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Book Review

Socio-Economic Profile of Rural India, Series II, Volume Five: North and Central India, Edited by Raj Mohini Sethi, Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2011. Pp. xix + 314. Rs. 750.00

The publication is a part of regular studies conducted by the Indian Administration Officer Trainees who undertake detailed village level surveys. The book covers the four states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in North and Central India. The editor has provided a nice summary of the studies on these four states in the introduction chapter. The book brings out the differences in the development profiles of these four states. A progressive land reform policy and institutional sources of credit for productive purpose provided the farmers some protection against the unscrupulous money lenders and created an alternative source of credit for easy loan and helped to face capital intensive risk in Punjab and Haryana. In Himachal Pradesh, even if the surplus land is redistributed among the landless, capital investment and innovative technologies are out of the reach of the poor farmers. In Madhya Pradesh, the farming sector is dominated by absentee landlords; highly skewed land distribution and lack of capital investment resulted in slow agricultural growth and slow improvement in the conditions of rural poor.

The study of the state of Punjab by Sucha Singh Gill provides interesting information about historical background of rural development, social structure of rural Punjab, Panchayati Raj Institutions and rural development, anti-poverty programme and centrally sponsored schemes, rural economic activities and agrarian relations and finally on the main issues of rural development and policy perspectives. All this information is helpful for providing a lead in the experience of green revolution and solve the problem of food grain shortage in the country during the decades of the sixties and the eighties. The development of the state infrastructure in agricultural research and development made a marked contribution to the increase in agricultural production and growth, thereby reducing poverty. In spite of the impressive achievements, the state of Punjab is confronted with acute agrarian crises, high level of unemployment due to non-diversification, decline in economic growth, fast deterioration of social and cultural fabric and rise of social and economic inequalities. Unlike other parts of the country, the state is witnessing marginalisation of the small and marginal farmers and decrease in their numbers because of leasing out, sale and mortgage of land to the large land holders and hence, rural indebtedness. Contrary to the general notion that the farmers are happy and prosperous in Punjab, increasing incidences of farmer's suicides indicate decaying rural social institutions

and absence of other support systems and social capital. The state performance on social and economic parameters is dismally lopsided mainly because of administrative preoccupation with law and order functions, official apathy, lack of political will for meaningful development of the state. In the concluding part, the author has very precisely given certain important issues which require immediate policy attention. These include bold steps to solve the problem of the rural people relating to drugs and intoxication of the rural youths, illegal migration abroad, diversification of agriculture, wide gaps between rural and urban sectors in education and health indicators, integration of agricultural production activities to marketing and processing activities, enactment of new Co-operative Act free from clutches of bureaucracy, establishment of mechanism of Minimum Support Price and procurement for all the crops and creation of storage and agro-processing facilities. Since Punjab is mainly a state having its economy based predominantly on agriculture in the rural sector, concerted efforts are required to be made to reduce the gap between rural and urban areas.

Based on a socio-economic survey of nine villages, Padamvir Singh has done an exhaustive analysis of the changes occurring in the Haryana State in terms of differentials in agriculture, animal husbandry, agrarian structure, socio-economic and demographic indicators, education, health and performance of government interventions such as panchayats. Overall, the state has experienced success in agriculture because of widespread green revolution resulting in increase in productivity and production of major crops of wheat and paddy, and also of milk production because of already available excellent genetic stock of Murrah buffaloes and Haryana cows. The geographic advantage of the state being located serving the national capital region from three sides – north, west and south has helped in the development of state particularly in the creation of secondary and tertiary sector diversification activities. However, the social and cultural ethos remaining mostly orthodox and traditional and parallel functioning of Khap Panchayat have created some hindrance in the improvement in the women and weaker sections of the society. This requires structural changes in the social and economic development programmes and impact analysis of the policies being pursued. Presentation of the study through boxes, charts and tables is very interesting and clear. The policy suggestions regarding the active participation of the villages in the Gram Sabha meetings, formation of self-help groups (SHGs), importance of sanitation for proper health and diversification of crop farming through allied sectors of animal husbandry, horticulture, floriculture, vegetables, food processing etc. are very useful and will help solve the problem of the state in economic and social sectors.

The study by H.R. Sharma and Virender Singh for Himachal Pradesh presents the agroclimatic conditions of the state, trends in population, access to infrastructure facilities, indicators of economic development, growth of state domestic product, land use pattern, area, production and productivity of major crops, crop diversification, land reform measures and land distribution structure, farm and non-farm

employment, facilitating factors, emerging concerns and policy options. The state was considered as less developed as compared to the neighbouring states of Punjab and Haryana. It has been able to transform its socio-economic profile through development strategies considering the geo-physical and agro-climatic conditions of different regions of the state and presents a holistic and balanced growth. The state has been able to reduce social and economic inequalities substantially as evident from the proportion of agricultural labourers to cultivators and also the assets owned by poor households. This happened because of crop diversification and high value crops suited to specific agro-climatic situations and resulting to regeneration of trade, business activities and non-farm activity diversification absorbing the unskilled and skilled labour and boosting the economy in general and rural economy in particular. The effective implementation of land reforms and establishment of institutional back-up along with the infrastructure facilities – roads, electricity, safe drinking water, education and health facilities have helped achieve a remarkable performance of social and demographic indicators – sex ratios, female literacy, fertility and infant mortality and reduction in social inequalities though the regional and inter-district variations in social, economic and infrastructure still exist. The challenges of competition with foreign markets resulting from liberalisation and globalisation can be overcome through expansion of public sector of employment by creating ultramodern facilities for attracting new industries and checking downward slide of states fiscal health. The policy option – promotion of rural small scale industries like handicrafts; continuous technological improvements evolving high yielding disease resistant varieties of high value crops; market infrastructure facilities for high value crops, improvement in grading and standardisation for improving the quality of products and technology for post-harvest loss minimisation; and providing the education to the farmers regarding the immediate threats due to changing economic dispensations - will go a long way in sustaining the socio-economic transformation and crop diversification in the state.

The paper by S.N. Chaudhary presents the profile of Madhya Pradesh representing a poor state of Central India. This describes the region; health and education, agrarian relations; scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, economic activities; anti-poverty and rural development programmes. The period for which study pertains, shows a very dismal picture of the state regarding population living below poverty line (more than 50 per cent), acute landlessness and proportion of marginal farmers (more than 37 per cent), slow distribution of land to the poor, failure of land reforms and very high prevalence of absent landlords (more than 30 per cent). Though the state has a rich wealth of forests, minerals and traditional handicrafts but could not progress satisfactorily because of administrative apathy and lack of political will resulting in unchecked deforestation, non-provision of irrigation facilities, non-introduction of modern technologies and package of practices and faulty or slow implementation of development schemes. This all has resulted in the poor performance of the state in the social indicators – highest infant mortality rate,

third-highest maternal mortality rate, vulnerability of children to preventable diseases (80 per cent) and female literacy rate being much lower than the males. The author has given information on rural development and antipoverty schemes, economic growth and inter-district variations. Though there were 36 IAS Officers trainees who undertook primary level studies at the village level in the state but most of the data, analysis and presentation remain from the secondary sources and from the publications and work of the author.

The four chapters written in this publication on Punjab (Sucha Singh Gill), Haryana (Padmavir Singh), Himachal Pradesh (H.R. Sharma and Virender Kumar) and Madhya Pradesh (S.N. Chaudhary) follow different patterns in their content, analysis, presentation, interpretation and recommendations. This has limited the comparison of different socio-economic parameters of rural sectors of the four states. The data used are mostly for the period earlier than a decade. Since lot of changes have taken place during the last decade or so, the exhaustive analysis and nice interpretation could have been more useful had the publication been brought out earlier as most of the parameters presented have changed and in some cases even drastically. Except the differences in the format of presentation and time delay in publication, all the authors have done excellent job of compilation and synthesis of the village level studies/reports prepared by the Indian Administrative Services Officers Trainees as part of their District Training Programme in four states of North and Central India. The introduction by the Editor (Raj Mohini Sethi) is very lucid and precise and summarises the publication in an excellent manner. The effort of the Director (Padamvir Singh), Co-ordinator (Ashish Vachhani) and the staff of the Centre for Rural Studies, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie and the IAS Officers Trainees who have done the field work at ground level in the villages and prepared the studies reports are praise-worthy for bringing out this very useful and informative publication on *Socio-Economic Profile of Rural India – North and Central India*.

Dehradun.

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