

Improving the lives of rural Indians through social innovation

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Abstract

India is a country of villages, and a significant proportion of the population lives in the rural area. There are several fundamental challenges in the Indian villages. There is a requirement for a holistic approach to participatory development. This study addresses important facets of the interconnected problems that Indian rural society has experienced in recent decades, highlighting the dysfunctional relationships between an innovation policy that is grounded on an economically and technologically oriented, one-sided understanding of innovation. There are two aspects, first, possibilities within the village or contributions from the local community, and second the state's role in innovation. The social capital, use of local resources, and participation of stakeholders can be seen as a base for the sustainable development of the village. The study recommends the state enable rural areas in the affordable agriculture system and other small occupations, information and communication technology (ICT), communication, vocational skills courses, self-help groups, and microfinance.

Keywords: Information and communication technology (ICT); rural development; social capital; social innovation.

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1. Introduction

India is an underdeveloped country, with more than sixty-eight percent of the population living in rural areas. After seven decades of being an independent nation, basic infrastructure requirements have not been established in rural areas. Essential facilities like drinking water, food security, primary education, employment, and health/medical facilities have not been fulfilled (Chen et al., 2020). They are not getting opportunities or cannot access them in rural areas. Therefore, the population of rural areas is moving to urban locations for the betterment of their life. Villages have been receiving a lot of support from the government, but the results are not favorable. The current working environment, patterns, and habits, as well as a lack of resources and an inability to meet modern criteria, are some of the elements that contribute to it. As a result, either something needs to change, or it is time for innovation. Thus, development organizations must examine the current development process.

In continuity, Innovation is a new notion, creative thoughts, and new imagination in the form of a device or method for change and development. However, innovation is often seen as the application of a better solution to the existing problem. Such innovation occurs by providing more effective products, processes, services, technologies, or new models made available in the community and society (Zhang & Qiu 2024). An innovation is something original and more effective, resulting in further changes in the business, community, and culture. In other words, innovation is the activity of people and organizations to change themselves and the environment. It means breaking the routine and dominant ways of thinking, introducing new things and behaviors, and launching new standards focused on a creative orientation. It arises from dissatisfaction with the current state. It is a way, and it is a process of change at an individual level, organizational level, and societal level (Farrell, 1997; Butkeviciene, 2009; Rana, 2021).

1.1. Purpose of study

In this study, we will address important facets of the interconnected problems that Indian rural society has experienced in recent decades, highlighting the dysfunctional relationships between an innovation policy that is grounded on an economically and technologically oriented, one-sided understanding of innovation (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2010). The prevailing focus on technical and economic innovations is insufficient, neither in dealing with significant social challenges nor solving social problems and unmet needs at local and regional levels. Regarding the need for a comprehensive transformation of the rural economic growth model, Meadows and Heck (1972) pointed out that “social innovation can no longer lag behind technological innovation” (Howaldt and Kopp, 2012). This study aims to fill this gap.

2. Methods and materials

This is a qualitative study that used a review method. The study draws resources from existing literature. The study maintained ethical standards that are required for review articles. The study, its findings, and reporting pose no harm or threat to any human, organization or institution.

3. Results

3.1. Understanding of social innovation

Several studies talk about the socio-cultural dimensions of innovation. Nowadays, there is a broader discussion on social innovation in policy implementation, scientific discussion, and debates among the public. The collective consensus among field practitioners, former policymakers, and researchers can be seen as an essential requirement. Social innovation has been seen as an effective strategy for the newly developed nation (Novikova, 2021). Awareness has been growing about the significance of social innovation, and sustained will systematically process for analysis of social

innovation in rural society. This capability approach revolves around the concept of a good or successful life and how a person and community can be capable with the help of available resources.

To understand social innovation, the relevance of Gabriel Tarde's social theory gives an understanding of the relationship between social innovation and social change, and it helps us understand that a meaningful theory and practices of social innovation can neither start from technology nor entrepreneurship (Tosti, 1897; de Fatima Ferreiro et al., 2023). Tarde's contribution to the micro-foundation of the sociology of innovation helps develop a concept of social innovation as a social mechanism of change. The process of change in the social structure of a society in its constitutive institutions, cultural patterns, associated social actions, and conscious awareness are included. These are intangible but highly intangible processes.

There is a specific point of view regarding social practice and, its non-normative social theory and approach, while being conceptually fundamentally different from the normative analysis framework of the capability approach. As an empirical analysis of social innovations is centrally concerned with identifying which normative demands and needs of actors find expression in which ways of new social practices, essential contributions can be expected from the Capability approach. Any new practices are not good or accepted by people of the community. That depends on workable, practical knowledge, community history, and understanding. In continuity, social innovation in the sense of new practices is omnipresent and contributes to social change. The establishment of new social practices plays a prominent role in making mobility more environmentally friendly toward social learning.

3.2. Innovation in rural society

When we talk about rural life, there are defined structures and systems for social, economic, and cultural life. Nowadays, natives cannot fulfill all kinds of requirements in rural areas. Poverty, chronic diseases, malnutrition, drug addiction, migration, and infrastructural problems are unsolved (Bock, 2016). Indian rural communities have needed revolutionary change in all aspects of life. However, the government of India is launching several policies and planning most of the results, not getting a good grade. The reason behind this would be found that all development process was one way, and there was no coordination between policymaker and beneficiary group. Even most of the time, the beneficiary group was not informed and aware of such developmental policies and schemes. On the other hand, lack of transparency, nepotism, corruption, administrative support, lack of sufficient resources, and so on (Neumeier, 2012; Schermer, & Kroismayr, 2020).

Innovation in rural life has a multidimensional requirement for work. Efforts done by the only state can't solve all alone. Participative rural processes are needed so all villagers and intellectuals can come on a single platform. There are two ways to know knowledge of the universe. The first experience and second is research; here, both are needed for rural change (Sharma, 2016). Experience tells about the practical aspect of a situation, and problems, while research gives new paths for change. The coordination of both can change desirably. With community experience, people can diagnose issues creating hurdles to change and what kind of change is expected by the rural population. Policymakers, executives, and researchers should work together with this participation. There are two aspects which need work first possibilities in the village: the contribution of the local community and second from external part: state contribution.

3.3. Contribution of the local community

3.3.1. Social capital

The term social capital refers to all human relationships. It describes social capital in functional terms as *"the value of those aspects of social structure to actors as resources that they can use to achieve*

their interest. Social capital includes obligations, expectations, trustworthiness, teamwork, collective consensus about structures, information channels, norms, and sanctions." The concept of a community and social capital are interrelated. In rural development, the

community frequently describes the residents of a small town and its surrounding area (Lipták, 2019; Vercher, 2022; Rana, 2023). Although the elements of social capital can not be seen in Indian villages, its contribution becomes the base of the development process.

3.3.2. Use of local resource

Now we need advanced management skills and creative youth from the local community. People can use *common community land* and resources for creative purposes, like *reusing ancient interconnected water resources* for smooth irrigation systems and *old small dams*. Rural areas have *big homes* that can be used for dairy, poultry farming, apiculture, sericulture, etc. On another side, every geographical location has some particular plant, medicine, soil, and local minerals, and some villages also have their traditional heritage of arts and crafts (Du & Shi 2019). These all should be used with an innovative strategy for community development.

3.4. Participation of stakeholders

In community development, all villagers must interact with each other. They should discuss similar issues and issues regarding community development, which is hindering each aspect, and discussion and sharing will create mutual consensus on common issues among people. Proper coordination, unity, and collective effort can change the current situation. Moreover, participation in activities is also required. Several natural, man-made hurdles can knock at any time. Local people should be alert and prepared for unexpected incidents with the help of local resources. The feeling of cooperation explores understanding among community people. Hence, participation allows mutual learning.

3.5. Change in attitude and aptitude

Due to a lack of education and innovation, rural people have a traditional mindset. Several times they decide as per continuous traditional practices. Their structural approach controls change and innovation. Their mindset believes that traditions make them safe against a risk-taking approach. The rural social structure has several customs and rituals that burden rural families financially, but if the decision is taken collectively, it creates a unique sense for all. People must initiate new social learning for the existing way of life and practices.

Several issues regarding the work environment in the community and some malpractices need to be changed. The collective decision can only help to ensure change, problem-solving skills, critical skills, and proper motivation of villagers. In this way, the community can help to change attitudes and aptitudes.

3.6. State contribution

As the supreme body, the state makes broader decisions for significant change. The state focuses on a new direction and provides resources according to requirements. But now we can not depend only on agriculture, even the Government of India has worked on this project. The Farmers' suicides have been one of the major challenges in front of us. Due to several non-profitable practices in the traditional agriculture system, it is not sufficient for the present livelihood of rural India. There is a need for alternative entrepreneurship, and this will be an essential point in transforming rural India. As we know, the rural population's dependency is increasing on agricultural land daily. Therefore migration percentage from rural to urban is also increasing. On one side, rural youth have no option for surviving,

and on another side, urban planning is also failing due to an overload of migrated population. The government of India started a separate agency for innovation, and other agencies are also working in the same direction, like skilled India, digitalization, microfinance, new health policies, and so on.

3.7. Innovation in agriculture system

When we talked about reducing agricultural inputs, which are increasing costs, there is an organic agriculture process that belongs to the indigenous agrarian system. The senior citizens of the rural area know the traditional approach. Agricultural professionals/ researchers working in organic agriculture, like composing fertilizers, organic pesticides, and small equipment for other related processes, can help people. Moreover, the crop cycle, multi-cropping, and cost-effective irrigation techniques can reduce the cost. Farmers should be able to know about all practices.

3.8. Information and communication technology (ICT)

Many rural challenges can be solved through ICT. Communication gives different aspects to solve the same problem and a new outlook to change in social, political, economic, and administrative areas (Atkočiūnienė & Papšienė 2023). It can improve awareness in social life. Several policies and schemes have failed due to a lack of awareness among rural people. Moreover, Health awareness, new educational policies, and several schemes of social security and social justice are paralyzed due to a lack of rural awareness. ICT can work to achieve livelihood and improved access to education and training through distance learning programs and educational tools for a wide range of formats. With the impact of increasing information flow, human capital is needed for translating information into different languages and appropriate formats for the intended users and their local culture.

ICT can support and strengthen local financial institutions, including micro-credit organizations, to improve information provision on services and facilities available such as loans and savings schemes. By using ICT, we can establish banking services in rural areas so that all the people can take loans and save money for growth purposes. It can help to improve networking at the community level with existing networks and potentially can also connect amongst a much wider community of natives. The ability to build new social networks at a regional and national level can help bring benefits to existing networks and institutions at a local level (Huan & Zheng 2022). The reduction in the cost and time taken to pursue social networking goals can also have a positive impact at a household level, with family members spending less time away and less money on transport can do their work. Expanded social networks may also increase employment opportunities both locally and globally.

3.8.1. Communication

Channels established by ICT are used for access to the markets, and market information helps to improve choices for the sale of goods on local markets or global markets according to enhanced information on prices, comparative supply, and demand for products. On the other part communication channel should be increased, telephone and mobile phone help to make life easy and comfortable. "Telephonic Market Information for Agricultural Products" mobile phones during emergencies help in rural development.

3.8.2. Vocational skills

International labour organization mentioned that "Skills are central to improve employability and livelihood opportunities, reduce poverty, enhance productivity, and promote environmentally sustainable development. Coordinated efforts are needed to develop an integrated approach that improves access to relevant, good quality education and training to all rural women and men." But, there are some hurdles in this process, like the quality of basic education, literacy of ICT, and lack of linkage between local, and outside opportunities, etc (Yadav and Goyal, 2015).

3.9. Self-help group and Microfinance

Even if one must remember that agricultural credit to small producers in developing countries has a long history, in the last decade, microfinance has played a significant role in economic development. However, a consensus has emerged among governments, donors, and practitioners that microfinance constitutes a powerful tool for improving living conditions, reducing poverty, and assuring social participation. Self-help groups can play an essential role in the development of rural areas (Cornet and Barpanda, 2021). The development process at the group and community level can be a reference to others.

4. Conclusion

Rural development can be understood with both cited coordination local as well as globally, same with respect of social capital as well as research and science, and participation in the understanding of local needs and resources of development.

Hence, with this study, it can understand that we have to understand our indigenous practices that were functional in an ancient era in a productive way. New science and research can help to understand the new mode of rural development.

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