CHAPTER- 2

RURAL DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPT AND APPROACHES

2.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the concepts of development with the basic elements including different indicators defining Rural Development with some important concepts, issues and strategies. Though the rural environ dominates the global landscape as well as India both in point of working forces and area, the concept of Rural Development distinctly came into consideration only a few decades ago.

In India, the importance of rural economy was recognized well before independence but concrete steps towards Rural Development were seriously considered long after independence as initially it was conceived that successive five year plans and other specific programmes and introduction of Community Development Programme in rural area would generate growth in the Country and the effect of which would automatically trickle down. But after few plan periods it was realised that these could not yield the desired goal of development in rural areas. It was also realised that unless the rural people can be involved in local planning and implementation actual development in vast rural areas was hardly possible. Rural Development became a planning concern on realization that total growth of a developing agrarian Country depends mostly on sustained growth of rural people reducing poverty, ignorance, unemployment, dependence and for the purpose a systematic effort is necessary to create better living conditions in the rural areas where the vast majority of population of developing countries reside.

2.2. Concept of Development

Development can be defined as ‘a process of becoming potential State of being’. In the process of development most often six interconnected sets of phenomena appear— levels of material production and consumption; changes in the levels of material production and consumption; the technology of material production and consumption; technological changes associated with social, cultural and political changes; the distribution of cost and lastly more or less equitable sharing of benefits of production and consumption.
The other basic elements of development are—

- an enhancement in technology and the capacity to produce various goods and services leading to a better quality of life,
- an equitable distribution of the gains of development among different groups of people, particularly the poorer ones.
- participation in decision-making, removal of disparities, equalization of opportunities for development.

Development is a sustained improvement in material welfare, particularly of those who are poor and affected by poverty, illiteracy and poor health conditions. Development is therefore a qualitative concept involving a qualitative improvement in the general standard of living of a society.

2.3. Basic Elements of Development

Irrespective of time, space and culture the three basic elements which are considered to bear the true meaning of development are—

2.3.1. Basic Necessities of Life

People can hardly survive without certain basic needs. These include food, clothes, shelter, safe drinking water, primary health care, education, security of life and property. Provision of the basic necessities of life to everybody is the primary responsibility of all economies. Economic growth (increased per capita availability of basic necessities) is a necessary condition for improvement of the quality of life of people and that may be termed as development.

2.3.2. Self-Respect

Each person and each nation desires to enjoy some sort of self-respect, dignity and honour. Absence or denial of self-respect signals lack of development.

2.3.3. Freedom

In actual sense, freedom means political or ideological freedom, economic freedom or freedom from social servitude. As long as a society is bound by the servitude of men to nature, ignorance, institutions and dogmatic beliefs, it cannot claim to have achieved the goal of development.

2.4. Indicators of Development

The new economic view of development considers reduction of poverty, inequality and unemployment as an important index of development. Seers (1969) view that if one or two of these problems have been growing worse, especially if all three exist, it cannot be called as development even if per capita income doubled.
Though development is a relative concept it can be stated that non-existence or removal of the following characteristics of underdevelopment are the indicators of development:— ● mass poverty; ● low levels of income and concentration of income inequality; ● low levels of productivity and backward technology; ● high level of unemployment and under-employment; ● poor nutrition, health, housing, literacy and welfare status; ● preponderance of primary sector and low level of industrialization; ● lower status of women.

The main objectives of development are—

a) to increase the availability and improve the distribution of life-sustaining goods;
b) to raise per capita purchasing power and improve its distribution; and

c) to expand the range of economic and social choices to individuals by freeing them from servitude and dependence.

Some indicators are essential to measure the extent of development and the material and social welfare provided to the rural people for their sustenance and better living like- Gross National Product, Per Capita Consumption Expenditure, Physical Quality of Life Index, Human Development Index etc.

**Gross National Product (GNP)** is the market value of all final goods and services produced in a year, and attributable to the factors of production supplied by the normal residents of the country concerned. It can be computed for rural people separately, it could be used as a measure of the economic component of Rural Development. But it does not include the value of physical and mental satisfaction that people derive from leisure. It is quite difficult to determine the per capita income of rural people, since most of whom are cultivators and agricultural labourers, a major part of whom are illiterate and the rest are not used to keep any written records of their income and expenditure.

On the other hand, **Per Capita Consumption Expenditure** of rural people is considered a better measure of Rural Development including relative case in recall by the respondent, of expenditure incurred and the general tendency of rural people not to hide any expenditure, as compared to income. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) estimates the consumption expenditure for both urban and rural people through sample surveys all over India.

The **Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI)** another measure of development, takes into account three major indicators— life expectancy at age 1, infant mortality and literacy. Each indicator is on a scale between 1 to 100 with 100 indicative of best performance and 1 indicating worst performance. A composite index of all these three indicators is made to yield the Physical Quality of Life Index.

Human Development is the process of enlarging people’s options that enables them to lead a long and healthy life, to be knowledgeable, and to find access to the assets, employment and income needed for a decent standard of living. The **Human Development index (HDI)** composed of three
indicators:— life expectancy, adult literacy and income expressed in logs. Human Development in recent times has been advanced as the objective of human activity in place of economic growth.

2.5. Major Issues in Development

There are several views with reference to the ways, policies of development of a nation and the economists and planners argue over it to determine the proper policy to be taken. India has been going through some of the conflicts in its various plan periods;—

2.5.1. Growth vs. Distribution

In the early period of independence it was assumed that economic growth would naturally lead to development and so no attention was paid to the question of distributive justice. Growth by itself does not guarantee an improvement in the quality of life for the vast number of people. Many were of opinion that if there was sufficient growth everybody will benefit from it. India, in the First Five Year Plan put greater emphasis on agriculture and allied matters but in subsequent later plans it changed its preference making heavy investments of capital in industrial sector and a fraction of it in agricultural sector and sought to take the country on to a new growth path. It was assumed that rapid industrialization in the country was the prime necessity of the nation to be self-sufficient. But during the early 1970s it was realised that the living conditions of the rural poor had not changed much because assets like land and capital were concentrated in the hands of big farmers. This perpetuated the problem further and the question of distributive justice remains unsolved. On the contrary, inequality and injustice increased further. But the country faced severe food crisis in the late fifties and early sixties due to shortage of food production, flood and drought in some areas and had to take temporary measures for immediate increase of production of food grains by implementing Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP), in 1960 in fifteen selected Districts in different States in different phases. Barddhaman District, West Bengal was one of such District. The economy of the Country is mainly agricultural based within a vast rural area and huge rural populations, majority of whom (above 70 per cent in the early sixties) depend on agriculture, face severe food-crisis caused by drought and flood and low investment. The nation, particularly the rural people had to go through acute food crisis, unemployment and poverty. Further, hoarding of large quantity of food-grains worsened the situation. As a result, the country had to import food-grains by lending and to reach most of the affected people by distributing the same at subsidized rate through Public Distribution System (PDS). Therefore, it was imperative for the Government, both the Central and the States to formulate policies and design instruments to ensure that developmental benefits reach to those categories of people who need those most.

2.5.2. Agricultural vs. Industrial Development

Agricultural development is no doubt the foundation of not only to development of the rural area but also to the development in the industrial sector. Due importance should be given to agricultural
sector in an agrarian country like India with a massive rural population. Use of high yielding variety of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation help to increase the food production. It is now accepted that a balance between agricultural development and industrial growth should be maintained. Establishing highly capital-intensive sophisticated enterprises displaces labour creating unemployment, poverty, malnutrition and other ills among large section of the poor people while the rural economy (agriculture, pisciculture, farming, cottage industry etc.) suffer due to lack of capital. Higher share of income mostly goes in favour of industrialists and the elites against peasants, workers of other occupations living in lower strata. For the growth of national economy agricultural sector as well as non-agriculture sector that is industry and supporting infrastructure should equally be developed as both are interdependent—the industry sector provides firm inputs and servicing and also absorb surplus manpower from agricultural sector while the agricultural sector provides the manufacturing sector necessary raw materials and food-grains. The Israeli strategy of integrating agricultural and industrial sector has shown good result.

2.5.3. Capital vs. Labour Intenstive Technology Development

Technology is the means by which goods are manufactured quickly and with less labour. The development in technology helps to manufacture goods faster, cheaper and with more efficiency. For example, tractors, harvesters are being used now a day in wide scale in agricultural sector. Higher investment is required for use of improved technology, which however displaces labour force. Hence it is termed as a labour displacing and capital intensive technology. On the contrary, there are labour intensive technologies which have absorbed the surplus labour in the developing countries. A balance in this matter is necessary so that both technology and livelihood of the people improve.

2.5.4. Centralization vs. Decentralization

It is agreed that development is a long-term phenomenon and therefore, needs to be planned. A certain degree of centralization is necessary to coordinate the various efforts towards development, but too much centralization weakens the process of popular participation. In recent times, the need to devolve decision-making powers to the Panchayats has attracted the attention of policy makers in India. Important steps, including the Constitutional amendments have been made since the late 1980s to empower local level institutions. It is hoped that decentralization of the development process would also lead to greater accountability of those who are actually involved in the decision making process. Devolution of the powers is very vital for development which so that the people would naturally participate in the process of planning and implementation But during the early 1970s it was realised that the living conditions of the rural poor had not changed much because of the assets like land and capital were concentrated in the hands of big farmers. This perpetuated the problem further and the question of distributive justice remains unsolved. On the contrary, inequality and injustice increased further.
2.5.5. Urban vs. Rural Development

Urban Development and Rural Development have close linkages with each other and the relation is not simple but intricate. They are interdependent; while the rural side provides food, raw materials from its agriculture and allied sectors as well as surplus labour including larger area and higher population concentration, the urban sector provides necessary inputs for higher agricultural yield, allied mechanism for the rural sector; most of the consumer goods and industrial products for the society.

In western countries economic development is associated with growing urbanization. It is a fact that growing urbanization is the consequence of the growing concentration of infrastructural networks and capital-intensive industrial enterprises in urban centres. This results in two separate economic sub-systems: on one hand, there exists in the economy a small but highly modern and developed urban sub-sector, which absorbs most of the material, financial and educated and skilled man power resources; on the other hand, a very large but traditional and underdeveloped rural sub-sector, characterized by widespread poverty, unemployment and low productivity poor health and illiteracy, which comprises the majority of population. Rural Development is a prerequisite for overall development and hence it deserves significant priority in terms of allocation of resources.

What is needed is to recognise the interlinkages and harmonizing interaction between the rural and urban sub-sectors. Integration of these two will facilitate the widening of the rural and urban economy.

2.5.6. Intervention of State vs. Market

One of the most contentious issues has been the scope and extent of Government intervention in the economy of the Country. During the post World War-II era, there was a near consensus among economists, for a variety of reasons, such as important developments in economic theory centered on the idea of market failure (which had several dimensions), whereby Governments had to play a major role in the economic sphere. In the recent years, however, Government intervention in economic spheres has come under much fire, particularly during the last couple of decades, and a sort of neoliberal market orthodox concept— which insists that ‘the market knows and does the best’— has become dominant.

2.6. Defining Rural Development

The term ‘Rural Development’ is a subset of the broader term ‘Development’. Fundamentally, development of a rural area means not only the aggregate development of the area but also development of the people living in the rural areas. It has some specific goals to achieve. It is accepted that Rural Development has to make such environment so that the main objective of Rural Development is to duly meet the basic needs of rural people like food, clothing, shelter,
fresh drinking water, health, sanitation, education, road, maintaining healthy environment etc. Thus, Rural Development means all aspects of human development.

The United Nations discuss that Rural Development is the outcome of a series of quantitative and qualitative changes occurring among a given rural population and whose converging effects indicate a rise in the standard of living and favourable changes in the way of life of the people concerned.

The World Bank’s view about Rural Development is that, in general, ‘it is a strategy designed to improve economic and social life of a specific group of people; the rural poor’ (Jain, 1997). It involves the extension of the benefits of development particularly to the poorest who seek a livelihood in the rural area. The group includes small farmers, agricultural labourers, tenants, village artisans and the landless.

Waterston’s (1965) view about Rural Development is that ‘it is the development of rural people and areas and also indicates as an integrated multi-sectoral process, including agricultural development and the development of social utilities services’.

Copp (1972) defined Rural Development as ‘a process in which collective efforts work together for self-realization and improvement of the rural poor. The ultimate target of Rural Development is mainly people not infrastructure’.

Preservation and improvement of the rural environment should be given top priority. In this respect, Rural Development planning may contribute to the change or development of a rural area community. In this regard, planning is considered as the most significant factor in managing any system. According to Bardhan (1974), Rural Development should have “the aim at eradication or at least reduction of three undesirable elements i.e., poverty, inequalities and privileges, which have all along been concern of development-planners and scholars”. As per Taylor (1975), Rural Development is “a process aimed at the welfare of people mainly living outside the urbanized area through forward and backward linkages between the rural-urban sectors”.

Rural Development is multidisciplinary in nature and multi-sectoral in operation which means it has to fulfil multiple objectives, namely more production, more employment and more equitable distribution of income, wider participation of people in the development process, increase access to modern inputs and greater self reliance and environmental awareness (CIDA, 1976). Following Misra and Sundaram (1977) the term ‘rural’ essentially means “an area which is characterized by non-urban style of life, occupational structure, social organization and pattern of settlements”. It is basically agricultural, its settlement system consists of villages; socially it denotes inter-dependence among the people, more deeply rooted community life with a slow rhythmic life built around nature, and occupationally it is highly dependent on crop farming, animal husbandry and related activities. Rural Development in a wider perspective implies growth and development in all fields such as primary, secondary and tertiary sector(Ambastha, 1978).
The term Rural Development connotes overall development of rural areas, which improves the quality of life of rural people. In this sense, it is a comprehensive and multidimensional concept, and encompasses the development of agriculture and allied activities, village and cottage industries and crafts, socio-economic infrastructure, community services and facilities and above all, the human resources in rural areas. As a phenomenon, Rural Development is the end-result of interactions between various physical, economic, socio-cultural, technological and institutional factors. As a strategy, it is aimed at improving economic and social well-being of a specific group of people—the rural poor. As a discipline, it is multi-disciplinary in nature, representing an amalgamation of agricultural, social, behavioural, engineering and management sciences.

According to Robert Chambers (1983) “Rural Development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest who seek a livelihood in the rural areas to demand and control more of the benefits of Rural Development. The group includes small-scale farmers, tenants, and the landless.”

Singh and Singh (1985), Dar (1992) considers Rural Development as “a strategy to improve the economic and social life of the rural poor by extending the benefits of development to the poorest such as small scale farmers, tenants and landless labourers who seek a livelihood in rural areas”. In other words, Rural Development means “structural change in the socio-economic situation of human beings as the society would assimilate and change in the realm of man-environment relationship, growth and distribution of population and self-reliant technology etc” (Pathak, 1986).

According to Aiyasamy (1987) “Rural Development strategy aims to integrate the growth of all the sectors of rural economy to improve the economic and social life of the rural people. In this way, it ensures higher income, security of life and thus changes the existing life style and attitudinal behaviour of the rural people.”

2.7. Rural Development Strategy

Different strategies emphasise and give importance to different mix of agrarian relations, techniques of production and planning policies in order to achieve the goals of Rural Development. There are basically four types of Rural Development strategies—

2.7.1. Strategy Based on Collectivisation of Resource

It attempts to bring about fundamental changes in the orientation of productive forces in the rural areas. It emphasizes abolishing private ownership of land and consolidating small plots of land. As a result, large-scale cultivation can be done using modern technology. This will increase agricultural production to a large extent. This strategy has been applied in erstwhile Soviet Union and China.
2.7.2. Strategy Based on Regulated Capitalist Perspective

It rules out any large-scale redistribution of land or reconfiguration of land relations. It is hoped that the capitalist sector would take care of rapid growth. This approach of Rural Development has been criticised for not being able to reckon the fundamental contradictions in rural areas. It has been pointed out that without meaningful land reforms, this strategy can only have limited success, as rural inequalities are ignored in this strategy. Rural elites, on one hand, exercise control and prevent changes that may bring about a change in the unequal distribution of assets (particularly land) and on the other hand, garner a large part of whatever resources are pumped in from outside to better the lives of the poor.

2.7.3. Strategy Based on Peasant Agrarian Perspective

It desires redistribution of land and overhaul of land relations. It envisages strong support of the Government for small peasant units, which are supposed to take care of both growth and employment. In this strategy due importance is laid on extensive network of cooperative institutions which may create facilities in helping the peasants and the artisans. Simultaneously, it is also expected that the Government will help the non-agricultural sector by arranging necessary infrastructure and also invest in the social sector such as health, education etc.

2.7.4. Strategy Based on Unregulated Free Market Capitalist Perspective

It presumes that rich landowners will play the main role in rapid increase in agricultural output, and gradually the small cultivator will disappear. It is suggested that the State should not intervene in the expansion of the capitalist sector and there should be no land ceiling on ownership. In this strategy, it is supposed that this will provide dynamic changes in rural economy and the benefits from it are supposed to percolate even to the lower strata.

2.8. Innovative Projects

Some wise and active personalities motivated by their strong belief on man's capability started various projects as per their dreams for the upliftment of rural people in India. The Planning Commission took these projects into consideration when they gave more emphasis on introduction of local self-government and Rural Development.

2.8.1. Sriniketan Project

Tagore's Sriniketan mission was based on the four major principles namely—self-interest, self-reliance, self-respect and joy in work. Rabindranath Tagore started the Sriniketan Project in 1921, which had the objectives of— creating an interest in people to participate in their own development; helping the people to develop their own resources; developing leaders from the community to guide the people in the right direction in their developmental process.
Tagore implemented this project through the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, which too was organized by him. This Institute had four important wings; Agriculture, Industries, Village Welfare, and Education:

➢ The Agriculture wing educated the farmers about the procedures of improved farming and cultivation of other crops too. They further demonstrated new methods of agriculture and use of agricultural equipments and guided the farmers in following the new methods. It also organized cooperative credit unions and storage of paddy.

➢ The Industries wing set up technical training centers to guide self-employed artisans.

➢ The Village Welfare wing constituted a medical team, visited the villages and met the requirements of the villagers as far as possible.

➢ The Education wing introduced open-air education and learning with work to educate them about the dignity of labour.

The project made people conscious about their own culture and introduced new methods of farming and use of modern agricultural equipments required for higher yields. The project also introduced health, education and technical inputs in the programmes. These projects, however, had to face some constrains- like scarcity of resources. Further, the people so long accustomed with the old slow pace of life could not imbibe with the new system which demanded faster activities for quicker results.

### 2.8.2. Marthandam Project

Under the leadership of Dr. Spencer Hatch an experiment on development was started at Marthandam (Kanyakumari District) in 1921. In starting this project it was assumed that the utilization of local community resources is a pre-requisite for community development. The project had the following objectives—

➢ Ensuring people’s participation and enabling them to make their own decisions and plan of action.

➢ Covering the entire community irrespective of caste, religion.

➢ Developing the rural community using locally available resources.

➢ Promoting cottage industries to generate income.

➢ Demonstrating improved system of farming, animal husbandry, bee keeping, poultry and cattle rearing.

➢ Establishing egg marketing societies and bee-keepers cooperatives.

➢ Imparting primary education and health education, and organizing leadership training courses for the villagers.
This project helped to raise the income level of the community to some extent and funds were raised from local people for welfare activities. Further, the project could not succeed as the funds being raised for welfare activities decreased gradually as people thought that the project was getting foreign aids.

2.8.3. Sevagram Project

In the matter of Rural Development Gandhiji’s views was that a village community should be self-supporting, self-governing and self-reliant where needs were met and people lived in harmony and cooperation. He was of firm belief that such village community was the basis of political autonomy, economic self-sufficiency, social equality and non-exploitation. On the basis of these principles he started the movement against the British cloth by introducing ‘Charkas’ (spinning wheel) and ‘Khadi’ (handmade cloth) and called the people of India to use such cloth instead of British ones. He also considered Rural Development as the primary necessity and accordingly started movement for elimination of untouchability, revival of village industries, village-sanitation and women’s upliftment.

The Sevagram Project started in 1936 is best known among the Rural Development projects. The objectives of the project was—rebuilding the villages; promoting village industries; service to the less privileged fellow men; developing all aspects of human life. Various experiments were made in this project. The basic principle of self-help was given the top priority in this project instead of depending on Government and others for financial assistance. The enthusiasm however did not last long as the ideas and principles of Gandhiji were too difficult for others to maintain for long.

2.8.4. Bhoodan & Gramdan

Acharya Vinobha Bhave, one of the followers of Gandhiji started the Bhoodan (gift of land movement) in 1951 and Gramdan (gift of village) movement in 1952. The characteristic of the Bhoodan was that landlords would donate the surplus lands, which would be redistributed to landless peasants. The quick response that it gained at the early period mainly from the State of Bihar however soon vanished. At the end of 1967 only 1.7 million hectares were obtained in this manner.

Gramdan (gift of village) movement was the outcome of Bhoodan movement. The concept of it is that 80 per cent of land owners of a village intend to give up ownership of land and if not less than 51 per cent of total land comes under its purview that would be considered as Gramdan; which was redefined in 1965 as the land owners were not willing to give up their properties. If only one twentieth of cultivable land was donated by the land owners and if the ownership of land was to be vested with Gram Sabha and contribution of one-fourth produce for Gramnidhi that would be considered as Gramdan. Gramdan and Bhoodan were different in their characters to that extent that in Bhoodan individuals were beneficiary while in Gramdan the village community. The limitation
of the Bhoodan movement was that major part of the lands donated as Bhoodan was rocky, barren, non-fertile. As a result, landless peasants, in spite of receiving land, had to submit to the landlords for their survival. The landowners could still maintain the control of the entire village community as they retained the ownership of the cultivable and fertile land which was the basis of economic and social power.

2.9. Background of Rural Development in India

The term Rural Development has gained widespread appeal in the last few decades in India. During the post—World War-II era development theorists became increasingly dissatisfied with the way traditional concepts of development emphasized growth and neglected important issues related to distributive justice and other dimensions of development. The interest in Rural Development is partly an offshoot of such disenchantment and also an account of the growing realisation of the centrality of Rural Development in facilitating the process of overall development.

In India, the importance of rural economy was recognized before independence but concrete steps were taken towards Rural Development only after independence through the successive five year plans and other specific programmes. Rural Development became a planning concern as result of the realization that a systematic effort is necessary to create better living conditions in the rural areas where the vast majority of populations of developing countries reside. At present, Rural Development occupies a strategic position in India’s plans for development of the country. The subject has witnessed large-scale debates at the national, regional and local level during the last few decades.

During the 1950s and 1960s, development policy of India sought to increase productivity and per capita income through advances in the manufacturing sector. In the realm of agricultural production, growth in output during the first two decades after independence was achieved mainly by increasing the area under cultivation, supported by expansion in public investment in supporting infrastructure. But realization soon came that the gains from these methods reached only to a small minority—mainly those who were already better off and privileged. In fact, the gains made as a result of these efforts are believed to have further accentuated inequality in incomes in rural areas. The failure of trickle down approach of achieving growth increased the social inequalities.

The strategy of industrialization also led to a flow of investments to urban areas at the cost of Rural Development. By the 1970s it became clear that there were serious problems in the way the issues and problems of development were being tackled. In particular, how the problems of unemployment and poverty in rural areas would get addressed adequately was certainly not realized. Moreover though the Green Revolution strategy increased the agricultural productivity in the few pockets of the country but did not succeed in providing widespread gains and also failed to
bring any significant changes in the conditions of the working classes in rural areas. On the contrary, inequality and imbalance among rural people and area increased.

In October 1974, the Rural Development department came into existence as a sub-component of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. On 18 August 1979, the Department of Rural Development was elevated to the status of a new Ministry of Rural Reconstruction. The Ministry was renamed as Ministry of Rural Development and again converted into a Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. It was later rechristened as Ministry of Agriculture in September 1985. On July 5, 1991 the Department was upgraded as Ministry of Rural Development. Another Department viz. Department of Watershed Development was created under the Ministry on 2nd July 1992. In March 1995, the Ministry was renamed as the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment with three sub-departments namely Department of Employment and Poverty Alleviation, Rural Development and Watershed Development. The Ministry, at present, consists of the following three Departments—Department of Rural Development; Department of Land Resources; Department of Drinking Water Supply.

During the plan periods, there have been shifting strategies in the approach of Rural Development. The First Plan (1951-1956) was a period when community development was considered as the method and national extension services as the agency for Rural Development. Co-operative farming with local people’s participation was the focus of the Second Plan (1956-1961) strategy. The Third Plan (1961-1966) was the period of re-strengthening the Panchayati Raj System through democratic decentralised mechanism. Special Area Programme was started for the development of backward areas in the Fourth Plan (1969-74). In the Fifth Plan (1974-79), the concept of minimum needs programme was introduced to eradicate poverty in rural areas. The objective was changed as ‘Growth for Social Justice’ instead of ‘Growth with Social Justice’. It proposed to strengthen and concretise the target group oriented programmes started during the Fourth Plan period. Emphasis was laid on integrated developments, both spatial and functional in the Sixth Plan.

There was a paradigm shift in the strategy for Rural Development in the Sixth Plan (1980-1985). It focused on the strategies and the methodologies to accelerate Rural Development. The emphasis was on strengthening the socio economic infrastructure in rural areas and initiatives were taken to alleviate disparities through the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).

During the Seventh Plan (1985-1990) a new strategy was chalked out to create skill-based employment opportunities under different schemes. Special programmes for income generation through creation of assets, endowments and land reforms were formulated for participation by the people at the grass root level. It envisaged the expansion of anti-poverty programmes.

During the Eighth Plan (1992-1997) emphasis was given to provision of social assistance to the deprived. The focus was to build up rural infrastructure through participation of the people. Priorities were given to rural roads, minor irrigation, soil conservation and social forestry. The
Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, passed by Parliament in 1992, came into force with effect from 24 April 1993 institutionalizing Panchayati Raj through the village, intermediate and district level Panchayats. This Act registers a defining moment in the history of decentralization of political power to the grassroots level.

Strategic changes were made in the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) to promote the process of nation-building through decentralized planning. Greater role of private sector was also ensured. Priority was given to agriculture and Rural Development with a view to generate productive employment and eradicate poverty.

During the Tenth Plan (2002-2007) prior concern was given to the reconstruction of rural infrastructure as well as provision of urban amenities in rural areas. It laid stress on a genuine thrust towards decentralization and people's participation in the planning process through institutional reforms. It emphasized strengthening of the Panchayati Raj and civil society groups for promoting transparency, accountability and responsibility in the development process. The role of the Government, in general, had to shift, from being the provider, to the facilitator of development processes by creating right types of institutional infrastructure and an environment conducive to broad-based economic development.

The Eleventh Plan (2007-2012) stressed upon developing concrete action plans in underdeveloped rural areas.

2.10. Rural Poverty

Based on the study of Indian planning programmes one may find that rural poverty is a vital issue in the field of Rural Development. Rural poverty in India is massive and conspicuous due to millions of small and marginal farmers with extremely uneconomic land holdings, large number of landless agricultural labourers, lack of employment opportunities etc. The concept of poverty and poverty line needs to be discussed before illustrating the rural poverty scenario of India and West Bengal.

2.10.1. Conceptualizing Poverty

'Poverty' is a 'social condition' of the poor. It is defined as "deprivation of human needs or deprivation in well-being." It generally results from deficit of income or assets or necessary means to meet the physical necessities of life. It is characterized by lack of purchasing power, exposure to financial risk, ill-health, malnutrition, high mortality rate, low life expectancy, inadequate access to social and economic services, illiteracy and few or limited opportunities for income generation. It is associated with deprivation of social needs like health, education, food, shelter, knowledge, clean environment, influence over the environment— and many other things that make the difference between 'truly living' and 'only surviving'.
Poverty in the above context refers to absolute poverty, being in a state of inadequate income and resources (material, cultural and social), which prevent them to afford a decent and dignified standard of living.

According to Rowntree (1899) families were defined to be in poverty ‘when their incomes were not sufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency’. Conventional definitions of poverty are based upon either per capita income or consumption, that is, on income poverty concept. Nearly all approaches in defining poverty were influenced by the application of the concept of subsistence and income. However, poverty has both income and non-income dimension usually intertwined. It has a cumulative impact on the life of the poor. The multidimensional deprivations (lack of access to credit, inadequate housing, tenure insecurity, unhygienic living condition, lack of employment, irregular income, poor nutrition, poor health condition) acts in a cyclic process to marginalize the poor into a state of disempowerment, insecurity and isolation. Very often, the poor are unable to meet social and economic obligations and lack the capacity to escape from this situation by themselves (Box No. 2.1).

The worldwide persistence of poverty is a major challenge of the twenty-first century. Despite the rapid shift towards urbanization, poverty remains largely a rural problem. Of the 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty (defined as those living on less than US$1.25/ day) in 2005 approximately 1 billion, that is, around 70 per cent lived in rural areas (IFAD, 2010).

In South Asia, approximately 80.4 per cent of the rural people were poor (living on less than US$ 2/ day) and 45.2 per cent were identified as living in extreme poverty (living on less than US$ 1.25/ day) in 2008 (IFAD, 2010). Also there is a large proportion of ‘ultra-poor’ suffering from a range of disadvantages that make escaping from poverty that much harder.
This characteristic causes the social conditions of extreme poverty to persist and to be transmitted from one generation to the next. Frequently, those most affected by extreme poverty are young children, pregnant mothers, the elders, the inhabitants of rural areas and marginal urban zones.

During the last few decades, the development efforts have failed to eliminate poverty in the developing countries. The World Development Report 1990 States, ‘the burden of poverty is unevenly spread among the regions of the developing world, among countries within that region and among localities within those countries’. Nearly half of the world’s poor live in South Asia, a region which accounts for 30 per cent of the world population.

2.10.2. Concept of Poverty Line

The income dimension of poverty defines poverty as a situation of low income or low consumption. This has been used for constructing poverty line.

A poverty line is defined, based upon a minimum level of consumption, typically defined as the cost of a bundle of goods (both food and non-food) deemed to assure that basic consumption needs are met and below which survival is threatened (Ravallion, 1992). Accordingly people are counted poor when their measured standard of living in terms of income or consumption is below the poverty line. Thus, the poverty line is a measure that separates the ‘poor’ from the ‘non-poor’.

2.10.3. Poverty Line Approach in India

In the year of 1962 the concept of ‘poverty line’ in India was formulated by the then Planning Commission of India. It came up with the ‘per capita consumption expenditure’ of Rs.20 per month at 1960-61 prices (excluding expenditure on health and education) as the minimum based on the minimum nutritional requirement of 2,150 calories per person per day. For rural area it was Rs.15 per capita per month and for urban area it was Rs.22.50 per capita per month (Table No. 2.1). However, the expenditures on health and education were not considered as they were expected to be provided by the State.

Later the calorie norms were changed to a minimum daily calorie intake of 2,400 calories per person in rural areas and 2,100 calories per person in urban areas. At 1973-74 prices, the poverty line for rural and urban areas was Rs.49.63 and Rs.56.76 per capita per month respectively. During 1999-2000, it was Rs.327.56 and Rs.454.11 per capita per month for rural and urban areas, respectively. During 2004-2005, these figures stand at approximately Rs.356.3 and Rs.538.6 per capita per month for rural and urban areas.
RURAL POVERTY OF INDIA (STATE WISE)
1973-74 & 1977-78

Legend
Percentage of Population
Below Poverty Line

- 60 to 75 (4)
- 45 to 60 (21)
- 30 to 45 (2)
- 15 to 30 (4)
- Data Not Available (1)

Note:
1. Poverty Ratio of Assam is used for Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Manipur, Nagaland & Tripura.
2. Poverty Ratio of Tamil Nadu is used for Pondicherry & Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
3. Poverty Ratio of Karnataka is used for Lakshadweep.
4. Poverty Ratio of Goa is used for Daman & Diu.
5. Urban Poverty Ratio of Punjab is used for both Rural & Urban Poverty of Chandigarh.
6. Poverty Line of Maharashtra & Expenditure Distribution of Goa is used to estimate Poverty Ratio of Goa.
7. Poverty Line of Maharashtra & Expenditure Distribution of Daman & Diu is used to estimate Poverty Ratio of Daman & Diu.

Map No. 1

Map No. 2

Rural Development Programme in West Bengal: A Critical Geographical Appraisal
Rural Development Programme in West Bengal: A Critical Geographical Appraisal
The Indian Poverty Line Approach distinctly classifies and distinguishes rural poverty from that of urban poverty. Till date, India's income poverty line is the monetary equivalent of the above mentioned calorie norm.

2.10.4. Incidence of Poverty in India

Poverty is pervasive in India. For six decades of planned development the challenge of poverty reduction has been and still remains a key policy concern for India. Figure No. 2.1 illustrates the change of poverty ration of urban India, rural India and All India combined.

Though the proportion of urban poor in India went down from 49.01 per cent in 1973-74 to 23.62 per cent in 1999-2000. During 2004-05 it increased to 25.7 per cent (Table No.2A and Figure No. 2.1).

There has been a steep decline in rural poverty from 56.44 per cent in 1993-94 to 27.09 per cent in 1999-2000 but in 2004-05 it increased to 28.3 per cent respectively. The trend for All India Average (combined (rural and urban)) shows similar trend of decline since 1973-74 to 1999-2000 and then slight rise in 2004-05 (Table No.2A and Figure No.2.1).

2.10.5. Incidence of Rural Poverty among the Indian States

There is wide disparity in poverty across Indian States as visible from the Map No.2.1 to 2.7. Individual States have exhibited very different positions.

During 1973-74 Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal had the highest rural poverty ratio ranging between 60 to 75 per cent (Table No. 2B and Map No. 2.1). Till 1987-88 West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa had experienced such high rural poverty ratio and since then there has been substantial decline (Table No. 2B, Map No. 2.2 and 2.3 & 2.4).

Between 1973-74 and 1993-94, the southern States have been more successfully able to reduce rural poverty than eastern or central States (Table No.2B, Map Nos. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5). The share of southern States in the country's total rural poor declined from about 24 per cent to less than 16 per cent during 1973-74 to 1993-1994.
The share of east-central States went up from 61 per cent to 71 per cent, largely contributed by Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa during 1973-74 to 1993-1994. In Bihar and Orissa, the rural poverty ratio was still around 40 to 50 per cent in 1993-94 (Table No. 2B and Map No. 2.5). In 1999-2000 Bihar’s poverty level reduced below 45 per cent. Uttar Pradesh had high levels of poverty (between 45 to 60 per cent) from 1973-74 till 1983-84. It reduced between 30 to 45 per cent in 1987-88 and remained consistent in the same class till 2004-05 (Table No. 2B and Map No. 2.4 to 2.7).

In Orissa, poverty decline has been very little. Orissa had the highest level of rural poverty according to 1999-2000 and 2004-05 estimates (Table No. 2B, Map No. 2.6 and 2.7). With the formation of Jharkhand State (earlier was a part of Bihar) its rural poverty level was as high as 48.01 in 2004-05 (Table No. 2B and Map No. 2.7).

In the northwestern part, low levels of poverty in the States of Punjab and Haryana are largely attributed to their agricultural growth.

Not all southern States were able to reduce poverty because of any spectacular economic growth. While Andhra Pradesh reduced its poverty through its public distribution system, Kerala's success in reducing poverty is largely the result of investment in human development. Specific targeted anti-poverty programmes were taken up during the Sixth Plan due to which the poverty ratios showed a decline. Maharashtra’s poverty level increased during 1973-74 and 1977-78 from 57.71 per cent to 63.57 per cent and then fell substantially to 23.72 per cent in 1999-2000 and further increased to 29.6 per cent in 2004-05 (Table No. 2B and Map No. 2.1 to 2.7).

Much later in the 1990s the regional disparities increased with the southern and western regions doing much better than the northern and eastern regions. Their uneven progress in rural poverty reduction in most instances, better-off States remained relatively affluent and reduced rural poverty, while poorer States remained poor and made less progress in rural poverty reduction (Table No. 2B and Map No. 2.6). There are also cases where poorer States made major progress in rural poverty reduction and growth. In Kerala, for example, rural poverty declined at 2.4 per cent per annum between the early 1970s and early 1990s.

States and Union Territories where rural poverty incidence fell substantially include Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Chandigarh and Daman and Diu where poverty rates were below 15 per cent according to 2004-05 figures. In the same year Gujrat and Rajasthan had poverty rates between 15-20 per cent. Notably poor performers include Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (Table No. 2B and Map No. 2.1 to 2.7).

The north-east has either shown little change or an actual rise in rural poverty proportions (Map No. 2.1 to 2.7). It is important to note that the north-eastern States, which have not received significant attention on the issue of poverty, have large proportions of below poverty line population and has not experienced any significant change over this period.
The rural poverty distribution maps of India (Map No.2.1 to 2.7) reveal a striking regional pattern: except for Jammu and Kashmir, the low growth States form one contiguous region made up of the eastern States (Assam, Orissa and West Bengal) and the so-called BIMARU States (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) exhibiting moderate to high rural poverty. The high-growth States consist of the southern States, the western States (Gujarat and Maharashtra) and the northwestern region (Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh) have low to moderate levels of rural poverty.

From the above discussion, it has to be admitted that poverty eradication measures for rural poor have not been implemented in the same momentum in all the States of India.

2.10.6. Rural Poverty Line of West Bengal

The Planning Commission of India provides official estimates of State level poverty line. At 1973-74 prices, the poverty line for rural areas of West Bengal was Rs.54.5 per capita per month, which lies below the Indian average for rural areas of Rs.56.76 per capita per month. During 1983 it stood at Rs.105.6 (above the rural poverty line of India at Rs.89.5 per capita per month). During
1993-94 rural poverty line of West Bengal almost doubled to Rs.220.74 and was still more than the average rural poverty line of India (Rs.205.84 per capita per month). As of 1999-2000, it was Rs. 350.17 per capita per month, much above the rural poverty line of India (Rs.327.56 per capita per month) respectively. In 2004-2005, this figure stands at Rs. 382.82 per capita per month, which exceeds the rural poverty line of India (Rs.356.3 per capita per month) once again (Table No.2C, Figure No.2.2 and Table No.2.1).

Since there are ample variations in the cost of living conditions across different Districts within a State, the official State level poverty line used for estimating poverty at the District level may not be appropriate. It requires to be properly adjusted with District price index numbers.

Due to the problem of unavailability of official District level poverty lines for the Districts of West Bengal, Chattopadhyay, S. (2010) has attempted to estimate the District level poverty lines and the region level poverty lines based on the State level poverty line of 2004-05. Incorporating the intra regional heterogeneity in the price structure within West Bengal and by properly adjusting with District price index numbers District specific poverty lines were estimated by Chattopadhyay, S. (2010).

The poverty measures adjusted for the District level poverty lines, give a clearer picture for the spatial variations in levels of living across the Districts of West Bengal (Chattopadhyay, S., 2010).
Estimates of District level price indices reveal that the Districts of rural North Bengal have lower price levels compared to those of rural South Bengal (Figure No. 2.3). As an outcome, it is also observed that poverty is overrated in the Districts of North Bengal and underestimated in the Districts of South Bengal when the conventional State level poverty line is used in place of the District level poverty lines for estimating poverty at the District level (Table No.2D, Figure No.2.3). A key finding is that the demarcation of West Bengal by price levels coincides with the natural geographical demarcation of the State. This provides a basis for exploration of the poverty situation in the various geographical regions of West Bengal separately (Chattopadhyay, S., 2010).

2.10.7. Incidence of Poverty in West Bengal

Rural poverty has exhibited a declining trend since 1973-74 till 2004-05. The decline has been slow initially, decreasing from 73.16 per cent in 1973-74 to 68.34 per cent in 1977-78 and then declining to 63.05 per cent in 1983-84. During 1983-84 and 1987-88 the rural poverty levels declined sharply to 48.30 per cent. Consequently it declined to 40.8 per cent in 1993-94, 31.85 per cent in 1999-2000 and to 28.6 per cent in 2004-05 (Table No.2E and Figure No. 2.4). As per the estimate of Planning Commission urban poverty level has increased from 34.67 per cent in 1973-74 to 38.2 per cent in 1977-78. Rising urban poverty has been due to rising unemployment as a result of industrial recession. Later there has been a sharp decline from 35.08 per cent in 1987-88 to 14.86 per cent in 1999-2000. According to the latest figure of 2004-05 it is 14.8 per cent respectively. The poverty line for West Bengal for 2004-05 is Rs.445.38 for rural areas and Rs.572.51 for urban areas respectively (Table No. 2E and Figure No. 2.4).

The rural and urban poverty levels of the State has an impact on the changing trend of the combined poverty rate of the State which have shown a declining trend during 1973-74 to 2004-05 (Table No. 2E and Figure No. 2.4).

The substantial reduction in poverty in West Bengal could be attributed to institutional reforms brought about by the State government. These include land reform (in particular— Operation Barga), effective political decentralisation through the Panchayati Raj System, implementation of
Poverty Alleviation Programmes and rapid agricultural growth because of notable increases in area under irrigation through substantial private investment in pump sets and tube wells. However, despite the substantial decrease in the incidence of poverty in West Bengal, the State still get included among the seven States that have a large proportion of their population in poverty. At the same time during 2004-05 the rural unemployment rate has been the highest among the eastern States being at 11.1 per cent for males and 11.6 per cent for females (NIRD, 2009).

2.10.8. Regional Variation of Rural Poverty Ratio in West Bengal

According to the 1993-94 poverty ratios, the high poverty (41 to 60 per cent) areas of West Bengal were in parts of the Himalayan region (Darjiling, Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar Districts) with poverty ratio of 58.73 per cent and Eastern Plains (Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Birbhum, Murshidabad and Nadia Districts) with poverty ratio of 47.14 per cent.

The medium poverty (21 to 40 per cent) areas of West Bengal were in parts of the Western Plains (Bankura, Puruliya and Medinipur Districts) with poverty ratio of 40.26 per cent and Central Plains (Barddhaman, Hugli, Haora, North 24-Parganas and South 24-Parganas Districts) with poverty ratio of 31.04 per cent (Table No. 2F and Figure No.2.5).

2.10.9. Regional Share of Rural Poor in West Bengal

According to NSS 50th Round (1993-94) survey, the Eastern Plains had the highest share of rural poor being 34.23 per cent of the total rural poor of West Bengal (Table No.2G). This is followed by the Central Plains with 26.52 per cent, the Western Plains with 24.04 per cent and the Himalayan Region with 15.21 per cent of rural poor (NIRD, 2009).

2.10.10. Population Structure in Poverty

According to NSS 61st Round (2004-05) survey, the share of the poor in different age groups show that nearly 44.3 per cent of the poor falls in the age group of below 15 years of age depicting the vulnerable condition of children in rural West Bengal. Nearly 34.4 per cent belong to 15-35 years age group, 17.9 per cent to 35-60 years and 3.5 per cent to more than 60 years (Table No. 2H and Figure No. 2.6).
N.B. District Medinipur was parted/subdivided into two Districts namely Purba Medinipur & Paschim Medinipur in 2002.
Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council & Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad are the two sub-divisions of Darjeeling District.

Map No. 2.9

Legend

Percentage of Rural Families
Below Poverty Line

- 50 to 60 (1)
- 40 to 50 (2)
- 30 to 40 (10)
- 20 to 30 (4)
- 10 to 20 (1)

N.B. Figure in parenthesis indicate number of Districts.

Hilroota (State Capital), the Urban District.
2.10.11. District Wise Variation of Rural Poverty in West Bengal

Koch Bihar District has the highest percentage of rural households of 46.01 per cent and 51.81 per cent living below the poverty line in 2002 and 2005 respectively. In 2002 Darjiling Gorkha Hill Council (combination of three Sub-divisions of Darjiling District) also had a high share of below poverty line rural households (44.97 per cent). In the same year Puruliya, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Bankura Districts had 40 to 45 per cent of rural households as below poverty line. Purba Medinipur, Hugli and Barddhaman Districts had the lowest share, that is, 20 to 30 per cent of rural households as below poverty line (Table No.2I and Map No. 2.8).

By 2005 Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Puruliya, Hugli, Haora, North 24-Parganas, South 24-Parganas and Bankura Districts had reduced the proportion of below poverty line households. Darjiling District as a whole had experienced a decline by the same period. Simultaneously Koch Bihar, Malda, Barddhaman, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur and Nadia Districts had experienced increase in the proportion of rural below poverty line households. In 2005 Haora District (14.89 per cent) had the lowest proportion of below poverty line households (Table No.2J and Map No. 2.9).

2.10.12. Incidence of Rural Poverty Among Different Social Groups in Rural West Bengal

Magnitude of poverty among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population is an issue of concern since these groups have been identified as ones without much access to land, the principal productive resource in rural areas and also that they suffer from social and educational deprivations. According to the 2004-05 figures the magnitude of poverty is highest among the ST population with the figures at 42.4 per cent of the rural households. It is persistently high among the SC population (29.5 per cent). It is lowest among the Other Backward Classes with the figures at 18.3 per cent of the rural households. While among the general section it is moderately high at 27.5 per cent but lower than the all rural average of 28.6 per cent (Table No.2K and Figure No. 2.7).

2.11. Rural Hunger

Poverty often determines the level of household or individual’s food security. By means of food poverty line households can be classified as ‘poor’ or ‘food insecure’.
As per the IFAD’s (2010) country performance status in reducing hunger, during 1990-2000 India had experienced high levels of hunger but made slow progress in improving it. According to NSS 50\(^{th}\) Round (1993-94) Report, in rural India 11.1 per cent of the rural households could avail 2 square meals, while 3 per cent of the rural households could not even avail 2 square meals a day. Non-availability existed for 8 months from April to November, with the estimates being higher for West Bengal in the month of September at 8.7 per cent.

Narrowing the focus among the lowest expenditure class as many as 25.3 per cent of the rural households in West Bengal got meals only in some months of the year. A staggering 21.2 per cent of the rural households of West Bengal did not get 2 square meals throughout the year (India average at 3.4 per cent). This portrays the severity of hunger in rural areas of the State.

According to NSS 61\(^{st}\) Round (2004-05) Report, 88 per cent of the rural households in West Bengal could avail 2 square meals a day throughout the year. Nearly 10.5 per cent could avail 2 square meals a day during some months of the year. Almost 1.3 per cent of the population could not even afford 2 square meals a day even for some months of the year (Table No. 2L and Figure No. 2.8).

Indeed, it points out that poor households face the most severe constraints to their own food production and in their ability to purchase food.

### 2.12. Conclusion

The notion of Rural Development has been conceived as a set of goals and programmes to a well-knit strategy, approach or even an ideology. The scope and content of Rural Development are nebulous and do not have well-accepted analytical boundaries. Rural society comprises a significant part of the Indian economy. No development activity can sustain if it is not built on the foundation of the rural economy. An attempt has been made in the following chapters to highlight the typical or specified rural scenario of West Bengal (the study area) and the importance and impact to its decentralisation process through Panchayati Raj Institutions in rural areas and the planning strategies and implementation for the upliftment of the rural poor of the State.

**Reference**