

Rural Development and Appropriate Information Transfer

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Importance of Rural Development

National Development Programme is the focal point around which a developing nation shall move. Our nation gives due recognition to this fact through its five year plans, meant for the progress in all walks of life. Our achievements in scientific research, educational facilities, transportation and telecommunications etc. are fruits of our planned attempts in the process of Nation Building.

Eighty percent of our population now live in rural areas. If the population ratio of our rural and urban area is 80:20, we have to admit that the national development means the progress of our rural population. But the present situation is so alarming that the urban elite is moving to the height of prosperity at the cost of poor, illiterate, ignorant and unenlightened rural majority. Socioeconomic changes and improvement of the major sections of the population obviously ensures a near total development of the nation and brings about parity in living conditions of the society. Scientific and technological advancement plays a pivotal part in bringing about this socio-economic change. Governments in developed and developing countries, organisations and institutions at national and international levels are spending huge sums

of money for promoting technological growth. Scientists and Engineers who are engaged in their field of work have good intention of satisfying human needs. But, research and technological development alone may not be enough to meet human requirements if achievements are not applied to the people who need them and know what is most appropriate to their situation.

In spite of rapid advances made in science and technology, the poor people in the developing countries continue to remain under conditions of extreme poverty. They live in such surroundings which are plagued with problems of malnourishment, ill-health due to bad sanitation and continuing poverty. Our attempts to apply science for the solution of these problems does not seem to have improved the situation of the rural masses.

In India fifty percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Nearly ten thousand young children go permanently blind due to the lack of sufficient vitamin. The crucial problems of our rural masses are mainly mass poverty, illiteracy, frequently recurring floods, droughts, famine, rapidly decreasing natural resources, etc. All talents, all resources, all scientists and technologists, all capacity must be directed

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to solving these problems¹. Clearly a total change in the educational patterns and scientific research pattern is urgently called for. This gives rise to a technology which should be most appropriate to the situation.

Appropriate Technology

Technology is the adaptation of scientific knowledge for meeting this requirement. Thus the use of scientific principle in the preparation of industrial tools (eg. Dynamo; motor; electric generator; printing machine) would be called technology². While science is universal, technology should be intensely localised. In this context the use of science for solution of problems typical for particular country or community would be called "Appropriate Technology"³. Intense efforts on the line of Appropriate Technology is a pre-requisite for the advancement of a developing nation. For the proper development of appropriate technology and for its proper utilisation by the rural masses, an intermediary information link must be developed. This appropriate information network must also be governed by the requirements and the information supply should rise to the occasion. The basic thing to be remembered is that, this information disseminations are particularly for the rural masses who are mostly illiterate and ignorant. The idea must be collecting of information on the real needs of the weaker and backward areas and then adopt a technology and strategy most suitable, appropriate and applicable to the skills of the people. It is thus brought to the people, in such a way that they can use their skills with greater care and efficiency. It utilises the potential rural manpower in the fullest measure.

Transfer of Technology:

Though it is believed that science and technology has brought the desired social and economic uplift, it is often said that they have failed to bring about any large scale socio-economic change. The complexity here is attributed to the rural ethos which is a factor in rural India⁴.

The characteristic features of Indian rural society which come in the way of successful implementation of appropriate technology can be identified is as follows.

- (i) This society is physically isolated from the public information system.
- (ii) Illiterates form a majority of the population.
- (iii) There is a suspicious feeling that the information cannot be exploited for its actual needs.
- (iv) The social structure is different from that of urban society.

It is clear from the above, that there is lacuna in the shape of some co-ordinating media which can bring them together. All the above attributes of rural masses are to be taken into account when information transfer system is introduced. The solution lies in the use of an effective use of technology transfer through a practicable information system, i.e. information transfer to the rural areas must be done at their level of understanding. The practical solution in this regard aims at bringing a central agency for collection; storage and transfer of appropriate information to the level of rural developmental activities. This centre shall be in constant touch with the national laboratories, research and information centres⁵.

In developing a network of information transfer to rural and backward areas the

public library system shall be considered as a focal point. The system should consist of three tiers viz. (1) District centre (2) Taluk centres (3) Local units with a state level controlling authority at the apex. The National Appropriate Information centres should feed necessary information to the Public Library system. In the same way the Public Library system should inform the centre; the requirements of the rural masses. The local units should be localised in certain local areas depending upon the size of the population.

Though books are considered to be important sources of information to the public it may be more effective and efficient if dissemination to rural and backward areas is given through film shows, exhibitions etc. The illiterate masses who will never be attracted by the libraries can easily be impressed by methods of this kind. But in order to implement this effectively there are some hurdles to be crossed.

1. Lack of documents on science and technology in local language is a problem of information transfer in rural areas.
2. Attempts at converting technological developments in the form of film shows are almost nil.
3. Though trained hands are there for information transfer there is a need for

refresher centre from time to time to keep them abreast of the latest techniques of information handling.

4. Lack of funds for providing library facilities to the entire population.
5. Lack of co-operation from the public itself is another hindrance.

Although public library system is considered to be the focal centre of information transfer, the co-operation of various agencies such as welfare, co-operative, voluntary and local bodies etc. need to be sought. Government should also liberally extend its hands for implementing the system. The Govt. can also encourage the writers to write more and more on technology in local language⁶.

Though our country is making rapid advances in Science and Technology most of our peasants, craftsmen and artisans are still working under serious handicaps with primitive inefficient tools and equipments. They are mostly unaware of the existence of modern techniques, tools and processes. Therefore there is a great need for extending the know-how by modern technology to them. This is a challenge to the public libraries and other co-ordinating agencies committed to the development of rural and backward areas of our nation.

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