

# India's Economic Growth: Rural Transformation and Integration

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## Abstract

Rural transformations imply dramatic social changes, and often radical changes in social as well as economic policies. This paper focuses on the rural transformation that occurs with the economic growth in India. The paper focuses on the forces that drive this transformation, how this transformation proceeds, and what are the potential traps and inefficiencies that may inhibit it. We also examine the growth of infrastructure in rural areas and inclusiveness of the growth and rural transformation along with the role of rural transformation and integration in India's economic growth. The impact of the growth of an economy trickles down to the lowest level entity which may be considered as village. On the other hand growth and development of the lowest level can contribute to the overall growth of the economy through multiplier effect. The pace of trickledown from top to bottom depends on the efficient planning and implementation of the Government's schemes and programmes.

Poverty alleviation focussing rural areas has been on the national policy agenda since independence. The importance of reduction in poverty, provision of other basic needs and equitable development has been emphasised in all the five year plans since independence particularly since the 5th Five-Year Plan. Significant development has taken place in the post-reform period; India has done well in some indicators such as economic growth, exports, balance of payments, resilience to external shocks, service sector growth, significant accumulation of foreign exchange, information technology (IT) and stock market, improvements in telecommunications etc. However, exclusion continued in terms of low agriculture growth, low quality employment growth in rural areas, rural-urban divides, and regional disparities etc. Overall poverty in rural areas has declined, but still around 25 percent of rural population is living below poverty line and not been getting basic necessity of live.

Lot of social infrastructure like health, educational, rural roads, rural housing, drinking water facilities, toilets, and Anganwadi centres have been created under various Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) of the Government of India. But still various rural areas of

the county, especially in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Orissa etc. lack in basic facilities. Therefore, now we need to prepare area specific focussed scheme and programmes with the targeted objectives for achievements in particular sector. To consider the area specific schemes a Committee was constituted by erstwhile Planning Commission for suggesting restructuring of CSS taking into consideration of State specific needs. On the recommendation of the Committee, 10% of flexi funds under all CSS have been earmarked and being provided to the State for taking up of innovative initiatives to provide basic facilities to the rural people so that rural transformation could be expedited.

**Keywords:** Reforms, Rural Transformation, Gross Domestic Product, Schemes, India

## Introduction

Rural transformations imply dramatic social changes, and often radical changes in social as well as economic policies. This paper focuses on the rural transformation that occurs with the economic growth in India. The paper focuses on the forces that drive this transformation, how this transformation proceeds, and what are the potential traps and inefficiencies that may inhibit it. We also examine the growth of infrastructure in rural areas and inclusiveness of the growth and rural transformation along with the role of rural transformation and integration in India's economic growth.

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One of the most significant developments in the world economy since the 1980s has been structural adjustments and macro-economic reforms introduced by a number of developing countries and India has not been an exception. Trends towards liberalisation in the Indian economy were well apparent during 1980s, but took concrete shape in mid 1991 when the economic conditions of the country, especially in the external sector, turned unmanageable. The Government of India was not having any option except structural adjustment and full-fledged macro-economic reforms in order to bring India economy back on the track. The structural adjustment and macro-economic reforms initiated by the Government of India during mid 1991 were broad-based and comprehensive. Consequently, the industrial, fiscal, monetary, financial and trade policies of India were changed dramatically. The reforms in different sectors are interlinked, though the way they are related may not always be direct and proximate (Vyuptakesh and Mukherji, 2001).

Economic reforms in various sectors of the Indian Economy are mostly related to the process of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG). The most important impact of this LPG model on the Indian Economy has been a very high rate of growth of Gross Domestic Product. Such a high growth rate of the economy was never achieved by India since independence. This could be considered as a major achievement of the country during the last decade.

The growth story of India is fascinating and interesting and unfolding the economy to the world with its vast presence of human and natural resources. India is the second most populous country of the globe with more than 1.20 billion and has become destination for quality workforce and potential market place for domestic and multinational companies. Today, India is one of the fastest growing economies amidst global uncertainties. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to note that the growth is not uniform across the sectors particularly rural development and agriculture sector is lagging behind other sectors and causing aberrations to the desired economic development process.

Improving the overall quality of life in rural areas is the agenda of rural transformation. The improvement in the quality of life can be brought through adequate investments in health, education, and rural infrastructure. Further, improvement in the quality of life necessitate efficient rural financial markets; designing policies for greater gender equity, especially the most vulnerable

through implementing effective safety-net programmes; improvement in market accessibility for small-scale farmers. For all this to happen, it is necessary to ensure effective institutions for rural development and public and private investments in agricultural research and extension to provide a continuous stream of yield enhancing technologies that can be profitably adopted by farmers (Isolina, Estherine, Felicity, Isaura and Hawa, 2012).

Increase in the incomes of the mass of the population to bring about a general improvement in living conditions, especially in the rural areas can be brought by the rapidly growing economy. The Eleventh and Twelfth Plans gave a special stimulus to several schemes/programmes with the aim for creating rural infrastructure and providing basic facilities in the rural areas having objective of increasing inclusiveness and reducing poverty from rural areas in particular and as a whole in general. The planned initiatives taken by the Government of India for rural development has started showing results with the significant contribution of rural economy in national economy.

Mahatma Gandhi often said that India lives in her villages. Two out of three Indians still live here. When Gandhi ji made the remark, rural India was very different from what it is today. We have seen a major transformation in the last 60 years. The Green Revolution propelled the food grains production from a mere 50 million tonnes to 245 million tonnes in 2010- 11. GDP per agricultural worker is 75% higher in real terms. Today, as much as 40% of India's total consumption is accounted for by rural India. By 2025, the Indian rural market is expected to grow more than tenfold to become a USD100 billion opportunity for retail spending (Manwani, 2012). India's rural population is about 12% of the world population. Rural population in India is higher than the population of Europe. The rural India is vastly heterogeneous and the size of villages varies widely. As per census 2011, around 32.95 percent of villages in India have less than 500 populations while 58.17 percent of the rural population lives in villages of over 2,000 people.

## India's Economic Growth

As per Central Statistics Office (CSO), Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of India at constant (2004-05) prices has grown at the rate average rate of 7.61 percent during 2004-05 to 2013-14, while per capita Net National Income

**Table 1:** Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at Constant (2004-05) Prices and Per Capita Net National Income (NNI) at Current Prices

Year	All India GDP at Constant (2004-05) Prices (Rs. in crore)	%age Change over the previous year	All India Per Capita NNI at Current Prices (In rupees)	%age Change over the previous year
2004-2005	2,971,464	---	24,143	---
2005-2006	3,253,073	9.48	27,131	12.38
2006-2007	3,564,364	9.57	31,206	15.02
2007-2008	3,896,636	9.32	35,825	14.80
2008-2009	4,158,676	6.72	40,775	13.82
2009-2010	4,516,071	8.59	46,249	13.42
2010-2011	4,918,533	8.91	54,021	16.80
2011-2012	5,247,530	6.69	61,855	14.50
2012-2013	5,482,111	4.47	67,839	9.67
2013-2014	5,741,791	4.74	74,380	9.64

Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO) as on 1.8.2014

(NNI) at current prices has grown at an average rate of 13.34 per cent during the same period. The details of year wise growth rate of GDP and per capita NNI, since 2004-05 is given in Table 1.

It may be seen that Indian economy has grown substantially during above reference period. Central Statistics Office (CSO) has estimated the growth rate of 4.74 percent in 2013-14 in terms of GDP at constant prices as against 4.47 percent in 2012-13 and 6.69 percent in 2011-12. Even after slowdown during recent past, India's GDP at constant prices has increased from Rs. 2,971,464 crore in 2004-05 to Rs. 5,741,791 crore in 2013-14 which 93.23 percent. Likewise, India's per capita NNI at current prices has increased by 208 percent during the same period.

The slowdown in the economy since 2011-12 has been trigger by domestic factors as well as factors emit from the rest of the world, particularly India's major trading partners and advanced economies. The slow growth in many advanced economies and the crisis in the Euro-zone area have affected India's growth through various linkages. The domestic factors is slowdown in the industrial sector which is estimated to grow at 3.1 percent in 2012-13 as against 3.5 per cent in 2011-12 and significantly lower growth of 1.8 per cent in agriculture sector on top of a growth rate of 3.6 percent achieved in 2011-12. Services sector is estimated to grow at a rate of 6.6 percent in 2012-13, which is also lower than that achieved in 2011-12 (Union Budget of India, 2013-14). Various steps have been taken by the Ministry of Finance and Reserve Bank of India to reverse the trend and to achieve high growth

rate in the economy.

The Economic Survey 2014-15 presented by the Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley to the Parliament on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2015 indicates that a clear political mandate for reform and a benign external environment now is expected to propel India on to a double digit trajectory. It states that Indian economy appears to have now gone past the economic slowdown, persistent inflation, elevated fiscal deficit, slackening domestic demand, external account imbalances and oscillating value of the rupee. As per the Economic Survey 2014-15, Indian economy is likely to grow in the range of 5.4 to 5.9 percent in 2014-15 overcoming the sub-5 per cent GDP growth of past two years, even as poor monsoon and disturbed external environment remain a cause for concern. Further, Economic Survey 2014-15 pegs a growth rate of over 8 per cent for the next financial year.

The main factor driving overall India's economic growth led by increased consumerism are, revealing improvement in socio-economic basic infrastructure, improvement in communication system and considerable enhancement of budgetary allocation and government spending for rural development through various schemes/programmes. Rural population, which were dependent mostly on farm income, have now diversified sources of income such as trading, agro-processing and ancillary industries. Further, Government's initiatives to increase procurement prices of the food grains and increasing access to finance have also boosted rural incomes. Improvement in physical infrastructure and the transformed communication

network has significantly increased access to urban India. This is creating new industry, better employment opportunities and higher wages in rural India. It is also unleashing a much higher level of aspiration among the 800 million people living in rural India. This is India's biggest opportunity as well as India's biggest responsibility. It can either drive India to become the biggest economic powerhouse or derail the growth story.

## Rural Transformation

A gradual but sweeping transformation is taking place in rural India as similar to the tune of national and International scenario. Greater exposure to outside world has raised rural aspirations for a better quality of life. Rural monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) has grown at a rapid pace of 5.5 percent per annum during 2009-10 and 2011-12 (NSSO: 2012). The average rural MPCE remains about half of urban MPCE but the growth in rural income and expenditure has reflected a sharp drop in rural poverty to less than 26 percent from 34 percent in just two years (MoRD, 2013-14). The purchasing power of rural India has been increasing continuously with

the developmental activities taking place in rural areas. Now, the rural market is cannot be treated as residual retail market as the various products are being designed to cater specific demand of rural people. The presence of rural India is being felt by the policy makers as the larger villages are rapidly emerging as vibrant growth poles.

Growth and development has changed the rural scenario of employment, wages, poverty, literacy rate, health infrastructure, roads, and telecommunication infrastructure. The changing trend of these indicators shows the transformation taking place in the rural areas. As per census 2001, proportion of population living in rural areas was 72.2 percent which has declined to 68.8 percent as per census 2011. This may be attributed to the migration from rural areas to the urban areas in search of livelihood, consequently increase the share of non farm income of rural India.

The transformation may be noticed from the increasing rate of literacy rate in rural areas. As per census 2001, literacy rate in rural areas was 58.7 percent in comparison to the urban literacy rate of 79.9 per cent. However, as per census 2011, literacy rate in rural areas has gone up

**Table 2: All-India Distribution of Rural Population by Household Type**

Household type	Population (%)			
	1993-94	1999-2000	2004-05	2009-10
Self-employed in agriculture	42.4	37.1	39.8	35.5
Agricultural labour	27.5	30.1	24.1	23.8
Employment in agriculture	69.9	67.2	63.9	59.3
Self-employed in non-agriculture	13.1	13.9	16.7	16.4
Other labour	7.5	7.6	10.6	14.8
Others	9.5	11.4	8.8	9.4
Employment in non-agriculture	30.1	32.9	36.1	40.6
All	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: NSSO 66th Round, Report No. 537: Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 2009-10

**Table 3: Proportion of Population below Poverty Line (Percent)**

Sl. No.	Year	Rural	Urban	Total (Rural + Urban)
1	2004-05	41.8	25.7	37.2
2	2009-10	33.8	20.9	29.8
3	2011-12	25.7	13.7	21.9

Sources: Press Note on Poverty Estimates, 2009-10, Planning Commission, Government of India website ([http://planningcommission.nic.in/news/press\\_pov1903.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/news/press_pov1903.pdf), accessed on 4 April 2013); Press Note on Poverty Estimates, 2011-12, Planning Commission, Government of India website ([http://planningcommission.nic.in/news/pre\\_pov2307.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/news/pre_pov2307.pdf), accessed on 26 August 2013).

to 68.9 percent in comparison to the urban literacy rate of 85.0 percent. The rural – urban gap in the rate of literacy was 21.2 percent in 2001 which has gone down to 16.1 percent in 2011. The increasing educational infrastructure through various schemes and programmes in rural areas may be attributed to the faster growth rate of literacy rate in rural areas.

Another indicator where rural transformation may be examined is the trend of agricultural and non-agricultural employment which is given in Table 2.

It could be seen from Table 2 that 69.9 percent of the rural population was employed in agricultural sector in 1993-94 which has declined to 67.2 per cent in 1999-2000, 63.9 percent in 2004-05 and 59.3 percent in 2009-10. The employment of rural population in agricultural sector has been declining continuously where employment of rural population in non-agricultural activities has been increasing correspondingly. With the growth of non-agricultural employment and diversification in agricultural activities, the poverty in rural areas has also declined over a period of time. The trend in poverty is given in Table 3.

Rural incomes have increased and rural poverty has declined over the years but the gap between urban and rural incomes has increased sharply. The reason for increasing gap between urban and rural incomes is due to slow rate of growth in agricultural sector in comparison to other sectors. Further, the employment growth in non-agriculture sector has not grown sufficiently to reduce population dependent on agriculture sector. It may be seen from Table 3 that the proportion of rural population below poverty line was 41.8 percent in 2004-05 which has gone down to 33.8 percent in 2009-10 and 25.7 percent in 2011-12. The population below poverty line in the rural areas has declined 16.1 point during 2004-05 to 2011-12, whereas this decline was 12 point basis for the urban areas and 15.3 point basis in rural and urban areas combined during the same period. This trend is also exhibiting the pace of transformation in rural areas. Apart from positive

changes in literacy, employment pattern, wages and poverty, road network, health and telecom infrastructure has also improved in rural areas. The improvement in health infrastructure is shown in Table 4.

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2005, to provide accessible, affordable and quality health care to the rural population, especially the vulnerable groups. The thrust of the mission was to establishing a fully functional, community owned, decentralized health delivery system with inter-sectoral convergence at all levels, to ensure simultaneous action on a wide range of determinants of health. National Rural Health Mission has improved the health facilities and health situation in rural areas. It could be seen from Table 4 that the total availability of health infrastructure like PHSCs, PHCs and CHCs in rural areas has substantially increased in 2012 from the level of 2005. The increasing health infrastructure has tremendous effect in the reducing death rate and controlling birth rate. The lower death and birth rate is another sign of transformation.

Another scheme namely Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2000 as a fully funded Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide all weather road connectivity in rural areas of the country. The programme envisages connecting all habitations with a population of 500 persons (Census-2001) and above in the plain areas and 250 persons (Census-2001) and above in hill States, the tribal and the desert areas. The programme envisages single all weather connectivity. The country has now a network of about 3,99,979 km of such roads. With a view to ensuring full farm-to-market connectivity, the programme also provides for the upgradation of the existing 'Through Routes' and Major Rural Links to prescribed standards, though it is not central to the programme. Under PMGSY-II, 10,725 projects have been cleared out of eligible 50,000 projects. As on March 31, 2014, 97,838 habitations have been

**Table 4: Primary Health Sub-Centres (PHSCs), Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs) functioning in rural areas**

<i>Number of PHSCs functioning</i>		<i>Number of PHCs functioning</i>		<i>Number of CHCs functioning</i>	
2005	2012	2005	2012	2005	2012
1,46,026	1,48,366	23,236	24,049	3,346	4,833

Source: Rural Health Statistics in India (2012), website (<http://nrhm.gov.in/images/pdf/publication/RHS-2012.pdf>, accessed on 7 September 2013).

connected. New connectivity of 2,48,919 kms has been achieved (Ministry of Rural Development: 2013-14). The impact of rural roads becomes visible not so much during or immediately after construction as after a few years, when the traffic picks up and market access is fully exploited by the rural economy. Maintenance of roads plays an important role in exploiting the full potential of socio-economic development leading to poverty alleviation.

Rural transformation in India is very much a halfway house. Substantial transformations have taken place in pockets around the country. At the same time, new drivers are at work more or less all around the country. The biggest challenge is that of managing the transition from subsistence rural livelihoods to mineral-based industrialisation in the country's central areas is undertaken in an inclusive way. Measures to increase the health and educational standards need to complement income measures. All of this would work towards a reduction of rural-urban inequality in India, achieving which is of importance not just to India itself, but given the size of the Indian economy, to the world economy too (Nathan, Reddy and Sharma, 2010).

While this performance reflects the strength of the economy in many areas, it is also true that large parts of our population are still to experience a decisive improvement in their standard of living. The percentage of the population below the poverty line is declining, but only at a modest pace. Far too many people still lack access to basic services such as health, education, clean drinking water and sanitation facilities without which they cannot be empowered to claim their share in the benefits of growth. These problems are more severe in some states than in others, and in general they are especially severe in rural areas.

Therefore, the challenge of transformation facing India is that of creating an environment that allows unskilled-labour-intensive manufacturing to grow rapidly and rise as a proportion of the GDP. On one hand, such growth would pull workers from agriculture into gainful employment more rapidly than is the case currently while on the other it will reduce the burden of labour on the land. Wage in agriculture would also rise faster than in the absence of rapid expansion of unskilled-labour-intensive manufacturing (Panagariya, 2006).

## Way Forward

Promoting development in rural areas is a slow and complex process faced with many challenges. It requires simultaneous action in various sectors, in an environment undergoing rapid, sometimes volatile change. The change comes from internal as well as external processes. To accelerate these processes, the financial and human resources devoted to the implementation of rural development programmes need to be greatly augmented. Present level of rail, road and communication linkages need substantial up-scaling. The enhancement of productivity and income of rural communities is at the core of rural development. Due to lack of adequate options, majority of the rural population rely on agriculture and farm-related works for their livelihood. Therefore, mechanisation, diversification and use of modern technologies in agricultural sector need to be promoted for enhancement in the farm production and productivity which can augment the livelihood option in rural areas. Inclusion could also be promoted through policies to improve productivity in the agricultural sector and by strengthening rural financial institutions.

Although Government policy has initiated steps to close the urban rural divide through increased public investment, fixing minimum support prices and decentralisation of local government, the challenges still persist. India continues to struggle with low agricultural productivity-agriculture accounts for 19 percent of GDP employing 50 percent of the workforce and poor capital cum infrastructural investment in rural areas-less than 50 percent of rural households have access to basic infrastructure such as roads, power, and potable water. The need of the hour is collaboration between corporate, communities and government institutions to enhance farm productivity and the rural resource base. Businesses should commit to the national agenda of making the rural economy more socially inclusive. If managed successfully, the rural areas possess the potential to contribute by producing more and better quality food, creating more productive jobs that support better livelihoods, safeguarding culture and traditions, and looking after the vast natural resources.

## Conclusion

Poverty alleviation focussing rural areas has been on the national policy agenda since independence. The

importance of reduction in poverty, provision of other basic needs and equitable development has been emphasised in all the five year plans since independence particularly since the 5<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan. Significant development has taken place in the post-reform period; India has done well in some indicators such as economic growth, exports, balance of payments, resilience to external shocks, service sector growth, significant accumulation of foreign exchange, information technology (IT) and stock market, improvements in telecommunications etc. However, exclusion continued in terms of low agriculture growth, low quality employment growth in rural areas, rural-urban divides and regional disparities etc. Overall poverty in rural areas has declined, but still around 25 percent of rural population is living below poverty line and not been getting basic necessity of live.

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We are living in a dynamic and more integrated world. Rural areas can no longer be viewed in isolation. Rural transformations thus require changes in mind set or mental landscape in the conceptualisation in managing changes. It calls for more integrated approach which view changes in a system of inter related parts. It means rural transformation has to be integrated and coordinated at local and national level to manage changes. Rural transformation has to look into development based on local needs, distinctiveness and potential.

Millions of people in rural India still live below the poverty line. There are a number of issues related to health, education and sanitation which need urgent attention. Agricultural growth is critical and needs to pick up.

Our agricultural productivity is among the lowest in the world and even slight improvements in yields will have a significant impact on overall growth. And yet we must go beyond agriculture if we have to make a real impact on the millions who live in rural India. As rural India rises, growth will bring its own challenges. It will put further pressure on our scarce resources. The explosion in rural consumption and growing competition for scarce resources demands that we embrace a new collaborative model of development. All stakeholders-government, NGOs, civil society, and corporate- have a role in enabling this growth while overcoming the attendant challenges. With the right kind of public-private partnerships we can address these challenges by finding innovative solutions and build on the opportunities.

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