

Rural Development through Life Long Learning

Abstract

Learning and development go side by side for a balanced society. Development of rural India is the imperative need even after 65 years of independence. Development is a continuous process so as is the learning.

This paper critically examines the role of lifelong learning (education) in the development of rural India with particular focus on social and economic perspective.

Keywords: Rural; Rural Society; Village; Rural Development; Education; India; Life-long Learning; Life-long Education

Introduction

Rural development actions are mainly and mostly related to development aim for the social and economic development of the rural areas. Rural development programs are usually top-down from the local or regional authorities, regional development agencies, NGOs, national government or international development organizations. But then, local populations can also bring about endogenous initiatives for development. The term is not limited to the issues for developing countries. In fact many of the developed countries have very active rural development programmes. The main aim of the rural government policy is to develop the undeveloped villages. This was designed by Eric Kiplagat.

Aim of the rural development is to find ways to improve the rural lives with participation of the rural people themselves to meet the required need of the rural area. In this context, many approaches and ideas have been developed and followed up, for instance, bottom-up approach, PRA-Participatory Rural Appraisal, RRA- Rapid Rural Appraisal etc.²

Aim of the Study

The main objective of the paper is to throw light on rural development and to see how life-long learning process can help for the betterment of rural development and rural Indian masses.

British Rule

Rural development in India is one of the most important factors for the growth of the Indian economy. India is primarily an agriculture-based country. Agriculture contributes nearly one- fifth of the gross domestic product of India. The British brought the good sides of the Industrial Revolution of Europe to India in the form of electrical power. These new developments in the forms of opening up of railways and roadways provided a better link between the villages and the towns with a new economic market. At the same time, the new scenario caused the extinction of many indigenous trades in rural India in particular. It should be very clear that the British policy was oriented to the increase of agriculture produce not for the welfare of the peasants but for satisfying their own vested interests.³

Voluntary Activities

Rabindra Nath Tagore was the pioneer in rural development in India in all practical and theoretical sense. Early effort of rural development was initiated by Tagore in 1908 by establishing youth organization in the Kaligram Pargana of his Zamindari in the then East Bengal (now Bangladesh). He tried to create a class of functionary workers who could learn to identify themselves with people. In 1921, he established a Rural Reconstruction Institute at Shantiniketan in West Bengal. This project called as Sriniketan Project, co-incidentally, had many elements of extension education in both spirit and action. Activities like demonstration on scientific methods of agriculture, training of youths, adult education and health co-operatives were important aspects of the work aimed to make a group of villages self-reliant. This was a very comprehensive programme combining culture, health, education and economic aspects of village life



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together. Concept of village level workers and regeneration of village organization were put to work. This project was closely guided by Mr. Leonard Elmhirst, an Englishman trained in economics from USA.⁴

Marthandam work was commenced by Spencer Hatch, an American Agricultural expert, in Travancore in Kerala. The aim of the project was to bring more abundant life for rural people. It was intended to symbolize the three-fold development, not only spiritual, mental and physical but also economic and social. The essential technique of the centre was 'Self-help with intimate expert counsel.'⁵

Gurgaon Experiment: Rural upliftment movement on a mass scale was first started by F.L. Brayne, Deputy Commissioner in the Gurgaon district of Punjab state. He was prompted by the backwardness, poverty and misery of the people. A village guide had been posted to act as a channel through which the advice of the experts in various departments could be passed on to the villagers. The programme of introducing improved seeds, implements, the methods of cultivation etc. was started throughout the district.⁶

Mahatma Gandhi adopted African community development ideals as a basis of his South African Ashram, and then introduced it as a part of the Indian Swaraj movement, aiming at establishing economic interdependence at village level throughout India. The Seva Gram Ashram established by Gandhiji in 1935 at Wardha undertook several development programmes for the villagers such as sanitation, adult education, promotion of village industries, manual work etc. In this way several voluntary organizations played important roles in preaching the message of self-sufficiency among the villagers.

The Independent India has slowly adopted many rural development policies and programmes. Side by side, numerous voluntary agencies have come up to join hands to spearhead rural development activities. With Indian independence, despite the continuing work of Vinoba Bhave in encouraging grassroots land reform, India under its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru adopted a mixed-economy approach, mixing elements of socialism and capitalism. During the fifties and sixties, India ran a massive community development programme with focus on rural development activities through government support. This was later expanded in scope and was called integrated rural development scheme [IRDP]. A large number of initiatives that can come under the community development umbrella have come up in recent years.

Life Long Learning and Education

Life learning is often considered learning that occurs after the formal education years of childhood (where learning is instructor driven – pedagogical) and into adulthood (where the learning is individually driven – andragogical). It is sought out naturally through life experiences as the learner seeks to gain knowledge for professional or personal reasons. 'Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it' (Kolb 1984:41). The

concept of lifelong learning has become of vital importance with the emergence of new technologies that change how we receive and gather information, collaborate with others, and communicate.

Education is a life-long process of growth and development. Such education is not confined to the limits of time, place and individual. Any person, who provides another person with new experiences, is a teacher and the place, where giving and receiving of such experiences takes place can be termed as a school. Lifelong learning is defined as "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment- related perspective."⁷

Taking the European Union (EU) Memorandum on Lifelong Learning as a reference point, lifelong learning for all in the North (Europe and North America) means basically promoting active citizenship and the necessary knowledge, skills, values, attitudes toward employment and work. At the same time, in the so-called South (Asia), livelihood becomes the issue-not active citizenship nor critical thinking, nor building capacities for development. It is simply dealing with livelihood. The focus on the poor and on basic education is put together with this focus on livelihood.

Lifelong learning formally came into existence in 1970 after the advocacy of Council of Europe for Permanent Education, recurrent education from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and UNESCO Report of "Learning to Be". In the Faure Report of "Learning to Be" the term lifelong education was used instead of lifelong learning. It was in the 1990s when idea of lifelong learning again gained momentum and became global in its nature.

It is a concept that claims it is never too late for learning. It is an attitude of openness to new ideas, decisions, skills and behaviours. One is provided with learning opportunities at all ages, all levels in various contexts.⁸

Indian Context

According to Swami Vivekananda, education is the manifestation of perfection already existing in man. It may be a pure spiritual meaning of education but it reflects the true essence of lifelong learning in Indian context. The ancient Indian followed and practiced this philosophy and flourished in true social, financial, moral and spiritual sense. However, this perspective has undergone a sea change over the centuries when innumerable rulers overpowered this country one after another. Different social systems, cultures and religions they brought here with them were adopted by the locals either by might or by laws.

In 1966, the Indian Education Commission observed that education does not end with schooling, but is a lifelong process. The adult needs an understanding of the rapidly changing world and the growing complexities of society. Even those who had the most sophisticated education must continue to learn; the alternative is obsolescence... This viewed the function of adult education in a democracy as to

provide every adult citizen an opportunity for education of the type which he wishes and which he should have for his personal enrichment, professional advancement and effective participation in social and political life.⁹

Adult Literacy and Life Long Learning in Legislation

The Constitution of India recognizes the significance of education for social transformation. It perceives education as essential for making the provision of equality and opportunity a reality.

Although the importance of lifelong learning was never overlooked in Indian education policy documents, and the policy statement on the National Adult Education Program (1978) considered continuing education as an indispensable aspect of the strategy of human resource development and of the goal of creation of a learning society, there has been practically no shift from the exclusive emphasis on adult literacy.

The present system of education in India, which follows the National Policy on Education 1986 (as modified in 1992), considers lifelong learning as the cherished goal of the educational process. It presupposes universal literacy and the provision of opportunities for young people, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers and professionals to continue the education of their choice at the pace suited to them (Government of India 1992). The critical development issue is the continuous improvement of skills so as to produce manpower resources of the kind and the number required by society. It suggests that the future thrust will be in the direction of open and distance learning. These policies were translated into practice and a number of lifelong learning programmes were planned and implemented by governmental and non-governmental organizations and universities (Government of India 2008). Some of the current programmes include Continuing Education, Mahila Samakhya (Women's Empowerment), Integrated Child Development Services, Vocational Training Programmes, Farmers' Education and Training and a number of short courses offered by the university departments of Adult Continuing Education and open and distance learning education organisations in the country.¹⁰

Now, we will examine how development can be sustainable if linked with lifelong learning in social and economic perspective. One should first know and understand these issues and their role in development.

Social Perspective

Social issues dominate the Indian society both in urban and rural region. These issues are more strong in rural India and virtually are the integral part of the village life. However, not all these issues lead to positive life. Instead, the non-positive issues rule the world and these have been transformed as social evils.

Casteism

A survey by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) put the OBC population in the country at 40.94%, the SC population at 19.59%, ST population at 8.63% and the rest at 30.80%.

Rural India remains a caste-based society and the majority of SCs, STs and other backward classes live in the heartland of rural India that constitutes about 70% of the country's population. Many of the existing social evils like untouchability and human exploitation loom large in village scenario inspite of having a number of legal protections. Casteism plays a vital role in the rank and file in social, political, religious and economic front in rural India and it is the indirect cause of backwardness of the society in general and villages in particular. The issues of exclusion and discrimination assume special importance in the Indian context wherein Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), who together constitute nearly one-fourth of the Indian population, have traditionally suffered from social exclusion.

The Constitution enshrines the right to equal opportunities, provides protection against social dogmas and economic exploitation, and makes specific financial allocations for expediting the development of SCs and STs. It guarantees protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46). It guarantees equality before law (Article 14), and enjoins upon the State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds of caste (Article 15.1).

These constitutional safeguards have far-reaching implications for promoting and protecting the economic, social and political interests of SCs. Despite several constitutional safeguards, their impact on the overall well-being of these marginalized groups have been less than desired, particularly in improving their economic and social development.¹¹ The SCs and STs continue to face various forms of exclusion and associated deprivations. Although the Constitution of India has abolished untouchability to help the SCs and STs overcome various disabilities and discriminations associated with it, it still persists in various forms, particularly in the rural areas.¹² There are evidences which suggest that SCs still face discrimination in labour market, at place of work, in ownership of assets, in education, and in public health. There are rising cases of caste-related violence and atrocities on SCs and STs.¹³

Caste based Crimes

Atrocities committed to the most underprivileged segments of our society are rooted in the complex caste system. The National Crime Bureau Report does not specify the rural- urban crime ratio/rate. Despite the SC/ST (PoA) Act being the premier legislation to protect security of life for SCs/STs, from 1995 to 2007, less than one-third (30.7%) of crimes against SCs/STs across India were registered under SC/ST (PoA) provisions.

The rate of registered crimes against SCs is significantly higher than that of STs, due to such factors as the larger SC population and their greater interaction with dominant caste communities, as well as greater non-reporting of atrocities against STs. The number of registered crimes against SCs/STs has shown no appreciable decline between 1995 and 2007.¹⁴

Women among the SCs also face a double disadvantage due to the prevalence of a strong patriarchal and caste system in the country. They face discrimination with regard to participation in various economic, social and political activities that require an interface with male (IIDS, 2010). A total of 3,09,546 cases of crime against women (both under various sections of IPC and the Crimes under the Special and Local Laws [SLL]) were reported in the country during the year 2013 as compared to 2,44,270 in the year 2012, thus showing an increase of 26.7% during the year 2013. There cases include rape (including incest rape), dowry, molestation, domestic violence, immoral trafficking etc.

Dowry

Dowry is another social evil that needs wide scale awareness not only among the poor but also among the affluent class of the society and it's a national evil rooted deeply all over the Indian society. The all India figure shows there has been a marginal decline in dowry death cases by 1.8% from 2009 to 2012. Yet, the cases under Dowry Prohibition Act have been on rise and there has been a spurt of 17.9% of this type of crime from 2009 to 2013.¹⁵

Child Marriage

About half of Indian women are married before they turn 18. Child marriage is a violation of child rights, and has a negative impact on physical growth, health, mental and emotional development, and education opportunities. Girls are often seen as a liability with limited economic role. Women's work is confined to the household and is not valued. In addition, there is the problem of dowry. Despite the fact that dowry has been prohibited for five decades (Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961), it is still common for parents of girls in India to give gifts to the groom and/or his family either in cash or kind. The dowry amount increases with the age and the education level of the girl. Hence, the "incentive" of the system of dowry perpetuates child marriage.

Child marriage is widespread across India, with nearly half of brides married as girls. While there has been a decline in the incidence of child marriage nationally (from 54 per cent in 1992-93 to 33 per cent today) and in nearly all states, the pace of change remains slow, especially for girls in the age group 15-18 years. Child marriage is more prevalent in rural areas (48 per cent) than in urban areas (29 per cent). There are also variations across different groups, particularly excluded communities, castes and tribes – although some ethnic groups, such as tribal groups, have lower rates of child marriage compared with the majority population. In general, rates of child marriage are highest in the central and western parts of India and lower in the eastern and southern parts of the country. In certain states, such as in Bihar and Rajasthan, approximately 60 percent of females (aged 20-24) marry as children. It also affects society as a whole since child marriage reinforces a cycle of poverty and perpetuates gender discrimination, illiteracy and malnutrition as well as high infant and material mortality rates.

Health & Sanitation

In most low income societies, communicable diseases dominate the population's health. In rural India, contagious and infectious diseases continue to dominate as causes of ill health and death. World Bank Report of 2013 highlights that about 23% of India child mortality is attributed to environmental factors like poor water, sanitation and hygiene. In spite of decline in infant and child mortality as well as mother mortality rate, the country is still lagging behind the world standard. The Census India 2011 exposes rural sanitation scenario. According to this report, there was no latrine in 69.3% in total of 167,826.730 rural households, though this percentage is better than 78.1% as recorded in 2001 Census. Even in developed states like Gujarat, rural latrine coverage was recorded only at 78.3% which is slightly better than the backward state of Uttar Pradesh (80.8%).

Twenty-six percent of the rural habitants still do not meet the lifetime minimum 40% litres per capita per day drinking water (as per WHO norm). Socio-economic disparities also exist in collecting water. 81% of rural STs collect water from outside their premises. Only 35% of the total rural population collects water within its premises.

Economic Perspective

Rural Household's Livelihood and Wellbeing

Poverty is the core issue in the households of rural India. Though rural poverty has substantially declined by 26% in 2011-12 from 34% in 2009-10, it is now more concentrated than before, regionally as well as among certain social groups. Poverty is found high among SCs and STs – even half of the STs and 42% SCs were poor in 2009-10, says India Rural Development Report 2012-13. More than half of STs in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jharkhand and nearly 70% in Bihar and Chhattisgarh are poor.

The human wellbeing is measured by poverty and human development. Rural households, therefore, face innumerable hardship to get access to the better life standard owing to poverty and lack of education.

At 71 million, India had the largest number of children under the age of five whose births were not registered between 2000 and 2012. The UNICEF report has said that birth registration levels in South Asia have increased since 2000, but progress has been slow. India, along with Afghanistan, Bangladesh and the Maldives, has been recording "significant improvements" in birth registration but about 100 million children in the region are still not registered at birth. Human development receives a setback when a sizeable population is found missing in the planning process.

Rural Economy

Rural economy is an integral part of the overall Indian economy. As a majority of the poor reside in the rural areas, the prime goal of rural development is to improve the quality of life of the rural people by alleviating poverty through the instrument of self-employment and wage employment programmes.¹⁶

Agriculture lies in the heart of rural livelihood. Despite its decline share in total GDP, agriculture continues to engage around half the country's total workforce and over a two-third of the rural workforce. As per Census 2011, in the rural sector, females have a workforce participation rate of 30.02% compared with 53.03% for males.

As per India Census 2011, 41.1% of female main and marginal workers are agricultural labourers, 24.0% are cultivators, 5.7% are household industry workers and 29.2% are engaged in other works. As per National Sample Survey (68th Round), the worker population ratio for females in rural sector was 24.8 in 2011-12 while that for males was 54.3. Among the States/UTs, worker population ratio for females in the rural sector was the highest in Himachal Pradesh at 52.42. In the rural sector, 59.3% females were self-employed, 5.6% females had regular wage/salaried employment and 35.1% females were casual labours compared with 54.5%, 10.0% and 35.5% males in the same categories respectively in 2011-12.

There has been a marked change in rural employment scenario following some major government endeavours during past two decades. Launching of IRDP, Wage Employment Programmes, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), Food for Work Program, Rural Housing, Social Security Programs and finally Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MANREGA) have strengthened the financial status of rural households to a significant extent. Yet, the India Rural Development Report 2012-13 points out that although a larger percentage of the low income households participate in MANREGA, a high two-thirds share of low income households still remain out of its reach.

Role of Lifelong Learning (Education) in Sustainable Rural Development

Lifelong learning offers opportunities to those who wish to enhance their knowledge, skill and interests to meet the challenges of global development.¹⁷ Thus, lifelong learning is regarded as a strong tool for social transformation, personal enrichment and income generation.

Government policies have not only changed children's lives, but have altered adult lives through various second-chance programmes for lifelong learning. This tool provides the rural poor to enhance their knowledge and awareness to get access to the facilities as well as to raise their voices against injustice and discrimination at social level. More is the awareness less is the deprivation and exclusion.

In spite of its many limitations, informal learning tools like adult literacy programmes of Akshar Bharat has brought the illiteracy rate in rural India down in recent decades. Rural literacy rate has gone up by 7.87% for males and 12.62% for females from 2001 to 2011 census. Higher rate of literacy has resulted in better attendance ratio at primary and upper primary among the children of SCs, STs and OBCs. Though the percentage is recorded lower at secondary and higher secondary level. And the dropout rate at higher level is a matter of concern. The government's program of Mid Day Meal at school

level may be the major reason of rural households to send their kids to the schools.

Observations of UNDP on India's Performance in Millennium Development Goals

India has made notable progress towards reaching the MDGs but achievement across the goals varies, the UNDP MDG Report 2015 says, India has achieved the poverty reduction target, but progress is uneven. Faster reduction in poverty since the mid-2000s helped India halve the incidence of poverty from the 1990 level. This is the result both of economic growth (including in agriculture) as well as increased social spending on interventions such as MANREGA and the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). Nevertheless, over 270 million Indians in 2012 still remain trapped in extreme poverty making the post 2015 goal of eliminating extreme poverty by 2030 challenging, but feasible. Divergent growth experiences and rising inequality have led to poverty becoming increasingly concentrated in poorer states. Incidence of poverty in rural India is twice that of urban areas, and higher among excluded groups-Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes female. India can improve performance by helping the weaker states emulate the good performers.

Observation and Conclusion

There is an explosion of knowledge. New scientific and technological inventions are taking place covering almost all the aspects of human world. This process can be covered under the lifelong learning system that is to be the continuation of non-formal and continuing education and even after the completion of the formal institution based education. It may be argued that the Indian interest in lifelong learning has been greatly influenced by the global discourse on lifelong learning and its advocacy by the transnational organizations like UNESCO and the European Commission. These two organizations have not only played a key role in publicizing the concept of lifelong learning in India, but also orienting the government officials and academic community towards lifelong learning. If the academic support provided by these organizations has given tremendous boost to India's lifelong learning program, the socio-economic changes taking place within and outside the country due to globalization, liberalization of the economy and the tremendous expansion of ICT also necessitated a review of adult education policy and its reformulation as lifelong learning.¹⁸

Community collaboration and sustainable development have the pivotal role in lifelong learning process for rural development. Since literacy rate is still not high in Indian villages, endeavour is required to develop a strong community based learning strategy providing information on developments and activities to the villagers for their active participation in rural development. Interlinking connections between the local, national and global citizens through non-formal learning is the need of the hour and the policy makers should encourage adaptability and adjustability and interest towards learning and training as a continuous process.

End Notes

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