
RURAL SOCIOLOGY OF INDIA

Dr. Renu Naidu

Assistant Professor (Sociology), Marathwada Mitra Mandal's
Shankarrao Chavan Law College, Pune

Introduction

Rural Sociology, as indicated by its name, studies rural society, rural social structures, and institutions. It is a field of sociology that is connected with the study of social life in rural areas. The sociology of food and agriculture is one focus of rural sociology and much of its field is dedicated to the economics of farm production. Other areas of study include rural migration, related demographic patterns, environmental sociology, amenity-based development, public land policies which is so-called "boomtown" development, social disruption, the sociology of natural resources (including forests, mining, fishing, and other areas) rural cultures and identities, rural healthcare and educational policies. The rural society as we all know is primarily dependent on agriculture and hence rural sociology also concerns itself with the peasant society. There is a stark difference between the social structure, social processes, social dynamics, and social control in rural society and urban society. Thus, Rural Sociology is a specialized field of sociology which studies life in the rural environment, studies rural communities to discover their conditions and tendencies to formulate the principles of progress, growth, and development.

Rural sociology focuses on how rural people and communities are socially, culturally, politically, and economically organized. As a discipline, it has a distinct body of knowledge, specific research approaches, recognizable commitments and discourses, and a set of institutional relationships. With a broad array of research questions, and often with a comparative perspective, rural sociologists consider how resource-based industries influence the social characteristics of rural communities.

Rural sociology was first developed in the United States. While other countries have developed their own approaches to rural sociology, most have been influenced by American traditions. In contrast with the general sociology perspective that associates urban life with complex societies, rural sociologists assert that contemporary rural and urban communities are the products of diversity. Studying how changes in rural places are related to wider societal and economic processes, rural sociology has also had a tradition of applied and engaged scholarship. The broad focus of rural sociology leads to the inclusion of concerns and insights from other disciplines, and it has led many rural sociologists to be interdisciplinary and to collaborate with scholars from other fields. Hence, we can say that rural sociology is the scientific, systematic, and comprehensive study of rural societies and understanding complexities of rural social life.

Definition of Rural Sociology

Many Western and Indian sociologists have given their definitions regarding rural sociology in their own point of view. Among the sociologists, T.L. Smith, A.R. Desai, Dwight-Sanderson, Chapin, etc. are very important.

According to F. Stuart Chapin, the sociology of rural life is a study of rural population, rural social organization and the social processes operative in rural society.

According to A.R. Desai (1978), "Rural Sociology is the science of rural society."

According to Sanderson, "Rural sociology is the sociology of rural life in the rural environment."

According to Bertand, "Rural Sociology is the study of human relationships in a rural environment."

As per F. S. Chapin, "The sociology of rural life is a study of the rural population, rural social organization, and the social processes operative in rural society."

Hence it is clear from the above definitions that rural sociology is related to the organized and scientific study of the life of the rural people and their personal inter-

relationships. The above definitions and discussion clearly justify that rural sociology studies the social interactions, social institutions, social activities, and social changes that take place in rural society. In other words, it can be said that rural sociology is a reflection of social life and provides the norms and values that govern the rural society and at the same time helps in understanding the difference they possess from urban society.

Origin and development of Rural Sociology

Rural sociology is a new branch of sociology with studies being carried out from the 19th century. The prominent scholars engaged in rural sociology during this period were - Sir Henry Maine, Etton, Stemann, Baden Powell, Slater, and Pollock, etc. The period of 1890-1920 in America saw the rural societies facing many socio-economic problems which attracted the attention of the intelligentsia thus establishing the study of rural society as an academic discipline.

Rural sociology as a separate discipline had its beginnings in the United States early in the twentieth century. Concerned with the social fabric of rural community life, it was public policy- and problem-oriented from the start. Early rural sociologists sought a better life for rural people. As Gillette wrote in his second rural textbook, *Rural Sociology* (1922:6), the "great business of rural sociology is, and perhaps ever will be, the attainment of a sympathetic understanding of the life of farming communities and the application to them of rational principles of social endeavor." As noted by Falk and Gilbert (1985), however, the view of rural sociology as an engaged science was contested by those who sought to establish the discipline as a value-free science whose task was more to describe and explain than to understand and improve. This tension has been a persistent feature of rural sociology, with one side ascending during some periods and the other being more prevalent at other times. The appointment of the Country Life Commission by Theodore Roosevelt was an important landmark in the history of rural sociology and in 1916 the first textbook on sociology was published by J.N Gillette.

The Second World War caused heavy destruction and damage to human society which needed reconstruction. As a result, rural sociology got an impetus in the USA. The main concern of rural sociology came to be the understanding and diagnosing of the social and economic problems of farmers. More emphasis was placed on issues such as the internal structures of community life and the changing composition of rural populations than on their relationships with land or the social aspects of agricultural production. Theoretically, rural sociology remained caught up in bipolar notions of social change whereas rural often got defined as the opposite of urban. Rurality was conceptualized as an autonomous sociological reality. The identification of rural sociology with rural society has also raised questions about its relevance in the western context where no rural areas were left anymore and almost the entire population had become urbanized.

In response to these critiques of rural sociology, a new sub-discipline of sociology emerged that operated largely within the functionalist paradigm and was preoccupied with the study of the community life of rural people. This sub-discipline known as the sociology of agriculture focused its attention on understanding and analyzing the social framework of agricultural production and the structures of relations centered on land. It raised questions about how and on what terms the agrarian sector was being integrated into the system of commodity production and about the unequal distribution of agricultural incomes and food among the different social categories of people. The sociology of agriculture also distinguished itself from peasant studies on the grounds that its focus was on capitalist farming where the production was primarily for the market, not on peasants producing for their own consumption by using family labor. Thus, it claimed more kinship with the tradition of the political economy of agriculture or agrarian studies. At the methodological level, historical inquiries became as relevant as ethnographic/empirical studies. This conceptual shift during the early 1970s also helped in bringing sociologists working on agrarian issues in the western countries closer to those concerned with agrarian transformations in the third world. To conclude, we can say that some

aspects of rural sociological analysis are closely related to other social science disciplines, such as settlement patterns with human geography, family and kinship systems with social anthropology, and land tenure and farming systems with agricultural and land economics.

Roots of Rural Sociology in Social Thought

Although the subject matter of rural sociology has been of keen interest to social thinkers for centuries, its treatment by the major 19th century classical theorists led to a polarization that continues today. Two points of view, both deeply embedded in the social thought and literature of western culture, and both quite limiting if not erroneous, have predominated. The first tradition, an image drawn from the Arcadia of Greek mythology, has been the glorification of village life for the supposed pastoral virtue of its people. The second tradition has been that of the Enlightenment and modern Western rationalism, which viewed the technological and organizational character of urban industrial forces as being superior to the alleged backwardness of rural areas.

These two traditions were ultimately embraced in major 19th century social theories. Some theorists, typified by Emile Durkheim and by Karl Marx to a lesser extent, viewed the urban industrial complex as a center of a new civilization emerging from the social transformations of the industrial revolution. Rural society, in this perspective, was regarded as a residual of preindustrial society and increasingly to be relegated to a secondary status. Other theorists, such as Toennies and early 20th century interpreters of Toennies, viewed the emergent cities of industrial capitalism as monuments to the degradation of civilization. Both points of view are deeply embedded in the social thought of western culture and continue to shape the perspectives of rural sociology as a scientific enterprise.

Rural Sociology in America

The roots of rural sociology in America lie in the social and political turmoil associated with America's version of the industrial revolution, which followed the Civil

War. As industrial capitalism made its great surge, urban America was on the move, quickly surpassing earlier achievements of European nations yet in the midst of obviously rising affluence there existed a paradoxical injustice of poverty and inequality, especially in rural areas. William Jennings Bryan was defeated in 1896 as the Populist Party candidate for president, but the political unrest in the countryside continued to be a source of concern to urban industrialists, who depended on farmers to provide a stable supply of cheap food for the growing army of industrial workers. The Country Life Movement emerged at the turn of the century as an urban sponsored alternative to the radical economic proposals of the rural Populists (Bowers 1974; Danbom 1979; Swanson 1972). It was a social, cultural, and moral reform movement that adopted the view that rural society was backward, lagging behind the evolution of an advanced urban society. The problems of rural people were viewed as stemming from a lack of organization, failures of rural social institutions, inadequate infrastructures, and technological backwardness, rather than the failures of the industrial capitalist system as claimed by Populists.

In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt gave legitimacy to the reform movement by appointing the Commission on Country Life. Spurred by the President's Commission and the Country Life Movement, Congress in 1914 passed the Smith Lever Act, which created the cooperative extension service to modernize rural America. In 1925 Congress passed the Purnell Act which provided colleges of agriculture and agricultural experiment stations with funds to support rural sociological research. Thereafter, departments of rural sociology began to emerge with universities often separated from the department of sociology.

The institutionalization of rural sociology was given further impetus in 1936 when rural sociologists established their own journal called *Rural Sociology*, and immediately after a year, they divorced themselves from the American Sociological Society which is now called as American Sociological Association by forming the Rural Sociological Society. Because of its historical roots, rural sociology has been an active participant in

two conflicting social policies derived from the opposing views of rural society in social thought. The institutional separation of rural sociology from sociology, its organizational location in colleges of agriculture, and its functional integration with cooperative extension have given American rural sociology a strong attachment to technologically driven modernization. For many of its institutional sponsors, whose primary goal has been the technological advancement of agriculture, the predominant justification for supporting rural sociology research has been presumed ability to enhance the process of modernization of rural society.

American rural sociology has been a part of explicit social policy of transforming rural society. Not only this it has tended to be driven primarily by the need to be "useful" in solving practical problems involved in transforming rural society. Also, the theoretical development within rural sociology has atrophied. Theoretical work that may contradict the prevailing social policy dogma and thereby threaten its financial and institutional support has been particularly uncommon. Thus, the practice of American rural sociology has been part of an explicit social policy of transforming rural society.

The opposing cultural theme portrays rural society as a way of life that is superior to existence in the cities and threatened by urban industrial capitalism. It has protagonists within rural sociology and in society for whom the problem is how to preserve the wholesome qualities of rural society against the encroachments of urban industrial capitalism (e.g., how to avoid community disintegration, loss of local autonomy, the collapse of the family farm, the decline of the traditional rural way of life, degradation of the rural landscape, and depletion of non-renewable natural resources). These Jefferson values of community, individualism, family entrepreneurship, and grassroot democracy inspire private and public sponsorship of many rural sociological endeavors.

Thus, American rural sociology has been significantly involved in two explicit and conflicting social policies. First, it has contributed to positivist social science by providing the basic descriptive information about the rural population, institutions, and social processes that have guided the development of programs to transform rural society.

Second, it has served those selected elements of rural society which are perceived by agricultural administrators and proponents of technological innovations as creating barriers to progress. Within the context of these conflicting and vacillating social policy orientations, rural sociology in America has generated a substantial body of research. Some research topics have emerged in response to the social policy of transforming the rural society and have followed the paradigm of positivism. There are other topics as well which are more associated with preservationist policy orientation and the paradigm of critical sociology. Both sets of orientations have existed within rural sociology since its inception, with the modernization-positivism orientation.

Rural Sociology in India

The commencement of rural sociology as a discipline in India dates back to Sir Henry S Maine who published two books i.e., *Ancient Law* (1861) and *Ancient Society* (1877). He wrote extensively on the Indian villages but was later criticized by Dumont for his European biases and centrism. According to Dumont, "Sir Henry Maine hardly ever looked at the Indian village in itself, but only as a counterpart to Tunic, Slavonic or other institutions". India was to him little more than the historical repository of veritable phenomena of ancient usage and ancient juridical thought". However, a systematic study of rural sociology in India commenced after the promulgation of the Constitution of India and the implementation of the Community Development Programmes.

During the British era in India, sociologists tried to trace the patterns of land tenure, customary laws and the functioning of the peasants and the artisans. There were also researches and enquiries made on the day-to-day affairs of rural life. The recurrent famines in India provoked numerous studies. It was the effort of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)-an apex body of the social scientists who conducted research-based surveys for nearly a decade. In its very first volume entitled *A Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology* (Vol.I), the sub-discipline of rural sociology is discussed under the chapter 'Rural Studies'. A.R. Desai, a noted sociologist, has done pioneering work in the field of Rural Sociology by editing *Rural Sociology in India*. He

has raised a few queries before defining rural sociology. Is rural sociology a distinct science or is it merely an application of the general principles of sociology? Should rural sociology restrict its scope merely to the life processes of rural society or should it also include as an integral part a study of rural and urban social life, comparative as well as in the mutual interconnection and interaction. He also interrogates: Should rural sociology only provide scientific knowledge about rural societies and laws governing its development or should it serve as a guide and suggest practical programmes of reform or reconstruction of that society in the socio-economic and cultural fields? Post independent India saw an upheaval in the community-based life due to extensive participation of the rural masses in the freedom struggle. There have been many instances of deep divide on the basis of language, caste, regional biases etc. Rural sociology eventually gained prominence and emerged in the India soil due to aforementioned reasons and also due to its agrarian nature. India resides in villages and majority of its denizens are dependent on agriculture, these twin statements paved the way for the origin and growth of rural sociology in India. It aimed at studying the grave issues, understanding the observable phenomena and proving viable and practicable solutions to mitigate the challenges.

In India, the importance of rural sociology gained recognition after independence. The agrarian context occupies special status both in the social scientific literature on India and in the literature on agrarian societies in general. However, unlike studies on caste, kinship, village community, gender, the study of agrarian relations did not occupy a central position in Indian sociology. The first systematic study of rural India was done by D.N Majumdar followed by N.K Bose, S.C Dubey, M.N Shrinivas. However, it was with the publication of Andre' Be'teille's *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure* in 1974 that agrarian sociology gained professional respectability within the two disciplines.

Peasant studies in a way arrived in India with village studies. The collection of essays, *Village India*, edited by Marriot with its emphasis on little communities and great communities was brought out under the direct supervision of Robert Redfield. By defining little communities not in relation to land but through other social institutions

such as kinship, religion, and the social organization of caste there was a shift away from looking at the rural population in relation to agriculture and land. Caste hierarchy came to be defined in terms of ritual or social interaction over institutions of commensality and marriage. According to Nelson up to the comparatively recent times, the story of man is largely the story of rural man. So rural society is the basic foundation of human life, the keystone of the developmental process, and the basic unit of social structure. Villages have been in existence since time immemorial, unlike cities which are of more recent origin. In the Indian context, rural sociology is of greater significance for the following reasons.

According to S.C Dubey from time immemorial village has been a basic and important unit in the organization of Indian social life. Unique nature of the transformation of Indian society where elements of traditional and modern cultures have been juxtaposed. For rural development and solution of rural problems according to A.R Desai this systematic study of the rural organization of its structure; function and evolution has not only become necessary but also urgent after the advent of independence. The growing influence of industrialization and urbanization. Village as the basic unit of study. The scientific study of village communities is a prerequisite for democratic decentralization.

Rural Sociology developed as a systematic branch of study only after the independence of India. In Post-Independent India it was felt that the development of a nation depends on the uplift of the rural society. Both sociologists and anthropologists contributed significantly to rural studies. Notable among them are D. N. Majumdar, N.K. Bose, R. K. Mukherjee, S. C Dude, F. G. Bailey, and G.S. Ghurye. Of late Rural Sociology has been included in the syllabi for undergraduate studies in Agriculture Engineering, Home Science, Economics, and Agriculture. It has also been introduced as a major field of specialization at the P.G level in some Indian Universities.

Scope of Rural Sociology

In comparison to other social sciences, Rural Sociology is a novel branch of Sociology and is a separate science that possesses its own subject matter and method of

study. By the scope of the discipline, it is meant that Rural Sociology refers to what it studies. To draw attention to the scope, N.L. Sims says, "The field of Rural Sociology is the study of association among people living by or immediately dependent upon agriculture. Open country and village groupings and group behavior are its concern." According to Lowry Nelson, "The scope of Rural Sociology is the description and analysis of the progress of various groups as they exist in the rural environment. In the words of Bertrand and his associates: "In its broadest definition Rural Sociology is the study of human relationships in a rural environment." On account of the opinions given by Sims, Nelson, and Bertrand, it is observed that the scope of Rural Sociology revolves around rural people, their livelihood, and social relationship in a rural environment. Though it studies society from the rural perspective, its main aim is concentrated on rural lives. The subjects that are included within the scope are very comprehensive in nature and we can blindly say that its boundary is varyingly large.

The scope of Rural Sociology may be clear from the analysis of the following subjects of Rural Society.

Rural Society: Rural Sociology is widely understood as the sociology of Rural Society. Apart from studying the rural society, Rural Sociology also studies its nature and primary components from the structural and functional stances. The most crucial objective of rural sociology is to study rural social life. Rural social life encompasses the behavior patterns, web of relationships, social interactions, standard of living, and socio-economic conditions of the rural people. Therefore, the scope of Rural Sociology expands where the boundary of Rural Society is expanded.

Rural Population: The population residing in the geographical rural area is the basic essence of Rural Sociology. The discipline studies the nature, characteristics, size, density, and distribution of the rural population from various angles. Rural Sociology aims at the study of the factors of growth of population, its evil effects of Rural Society, rural-urban migration for the greater interest of the country at large. It also tries to

understand the behavioral patterns, prevailing customs, and folklores that dominate the day-to-day lives of the rural population.

Rural Community: Rural community is considered as one of the primordial organizations of mankind. Hence, Rural Sociology is chiefly concerned with the origin, nature, characteristics, social attributes, and human ecology of rural communities. It also studies the homogenous trajectory of the rigid and conservative nature of hitherto existing customs, traditions, folkways, mores, norms, values, and so on in rural communities.

Rural Social Organization: Social organization plays the backbone of every society as well as social life. The notion of the jajmani system was popularized by colonial ethnography. It tended to conceptualize agrarian social structure in the framework of exchange relations. In its classical construct, different caste groups specialized in specific occupations and exchanged their services through an elaborate system of division of labor. Though asymmetry in the position of various caste groups was recognized, what it emphasized was not inequality in rights over land but the spirit of community. The most imperative function of Rural Sociology, therefore, is to offer fundamental knowledge about rural social organization. Rural sociology, thus, studies the future prospectus of rural social organization and governing laws for its development.

Rural Social Institution: Rural social institutions imply the known figures of processes that prevail among the relations between the rural people. Rural sociology, thus, studies the structure, characteristics, and functions of rural social institutions. Rural social institutions comprise family, marriage, kinship, religion, caste. Rural Sociology studies the sociological significance of these institutions in the rural context.

Rural Economy: Agriculture is the backbone of the rural economy and the majority of the rural population is absorbed in it. They directly depend on agriculture for their livelihood and sustenance. Rural Sociology, therefore, studies the causes liable for the failure of agriculture and suggests various measures for the development of agriculture

in villages. Besides, the acceptance of new agricultural technology among the farming centers, upgrading of old farming methods, formation of open markets, and providing agricultural training to the farmers are the vital areas of the study of rural society.

Rural Social Process: Rural Sociology also studies the two processes of rural social interaction, namely, conjunctive and disjunctive. The rural conjunctive process includes co-operation, accommodation, and assimilation. Rural disjunctive process, on the other hand, comprises competition and conflict. Thus, the nature, characteristics, and social importance of these processes are to be appropriately considered by the scope of Rural Sociology.

Rural Culture: Culture refers to that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, moral law, art, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society. It includes old customs, traditions, folkways, mores, norms, values, and so on. Rural Sociology studies the complexities of rural culture, its different structural organizations, cultural patterns, cultural traits, and cultural lag in the rural contexts.

Rural Social Problems: One of the important contents of rural sociology includes the study of problems engulfed in rural life. These problems are centered on socio-economic conditions, political, cultural ethos, and value-based. The problems generally are poverty, unemployment, population growth, illiteracy, casteism, untouchability, etc. Rural Sociology, therefore, studies the causes and evil effects of these problems and also suggests measures for their eradication for the greater interests of the country at large. As these problems are rooted in the rural societies that are also diverse from place to place, their causes, nature, and remedies vary from one another. Rural sociology tries to draw in the similarities as well as the differences between the problems that stem from various existing issues and also the discipline tries to provide viable remedies to it.

Rural Social Control: Social control is the control of society over an individual. In Rural Society, social control is formal and rigid in nature. Rural Sociology considerably studies the informal means and agencies such as religions, customs, folkways, mores,

-norms, etc., of social control. In rural society, the imperative primary groups like family and neighborhood play a vital role in social control.

Rural Social Change: Social change is meant only by such alterations as occur in social organization, that is, structure and functions of society. Of late, rural society is on the path of social change. Due to the impact of money modernizing forces, Rural Society is undergoing incredible transformations in the twentieth century. In order to pace up social change in the rural areas and also keep the momentum going, Rural Sociology undertakes necessary steps. Rural Sociology also studies the diverse factors responsible for social changes in a systematic way. It also tries to provide possible solutions for any change ignited derailment in rural social life.

Rural-Urban Contrast: The study of rural society remains incomplete unless the study of rural-urban contrast is done in a proper and scientific manner. Both the village and city, hypothetically, are the two contrasting modes of community life. Rural Sociology studies the rural-urban contrast on the basis of social, economic, religious, and cultural points of view. Besides, rural sociology also draws attention to the comparative study of these two societies. As a result, the concept of rural society and social institutions can be clear by this contrasting analysis.

Rural Planning and Reconstruction: Rural planning and reconstruction are very much necessary for underdeveloped societies. In this context, the poor and backward condition of Indian rural society requires planning and reconstruction in a systematic and planned manner. Rural Society is engulfed in plenty of issues and social problems. Therefore, for the eradication of these problems and for the betterment of rural life, proper planning and reconstruction should be made by the state as well as the central government. A.R. Desai says, Rural Sociology studies all these subjects and provides proper guidelines in this direction.

Significance of Rural Sociology in India

Rural sociology holds immense importance in a country like India that is predominantly agrarian and the majority of its population resides in villages. Dependence

on agriculture forms the fundamental base of the Indian rural life and it also acts as a backbone for the rural population. It not only has an economic role to play but also helps in shaping the moral, psychological and ideological life of the rural people. But an urban bias has always been noticed among the scholars and researchers who have hitherto focused their attention on the study of phenomena and the challenges faced in urban society. Although, three-fourths of the population resides in the villages under acute poverty and distress but they are hardly studied upon.

The following may be noted as the factors that have led to transformations in the Indian rural society that has necessitated the significance of the discipline of rural sociology:

Class Formation and Power Transformation: The significance of rural sociology in present-day India is principally due to political transformation and the ensuing class formation. The performance of the five-year plans and the surfacing of the green revolution in the 1960s and 1970s has propelled the creation of new classes. The agricultural bourgeoisie which came into prominence during this time, eventually, claimed the allocation of political power. Agricultural development has been conveyed by the augmentation of a progressively more confident class of rich capitalist farmers, comprising newly rising rich kulak peasants and the middle-class peasants who have articulated their interest through political power. However, class formation and class differentiation in rural India has not been an even process. This potholed development of agriculture has caused conflict and contradiction at the village level. This has also given rise to communalism and brought in power the political parties that are non-secular.

Panchayat Raj and Its Impact: The new power regime of the Panchayat Raj system has also asked for the significance of rural sociology. The distinction attributed through the policy of reservation to the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women has reinforced the lately budding social formation in village life. The structure and functioning of Panchayat Raj and the in-built contradictions between the progressive castes and the Dalits have also affected the rural structure. It calls for the use of a scientific

The despair of the small and marginal farmers: Due to excessive and continuous segmentation of the landholdings with every process of succession going from one generation to the other in a period of decades, the land today has become an inadequate commodity. It has resulted in depeasantization. The new and modern agricultural technology has become beneficial for big peasants and seldom is favorable to the small owners. This has forced the poor small and marginal farmers to leave their homestead land and migrate to other places. The marginal farmers are on the way to proletarianization as they don't possess adequate land that would help in higher productivity. As a result, lower production leads to lower returns which drag them into poverty and poor standard of living. Rural sociology can be utilized to study the condition of the poor farmers and its perspectives can be used to formulate suitable policies that would target the small and marginal farmers. Such a farmer-oriented policy would help in uplifting the standard of their living and provide them with viable opportunities in other livelihood realms.

Diverse Ethnicities: India is an apt example of heterogeneity, diversities and multi ethnicities which makes it mandatory to comprehend the village life methodically. There are many villages in our country that have their own language, dialect, customs, norms and values. It clearly brings out the fact that thorough knowledge of rural anthropology and rural sociology is essential to understand the diversities and yet the coexistence.

From the aforementioned points it is conclusive that rural sociology as a discipline holds immense significance as it touches varied facets of rural social life. In recent years, rural sociology is widening its horizons. Rural Sociology now studies agrarian relations, land reforms, agricultural laborers, wage reforms, stratification, rural leadership, environment and above all peasant movements and struggles. There are troubles of rural people concerning exploitation and antagonism between lower peasantry and upper peasantry. Rural sociologists have recently shifted their emphasis from caste, ritual and village solidarity to agrarian relations and peasant movements. Such a widening zone of rural sociology provides attractive feedback to an appropriate rural development. It is a holistic study of rural social settings. It provides us valuable knowledge about the rural

social phenomena and social problems which helps us in understanding rural society and making prescriptions for its all-round progress and prosperity.

Changes in Land Tenure During British Rule

In the course of time, India's invasion by the British brought about a complete transformation in the country's land tenure system. The East India Company experienced difficulty in its trading because the sale of British goods in India was insignificant. The exportation of gold and silver from England to pay for Indian goods was soon prohibited. The Company found a solution by securing money from India to pay for Indian goods. The decisive breakthrough came in 1765, when the office of 'dewan' for Bengal, Orissa, and Bihar, i.e., the financial independence for these areas, was assigned to the Company. In 1793, after some experimentation, Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement brought a final regulation of the procedure for levying taxes. It led to decisive changes in land tenure. The British arrangement meant that all the land belonged to the state and was thus at their disposal. They registered the local tax collectors as zamindars. They were free to decide how much to demand from the cultivators. The fixed lump sum tax payment provided them an incentive to put more land under cultivation. In the beginning, it was not a problem because the cultivators were fewer, which prevented the zamindars from demanding too high taxes. They were interested in attracting people to cultivate the land and to increase the number of taxpayers, which in turn would increase the difference between the revenues and the fixed amount that had to be remitted to the state. The zamindars, thus, control their livelihood and this power that shifted into the hands of the zamindars enabled them to extort more and more taxes as the demand for land increased. This led to indebtedness and often to the loss of occupancy rights and relegation to tenants at will.

The right to land conferred on the zamindars was alienable, rentable, and heritable. This meant the introduction of a complete novel arrangement in India. The land became a saleable good. Those who had been cultivators obtained the status of 'occupancy tenants'. These occupancy rights were heritable and transferable and were not tampered

Chowdhurys, who were zamindars in most cases, had the authority to deal with the complaints about debts, thefts, and petty quarrels and to impose paltry fines.

Under the British Rule, there were three main types of land tenure systems which existed for many years even after Independence, namely Zamindari, Mahalwari and Ryotwari.

i) **Zamindari:** This system was introduced by Lord Cornwallis in Bengal in 1793, known as the Bengal Settlement or the Permanent Settlement. The outcome of the permanent settlement is known as the zamindari system widely introduced in Eastern India. Under this system, the land of a village or few villages was held by one person or a few joint owners who were responsible for the payment of land revenue to the Government. Generally, there were a number of intermediaries between the zamindars and the actual tillers of the soil. This system was adopted in several forms such as Zamindari, Jagirdari, Inamdari, etc. In many cases revenue collectors were raised to the status of land owners. This system was introduced in many parts of the country.

As per this settlement arrangement, tenure was a form of socio-economic authority or control; moreover, the tenants and subtenants all enjoyed similar kinds of power and privileges, each based on a similar kind of settlement or agreement. In this system, tillers of the soil were exploited by way of exorbitant rents. It is said that the British introduced the zamindari system to achieve two objectives. First, it helped in the regular collection of land revenue from a few persons i.e., zamindars. Secondly, it created a class of people who would remain loyal to the British. The zamindari system was a way of collecting taxes from peasants. The zamindar was considered a lord, who would collect all taxes on his land and hand over the collected taxes to the British authorities. Under the system, there was a provision of keeping a portion of taxes for the zamindar himself.

ii) **Mahalwari:** Under this settlement, there was a direct contract between the village community and officers of the government. The village community did not

necessarily mean the entire village population. It was a group of elders, notables of high castes. They in joint capacity governed the affairs of the village and faced the demands made by the superiors backed by the higher authority. In this system, the village land was held jointly by the village community, and members jointly, or in the group, were responsible for the payment of land revenue. Land revenue was fixed for the whole village and the village headman (Lafibardar) collected it. Many names were used for this kind of settlement i.e., joint rent, 'joint lease', 'brotherhood' tract (mahal) holding, and 'gram wari' etc. All in all, this form at its best was considered as the village settlement or Joint Village Settlement. This system was prevalent in Northern and Central India.

iii) **Ryotwari:** Introduced by Sir Thomas Munro at first in Madras State, this settlement was intended to deal with each 'ryoyat' or 'cultivator' as an individual. Under this settlement, every registered holder was recognized as its proprietor who could sell or transfer the land. He was assured of permanent tenure as long as he paid the revenue. The land holder was allowed to sublet his land. Madras and Bombay Presidency areas are generally classified as Ryotwari areas.

Consequences of Land Tenure System on Agrarian Society

The major changes introduced by the British rule were the new land revenue systems, high rates of revenue, new administrative and judicial system, which not only damaged the management of the villages but introduced major changes in the Indian socio-economic and legal systems also. The functions of gram panchayat in the fields of land management and judicial function were taken away. As a consequence, the old social, economic and political institutions prevalent in the Indian village were destroyed. Due to the destruction of small village industries and crafts, land acquired much importance. Both the ownership of land and farmers became mobile bringing in the absentee landlords and moneylenders on the villages. The land revenue was very high in both the zamindari and the Ryotwari systems and when zamindars of ryotwars were not in a position to pay revenue in time, the British took away the lands from them and sold it to businessmen, who were not farmers, and were not too worried about the farming but worried more

It also produced significant social and political changes in the Indian village and did bring about an agricultural revolution. In purely economic terms the agricultural sector experienced growth at the rate of 3 to 5 % per annum which was many times more than what the rate of growth had been during the colonial period (less than 1%).

The green revolution conceptualized agrarian change in purely technological terms and was based on the trickle-down theory of economic growth. The expression green revolution carried the conviction that agriculture was being peacefully transformed through the quiet working of science and technology, reaping the economic gains of modernization while avoiding the social costs of mass upheaval and disorder usually associated with rapid change.

The term green revolution had been first used during the late 1960s to refer to the effects of the introduction of higher-yielding variety HYV seeds of wheat and rice in developing countries. The new varieties of seeds required fertility-enhancing inputs like chemical fertilizers, controlled irrigation conditions, and plant-protection chemicals. The other components were providing cheap institutional credit, price incentives, and marketing facilities. In order to back up the application of new technology on local farms, a large number of agricultural universities were also opened in the regions selected for the new programme. It was under the direct supervision of the Ford Foundation that the Intensive Agricultural Development Programme was started in 1961. Initially, the IADP operated in 14 districts on an experimental basis it was later extended to 114 districts under the name of the Intensive Agriculture Areas Programme in 1965.

Its advocates argued that the new technology was scale neutral and could be used with as much benefit by small as well as big landowners. However, in the actual implementation small holdings were not found to be viable units for technological change. Participating in the green revolution did not mean the same thing to smaller farmers as it did to bigger farmers. While bigger farmers had enough surplus of their own to invest in the new capital-intensive farming for smaller landowners it meant additional dependence on borrowing generally from informal sources. Although theoretically, the

new technology was scale neutral it was certainly not resource neutral. The new technology also compelled widespread involvement with the market. Cultivators in post-green revolution agriculture had to buy all farm inputs from the market for which they often had to take credit from traders or institutional sources. In order to clear the debts, they had no choice but to sell the farm yield in the market even when they needed to keep it for their own consumption. They sold their farm yield immediately after harvesting when prices were relatively low and bought later in the year for consumption when prices were higher. Thus, although the small farmers took to the new technologies the fact that their resources were limited meant that these technologies ushered in a new set of dependencies. On the other hand, it has strengthened the economic and political position of rich farmers. One of the manifestations of the growing market orientation of agrarian production was the emergence of a totally new kind of mobilization of surplus producing farmers who demanded a better deal for the agricultural sector. These new farmers' movements emerged almost simultaneously in virtually all the green revolution regions. These movements gained momentum during the decade of the 1980s. These movements were led by substantial landowners who had benefited most from the developmental programmes and belonged to the numerically large middle-level caste groups whom Srinivas had called the dominant castes. The members of this new social class not only emerged as a dominant group at the village level but they also came to dominate regional /state-level politics in most parts of India. They had an accumulated surplus that they sought to invest in ever more profitable enterprises. Some of them diversified into other economic activities or migrated to urban areas or entered agricultural trade. Culturally also this new class differed significantly from both the classical peasants and old landlords.

about the extracting maximum revenue from it. The moneylender and zamindars became an inseparable part of the village life because the villagers always needed them for their survival. In such a situation the majority of the farmers stopped farming and the land became sterile/unproductive. The number of sharecroppers and landless farmers increased significantly.

The British land tenure system of Zamindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari destroyed the self-sufficiency of the Indian villages and brought fundamental changes in the rural social and economic life which were often damaging to the old customs. The permanent settlement helped the British in making British imperialism more powerful and mature by suppressing oppositions targeted towards them. It provided the British establishment with more permanency by making poor villagers poorer. These new arrangements had opened the door of exploitation by breaking the age-old Indian agricultural system. The land revenue was dependent on the geological state of land rather than the old tradition of equality. The land revenue was fixed on the part of the land, not on the total land of the farmers. Instead, any systematic method of fixing revenue was based on a mere guess. The land revenue was increased from 66 percent to 100 percent after the American civil war. The farmers had no right to appeal in the court of law.

During the British period, the payment on the land revenue was decided on the basis of crops grown on the land which was different every year. Even the mode of payment of land revenue had changed in cash while earlier it was not always cash. The amount of revenue was not subject of change even if the crops were not good. The zamindar had to give a fixed amount of revenue from their area in time. But the amount that was extracted from the farmers was fixed at the will of zamindars. The farmers were left little after paying their taxes.

The creation of a class of zamindar provided social support for the colonial government and made it easier to impose control over the rural population. special - privilege was for zamindar was a necessary part of the colonial rule, and the British government provided them special representation in the reformatory planning and did

not hesitate to use this conservative class against the Indians. The zamindar class had become a tool of economic exploitation by the government. Lack of resources prevented the farmers from making any improvements in the lands. The selling and buying of land under the system brought moneylenders of Mahajan Baniya class, who owned land and were in control of village land without any accountability.

In many ways, independence from colonial rule in 1947 marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of Indian agriculture. Having evolved out of a long struggle against colonial rule with the participation of the people from various social categories, the Indian state also took over the task of supervising the transformation of its stagnant and backward economy to make sure that the benefits of economic growth were not monopolized entirely by a particular section of society.

It is with this background that development emerged as a strategy of economic change and an ideology of the new regime. However, at the micro-level, the structures that evolved during colonial rule still continued to exist. The local interests that had emerged over a long period of time continued to be powerful in the Indian countryside even after the political climate had changed. According to Daniel Thorner, the earlier structure of land relations and debt dependencies where a small section consisting of few landlords and money lenders were dominant continued to prevail in the Indian countryside. The nature of property relations, the local values that related social prestige negatively to physical labor, and the absence of any surplus with the actual cultivator for investment on land ultimately perpetuated stagnation. This complex of legal, economic, and social relations typical of the Indian countryside served to produce an effect that Thorner described as a built-in depressor.

Green Revolution: Of all the developmental programmes introduced during the post-independence period the green revolution is considered to have been the most successful. The green revolution led to a substantial increase in agricultural output to the extent that it almost solved India's food problem.