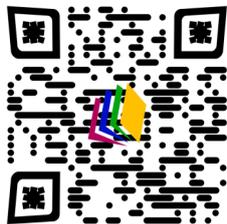




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***Corresponding Author**

Dr. Manas Behera
Head, Department of Political
Science, R.D.Women's University
Bhubaneswar
Email: manasbehera1964@gmail.com

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Inclusive Rural Development Under Neo-liberalism and Gandhian Strategy

Dr. Manas Behera

Head, Department of Political Science, R. D. Women's University, Bhubaneswar

ABSTRACT:

The Concept of Inclusive Development has already occupied the centre- stage of development discourses today throughout the world. So far as India is concerned the all-pervasive poverty in its rural areas is the major stumbling block in the way of achieving the goal of inclusive development. The fruits of growth could not be distributed equitably and the major impediment was the hierarchical, unequal socio-economic structure in the rural areas. So there was a need to have more equitable distribution of the fruits of growth. This means that there was a need for inclusive development. Rural people comprise the vast majority of the population in the developing world and virtually all of them need development that is inclusive. No problem is of greater concern in the world today than the poverty. The economic gap between the rich and poor nations is one dimension of this problem. The gap between the urban and rural areas is another and the gaps within the rural areas are yet another. Attacking poverty is at the level of providing food security and not giving access to resources or power or breaking the chains of inequalities and exploitation. Here inclusive rural development assumes the significance. But this should be different from existing notions of rural development. An inclusive view of rural development was reflected in the UN second development decade goals. It equates rural development with the far reaching transformation of the social and economic structures, institutions, relationships and processes in any rural area. It conceives the goals of rural development not simply as agricultural and economic growth in the narrow sense but as balanced social and economic development, with emphasis on equitable distribution as well as creation of benefits. The discourses on rural development need to be situated in the context of the power structure, power relations and power struggles in the rural areas.

KEY WORDS: Agricultural Growth, Inclusive Development, Technology, Socio-Economic Divide, Rural Poverty

Introduction

Rural people comprise the vast majority of the population in the developing world and virtually all of them need development that is inclusive. In the poorest and least developed countries more than 90% of the population live in rural areas. South Asia has some of the most densely populated rural areas of the world. No problem is of greater concern in the world today than the poverty. The economic gap between the rich and poor nations is one dimension of this problem. The gap between the urban and rural areas is another and the gaps within the rural areas are yet another. Attacking poverty is at the level of providing food security and not giving access to resources or power or breaking the chains of inequalities and exploitation. Here inclusive rural development assumes the significance. But this should be different from existing notions of rural development. An inclusive view of rural development was reflected in the UN second development decade goals. It equates rural development with the far reaching transformation of the social and economic structures, institutions, relationships and processes in any rural area. It conceives the goals of rural development not simply as agricultural and economic growth in the narrow sense but as balanced social and economic development, with emphasis on equitable distribution as well as creation of benefits. Among the goals are the generation of new employment; more equitable access to arable land; more equitable distribution of income; widespread improvements in health, nutrition and housing; greatly broadened opportunities for all individuals to realise their full potential through education; and a strong voice for all rural people in shaping the decisions and actions that affect their lives. These, of course, are long-range goals, but they provide the guidelines for shorter-range actions and the framework for rural development

strategies. (Coombs: 1974).

The Conceptual Issues

Rural Development has already occupied the centre stage of policy discourses today. There are a lot of changes in the approaches towards rural development since community development programmes in the early years of post-independent development paradigms till globalisation of recent times. Rural development is not free from debates or controversies. There are different and even conflicting paradigms of rural development and they are based on questions of development for whom and how. So now there is the concept of Inclusive Rural Development. Rural development simply means ways and policies to better the conditions of life of the people living in the rural areas with a focus on the rural poor and the disadvantaged. The theories and approaches to rural development vary because of the changes in the policies of rural development and its focus in different times. Rural development recognises, however, that improved food supplies and nutrition, together with basic services such as health and education, cannot only directly improve the physical well-being and quality of life of the rural poor, but can also indirectly enhance their productivity and ability to contribute to the national economy. It is concerned with the modernisation and monetisation of rural society and with its transition from traditional isolation to integration with the national economy. (World Bank: 1975) Rural development, in a complete sense, is a process of social action in which people of a community organise themselves for planning and action, define their common and individual needs, make group and individual plans to meet their needs, and execute these plans with maximum reliance upon community resources, and supplement these resources, when necessary, with

services and material from government and non-government agencies. (William and Christopher: 2015) Another approach indicates the reality of reshaping the rural development to serve the needs of urban development. By the very implication, rural development does not mean conservation, regeneration or rearrangement of rural landscapes as it is simply implied against the backdrop of urbanisation, where the state-mediated policy and programmes shape the rural to meet the urban needs. (Shah et al.:2006) The development paradigm implemented and advocated under neo-liberal globalisation often leads to destruction of rural areas to serve as hinterlands of the industry or mining for industry, particularly as the sources of raw materials and labour for industry. It means intervening through various development and rural development routes, to restructure the internal division of labour in post-colonial country, redrawing the division between the rural and urban sector. (Shah et al.:2006) This model has become dominant in neo-liberal capitalism, particularly in South Asia and is often confused with Rural Development. This is more in areas inhabited by the tribal and full of natural resources like minerals, forest etc.

Rural development can be identified as narrow as mere extension of irrigation facilities (Shah: 1977) or as broad as responsible for basic structural changes in rural society with a view to remove inequality between different classes of people. (Verghese:1978) Later on the significant element of people's participation was included in the concept of rural development to make development democratic, to involve beneficiaries in the process of both decision making as well as in implementation of policies at the grassroots level for rural development. Also the failures of different models of development led to think in terms of inclusion of people as participants of development. Though the inclusion of the element of participation was going to make the package of rural development acceptable to the people, it was not going to, in any manner, enhance the comprehensiveness of the very concept of rural development. What was needed was to treat the concept as multidimensional and provide for approaching them simultaneously. (William and Christopher: 2015) A comprehensive definition of rural development is seen as a process to increase the quality of life of rural people by bringing about social, economic, political and cultural change, providing and improving basic amenities and infrastructural facilities, and increasing employment opportunities and agricultural output in rural areas with the active participation of rural people for ultimate self-help and self-reliance and achieve sustainable development where there is no dependency, inequality and exploitation. (Christopher: 1985) Majority of the definitions of rural development aims at improving the life of the rural people without disturbing or challenging the existing order which is in equal and exploitative. They can be clubbed together as status quoist. (Shah:1977, Malgavakar:1976, Bhattacharya: 1970, Arora: 1979, Kanda: 1981) the people who advocate a change through rural development are a minority. (Mishra: 1985, Verghese: 1978).

Different routes to rural development with thrusts on particular aspects have developed in different times. These can be said to be different approaches to rural development. In terms of their thrust areas they can broadly be divided into these categories, technocratic, welfare and radical. There has been a trend in post independent India to introduce new schemes like old wine in new bottle or clubbing different policies together to cover up the failures in rural development. The state escapes the difficult

question of why there have not been any radical and marginal farmers are at the receiving end. changes in favour of the marginalised in terms of Unless there is the state intervention in favour of the access to power and resources despite these decades poor farmers through providing access to them to of rural development. Despite investments in rural technology, inputs, loans etc. they will be the worst areas in terms of infrastructure development, sufferers in the process of capitalist agriculture. development in education and health sectors, Globalisation has affected both social relations of policies targeting benefits of the poor and so on the production and social relations of consumption in rural India. A new era is being constructed in inequalities in terms of class, caste, gender, religion, which state, people and the environment are region, and language persist in significant manner. forced to adjust to the market, and it is the rural development have not been able to challenge markets, not people, that require freedom. the unequal power structure in rural areas and the (Saxena:2014) There is a tendency to analyse the class and caste in hegemonic position have got the issue of rural distress independent of the lion's share of the fruits of development political economy and to give solutions on this marginalising the marginalised in the process. A neo basis. This is a piecemeal approach not aimed at -elite class has emerged from among the solving the problem of rural distress. The problem of marginalised in the process of development and this rural distress arising mainly out of crisis in class has become the junior partners of the ruling agriculture has to be linked to the policies on SEZ class in both centre and in the periphery. This is a (Special Economic Zone), intensive capitalist common feature of the rural development process agriculture, and entry of corporates into agriculture, not only on India but also in the entire South Asia. It non-protection of farmers against the insecurities of the market, withdrawal of state from market and is part of the grand strategy of the ruling class to occupation of this vacated space by the market. manage and manipulate the forces generated by the development process as well as from the process of The current crisis in agriculture and the resultant democratic decentralisation. The radical approaches rural distress is the product of a particular historical to rural development have not been implemented by situation and its class relations and power structure. the state nor have been experimented. The The capital is in desperate search for new areas for democratic space created out of the struggle of the appropriation of surplus value and the agricultural toiling masses in the rural areas for justice from sector is one of the most lucrative areas for it. There is continuous struggle between the capital and those social to political to economic as well as from who are opposing its entry into agriculture in a democratic decentralisation could not be sustained massive scale. Under a Neo-liberal paradigm nor strengthened largely because of the fear of the of development the state is facilitating capital's ruling elites to lose their power. control of agricultural sector. The emergence of contract farming is a serious threat to the

Neo-liberalism and Agriculture

The crisis in agriculture at its current stage is due to the political economy of agriculture, which is neo-liberal capitalist economy. The state and the market are supplementing each other under this paradigm of development and the farmers, particularly the middle state to the farmers, taking away of agricultural land

for industry and other purposes, non-implementation of land reforms, lack of sufficient irrigation etc. are major problems in agriculture. For all these reasons farmers are forced to leave agriculture and again they are blamed for not being interested in agriculture. The dynamics in agriculture must be understood to fight rural distress and to attack rural poverty. Unless there is resistance to the neo-liberal political economy of rural distress an alternative cannot emerge. And for this the peasants, agricultural labour, the working class, the middle class and the intelligentsia, have to build a united front against neo-liberal paradigm of development. This can only be possible through the alliances of the democratic movements on common agenda. Then can only the state be forced to take its responsibility of intervening in the agricultural sector and save the rural sector from distress and marginalisation. The alliance of global Capital with the Neo-liberal state has to be confronted by the people's alliance for radical change of policies in favour of the common masses in the rural areas. The paradigms of Rural Development must take into account the changes made by the onset of neo-liberal policies in agriculture as well as in Industry and other sectors. Otherwise they are exclusive.

Gandhian Vision

Gandhi located the poor, above all where they are- in the villages. In his address to the court in March, 1922, he said, 'Little do the town dwellers know how the semi starved masses of India are slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get for the work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realise that the government established by law in British India is carried on for this exploitation of the masses. No sophistry, no jugglery in figures can explain the evidence the

skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town-dwellers in India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in India.' This reflects the compassion and the commitment Gandhi had for the rural poor. It was also getting to the heart of the social problem of the country in rural areas. It is not charity and beyond socio-economic analysis with data and scientific tools. It is above all a problem of morality, of a passion for justice and equality without which nobody can in India engage in any worthwhile struggle for a better life, for a more human condition for our people in rural areas, for a radical change in favour of the poor, the deprived, marginalised and the dispossessed. What is lacking today in the discourses for rural development is the Gandhian passion for justice. The state and its bureaucracy are planning without the passion and the political leadership in general is deficit of this Gandhian commitment without which the strategy and goals of Inclusive Rural Development will not be possible. This lack of passionate engagement with the suffering masses alienates them from the development process designed for them. This explains the failure to evoke mass response in rural development. The Gandhian technique of being one among the masses and of mobilising masses is relevant today to democratise democracy in rural areas to achieve inclusive rural development.

Conclusion

The solution to the problem of making rural development serves the needs of the disadvantaged majority, rather than a privileged few, will lie in a deliberate policy of organising the political voice of the poor, encouraging them to take their rightful place in the local power structure, and ensuring their participation and development in the decisions which affect their welfare. Local institutions can

become can become the means for the rural people to organise themselves for voicing their own needs and priorities and for progressively taking over the management of their affairs. But this can happen only with painstaking efforts on the part of planners and promoters of rural development programs, supported by appropriate national policies, to prevent these bodies from being captured by the articulate and privileged minority. What is needed is vigorous and forthright attack on rural poverty and injustice through rural development. Defining the goals of rural development will not be sufficient. The process by which it occurs must also be reasonably clear to permit the design of programs that can effectively accelerate it. There should be integration, decentralisation and greater equity to bring radical changes in rural areas. But neo-liberal policies are contradictory to an inclusive rural development and strategies designed to achieve this. The democratic movement must engage the state to reverse these policies in favour of inclusive rural development. The Gandhian strategy will be of great help in this regard.

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