



# **HISTORY OF INDIAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A JOURNEY OF PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper explores the historical evolution of rural development in India, highlighting key milestones, policy initiatives, and challenges faced over the years. The analysis traces the journey of rural development from pre-independence to the present day, emphasizing the diverse approaches taken by the government and various stakeholders.

The paper begins with an overview of the agrarian society in pre-independence India, examining the traditional methods of rural development and the impact of colonial rule on rural communities. It then delves into post-independence efforts, starting with the First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956), which focused on agricultural development, irrigation, and land reforms.

Subsequent sections of the paper discuss the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, which aimed to enhance agricultural productivity through the adoption of high-yielding crop varieties and modern farming techniques. The paper also analyzes the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) introduced in the 1980s, which sought to address poverty and unemployment through self-employment and income-generating activities.

Additionally, the paper explores the impact of economic liberalization in the 1990s on rural development, examining the shift towards market-oriented policies and the challenges of balancing growth with social equity in rural areas.

Furthermore, the analysis incorporates successful rural development projects, such as the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and other initiatives which illustrates the importance of community participation and targeted social welfare programs in empowering rural populations.

The paper also addresses persistent challenges in Indian rural development, including agricultural distress, inadequate infrastructure, land degradation, and limited access to education and healthcare. It highlights the importance of addressing these challenges to achieve sustainable and inclusive rural development.

**Key words:** rural development, agrarian society, colonial rule, first five-year plan, Government initiatives.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The historical evolution of rural development in India is a journey marked by significant milestones, policy shifts, and persistent challenges. The evolution spans from pre-independence to the present day, illustrating how various approaches by the government and stakeholders have shaped rural development in the country.

## **PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD**

Pre-independence India was predominantly an agrarian society, with agriculture forming the backbone of the economy and rural life. The agrarian economy was characterized by subsistence farming, where the majority of the population were engaged in agriculture to meet their basic needs. Rural communities had developed traditional methods of rural development that revolved around agriculture and local self-sufficiency.

### **Traditional Methods of Rural Development:**

- **Subsistence Agriculture:** Agriculture was the primary livelihood of rural communities, and they practiced subsistence farming, growing crops to meet the immediate needs of their families. The focus was on food crops like rice, wheat, millets, and pulses, which were essential for sustenance.
- **Traditional Irrigation Techniques:** In regions with limited access to water, rural communities developed traditional methods of irrigation, such as wells, tanks, and canals, to ensure water availability for their crops.
- **Community-Based Agriculture:** Rural communities often engaged in collective farming practices, where members of the community would come together to cultivate land, share resources, and ensure equitable distribution of produce.
- **Barter System:** In the absence of a formal currency system, rural communities relied on the barter system to exchange goods and services. This practice facilitated local trade and economic transactions.
- **Village Self-Governance:** Villages were typically self-governing units, led by local elders or councils. Decision-making and dispute resolution were handled through traditional systems, fostering a sense of community cohesion.

### **Impact of Colonial Rule on Rural Communities:**

The advent of colonial rule in India significantly impacted rural communities and their traditional methods of rural development. Here are some key impacts:

- **Land Revenue System:** The British introduced the Zamindari system, where intermediaries (zamindars) were appointed to collect land revenue on behalf of the British government. This system led to exploitative practices and often resulted in the loss of land rights for farmers.
- **Cash Crop Cultivation:** Under British rule, the emphasis shifted towards cash crop cultivation, as these crops were demanded for export to Britain. As a result, food crops were often neglected, leading to food shortages and agrarian distress.
- **Commercialization of Agriculture:** The colonial administration encouraged the commercialization of agriculture, favouring large landlords and plantation owners. This further marginalized small and subsistence farmers, perpetuating economic disparities.
- **Disruption of Traditional Industries:** British policies and the growth of modern industries led to the decline of traditional rural industries, affecting rural livelihoods.
- **Indebtedness:** The exploitation by moneylenders and the burden of high taxes led to widespread rural indebtedness, trapping many farmers in cycles of poverty.
- **Displacement and Land Loss:** Colonial policies and infrastructure development projects led to the displacement of rural communities and loss of agricultural land.

Therefore, pre-independence India was predominantly an agrarian society with traditional rural development methods centred around subsistence agriculture and community-based practices. The impact of colonial rule disrupted these traditional systems, leading to agrarian distress, economic inequalities, and challenges that persisted even after independence. Understanding this historical context is crucial to comprehending the complexities of rural development in modern-day India.

### **POST-INDEPENDENCE INITIATIVES:**

After independence, the Indian government prioritized rural development to address widespread poverty and inequality.

#### **The First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956)**

The First Five-Year Plan (1951-1956) laid the foundation for this vision with a focus on land reforms, agricultural development and establishment of village panchayats (local self-governing bodies). This plan was the initial step taken by the newly independent Indian government to promote economic development and address various challenges faced by the country, including rural underdevelopment. Rural development was a crucial component of this plan, and significant efforts were made to improve the conditions of rural areas and the lives of rural communities.

#### **Key Objectives of the First Five-Year Plan for Rural Development:**

- **Agricultural Development:** The plan aimed to boost agricultural productivity by promoting modern farming techniques, providing access to improved seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation facilities. Special attention was given to increasing food production to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce food shortages.

- **Land Reforms:** Land reforms were a major focus to address the unequal distribution of land. The plan sought to implement land redistribution measures to provide land to landless and marginal farmers, thereby enhancing their economic prospects.
- **Rural Infrastructure:** The First Five-Year Plan recognized the importance of rural infrastructure for development. Investments were made in building rural roads, improving communication networks, and establishing rural electrification projects to bridge the urban-rural divide.
- **Community Development:** The plan emphasized the concept of "Community Development" to promote self-help and community participation in rural areas. The objective was to empower rural communities to take charge of their development through collective efforts.
- **Employment Generation:** Rural unemployment was a significant concern, and the plan aimed to generate employment opportunities in the rural sector through various agricultural and non-agricultural activities.
- **Education and Health:** The plan allocated resources to improve education and healthcare facilities in rural areas, recognizing their importance for human capital development and overall well-being.

### **Impact of the First Five-Year Plan on Rural Development:**

The First Five-Year Plan had both advantages and disadvantages in the context of rural development:

#### **Advantages:**

- The plan laid the foundation for agrarian growth and modernization by introducing improved agricultural practices and inputs.
- Land reforms resulted in some redistribution of land, benefiting landless and marginalized farmers.
- Rural infrastructure projects improved connectivity and accessibility in rural areas.
- The Community Development Program encouraged community involvement and led to the establishment of Village Panchayats.

#### **Disadvantages:**

- Despite efforts, rural poverty and inequalities persisted due to limited resources and the magnitude of the development task.
- The impact of land reforms varied across states, and in some cases, implementation faced resistance from powerful landowners.
- The Community Development Program had limited success in some regions due to bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of adequate resources.

Overall, the First Five-Year Plan laid the groundwork for subsequent development efforts and set the trajectory for rural development in India. It emphasized the importance of rural areas in the nation's growth and recognized the need for targeted interventions to uplift rural communities and promote inclusive development. Subsequent Five-Year Plans continued to build upon these efforts and evolved strategies to further address rural development challenges in the country.

**Green Revolution:**

In the 1960s and 1970s, India witnessed the Green Revolution, a transformative phase that aimed to boost agricultural productivity through the adoption of high-yielding crop varieties, modern irrigation techniques, and increased use of fertilizers and pesticides. The Green Revolution played a vital role in enhancing food production but also brought forth new challenges related to environmental concerns and disparities in access to resources among small and marginalized farmers.

**Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP):**

In the 1980s, the government introduced the IRDP, focusing on poverty alleviation through self-employment and income-generating activities. Various poverty alleviation programs were launched to uplift the marginalized sections of society, providing them with access to credit, vocational training, and livelihood opportunities. However, the program faced implementation challenges, and its impact on poverty reduction was limited.

**Economic Liberalization:**

In the 1990s, India adopted economic liberalization policies, promoting market-oriented reforms and opening up the economy to foreign investment. While these policies spurred overall economic growth, rural development faced the challenge of maintaining a balance between economic progress and social inclusivity.

**Community-Driven Development:**

In recent decades, community-driven development models gained prominence, recognizing the importance of local participation and empowerment. Initiative like Self-Help Groups gained momentum in the 1990s in India and have played a crucial role in poverty reduction, women's empowerment, and community development. They have contributed to financial inclusion by providing access to credit and savings services in areas where formal banking institutions have limited reach. Moreover, SHGs have been instrumental in promoting sustainable livelihoods, women's entrepreneurship, and social mobilization in rural and marginalized communities.

**INITIATIVES LAUNCHED BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT:**

1. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY): Launched in 2000, PMGSY is a flagship program aimed at providing all-weather road connectivity to unconnected rural habitations. The scheme has played a crucial role in improving rural accessibility, connecting remote areas to markets, schools, and healthcare facilities.
2. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA): Launched in 2005, MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of wage employment to rural households, providing a safety net during times of unemployment and boosting rural livelihoods. It is one of the world's largest social welfare programs.

3. Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana (DAY-NRLM): Launched in 2011, DAY-NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission) aims to alleviate rural poverty by promoting self-employment and building sustainable livelihoods for rural households. It focuses on empowering women and marginalized communities.
4. Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission: Launched in 2016, this mission seeks to develop "Rurban" areas, which are regions that exhibit the qualities of both urban and rural areas. The initiative aims to bridge the rural-urban divide by providing urban amenities and services in rural areas.
5. Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin): Launched in 2016, this scheme aims to provide affordable housing to rural households living in inadequate housing conditions. It offers financial assistance to eligible beneficiaries for the construction of pucca houses.
6. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission): Launched in 2014, this nationwide campaign aims to achieve universal sanitation coverage and make India open defecation-free. It focuses on improving hygiene and sanitation facilities in rural areas.
7. Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY): Launched in 2015, PMKSY aims to improve the efficiency of irrigation systems and expand the area under irrigation. It focuses on increasing water use efficiency and ensuring the availability of water to every farm field.
8. e-National Agriculture Market (e-NAM): Launched in 2016, e-NAM is an electronic trading platform that connects mandis (agricultural markets) across the country. It enables farmers to sell their produce online, ensuring fair prices and reducing intermediaries' role.
9. Startup Village Entrepreneurship Program (SVEP): Launched in 2015, SVEP aims to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship in rural areas. It provides support and training to rural entrepreneurs and helps create sustainable enterprises.
10. Gram Samridhi Evam Swachhata Pakhwada: This initiative focuses on cleanliness, hygiene, and overall rural development during a fortnight-long campaign organized in various villages.

These are just a few of the initiatives launched by the Indian government to promote rural development and uplift the lives of rural communities. The government has continuously been working on implementing various programs and policies to address the challenges faced by rural areas and ensure inclusive growth across the country.

RESEARCH THROUGH INNOVATION

## CHALLENGES:

1. Throughout the evolution of rural development in India, several challenges persist. These include:
2. Agricultural Distress: Farmers continue to face challenges related to low productivity, market volatility, and inadequate access to credit and technology.
3. Infrastructure Gaps: Rural areas often suffer from inadequate infrastructure, including transportation, electricity, and healthcare facilities.

4. Land Degradation: Soil erosion, deforestation, and improper land use have led to environmental degradation in rural regions.
5. Poverty and Inequality: Despite progress, rural poverty and income disparities persist, particularly among marginalized communities.
6. Education and Healthcare: Access to quality education and healthcare remains limited in rural areas, affecting human capital development.

## CONCLUSION:

The historical evolution of rural development in India showcases a dynamic interplay of policies, programs, and socio-economic factors. While significant progress has been made in certain areas, addressing persistent challenges requires continued commitment and innovative approaches from the government, civil society, and various stakeholders to ensure inclusive and sustainable rural development in India.

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