

RURAL-URBAN DICHOTOMY

Dr. Amit Bhowmick and Abhishek Sarkar

Human beings live in various communities and based on certain criteria there are two broad categories of human existence in society throughout the world- urban society and rural society. The proportionate number of people living in urban society and rural society differs in different countries and there are many reasons for such wide range of divergence. We have general conception of urban and rural societies as we make use of these terms in our daily life. However, it is not easy enough to define them categorically and draw a clear line of distinction between them. In fact, it turns out to be an intricate task to define them as from the perspective of population, area, demography and life style, one town differs widely from the next one and one village from the other. For example, the similarity between Kolkata and towns like Berhampore, Suri, Raiganj or Jalpaiguri is less than the point of differences, though broadly all of them can be categorized under urban society. At the same time, a rural area adjacent to Kolkata is different from another rural area far away from Kolkata. Further, the disparity between the rural society in developed western countries and that of ours is also glaring. So is the case with the small towns of theirs and ours. Hence, it becomes vital

to discuss important features of rural and urban societies.

Rural life is the principal pivot around which whole Indian social life revolves. India is a land of agriculture. The village is obviously, the primary unit of rural society. It may figuratively be thought of as the theatre whereon the rural life is enacted. So, rural society is the basic foundation of human life, the keystone of the developmental process and the basic unit of social structure. The rural communities being less voluminous, less densely populated and less mobile, the number of various persons whom the cultivator meets or with whom he enters into an intentional or unintentional, long or short, intensive or extensive contact and the number of the contacts per individual is much below that of an urbanite. Caste stands as a pivot of rural social structure. It acts as the most powerful determinant of individual behavior and social order in rural unity. The religious customs and practices in Indian village society vary in different parts of the country, depending upon their cultures and lifestyles. Fairs and festivals have always been an integral part of Indian village society. The villagers celebrate different types of



festivals like religious, regional, seasonal or sports based festivals together. The style of celebrating festivals also differs from one region to another. Many status differences in Indian society are expressed in terms of ritual purity and pollution. Notions of purity and pollution area extremely complex and vary greatly among different castes, religious groups and regions. There are many Indians, particularly among the educated urban elite, who do not follow traditional purity and pollution practices. The joint family is an ancient Indian institution, but it has undergone some change in the late twentieth century. Traditional joint family occupied a predominant position in rural areas in India. Rural family works as the unit of economic, cultural, religious, and political activities. A very important feature of traditional village life in India is the *Jajmani* system. In fact, the *Jajmani* system is a system of economic, social and ritual ties among different caste groups in a village. The village is a political unit with an elected Panchayat to run the day-to-day administration. The problem of untouchability is a serious social problem in the Indian villages and it is becoming weaker due to the influence of factors such as industrialisation, urbanisation, increase in the means of transportation, popularity of English education, political and social awakening by the democratic Government and laws abolishing untouchability, etc. Side by side most Indian cities are very densely populated. Congestion, noise, traffic jams, air pollution and major shortages of key necessities characterise urban life. Less spectacularly, on a daily basis, uncontrolled pollutants from factories all over India damage the urban environments in which millions live.

The general basis of differentiating rural and urban societies is the number of population and this varies in different countries. For example, in France it is 2000 and 2500, 20,000 and 30,000 in United States, Holland and Japan respectively to identify a location as town. In Iceland, the number is only 300. In many cases, the differentiation is based on geographical location. However, in that

case the demarcation between areas cannot be pointed out clearly.

Based on the discussion on the principles of census in 52 countries, an organisation of UN has submitted a report that categorizes the fact that, each country offers a distinct and precise definition of urban society and the rest of the location is allotted as rural society. The survey has pointed out the following five important features to categorize a location as urban society: a place that is/ has:

- ❖ the administrative headquarter; e.g district town, sub-divisional town etc.
- ❖ minimum fixed number of people living in a location
- ❖ governed by autonomous administration; e.g Municipality
- ❖ the criteria of municipality- e.g broad roadways, proper sanitation, lightened roads, drinking water pipe line, hospital, market, court, educational institutions, voluntary organization are maintained by that location and
- ❖ more people following occupations other than agriculture (e.g industry, business, automobile etc.) than the minimum proportion of total population.

The census of India held in 1961, has defined a municipality in the following way. An area under municipality or Municipal Corporation would be governed by notified area committee and would be regarded as cantonment municipal. Besides, if an area fulfills the following criteria that would also be regarded as municipal area:

- i) population density should not be less than 1000 per square mile,
- ii) minimum population should be 5000
- iii) three fourth of the employed population must have profession other than agriculture,
- iv) must possess the criteria of municipal area as per the direction of the State Census.

However, it is interesting to note that the above-mentioned features that distinguish rural

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and urban societies hardly have much importance from sociological perspective. It is the difference of life style of rural and urban societies and not merely the external issues that finds room in sociology. Hence, to realize the difference of life style of rural and urban societies in sociological study, we must be familiar with the social organisations. Some important aspects of rural and urban societies are hereby made to create a clear idea:

- i) An important identity of urban life is the distinct character of behavioural pattern, dress- sense and food-habit of the people. High density of population in a comparatively small area affects such peculiarities. High rate of competition in such places results in differentiation of profession. Moreover, survival solely on the basis of agriculture becomes really difficult; so few have to look for business, industry etc. and consequently the network with the external world is established. Often people from other locations come to live in urban area in search of jobs, better facilities etc. Hence, the urban life style varies quite naturally. In rural areas, the possibility of such penetration is so thin that behaviour, dress- sense, food habit of the rural people remains the same.
- ii) Growth of education is an integral issue at the core of this dichotomy. In urban society, the number of educated people has always been higher than rural areas. Most importantly, in respect of women education the disparity is on higher side. Hence, social change finds more acceleration in urban society than rural society.
- iii) In urban community the 'we- feeling' is less strong than the rural community. Here more importance is given to individual than the family; whereas the influence of the community on the individual is greater that in towns.
- iv) The concept of neighbourhood thereby has a greater role to play in rural community. In fact, in urban areas human relationship is more indirect and less intimate. People are mainly

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familiar with each other on professional terms and thereby the bonding of mind is not firm.

- v) Specialisation in profession is another important feature in urban life. People are involved in diverse range of professions and this professional variety makes urban life advanced and dynamic. Here, more prominence is given to one's professional identity than birth identity. In rural areas such divergence is absent and consequently its developmental process is slow.
- vi) The predominance of competition, specialisation in profession, variety in profession and weaker social bonding promote the growth of individuality in people. A man in town life can participate in different ways and yet can maintain his or her individuality. However, in rural area such environment conducive to growth of individuality is absent. The life style and thought process of a villager are much governed and often controlled by the principles of the rural society.
- vii) The presence of multiple sources of amenities in urban society imparts an undeniable change in the lifestyle of the urban people. Well-trimmed parks, well equipped playgrounds, cinema halls, multiplexes, shopping complexes and such other facilities of civic amenities differentiate the spirit of an urban society from a rural society.
- viii) Besides such institutional differences the mind set of rural and urban people develops differently. In Indian perspective, agriculture is not mere profession or vocation. Its impact is omnipresent and it affects the entire lifestyle of people. Agriculture is based on nature or climate and people can hardly control over nature. Flood, drought and such other whimsicalities of nature (fate) affect agriculture. Consequently, peasants naturally depend on or believe in fate. However, people in urban society do not have to depend on such factors as their lifestyle does not depend

on such requirements. These results in the growth of superstitions, age-old ideas and beliefs and the reflection of such practices can be found in the festivals, fairs of the rural societies. Urban society is more dynamic and reflexive; hence, the role of superstitions, age-old ideas and beliefs is of little importance. People in an urban society are free thinkers and individualistic. They adapt themselves to new situations in their own way. So the presence of discipline in observing different festivals, fairs in urban society is not to be found as clearly as in rural society.

Rural society has been increasingly urbanised in modern times. In proportion to its urbanisation it exhibits the characteristics of urban society. The rural family more and more develops centrifugal tendencies. Its economic homogeneity based upon a single cumulative economic activity of its members declines. Joint family property tends to be disrupted since its individual adult members begin to demand its partitioning. Being increasingly engaged in different occupations, they earn independent separate incomes which they retain as their own. They live less and less together and spend extra-familial centres like clubs, hotels, unions, associations, cafeteria, which weakens family emotions.

However, as societal changes are taking place quickly the points regarding the difference of rural and urban societies are too fast changing. The reasons of such changes are:

- i) The rapid development in transport system that has made the direct connection between rural and urban people lot easier. Hence, the gap between them in respect of dress-sense, food habits, behavioural pattern is getting narrow.
- ii) With the flourishing of different social media and social networking sites along with the fast expansion of user-friendly technology, the influence of urban society is imparted on rural society easily and effectively. In fact, the

use of internet has been playing a great role in changing things around.

- iii) Due to the development in agricultural technology these days, agriculture does not depend on caprice of nature entirely. Like industry, agriculture becomes an independent vocation and gradually the central influence of agriculture in the life and living of people is diminishing. Sociologists refer this change as the Rural Revolution of the 20th century.

Though the wave of such Rural Revolution is yet to hit hard our society, its expansion is already in process. The introduction of advanced transportation system, newspapers, television, internet and the change of thought process of urban people due to different awareness programmes and campaigns of different political parties influence the mind set of rural people with great effect. Green Revolution in India has made its impact considerably; but its wholesome outcome has been limited to few pockets. However, it is expected that in times to come Green Revolution will spread in every nook and corner of the country with the expansion of power supply, production of fertilizers, land-reformation act and agro-based research and application of advanced technology in agriculture. Green Revolution thus will lead to Rural Revolution.

A close look at the flow of change throughout the world indicates the fact that the society in future will be fundamentally urban-centric. Though such changes have not been hospitable to many, there is no alternative to accept the change as the demand of time has to be endorsed.

[Dr. Amit Bhowmick is Assistant Professor, HOD & Programme Officer, Department of Sociology, Nur Mohammad Smriti College Dhuliyar, Murshidabad, West Bengal and Abhishek Sarkar is Assistant Professor, Murshidabad College of Engineering & Technology Berhampore, Murshidabad, West Bengal. E-mail id: amit.socio@rediffmail.com]

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