret agrarian change and how landownership patterns shape the lives of people in rural India.



Keywords

Feudalism, Capitalism, Mode of production, Agrarian relations

Discussion

During the 1960s and 70s, a major debate took place among Marxist scholars in India and abroad regarding the nature of the mode of production in Indian agriculture. For almost fifteen years, social scientists such as Ashok Rudra, Amit Bhaduri, Utsa Patnaik, Jairus Banaji, John Harriss, Daniel Thorner, Nirmal Chandra, Pradhan Prasad, and Hamza Alavi actively discussed how to understand agrarian relations in India. The central questions were:

1. What type of production relations dominates Indian agriculture?
2. Are these relations pre-capitalist, semi-feudal, or capitalist?
3. How do institutions such as landlordism, sharecropping, tenancy, rent extraction, and unfree labour fit into this picture?
4. Did colonial rule shape Indian agrarian relations?
5. Was petty commodity production gradually moving towards capitalism?

This debate drew inspiration from an earlier, famous Marxist discussion on the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe. That earlier debate involved scholars like Paul Sweezy, Maurice Dobb, and Rodney Hilton. In India, however, the debate gained further energy because it was taking place during a period of radical political mobilization, such as the Naxalbari movement.

The study of India's agrarian structure has always attracted sociologists and economists. One major discussion in this area is known as the Mode of Production Debate. This debate began in the late 1960s among Marxist scholars, primarily through articles published in the journal of *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*. The central question was: What kind of production system exists in Indian agriculture: is it feudal, semi-feudal, capitalist, or something in-between? Scholars sought to understand whether Indian agriculture was moving towards capitalism, how labour was organised, and how historical forces such as colonialism shaped rural society. A key question was: Has capitalism developed in Indian agriculture? Scholars disagreed on this issue.

One group of scholars argued that there was no significant difference between colonial and post-independence agriculture. According to them, both periods exhibited similar forms of exploitation, primarily through wage labour and the landlord-tenant system. They believed India was slowly but steadily moving towards capitalism.

Another group contended that colonial rule created a unique type of agrarian structure. Under colonialism, peasants became poorer and more dependent, rather than becoming free wage labourers. After independence, although the legacy continued, new economic policies permitted some capitalist development. Due to this complexity, some scholars even proposed the idea of a "colonial mode of production," distinct from both feudalism and capitalism.

Another important contribution came from empirical studies. Farm Management Studies in the 1950s demonstrated that small farms were more productive than large farms. Amartya Sen explained this by pointing out that small farms rely mainly on family labour, which is cheaper and more efficient than hired labour. However, other scholars questioned whether this pattern held true across all of India.

By the 1960s, the debate took two directions:

- ◆ One group (Rudra, Patnaik, Chattopadhyay) questioned whether capitalism had truly arrived in Indian agriculture.
- ◆ Another group (Bhaduri, Nirmal Chandra) argued that India still had semi-feudal relations that impeded capitalist development.

4.1.1 Significance of the Debate

Even though scholars disagreed, the debate helped us understand:

- ◆ why rural inequality persists
- ◆ how class structures in villages are formed
- ◆ how colonial legacies continue to shape Indian agriculture
- ◆ why capitalist development in India is uneven and incomplete
- ◆ how technology and global markets affect agrarian relations

For students of sociology like you, the mode of production debate is important because it illustrates how economic structures, social relations, and historical forces combine to shape rural India.

4.1.1.1 What is Mode of Production?

The mode of economic production remains a central concept for understanding social change. According to this view, the forces of production, together with the relations of production, constitute the foundation upon which the economic structure and social history of every society are built.

In any production process, three important elements interact with each other. The first is the *object of labour*, the thing that human beings work on. This may include natural materials like land, minerals, fish, and ores, or materials that have already been processed, such as yarn in textiles or metal in engineering units. The second element is the *instruments of labour*, which refers to the tools or equipment used to work on these objects. These range from simple tools like spades and hammers to advanced machinery such as tractors, machine tools, and large industrial systems. Buildings, factories, transport routes, and storage facilities also fall under this category because they indirectly support the production process.

Together, the objects of labour and the instruments of labour form the *means of production*. When these means of production interact with *labour*, that is, human effort, skill, and purposeful activity, they produce the overall productive capacity of society. These productive forces develop over time, and as they change, the *relations of production* also change. Relations of production refer to the social relationships people enter into during the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of goods. Central to these relations is the question of who owns the means of production. This ownership determines class structure, social status, and living conditions. When the productive forces and the relations of production come together, they form what is called a *mode of production*.



4.1.1.2 Agrarian Relations in India

Agrarian relations in India represent the intricate intersection of social, economic, and legal structures governing land ownership, labor, and production. These relations are shaped by history, **class, caste, and state policy**. Understanding agrarian relations helps us see how rural society functions and why problems like poverty and inequality persist in the countryside.

Historically, these relations were defined by exploitative British colonial systems like Zamindari, which institutionalized a hierarchy of powerful landlords and impoverished tenants. Following Independence, the state attempted to dismantle these feudal remnants through Land Reforms aimed at redistributing surplus land and securing tenancy rights. While successful in states like Kerala and West Bengal these reforms were elsewhere hindered by political loopholes, allowing traditional power centers to remain largely intact. One famous example is Operation Barga in West Bengal, which recorded the names of sharecroppers and gave them legal rights against eviction.

Sociologically, the agrarian structure is inseparable from the caste-class nexus. Land remains the primary source of power, often monopolized by dominant castes (such as Jats or Marathas), while Dalits and lower-caste groups remain disproportionately landless. As B.R. Ambedkar observed, this land monopoly serves as the material foundation for caste oppression in rural India. Since the 1960s, the Green Revolution further transformed these dynamics by shifting agriculture toward a capitalist model; while productivity increased, the benefits favored wealthy farmers, replacing traditional patron-client (Jajmani) systems with impersonal, wage-based labor.

In the modern era of economic liberalization, agrarian relations face new crises characterized by high cultivation costs and a cycle of debt for marginal farmers. Current trends include the fragmentation of landholdings, where most farms are too small for subsistence, and the feminization of agriculture, as women increasingly manage farms while men migrate to cities for work. Additionally, there is a growing casualization of labor, with more workers relying on insecure daily wages. Ultimately, while India has moved away from colonial feudalism, deep-seated inequalities in land ownership continue to shape the social and economic struggles of the rural peasantry.

4.1.1.3 Pre-Capitalist Mode of Production

A pre-capitalist mode of production is marked by low levels of technology and simple tools. Production is mainly for subsistence rather than for the market. Labour is often unfree and may include bonded labour or labour tied to landlords. Coercion, both economic and non-economic, is common in extracting surplus from the direct producers. Production and trade are mostly local, and money plays a very limited role. Rent is often collected in kind rather than in cash, and technological change is slow. Capital, when invested, goes mostly into trade or money lending rather than into productive improvements.

4.1.1.4 Capitalist Mode of Production

Capital is the main means of production. It exists in different forms, such as money or credit, which are used to buy labour power and the materials needed for production. A capitalist mode of production has several distinct features. Labour becomes free wage labour, and production is heavily dependent on markets. Capital is continuously

reinvested, and surplus is accumulated for profit. Production becomes generalised and commodity-oriented rather than tied to local needs. Class conflict between capitalists and workers becomes central to this system.

4.1.1.5 Debate on Mode of Production

The broader debate on modes of production began with the exchange between Maurice Dobb and Paul Sweezy in the 1950s regarding the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe. Later, scholars like A. G. Frank and Ernesto Laclau expanded this debate to Latin America. Frank argued that countries like Chile were underdeveloped because they were deeply integrated into global capitalism. Laclau disagreed, asserting that Latin America could not be called capitalist because much of its labour was unfree. He believed that feudal and capitalist forms coexisted, and that capitalism had not fully developed in the region.

4.1.1.6 The Debate in Indian Agriculture

In India, the mode of production debate began in the 1960s. An early study by S. C. Gupta classified Indian peasants into capitalist farmers, market-oriented family farms, and smallholders. However, the debate gained prominence after Ashok Rudra and colleagues conducted a study on big farmers in Punjab in 1969. They looked for signs of capitalist farming, such as the use of hired labour, machinery, production for the market, and profit-oriented behaviour. However, their findings did not strongly support the existence of a capitalist farmer class. Rudra argued that even in this relatively advanced agricultural region, capitalist farming was not widespread. According to him, the number of farmers who used a high proportion of hired labour, produced large surpluses for the market, and invested heavily in machinery was statistically very small.

This conclusion was challenged by scholars like Daniel Thorner and Utsa Patnaik, who argued that new capitalist farmers were emerging. Patnaik responded by criticising Rudra's method, stating that simply using wage labour or producing a market surplus was not sufficient to define capitalist farming. For her, capitalist relations required continuous accumulation of surplus and reinvestment. She argued that in post-colonial countries like India, capitalism had developed in a limited and distorted way, without fully transforming the agrarian structure. She also warned that property ownership or farm size alone could not be used to label a system as capitalist or feudal. At this point, Paresh Chattopadhyay entered the debate, maintaining that property relations could not be separated from relations of production, as Rudra seemed to suggest.

A major debate soon unfolded involving Indian and international scholars such as Paresh Chattopadhyay, Ranjit Sau, Hamza Alavi, Jairus Banaji, Harry Cleaver, Amit Bhaduri, and Pradhan Prasad.

American sociologist William McEachern (1980) studied the debate on Indian agriculture and suggested that we can understand whether farming is becoming more capitalist by checking four main signs:

1. First, he suggested looking for widespread commodity production. This means farmers are not just growing food for their families but are producing large quantities to sell in the market. When farming becomes more market-driven, it moves towards capitalism.
2. Second, he discussed free wage labour. In capitalist farming, people work on farms for wages, just like workers in factories. They are free to take up jobs wherever they want, instead of being tied to one landlord or one piece of land.



3. Third, McEachern explained the role of capital investment. This means farmers use money to buy tractors, fertilisers, pumps, and other modern tools. When farmers invest more capital to increase production, agriculture becomes more modern and capitalist.
4. Finally, he noted the declining importance of sharecropping and usury. Sharecropping is when a farmer works in someone else's land and gives a part of the harvest as rent. Usury means borrowing money at very high interest rates from moneylenders. These are older feudal practices. When they become less common, it shows that agriculture is changing.

William McEachern (1980) stated that when we see more market production, more wage labour, more investment, and less sharecropping and usury, agriculture is moving toward a capitalist form.

4.1.1.7 The Argument for Semi-Feudalism

One influential strand of the debate argued that Indian agriculture remained semi-feudal. Daniel Thorner, writing in the 1950s, spoke of "built-in depressors" in Indian agriculture: factors such as unequal land distribution, tenancy and sharecropping, high interest rates, exploitative landlords, and slow technological change. These conditions, he argued, kept peasants poor and agriculture stagnant. This perspective came to be widely interpreted as describing semi-feudal relations.

Amit Bhaduri gave this argument a stronger theoretical basis through a mathematical model based on village studies in West Bengal. In his model, sharecropping tenants borrowed money from landlords (jotedars) at very high interest rates. Because tenants had

to pay both rent and interest, their output was always less than what was needed to escape debt. Landlords, therefore, benefitted from keeping tenants indebted and discouraged technological improvement. This created a classic semi-feudal trap where productive forces could not grow.

Amit Bhaduri argued that Indian agriculture was semi-feudal. He pointed to widespread sharecropping, the permanent indebtedness of tenants, and the dominance of landlords who were also moneylenders, which restricted market access for small farmers. These factors prevented productive investment. Pradhan Prasad made similar observations in Bihar and argued that big landowners avoided mechanisation to maintain their control over tenants.

Studies from Bihar and West Bengal by Pradhan Prasad and Nirmal Chandra supported this model. They showed that landlords resisted changes that could empower tenants or reduce their dependence. Chandra argued that colonial rule strengthened such forces and created a massive labour surplus. Since industrial development was weak, small peasants had no alternative but to continue self-exploiting. Ranjit Sau added that capitalist farmers might find it difficult to replace such peasants because they were willing to work for extremely low returns.

Interestingly, Ashok Rudra later shifted his earlier view. In 1974, he argued that landlords in West Bengal were, in fact, investing in new technologies and accumulating land. He also questioned the idea of vast surplus labour by pointing out that farmers often struggled to find adequate labour during peak seasons. According to his new position, capitalist relations were more widespread than earlier thought.

4.1.1.8 The Colonial Mode of Production Perspective

Hamza Alavi and Jairus Banaji argued for a colonial mode of production, suggesting that agricultural changes in India were shaped by colonial policies and class alignments within the political system. Post-independence reforms, community development programmes, and the Green Revolution further transformed the agrarian structure, but the legacy of colonialism remained significant.

Jairus Banaji made a major contribution in this area. He explored how relations such as tenancy or money lending could coexist with wage labour. Drawing on Marx, he distinguished between “formal subsumption,” where producers remain independent but are drawn into capitalist value circuits, and “real subsumption,” where workers are directly employed under capitalist production. In formal subsumption, capital takes control of an existing labour process without changing how work is actually done. Traditional methods continue, but workers now produce under capitalist control. For example, a landlord employs workers who farm using traditional tools, but the produce is sold for profit. In contrast, real subsumption involves capital not only controlling labour but also transforming the production process itself to increase productivity and profit. This transformation could involve the introduction of machines, new technology, or scientific farming to boost output.

Banaji argued that even if peasants appear to work independently, they can still be deeply integrated into capitalist exploitation. For instance, during 1850–90, peasants in the Deccan were drawn into producing cotton and cash crops for cities like Bombay and Pune. Through unequal exchange and moneylending practices, capital extracted surplus from them even without direct wage labour. Banaji therefore contended

that many forms of tenancy in India were not pre-capitalist at all; they were simply different expressions of capitalist relations. Moneylending, rather than being a pre-capitalist institution, became a mechanism through which capital dominated peasants.

Hamza Alavi offered a similar perspective. He noted that peasants often survive longer than urban petty producers because they can feed themselves from their land. However, over time, they also come under the pressure of capitalist relations, first formally and then through direct wage labour.

Kathleen Gough, studying Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu, argued that capitalist relations became dominant from the late 19th century onwards, even though some pre-capitalist cultural practices remained. She pointed to rapid agricultural growth after Independence, driven by new technologies such as hybrid seeds, fertilisers, tractors, and pump sets. She regarded this as clear evidence of capitalist development.

4.1.1.9 Other Perspectives

Utsa Patnaik argued that labour in Indian agriculture may be un-free in some respects, but this alone does not determine whether a system is feudal or capitalist. Instead, she emphasised the importance of whether surplus is reinvested for productive growth. According to her, Indian agriculture is still largely pre-capitalist, although small pockets of capitalist farming do exist. She highlighted three features of pre-capitalism in India: lack of productive reinvestment, personalised relations of dependence, and the dominance of moneylending and trade over productive investment.

4.1.1.10 Caste, Class, and the Expansion of the Debate

Scholars like Gail Omvedt and Ashok Rudra added a new dimension to the mode of production debate by highlighting caste



oppression. They argued that social oppression and caste-based exploitation must be fought alongside economic exploitation. Rudra revisited historical debates and contended that scholars who claimed India had been feudal such as R.S. Sharma or B.N.S. Yadav were largely mistaken. He insisted that any rural movement must also combat the reactionary elements of Brahmanical ideology, which shaped social hierarchy in the countryside.

4.1.1.11 Gail Omvedt's View

American sociologist Gail Omvedt (1981) believed that the mode of production debate began when Marxist scholars were trying to understand the rapidly changing realities of Indian agriculture. However, she felt that the debate had a significant weakness: it focused too much on the colonial period and did not study the post-independence changes deeply enough. She emphasised caste rather than class. Omvedt argued that agrarian relations in India cannot be understood solely in terms of class. Caste plays a central role in determining access to land, labour, and power in rural society. She highlighted that anti-caste movements are major forces underlying agrarian struggles.

Omvedt explained that capitalism had now become dominant in Indian agriculture, unlike in the pre-independence period. She pointed to several indicators: more than half of the rural population now depended on wage labour, agricultural production had become commodified, market surplus had increased, agricultural tools and inputs were industrially produced, and modern methods of cultivation had spread. This meant that the primary form of surplus extraction in rural India was capitalist.

Using information from agricultural censuses and surveys, Omvedt (1981) stated that Indian agriculture has become more complicated over time. She identified three major classes in rural India:

1. **Capitalist farmers:** wealthy farmers who invest money, use machines, and produce mainly for the market.
2. **Middle peasants:** farmers with enough land to survive but not enough to become big capitalists.
3. **Semi-proletarian poor peasants and labourers:** individuals with very little or no land, who must work for wages to survive.

Omvedt also stressed that Indian capitalism did not grow in a straightforward manner. It developed in a post-colonial society influenced by global forces such as imperialism and by internal issues like caste hierarchies and gender inequalities. She highlighted that the mode of production debate was not merely academic; it was connected to real struggles happening in villages. These included the Naxalbari uprising, movements by agricultural labourers, and severe caste violence, such as the Kilvenmani massacre of 1968, where Dalit labourers were killed. She believed that to truly understand Indian agriculture, we must examine economic changes alongside caste, gender, politics, and people's struggles.

4.1.1.12 Studies on Rural Class Structure

Much of the debate was strengthened by detailed empirical studies conducted by Mencher, Chandra, Patnaik, Rudra, Prasad, Bardhan, and others. Their work explored how class and caste were closely linked in the countryside. They analysed labour exploitation, shifting relations among different peasant groups, and the hybrid nature of big landowners, who often displayed both feudal and capitalist features. New tensions were also observed between large landowners and wealthy peasants on one side, and poor peasants and landless labourers on the other.

Jan Breman's research provided insights into labour bondage, demonstrating that various forms of unfree labour could survive within capitalism. Rajat Ray studied the historical evolution of landlordism in Bengal, shedding light on how power operated within rural society.

In the Hindi-speaking belt, researchers noted new alliances emerging among different class and caste groups. A major shift occurred as middle castes (now referred to as OBCs) began challenging the dominance of traditional upper castes. This social transformation later became evident in the slogan "Forward March of the Backward" and the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations for OBC reservations. Most scholars believed that the main conflict in rural India was between big landowners and rich farmers versus agricultural workers, such as landless labourers and small farmers. However, they did not fully agree on the role that middle-level farmers played in this conflict.

4.1.2 Indian Capitalism and Colonialism

After nearly fifteen years of debate, Alice Thorner summarised the general conclusion: capitalism now dominated Indian agriculture, just as it had in industry. However, she added an important caution. Indian capitalism had developed in a colonial context, which was very different from the conditions under which capitalism emerged in Europe. Therefore, it could not be assumed that capitalist development in India would follow the same trajectory.

Thorner pointed out that certain features such as tenancy, sharecropping, or small landholdings do not automatically indicate feudalism. Similarly, the presence of wage labour alone does not prove capitalism. However, she observed an important trend: agricultural production was shifting away from tenant exploitation and moving towards large-scale or intensive farming based on hired labour. At the same time, bonded and tied labour had gradually been supplanted by free wage labour paid in cash. Investments in scientific agriculture had increased production in several regions. Nonetheless, she stressed that capitalist growth could not resolve the deeper issues of access to land and food security for the rural poor. These problems persisted despite technological improvements.

4.1.2.1 The Impact of the Green Revolution

The Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s changed the nature of this debate. New technologies and machines were introduced, but only wealthy farmers could afford them. This widened the inequality between big and small farmers. Sociologist Dhanagare pointed out that the benefits of the Green Revolution were primarily captured by large farmers, deepening class and caste inequalities in villages.

Some scholars argued that these technological changes represented ways in which capitalism entered agriculture. Contract farming is one such example, where corporations control production decisions, pushing agriculture closer to capitalist relations.



Recap

- ◆ From the 1960s to the 1970s, Marxist scholars intensely debated the mode of production in Indian agriculture.
- ◆ The main question was whether Indian agriculture was feudal, semi-feudal, capitalist, or a mix of different systems.
- ◆ Scholars linked agrarian relations to labour forms, tenancy, sharecropping, moneylending, and market production.
- ◆ The debate was influenced by an earlier European debate on the shift from feudalism to capitalism.
- ◆ Some argued that colonial and post-colonial agrarian structures were similar and showed gradual capitalist development.
- ◆ Others felt colonial rule created a unique agrarian system marked by debt, dependence, and limited wage labour.
- ◆ Amartya Sen's work showed that small farms were often more productive because of efficient family labour.
- ◆ Two main groups emerged: one questioning capitalist development, and the other claiming semi-feudal relations blocked it.
- ◆ Scholars like Amit Bhaduri argued that debt, high interest, and sharecropping created a semi-feudal trap.
- ◆ Others, including Jairus Banaji, claimed that tenancy and moneylending could operate within capitalism, not outside it.
- ◆ Gail Omvedt argued that capitalism had become dominant post-Independence, shaped by caste, class, and global pressures.
- ◆ Empirical studies showed villages with mixed features—some capitalist tendencies and some pre-capitalist remnants.
- ◆ Caste oppression and class exploitation were closely linked, shaping rural conflicts and power structures.
- ◆ Most scholars agreed that the main conflict was between big landowners and labourers, though the role of middle peasants remained debated.
- ◆ The Green Revolution accelerated capitalist tendencies but widened inequalities between rich and poor farmers.

Objective Questions

1. When did the Mode of Production debate in Indian agriculture mainly begin?
2. Which group of scholars primarily contributed to this debate?
3. What was the central question of the Mode of Production debate?
4. Which earlier European debate inspired the Indian discussion?
5. Who showed that small farms were often more productive than large farms?
6. What did one group of scholars argue about the similarity between colonial and post-colonial agriculture?
7. What did the other group argue about the impact of colonialism on agrarian relations?
8. What was Amit Bhaduri's explanation for semi-feudal stagnation?
9. Who argued that capitalist relations can exist even without direct wage labour?
10. What did Gail Omvedt say had become dominant in post-Independence Indian agriculture?
11. What were the three major rural classes identified by Gail Omvedt?
12. Which event in the 1960s and 1970s deepened agrarian inequalities?
13. According to most scholars, what was the main conflict in rural India?
14. What caution did Alice Thorner give about Indian capitalist development?
15. What did sociologists observe about the role of caste in shaping rural class relations?



Answers

1. The late 1960s.
2. Marxist scholars from India and abroad.
3. Whether Indian agriculture was feudal, semi-feudal, capitalist, or mixed.
4. The debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe.
5. Amartya Sen.
6. That both periods showed similar forms of exploitation and slow capitalist growth.
7. That colonial rule created a unique agrarian structure marked by debt and dependence.
8. Sharecropping, indebtedness, and landlord control kept peasants trapped in semi-feudalism.
9. Jairus Banaji.
10. Capitalism.
11. Capitalist farmers, middle peasants, and semi-proletarian poor peasants/labourers.
12. The Green Revolution.
13. Between big landowners (including rich peasants) and agricultural labourers.
14. That Indian capitalism developed in a colonial context and would not follow Europe's path.
15. Caste and class were closely linked, shaping exploitation and rural power relations.

Assignments

1. Briefly discuss why the Mode of Production Debate gained importance in Indian agriculture during the 1960s and 1970s.
2. Explain how Marxist scholars differed in their views on whether Indian agriculture was feudal, semi-feudal, or capitalist.
3. State the main arguments used by scholars who supported the semi-feudal perspective in Indian agriculture.
4. Describe how colonial policies influenced agrarian relations according to the colonial mode of production perspective.
5. Discuss how the Green Revolution reshaped class relations and contributed to the Mode of Production Debate.

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UNIT

Land Ownership and Reforms in India

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the major types of land ownership in India
- ◆ describe how the land relations shape rural social and economic relations
- ◆ analyse the key land reform measures introduced in India
- ◆ evaluate the effectiveness of land reforms in reducing inequality

Prerequisite

If you walk through a village in India, you will see vast stretches of green paddy fields, won't you? On one side, you see a large stretch of land owned by a single family for generations. On the other side, you notice small plots where farmers work from morning to evening, sometimes on their own land and sometimes on land they have taken on lease. As you move further, you see people discussing how land was redistributed after land reform laws and how those changes affected their livelihoods.

To fully understand such scenes, you need a basic foundation before starting this unit. You should already be familiar with some important ideas: what agriculture means in the Indian context, how rural society is organised, and how class and caste influence people's access to resources. It will also help if you know about the history of Indian independence and the social and economic challenges the country faced in the early decades.

Think of this unit as a journey where you will explore who owns land, how ownership patterns were created, why some people have more land than others, and what the government has done to bring fairness to the system. As you move through

the unit, keep asking yourself: How do these land relations shape everyday life in villages? Who benefits, and who does not?

If you come with this basic understanding and curiosity, you will be ready to learn about different types of land ownership, understand the social dynamics surrounding land, analyse major land reforms, and reflect on whether these reforms have truly helped reduce inequality in rural India.

Keywords

Tenant, Labour, Agriculture, Village economy, Caste

Discussion

4.2.1 Importance of Land in the Village Economy

A. R. Desai, in his book *Rural Sociology in India*, explains that the way a society produces goods, its mode of production, plays a key role in shaping its social structure, people's thinking, and their beliefs. Land is an important asset for the survival of socially vulnerable groups. Many depend on land for their overall well-being like access to food, sustaining their livelihoods, and maintaining their cultural and social identity. In rural India, agriculture is the main occupation. Unlike urban industry, agriculture depends directly on nature. Land is the most important resource, and it becomes productive only when people use their labour and skills. From the land, rural communities grow a variety of crops such as food grains, cotton, jute, tea, coffee, and tobacco. Factories in towns and cities then convert these raw agricultural goods into finished products like cloth or sugar. This fundamental difference between agriculture and industry influences the institutions, values, and lifestyles of rural and urban societies.

The level of agricultural production and the way agricultural goods are distributed

among different groups determine the overall economic condition of rural society. In India, traditional and backward farming methods, along with unequal landownership patterns, have contributed to widespread poverty, inequality, and social hierarchy in villages. These factors also shape customs, beliefs, and cultural practices in rural areas.

4.2.1.1 Changing Motives of Agricultural Production

Desai points out that rural sociologists must study the main purpose of agricultural production. Traditionally, Indian villages produced mainly for their own needs. Before British rule, rural economies functioned as subsistence economies in which production was meant to support local consumption. However, during British rule, new land systems like the ryotwari and zamindari turned land into private property and forced farmers to pay taxes and rent in cash. This pushed peasants into debt and made them produce more for the market instead of for themselves. Over time, village economies became increasingly connected to national and global markets.

Desai also describes a modern idea that agriculture should not only serve the needs of



the community but should be planned according to scientifically assessed requirements of the whole society. Supporters of this view argue that planned agriculture along with planned industry can eliminate unnecessary competition, use resources efficiently, and improve the overall standard of living.

4.2.1.2 Techniques of Agricultural Production

The history of agriculture shows three main stages of technological development. The earliest stage is hoe culture, where farming was done by hand with simple tools (not ploughs), which prevailed in pre-colonial Asian, African, and American agrarian communities. This was followed by plough culture, which involved the use of animals and increased productivity. Modern agriculture employs advanced tools such as tractors and chemical fertilizers, enabling the production of much more with less human labour. However, in India, traditional plough-based

agriculture remains common in many regions, and hoe cultivation continues in some places.

The level of technology used affects not only productivity but also how work is divided among people. In simple systems like hoe or plough agriculture, family labour is usually sufficient. In contrast, modern mechanised farming requires many specialised workers such as tractor drivers, mechanics, and technicians. Therefore, studying the working groups created by different farming techniques is an important part of rural sociology. Desai argued that although agricultural production has increased more rapidly after independence than it did under British rule, this growth has come at a heavy social cost. A small class of landlords and wealthy farmers has become more powerful and prosperous, while large sections of the rural population especially small peasants and agricultural labourers have experienced a steady decline in their quality of life. Rather than leading to broad-based



Fig.4.2.1: Hoe Cultivation

rural development, agricultural growth has deepened inequality and reinforced class divisions in the countryside (Desai, 1984).

4.2.1.3 Land Ownership Pattern

Desai highlights that, apart from technology, the landownership system is crucial for understanding rural economic life. Different land systems create different social groups and patterns of inequality. For example, the plough can be used in various systems such as slavery, feudalism, or capitalism, illustrating that technology alone does not determine land relations.

Land relations dictate how agricultural wealth is shared. In the zamindari system, landlords receive a large share of agricultural income, while tenants remain poor. Even with reforms, many tenants continue to lose income and face impoverishment. In capitalist agriculture, wage labourers depend on the labour market for wages. Thus, the type of landownership influences both income distribution and people's motivation to work. Tenants who must give away a large portion of their produce have little incentive to improve cultivation, whereas small landowners may work harder if they can keep most of the harvest.

Land relations also determine the composition of rural society. Under *zamindari*, rural society includes landlords, tenants, and subtenants. Under *ryotwari*, there are mostly small landowners and landless labourers. In capitalist farming, there are owners, managers, technicians, and wage workers. These differences shape the economic, political, and cultural power of each group. Wealthy landlords or capitalists can influence village politics and culture, while poor farmers have a limited voice.

Another key point is that unequal land relations often lead to conflict. In areas with extreme inequality, tensions between

landlords and peasants may result in social unrest. Historically, many rural struggles, including those during the French Revolution and China's land reforms, were rooted in landownership issues. Even in India today, many rural conflicts arise from unequal land distribution.

Finally, Desai explains that access to education and culture also depends on land relations. Groups that receive a larger share of agricultural wealth have greater opportunities for education and cultural participation. This creates long-term differences in knowledge, skills, and status among rural groups.

Desai's analysis shows that the economic structure of agriculture, its motives, techniques, and landownership patterns shape nearly every aspect of rural life. These elements influence not only production and income but also social relations, culture, political power, and the stability of rural society. Understanding these connections is central to the sociological study of rural India.

4.2.2 Types of Land Ownership

Soon after the Indian Constitution came into force, different states began to implement various land reform measures. One of the most important steps was the abolition of intermediaries: people who collected rent from peasants without cultivating the land themselves. Before independence, four major tenancy systems existed in India: the *Ryotwari*, *Mahalwari*, *Zamindari*, and *Jagirdari* systems.

Ryotwari System

The Ryotwari system was introduced by the British in Madras in 1772 and later extended to the Bombay Presidency. In this system, every registered cultivator was recognised as the owner of the land and paid revenue directly to the government. The





Fig.4.2.2: Modernization of agriculture in India

cultivator could sell, mortgage, or sublet his land, and he could not be removed as long as he paid the revenue. Although this system gave cultivators some security and encouraged them to improve their land, it also created a class of dependent peasants because landowners often sublet their land to the landless. After independence, this system was abolished as part of land reforms.

Mahalwari System

The Mahalwari system was another tenancy arrangement introduced during British rule, first in Agra and Awadh and later in Punjab. In this system, the land was owned jointly by village communities or groups of co-sharers. These groups were collectively responsible for paying land revenue. In many villages, landowners cultivated the land themselves, while in others, tenants paid rent in cash or kind. The system worked best when a peasant owned enough land to cultivate with family labour. Like other intermediary systems, Mahalwari was abolished during the land reform programmes of the 1950s.

Zamindari System

The Zamindari system existed in states such as Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, the Bombay Presidency, and Tamil Nadu. Under this system, one or more zamindars owned large plots of land and collected rent from peasants. This system was highly exploitative. Many zamindars were absentee landlords who frequently raised rents, leaving peasants with no security since they did not own the land. There was also little effort to improve agricultural productivity. Writers like Prem Chand effectively described the miserable conditions of peasants under this system, particularly in his novel *Godan*. After independence, states abolished the Zamindari system to protect the rights of cultivators.

Jagirdari System

The Jagirdari system was mainly found in princely states like Rajasthan. Jagirs were granted to military commanders, ministers, and noble families, who collected revenue for their own use or to maintain troops. This system supported a class of people who

lived off the labour of peasants without contributing to agricultural work. Jagirdars often imposed many taxes to maintain the feudal structure and support royal families. *The Rajasthan Jagir Abolition Act*, passed in 1952 and implemented in 1954, ended this system, and similar reforms were carried out in other states.

The abolition of intermediary systems led to several positive outcomes. Powerful intermediaries like zamindars and jagirdars lost their control over land and peasants, reducing exploitation. Land was transferred to actual cultivators, which helped reduce land inequality to some extent. The new landowners had more incentive to improve their land and increase productivity. Former landlords shifted to new occupations, contributing to economic growth. Moreover, the state government began receiving revenue directly from the new landowners, which was then used for agricultural development and rural welfare.

4.2.3 Land Reforms in India

The study of rural sociology mainly focuses on understanding the agrarian social system. Village life and its social and cultural patterns are deeply shaped by people's relationship with land. In this context, tenancy systems become important to study. When we examine tenancy, we look at different types of landowners as well as various categories of tenants and the variations among them. In India, a large share of land is cultivated by tenants and agricultural labourers, who play a crucial role in farm production. Agriculture remains the main source of employment and income for most rural families. So, agricultural productivity greatly affects rural life.

Rural sociology also studies the relationships between landowners, sharecroppers, labourers, and the larger

market where farm produce is sold. However, land in rural India is not distributed equally. Some peasants own large areas of land, while many others are marginal farmers or landless. This unequal distribution of land creates clear social and economic divisions in rural society. In an agrarian economy like India characterised by great scarcity and unequal distribution of land, coupled with a large portion of the rural population living below the poverty line, there were compelling economic and political arguments for land reform. Not surprisingly, it received top priority on the policy agenda at the time of Independence. In the decades following independence, India passed a significant body of land reform legislation. The 1949 Constitution left the adoption and implementation of land and tenancy reforms to state governments, leading to considerable variation in the implementation of these reforms across states. As Gunnar Myrdal pointed out, inequality in rural India is largely linked to landownership, and the poorest people are usually those who do not own land.

In rural areas, land is the most important productive asset. It determines a person's income, employment opportunities, social status, and even authority. For this reason, the study of land tenure systems and land reforms forms a central part of rural sociology. In the next section, we examine how land reforms developed in India.

4.2.3.1 History of Land Reforms

In India's Constitution, land is included in the Concurrent List, meaning both the central and state governments can make laws regarding it. However, in practice, it is mostly the state governments that legislate and implement land reforms. Because of this, different states have adopted different policies, making cross-state comparisons difficult.



The idea of land reforms emerged during India's freedom struggle. National leaders were concerned about the unequal distribution of land and believed that colonial policies had worsened rural poverty. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru argued that after independence, land should be distributed more fairly.

The J. C. Kumarappa Committee on Land Reforms (1949) examined agrarian relations in India and highlighted the exploitative nature of the zamindari system, recommending its abolition. It emphasised land redistribution, security of tenure for tenants, and the promotion of cooperative farming to achieve social justice and agricultural productivity.

After independence, the first major step was the abolition of the zamindari and jagirdari systems. These systems involved intermediaries who collected rent from peasants. By abolishing them, the government aimed to establish a direct relationship between the state and the cultivators. This law was passed by most states in the early 1950s. The broader goals of land reforms in India were:

1. To redistribute land and move towards a more equitable, socialist pattern of society.
2. To implement land ceiling laws, take surplus land from big landowners, and distribute it among marginal and landless farmers.
3. To regulate tenancy, so tenants had more security.
4. To ensure all tenancy agreements were officially registered.
5. To connect land ceiling laws with tenancy reforms.

Although abolishing intermediaries was

relatively easy, enforcing land ceilings was more difficult. Wealthy landowners resisted these laws, resulting in limited success for land redistribution. Only a few states, such as Karnataka (in the 1970s) and West Bengal (in the 1980s), made significant progress. Many Five Year Plans also acknowledged that most states failed to reduce inequalities in land ownership. Land concentration has increased in some regions, while in others, the landholdings of poorer farmers have become smaller and economically non-viable. The slow progress has been linked to political resistance, loopholes in laws, court delays, and the growing political influence of wealthy farmers.

4.2.3.2 Approaches to Land Reforms

Since land reforms fall under state jurisdiction, each state has followed its own path. P.C. Joshi identified three major approaches to land reforms:

1. **Gandhian Approach:** This approach did not directly address class conflicts in rural society. However, Vinoba Bhave's *Bhoodan* and *Gramdan* movements encouraged landlords to voluntarily donate surplus land to the landless. Although the movement gained initial support, it gradually weakened.
2. **Radical Nationalist Approach:** This approach was generally used by state governments, but it often remained limited to legal and administrative reforms, without affecting deeper structural inequalities.
3. **Marxist Approach:** This approach focused on peasant struggles and aimed to bring about change through collective action and mobilisation.

Despite the differences among these approaches, all of them recognised the need

to reduce class inequalities in rural areas through land reforms. Before examining state-specific experiences, it is important to note that all states, despite their differences, share some common goals and features in their land reform programmes.

4.2.3.3 Land Ceiling

Land ceilings were introduced as a measure to take away surplus land from individuals who owned more land than a fixed limit. The idea was that people should not be allowed to own extremely large amounts of land when many others had none. By enforcing land ceilings, the government aimed to redistribute surplus land to agricultural labourers, marginal farmers, and small farmers, so that they could secure their livelihoods. Land ceiling laws also applied to different types of land, such as fallow land, uncultivable land, cultivable land, and irrigated land, to ensure fairness.

Ceiling limits varied for different types of land. For example, in many states, a person owning more than 18 acres of irrigated land capable of producing two crops a year was considered to be holding surplus land. In the case of irrigated land producing only one crop, a limit of up to 27 acres was allowed. For owners with a mix of different land types, the ceiling limit could extend to 54 acres after converting all land into a common category. These limits also differed from state to state, depending on local conditions. The laws also took family size into account. Typically, a family of five, including husband, wife, and three minor children, was treated as a single unit. Additional land was permitted for larger families, but only up to a certain limit. When both husband and wife owned land separately, the land within the ceiling was divided between them in proportion to their earlier holdings. Major children were treated as separate units for the purposes of applying ceiling laws.

Land ceiling acts included certain exemptions. Plantations such as tea, coffee, rubber, and cocoa were exempted. Land held by industrial and commercial undertakings was also exempt. For instance, sugarcane factories were permitted to hold up to 100 acres of land. These exemptions were seen as necessary to support industries that contributed to the economy. Actual ceiling limits varied widely across states. For example, in Andhra Pradesh, the ceiling for irrigated land was 10–18 acres; in West Bengal, it was 12.4 acres; in Haryana, 17.9 acres; and in Karnataka, 10.13 acres.

Apart from being a productive asset, land in rural areas also provides social power. Scholars like Walter Fernandes have pointed out that landownership is not solely about cultivation or construction; it is also a marker of social status. Similarly, Morely Mohan Lal argues that ownership of land reflects social class and shapes class relations. Thus, land reforms are not only intended to redistribute land but also to bring about social change by dismantling old power structures based on landownership.

4.2.3.4 Consolidation of Land Holdings

Another important aspect of land reform legislation is the regularisation of tenancy agreements. In rural India, land is often passed down informally from one generation to the next without proper documentation. This creates problems when families attempt to obtain loans for agricultural development. Land reform laws therefore insist that tenancy arrangements must be officially recorded with the Village Panchayat. This helps maintain accurate land records and protects the rights of tenants.

The concept of land as private property also has its roots in British rule. The Permanent Settlement introduced by Lord Cornwallis in 1793 in Bengal, Bihar, and



Orissa established land as private property for the first time. Before this, land in many parts of India was held collectively by communities. Modern land reform laws continue to support the concept of legally documented private property. Ensuring proper records and codification of land rights is considered essential for reducing disputes and enabling rural development.

4.2.3.5 Failure of Land Reforms

Land reforms in India have become a controversial topic today. The term “land reforms” originally referred to changing the basic relationship between people and land, especially between those who work on the land and those who profit from it, such as landlords, moneylenders, and traders. In a country like India, where about 70 percent of the population depends on agriculture, the relationship between big farmers, small farmers, sharecroppers, and landless labourers is very important. Any effort to reduce rural poverty or increase agricultural production must take this agrarian structure into account.

When land reforms were introduced, it was believed that one of the major problems in Indian agriculture was the gap between who *owns* the land and who *actually works* on it. However, the results of the land reform laws show that these reforms have not been successful everywhere. Some states achieved limited success, but many others saw very little progress. Let us discuss the major reasons why it failed to achieve its intended outcomes.

1. Increasing Land Inequality

One of the major goals of land reforms was to reduce inequality in land ownership. However, this goal has not been achieved. Definitions of land categories changed over time, making comparisons difficult, but available data still shows growing inequality.

For example, in 1961, more than 19 million rural households were landless. About 19 percent of peasants owned extremely small plots, less than half an acre. By 1971, the situation worsened: 51 percent of peasants became marginal farmers, owning only 9 percent of total land. At the same time, the richest 1 percent owned 13.5 percent of the land.

Surveys by the Reserve Bank of India in 1981 also showed that the poorest 10 percent owned almost no assets, while the richest 10 percent controlled nearly half of rural assets. This trend continued into the 1980s and is still visible today.

2. State Governments Supporting Big Farmers

According to N. C. Saxena, land reforms failed partly because state governments often supported big farmers. Since land-related matters are handled by state governments, their favourable policies towards wealthy landowners harmed the interests of small and marginal farmers. This bias prevented the fair implementation of reforms.

3. Big Farmers Taking Over Small Farmers' Land

Although land ceiling laws aimed to redistribute surplus land to landless labourers and small farmers, big farmers ultimately benefitted. Small plots given to marginal farmers were often too small to cultivate economically. As a result, many sold or lost these plots to big farmers. This helped large landowners expand their holdings instead of reducing them.

4. Surplus Land Being Uncultivable

Another major problem was that much of the “surplus land” declared under land ceiling laws was actually barren or uncultivable. Landowners manipulated records so that only poor-quality land was surrendered, while fertile land remained in their hands.

This made redistribution meaningless, as landless peasants received land that could not support their livelihood.

5. Benami Transactions

Benami (false name) transactions became a common way to evade land ceiling laws. Landowners registered land under the names of relatives or other individuals to avoid surrendering it. As a result, the pattern of land ownership remained unchanged, and agricultural operations did not alter. This rendered the entire land reform process ineffective.

6. Lack of Political Will

Political parties and leaders often had vested interests in protecting large landowners. Former zamindars and jagirdars also used their influence to obstruct reforms. This lack of political will is one of the main reasons why land reforms did not succeed.

For example, the Bihar Land Reforms Act remained ineffective even after amendments in 1981 because powerful landowners resisted it. A seminar by the National Institute

of Rural Development (1991) concluded that land reforms had very little impact in Bihar. Similar situations existed in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana. In these states, politicians either avoided strict implementation or favoured powerful farmers.

Land remains a crucial source of income, employment, status, and power in rural India. Recently, women's groups in some regions have demanded joint land titles (patta) in both men's and women's names, highlighting the gender dimension of land rights.

The issues surrounding land tenure and land reforms are urgent and cannot be postponed any longer. State governments must demonstrate greater commitment to implementing tenancy reforms and land ceilings. Without effective land reforms, rural poverty and inequality will persist. Before rural movements demanding land rights become more robust, governments need to take concrete steps to ensure fair land distribution and support for small and marginal farmers.

Recap

- ◆ Land is the central resource in rural India and shapes economic, social, and cultural life.
- ◆ Traditional farming methods and unequal landownership have contributed to rural poverty and hierarchy.
- ◆ British land policies shifted villages from subsistence production to market-oriented production.
- ◆ Agricultural technology evolved from hoe culture to plough culture and later to modern mechanization.
- ◆ Different farming techniques create different divisions of labour in rural society.



- ◆ Landownership patterns—such as zamindari, ryotwari, and mahalwari—created distinct social groups and inequalities.
- ◆ Abolishing intermediaries after independence reduced some exploitation and transferred land to cultivators.
- ◆ Land reforms aimed to redistribute land, regulate tenancy, and reduce inequalities in ownership.
- ◆ Land ceiling laws sought to take surplus land from big owners and give it to landless and marginal farmers.
- ◆ Many states failed to implement land reforms effectively due to political resistance and legal loopholes.
- ◆ Inequality increased as surplus land was often uncultivable, and benami transfers helped big farmers escape ceilings.
- ◆ Effective land reforms remain essential for reducing rural poverty, strengthening tenant rights, and ensuring social justice.

Objective Questions

1. Who explained the link between mode of production and rural society?
2. What is the main occupation in rural India?
3. Which colonial land system created private property in India?
4. Which system recognised cultivators as landowners?
5. Which system involved large landlords collecting rent?
6. Which system was linked to princely states like Rajasthan?
7. Which movement encouraged voluntary land donation?
8. What term refers to land owned beyond the legal limit?
9. What is the most important productive asset in rural areas?
10. Which group is most affected by unequal land distribution?
11. What fraudulent method did landowners use to hide land?

12. Which state made notable progress in land reforms in the 1970s?
13. Whose novel Godan depicted peasant misery under zamindari?
14. Which economic sector converts agricultural goods into finished products?
15. Under which list of the Constitution does land legislation fall?

Answers

1. Desai
2. Agriculture
3. Zamindari
4. Ryotwari
5. Zamindari
6. Jagirdari
7. Bhoodan
8. Surplus
9. Land
10. Landless
11. Benami
12. Karnataka
13. Premchand
14. Industry
15. Concurrent

Assignments

1. Explain how landownership patterns influence social and economic relations in rural India.
2. Describe the major differences between the zamindari, ryotwari, and mahalwari land systems.
3. Analyse the main objectives of land reforms in post-independence India.
4. Discuss the major reasons for the failure of land ceiling laws in many states.
5. Evaluate how technological changes in agriculture have affected rural labour and productivity.

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SGOU





BLOCK

Rural Development



UNIT

Trends and Change in Rural Society

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain how changes in rural India led to the need for strong local self-government
- ◆ compare Panchayathi Raj Institutions (PRIs) before and after the 73rd Amendment in terms of elections, reservations, powers, finance and accountability
- ◆ discuss how well PRIs perform today, including success stories, problems, and differences across states

Prerequisite

To engage effectively with the study of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) before and after the 73rd Amendment, learners should have an integrated background in constitutional law, Indian political history, rural socio-economic change, and basic public administration. Familiarity with India's constitutional framework, particularly federalism, the division of legislative subjects between the Union and States, and the role of constitutional amendments, will help students grasp why the 73rd Amendment legally reshaped local government. Knowledge of post-Independence rural policies (for example, land reform drives, community development efforts, the Green Revolution, and rural poverty alleviation programmes) is important, as these shaped state priorities and the administrative functions assigned to local bodies. An understanding of theories of decentralisation and local self-government, including the principles of subsidiarity, democratic decentralisation, and the normative arguments for participatory governance, is also essential so that students can evaluate policy goals versus practice. Methodological preparedness is useful; basic competence in mixed methods (survey design, key informant interviews, participant observation, and the use of secondary administrative data) enables empirical assessment of Gram



Sabha functioning, fiscal flows, and service delivery outcomes. Students should also be aware of major post-Independence committee reports and policy instruments (such as the Balwantrai Mehta Committee recommendations and subsequent state Panchayat Acts) that influenced statutory practices before constitutionalisation. Finally, a sensitivity to social structure in rural India, including caste hierarchies, gender norms, land ownership patterns, and elite–subaltern relations, is essential, as these social factors mediate whether formal institutional reforms (reservations, elections, and devolution) translate into real shifts in power, inclusion, and service outcomes. Thus, these interdisciplinary prerequisites equip learners to analyse the legal design, administrative mechanisms, and socio-political constraints that determine how PRIs operate in differing state contexts.

Keywords

Panchayati Raj, Decentralisation, Gram Sabha, 73rd Constitutional Amendment, State Election Commission

Discussion

The architecture of rural governance in India is the outcome of a long historical process in which administrative experiments, committee recommendations, efforts towards political empowerment at the grassroots level, and constitutional reforms intersected. From the post-1950s push for “democratic decentralisation” (Balwantrai Mehta Committee) to decades of uneven devolution, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992) aimed to convert fragile statutory PRIs into constitutionally protected organs of self-government. The Amendment inserted a new Part IX (Articles 243–243O) and the Eleventh Schedule into the Constitution, mandated regular elections and reserved seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women, and established institutional mechanisms for elections and fiscal transfer measures designed to stabilise and empower local democracy. Yet, composition and implementation have varied across states; while many gains are visible (regular elections, increased representation

of women), persistent challenges remain in the effective devolution of functions, funds, and functionaries.

5.1.1 Significance of PRIs in Rural Governance

Panchayats are the principal institutional mechanism for democratic governance in rural India. Understanding how PRIs evolved in their structural features, legal status, roles, and limitations illuminates how democratic accountability, local development, and social inclusion intersect at the grassroots. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment is a watershed moment because it transformed PRIs from ad-hoc, statutory bodies into constitutionally recognised local self-government institutions with guaranteed elections, reservations, and a statutory list of functions. Studying the before-and-after of the amendment helps us evaluate decentralisation as both a political and administrative strategy for rural transformation.

5.1.2. Historical Trajectory of Rural Local Governance (pre-73rd Amendment)

After independence, the Indian states faced the twin tasks of nation-building and rural development. Policymakers and reformers argued that local participation could improve planning, increase administrative reach, and cultivate civic consciousness. Several programme experiments (Community Development Programme from 1952 and National Extension Service) sought to integrate rural development with local institutions, but results were mixed. Committee reports soon became central to shaping the policy response.

5.1.2.1 Key Committees and Models

The Balwantrai Mehta Committee (1957) recommended “democratic decentralisation” and a three-tier Panchayati Raj system (village, block/panchayatsamiti, district/zillaparishad) with directly elected Gram Panchayats and indirectly constituted higher tiers, a blueprint that guided the spread of PRIs in many states during the 1950s–1970s. Later committees (e.g., Ashok Mehta Committee, 1978; L. M. Singhvi Committee, 1986; G.V.K. Rao and others) revised institutional prescriptions; debates oscillated between strengthening local executive capacity and insulating elected bodies from partisan politics.

5.1.2.2 Statutory PRIs: Features and Limitations before Constitutionalisation

Before 1992, most of the states in India legislated Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) under state Acts. Many PRIs performed development-related tasks, but they had three major weaknesses: irregular elections or long gaps between polls; weak financial autonomy limiting untied funds; and restricted

powers, as they often functioned merely as implementation agencies for central or state-sponsored schemes rather than as independent decision-making bodies. Social inequalities and elite capture further constrained their democratic potential. Consequently, these gaps motivated demands for constitutional safeguards.

5.1.2.3 The 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992): Legal Architecture and Key Provisions

a. What the Amendment Changed

The Amendment added a new Part IX “The Panchayats” (Articles 243–243O) to the Constitution and the Eleventh Schedule (a list of 29 subjects that may be devolved to Panchayats). It made the creation of PRIs obligatory for states (subject to the state being able to adapt the structure to its local needs), mandated regular elections every five years, required the establishment of State Election Commissions to conduct Panchayat elections, and mandated State Finance Commissions every five years to recommend the distribution of financial resources between the state and Panchayats. It also provided for the reservation of seats for SCs, STs, and at least one-third of the seats for women (and the reservation of offices of Chairpersons at different levels for women to promote political inclusion).

b. Institutional Mechanisms Introduced

The Gram Sabha: Was strengthened as the grassroots democratic decision-making body and recognised as the basic unit of participatory democracy; its members include all registered voters in the village. Drawing significantly on the recommendations of the L. M. Singhvi Committee, the Constitution accorded the Gram Sabha a central role in deepening democracy at the village level. It is



constitutionally mandated to hold a minimum of two sessions every year, ensuring regular participation, deliberation, and accountability.

Regular Election Cycle: Fixed five-year tenure with the proviso for elections within six months of dissolution (subject to limited exceptions).

Reservation Policy: Seats for SCs/STs in proportion to their population in the area; one-third reservation for women across all levels (many states have increased this to 50%).

Institutional Safeguards: State Election Commission for free and fair local elections; State Finance Commission for fiscal devolution; specific provisions for the protection of powers and functions from

judicial interference in electoral matters.

c. The Eleventh Schedule: Functional Domains

The Eleventh Schedule lists 29 subjects (e.g., agriculture, land improvement, minor irrigation, animal husbandry, fisheries, social forestry, rural housing, drinking water, rural electrification, education, sanitation, implementation of poverty alleviation programmes) that may be devolved to Panchayats. The schedule serves as an indicative list for state governments to transfer functions; however, actual devolution depends on state policy and administrative practice.

5.1.2.4 Comparison of PRIs before and after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment

Sl. No.	Dimension	Before the Amendment	After the Amendment
1.	Structure & Democratic Legitimacy	PRIs existed as statutory bodies; strong centralised administrative control; irregular elections.	Constitutional status mandated elected PRIs; improved institutional stability and democratic legitimacy.
2.	Elections & Representation	Irregular elections; nominated members and administrative appointees were common.	Mandatory five-year elections by State Election Commissions; expanded participation of women and marginalised groups.
3.	Reservation & Social Inclusion	Uneven SC/ST and women representation; women's participation was very low.	Reservations for SC/STs and women; significant rise in elected women; some states increased the quota beyond one-third.
4.	Functions & Devolution	PRIs mostly implemented state/central programmes with limited discretionary power.	Eleventh Schedule proposed devolution of 29 subjects; uneven practical devolution due to limited staff transfers.
5.	Finance & Fiscal Autonomy	Weak own-source revenue; high dependence on state and central funds.	State Finance Commissions mandated; fiscal autonomy varied; many PRIs still face resource shortages.

5.1.2.5 Institutionalisation and Administrative Ecosystem after the Amendment

a. State Election Commissions (SECs)

SECs were mandated to conduct Panchayat elections autonomously, reducing ad hoc executive control over electoral timetables and improving technical capacity for voter rolls and polling. Implementation has been uneven; in many states, SECs function effectively, while in others, administrative interventions continue to shape electoral conduct.

b. State Finance Commissions (SFCs) and Fiscal Devices

SFCs provide a statutory mechanism to review fiscal relations and recommend resource transfers to PRIs. Their recommendations are crucial for strengthening PRI budgets but depend on political will and state finances for implementation.

c. Gram Sabhas and Participatory Processes

The Amendment reaffirmed the Gram Sabha as a foundational participatory forum. Where Gram Sabhas meet and function (decision-making on local priorities, social audits), they can democratise planning. In many places, operational weaknesses (low attendance, elite capture, lack of information) limit their transformative potential.

5.1.3 Political Economy, Social Change and PRIs

a. Political Mobilisation and Elite Dynamics

The PRIs can open spaces for new political leaders (women, OBCs, marginal farmers), reconfiguring rural power relations. Conversely, existing elites may capture office or influence elected representatives through

informal networks; thus, formal inclusion does not guarantee redistribution of power.

b. Service Delivery and Accountability

The proximity of elected representatives to beneficiaries and other stakeholders can improve accountability, transparency, and responsiveness, but only when PRIs have adequate funds, staff, and discretion. Without sufficient devolution of functionaries (e.g., technical staff), accountability remains constrained because local bodies are unable to execute, monitor, or maintain services independently.

c. Gender and Social Inclusion

The reservation of seats for women has expanded their presence in elected office; empirical studies show mixed evidence on substantive changes in governance priorities (some show improved attention to water, sanitation, education). The effectiveness of women leaders is mediated by socio-cultural norms, political training, and support systems.

5.1.4 Implementation Variations and Key Challenges

a. Uneven Function Devolution

Although the Eleventh Schedule lists 29 subjects, many states retained administrative control over critical functionaries (engineers, health staff), limiting PRIs' operational autonomy.

b. Financial Constraints and Delays

Financial dependency, scarcity of own funds, and delays in obtaining concurrence from the state administration, along with delayed transfers, limited own-source revenues, and earmarked centrally sponsored scheme rules, reduce fiscal flexibility for PRIs.

c. Capacity Deficits



Many PRIs lack trained administrators, planning capacities, and data systems necessary for local planning, budgeting, and monitoring.

d. Political Interference and State-Local Tensions

State governments often retain discretion that allows varying degrees of interference, including superintendence over work plans and funds, which produces heterogeneous outcomes.

e. Social Inequalities and Elite Capture

Caste, class, and gender inequalities shape who participates in Gram Sabhas and who benefits from PRI decisions; measures to ensure transparency and social audits are crucial to mitigate capture.

an indicative list of functions (Eleventh Schedule), mandated regular elections and institutional mechanisms (State Election Commissions, State Finance Commissions), and introduced reservations to broaden representation. These measures substantially improved the formal institutional status of PRIs, expanded women's electoral presence, and standardised certain institutional processes. However, the Amendment did not, by itself, ensure full functional, financial, and administrative devolution; state choices, bureaucratic structures, and local power relations continue to shape the lived reality of grassroots governance. Hence, the Amendment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for deepened local democracy and transformed rural development.

5.1.5 Rural Transformation under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment created constitutional guarantees for Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), provided

Recap

- ◆ The 73rd Amendment (1992) constitutionally recognised Panchayati Raj Institutions, adding Part IX (Articles 243–243O) and the Eleventh Schedule (29 subjects).
- ◆ It mandated regular elections, reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), one-third of seats for women, and institutional mechanisms (State Election Commissions, State Finance Commissions).
- ◆ While formal institutionalisation strengthened the legitimacy of PRIs, effective devolution of funds, functions, and functionalities varies considerably across states; implementation remains the crucial challenge.
- ◆ Panchayats are the key institutions for democratic governance in rural India.

- ◆ Balwantrao Mehta Committee (1957): Proposed a three-tier PRI system and democratic decentralisation.
- ◆ Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) and G.V.K. Rao: Recommended strengthening local governance, improving executive capacity, and reducing political interference.
- ◆ The Gram Sabha was strengthened as the base of village democracy.
- ◆ PRIs create opportunities for new political actors (women, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), SCs, and STs).
- ◆ They reshape elite power structures and mobilise local political competition.
- ◆ Social inclusion and empowerment outcomes depend on local contexts, resources, and institutional performance.

Objective Questions

1. Which constitutional part and which articles were added by the 73rd Amendment?
2. Name two institutional mechanisms the 73rd Amendment mandated for state-level support to PRIs.
3. What is the Gram Sabha?
4. How many subjects are listed in the Eleventh Schedule?
5. What minimum proportion of Panchayat seats did the Amendment reserve for women?
6. Name the 1957 committee widely credited with recommending democratic decentralisation and a three-tier Panchayati Raj.
7. Mention one major challenge that limits effective devolution to PRIs.
8. What is the primary role of State Finance Commissions (SFCs)?
9. How did the Amendment aim to improve electoral regularity for PRIs?
10. Give one reason why constitutional status for PRIs matters.

Answers

1. Part IX; Articles 243 to 243O.
2. State Election Commissions and State Finance Commissions.
3. Assembly of all adult village voters.
4. Twenty-nine subjects.
5. One-third (33.3%) of seats for women.
6. Balwantrai Mehta Committee, 1957.
7. Limited fiscal and functional devolution.
8. To recommend resource distribution to Panchayats.
9. It mandated five-year regular PRI elections.
10. It ensures stability and democratic legitimacy.

Assignments

1. Describe and critically evaluate three key provisions of the 73rd Amendment (choose from: reservations, Gram Sabha, SFC/SEC, Eleventh Schedule). Use state-level examples to show how legal provisions translated (or failed to translate) into practice.
2. Compare the features of PRIs before and after the 73rd Amendment. Use one state (e.g., Kerala, Rajasthan, or Maharashtra) as a focused case study to illustrate changes in electoral regularity, service delivery, and fiscal autonomy.
3. Examine the impact of reservations for women on local governance. Design a short empirical study (research question, sampling, indicators, methods) to test whether women's representation has influenced the provision of local public goods.
4. Analyse the role of State Finance Commissions in strengthening PRI finances. Critically assess why SFC recommendations succeed or fail in different states, and propose policy measures to improve fiscal autonomy.

5. Prepare a proposal exploring the functioning of Gram Sabhas in your district: objectives, literature review, mixed-methods design (participatory observation, key informant interviews, survey of households), and expected contributions.

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UNIT

Rural Development Programmes

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ discuss the major rural development programmes in India
- ◆ explain the core objectives of key programmes related to infrastructure, skill development, and social security
- ◆ distinguish between wage employment programs and income generation programs based on their immediate goals
- ◆ examine how rural development programs contribute to inclusive growth and the overall socio-economic progress of India

Prerequisite

Rural development in India is not just about building roads or providing jobs; it is about reshaping the very fabric of village life to ensure dignity, equity, and opportunity for all. Rural development in India has always been shaped by the country's unique social fabric, where nearly two-thirds of the population still lives in villages. These villages are not just geographic spaces but complex social systems influenced by caste, class, gender, land relations, and cultural traditions. After Independence, India inherited a rural society marked by poverty, indebtedness, low agricultural productivity, and deep social inequalities. This made rural development not just an economic goal but a sociological necessity, aimed at transforming the structures that keep people poor and marginalised. As a result, rural development emerged as a major pillar of planning, linking ideas of community participation, grassroots democracy, and social justice with economic change.

Over the decades, rural development expanded far beyond agriculture to include education, health, housing, employment, women's empowerment, technology, and

local governance. From early Community Development Programmes to contemporary rights-based schemes like MGNREGA and decentralised planning through Panchayati Raj, each initiative reflects changing national priorities and sociological shifts. In this unit, we will examine how rural development schemes shape the everyday lives of people in India and how the state interacts with local communities through various programmes and institutions.

Keywords

MGNREGA (VB-G RAM G), PMAY-G, Decentralisation, Social Safety Net, Livelihood Security, Convergence, Skill Development, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Gram Panchayat

Discussion

Rural development is a critical component of achieving inclusive growth and equitable progress in India, where a large proportion of the population continues to reside in villages. Development efforts in rural areas are essential for improving the quality of life, reducing poverty, and ensuring access to basic amenities such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. India's rural economy is predominantly agrarian, relying on agriculture, forestry, and allied activities. However, challenges such as infrastructural gaps, unemployment, and limited access to essential services persist, making targeted interventions necessary.

Addressing the need for poverty alleviation and improved livelihoods, the Central Government has introduced several flagship programmes aimed at transforming rural India. Coordinated by the Ministry of Rural Development, these initiatives focus on five critical areas: employment generation, infrastructure development, housing, skill enhancement, and social welfare. By prioritising rural and disadvantaged regions, the schemes seek not only to reduce poverty but also to promote broader economic stability across the nation.

The main objectives of poverty alleviation and employment generation programmes are:

- i. Reduction of rural poverty
- ii. Employment generation in rural areas
- iii. Development of rural infrastructure
- iv. Removal of regional imbalances
- v. Housing for the rural poor
- vi. Promotion of community participation

5.2.1 Historical Evolution of Rural Development Programmes

The trajectory of rural development in India has evolved through several distinct phases, shifting from broad community participation to intensive agricultural support, and finally to specialised employment and self-help initiatives.

1. Early Community and Extension Phase

Community Development Programme (CDP, 1952): Launched as the first major initiative to promote overall development in villages through community participation



and grassroots democracy.

National Extension Service (NES, 1953): Aimed to provide a permanent organisation for rural reconstruction and to bring technical knowledge to the doorsteps of farmers.

2. Intensive Agricultural and Area Development Phase

Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP, 1960): Known as the “Package Programme,” it focused on providing integrated support (credit, seeds, tools) in selected districts to boost productivity in the predominantly agrarian rural economy.

Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP, 1973): Introduced to mitigate the impact of drought and restore ecological balance in vulnerable regions to reduce regional imbalances.

3. Integrated Poverty Alleviation and Skill Phase

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP, 1978): A major milestone aimed at providing productive assets and inputs to help the rural poor cross the poverty line.

Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM, 1979): A sub-scheme of IRDP focused specifically on equipping rural youth with technical and entrepreneurial skills to enhance livelihood security.

4. Transition to Self-Employment and Wage Guarantees

Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY, 1999): This programme restructured earlier schemes into a holistic self-employment initiative focusing on mobilising rural communities into Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP, 2005): This marked a paradigm shift by providing a legal

guarantee for wage employment. It was later renamed the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

5.2.2 Rural Development Programs

Government schemes play a pivotal role in addressing these issues by promoting social and economic development. These programmes provide financial support, skill development opportunities, and infrastructure improvements, enabling rural communities to overcome systemic disadvantages and move toward sustainable progress. Flagship initiatives such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) have contributed significantly to livelihood security through guaranteed wage employment, while the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) has enhanced rural connectivity by linking villages to markets and essential services. Alongside centrally sponsored schemes, state-specific programmes focusing on agriculture, crafts, and rural entrepreneurship complement national efforts.

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

Passed in 2005, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a major Indian labour law meant to improve income security in villages. MGNREGA is a demand-based job scheme that helps rural families by guaranteeing at least 100 days of paid work each year to any household with adults ready to do manual labour. It acts as a safety net for these families when they cannot find better job options. More than just offering work, MGNREGA is a powerful way to provide social support and build rural facilities. By tackling the serious issues of unemployment, the programme also creates lasting assets that boost local economies and support long-term growth. A main feature of the scheme

is its focus on openness and accountability, ensuring that funds reach the people who need them and that rural progress remains a top priority for the country.

Scheme Highlights

- a. **Employment Guarantee:** MGNREGA provides a legal guarantee of 100 days of employment per year to every rural household in India.
- b. **Focus on Rural Development:** The primary objective of MGNREGA is to enhance the livelihood security of rural households by promoting sustainable rural development.
- c. **Inclusive and Demand-Driven:** MGNREGA is designed to be demand-driven, meaning that employment opportunities are created in response to the expressed demand from the rural community.
- d. **Transparency and Accountability:** MGNREGA emphasises transparency in the implementation of projects and financial transactions.
- e. **Electronic Fund Management:** The use of technology is encouraged for efficient implementation and monitoring. The Electronic Fund Management System (e-FMS) is employed to transfer wages directly to the bank accounts of workers, reducing leakages and ensuring timely payments.

Challenges

According to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), only a small fraction, about 3.2 per cent of the nearly 50 million households registered under the scheme were able to secure the full 100 days of employment promised to them. On average, households received work for just 18 days, far below the intended level. A major reason for this shortfall is the acute shortage of administrative and technical staff at the block

and gram panchayat levels. This lack of manpower has seriously affected crucial processes such as planning, scrutiny and approval of projects, monitoring of works, measurement of outputs, and the proper maintenance of records. In addition, the scheme has been undermined by various malpractices, including inflated work measurements, the inclusion of non-existent workers on muster rolls, and the illegal involvement of contractors. In several states, the absence of appointed technical staff has further weakened implementation, while delays or shortfalls in the release of funds from the central government have also constrained the scheme's effectiveness.

1. From MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G (2025)

The legislative framework of rural employment in India underwent a significant transformation in December 2025, with MGNREGA (2005) transitioning into VB-G RAM G (The Viksit Bharat—Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)). This updated act enhances the legal guarantee of work from 100 to 125 days per rural household annually, reflecting a heightened commitment to livelihood security. Structurally, the program has moved from a fully centrally funded wage model to a shared 60:40 funding ratio between the Centre and the States, alongside the introduction of a 60-day agricultural pause to prevent labour shortages during peak farming seasons. These policy shifts signify a broader transition from a rights-based, demand-driven safety net to a centralised, mission-mode framework.

2. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin (PMAY-G)

Shelter is a fundamental need for human survival. For someone without a home, owning a house transforms their life, providing them with an identity and connecting them to their community. To address the housing shortage for the rural poor, the Indira Awaas



Yojana (IAY) was initiated in May 1985 as part of the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. It began operating as a standalone programme on January 1, 1996. The goal of IAY was to assist rural families below the poverty line (BPL), including SCs/STs, freed bonded labourers, and others, in building homes or repairing damaged temporary houses by providing a full financial grant.

To address shortcomings in the previous system and fulfil the Government's promise of 'Housing for All,' the IAY scheme was restructured into the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G), starting from April 1, 2016. Through this initiative, the Ministry of Rural Development aims to support eligible rural families. The main objective is to build 2.95 crore permanent homes equipped with essential amenities by March 2024.

Objectives

- ◆ To increase the size of the minimum housing unit from 20 sq. m. to 25 sq. m., including a dedicated space for clean cooking.
- ◆ There is an increase in financial aid to Rs.1.20 lakh in plain areas and Rs.1.30 lakh in hilly areas, difficult regions, and districts covered by the Integrated Action Plan, particularly in tribal and backward areas.
- ◆ Beneficiaries are encouraged to construct quality houses using local materials and trained masons.
- ◆ Instead of a standard cement concrete design, beneficiaries can choose from a variety of structurally sound, aesthetically pleasing, culturally appropriate, and environmentally friendly house designs.

3. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)

Rural road connectivity and its sustained availability are key components of rural

development, as they assure continued access to economic and social services, thereby generating sustained increases in agricultural incomes and productive employment opportunities. The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) is a vital programme for connecting rural India. Launched on December 25, 2000, this scheme aims to link even the most distant villages with roads that remain usable in all weather conditions. By improving travel, the programme has greatly helped rural people access markets, hospitals, and schools, leading to better economic growth and quality of life. Originally, the scheme was fully funded by the Central Government. However, since 2015-16, the funding structure has changed so that the Central and State governments share the costs at a 60:40 ratio.

4. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)

The Ministry of Rural Development launched the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) on September 25, 2014. Operating under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), this programme aims to provide steady jobs to rural youth, especially those from poor families. The scheme has two main goals: to help rural families earn money from different sources and to support the career aspirations of young people. DDU-GKY specifically focuses on youth aged 15 to 35 years. As a key part of the Skill India campaign, it also supports other national initiatives like Make in India and Digital India. This focus is vital because about 69% of India's youth (around 180 million people) live in villages. Of these, roughly 55 million come from very poor backgrounds with little or no work.

5. National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) is a welfare programme administered by the Ministry of Rural Development.

Launched in 1995, NSAP aims to provide financial assistance to the most vulnerable sections of society, particularly the elderly, widows, and persons with disabilities. The programme is part of the government's broader commitment to social security and welfare. NSAP represents a significant step towards the fulfilment of the Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Constitution of India, which enjoin the State to undertake, within its means, a number of welfare measures.

Thus, NSAP currently comprises the following five schemes:

- i. Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS).
- ii. Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS).
- iii. Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS).
- iv. National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS).
- v. Annapurna Scheme.

6. Mission Antyodaya

Mission Antyodaya, adopted in the 2017-18 Union Budget, is a major project by the Ministry of Rural Development. Its goal is to create a system that brings different programmes together (convergence) to ensure funds are used efficiently and lead to tangible results that improve lives. This plan manages resources allocated by 26 Central Government Ministries for rural growth and is led by the States, with the Gram Panchayat (village council) acting as the main hub for all development efforts. The planning is supported by a yearly survey carried out in Gram Panchayats. This survey occurs concurrently with the People's Plan Campaign (PPC) and helps communities formulate their Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). The survey

identifies development gaps by collecting information on the 29 subjects (such as health, water management, and social security) assigned to local councils by the Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

7. Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY)

The Department of Rural Development (DoRD) of the Indian Government launched the Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) on October 11, 2014. The scheme aims for complete village improvement by asking Members of Parliament (MPs) to select Gram Panchayats (GPs) and turn them into model villages, or 'Adarsh Grams.' SAGY is implemented using 100% convergence of resources from various existing Central and State Government schemes, meaning no additional funds are allocated specifically for the programme. However, the Ministry provides administrative support to States/UTs to monitor the scheme under the 'Management Support for Rural Development Programme' (MSRDP). The main goal is to achieve integrated development across many sectors, including agriculture, health, education, sanitation, environment, and physical infrastructure.

The main objectives of SAGY are:

1. To trigger processes that lead to the holistic development of the identified Gram Panchayats
2. To substantially improve the standard of living and quality of life of all sections of the population through
 - ◆ Improved basic amenities
 - ◆ Higher productivity
 - ◆ Enhanced human development
 - ◆ Better livelihood opportunities
 - ◆ Reduced disparities



- ◆ Access to rights and entitlements
- ◆ Wider social mobilisation
- ◆ Enriched social capital

8. Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM)

The Census of India shows that India's rural population is large, standing at 833 million, which is nearly 68% of the country's total population. Between 2001 and 2011, this population grew by 12%. Many rural areas are not isolated settlements; rather, they form clusters of villages that are situated close to each other. These clusters demonstrate clear potential for growth, possess economic drivers, and benefit from their proximity. When these clusters are developed, they are classified as 'Rurban' (combining rural and urban elements). Recognising the advantages of developing these clusters, the Government of India launched the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM). The Mission aims to develop these Rurban areas by providing essential economic, social, and physical facilities (infrastructure).

The Mission intends to develop 300 Rurban clusters over five years to maximise economic advantages and ensure effective use of infrastructure funds. To supply these clusters with necessary amenities, the scheme pools resources by combining funds from various existing government schemes (convergence). Additionally, the Mission provides Critical Gap Funding (CGF) specifically to ensure focused and complete development in these clusters. The objective of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) is to stimulate local economic development, enhance basic services, and create well-planned Rurban clusters.

9. Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)

Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) was launched in the year 2015-16, with the aim of enhancing physical access to water on farms, expanding the cultivable area under assured irrigation, improving on-farm water use efficiency, and introducing sustainable water conservation practices. PMKSY is an umbrella scheme, consisting, inter alia, of two major components being implemented by the Ministry of Jal Shakti, namely, the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) and Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP). HKKP, in turn, consists of four sub-components: Command Area Development & Water Management (CAD&WM), Surface Minor Irrigation (SMI), Repair, Renovation, and Restoration (RRR) of Water Bodies, and Ground Water (GW) Development.

10. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), initiated on February 18, 2016, is a crucial governmental measure under the Ministry of Agriculture designed to offer economic security to India's farming community. The primary purpose of this crop insurance scheme is to provide essential financial safeguards to cultivators whose harvests are destroyed by unpredictable events. This protection extends across various risks, including major natural disasters such as floods, droughts, and hailstorms, as well as damage caused by pests and widespread crop diseases. By mitigating these risks, PMFBY aims to stabilise farmers' incomes and encourage continuous agricultural production.

11. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), launched by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MOPNG) in May 2016, is a flagship scheme aimed at

providing clean cooking fuel, primarily LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas), to rural and deprived households. The core objective is to replace traditional cooking fuels like firewood, coal, and cow-dung cakes, which have severe negative impacts on the health of women and children, as well as the environment.

12. PM-KISAN – Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi

The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a crucial Central Sector Scheme of the Government of India, formally introduced by the Prime Minister in February 2019, although its implementation was retroactively effective from December 1, 2018. The foundational goal of the PM-KISAN initiative is to provide direct financial support to all eligible landholding farmer families across the country. This income support is intended to assist farmers in managing their costs related to farming activities, allied agricultural needs, and other pressing domestic expenses, thereby alleviating financial stress. Under the provisions of the scheme, eligible farmer families receive a total of ₹6,000 per year. This amount is not given as a lump sum but is delivered in three equal instalments of ₹2,000 each.

13. Jal Jeevan Mission

The Jal Jeevan Mission, launched in 2019, aims to ensure safe and sufficient drinking water for every rural household in India by 2024 through individual tap connections. As part of the initiative, source sustainability will be prioritised with mandatory measures such as groundwater recharge, greywater reuse, water conservation, and rainwater harvesting. Built on a community-driven approach, the mission emphasises active participation and will be supported by extensive Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) activities to raise awareness and strengthen implementation.

14. Swachh Bharat Mission- Gramin

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), also known as the Clean India Mission or Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, is a nationwide initiative launched by the Government of India on 2 October 2014. Its primary objectives are to eradicate open defecation, strengthen solid waste management systems, and establish Open Defecation Free (ODF) villages across the country. The Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin (SBM-G), launched in 2014 under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, is the rural component of the Clean India Mission. Its primary objective is to eliminate open defecation by ensuring access to household toilets and promoting hygienic practices in villages. In its second phase (2020–2025), the mission focuses on sustaining Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and advancing towards ODF Plus, which emphasises solid and liquid waste management. By encouraging community participation, behaviour change, and awareness campaigns, SBM-G not only improves rural sanitation infrastructure but also enhances public health, empowers women, and fosters environmental sustainability.

15. Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)

The Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), launched in 2014, is a centrally sponsored scheme designed to promote the holistic growth of India's horticulture sector. It covers a wide range of crops, including fruits, vegetables, spices, flowers, mushrooms, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew, cocoa, and bamboo. MIDH integrates several earlier schemes, such as the National Horticulture Mission, National Bamboo Mission, and Coconut Development Board, to ensure coordinated development. Its objectives include enhancing production and productivity, improving nutritional security, generating employment, and boosting exports. Through interventions like providing quality



planting material, rejuvenating orchards, supporting mushroom and seed infrastructure, and adopting a cluster-based approach, MIDH strengthens horticulture as a key driver of farmer income, rural employment, and sustainable agricultural growth.

16. Antyodaya Anna Yojana

Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) is a food security scheme launched in 2000 to support India's poorest households by providing highly subsidised food grains. It was designed to ensure that vulnerable families living below the poverty line have access to basic nutrition and can lead a life free from hunger. The scheme specifically targets the "*poorest of the poor*" by identifying families most in need and issuing them special ration cards. Through the Public Distribution System (PDS), beneficiaries receive wheat at ₹3 per kilogram and rice at ₹2 per kilogram, which is far below market prices. This initiative not only addresses immediate hunger but also aims to improve the overall health and livelihood of marginalised communities. By reducing the financial burden of food expenses, AAY helps families allocate their limited resources to other essential needs such as healthcare and education.

5.2.3 Wage Employment Programmes in India

Wage employment programmes in India are designed to provide immediate livelihood opportunities to rural households by guaranteeing paid work, usually in public works or community development projects. These schemes aim to reduce poverty, create rural infrastructure, and ensure social security for vulnerable populations. By offering short-term employment, they help families meet basic needs while also contributing to the development of assets such as roads, irrigation facilities, and housing.

Over the years, the Government of India has introduced several wage employment

initiatives to address rural distress and unemployment. These programmes not only provide income support but also empower communities by involving them in the creation of durable assets. They serve as a safety net during agricultural off-seasons and times of economic hardship, ensuring that rural households have access to minimum wages and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

1. MGNREGA

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a demand-driven wage employment initiative aimed at strengthening livelihood security for rural households across India. Under this programme, every household whose adult members are willing to undertake unskilled manual work is entitled to at least 100 days of guaranteed employment in a financial year.

2. Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan (PMGKRA)

Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan (GKRA) was introduced on 20th June 2020 as a 125-day programme aimed at tackling the challenges faced by migrant workers who returned to their villages during the Covid-19 pandemic, along with other rural communities affected by the crisis. The initiative adopted a multi-dimensional approach to provide immediate employment and livelihood support to distressed households.

Its objectives included strengthening rural infrastructure, creating durable livelihood assets, and boosting income-generating activities to ensure long-term sustainability. The programme concentrated on 25 categories of work across 116 districts in six states, backed by a financial package of ₹50,000 crore, thereby combining short-term relief with long-term rural development.

3. Aajeevika - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)

This is a major poverty reduction initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development,

Government of India. Its central objective is to empower rural households living in poverty by facilitating access to sustainable self-employment and skill-based wage opportunities. By doing so, the programme seeks to create diversified livelihood options that can provide long-term economic stability for the rural poor. Recognised as one of the largest livelihood improvement missions globally, it reflects India's commitment to inclusive development.

To achieve its goals, the mission focuses on four key areas: (a) mobilising rural communities, especially women, into strong, self-managed, and financially viable institutions; (b) promoting financial inclusion to ensure access to credit and banking services; (c) supporting sustainable livelihood activities that enhance income generation; and (d) advancing social inclusion and development by linking households to entitlements and welfare schemes through convergence with other programmes. Together, these components aim to build resilience, reduce vulnerability, and foster long-term prosperity among rural families.

4. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)

The main aim of DDU-GKY is to reduce poverty by training rural youth (aged 15-35) and enhancing their employability in various industries.

Objectives

- i. Skill training
- ii. Placement Assistance
- iii. Post Placement Support
- iv. Career Progression Support
- v. Incentives for higher placements

5. Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)

Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) is a major initiative of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), implemented through the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). The scheme is designed to support aspiring entrepreneurs in establishing new ventures in the non-farm sector, thereby promoting self-employment and small-scale industries.

Its primary objective is to generate sustainable employment opportunities for traditional artisans as well as unemployed youth in both rural and urban areas. By providing financial assistance and guidance, PMEGP enables individuals to start enterprises close to their homes, ensuring livelihood security while also contributing to local economic development.

6. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is the flagship skill development programme of the Government of India, launched in 2015 under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). Its primary aim is to provide skill training to youth across the country, enabling them to secure better livelihood opportunities. By focusing on industry-relevant skills, the scheme seeks to bridge the gap between the demand for skilled workers and the supply of trained manpower.

PMKVY offers short-term training courses in diverse sectors, certification of skills acquired, and financial rewards to encourage participation. It emphasises inclusivity by targeting unemployed youth, school/college dropouts, and workers in the informal sector. The programme also promotes recognition of



prior learning (RPL), ensuring that individuals with existing skills are formally certified. Through its nationwide network of training centres, PMKVY contributes to enhancing employability, reducing unemployment, and supporting India's vision of becoming a global hub for skilled manpower.

7. Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM)

The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana is the flagship initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) aimed at reducing poverty by strengthening community-based institutions for the poor, with a special focus on women. It promotes self-employment and sustainable livelihoods through women's self-help groups and financial inclusion. Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) is a specialised sub-component of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-NRLM, launched to empower women in agriculture by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity. From a sociological perspective, the programme recognises that while women contribute significantly to the rural agrarian economy, they are often not recognised as 'farmers.' MKSP addresses this by mobilising women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and providing them with technical knowledge and sustainable farming practices.

8. Rural Self Employment and Training Institutes (RSETIs)

Rural Self Employment and Training Institutes (RSETIs) are specialised training centres established by sponsor banks in different districts, with financial support from the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). These institutes focus on skill development and entrepreneurship training for rural populations, aiming to equip them with the knowledge and abilities required to pursue self-employment or wage-based opportunities. MoRD provides funds for constructing RSETI buildings and covers

the expenses related to training rural poor candidates.

Unemployed youth between the ages of 18 and 45, who show interest and aptitude for self-employment or wage employment, can enrol in these training programmes. The courses are designed to impart practical skills and entrepreneurial capabilities, enabling participants to start their own ventures or enhance their employability. While many trainees move towards self-employment, some also secure regular salaried jobs after completing their training, thereby contributing to rural economic development.

5.2.4 Income Generation Programmes

Income generation programmes in rural India are designed to empower households by creating sustainable livelihood opportunities beyond traditional agriculture. These initiatives focus on skill development, entrepreneurship, and financial support, enabling rural communities to diversify their sources of income. By promoting self-employment and small-scale enterprises, such programmes help reduce poverty, enhance economic resilience, and improve the overall quality of life in villages.

1. PM Vishwakarma Scheme

The Vishwakarma Scheme, launched on 17 September 2023, is a comprehensive initiative aimed at supporting traditional artisans and craftspeople engaged in 18 different trades that rely on manual skills and tools. The programme seeks to provide holistic assistance to these workers by recognising their contributions and enhancing their livelihood opportunities.

Its major components include formal recognition through a PM Vishwakarma Certificate and ID Card, opportunities for skill upgradation, provision of toolkit incentives, access to credit support, encouragement of

digital transactions, and marketing assistance to promote their products. Together, these measures are designed to strengthen the economic base of artisans, preserve traditional crafts, and ensure sustainable income generation for rural and urban craft communities.

2. Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) Initiatives

The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) runs a wide range of initiatives to promote rural employment, traditional crafts, and self-reliance in India. It supports artisans, entrepreneurs, and small industries through schemes that combine skill development, financial assistance, and market promotion. KVIC is a statutory body under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Government of India. Its primary role is to plan, promote, and develop khadi and village industries across rural areas, thereby generating employment and strengthening local economies. KVIC initiatives are closely aligned with national campaigns like *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* and *Vocal for Local*, ensuring that traditional crafts and small industries remain competitive in modern markets.

3. Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)

The Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) was launched on 8 April 2015 to extend financial support to small and micro enterprises operating in the non-farm, non-corporate sector. Under this scheme, entrepreneurs can access loans categorised as MUDRA loans, with amounts reaching up to ₹20 lakh for those who have previously availed themselves of and successfully repaid loans under the *Tarun* category.

These loans are disbursed through a wide network of institutions, including commercial banks, regional rural banks (RRBs), small

finance banks, microfinance institutions (MFIs), and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs). Applicants can approach these institutions directly or submit their requests online via the official portal udyamimitra.in. The scheme plays a crucial role in promoting entrepreneurship and supporting small businesses by providing accessible credit facilities at the grassroots level. Under the framework of the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY), MUDRA has introduced four distinct loan categories: Shishu, Kishore, Tarun, and Tarun Plus. These categories are designed to reflect the different stages of growth and the financial requirements of micro units and entrepreneurs.

5.2.5 Government Schemes and Rural Transformation in India

About 70 per cent of India's population resides in rural areas. This part of India faces numerous problems, such as dependence on agriculture, poor wages, distress migration, malnutrition, poor implementation of government schemes, and a lack of access to quality healthcare and education facilities. India's approach to rural development is defined by a comprehensive and multi-sectoral strategy, spearheaded by the Ministry of Rural Development and allied ministries. The suite of flagship programmes, ranging from the MGNREGA for wage employment to the PM-KISAN for income support and the Jal Jeevan Mission for sufficient drinking water, collectively aims to address five critical areas: poverty reduction, employment generation, housing, skill enhancement, and social welfare. Current statistics reflect significant national progress: MGNREGA has consistently provided a crucial safety net, especially during economic shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic, with millions of households utilising the 100-day work guarantee. Similarly, schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin (PMAY-G)



have successfully targeted the goal of 'Housing for All,' while the PM-KISAN scheme has transferred over ₹2.8 lakh crore directly to farmers' bank accounts since its inception, providing essential income stability through the DBT mode.

Despite impressive national figures, these centralised schemes face recurrent criticisms concerning implementation quality and regional imbalances. Common critiques include delayed wage payments under MGNREGA, corruption and 'leakage' in fund disbursement, and the creation of substandard durable assets. In terms of social welfare, while the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) components like the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) provide minimum support, the central pension amount remains low, often just ₹200 to ₹500 per month, which is barely adequate to cover basic living costs. This inadequacy often necessitates significant top-ups by state governments to make the pension meaningful. Furthermore, while programmes like the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) focus on skilled employment, linking trained rural youth to sustainable, well-paying jobs remains a persistent challenge due to market demand and migration patterns.

5.2.6 Rural Development Experience in Kerala

Rural development initiatives in Kerala are carried out through a mix of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS), state-sponsored programmes, and schemes of local governments, with local bodies playing a key role in their implementation. Several centrally sponsored schemes are executed in rural regions via the state government, focusing on poverty alleviation, employment creation, rural infrastructure development, and the provision of essential services. Fundamentally, all these varied programmes contribute, either directly or indirectly, to

the comprehensive overall development of the State's rural areas.

The current wage for MGNREGA workers in Kerala is ₹369 per day (as of the revised rates for the financial year 2025-26), which is significantly higher than the minimum wage in many other Indian states. Haryana continues to have the highest MGNREGA wage at ₹400 per day, while states like Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland have the lowest at ₹241 per day. The Kerala experience provides a unique and illustrative case study, often showcasing how robust state mechanisms and high social capital can enhance the impact of central schemes.

Kerala has a strong history of decentralised planning and high social welfare expenditure. For instance, while the NSAP provides a base pension, the state has a long-standing tradition of offering significantly higher social security pensions, often reaching ₹1,600 per month, far exceeding the minimum central component. In Kerala, the monthly welfare pension was revised in October 2025, with the amount raised from ₹1,600 to ₹2,000. This enhancement in social security support is expected to benefit nearly 62 lakh beneficiaries, strengthening financial assistance for vulnerable groups. The revision highlights the role of welfare programmes in poverty reduction, social protection, and livelihood security, ensuring that marginalised populations receive sustained support. Such measures reflect the broader commitment of welfare policies to improve the quality of life in both rural and urban areas.

Furthermore, the state's success with the Kudumbashree Mission, a powerful women-led community network, acts as an effective institutional vehicle for implementing schemes like the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), ensuring high levels of community participation and efficient delivery of benefits, including financial inclusion and self-employment promotion.

Kerala's progress in development-focused missions, such as the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G) and the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), has been rapid and comprehensive. Having achieved Open Defecation Free (ODF) status early, the state is now focused on the ODF Plus objectives of solid and liquid waste management. Similarly, in the context of the Jal Jeevan Mission, Kerala is one of the states that has made remarkable strides towards achieving the

2024 target of Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTCs), leveraging its existing decentralised water management systems. This success demonstrates that strong state-level commitment, high public awareness (supported by IEC), and robust community participation—a key objective mentioned in several scheme designs—are the most crucial factors in translating national objectives into tangible rural transformation.

Recap

- ◆ MGNREGA (2005) is a demand-based job scheme providing a legal guarantee of 100 days of paid, unskilled manual work per year to rural households.
- ◆ The primary goals of rural development efforts include reducing rural poverty, generating employment, developing infrastructure, and ensuring social welfare.
- ◆ PMAY-G (2016) restructured the former IAY scheme with the goal of building 2.95 crore permanent houses for the rural poor by March 2024.
- ◆ PMAY-G increased the minimum housing unit size to 25 sq. m and provides enhanced financial assistance (₹1.20 lakh in the plains).
- ◆ PMGSY (2000) aims to connect distant villages with all-weather roads, improving access to markets, schools, and hospitals.
- ◆ The funding ratio for PMGSY was changed in 2015-16 to 60:40 (Centre:State).
- ◆ DDU-GKY (2014) is a placement-linked skill development programme for rural youth aged 15-35 from poor families, operating under NRLM.
- ◆ The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) (1995) provides financial aid to the vulnerable, comprising five schemes including IGNOAPS (Old Age Pension) and IGNWPS (Widow Pension).
- ◆ Mission Antyodaya (2017-18) is a convergence project that uses a yearly survey in Gram Panchayats to identify development gaps based on the 29 subjects in the Eleventh Schedule.
- ◆ SAGY (2014) mandates Members of Parliament (MPs) to develop 'Adarsh Grams' (model villages) using 100% convergence of existing scheme resources.



- ◆ The Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) focuses on developing “Rurban” clusters of villages by providing urban amenities and critical gap funding (CGF).
- ◆ PMKSY (2015-16) is an umbrella scheme aimed at ‘Har Khet Ko Pani’ (water to every field) and improving on-farm water use efficiency.
- ◆ PMFBY (2016) is a crop insurance scheme providing financial safeguards to farmers against loss from natural disasters, pests, and diseases.
- ◆ PM-KISAN (2019) provides direct income support of ₹6,000 per year in three equal instalments of ₹2,000 to eligible landholding farmer families via DBT.
- ◆ Jal Jeevan Mission (2019) aims for safe and sufficient drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024, prioritising source sustainability and a community approach.
- ◆ In Kerala, the monthly welfare pension was revised in October 2025, with the amount raised from ₹1,600 to ₹2,000.

Objective Questions

1. MGNREGA guarantees how many days of employment per year?
2. PMAY-G was launched by restructuring which former housing scheme?
3. DDU-GKY operates under the umbrella of which larger mission?
4. PMGSY was launched in which year?
5. Which NSAP scheme provides pension to the elderly?
6. The concept of ‘Rurban’ clusters is central to which scheme?
7. PMKSY is an umbrella scheme focused on?
8. Which scheme focused on providing LPG connections to rural households?
9. PM-KISAN provides income support of ₹6,000 per year in how many installments?
10. Which mission is responsible for achieving and sustaining ‘ODF Plus’ status in rural areas?

11. The MIDH scheme promotes the holistic growth of which sector?
12. Which scheme targets the “poorest of the poor” with highly subsidized food grains?
13. What technological mechanism is utilized in MGNREGA to transfer wages directly to workers’ bank accounts, ensuring transparency and timely payments?
14. The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), which aims to link distant villages with all-weather roads, was launched on which date?
15. The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) specifically focuses on providing steady jobs to rural youth within which age bracket?

Answers

1. 100 days
2. IAY (Indira Awaaz Yojana)
3. NRLM (National Rural Livelihoods Mission)
4. 2000
5. IGNOAPS
6. SPMRM (Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission)
7. Rural Irrigation
8. PMUY (Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana)
9. Three
10. SBM-G (Swachh Bharat Mission - Gramin)
11. Horticulture
12. AAY (Antyodaya Anna Yojana)
13. Electronic Fund Management System (e-FMS)
14. December 25, 2000
15. 15 to 35 years



Assignments

1. Analyse the dual role of MGNREGA as both a safety net for income security and a mechanism for rural infrastructure development.
2. Discuss how Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) acts as a catalyst for economic and social development in rural areas.
3. Explain the concept of 'convergence' as utilised in Mission Antyodaya and Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY). Why is inter-scheme coordination crucial for holistic rural development?
4. "Welfare measures are a fulfilment of the Directive Principles of State Policy." Justify this statement by detailing the various components and beneficiaries covered under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP).
5. Analyse the public health and environmental benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) and the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G). How do these programmes specifically empower women in rural households?

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Voices of Rural Society

BLOCK



UNIT

Rural Social Movements

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the historical and contemporary evolution of farmers' and women's movements in rural India
- ◆ analyse the structural drivers of rural mobilisation, including land relations, indebtedness, gender inequality, and ecological change
- ◆ evaluate the role of Kerala's institutional frameworks, particularly Kudumbashree and decentralised governance, in shaping rural collective action

Prerequisite

India's villages are not just landscapes of cultivation; they are theatres of struggle, negotiation, and hope. Beneath the rhythm of sowing and harvest, rural life resonates with aspirations for dignity and justice. Every field tilled, every seed planted, and every grain harvested carries within it a story of collective survival, while the hands that labour remain invisible in mainstream narratives of development.

Across generations, farmers and rural women have refused to accept marginalisation as destiny. Their protests whether dramatic uprisings against colonial rule, sit-ins along national highways, or silent defiance within households have shaped the social and political history of India. These movements emerge not from privilege or power but from the necessity to live with honour: to secure land, fair prices, access to credit, recognition of labour, safety, identity, and rights.

In recent years, rural voices have grown louder and more strategic. Digital tools amplify grievances from the paddy fields of Kerala to the wheat belts of Punjab. Women, once relegated to the background of agrarian narratives, are rewriting the script, asserting their indispensable role in food production, care work, and



community resilience. Even as climate change reshapes landscapes and policies attempt to restructure agriculture, collective resistance continues to flourish in new and creative forms.

This unit journeys through these vibrant struggles of farmers who feed the nation and women who sustain its foundations. It asks: What does development mean if those who nourish the country are left vulnerable? How do rural communities reimagine their futures when confronted with powerful structures like the state, market, and patriarchy? And most importantly, how do these movements forge pathways toward equity, democracy, and sustainability in twenty-first-century India?

Keywords

Agrarian mobilisation, MSP (Minimum Support Price), Feminisation of agriculture, Kudumbashree, Intersectionality

Discussion

To understand rural movements, we must apply the lens of Social Movement Theory. While earlier peasant uprisings were often spontaneous reactions to 'moral economy' violations, such as unfair taxation, contemporary movements are better explained through Resource Mobilisation Theory and the Political Opportunity Structure. The 2020-21 farmer protests, for instance, were not merely outbursts of anger but sophisticated operations that utilised trans-local networks, digital media, and legal expertise to exploit political openings. Furthermore, these represent a shift toward 'New Social Movements' (NSM), where the focus has expanded from traditional class-based material demands (like land and wages) to 'post-material' issues such as ecological preservation, cultural identity, and the right to participate in global trade policy.

6.1.1 Rural Social Movements as

Rural social movements in India represent some of the most influential forms of

collective action. Rooted in the agrarian political economy and daily practices of subsistence, they articulate demands around land, labour, dignity, and citizenship. Unlike many urban movements that mobilise around rights-based claims (civil liberties, environment, identity politics), rural movements typically emerge from material conditions of survival, including fluctuating commodity prices, indebtedness, land alienation, gendered labour burdens, and ecological precarity.

Studying rural social movements reveals broader structural contradictions: development-induced displacement, neoliberal governance, corporatisation of agriculture, patriarchal property regimes, and state-capital alliances. These contradictions give rise to new repertoires of resistance, which combine classical forms of mobilisation (marches, sit-ins, cooperative membership) with contemporary modes (networked activism, digital memory-making, trans-local solidarity). Situating farmers' movements and women's movements within this broader

framework illuminates how rural India negotiates policy, power, and social change.

The origins of rural social movements can be traced to colonial land revenue policies such as the Zamindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari systems, which institutionalised land alienation and peasant exploitation. Early movements like the Indigo Revolt, Tebhaga, Telangana, and Moplah uprisings were deeply political and directly linked to the nationalist movement, articulating demands for tenancy rights, fair wages, and land redistribution. These classical movements framed land as a moral economy issue rather than a market commodity and laid the foundation for rural collective consciousness. They were rooted in agrarian economic concerns such as rent extraction, bonded labour, and sharecropping exploitation, while simultaneously resisting colonial ecological extraction and displacement.

After independence, state-led development projects such as dams, mining, industrial corridors, and urban expansion intensified land acquisition and forced displacement, giving rise to a new generation of rural social movements. These included tribal, fisherfolk, peasant, and slum-dwellers' movements protesting against eviction, forest alienation, and urban land acquisition. Movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Chilika Bachao Andolan, Silent Valley, and Ekta Parishad represented resistance to development-induced displacement and ecological degradation. They exposed how development policies marginalised traditional land users, disrupted agroecological systems, and intensified rural poverty.

Rural social movements have evolved across multiple dimensions. In the agrarian economy, they challenge landlessness, wage exploitation, agribusiness monopolies, and declining farm incomes. In agroecology, they defend forests, commons, water bodies, and biodiversity, highlighting the

ecological basis of rural livelihoods. In rural land relations, they confront unequal land ownership, caste-based exclusion, and gendered inheritance. In urban land struggles, rural migrants, slum dwellers, and informal workers contest evictions, housing denial, and land commodification. Rural movements transcend village boundaries and extend into urban spaces, reflecting the continuum between rural dispossession and urban precarity. These movements operate both within and outside formal political structures. Politically affiliated movements (peasant unions, left mobilisations, farmers' fronts) use electoral bargaining, party alliances, and policy lobbying, while so-called apolitical movements rely on moral persuasion, civil disobedience, community mobilisation, and legal activism. Together, they represent diverse repertoires of resistance, from mass protests and marches to litigation, digital advocacy, and international networking.

A significant transformation has occurred in the tools and strategies of rural social movements. Classical movements relied on mass uprisings, village assemblies, physical occupation of land, and confrontational protests. Contemporary movements increasingly use legal interventions, media campaigns, digital mobilisation, NGO networks, transnational advocacy, and rights-based frameworks. The shift is from rebellion to rights-based citizenship claims, from localised revolts to networked movements, and from ideological class struggle to intersectional struggles involving caste, gender, ecology, and identity.

Rural social movements in India represent transformative collective action that has evolved from classical agrarian rebellions to complex, multi-layered rights-based movements. They have reshaped land policies, environmental governance, rehabilitation norms, and democratic participation, transforming rural populations from subjects of development to claim-making citizens.



These movements continue to redefine development, justice, and democracy in contemporary India.

6.1.2. History of Farmer Mobilisation

6.1.2.1 Colonial India

Peasant and farmer mobilisations in India have historically taken shape in relation to transformations in land relations and agrarian surplus extraction. During the colonial period, significant peasant militancy surfaced in the Indigo Revolt (1859-60), the Moplah Rebellions (1836-1921) in Malabar, the Bardoli Satyagraha, and the Tebhaga Movement. Peasant life in colonial India was shaped by extreme agrarian distress, exploitative land revenue systems, and deepening indebtedness. Colonial policies such as the Zamindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari systems converted customary land rights into private property and subjected peasants to heavy taxation, rigid cash payments, and forced commercialisation of crops. Traditional subsistence farming was replaced by export-oriented cash crop cultivation, making peasants vulnerable to market fluctuations, moneylenders, and periodic famines. Land alienation, bonded labour, forced labour (beggar), and tenancy exploitation became widespread, creating a class of landless agricultural labourers and marginal peasants. This structural oppression generated widespread rural unrest, laying the social foundation for organised peasant movements.

The Santhal Rebellion is considered the earliest large-scale peasant-tribal uprising against colonial land exploitation. The Santhal adivasis of present-day Jharkhand and West Bengal revolted against oppressive zamindars, moneylenders, and colonial administrators who had dispossessed them of land through fraudulent debt practices and rent extraction. Led by Sidhu and Kanhu

Murmu, the rebellion sought to restore community control over land and forest resources. Though brutally suppressed, it exposed the exploitative character of colonial agrarian policies and set a precedent for later tribal and peasant resistance.

1. Indigo Revolt (1859–60): Peasants in Bengal protested against European planters who forced them to grow indigo under exploitative contracts. This movement asserted peasants' right to crop choice and exposed colonial agrarian coercion.
2. Deccan Riots (1875): Peasants in Maharashtra revolted against moneylenders and usurious debt practices, highlighting the crisis of rural indebtedness.
3. Champaran Satyagraha (1917): Under Gandhi's leadership, peasants protested the forced cultivation of indigo (tinkathia system), marking the entry of mass peasant issues into nationalist politics.
4. Kisan Sabha Movement (1920s–30s): Organised peasant unions demanded fair rents, abolition of illegal cesses, and tenancy security, strengthening class-based rural mobilisation.
5. Tebhaga Movement (1946–47): Sharecroppers in Bengal demanded two-thirds of produce, challenging landlord domination.
6. Telangana Movement (1946–51): A militant peasant uprising against feudal exploitation and bonded labour, led by communists.

The Indian National Congress gradually incorporated peasant issues into the nationalist agenda. From Gandhi's Champaran movement onwards, Congress began framing agrarian distress as part of the freedom

struggle. Peasant grievances were mobilised through constructive programmes, village upliftment campaigns and Kisan Sabhas, thereby transforming peasant resistance into a mass nationalist force while maintaining non-violent and reformist frameworks.

Gandhi played a crucial role in transforming peasant movements into moral and political struggles. Through the Champaran, Kheda and Bardoli satyagrahas, he emphasised non-violent resistance, truth, collective discipline and ethical persuasion. He elevated peasant suffering into a national moral issue and politicised rural masses within a broader freedom movement framework.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) played a decisive role in organising militant peasant struggles. It mobilised landless labourers and tenants through class-based movements like Telangana, Tebhaga and Punnapra-Vayalar. These movements directly challenged feudal land relations and demanded radical land redistribution, leaving a lasting imprint on post-independence land reforms and agrarian policies.

6.1.2.2 Post-Colonial India

Post-independence, agrarian mobilisations re-oriented themselves to the state and its institutional frameworks, demanding land reforms, minimum wages, tenancy rights and access to irrigation. The advent of the Green Revolution generated new contradictions: while raising productivity for certain regions and castes, it also intensified inequalities, encouraged monocultures, increased dependence on chemical inputs, and tied farmers to volatile market cycles and credit networks. By the 1980s and 1990s, organisations such as the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) and Shetkari Sanghatana articulated farmer interests in new ways, opposing price shocks and input costs.

The Communist movement in India

played a decisive role in transforming agrarian discontent into organised class-based struggles. From the 1930s onward, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and later the CPI(M) mobilised peasants, tenants and landless labourers against feudal exploitation, bonded labour and landlord domination. They led some of the most militant agrarian uprisings, such as the Telangana Armed Struggle (1946–51), the Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, the Punnapra–Vayalar uprising in Kerala, and later the Naxalbari movement (1967) in West Bengal. These struggles demanded land redistribution, abolition of forced labour and security of tenure, directly shaping post-independence land reform agendas. Over time, sections of the radical Left adopted revolutionary strategies inspired by Maoist ideology, leading to the emergence of Maoist insurgencies in central and eastern India. These Maoist movements articulated resistance against land alienation, mining, forest dispossession and state repression, especially among Adivasi communities, and continue to influence debates on development, displacement and internal security.

Alongside Left-led struggles, regional farmers' movements emerged across India in response to changes brought about by the Green Revolution, rising input costs, market instability, and state procurement policies. In Uttar Pradesh, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) led major mobilisations demanding fair sugarcane prices, loan waivers, and irrigation rights. In Karnataka, the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) spearheaded farmers' protests against seed monopolies, GM crops, and trade liberalisation. In Punjab, farmers' unions such as the BKU (Ugrahan) and BKU (Dakaunda) mobilised peasants over minimum support prices, indebtedness, and procurement policies, playing a central role in nationwide farm protests. In Andhra Pradesh, movements like the Rythu Coolie Sangham, AP Rythu Sangham, and tribal land struggles mobilised farmers and agricultural labourers against land alienation,



irrigation inequities, and displacement due to development projects. Together, these movements reflect the evolving nature of rural social movements as organised, regionally rooted, and politically influential collective actions addressing agrarian distress in contemporary India.

6.1.2.3 Contemporary India

WTO agreements and seed monopolies have signalled a shift from class-based to identity-inflected politics, where "farmer" has become a moral category symbolising national food security. The introduction of economic liberalisation in the 1990s marked a critical turning point in Indian agrarian relations. Policies of trade liberalisation, reduction of state subsidies, market deregulation, and the promotion of corporate agribusiness fundamentally altered rural land relations and farming practices. Small and marginal farmers increasingly faced rising input costs, withdrawal of institutional credit, shrinking public procurement, and exposure to volatile global markets. This intensified land alienation, rural indebtedness, and agrarian distress, giving rise to a new wave of land and farmers' struggles across the country.

Farmers across India mobilised strongly against international trade agreements such as GATT, WTO, and ASEAN trade pacts, which were perceived as threatening domestic agriculture by exposing farmers to cheap imports, multinational seed corporations, and corporate contract farming. Movements led by organisations like the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Bharatiya Kisan Union, and various Left-affiliated unions protested against patent regimes, genetically modified seeds, and corporate control over agriculture, arguing that these policies undermined food sovereignty and traditional seed systems. Simultaneously, nationwide mobilisations demanding a legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP) and assured procurement

reflected growing resistance to market-driven agricultural reforms.

Agrarian distress after liberalisation has also been reflected in widespread farmer suicides, particularly in regions like Vidarbha in Maharashtra and parts of Kerala, where indebtedness, crop failures, and unstable market prices have driven farmers into deep financial crises. These tragedies transformed personal distress into collective political mobilisation, compelling state interventions such as debt relief packages, compensation schemes, and renewed debates on sustainable agriculture and mental health in farming communities.

In Kerala, regional farmers' organisations such as INFARM (Indian Farmers Movement) and KIFA (Kerala Independent Farmers Association) have mobilised farmers against falling prices, rising input costs, and import policies that undermine local produce. Another emerging front of struggle involves farmers living on the fringes of forests who face increasing human-wildlife conflict, including crop destruction by elephants, wild boars, and monkeys. These farmers have organised protests demanding compensation, protective measures, and recognition of their livelihood vulnerability, highlighting the ecological dimension of contemporary agrarian struggles.

Climate change has further deepened agrarian vulnerability. Erratic monsoons, prolonged droughts, unseasonal rains, floods, soil degradation, and declining groundwater levels have severely affected crop cycles, productivity, and farm incomes. Farmers increasingly confront the uncertainties of a climate economy, where livelihoods are shaped by ecological instability, carbon policies, climate insurance regimes, and green transitions. Climate-related risks have intensified rural distress, leading to growing demands for climate-resilient farming, sustainable agroecological practices, crop

insurance reforms, and state accountability.

Overall, post-liberalisation land struggles reflect a shift from classical land redistribution movements to complex struggles over market justice, ecological security, climate resilience, and food sovereignty. These movements represent a new phase of rural social movements as transformative collective action in response to globalisation, environmental change, and neoliberal development.

6.1.3. Political Economy of Contemporary Farmer Demands

The MSP Question as a Structural Demand: Minimum Support Price (MSP) is one of the many important aspects related to agricultural development. Farmers have been demanding MSP for decades, but the demand for legalisation of MSP has been raised prominently by contemporary farmers' movements. The demand for a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) represents more than just an economic ask; it is a political claim asserting farmers' right to a dignified livelihood.

The debate around Minimum Support Price (MSP) has evolved from a technical pricing mechanism into a deeply political and structural demand, especially in the context of contemporary farmers' movements. Traditionally, MSP fixation has been presented by the state as an administrative tool meant to encourage the production of key crops and protect farmers from market price crashes. It is determined by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) based on factors such as the cost of cultivation, demand–supply conditions, inter-crop price parity, and implications for consumers and food inflation. From this perspective, MSP is viewed as a policy incentive, not as a legally enforceable right.

In contrast, farmers' movements argue that MSP must be understood as a right to livelihood and survival, not merely a market signal. Farmers demand that MSP be legally guaranteed for all crops, ensuring compulsory procurement at remunerative prices. Their central argument is that existing MSP calculations underestimate real cultivation costs by ignoring unpaid family labour, land rent, climate risks, and market volatility. Movements advocate for the C2+50% formula (Swaminathan Commission), which includes comprehensive costs and provides a reasonable profit margin, whereas the government primarily follows the A2+FL formula, which excludes several critical cost components.

The controversy arises because legalising MSP would significantly transform India's agrarian political economy. Critics argue that mandatory MSP could distort markets, increase food inflation, burden state finances, and reduce private sector participation. Supporters counter that current market-driven pricing systematically disadvantages small and marginal farmers, forcing distress sales and indebtedness, and that MSP legalisation would correct structural inequalities embedded in agrarian markets. The difference in arguments reflects a deeper ideological divide: the state frames MSP as a supportive policy instrument, while farmers frame it as a constitutional and moral entitlement tied to dignity, food sovereignty, and rural citizenship. The MSP question, therefore, is not merely about price fixation but about who controls agrarian livelihoods in a liberalised economy.

Credit, Indebtedness, and Agrarian Vulnerability: Indebtedness remains a chronic structural condition, shaped by declining profitability, climate shock exposure, and dependence on private moneylenders. The resultant debt cycles have contributed significantly to farmer suicides in India. Credit cooperatives, public and



regional rural banks, and formal financial institutions have been central to providing agricultural credit, subsidised loans, and targeted financial support to farmers in India. Schemes such as the Kisan Credit Card (KCC), introduced in 1998, aim to extend short-term and term credit for crop production and allied activities through commercial banks, regional rural banks, and cooperatives, reducing dependence on informal moneylenders and lowering borrowing costs for farmers. As of recent data, KCC credit has expanded, with outstanding loans growing and non-performing assets (NPAs) declining moderately, indicating broader access to institutional credit and reduced reliance on informal debt sources. Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) and other cooperatives continue to distribute subsidised loans, often at concessional interest rates, supporting input purchases like seeds, fertilisers, and irrigation. Structural inequalities persist: while about 86% of Indian farmers are small and marginal, they receive a disproportionately smaller share of total agricultural credit compared to larger farmers, who account for roughly 55–60% of loan benefits despite being only about 14% of the farming population. About 25% of marginal farmers are linked to cooperatives, leaving many outside formal credit networks due to barriers such as membership complexity, limited capital, and geographic or social exclusion. These inequalities deepen agrarian distress, as small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers, especially from vulnerable caste and tribal groups, face limited access to affordable credit, higher debt burdens, and persistent dependence on costly informal lenders, exacerbating cycles of indebtedness and vulnerability. The juxtaposition of subsidised institutional support with ongoing exclusion underscores how financial structures both enable and constrain agrarian livelihoods in contemporary India.

Land, Inputs, and Ecological Stress: Growing ecological stress (soil degradation, groundwater depletion, floods, and drought) has become integral to the agenda of farmer mobilisation. Farmers increasingly challenge development paradigms that prioritise growth over ecological sustainability.

Traditionally, Indian agriculture was based on community-oriented land use and indigenous ecological knowledge systems. Land was cultivated through mixed cropping, shifting cultivation, rotational farming, and shared use of commons such as grazing lands, forests, and water bodies. Farmers relied on indigenous seeds, which were locally preserved and exchanged within villages, and were well adapted to local soils, rainfall patterns, and pests. Fertilisers were largely organic, including cow dung, compost, green manure, leaf litter, and ash, which maintained soil fertility and biodiversity. These practices ensured food security, low input costs, and ecological balance, especially for small and marginal farmers.

With the advent of the Green Revolution and later economic liberalisation, this traditional system was gradually replaced by commercialised, high-input agriculture. Hybrid and later genetically modified (GM) seeds, along with chemical fertilisers and pesticides, became dominant. While GM seeds such as Bt cotton promised higher yields and pest resistance, they also introduced new forms of dependency. These seeds are expensive, must be repurchased every season, and are controlled by multinational seed corporations, making them less accessible to small and marginal farmers. Many farmers became trapped in cycles of high-cost cultivation, indebtedness, and ecological vulnerability due to declining soil fertility and pest resistance.

These transformations have triggered widespread farmers' protests across India. Farmers have mobilised against seed

monopolies, patent regimes, and corporate control over agriculture, particularly opposing GM crops and trade agreements like the WTO that facilitate multinational agribusiness entry. Movements led by organisations such as the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), and regional farmers' unions have demanded seed sovereignty, affordable inputs, legally guaranteed MSP, and protection of indigenous farming systems. These protests reflect a broader struggle to reclaim farmers' control over land, seeds, and food systems, highlighting how rural social movements have evolved into powerful collective actions defending livelihood security, ecological sustainability, and agrarian autonomy.

The recent wave of farmers' struggles in India, particularly the Delhi border protests (2020–21) and the long tradition of farmers' marches and protests in Maharashtra, reveal deep social transformations as well as persistent structural contradictions within Indian democracy and development.

The Delhi border protest, led largely by farmers from Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh, was not merely a reaction to the three farm laws but a symbolic confrontation with the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture. Socially, it brought the agrarian crisis into national consciousness by transforming invisible rural distress into a visible political question. Farmers redefined themselves not as beneficiaries of state welfare but as rights-bearing citizens, asserting claims over Minimum Support Price (MSP), market protection, and food sovereignty. The protest space itself became a living social institution organised with langars, libraries, health camps, and women-led platforms, demonstrating a new form of participatory rural democracy. From a critical perspective, the movement also revealed regional inequalities, as farmers from rain-fed and marginal regions remained underrepresented, exposing how agrarian

politics continues to be shaped by relatively resource-rich farming belts.

In Maharashtra, farmers' movements, particularly the Long March to Mumbai and subsequent protests in Vidarbha and Marathwada, represent a distress-driven mobilisation rooted in drought, indebtedness, and farmer suicides. These movements brought to the forefront the social tragedy of agrarian collapse, highlighting how liberalisation, declining irrigation coverage, and volatile markets have disproportionately affected small and marginal farmers, Adivasis, and Dalits. The Long March symbolised a politics of suffering, where barefoot farmers walking hundreds of kilometres exposed the moral failure of development policies. Socially, it generated public empathy and forced temporary policy responses such as loan waivers and compensation packages, but structurally, it did not dismantle the deeper inequalities of land distribution, credit access, and irrigation.

Critically, both movements show that contemporary farmers' protests have shifted from classical land redistribution demands to struggles over market justice, climate vulnerability, and survival. They have strengthened democratic participation, revived rural political consciousness, and challenged corporate-dominated agricultural reforms. At the same time, they also expose the limits of protest-based reforms, where concessions remain temporary, regional, and uneven, leaving the structural roots of agrarian inequality largely intact. Farmers' struggles today are both transformative and symptomatic: they empower rural voices while simultaneously revealing the unresolved contradictions of India's agrarian political economy.

A New Rural Political Consciousness: A new rural political consciousness in India has emerged from the deepening agrarian crisis, neoliberal restructuring of agriculture, and



the growing perception among farmers that market-driven reforms have eroded livelihood security, dignity, and autonomy. Declining farm incomes, rising input costs, climate uncertainties, and uneven state support have transformed economic distress into sustained political mobilisation. Farmers are no longer articulating demands merely as beneficiaries of welfare, but as rights-bearing citizens asserting claims over policy, prices, and the future of food systems.

The 2020–2021 farmers' agitation marked a historic turning point in this transformation. The prolonged sit-ins at the Delhi borders reconfigured the visibility of agrarian politics by demonstrating remarkable organisational capacity, inter-state solidarity, and symbolic political practices such as tractor rallies, memorial columns, and community kitchens. These protest spaces functioned as alternative public spheres, where farmers deliberated on laws, markets, and rights, thereby institutionalising agrarian resistance within national political discourse. This consciousness further deepened during the renewed mobilisations of 2024–2025, when farmers once again organised large-scale protests demanding statutory MSP, crop insurance reforms, and debt relief. Unlike earlier movements, this phase was characterised by broader coalition-building, multi-state coordination, and more calibrated negotiation strategies, indicating a maturing political identity and strategic sophistication of rural movements.

The state's oscillation between dialogue committees and coercive responses has further politicised farmers, reinforcing their collective identity as central actors in policy negotiation rather than peripheral stakeholders. The persistence of protests over multiple years reflects not episodic unrest but the consolidation of a new rural political consciousness one that places agrarian citizens at the heart of debates on

development, democracy, and economic justice in contemporary India.

- 1. The 2020–2021 Agitation and Its Institutional Legacy:** The sit-ins at Delhi borders by Indian farmers (for over a year) reconfigured the visibility of agrarian politics. These protests demonstrated sustained organisational capacity, inter-state solidarity, and the centrality of symbolic politics (e.g., tractor rallies, memorial columns, community kitchens).
- 2. Renewed Agitations Post-2024:** In 2024-25, farmers again mobilised in large numbers, demanding statutory MSP, crop insurance reform, and debt relief. Unlike earlier protests, this phase featured more systematic coalition-building, multi-state coordination, and calibrated negotiation strategies.
- 3. Oscillation Between Negotiation and Confrontation:** The state's response has oscillated between dialogue committees and coercive tactics. The persistence of protests over multiple years suggests a deeper political shift: farmers are no longer peripheral to national debates but central participants in policy negotiation.

6.1.4 Farmers' Movements in Kerala

Kerala's farmers' movements have a long historical legacy rooted in struggles against feudal land relations, tenancy exploitation, and agrarian inequality. During the pre- and post-Independence period, peasant mobilisations such as the Kayyur–Chirakkal struggle, Punnappa–Vayalar uprising, and organised tenant movements under Communist leadership challenged landlord domination and laid the foundation for radical land reforms in the state. These

classical movements transformed Kerala's agrarian structure by abolishing tenancy and redistributing land, creating one of the most egalitarian landholding patterns in India.

In the post-liberalisation era, Kerala's agriculture has faced declining profitability, rising input costs, shrinking cultivable land, import pressures, and ecological stress. In this context, contemporary farmers' movements have emerged that focus on market justice, ecological protection, and livelihood security. Among them, the Vayalkkili Samaram (Save the Paddy Fields Movement) has become symbolic of resistance against the conversion of paddy fields for real estate, commercial projects, and infrastructure development. This movement mobilised farmers, environmental groups, and local communities to defend wetlands, food security, and ecological balance, leading to public awareness and policy interventions for wetland and paddy field conservation.

Major Farmers' Struggles in Kerala

- ◆ Kayyur–Chirakkal Struggle
- ◆ Punnapra–Vayalar Uprising
- ◆ Land-to-the-Tiller and Tenancy Movements
- ◆ Vayalkkili Samaram (Save the Paddy Fields Movement)
- ◆ INFARM and KIFA Mobilisations
- ◆ Protests against wildlife crop raids
- ◆ Movements against land conversion and eviction

6.1.4.1 Socio-Political Implications

Kerala's farmers' movements have reshaped rural politics by strengthening grassroots democracy, empowering small and marginal farmers, and embedding

agrarian justice within state policy. They have influenced progressive land reforms, conservation laws, wetland protection policies, and farmers' welfare schemes. Socially, they have reinforced collective bargaining, enhanced political participation of rural communities, and fostered ecological consciousness. Politically, these movements have ensured that agriculture remains a central concern of Kerala's development agenda, transforming farmers from marginal producers into active stakeholders in governance and sustainable development.

6.1.4.2 Agrarian Specificities of Kerala

The agrarian structure of Kerala differs sharply from that of the Indo-Gangetic plains. The state is characterised by small and marginal landholdings, high literacy, strong cooperative institutions, and diversified cropping patterns. Land reforms significantly weakened landlordism, enabling tenant-cultivator empowerment and political mobilization. Moreover, Kerala's political culture, shaped by robust unionisation, leftist party dominance, and decentralised governance, creates a fertile environment for farmer participation.

Contemporary agrarian movements in Kerala represent a deepening rural political consciousness shaped by ecological fragility, market instability, administrative failures, and climate vulnerability. Unlike classical land redistribution struggles, present-day mobilisations are driven by survival, sustainability, and state accountability. Farmers increasingly perceive development, environmental regulation, and market liberalisation as structurally disadvantaging small cultivators, especially those located along the fragile fringes of the Western Ghats.

Farmers inhabiting the ecologically sensitive zones of the Western Ghats have raised serious allegations against what



they describe as selective environmental governance. While conservation regulations restrict cultivation, construction, and land-use changes, farmers argue that they are simultaneously left unprotected from wildlife incursions, climate disasters, and market failures. This contradiction strict ecological controls without livelihood safeguards has intensified protests across Wayanad, Idukki, Nilambur, and high-range areas. Farmers accuse the state of criminalising traditional livelihoods while failing to provide effective compensation, insurance, and rehabilitation mechanisms.

One major form of agrarian mobilisation in Kerala has emerged among paddy cultivators in Kuttanad, Palakkad, and Alappuzha, who have repeatedly protested against procurement delays, arrears, and unfavourable out-turn ratios. While Kerala publicly commits to protecting rice cultivation for food security and ecological reasons, administrative bottlenecks and delayed payments have pushed farmers into distress. These procurement struggles reveal a gap between policy commitments and implementation capacity, transforming paddy farmers into organised claim-making citizens.

High-range farmers cultivating pepper, cardamom, and rubber face acute price volatility due to global commodity cycles, disease outbreaks, and climate stress. These instabilities have led to new mobilisations demanding minimum support mechanisms for plantation crops, climate-linked crop insurance, subsidies for replanting, and scientific disease control. These movements reflect a shift from land ownership demands to market justice and ecological security.

Kerala's recurrent floods (2018, 2019, 2021) and landslides have further intensified agrarian vulnerability. As farms are repeatedly destroyed, climate compensation, disaster insurance, ecological zoning, and

resettlement have become central themes of agrarian protest. Farmers now frame climate change not as a natural calamity but as a political-economic risk requiring institutional accountability.

Compounding these pressures are increasing vermin and wildlife raids, particularly by wild boars, elephants, and monkeys, which are destroying crops in forest fringe villages. Farmers argue that conservation policies prioritise wildlife protection while neglecting farmer livelihoods, leading to mounting protests demanding fencing, culling permissions, compensation reform, and livelihood protection.

Collectively, these mobilisations have transformed agrarian politics in Kerala into a complex rights-based movement rooted in ecological justice, climate security, procurement accountability, and market regulation. They reflect a new phase of rural social movements where farmers act not merely as producers but as political subjects demanding dignity, protection, and participation in sustainable development governance.

6.1.5 Women's Movements in Rural India

Women's movements in rural India have emerged as powerful collective struggles rooted in everyday experiences of inequality, exploitation, and social exclusion. Traditionally, rural women were positioned at the intersection of patriarchy, caste hierarchy, and agrarian relations, which restricted their access to land, education, mobility, and political participation. As Reddy (1986) observes, women's movements in India were guided by two core objectives: first, to eliminate customs and practices that undermined women's dignity, such as child marriage, purdah, and legal disabilities; and second, to promote measures that recognised

women's distinctive social roles, particularly within the family and community.

In rural contexts, these objectives acquired deeper significance because women were not only socially subordinated but also economically marginalised as unpaid agricultural workers, landless labourers, and invisible contributors to household production. Consequently, women's movements in rural India evolved beyond social reform into struggles for land rights, livelihood security, access to resources, political voice, and ecological justice. From early participation in freedom struggles to contemporary mobilisations around land, forests, wages, food security, and self-help groups, rural women have transformed themselves from passive beneficiaries into active political agents. Women's movements in rural India represent a critical dimension of rural social movements, redefining development, citizenship, and social justice from a gendered perspective. Women's movements in India had two major objectives: (1) to remove customs that were detrimental to women's dignity and status, such as child marriage, purdah, and legal disabilities; and (2) to promote measures that would allow for the recognition of the distinctive features of womanhood, particularly those related to the family (Reddy N G, 1986).

6.1.5.1 Theoretical Framework: Gender, Labour, and Agrarian Political Economy

Rural women perform a substantial undervalued portion of agricultural labour, including sowing, transplanting, livestock care, and post-harvest processing. Feminist scholars identify this as the feminisation of agriculture, but without the parallel feminisation of rights: women often lack land titles, access to credit, and representation. Women's movements in rural settings Contest both material inequalities (wages,

land rights) and symbolic hierarchies (norms of domesticity, gendered invisibilisation of work).

6.1.5.2 Evolution of Rural Women's Movements

The roots of women's movements in India can be traced back to the nineteenth-century social reform movements that challenged practices such as sati, child marriage, widow oppression, and the denial of education to women. These early reform efforts created new ways of thinking about social institutions, customs, and traditions, and laid the ideological foundations for women's mobilization. Women's movements did not develop in isolation but grew alongside broader debates on social reform, justice, and citizenship. During the freedom struggle, rural women actively participated in nationalist movements through Gandhian constructive programmes such as spinning, prohibition, village sanitation, and basic education. Their participation was largely framed within ideals of sacrifice, service, and motherhood rather than political autonomy. In the early post-Independence period, the state adopted a welfare-oriented approach that viewed women mainly as dependents and beneficiaries of social services related to nutrition, health, and child welfare. While these initiatives improved basic welfare, they did not substantially challenge women's subordination in agrarian relations, land ownership, or decision-making processes.

From the 1970s onwards, rural women's movements acquired a more political and rights-based character. Civil society organisations and women's collectives mobilised rural women to become aware of and demand their rights. This period witnessed struggles for minimum wages, social security, and recognition for ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, and midday-meal workers; campaigns for land rights led largely by Dalit and Adivasi women;



and movements against domestic violence, trafficking, and caste-based sexual exploitation. Rural women also emerged as prominent leaders in ecological and anti-displacement struggles opposing mining, deforestation, and land alienation caused by development projects. These mobilisations exposed the patriarchal foundations of rural development practices and challenged the exclusion of women from agrarian decision-making. The most significant institutional outcome of this phase was the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which reserved one-third of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions for women and marked a major shift from welfare-based approaches to political participation and citizenship.

In the contemporary phase, rural women's movements increasingly focus on participatory governance, livelihood security, and collective empowerment. Women's representation in Local Self-Government Departments has expanded their role in development planning, budgeting, and the implementation of welfare schemes. Self-Help Groups have become important platforms for savings, credit, entrepreneurship, and community leadership while also serving as spaces for collective solidarity and consciousness-raising. Programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme have strengthened women's economic participation by ensuring wage employment, financial inclusion, and greater bargaining power within households. Organisations like the Self-Employed Women's Association further consolidate these gains by advocating for labour rights, access to credit, and social protection for informal sector women workers. Together, these contemporary initiatives demonstrate the transformation of rural women from welfare beneficiaries into political and economic agents shaping grassroots democracy and social justice in India.

6.1.5.3 Recent Feminist Mobilisations (2024–2025)

In recent years, women's movements have increasingly aligned with labour movements. Frontline workers (overwhelmingly women) have articulated demands for standardised wages, pensions, maternity benefits, and occupational dignity. These protests highlight the contradiction between the state-dependent nature of their work and their classification as "volunteers." feminist mobilisation is not only about rights but about reconstituting the political economy of care labour.

6.1.6 Women's Movements in Kerala

Kerala represents a distinctive model of feminist mobilisation in India, where women's collective action has been historically embedded within progressive social reform, left political traditions, and decentralised governance structures. Unlike many regions where women's movements operate largely as oppositional struggles, Kerala's women's mobilisation has evolved through a dense institutional ecosystem shaped by high female literacy, advanced health indicators, strong cooperative traditions, and participatory local governance. Central to this ecosystem is Kudumbashree, the state's flagship poverty eradication and women's empowerment mission, which has institutionalised women's participation through multilayered neighbourhood networks that function simultaneously as economic collectives, political forums, and sites of feminist consciousness-raising. Through its Neighbourhood Groups, Area Development Societies, and Community Development Societies, Kudumbashree has transformed women from passive welfare beneficiaries into active, claim-making citizens engaged in development planning, livelihood generation, and local governance.

Beyond institutional platforms, Kerala's feminist politics have been profoundly shaped by women-led land, labour, and ecological struggles that challenge both market-driven development and patriarchal exclusions. Movements such as the Penpillai Orumai struggle at Munnar, the Nilpu Samaram, the Chengara land struggle, the Valanthakkad and Munambam agitations, and the Vayalkkili (Vayalkillikal) movement at Keshattoor marked critical moments in Kerala's feminist political history, as women emerged as visible leaders in confrontations over plantation labour exploitation, land alienation, coastal livelihood insecurity, and ecological destruction. These struggles not only foregrounded women's economic marginalisation but also challenged the gendered invisibilisation of labour, land rights, and environmental stewardship, thereby expanding the ideological boundaries of women's movements from social reform to political-economic resistance.

Contemporary mobilisations in Kerala further reveal the gendered contradictions underlying the state's celebrated welfare model. The large-scale protests by ASHA workers, Anganwadi employees, and other care-sector workers demanding standardised wages, pensions, and social security highlight the structural paradox of Kerala's development: while women form the backbone of its public health and welfare delivery systems, their labour continues to be precarious, underpaid, and classified as "voluntary." These struggles demonstrate a shift in feminist politics from recognition-based claims to structural challenges against the political economy of care, positioning women workers as organised labour subjects rather than merely community volunteers.

Kerala has also emerged as a leading site of state-supported feminist public discourse. Kudumbashree-led initiatives such as Gender Carnivals and Gender Resource Centres

institutionalise feminist debates on safety, digital rights, mobility, political participation, and bodily autonomy within governance spaces, signalling a rare convergence between feminist activism and public policy. These platforms reflect a transition from movement-based resistance to policy-embedded feminism, where gender justice becomes a formal development priority rather than a marginal social demand.

Importantly, women's movements in Kerala intersect significantly with agrarian and ecological mobilisations. In farmer-led protests and environmental struggles including the Aranmula anti-airport movement women have played crucial but often under-documented roles by managing protest logistics, leading marches, sustaining community kitchens, and articulating the gendered consequences of land loss, displacement, and price instability. Leadership positions in these movements remain predominantly male-dominated, revealing persistent patriarchal hierarchies within rural political organisations. An intersectional analysis demonstrates that caste, class, and gender together shape women's access to leadership, recognition, and political visibility, even within progressive mobilisations.

Kerala's women's movements represent a complex synthesis of institutionalised participation and radical grassroots resistance. They have expanded feminist politics beyond welfare and representation to include land rights, labour justice, ecological sustainability, and participatory governance. By embedding women's collectives within decentralised political structures while simultaneously sustaining confrontational movements against dispossession and precarity, Kerala illustrates how feminist mobilisation can reshape both development policy and democratic practice in contemporary rural India.



6.1.7 State Responses and the Future

- 1. Repertoires of Rural Contention:** Rural movements now employ an expanding repertoire of contention including marches, highway blockades, sit-ins, community kitchens, and the occupation of public spaces; legal petitions and policy dialogues; and digital documentation and counter-narratives. These actions challenge state and corporate power by making rural distress visible and morally compelling.
- 2. State Response:** Negotiation, Containment, and Co-optation: State responses to rural mobilisations range from selective accommodation (committees, temporary relief measures) and bureaucratic regulation (licensing, eligibility criteria) to coercive control (detentions, barricades) and discursive co-optation through welfare schemes that de-politicise structural questions.

The oscillation between repression and welfare reflects the political unease generated by sustained rural mobilisation.

Rural social movements remain central to shaping India's agrarian futures. As climate change, neoliberalism, and demographic transformations intensify pressures on rural communities, the role of farmers' and women's movements becomes even more significant. For durable change, these movements must secure statutory entitlements (legal MSP, universal pensions, wage rights), land and resource rights for women, climate-responsive agricultural policies, and institutional reforms that democratise rural governance. Kerala's experience demonstrates how women's collectives and farmer cooperatives embedded in decentralised governance can forge innovative pathways toward equity and sustainability. The future of India's rural landscape will depend on how effectively such movements turn episodic protest into enduring institutional and ideological change.

Recap

- ◆ Rural social movements in India represent some of the most influential forms of collective action
- ◆ The origins of rural social movements can be traced to colonial land revenue policies such as the Zamindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari systems
- ◆ Early movements like the Indigo Revolt, Tebhaga, Telangana, and Moplah uprisings were deeply political and directly linked to the nationalist movement, articulating demands for tenancy rights, fair wages, and land redistribution
- ◆ State-led development projects such as dams, mining, industrial corridors, and urban expansion intensified land acquisition and forced displacement, giving rise to a new generation of rural social movements
- ◆ Movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Chilika Bachao Andolan, Silent Valley, and Ekta Parishad represented resistance to development-induced displacement and ecological degradation

- ◆ Rural movements transcend village boundaries and extend into urban spaces, reflecting the continuum between rural dispossession and urban precarity
- ◆ Classical movements relied on mass uprisings, village assemblies, physical occupation of land, and confrontational protests
- ◆ Contemporary movements increasingly use legal interventions, media campaigns, digital mobilisation, NGO networks, transnational advocacy, and rights-based frameworks
- ◆ Rural social movements in India represent transformative collective action that has evolved from classical agrarian rebellions to complex, multi-layered rights-based movements
- ◆ Peasant and farmer mobilisations in India have historically taken shape in relation to transformations in land relations and agrarian surplus extraction
- ◆ Gandhi played a crucial role in transforming peasant movements into moral and political struggles
- ◆ The Communist movement in India played a decisive role in transforming agrarian discontent into organised class-based struggles
- ◆ WTO agreements and seed monopolies have signalled a shift from class-based to identity-inflected politics, where "farmer" has become a moral category symbolising national food security
- ◆ Farmers across India mobilised strongly against international trade agreements such as GATT, WTO, and ASEAN trade pacts
- ◆ Climate change has further deepened agrarian vulnerability
- ◆ Minimum Support Price (MSP) is one of the many important aspects related to agricultural development
- ◆ Farmers' movements argue that MSP must be understood as a right to livelihood and survival, not merely a market signal
- ◆ Mandatory MSP could distort markets, increase food inflation, burden state finances, and reduce private sector participation
- ◆ With the advent of the Green Revolution and later economic liberalisation, this traditional system was gradually replaced by commercialised, high-input agriculture
- ◆ The state's oscillation between dialogue committees and coercive responses has further politicised farmers

- ◆ Kerala's farmers' movements have a long historical legacy rooted in struggles against feudal land relations, tenancy exploitation, and agrarian inequality
- ◆ Contemporary agrarian movements in Kerala represent a deepening rural political consciousness shaped by ecological fragility, market instability, administrative failures, and climate vulnerability
- ◆ The roots of women's movements in India can be traced back to the nineteenth-century social reform movements that challenged practices such as sati, child marriage, widow oppression
- ◆ In the contemporary phase, rural women's movements increasingly focus on participatory governance, livelihood security, and collective empowerment

Objective Questions

1. The demand for a legally guaranteed payment is central to recent farmer agitations in India, this is termed as what?
2. Which is Kerala's flagship women-empowerment and poverty-eradication mission?
3. What is the term for when rural women's participation in agricultural labour rises exponentially?
4. Identify the theory that explains the strategic use of resources in social movements.
5. Name the concept that was violated in early peasant uprisings triggering protest.
6. Classify the 2020–21 farmers' protest under the appropriate movement type.
7. Mention the colonial agrarian resistance movement against forced indigo cultivation in Bengal.
8. Specify the movement in which sharecroppers demanded two-thirds of the produce.
9. State the statutory price demand central to contemporary farmers' mobilisations.
10. Indicate the global trade institution widely opposed by Indian farmers after liberalisation.

11. Identify the Kerala-based movement that resisted the conversion of paddy fields.
12. Mention the constitutional amendment that enabled women's political participation in local governance.

Answers

1. MSP
2. Kudumbashree
3. Feminisation of agriculture
4. Mobilisation
5. Morality
6. NSM
7. Indigo
8. Tebhaga
9. MSP
10. WTO
11. Vayalkkili
12. 73rd

Assignments

1. Discuss the evolving genealogy of farmers' movements in India from colonial resistance to neoliberal agrarian activism. Use examples.
2. Critically evaluate the intersection of women's movements and agrarian movements in rural India. How do gender, caste, and class shape participation and leadership?
3. With reference to Kerala, assess how institutional infrastructures like SHGs and decentralised governance have enhanced rural women's mobilization and influenced farmers' movements.
4. Assess the current status of women movement in Kerala.

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UNIT

NGOs and CSR in Rural Development

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the non-governmental interventions in rural development
- ◆ examine the role of corporate social responsibility in rural development
- ◆ identify the interventions promoting rural development from a non-governmental sphere

Prerequisite

Rural India has always been more than a geographic space; it is a living social landscape shaped by aspirations, vulnerabilities, and the everyday negotiations of livelihood and identity. As the Indian countryside confronts new challenges posed by globalisation, technological transitions, climate change, and agrarian distress, the question of who drives rural development has become increasingly complex. No longer restricted to state-led schemes or bureaucratic interventions, rural areas today are an arena where civil society, community collectives, and corporate actors actively participate in shaping developmental possibilities.

Over the past few decades, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives have emerged as powerful agents of transformation in this landscape. Their presence reflects a broader shift in development thinking from welfare delivery to participatory governance, from top-down planning to community empowerment, and from isolated projects to sustainable, rights-based approaches. Whether it is women's self-help groups reclaiming economic autonomy, farmers accessing digital markets through CSR-supported platforms, or tribal communities negotiating forest rights with NGO assistance, rural development now unfolds through a mosaic of collaborations and innovations.

This unit explores these evolving dynamics with a particular emphasis on India and Kerala, examining how NGOs and CSR initiatives redefine development priorities, build local capacity, and create new pathways for social change. It highlights not only the successes and innovations but also the tensions, contradictions, and ethical questions that accompany the growing involvement of non-state actors in rural development.

Keywords

Rural development, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Community empowerment, Participatory governance, Livelihood enhancement, Sustainable development, Decentralisation, Social mobilisation, Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

Discussion

Rural development in India has increasingly become a multi-actor process involving the state, civil society, private agencies, and corporate actors. While the government remains the primary architect of rural development policy, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives have emerged as influential forces shaping livelihoods, social justice, participatory governance, and community empowerment. In states such as Kerala, where decentralisation, literacy, and social mobilisation are comparatively advanced, NGOs and CSR efforts play distinct but complementary roles in enhancing local development outcomes. This unit analyses the conceptual foundations of their involvement, the institutional mechanisms through which they operate, and the practical impact evidenced through key case studies from India and Kerala.

6.2.1 NGOs in Rural Development: Conceptual Foundations

NGOs in India have historically occupied the space between the community and the

state, acting as intermediaries promoting welfare, advocacy, service delivery, and capacity building. Rooted in Gandhian ideals of self-reliance and community empowerment, and later influenced by rights-based and participatory development paradigms, NGOs gained momentum especially from the 1980s onward. They now address a wide range of issues including livelihood enhancement, education, women's empowerment, environmental conservation, public health, and disaster management. Their methodological orientation often emphasises social mobilisation, training, micro-planning, awareness generation, and the creation of sustainable, community-owned institutions such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), cooperatives, and farmers' collectives.

In Kerala, NGOs operate within a politically conscious and decentralised governance environment where Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and community-based organisations help create inclusive platforms for planning and decision-making. The synergy between NGOs and local governments is especially apparent in sectors like watershed development, literacy



campaigns, rehabilitation, and women's empowerment, in which Kerala has set national benchmarks.

6.2.2 Types of NGO and Interventions in Rural Development

NGOs adopt a range of interventions depending on their ideology, resources, and area of expertise. Service-delivery NGOs provide education, health, sanitation, and housing support; empowerment-oriented NGOs organise communities, develop local leadership, and promote rights-based campaigns; environmental NGOs work on biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, and climate adaptation; and livelihood-focused NGOs promote micro-finance, skill development, market access, and enterprise management. Many NGOs also partner with government programmes such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to enhance efficiency and community participation.

6.2.2.1 NGO Case Studies from India

a. M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Tamil Nadu

MSSRF's "biovillage" model promotes eco-friendly agriculture, coastal resource management, and rural knowledge centres. In several districts of Tamil Nadu, community-managed resource centres have helped farmers access soil health data, weather information, and market updates. These centres have significantly enhanced resilience among small and marginal farmers affected by climate variability.

b. PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action), Jharkhand and Odisha

PRADAN has been a leading organisation in the mobilisation of women through Self-Help Groups linked with livelihood interventions such as tasar sericulture, agriculture, and poultry cooperatives. In Jharkhand, PRADAN-led SHGs have transformed thousands of rural households by creating diversified income streams and strengthening women's decision-making power.

c. Barefoot College, Rajasthan

Known for its "barefoot engineers," this organisation trains rural women often grandmothers from remote villages to become solar engineers. This model has electrified hundreds of off-grid hamlets across Rajasthan and other states by empowering local women with technical skills and leadership roles.

6.2.2.2 NGO Case Studies from Kerala

a. Kudumbashree Mission and NGO Partnerships

While Kudumbashree is a state-run poverty eradication mission, it works closely with numerous NGOs for training, micro-enterprise development, and gender empowerment. NGO collaboration was crucial during the Kerala floods of 2018 and 2019, where women's collectives led rehabilitation, community kitchens, and rebuilding efforts.

b. Thanal, Thiruvananthapuram

Thanal, an environmental NGO, works with rural communities on organic farming, seed conservation, and waste-free village models. The "Organic Capital" initiative in

Wayanad, supported by Thanal, has helped hundreds of farming families' transition to pesticide-free agriculture and establish farmer producer collectives.

c. Maitri (Tribal Development), Wayanad

Maitri, an NGO engaged in Adivasi welfare, focuses on nutrition security, forest rights, and women's cooperatives. It has facilitated community land claims and improved livelihood options for Paniya and Kurichiya tribal households through bamboo products, wild honey, and eco-tourism initiatives.

d. Peermade Development Society (PDS), Idukki

Active since the 1980s, PDS has implemented watershed development, sustainable agriculture, medicinal plant cultivation, and tribal rehabilitation projects in Idukki district. Its integrated farming models have significantly improved incomes for small tea and cardamom farmers.

6.2.3 Corporate Social Responsibility in Rural Development: Historical and Policy Context

CSR has evolved from voluntary philanthropy to a mandated framework under the Companies Act, 2013, which requires eligible companies to spend at least 2% of their profits on social development. CSR in India increasingly focuses on rural development sectors such as sanitation, drinking water, digital literacy, health services, renewable energy, skill development, and agricultural innovation. The shift from charity to strategic CSR reflects global trends encouraging businesses to align social responsibility with sustainability goals, supply chain security,

and long-term community relations.

Kerala's CSR landscape has expanded rapidly due to the presence of sectors such as oil refining, IT, banking, cooperatives, and tourism. Many companies partner with local governments, NGOs, and Panchayats to design need-based, participatory rural development projects.

6.2.3.1 Major CSR Interventions in Rural India

a. Tata Group's Rural Livelihood and Skill Development Programmes

Tata Steel has implemented watershed development, irrigation support, rural entrepreneurship training, and cattle breed improvement in Jharkhand and Odisha. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has introduced digital education and adult literacy software in rural schools.

b. ITC's e-Choupal Initiative

One of India's most celebrated CSR-linked rural innovations, e-Choupal provides digital access to market information, crop advisory, and quality assessment. It has improved transparency and bargaining power for farmers across Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka.

c. Reliance Foundation Rural Transformation Programme

The programme addresses water stewardship, climate-resilient agriculture, and women's self-help groups. Its integrated village development model has been implemented in over 20,000 villages, helping to increase water availability and crop productivity.



6.2.3.2 CSR Case Studies from Kerala

a. Cooperative Sector CSR: IFFCO and MILMA

IFFCO's training programmes for farmers in Palakkad and Thrissur on bio-fertilisers and soil health management have significantly raised awareness about sustainable farming practices. The Kerala Milk Marketing Federation (MILMA) supports dairy farmers with veterinary services, fodder development, and women-operated dairy units.

b. BPCL Kochi Refinery CSR in Ernakulam District

BPCL has carried out multiple interventions, including model anganwadis, skill centres for rural youth, renovation of rural schools, and integrated watershed projects in villages around Ambalamugal and Eloor. Its "Ujwala" support programmes have improved access to LPG connections in poorer rural households.

c. Federal Bank CSR in Thrissur and Aluva

Federal Bank focuses on financial literacy camps, digital banking awareness, rural school infrastructure, and health camps in economically backward rural pockets. Under its "Sanjeevani" initiative, mobile health units regularly visit rural communities, offering free consultations and medicines.

d. KITEX CSR Initiatives in Kizhakkambalam, Ernakulam

Operated through the NGO Twenty20 Kizhakkambalam, this unique CSR-driven rural governance initiative has transformed local infrastructure, waste management, drinking water distribution, and health services. The organisation also supports organic farming, skill development, and employment for rural youth.

6.2.3.4 Advantages of NGOs and CSR Actors

NGOs bring grassroots experience, trust, and community mobilisation skills, while CSR actors supply financial resources, infrastructure, and technological expertise. When these sectors collaborate particularly through public-private partnerships rural development becomes both socially rooted and economically sustainable. Kerala provides examples of such synergy, as seen in CSR-supported Kudumbashree micro-enterprises, NGO-facilitated watershed work funded by corporate donors, and tribal development programmes supported jointly by the corporate sector and civil society organisations.

6.2.3.5 Challenges Faced by NGOs and CSR Initiatives

Despite their contributions, both sectors face limitations. NGOs struggle with fluctuating funding, bureaucratic dependencies, and at times inadequate accountability mechanisms. CSR projects may lack long-term commitment, sometimes prioritising brand visibility over community needs. Coordination with Panchayats remains inconsistent, and many rural communities complain that CSR projects are fragmented or technology-heavy without proper training support. In Kerala, high literacy and political awareness often create higher expectations, making transparent community participation essential for both NGO and CSR-led interventions.

NGOs and CSR actors have become indispensable pillars of India's rural development landscape. Their interventions ranging from livelihood enhancement and gender empowerment to environmental sustainability and digital literacy have reshaped rural economies, especially in states like Kerala, where decentralised governance and social mobilisation provide

a conducive environment for innovation. The future of rural development depends on stronger collaboration among government institutions, community organisations, NGOs, and corporate entities, ensuring that development is locally relevant, inclusive, equitable, and sustainable.

Recap

- ◆ Rural development in India has increasingly become a multi-actor process involving the state, civil society, private agencies, and corporate actors
- ◆ NGOs in India have historically occupied the space between the community and the state, acting as intermediaries promoting welfare, advocacy, service delivery, and capacity building
- ◆ NGOs gained momentum especially from the 1980s onward
- ◆ In Kerala, NGOs operate within a politically conscious and decentralised governance environment
- ◆ The synergy between NGOs and local governments is especially apparent in sectors like watershed development, literacy campaigns, rehabilitation, and women's empowerment
- ◆ NGOs adopt a range of interventions depending on their ideology, resources, and area of expertise
- ◆ Many NGOs also partner with government programmes such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to enhance efficiency and community participation.
- ◆ CSR has evolved from voluntary philanthropy to a mandated framework under the Companies Act, 2013, which requires eligible companies to spend at least 2% of their profits on social development
- ◆ CSR in India increasingly focuses on rural development sectors such as sanitation, drinking water, digital literacy, health services, renewable energy, skill development, and agricultural innovation
- ◆ Kerala's CSR landscape has expanded rapidly due to the presence of sectors such as oil refining, IT, banking, cooperatives, and tourism
- ◆ NGOs struggle with fluctuating funding, bureaucratic dependencies, and at times inadequate accountability mechanisms



- ◆ CSR projects may lack long-term commitment, sometimes prioritising brand visibility over community needs
- ◆ NGOs and CSR actors have become indispensable pillars of India's rural development landscape

Objective Questions

1. Which sector mandates CSR spending in India?
2. Which mission in Kerala works closely with NGOs for women's empowerment?
3. Which concept emphasises people's participation in planning and decision-making?
4. Which organisation introduced the e-Choupal initiative?
5. Which Kerala district is known for PDS's tribal rehabilitation work?
6. Which act mandates 2% CSR spending for eligible companies?
7. Which sector do NGOs strengthen through Self-Help Groups?
8. Which group in Rajasthan is known for training 'barefoot engineers'?
9. Which Kerala NGO works on organic farming and seed conservation?
10. Which type of development is associated with environmental sustainability?

Answers

1. Corporate
2. Kudumbashree
3. Decentralisation
4. ITC
5. Idukki

6. Companies (or Companies Act)
7. Livelihoods
8. Barefoot (or Barefoot College)
9. Thanal
10. Sustainable

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in rural development in India, with special reference to Kerala. Illustrate your answer with relevant case studies.
2. Critically examine the evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India and evaluate its contribution to rural development, using examples from different states.
3. Compare and contrast the strengths and limitations of NGOs and CSR initiatives as development actors. How can collaboration between them enhance rural development outcomes?
4. Analyse the significance of participatory governance and decentralisation in shaping successful NGO and CSR interventions in rural development, with a focus on Kerala's experience.

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MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS

SGOU



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No.:

Name:

MODEL QUESTION PAPER I
SIXTH SEMESTER BA SOCIOLOGY EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE CORE -B21SO06DC –RURAL SOCIOLOGY
(CBCS - UG)

Time: 3 Hours

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Max Marks: 70

Section A (Objective Type Questions)

I Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence.

1. Who defined rural sociology as “the science of rural society”?
2. What is the primary unit of rural society?
3. Which is the mainstay occupation of rural Indian society?
4. Name the dominant social institution that permeates both social and economic interactions in Indian villages.
5. What type of family system is a defining feature of rural society?
6. Who is considered the founder of Indian rural sociology?
7. Which sociologist first categorized “peasants” as a distinct social group in 1956?
8. Is the population density in rural areas typically high or low?
9. Name the governing body traditionally rooted in Indian villages.
10. What is the main basis of the rural economy?
11. What is the “science of the laws of the development of rural society” according to A.R. Desai?
12. Which scholar defined rural sociology as “the sociology of rural life in the rural environment”?
13. Name the work published by Sir Henry S. Maine in 1861 that helped initiate rural studies in India.

14. What term is used to describe the “conjunctive” process where rural residents work together, such as through cooperation?
15. What is the fundamental basis of the rural economy?

(10×1=10 marks)

Section B (*Very Short Answers*)

II Answer any ten of the following questions in one or two sentences.

16. Define Rural Sociology according to Sanderson.
17. State any two characteristics of the “Little Tradition” as described by Robert Redfield.
18. What are the two types of rural social interaction processes?
19. Distinguish between rural and urban communities based on occupation.
20. Mention two informal means of social control in rural society.
21. Define the term “Dominant Caste.”
22. What is “Social Solidarity” in the context of rural life?
23. Briefly explain the “Mode of Production” concept.
24. Define Rural Sociology as per the perspective of T.L. Smith.
25. List two “disjunctive” social processes found in rural social interactions.
26. How does population density differ between rural and urban ecological settings?
27. Briefly explain the concept of “Homogeneity” in a rural population.
28. What are the two primary informal agencies of social control in a village?
29. Distinguish between “Peasants” and “Farmers” according to Eric Wolf.
30. State any two characteristics of the “Joint Family” system in rural India.

(10×2=20 marks)

Section C (*Short Answers*)

III Answer any five of the following questions in one paragraph

31. Evaluate the effectiveness of Land Ceiling laws.

32. Explain the core objectives of the MGNREGA program.
 33. Discuss the social and economic impact of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY).
 34. Explain how rural development programs contribute to “inclusive growth.”
 35. Analyse the structural drivers of rural mobilization/movements.
 36. Discuss the role of Kudumbashree in rural collective action in Kerala.
 37. Examine the impact of the Green Revolution on rural class relations.
 38. Explain the concept of “Convergence” in Mission Antyodaya.
 39. Explain how “convergence” is utilized in programs like Mission Antyodaya to ensure holistic rural development.
 40. Assess how institutional infrastructures like Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have enhanced rural women’s mobilization, with specific reference to Kerala.
- (5×4=20 marks)**

Section D (Long Answers/Essay)

IV Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words.

41. Critically examine the nature, importance, and scope of Rural Sociology in the Indian context.
 42. Compare and contrast the rural and urban way of life with reference to social control, education, and family.
 43. Discuss the changing nature of the Caste System in rural India and the factors leading to its decline.
 44. Analyse the Agrarian Class Structure in India and how it has been reshaped by land reforms.
- (2×10=20 marks)**



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No.:

Name:

MODEL QUESTION PAPER II
SIXTH SEMESTER BA SOCIOLOGY EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE CORE -B21SO06DC – RURAL SOCIOLOGY
(CBCS - UG)

Time: 3 Hours

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Max Marks: 70

Section A (*Objective Type Questions*)

I Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence.

1. Which land system involved the state collecting tax directly from individual cultivators?
2. Under which land system was the village community as a whole responsible for land revenue?
3. Name the central program that provides 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in rural areas.
4. What term describes the “reciprocal” and “hierarchical” relationship between service castes and landowning castes?
5. Who pioneered the peasant movement in India?
6. In which year was the “Ancient Law” by Sir Henry S. Maine published?
7. What is the nature of rural culture?
8. Name the flagship program for rural sanitation in India.
9. Which movement in Kerala is a state poverty eradication mission?
10. What do we call the process of becoming an urban society?
11. According to Robert Redfield, what is the term for the local identity and culture based on oral traditions?
12. Which land tenure system involved the village community as a whole being responsible for revenue?
13. In rural areas, is social control primarily “formal” or “informal”?

14. What is the primary unit of rural society in the Indian context?
15. Which flagship program provides a “safety net” for rural income security through 100 days of wage employment?

(10×1=10 marks)

Section B (*Very Short Answers*)

II Answer any ten of the following questions in one or two sentences.

16. List two objectives of Land Reforms in post-independence India.
17. What is the “Zamindari System”?
18. Explain the concept of “Rural-Urban Interdependence.”
19. What does “Homogeneity” mean in a rural context?
20. Name two rural social problems mentioned in the text.
21. Define “Peasant Society” according to Eric Wolf.
22. What is the significance of the “Ancient Law” (1861) in Indian rural sociology?
23. Briefly explain the “Ryotwari System.”
24. Briefly define the “Mahalwari System” of land revenue.
25. What is meant by “Social Solidarity” in a rural community?
26. Name two major rural social problems mentioned in the study material.
27. Define “Karmaphala” and its impact on rural social life.
28. What is the significance of the “Ancient Society” (1877) work by Sir Henry S. Maine?
29. Mention two differences in the “House Structure” of rural versus urban areas.
30. What are the two types of rural social interaction processes?

(10×2=20 marks)

Section C (*Short Answers*)

III Answer any five of the following questions in one paragraph

31. Discuss the scope of Rural Sociology as a distinct sub-discipline.

32. Explain the major characteristics of rural society in India.
 33. Analyse the differences between rural and urban social structures.
 34. Describe the Jajmani system as a traditional rural institution.
 35. Discuss the role of the Joint Family in rural India.
 36. Examine the relationship between Caste and Class in rural stratification.
 37. Explain the “Mode of Production Debate” in Indian agriculture.
 38. Discuss the impact of colonial land revenue systems on Indian villages.
 39. Discuss the economic and social exchange that maintains close ties between these two distinct regions.
 40. Evaluate the effectiveness of land reform measures, such as land ceilings, in reducing inequality in post-independence India.
- (5×4=20 marks)**

Section D (Long Answers/Essay)

IV Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words.

41. Provide a detailed account of the major Rural Development programs in India since independence.
42. Examine the evolution of Farmers’ and Women’s movements in rural India.
43. Discuss the “Mode of Production” debate, highlighting the views of Marxist scholars on feudalism and capitalism in agriculture.
44. Evaluate the interdependency between rural and urban communities through ecological, economic, and social lenses.

(2×10=20 marks)

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുരിശുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

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**DON'T LET IT
BE TOO LATE**

SAY NO TO DRUGS

**LOVE YOURSELF
AND ALWAYS BE
HEALTHY**



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RURAL SOCIOLOGY

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