



# A sociological study of changing village structure of India

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## Abstract

India is a developing country where more than 60% of its population is earning their livelihood from the primary sector. Hence, it becomes imperative to study and analyse the rural sector of India which is equally important for the growth of our nation. Rural India depicts the real face of our country with 70% of its population living in villages. India's major growth is contributed by agrarian economy and its study would help the country's overall growth and progress. The sociological study of changing village structure will highlight the problems faced by the rural India and the provisions of state and central government to tackle them.

**Keywords:** villages, Rural, Sociological ,Modern, Land reforms

Since independence, the rural India has been evolving its structure. There are more than half a million villages in our country each having its unique way of living. Most of the problems they face is addressed locally and have well defined social structure for it. The deep fermented differentiation of people based on caste has formed a strata based society which is not allowing the villages to develop after a certain level. Indian rural society varies in every state and the difference is because of the diverse geographical and ethnic background.[1]

The India constitution had aimed for a secular state where the inclusive growth was planned without any differentiation based on caste, creed, community and region. However, the implementation of that plan still needs to be relooked as the Indian villages are still living by the age old customs. This surely generates the need for a thorough study of changing village structure in India and the scope of their development.

## Background of Indian Villages

As we say rural India is the real face of our country. People living over there were more contented with the lifestyle they had. The fad of urban lifestyle and the desire to earn more in cities has changed the mindset of villagers over the period of time. The migration of people from rural to urban areas in search of better and more promising source of livelihood has skewed the structure of villages in modern India. Agriculture being the main source of our economic growth is being ignored as a result of this bulk migration. We need to understand the reason behind this changing mindset of people living in villages. It cannot be just the desire of living the city lifestyle which is causing the migration. The problem lies deep rooted in the existing problems in the villages. [2]

During British rule, each village in the country lived like a close society and the rules were defined by the upper caste communities. They were self sufficient and hardly needed any external aid for their existence. The society used to be based and governed by the caste system where the roles of people were pre-defined and they were not allowed to do anything other than that. Brahmin was supposed to preach, Kshatriyas were considered as warriors, Vysas and Shudras were assigned the lower level jobs. The society looked stable from inside but the resentment had always been growing with the exposure. The structure of village has been changing since then.

Indian villages thrive on agriculture and that forms the basis of their life. Their source of livelihood has shaped the social structure and ideologies of people living in the countryside. Any change in the structure of village would be majorly driven by the agricultural reforms. Moreover, the stratification of society would have an equal impact in the transformation of the rural India. A comprehensive study of the cultural and economical aspects of the Indian villages would give a fair idea about how the changing structure of Indian villages has impacted the country as a whole.[3]

Rural sector has a close connection with agriculture and hence called agrarian societies. Land is not just a property or a resource for agriculture but it is the basis of life. Agriculture is not just the source of livelihood but the essence community. This is evident from the fact that the festival celebrations in India are marked by the harvesting seasons. For example, Baisakhi in Punjab, Bihu in Assam, Pongal in Tamil Nadu and Ugadi in Karnataka would be to name a few.

## Rural India – A comprehensive study

The concept of village came up when nomadic human beings started to live in herds and hunted together. They had rules for their herd and everyone followed them. IT was easy to survive together rather than struggling alone. That brought people of same geography together and they started living in closed societies. Slowly, the structure of those herds developed and became more organised. The rules for governance kept on changing and that's how multitudes of unique villages were formed in the country.

The outside intervention was limited and they were sufficient in fulfilling all their requirements. The roles and responsibilities were defined and hence the equilibrium was maintained. The agriculture formed the basis of their life and provided stability to their agrarian communities. The rural societies started developing with the advancement of science and technology and that helped in increasing their agricultural productivity.

The interaction of village communities amongst themselves has also helped in shaping the current structure of Indian villages. The communities were of different types based on their tenure of existing at a place. Some of them belonged to migratory communities where the herd stayed for few months and then moved. Some communities stayed at a particular place for certain years until the fertility of soil was lost which made them move to a more productive land. Another type was of permanent communities who resided on the same soil for years.[4]

There are many factors which determine the structure of Indian villages which has been covered in our scope of the sociological study. The ecological conditions like soil, water and other resources have a huge impact on the formation of village structure. Places rich in resources for a stable community residing there for years and places having difficult conditions for survival creates a nomadic nature and a volatile structure which keeps on changing.

Earlier, the power structure in villages mainly depended on ownership of land, caste and position held. The zamindars having control over the land had more power in the village societies. Similarly, upper caste people were looked with great respect and were known to have more say in the village communities. Moreover, people holding positions in the village panchayats controlled power in the rural sector. However, post independence zamindari system and caste system were abolished and new land reforms were made. A complete new power structure was formed which was driven by politics. [5]

### **An analysis of the changing village structure**

India being a diverse country has people living with different cultures, speaking different languages and has different backgrounds. The reason behind this interesting dissimilarity is the geographical, economical and social origin of people in the country. Each village in India is unique with a different story of its evolution. The self-sufficient mosaics of the country have been influenced by the modern era and have changed over a period of time.

**Infrastructure and lifestyle:** The face of Indian village has changed over the period of time. Houses built from mud and thatch roof has been replaced by cemented ones. Wide well lit roads have replaced the narrow lanes. Hand pumps and wells have been replaced by taps and continuous water supply. Two wheelers and four wheelers can be seen instead of bullock carts. General stores and even beauty parlours are there in the village communities. Attire of men and women has got a western influence now.

Government has been serious now in tackling local sanitisation issues. Swachh Bharat Mission is one of them. Government has worked further to encourage the village communities for using toilets. The awareness programmes has been launched to make people aware about the importance of hygiene on health.

**Power:** Earlier the community was governed by zamindars, upper castes and panchayats. All of them are gone now and the centralised rules have been made. After the abolition of upper caste rule, higher sections of the society had very little power left. They did not feel any advantage in living in the villages anymore and wanted to explore the urban lifestyle. The introduction of modern means of transport and communication further connected the remote societies to the bigger world and changed their thinking and mindset. People started becoming more aware of the available options in the world and wanted to explore more. The level of contentment was decreasing with the increasing exposure to the outer world. The change had started after the start of British rule in the country. They interfered with the existing social and cultural set of the villages and tried to transform it. That had started the era of change which has many benefits as well. The emergence of new face of rural India is the result of that transformation. The equilibrium was disturbed and that had started a chain of reactions in the structure of Indian villages.[6]

**Livelihood:** Apart from agriculture, artisans form like carpenters, weavers, potters, goldsmiths, ironsmiths etc. has formed a major part of the livelihood earners. Later, because of the increasing impact of urban sector, people are trying varied sources of income. Moreover, many artisans from rural sector are now migrating to cities for a better income. And the foreign made product has reduced the demand of hand crafted ones. So the face of rural livelihood is changing in the modern era. With the developments happening all over the country, the influx of cheap foreign goods undermined the capabilities of local village artisans. They faced a huge competition from the foreign market and their survival became tough. The use of indigenous products started reducing and once the self-sufficient societies started facing turmoil. The equilibrium that was built over the period of time was disturbed and people started looking for opportunities outside the village.

**Economy:** Earlier, the village communities used to be self-sufficient. Each household used to produce enough food grains for their survival. Very less external aid was required and that too was fulfilled amongst them. They lived like a close knit society. Later, with the introduction of modern era, people in villages started moving to cities to earn their livelihood and as a result village economy showed a major shift. Focus on agriculture and local hand made products was undermined and industrialisation started dominating the financial structure of the village communities. This led to a major transformation in villages as men started moving out for work which also skewed the gender diversity in the communities.

**Demographics:** With more and more people migrating to the cities in search of better livelihood, the rural-urban population of the country has seen a major shift. Density of population in urban and rural India has changed accordingly. Even the gender ratios have skewed due to the migration of men of the villages to the cities.

**Geography:** In the modern era, the cities are expanding at an increasing pace. Farmers are forced to sell their land at low costs which is used to develop advanced infrastructure for the cities. Village boundaries are shrinking and the cities are replacing them. This has further increased the migration of people from rural to urban sector of the country as this expansion has created the further scope of employment.[7]

### **Benefits – Changed structure of Indian villages**

Land reforms have brought a revolutionary change in the structure of Indian villages. Now the lands are no more the properties of zamindars and jagirdars. The farmers can earn profit on their produce now. Policies have been made to make the farmers aware about the latest developments in the field of agriculture. The commission at every level is no more a concern for the farmers.

Industrialisation has created a major scope of employment and has opened the secondary sector as well for the source of employment for the rural communities. This has broadened the scope of livelihood and has helped families in increasing their income. Though more people have started migrating to the cities but that can be compensated with the economic growth of the country these labours are bringing by working in the production of goods and services.[8]

Abolished caste system has improved the society and its mindset. This has helped the community in getting rid of problems like untouchability. The society is progressing because of this reform and would bring a major change in its pace of development. Now the jobs are not assigned based on the caste, creed or religion of the people. In the modern era village, the skill matters the most now instead of the social status of people. The domination of upper caste has gone bringing the society to a fair level of competition based on merit. Even the weaker sections of the society would grow and in the long term, this will reduce the economic and social disparity of the country.

Government awareness programmes and exposure to the wider world has sensitised the people of rural communities about the importance of limiting the size of their family. Overpopulation was one of the major contributing factors for poverty. People are now aware about the importance of having a small family and are focusing more on the education and better upbringing of their children instead of increasing the family size at an alarming rate. The age old family customs and traditions are breaking the shackles with the help of changing mindset. Small and happy family has become the mantra of the improved village structure.[9]

Development in infrastructure of rural sector of the country has provided better scope to the people living in the villages for their development and overall improvement of the community. Improvement in education and health will bring a long term change in the country's socioeconomic status. Better facilities would help the people in rural communities to grow at a faster pace. This is also help in the better integration of rural sector in the country's overall development path.

### Challenges

Though immense amount of effort has been put to transform the rural sector of India, we still have a long way to go. There are multiple challenges faced by the government in bringing a long term change in the villages. The main problem behind this is the overpopulation which leads to increased unemployment and poverty. There are many awareness programmes running to educate the people living in villages but the proper implementation and reach of information remains a challenge.

Another problem is the deep rooted caste system in village communities which highly influences the thinking and mindset of people living in rural India. The defined roles of people belonging to each caste and community have blocked the scope of progress in the society. The age old custom and governance still act as a road block to government reforms like compulsory education and vocational courses.

The political backing in the formation of leaders for the rural sector impacts the real interest of the villages. People obeying the political leaders are supported and made leader of the village communities. However, the main criteria for selection should be defied keeping the interest of villagers in the mind and it should not aim at returning favours to the political parties. Power structure has a huge impact on the transformation of village and if that is compromised, the growth and progress of the village communities would be in trouble.[10]

Further, the major problem impacting the positive transformation of rural India is the inertia towards any kind of change which is mainly driven by the ego of the patriarchy. In villages, the oldest man of the household has the authority to make decisions. And any change or reform for the development of society is seen against the age old customs. The priority for the head of the family is to take care and carry forward the age old traditions and any change in that is not welcomed. This creates a hurdle in the implementation of any reform aimed at the development of the rural communities.



## Future Scope

India being a diverse country with varied climatic conditions and different socio-economic regions, it would be a good start by creating an ecological map of India. The intent would be to highlight the areas having difficulties in their survival and make a different strategy for each area depending on the problem they are facing. This would provide a better assistance in the transformation of rural economy and would bring a stable structure to the Indian villages.

Further, the awareness programmes and campaigns can be launched to tackle the existing mindset promoting caste based stratification of society. The power needs to be diversified in the hands of people working for the interest of the community. Politics can be streamlined to improve the power structure of the rural communities. Overall, the structure of Indian villages has changed a lot since our independence. However, a lot needs to be done for its further development. Villages are an integral part of our country and its changing structure is of great importance for the development of the nation.

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