
Rural Development in British Period in India

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ABSTRACT

Development of rural area is not a one day task; rural development signifies a complex and long term process involving fundamental transformation of rural society both at social and economic levels. This study has been made to characterize the Indian villages in British period. It narrates how the establishment of British rule altered the basic land relationships in the villages which were governed by traditional customs and usage. It logically interprets how the British tampered with the basic stability of the villages through the introduction of the concept of mortgage, sale and transferability of land. It also focused some schemes that have been introduced by British in rural development in India. The study concluded that the basic infrastructure was also ignored by the British. That does not mean that no efforts were taken in this direction. But all these efforts were taken by Indian directly and indirectly. The implement of such programmes were effective in limited areas.

KEY WORDS- rural, agriculture, commercialization, jute, land.

Introduction

“Just as the whole universe is contained in the self, so is India contained in the villages.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

The basic objective of the rural development is to organize, develop and utilize the available resources of land, water and manpower in such a manner that the entire population depending on these resources has an equitable opportunity to meet, as a minimum, its basic needs. Rural development implies both the economic betterment of people and a greater transformation of people. In order to provide the rural people with the best prospects, there needs an increase in participation of people in the rural development programmes, decentralization of planning, better enforcement of land reforms and greater access to credit. Working on these sections will bridge the gap between urban- rural divide and will upgrade the standard of living of people in the rural areas. Development of rural area is not a one day task; rural development signifies a complex and long term process involving fundamental transformation of rural society both at social and economic levels. It represents planned programmes to improve the quality of the lifestyle of the realities. The concept of Rural Development in India exists from the Vedic times; it is not a newfangled concept. Rural Development involves rebuilding of every aspect of human life which includes social, political and economic condition of a human being. Development of a country is predominantly divided into two parts: Urban Area and Rural Area. Thus, the development of both the areas is necessary. India mainly focuses on the development of the Urban Area instead of Rural Area. Keeping the importance of rural development in mind from ancient India, the rulers made their valuable efforts in this regard.

In the present research paper, an attempt has been made to examine the rural development including the basis facilities in rural areas and agriculture conditions in India during British period.

Objectives of the Study:

As the changing life in Indian Villages marked best the impact of the British administration on the Indian people, this study has been made to characterize the Indian villages in British period. It narrates how the establishment of British rule altered the basic land relationships in the villages which were governed by traditional customs and usage. It logically interprets how the British tampered with the basic stability of the villages through the introduction of the concept of mortgage, sale and transferability of land. It also focuses on some schemes that have been introduced by British for rural development in India.

Methodology: Many studies have been conducted by the researcher to highlight the concept. Some of studies out of these have been used as review of literature which also proved help ful to researcher to understand the concept lucidly. An elaborative research methodology was used to investigate and interpret the impact of British rule on Indian villages from the second half of eighteenth century. The researcher has relied both on primary and secondary sources of data. Secondary data is based on analysis and discussions.

Indian village before British period

Throughout the historical ages, Indian village remained a remarkable socio-economic organization till the introduction of the British rule; the village remained the basis of the rural society and economy. Interrelating with economic sense, the village has been termed as village community having its own sources and resources. The villages enjoyed a self-contained and self-sufficing existence. The activities of the villages were regulated, as far as possible, a self-propelled and self-dependent economic unit. Broadly speaking, the needs of the village community were satisfied either within the village or by the neighboring villages. The prime economic necessities were food and clothing. The majority of members of the typical village community were, therefore obvious, cultivators and weavers. The additional needs, such as, farming implements and utensils, were provided by the smith. The potter made pots, and the goldsmith, ornaments. The simple needs of the villager could be met by these craftsmen or tradesmen. The small trader supplied the other goods which the village did not produce. Economic transactions within the village were conducted in a lucid and logical manner. Traditionally, the cultivator purchased his cloth, oil or pot by paying in grain. Other professional groups of the society were also paid a fixed annual share of grain. This procedure of mutual exchange has been termed as barter system. **It was only in the British era that money began generally to replace the barter system.** But in the traditional village economy money served the purpose of wealth, either in the shape of gold and silver (*Bose, 1993; Charles worth, 1982*). Whatever any particular village community could not produce the adjacent village or villages could supply and, thus, the villages remained interdependent to meet mutual needs. If the needs could not be satisfied within the immediate vicinity, there was a periodical or weekly market of various neighboring villages, where the required commodities could be available. These markets were arranged at regular intervals.

Moreover, there was the annual fair to which the inhabitants of a number of villages eagerly looked forward to buy commodities of a specialized nature or technique. It is remarkable, that in the traditional village community, the moneylender had an important socio-economic character to perform. The vast majority of cultivators were men of poor means if the crop failed, they starved; and to prepare for the next crop they required money. In this scenario, the moneylenders served a valuable instrument for the poor peasant to sustain in the hours of crisis. But, often, they exploited the peasant beyond all proportions and even forfeited his land (*Blunt, 1931; Ghurye, 1961*). Their usual rates of interest were high and the manner of recovery was very harsh or sometimes it became inhuman. The pre-British village infrastructure had its merits and demerits. The community lived on the principle of self adjustment. The members shared their prosperity as well as adversity according to prevailing conditions. Their wants being limited to bare necessities, the villagers worked intently to produce them. Self-sufficiency was, more or less, a universal feature except in times of natural calamities. Against such merits, the demerits were equally weighty. The isolated existence of the village and the still and quiet village life made the economic activities stereotyped. The incentive for material prosperity was lost in quietist attitudes of self-contentment. The immobile peasant, after his seasonal field work, had much time to spare. The craftsman and the artisan, with all his gift and talent, did not try to create a greater demand for his goods. The small traders had no transport facilities to carry village products to distant markets.

Indian village economy during British

The economic policies and rural development policy in British time period led to the rapid transformation of India's economy into a colonial economy whose nature and structure was determined to establish for the benefits of Britain economy. They had overthrown Indian political powers but had made no basic changes in the county's socio-economic structure. The ruling patter of British was very different as they disrupted the traditional socio-economic structure of the Indian villages. In order to rule over the country effectively, the government did not make any substantial changes in the village infrastructure, but promoted the class of non-cultivating intermediaries. Under the regime of East India Company and later on of Crown in India, the colonial rule left behind several everlasting imprints in the socio-economic, political and cultural life of Indians.

Due to the process of colonialization, agriculture, trade, and industry of India were ruined badly and India became a poor country as it had never been. Similarly, the ruin of rural artisan and cottage industries proceeded more rapidly once the railways were built in the hinterlands of India. The disintegration and degeneration of the village communities in India started with the advent of British in India. The introduction of new land laws and consequent infiltration of urban exploitative elements, the opening of trade and breakdown of the village self-sufficiency, and the centralization of revenue were the chief characteristics of villages after the mid of eighteenth century. During the British rule the revenue rate were high and in the land settlements that were made between in the second half of 18th century, lands were habitually sold by the English Company to the new intermediaries because the old revenue farmers failed to meet out the demand of land revenue. This transformation of land brought into existence a new class of Zamindars. This class treated land more as a channel for investment for their rent rather than as a source of agricultural production. Furthermore, the agrarian structure was supplemented by the novel experiments as and when the English Company expanded her control in India. Tax from the land remained a primary source of revenue for the kings and emperors since time immemorial. Nevertheless, the ownership pattern of land had witnessed changes over centuries. In the pre-capitalist stage of Indian economy, the idea of absolute ownership did not exist. All classes connected with land possessed certain rights. Unlike, the ancient and medieval period; the British imperial rule unleashed far-reaching changes in Indian agrarian structure. New land tenures, new land ownership concepts, tenancy changes and heavier demand for land revenue brought havoc changes, both in rural economy and social web. From their beginning, as political masters, the English Company relied on land revenue as the principal source of income for the functioning of state.

Decline of Indian Handicrafts and Progressive Ruralisation of the Indian Economy Before the beginning of Industrial Revolution in England, the East India Company concentrated on export of Indian manufactured goods, textiles, spices. etc. to Europe where these articles were in great demand. The Industrial Revolution reversed the character of India's foreign trade. Tremendous expansion (of productive capacity of manufacturers resulted in increased demand of raw materials for British industry and the need to capture foreign markets for finished products. As a first step, attempts were made to restrict and crush Indian manufacturers. On the other hand, efforts were made to commercialize agriculture so as to step up the export of those raw materials required by British industry. The Indian textile handicrafts were the first to be hit.

The decline of this industry started a chain reaction leading to the speedy discovery of other handicrafts.

Commercialization of Indian Agriculture

Table 1.1**Trends in Indian Agriculture during British period**

Amount in billion Rs. (***) growth rate

	Food grain (production value in Rupees)	Commercial crop (production value in Rupees)
1896-1905	28.1 billion Rs.	6.7 billion Rs
1906-1915	28.8 billion Rs (3 percent growth)	8.0 billion Rs (20 percent growth)
1916-1925	28.6 billion Rs (-1 percent growth)	9.1 billion Rs (14 percent growth)
1926-1935	27.3 billion Rs (-5 percent growth)	11.1 billion Rs (22 percent growth)
1936-1945	27.2 billion Rs -	11.9 billion Rs (7 percent growth)
1946-55	27.5 billion Rs (1 percent growth)	13.7 billion Rs (15 percent growth)

Source: Patel, Indian Economic Journal, Vol. V, No. 3, p. 24

Another noteworthy change in Indian agriculture was its commercialization that spread during British time period. Commercialization of agriculture implies production of crops for sale rather than for family consumption. At every stage of the economic history of the nation, a part of the agricultural output has been produced for the market. Then, what distinguished commercial agriculture from normal sales of marketable surplus? It was as deliberate policy worked up under pressure from British manufacturer-industrialist and merchant to acquire more and more of raw materials for the British Industries. By offering a higher bait of market price, the peasants were induced to substitute commercial crops for food crops as the former were more paying than the latter. This led to fall in the production of food and consequently this period is marked by the occurrence of most terrible famines and this happened for the first time in the economic history of India.

Table 1.1 highlight the variation between commercial and food grain crop growth and their production amount in rupees. Table shows that the growth rate of commercial crop was all time high then food grain crop that clearly indicates the commercialization of India agriculture during British period.

Commercial agriculture was also to some extent the result of the mounting demands of land revenue by the state and excessive rent by the landlords from the peasantry. The process of commercial agriculture necessitated by the Industrial Revolution was intensified by the development of an elaborate network of railways in India, after 1850. Railways linked the interior of the country with ports and harbors. Large quantities of wheat from Punjab, jute from Bengal and cotton from Bombay poured in for export to England. The same railways which carried commercial crops from the various parts of the country brought back the foreign machine. Thus, railways, and link-roads connecting the hinter-land of the country with commercial and trading centers were instrumental in intensifying commercial agriculture on the

one hand and sharpening competition of machine-made goods with Indian handicrafts, on the other. These factors led to the ruin of Indian industries.

Rural development programmes during British period

Rural development in India before independence can be analyzed under two broad heads. During the British rule, Britishers were not concerned with the socio-economic development of India and thus our rural economy got severely damaged resulting in the miserable conditions of the ruralites. The primary concern of the administration was maintenance of law and order and collection of revenue, not the development. Thus colonial interests were primary objectives and the rural development was secondary.

Development efforts made by the British Government:

It was the famine of 1899 which forced the British Government to think about the people of India who were dying of hunger.

The Recurrent famines forced the State Administrators to seize the food grains and make arrangements for the distribution among the famine-affected people. All this was done without any apparent legal sanction, motivated as the action purely was by determination to control profiteering and alleviate rural suffering.

Removal of Barter system: The traditional barter system received a severe setback during the British period. British introduced cash economy, which enabled the peasants to adopt commercial crops. In this way agricultural subsistence gave rise to commercial crops. To combat the agriculture crisis during the British period, the government adopted several measures such as provision of irrigation facilities, setting up of cooperative societies, creation of a research committee for the comprehension of problems in agriculture etc. Efforts made by voluntary organizations. Different types of programme were introduced which are as follows:

Sriniketan Experiment: Early effort at rural development was initiated by Shri. Rabindranath Tagor in 1908 by establishing youth organization in the kaligram Prokana of his Zamindari. He tried to create a class of functionary workers who could learn to identify themselves with the people. This was a very comprehensive programme combining culture, health, education and economic aspects of village life together.

The Martandam Experiment: The aim of this project was to bring more abundant life to the 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'. From the demonstration centre at Martandam, about a hundred villages were covered through Y.M.C.A. centers in villages. (M.S. Randhawa, Developing village India, Orient Longman, Bombay, 39-42(1951).

The Gurgaon Experiment: It was started by Mr. F.L. Brayne, Deputy Commissioner in the Gurgaon district of Punjab State as he was prompted by the backwardness, poverty and misery of the people. Introduction of this programme improved seeds, implements, the methods of cultivation, etc. This project could not develop leadership in the villages that would continue working when the village's guides had left the villages.

Gandhian Constructive Programme/ Sewagram: The dream of the Gandhiji was to see the village as self - contained and self – sufficient unit. The problem of the rural people which he was aware, he wanted to remove that problem without any intervention of outside agencies. He wanted to solve these problems with local people and through local resources. Therefore, for the betterment of people he formulated 18 programmes, which included the promotion of village industries, basic and adult education in rural sanitation, upliftment of backward tribes, upliftment of women, education in public health and hygiene, propagation of natural language. Love for the mother tongue, economic equality, organization of kisans, labor and students and so on. He gave special attention to revive crafts, especially spinning and weaving, traditional oil press, grain processing and leather work. Gandhian rural reconstruction activities were based on the principles of truth and non-violence. His ideas of rural reconstruction were adopted officially and resulted in the adoption of khadi and Village Industries Programme, the principle of Village Self-sufficiency and the faith in the Panchayati Raj and Sahakari Samaj Movement.

Rural Reconstruction Programmes in Baroda: The Maharaja of Baroda was a progressive and enlightened man and therefore, he started the Baroda experiment in 1932. This programme aimed at developing “will to live better” and a capacity for the self-help and selfreliance.

The Firka Development scheme: The Firka Development scheme of Madras was a Government sponsored scheme in 1946. This programme aimed at organizing the villages for a happier, more prosperous and fuller life in which the individual villagers had the opportunity to develop both as an individual and as a unit of a well-integrated society.

Conclusion

The pre-British village infrastructure had its merits and demerits. the British imperial rule unleashed far-reaching changes in Indian agrarian structure From their beginning, as political masters, the English Company relied on land revenue as the principal source of income for the functioning of state. The British rule meant the disappearance of this patronage enjoyed by the handicrafts. Cotton and silk manufacturers suffered especially. In case of agriculture condition study concluded that British government focused on commercial agriculture rather than food grain. These efforts were made to commercialize agriculture so as to step up the export of those raw materials required by British industry.

The basic infrastructure was also ignored by British. That does not mean that no efforts were taken in this direction. But all these efforts were taken by Indian directly and indirectly. The implement of such programmes were effective in limited areas.

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