

03. INDIAN RURAL SOCIETY

Important characteristics of Indian Rural Society

Reddy (1985) has stated the following as the characteristic of Indian Rural Society.

1. The village is the unit of the rural society. Its people carry on the business of living together within a distinctive framework of caste and social custom. Caste is a dominant social institution permeating social and economic relations. Traditional caste occupation mostly prevails. Co-operative labour of different castes is required not only for agro-economic activities but also for socio-religious life. The large villages have within its population all the occupational castes, have a comparatively more integrated and self sufficient economic as well as socio-religious life than smaller villages.
2. The village as a social and cultural unit possesses a basically uniform organisation and structure of values all over India. Many problems are common to the entire Indian country side.
3. The ethnic, linguistic, religious and caste composition of a village largely determine its character and structure. Some villages or hamlets are inhabited almost exclusively by certain castes as in the case of Agraharams for Brahmins. Even in a village with mixed population the different castes usually live in different sections of the same village. Inter caste rivalries are present.
4. Women do not have full equality with men in several aspects of life.
5. Indian rural society is predominantly based on agriculture. Possession of land carries with it social and prestige value, besides being considered as an economic asset. In many villages, the land is mostly distributed between two or more castes, or among a few families, or between one big land owner and the rest of the community. Landless labourers and tenants constitute a considerable part of the population depending on agriculture.
6. Every village has its own organisational set up, authority and sanctions. It has its growing body, the panchayat, based on local tradition since long, but now constituted on a regular basis according to provisions of Panchayat Raj.
7. Social distance or isolation has a bearing on the nature of the organisation of a village and of its view on the world. Availability of or nearness to modern means of transport or communications also modifies the setting and fabric of a village.

8. Village settlements are generally governed by certain regional and local traditions. The layout of the village, construction of the house, the dress, the speech, and manners follow the set pattern of the cultural area. Each village possesses an individual of its own. Some have a reputation for generosity, hospitality and fair play, while others are notorious for their meanness and corruption. Some villages are known for their co-operatives, while some are noted for their litigations and factions.

The important characteristics of the Indian villager was summarised by Reddy (1985) as hospitality, feminist traditionalism, fatalism, religiousness often combined with superstitious beliefs, leisure attitude to life, and low standard of living. Nevertheless most villagers are capable to change and will respond to the teachers whom they trust even though their past sad experiences make them conservation and hopelessness about the future. They are eager to learn how to help themselves and they represent paternalism.

Rural - urban Differences and Relationships

Environment affects human life to a greater extent. Human beings live in two different environments of rural and urban. Since, there is difference in social life in both environments it is of interest to know the differences. Further, extension workers are concerned themselves to rural environment, they must be in a position to differentiate the rural from urban environment.

While comparing and contrasting it has to be kept in mind that both the societies are the part of one human society. As a result of development one particular society assumes the name of rural society while the other becomes urban society. The two societies are basically the same. The difference that exists between the two is of theoretical and academic than the real.

S. No	Parameters or Criteria	Rural	Urban
1.	Occupation	Totality of cultivators and their families	Totality of people engaged principally in manufacturing, trade, commerce, profession and non-agricultural occupation.
2	Environment	Direct relationship with nature	Predominance of man-made environment. Greater isolation from nature.
3.	Size of community	Rurality and size of community are not correlated	Urbanity and size of community is positively correlated.

4.	Heterogeneity and Homogeneity of population. (Similarity in socio-psychological and other characteristics of population like behaviour belief, language etc.)	More Homogeneity	More Heterogeneity
5.	Culture	1. Quite conservative and tradition bound	Free from conservation and tradition
		2. Guided by superstitions and age old customs. They do not accept importance of scientific functions.	Free from superstitions and customs. They are influenced by the scientific inventions which bring about changes in every day life.
6.	Social stratification (it determines the status and role of individuals, or differentiation or certain persons as superior to others)	1. Has the traditional system of stratifications.	The society is divided into different strata on the basis of economic, social, political, educational and other factors.
		2. Status is determined by birth	Status is not determined by birth. But on the economic, social, political, educational and other consideration.
		3. Stratification is more or less static. It does not change.	It changes with the changes in values. (e.g) A person who is rich now may become poor tomorrow. So the status shall change.
		4. Difference between the high and low is less.	More
7	Social mobility	1. Lack social mobility. People do not change their place, occupation, religion, political view etc.	Have a lot of social mobility
		2. Wards generally carries the occupation of parents and the social status also thus remains more or less same.	Occupation of wards is not necessary that of the parents.
		3. Occupation is determined by tradition & customs	Occupation differs according to skill
8.	Systems of interaction	1. Less contact per man	Numerous contacts
		2. Narrow area of interaction	Wide area of contact
		3. More of primary contacts	Predominance of secondary contacts
		4. Predominance of personal and relatively durable relations	Predominance of impersonal, casual and short lived relations

		5. Comparatively simple and sincere relations.	Greater complexity, superficiality and standardized formality of relations.
		6. Man is interacted as a human person	Man is interacted as a "number" and address.
9.	Social control	1. Informal because of size of community	More formal because of more laws
		2. It is the primary institutions like family & neighbourhood that control life and the society.	Primary institutions have social control. There are secondary institutions like economic and other institutions that control social life.
10	Social change	The process of social change takes place at a very slow rate because of little competition	Social change is fast because there is a good deal of competition
11.	Social tolerance and family domination	1. More tolerance because	Less tolerance because
		a. People do not face the new situation	People often face new situation
		b. There is cultural uniformity	Cultural variety seen
		c. Lack of variety (Neither different castes nor religions)	Full of varieties
		2. Family is the most dominant institution	2. Apart from family other institution like economy dominates
12.	Status of women	1. Inferior to men	On par with men
		2. Role confined to house	Free to take part in out-door activities
		3. Live with serious restrictions. They do not enjoy full freedom	On par with men enjoy a good deal of freedom
13.	Neighbourhood environment	1. Have important place	Not important
		2. Rural life is based on co-operation and mutual goodwill. That is why neighbourhood is important.	People have fairly convenient life. People belong to different communities, castes and places and so no institutions like neighbourhood is built.
		3. Neighbourhood generally consists of same caste and economic status. That is why a good deal of co-operation and fellow feeling is seen.	Belong to different economic status and castes so no co-operation is seen.
14.	Leaders	Based on personal characters	More impersonal leaders
15.	Solidarity	Stronger, informal	Less predominant

16.	Income	Less	More
17.	Sense of belongingness	More	Less

Sorokin and Zummerman have summed the above differences as "Rural community is similar to calm water in a pail and urban life is like the boiling water in a kettle".

Limitations in studying the differences

As it is discussed the above differences are theoretical and academic than real. It is so because there are many limitations in differentiating the both. Some of the limitations in differentiation are:

1. There are no demarcation where urban (city) ends and rural begins
2. The parameters or criteria said above are not quantitative.
3. Changing characters create problems. The solidarity, belongingness etc. are now reduced in rural areas.

Due to communication of new ideas and extension facilities to rural areas the gap between rural and urban is being narrowed down. However, the complete closure of this gap will not be possible in the near future.