

Augmenting LIFESTYLE



The demographic transition in rural India has paved the way for many economic consequences in rural India. However, failure to bring new technology towards improvement of quality of life is a big neglect. Consequently, it's time to think seriously on this strategic thrust required in rural India, writes **V Mukunda Das**



A review of over last six decades highlights the critical role innovations could have played in rural development, if innovation were given the trust

Rural India, since independence, has undergone several discernible changes. The most prominent amongst these changes are demographic. The demographic transition in rural India paved the way for many economic consequences in rural India. Increase in population contributed to decrease in per capita availability of land. Further, it contributed to increased number of poor in rural India. The derivatives of these manifested in decreasing per capita per family availability of basic facilities impacting on the quality of life in rural India.

We are trying to think aloud the reasons behind innovations, especially innovations

in technology, not being a thrust area in enhancing the quality of life rural India. Therefore, it is time to think seriously on this strategic thrust required in rural India.

GRASSROOT INNOVATION

A review of rural India over the last six decades highlight the critical role innovations could have played in its development, if innovations, especially in technology development, were given thrust as a strategy for enhancing the quality of life of the weaker sections. Rural change, as it has happened, could have been better and better for the weaker sections, if appropriate innovations could have helped them in more than one way. India has spent so many thousands of Crores of rupees



for rural development related activities / schemes. However, improving rural habitats, and related aspects for the betterment of weaker sections were not innovation driven. It is interesting to note that, even now, 46 per cent (source: CSO, Selected Socio-Economic Statistics India, 2006) of rural population (2001) are in villages which has less than 2000 population. This figure was 55 per cent in 1961 and much more in 1951. What has happened to them could have been much better if the governments in power could focus on innovations as a deliberate strategy to improve their quality of life. Even now around 70 per cent (2001 census) of the rural population are in villages which has less than 10000 total population.

EVOLVING TIMES

India's rural milieu and life did not have the benefit of outstanding innovations in the last six decades, though, during this period, across the World, technology has changed the life of human beings in such a way that the World is 'shrinking' through communication and convergence. If the World could progress in developing so many varieties of new technologies through innovative approaches in research and development, why did India not try the same or give the same thrust for technology development for rural India where the gap between quality life and their present life are so wide? The quality of life



could have been much better if appropriate technology could have been developed for enhancing the quality of life of people in rural India. The technology could have been developed for every aspect of rural life including cooking, habitat development, disease diagnosis, water purification, waste recycling, to name a few.

These technological innovations, if thrust upon, could have changed the meaning of life for rural people. When the countries of the world could focus on developing technologies through the help of which even Mars could be explored, why this focus did not occur in India's rural milieu. If one looks at the history of research and development and innovations in technology development in the defense sector all over the world, we can observe that unprecedented technology development occurred. And India spent so many thousands of crores for defense

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purchase every year. On the contrary, if similar thrust, efforts and commitment was initiated in the past for developing technologies for the benefit of weaker sections of rural areas, we would have found our 'companions among Indian citizens' in rural areas having a better life. One can only lament on the stereotyped thinking, lack of focus through policy development that prevented technological innovations in rural India. A time has come to think beyond the present.

MOVING WITH TECHNOLOGY

This is not to mention that technological innovations did not occur at all in India's agriculture sector, which is part of rural India. But there are pockets in India, covering thousands of people, who do not have any equipment to purify contaminated / arsenic water and make it useful for drinking. Is it more difficult than technology for Mars exploration? Similarly, equipments (such as washing machine other washing mechanism) which can help them wash their clothes using technology, which is affordable to poor, has so far not been innovated in rural India. Leave a side this, India could not innovate on ways and means by which habitats which are safe, secure and low cost could be made available to the rural weaker sections of population.

A very interesting observation, based on study across rural India, is that lack of availability of technology for preserving agriculture products at the level of small farmers / marginal farmers in distant (from urban areas) villages. This could have helped



them in saving losses, and thus, reducing poverty. A more noteworthy point is the lack of processing technology at micro level to process fruits which do not have longer shelf life. If scientists can reach out to Mars through technology upgradation, why these efforts of technology development do not focus on such micro processing technology development. This is a question which emphasis on the lack of innovation reaching the most deserving sections of people of rural India. On the one hand when lack of nutrition is a major issue in many parts of rural India, lack of suitable technologies, developed through innovative approaches, could have been identified and made available to resolve these lacunae.

The purpose of the present attempt is to delve into policy deficits in improving the quality of life of weaker sections in rural India through appropriate interventions in technology development suitable to their life style. Such technology development, in the innovative mode, could have happened if we had a concern for those 'rural citizens' of India who, for no fault of theirs, are used as voting machines for Indian democracy. ■

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