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**Jitendra Kumar Pandey**  
Department of political  
science, University of  
Allahabad, India

**Dr. Hemlata Rawat**  
Department of Mathematics,  
Shrimati Indira Gandhi  
College, Trichy-620002.  
Assistant Professor  
Government Degree College  
Maharajganj  
Department of Humanities and  
Social Sciences, MNNIT  
Allahabad, India

**Tauffiqu Ahamad**  
Institute Research Fellow,  
Department of Humanities and  
Social Sciences, Motilal Nehru  
National Institute of  
Technology Allahabad, India

## Indian thinker's approach towards sustainable development of rural India

**Jitendra Kumar Pandey, Dr. Hemlata Rawat, Tauffiqu Ahamad**

### Abstract

Indian thinkers approach plays an important role towards sustainable development of rural India. Rural development in India would correspond to Indian development as a whole; this obvious thought was appreciated by the Indian thinkers at various points of the holistic phase of sustainable development of rural India. Various approaches have been there, initially by those from within country, and later with time and advent of technology, foreign approaches have also found use. There were various Indian thinkers such as Rabindra Nath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Jaya Prakash Narayan and post-independence M.S. Swaminathan, Verghese Kurien & Amartya Sen, to quote a few, India has seen thinkers with unique appreciation to this phenomenon, where concepts like Sriniketan, Self-Sustenance, Sarvodaya movement, Bhoodan yag samiti andolan, Green Revolution, White Revolution etc. came to formulation. This article critically discusses and observes the ideas and approaches of these few Indian thinkers at various time points, associated relevance to the complexity involved, deviations from these propositions by outer inclusion in policies and implications therefore for sustainable development of rural India.

**Keywords:** Rural Development, Indian thinkers Approach, holistic phase, green revolution white revolution, Savodaya movement.

### 1. Introduction

India has been a nation of villages since ages. It has seen volumes of change in all possible spheres in the past yesteryears. It has seen the golden times as well as the ruins. The effect of which is still visible and dominant in various arenas. It has also developed phenomenally in certain areas. The reasons for which are the constant intellectual applications on various issues and the thirst to raise the bar against the status quo by the contemporary intelligentsia of the country. India has been a pool of talent for various forte's where the Indian thinkers and their productive contributions have paved way for development. One such dimension is represented by the nation's rural development. If we talk about the pre independence era, before the arrival of the East India Company in India; it was divided in numerous princely states where the common mass was ruled by different dynasties under different circumstances. The state of the people was different at different places and times. The development of people was limited to the contemporary policies under the discretion of few people which was subjected to their whims and fancies, which certainly doesn't mean that it was on the worse side all the time. But what was prevalent at those times and still is the inequities faced by the rural population which used to include uneven income, education facilities, infrastructure, employment, sanitation, human development etc. There wasn't much practiced by the masses to oppose to the conditions faced by them. The reasons for which were the institutional acceptances of those times. The society was divided in different classes and those related to them had the obligation to carry out particular activities which corresponded to their respective class. The Vedas had defined the classes in a different way, They saw the loopholes and eventually succeeded to exploit them, leading to further deterioration of the condition of the Indian common man living in the villages. The foreign bodies, especially the East India Company promised its Indian allies over infrastructural development, trade benefits and other avenues. With passage of time, the real intentions of

**Correspondence:**  
**Jitendra Kumar Pandey**  
Department of political  
science, University of  
Allahabad, India

the British manifested themselves and there was no coming back from there. The condition of the rural population, land, facilities and policy implementation for their betterment saw the darkest of times. Meanwhile, the Indian thinker was being born amongst the various classes of India. When only a few could enjoy higher education, there was a thought process ready for its onset, ready to understand and critically evaluate the problem areas and come up with probable and feasible solutions. The rise of nationalism in various parts of the world and its awareness across created a new sense of belongingness among the population which led to the first struggle of independence in 1857. It was then that the need for the development of the rural areas and the incumbent population came to the ideas of the erstwhile Indian thinker. India then was jeweled with personalities of eminence such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh, Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Gandhi, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak etc. who pioneered in recognising the real need for the development of the Indian population which still lived under deprivation in most parts of the country. The initiatives to uplift the rural population of India had started. The facets explored under the rural development of India were varied as per the need of the times. The empowerment of women, the education level among the masses, basic facilities, self-sustenance of the rural poor was among the many problems which existed. In between the struggle of Indian independence, these thinkers emphasized over raising the bar by asking the rural people to participate in different activities so as to be able to change their situation themselves and also asked the incumbent offices of power to pay heed to the need of the hour. In the wake of independence, as the “tryst with destiny” was revealed, the first breath of the Indian thinkers was still vigilant to the need and hence the vision of Indian rural development. In its primitive stage as a nation, India related to its rural development as the agricultural development since most of the population was actually a part of it. Policies to ensure the upward movement of the graph of the agricultural development were made. Thinkers of these times were Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel & Jaya Prakash Narayan to start with a few who were in lines with the ideas of equitable provision of land, overall development, employment for all, literacy, credit facilities to farmers etc.

The government was also vigilant to these issues now and certain inclusions were made specifically to address the need of rural development in India. Green revolution, Operation Flood etc. were the result of such initiatives pioneered by visionaries like M.S. Swaminathan and Verghese Kurien. The Indian Government and its various incumbents over different periods have always taken into account the prescriptions made by the pioneers of Indian rural development and maintained the inclusion of their models of rural growth and development. The MGNREGA, the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojna, the Indira Awas Yojna and many others can be quoted as examples. There have been other inputs by the emerging torchbearers who include various NGOs and individual entities in order to add value in the existing system as it needs renovation and modification as the need of the hour. India has definitely come a long way in terms of certain areas of rural development itself but the scope of improvement is still immense and pronounceable. In this paper, we shall look at

all the initiatives which were the fruits of the approach of various Indian thinkers, and we will also be in a position to appreciate the government initiatives or adoption to the proposed models of rural development by these thinkers. At the end, the loopholes shall be critically assessed and the recommendations for possible policy rectification shall be discussed.

## 2.0 The Concept of Rural Development

The phenomenon of Rural Development consists of two words: Rural and Development. The individual definitions are as follows:

### 2.1 Rural:

Is an area, where the people are engaged in primary industry in the sense that they produce things directly for the first time in cooperation with nature as stated by Srivastava (1961). The above definition is taken so as to give an impression of the erstwhile India as per an Indian thinker. A demarcation, whereas, was given by Anríquez and Stamoulis (2007) where they point out that “A natural definition of rurality is to define it by exclusion, as that which is not urban, where urban is defined on the basis of population agglomerations.”

**2.2 Development:** It refers to growth, evolution, stage of inducement or progress. This progress or growth is gradual and had sequential phases. Always there is increasing differentiation. It also refers to the overall movement towards greater efficiency and complex situations. Rural Development (RD) is a process, which aims at improving the well-being and self-realization of people living outside the urbanized areas through collective process. According to Agarwal (1989), rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of rural poor. The above definition appreciates the need of development which is more inclusive than the initial idea or approach of rural development which used to be concentrated to selected areas. Earlier, the ideas were limited to agriculture and with eyes on the emerging issues faced by the rural population and areas more ideas happened to get inculcated in the overall definition.

Whereas, prevalent was a tumultuous growth in the very definition of rural development outside the country. One of the definitions that came out was, “Rural development is essentially a part of structural transformation characterized by diversification of the economy away from agriculture. This process is facilitated by rapid agricultural growth, at least initially, but leads ultimately to a significant decline in the share of agriculture to total employment and output and in the proportion of rural population to total population.” Johnston (1970) The above definitions in totality imply the thought fluctuations among the thinkers all across the world over the idea of rural development and so with India and to the Indian thinkers and their approach.

## 3.0 Indian thinkers Approach towards sustainable development of rural India

### 3.1 Rabindranath Tagore (The Sriniketan Experiment)

This experiment was initiated by Rabindranath Tagore in 1914 and further consolidated in 1920. “In 1920, Rabindra Nath Tagore laid the foundation of the Sriniketan Institute for Rural Reconstruction and formulated a programme for the all-round improvement in the village of his Zamindari

with the objective of studying rural problems and of helping the villagers to develop agriculture, improving the livestock, formation of co-operatives and improving village sanitation." Rambhai (1959) This was notably the first model initiative formulated under an approach regardless of the lack it had in terms of organization and other variables which made it not so much a success. "He started this programme in the cluster of 8 Villages but was not very successful and can only be described as rural welfare works. The absence of market facilities, professional guidance, lack of co-ordination between the implementing authority and improper incentives for workers made the task more difficult and desired results could not be achieved." Thankappan (2010) Tagore's vision was to promote self-help and mutual help among the villagers so that the village workers work for the welfare of the rural population. It was undoubtedly an approach which emphasized upon self-sustenance, mutual help, self-esteem and sense of belongingness to the villagers so that they could develop themselves on the rural level itself. This initiative looked to develop the villagers of those eight villages on the intellectual, physical and economical grounds. Although this initiative was on a very small level and did not include all the villages across India but it had pioneered in presenting a thought process outline for the concept of rural development at various levels in India. As Thankappan (2010) quotes, "Though this experiment was not successful, it attained certain physical and notable results."

### 3.2 Dr. Spencer Hatch (The Martandam xperiment)

This was a unique approach on its own, sensitizing the rural people in and around Martandam, a village 25 miles south of Thiruvananthapuram, to realize the importance of self-reliance and self-help in order to sustain when there is no help from the side of the local ruling bodies or the government itself. "The purpose of this experiment was to bring about a complete upward development towards a more complete and meaningful life for rural people, spiritually, mentally, physically, socially and economically." Randhawa (1951) Dr. Hatch was a part of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) which worked in this programmed to eliminate poverty from the villages. The Rural Reconstruction Centre at Martandam had various incentives to entice the villagers in the lines of their development through various lucrative processes. "The Rural Demonstration Centre at Martandam had a demonstration farm, prized animals, equipment for the honey industry and other cottage vocations in its campus. Some industries like weaving, poultry and bee-keeping were started on a co-operative basis." Venkata Reddy (1988) This approach became a source of inspiration for the erstwhile states of Baroda, Mysore, Cochin, and Hyderabad where the members of YMCA helped to set up Rural Reconstruction Training Centers. This methodology was also adopted in approach by various other institutions at various other places. The essence of this approach was to create an enthusiasm among the rural population of the erstwhile era and to help them realize the power of the co-operatives to achieve something which was not feasible to be achieved on individual basis. The sense of self-respect, self-reliance which was envisaged to be developed among the rural population, was the crux of this approach. This way of putting in excitement with welfare was something

which can be of use beyond the barriers of time. The method can be assumed to be instrumental in bringing in participation by showcasing the benefits of participation for the rural people for their own development by the merit of being lucrative enough.

### 3.3 F.L. Brayne (The Gurgaon Experiment)

The experiment dates back to 1927, when the Deputy Commissioner of Gurgaon District of Punjab, F.L. Brayne started this experiment with an intention to thrust upon the need of improving agriculture, health services, level of education, social development and co-operation in a vigorous way. Amarendra (1998) mentions, "He took unusual interest in the welfare of the rural people and made extensive tours in the villages to study the conditions of the people. After about seven years of study and experiments, Brayne evolved a scheme called "the Gurgaon Scheme". Moreover, he created a framework where a school of rural economy was developed to have village guides trained for various works such as developing co-operatives, taking up public health work, maintaining cleanliness in the villages, selling of the improved ploughs for agriculture and improved seeds etc. However, the approach did not work phenomenally well, as it was limited and for other reasons as well. "The main reason for the failure of this programme was that the reforms were imposed on the people, rather than initiated by themselves. This widened the gap between the 'haves and have-nots'. Thankappan (2010)

It is also pointed out that "In Brayne's project, there was no co-ordination between agriculture and production-oriented activities with output marketing which ultimately was the primary concern of farmers and village craftsmen, as his entire economy depended on the marketing of his produce." Amarendra (1998) Although, the approach is not said to be fruitful but it is remarkable. It shows that in a rural framework what all areas are to be primarily hit by the merit of the failure of this initiative. This approach definitely adds value as to how the approach of the thinker or the strategy maker should be when he takes his step forward to implement his ideas. This approach makes one realise the importance of taking feedback or understanding the nerve of the subject population.

### 3.4 The Rural Reconstruction Programme by the Maharaja of Baroda

The Maharaja of Baroda being a progressive and visionary himself started with this experiment in 1932. This experiment aimed at creating "a self-urge to live better", to be developed and self-sufficient on various grounds for the rural population. It pressed upon and included improvement of communication, digging of drinking water wells, anti-malarial measures, pasture development, distribution of improved seeds, training in cottage crafts, establishment of Panchayats and Co-operatives covering every village, development of village schools to teach agriculture and the will to live better. The plan had full-fledged financial and legislative backing. The approach was well thought off and backed up. The welfare of the people was its utmost motive. It was a perfect example to showcase that provided a judicious backing to the activities and creating awareness by justification would yield fruitful results.

### 3.5 Mahatma Gandhi Approach at Sewagram

The locus of rural development in India would be narrow if we exclude the valuable and timeless thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi. All his life after the incidence of him being thrown out of the train has been a journey of enlightenment. Empathy gradually developed in his heart as he saw the condition of the rural people in his journey all across India. Being in South Africa, he had worked for the development of the local people by creating a farm called Tolstoy farm where he had practiced self-sufficiency and caste indiscrimination before coming back to India. As he came back to India in 1915, under the mentorship of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, he refrained from active politics and went on to his villages in Rajkot and Porbandar, thereafter; he went on to Shantiniketan in West Bengal to meet Rabindranath Tagore. It is great to observe how these two personalities converged on the inevitable need of rural development. However, there had been many a difference in the approach and thought process of both the personalities.

#### 3.5.1 Sewagram:

Gandhi started with the rural development programme much later in 1938 in Wardha at Sewagram. His rural reconstruction programme had 18 points which were the use of khadi, promotion of village industries, basic education, adult education, rural sanitation, removal of untouchability, uplift of the backward classes, welfare of women, education in public health and hygiene, prohibition, propagation of mother tongue and economic equality. The rural reconstruction programme was basically an initiative for the village folks to indulge in activities of economic growth so that development of villages and finally India could be achieved. Gandhiji also lamented the decline of rural industries due to rapid mechanical industrialisation. Madan (1990) quotes, "He believed that the extinction of Village industry would complete the ruin of 7,00,000 villages He gave special attention to revive rural crafts especially spinning and weaving, traditional oil press, grain processing and leather work." Gandhian rural reconstruction programme was based on truth and non-violence. He also believed in Swaraj and Swadeshi i.e. Self-Rule and Self-Sufficiency respectively. His approach, because of its extremely humane basic ideologies, was accepted in most of the initial rural development drives such as acceptance of Khadi, the Panchayati Raj and the Sahkari Samaj Movements.

### 3.6 Acharya Vinoba Bhave (The Bhoodan Movement in 1951)

Vinoba Bhave was an ardent follower of the Gandhian philosophy of Sarvodaya, which literally means the "rise of all". This means the upliftment of all classes of the society including the rural population where most of the discrimination existed. Under this thought process, he founded the Bhoodan Movement, which occurred to him as he was visiting the erstwhile Telangana district of Hyderabad. The motive behind this movement was to ensure peaceful solutions of existent land problems there by preventing the use of violence or bloody revolution in it. Its aim was to create the right atmosphere for the progressive and judicious land reforms in the area. This movement was not successful to a great extent as most of

the land allocated by the owners of larger land holdings to landless or poor farmers eventually remained with the owners only as Shriman Narayan (1978) points out that – At one stage, it was thought that Vinoba had succeeded in converting the minds of large numbers of big landholders. Acres upon acres and later villages after villages were shown as being given away to the landless or the tenants. But later, it was found that, in most such cases, the Bhoodan proved to be a sham; in one manner or another, the land was retained by the large landholders." The approach was Sarvodaya. Acharya Vinoba Bhave himself said, "Bhoodan Yagna is an all- comprehensive movement directed to the reform in all walks of life. Today every one thinks of himself alone and feels for his self only. But Bhoodan makes the people think and do just the opposite of what they do now. It makes the people first think of their neighbours, and if he has no land, it must be their duty to provide him with it. In Bhoodan, distribution of land is not the only question. It aims at the moral regeneration of the whole nation. Through it we hope to solve the economic difficulties, encourage Village Industries and remove the difference between the educated and the uneducated by making them both to join in common work." Madan (1990)

### 3.7 Alfred Mayor (The Etawah Pilot Project in 1948)

In 1948, Alfred Mayor started the Etawah Pilot Project for the development of the rural areas of Etawah District in Uttar Pradesh. The main objective of the project was "to see what degree of productive and social improvement as well as initiative, self-confidence and co-operation can be developed. The problem was to ascertain how quickly these results may be attained and remain permanently a part of the people's mental, spiritual, technical equipment and outlook after the special pressure is lifted." Mayor (1958) "The other important features were: production intensity, people's cooperation, and development of appropriate attitudes, careful selection of Personnel, self-reliance, local resources and supply and development of Village leadership. The effort was made to introduce the Concept of Decentralised Economy leading to Agro-Industrial Economy which in turn led to the development of agriculture, horticulture, poultry, piggery, fishery and other forms of animal husbandry." Madan (1990) "For intensive operation of the programme, 97 Villages of Mahadeva Block in Etawah District were selected. Various activities like agricultural demonstrations, soil conservation, improvement in animal husbandry, village sanitation and the co-operation of various departments and non-official agencies were carried out. In order to secure people's participation, a programme of social education was also started. The Project was successful in achieving its aim and within 3 years, it was extended to 300 Villages of the Etawah District in UP." Krishnamachari (1958) The concept of decentralization of economy leading to agro-industrial economy, cooperation among the rural people, rural sanitation, encouraging inclusion and self-sufficiency are existent in this approach. It was a demonstrative approach with handsome inclusion of the rural population in it.

### 3.8 S. K. Dey (The Nilokheri Township Project in 1948)

"S. K. Dey, the former Minister for Community Development and Cooperation was the founder of the Nilokheri Experiment in 1948, when nearly 7000 displaced

persons were rehabilitated in Nilokheri town after independence.” Madan (1990) “The scheme was also known as "Mazdoor Manzil" because of its principle 'he who will not work, neither shall he eat.'” Thankappan (2010) Under this, the main activities were a Vocational Training Centre run on co-operative lines and the Colony had its own dairy, poultry, printing press, engineering workshops, tannery and bone-meal factory. People were given vocational training of their choice to run these Co-operative Enterprises. Special rights for education and medical care for the sick were also guaranteed. “Nilokheri was seen as a symbol of progress, but the colony developed its own hierarchical structure and the industries started facing troubles due to lack of competitive advantages.” Thankappan (2010) In spite of all its limitations Nilokheri became a landmark initiative for the Community Development programmes in the country. It pointed out the importance of agro-industrial development in the paradigm of rural development. Due to the same reason, it was included in the first five year plan and in the financial plans of the first 52 community projects.

### 3.9 M.S. Swaminathan (The Green Revolution in 1970)

After independence over a long period of time, the country was struggling with numerous challenges. It was usually stuck with famines and wars in 1962 and 1965 had strangled the resources of India in a very ugly way. The country was struggling on the lines of not even being able to sustainably feed its population after a period of time. It was 1968 when an agronomist from America named Norman Borlaug provided India with high yield varieties of wheat. M.S. Swaminathan, now called as the Father of Green Revolution in India, used this aid provided by his American counterpart and rejuvenated the policies prevalent in the country to promote the growth of agriculture so that we could become self-sufficient in terms of the availability of food grains in the country. The approach was a readiness to absorb latest technology to inculcate growth in lacking areas, the understanding of the problem and providing solutions on a proactive basis. The approach actually changed the face of India in the field of agricultural production all over the world.

### 3.10 Verghese Kurien (Operation Flood or White Revolution)

On the lines of the green revolution, the operation flood helped India to ensure global position in terms of milk production bringing it with countries like America amongst the top producers in the world. Verghese Kurien led this revolution where it was carried out in three planned phases of development. The operation flood occurred over a period of time as much as a decade. The importance of forming cooperatives and developing them was realised during this operation. This also included the unification of milk trade by inviting all kinds of milk from the local farmers and grading it as per quality and selling it. This operation helped to ensure that the farmers get the right price of their produce.

### 4.0 Conclusion

The Indian thinker's approach in terms of sustainable rural development has been duly tested in the heat of time and it has succeeded and failed at different instances. The better thing that has continued to happen that the Indian thought

process has constantly evolved and has become more accommodating and liberal when it comes to develop the villages of India. From the earliest to the latest, what we could accept from the cases discussed that living in India and facing the rural situations shall always invoke the urge of development in the mind of people who belong here. The times have passed where the conditions used to be haunting when it came to development. Over the years, the Indian thinkers with their ever increasing empathy for the problems of the rural population have stepped in to bring in changes. It can be hence concluded that unlike earlier days where most of the thought process came from the elite part of the country, this age will see more of Indian thinkers with variety of approaches. So far, the approaches have been beneficial, appreciated and implemented. Although few of the approaches of the past Indian thinker might have failed but what they definitely have was a unique thought process which was intended for rural development. The latest models, hence, should not ignore the previous models and also should look at the success and failure points of those approaches so as to be able to proceed in a calculated manner.

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