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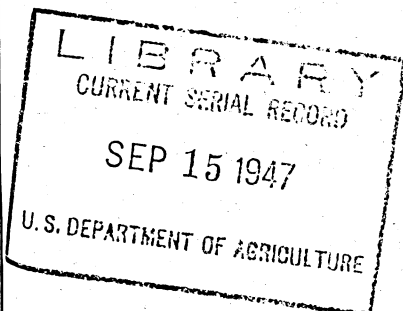
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PROCEEDINGS
of the
SIXTH CONFERENCE
held at Benares, December, 1945.

SUBJECTS

1. T.V.A. Approach and its possibilities in Indian Agriculture.
2. Social Factors in Rural Economy.
3. Costs in relation to size of Farms.
4. Indian Food Policy.



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BOMBAY**

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To promote the investigation, study and improvement of the economic and social conditions of agriculture and rural life through

- (a) periodical conferences for the discussion of problems;
- (b) the publication of papers, separately or collectively; or in a periodical which may be issued under the auspices of the Society;
- (c) co-operation with other institution having similar objects, such as the International Conference of Agricultural Economists and the Indian Economic Association; etc.

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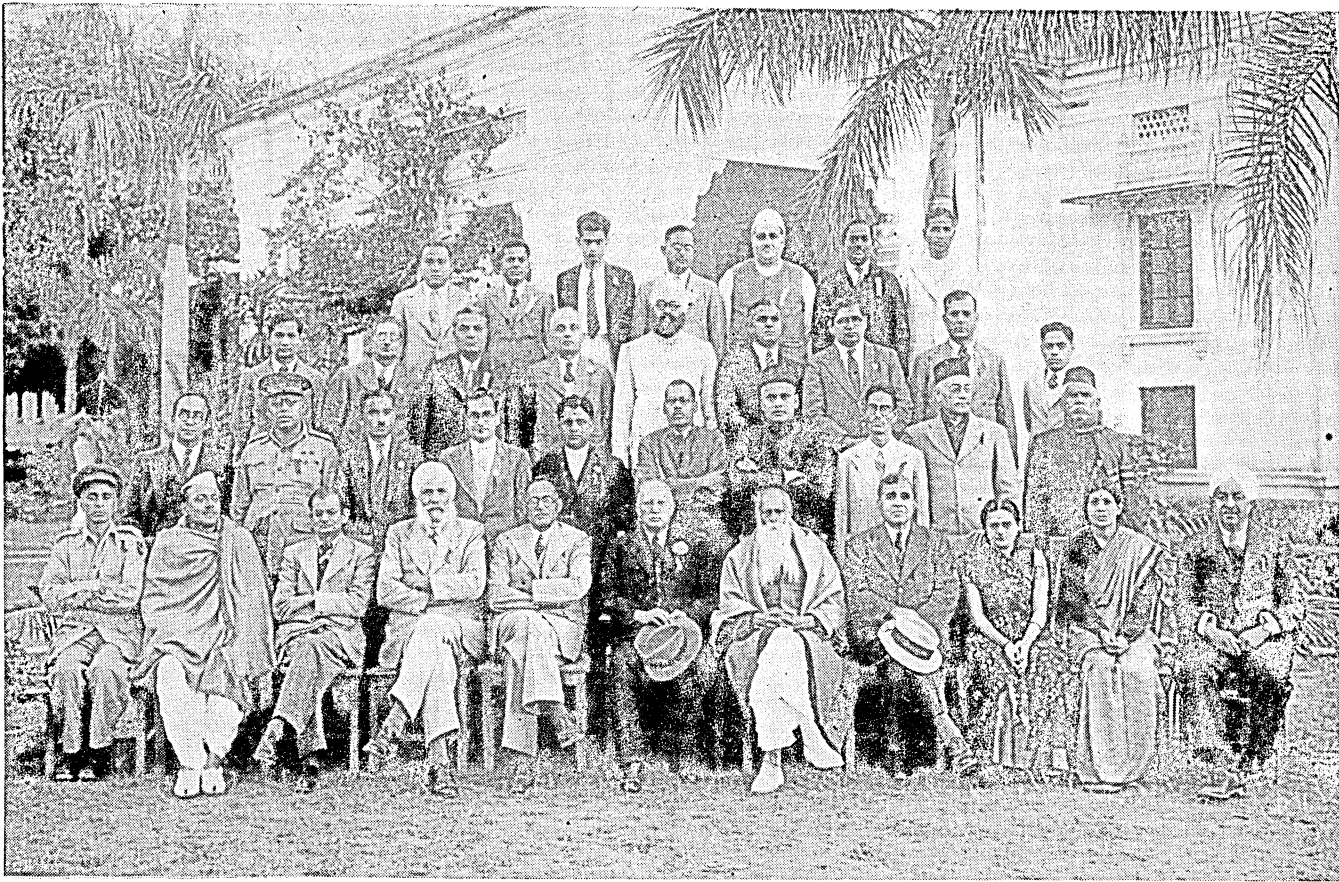
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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL FACTORS IN RURAL ECONOMY

(With reference to rural *Karnatak*)

BY

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Introductory:—

The rural economy of any region is dominated by innumerable social factors. The influence of the social factors is not only profound but in certain spheres of rural life it is regulative and even dictatorial. Important among these factors are the caste system, the rural traditions, the customs, the religious beliefs and superstitions. These factors affect all spheres of economic activity, namely, production, consumption and distribution. The influence of social factors is usually understated or undervalued by the students of Rural Economics. This paper is an attempt just to indicate the influence of these social factors in rural economy.

2. Traditions:—

The rural society is a hierarchy of several castes, each having its own set of customs, beliefs, and sometimes a vocation. But every rural society has a set of traditions and customs which lay down in broad outlines the rules governing the relations between the individuals, between castes, and between economic classes. The relations between the landlord and his tenant, the cultivator and the artisans or the labourers, the moneylender and his debtors, the village official and the public, the host and the guest, the servant and the master are prescribed by the traditions of the village. In those days when the caste was a force which unified its members, the traditions of the village, was force which unified and socialised the different castes and groups of the hierarchy into one social entity.

The rural society can be roughly divided into following economic classes, (1) the landlords (2) the cultivating owners (3) the tenants (4) The labourers (5) the traders and moneylenders (6) the artisans (7) the servants (8) the Harijans (9) the rest. The landlord is usually a Inamdar who received land in the past for some meritorious service. He is usually the prominent person of the village. The artisans are of two types. (1) the agricultural artisans or those who depend upon the agriculturists for their living (2) non-agricultural artisans like the weavers who do not depend exclusively on the cultivators. The servants

class consists of superior servants like the Patil, the Kulkarni and the teacher as also of inferior servants like the domestic servants, the menial servants, and the village servants. The Harijans with all their sub-castes form a group of their own. The relations between these different classes are generally regulated according to customs and traditions. The mode and the amount of remuneration for different forms of labour are also mostly customary.

In rural areas, a person takes his social position according to his relation to land. An owner of a large area occupies a higher status than one with no or small piece of land. Next to caste, land lends status and credit to a family to a larger extent than any other factor. In the economic organisation of the rural areas where agriculture is the mainstay, the owner of the land enjoys a privileged position. He is the producer and the principal employer of labour and of other artisans. As consumers of grain and as employees of the land-owning class the other classes are dependant more or less on the land-owning class. The relations between the land-owning class and other classes are also regulated mostly by customs and traditions.

The relations between the owner of the land and his tenant are governed by the customary land tenures. Every tenure has its own set of rules which define the rights and liabilities of the owner and the tenant in the sphere of production and sharing. When the owner of land leases out his land, he makes an oral settlement regarding the nature of tenure. No contract is signed nor a set of rules framed. The tenant gives a betelnut with a leaf to the owner of land as a mark of confirmation of the contract. This simple ceremony completes the whole procedure of a contract.

When the land has become useless for cultivation on account of the growth of weeds and other shrubs the land is leased out according to Hansan Kaul tenure. The condition of this tenure is that the tenant should cultivate his land and make it fit for cultivation within a stipulated period during which he is not to pay any rent. According to Alu-Palu system of tenure, the tenant receives one-fourth of the produce and has to attend to all manual work and share expenses on manure, weeding with the owner. The owner gets three-fourths of the produce but has to incur all expenditure. Produce is shared in proportion of 2:1 between the tenant and the owner according to Mukupi tenure. The Korpalu or equal sharing tenure is the most prevalent system, so much is the influence of custom that both the parties abide by the customary particulars of the tenure when once they agree upon the kind of tenure.

All the persons who render service to the cultivator in one form or the other during the year are usually paid in kind and that too at the

time of harvest. The recipients of these dues are known as Aygars. The Aygars include among others, the carpenter, the blacksmith, the barber, the washerman, the goat-man, Holeyā or village public servant, the shoe maker, the tailor and the priest. Each Aygar is given a share of the produce. The amount of produce to be given to an Aygar is not fixed by any contract. But as the payments are customary the producer pays every Aygar his dues according to his services. Rarely there is straining of or a break in the relations between the producer and his Aygar on the point of the amount of the dues.

The payments for different forms of labour are also customary and are in kind. The labourers who reap, are paid in the form of particular produce they have reaped. For reaping, the hours of work for the labourer are not fixed. The wages are also not settled. The cultivator simply invites a leader to come with his group of labourers to reap the fields. There is no talk about payments because in most cases it is customary. For reaping Jowar crop, a labourer is paid one or two sheaves according to local custom, for every fifty sheaves. The other custom is to pay out to the labourers an arbitrary share in the produce: the size of the share depending upon the cultivator and the nature of the harvest. The group of labourers, then, shares the produce equally among themselves. In case of cotton-harvesting, which is usually done by women, the group of women labourers who pick cotton are paid $\frac{1}{8}$ or $\frac{1}{12}$ th of the produce according to local custom. The payment for wheat harvesting is also in terms of sheaves or about $\frac{1}{20}$ th of the produce according to custom. In the harvesting of other crops like gram, chilly, etc., payments are all customary. For other forms of labour like ploughing, weeding, threshing, manuring, etc., payments are made in Jowar or Bajari at a rate of two seers or three seers per day according to custom. The custom, thus has the direct influence on the amount of wages paid for labour. The forces of demand and supply play but a subsidiary role in determining wages. The scarcity or abundance of labour during a particular day or season do not affect the customary rates of wages very much. As wages are in kind, the prices of commodities do not materially affect the return which labour gets. When the war broke out, there was no appreciable rise in wages except in the irrigated region, for a few years. Even today, it is only in the irrigated regions where many crops like sugar are raised, the payments for labour are made in cash and wages vary according to demand and supply. In other areas the system of customary payments prevails.

Traditions also regulated the relations between the creditor and debtors. The moneylending class was not looked upon as an exploiting class as at present. His services were recognized by the society and it

was considered a sin if the debtor did not repay. Even to this day, debtors as a class consider it their holy duty to repay the dues of the moneylender. As this was the social attitude, defaults were few and litigation was nil. At the same time, the lending class could not bleed or harass the debtors as it was against the social etiquette. There were also certain restrictions on the rates of interest. When the lendings were in kind 25 per cent interest was charged. This system was called "Savaki". On account of these factors the relations between the two classes were harmonious. But now, these classes view each other with suspicion.

The 'noblesse oblige' was the principle underlying most of the rural traditions. Each class considered that it had certain duties to perform. Special responsibilities were attached to special rights. In short, the traditions formed a socializing force and conduced to harmony and well-being in rural areas. On account of the impact of the western civilization, many of the healthy traditions of the past are becoming extinct without any modern substitutes.

The Caste System

The caste system is in vogue in India since ancient times. Originally, a caste was a broad group of families which inter-married and interdined and some times, followed the same occupation. It had the advantage of establishing a bond of brotherhood in a larger group of families. It was thus a socializing force in the rural society of the past which always lived under the threat of political and religious encroachment of an alien group. But the caste which was a cohesive group of individuals who intermarried and interdined degenerated and has now yielded place to a multiplicity of communal groups. The classification of population according to castes as given in the census and other reports is misleading because the castes mentioned therein are only the names of the original castes from which now several communal groups have come into existence. The caste has ceased to be an intermarrying group. Members of the same castes, sometimes, do not even interdine unless they belong to the same communal group. Not only that, each group looks down upon the other.

The Brahmins who are supposed to form a progressive caste can be given as an illustration. In Karnatak there are following important communal groups among the Brahmins:—the Deshastha, the Konkanstha, the Karhade, the Govardhan, the Havik, the Saraswat, the Telang and The Daivadnya. Some of the groups intermarry. Each group generally considers itself superior to the other group. If a Deshastha Brahmin goes to Kanara, a Havik would not allow him to take his seat

in his line at the time of his meals. If he is very orthodox, he would not take the water touched by the Deshastha. The lady of the house would not touch the plate in which the guest has dined. The same treatment is given to a Havik Brahmin if he goes to Dharwar District, as a guest of a Deshastha Brahmin. Among the Deshasthas themselves, a Vaishnava will consider himself superior to a Shaivite and would not like to have marriage relations with him. For purposes of marriage, there are sub-groups within a group. Among the Deshasthas there are the Shaivas and the Vaishnavas, then again, there are Rugvedis, the Yajurvedies, the Apasthabhas, the Kanvas and the Madhyandins. Among Haviks there are Kots and other Haviks. Among the Saraswats, which is a tiny and supposed to be the most advanced community, there are five groups which do not inter-marry ordinarily.

These communal groups are more numerous in the lower classes which are less advanced. On an average, there is one communal group for about 700-800 families.

A study of the degeneration of the caste into communal groups, reveals that disintegration has taken place on most artificial and arbitrary grounds. When some members of a caste emigrated to a new place, they formed a new communal group. Among the lower castes like the Gurus, The Kunbis, The Gollas, the communal groups are based on the habitat. The religious leaders or the conversion movements are also responsible for hastening the process of disintegration. In the Karnatak the Lingayatism professed to do away with communal groups and to unify all under one banner of Basava. But experience showed that it only multiplied the existing number of communal groups. It divided about 40 groups like the Ghanig, The Agasa, The Nhavi, The Hugar, and the Kurba, into the converted and the unconverted. Among the Lingayats also, there are more than 20 subsects which do not intermarry. Even a change in a custom or the diet is found sufficient for forming a new group. Among the Kurubas, the Hatti Kankans wear a bracelet of cotton during marriage ceremonies and the Unni Kankans wear one made from wool. The Birads who eschewed flesh formed a new group of the Bile Birads as distinct from the old group which came to be called Kare Birads. The Ghanigs who disallowed widow remarriage formed a new group of Sajjan Ghanigs as against the Kare-Kula. These instances can be multiplied. This integration of the caste has led to the disruption of the village community into tiny communal groups. The growth of these groups has seen a gradual decay of the unifying forces of the village and have at the same time ushered in separatist and isolationist tendencies.

Caste and Individual Liberty

A person is supposed to belong to the same caste as that of his parents. He has to continue in that caste and abide by all its customs and traditions. He has to follow the profession of his father if he happens to belong to a functional caste. He has no choice to choose his caste, his vocation, or his mode of living. It is determined for him at the time of birth only, by the caste system. He has not the liberty of choosing even the kind of food. If he is born in a Brahmin family he cannot taste flesh though it may agree with his health. The caste does not allow the individual to develop his personality in the light of his latent faculties. A man has to seek his fortunes in the framework set by his caste. A person who aspires for individual liberty is looked down upon with ostracism and is treated with contempt. No individual dares to assert his rights as against his caste through the fear of the censure of his caste-men. Because a man deserted by his castemen has no status or standing in the social life. He is like an orphan. So everybody chooses the lesser evil of staying within the caste and conforming his behaviour to the customs of the caste. In a sense, the caste system in India has stifled individual liberty of action to a larger extent than the alien political domination.

Caste and Inequality

As the individual is a part and parcel of his caste, his relations with other individuals are determined by the customs and the traditions of that society which regulate the relations between castes. The whole community is a communal hierarchy in which each caste is assigned its place. Thus there are some castes which are superior and some which are inferior. There are other castes who take their position in between the two groups of inferior and superior castes. Superiority may be in respect of marriage, meals or touchability. At one end of the hierarchy, there is the superior caste of Brahmins and at the other end there are the untouchables. Some of the intermediate castes between themselves usually eat together and touch each other but do not intermarry. Among the intermediate castes also, some consider themselves slightly superior to others. So an individual becomes superior or inferior as soon as he is born according to the status of his caste. This system has perpetuated inequality among individuals on such an accidental basis as birth. In this system, innate or acquired ability contributes but little to determine the status of a person.

This inequality can be noticed in the communal groups of a caste also. Some communal groups are supposed to be superior to others in the same caste. The members of the superior group marry the girls be-

longing to the inferior group but do not give their daughters in marriage to the members of that group. Among the Lingayats, the Banajigs are hypergamous, Panchamasalis and the Vaders among the Kurbas are hypergamous to the other Kurbas. Hypergamous—wherever it exists, is born of the notion that some communal group is superior to some other. In other castes wherein the status of a communal group in relation to others is not decided by custom, each group claims a doubtful or disputed superiority over other groups. This superiority complex of some communal groups exists in every caste. To take only one example of the untouchables, it can be seen that there are eight sub-divisions among them, namely the Holey, the Chelvadis, the Samgar, the Dhor, the Bhangi, the Mang, the Lad, the Holedasa. Not knowing that there was a group of untouchables among the untouchables, one District Local Board constructed a well in a village for untouchables. As this well was touched by a few Holedasas, it was not at all used by other Harijans. This example just illustrates to what extent the caste system has created superiority and inferiority complexes in the rural society. The caste is a negation of the principle of equality. Equality of rights in the political sphere will have no meaning if inequality in a communal group in the village, is allowed and tolerated.

Caste and Communalism

Inequality between the castes has recently given birth to a new menace, namely communalism. Favouritism to the member of the same group and the animosity of other groups characterizes this new spirit. Slowly it is gaining ground and is fostered by some interested leaders, and has given rise to communal cliques in the social and political spheres of rural society. The clique in power tries to retain power within itself to the exclusion of other persons or communities of the village. It is not unusual to find that the members of the same communal clique are in power at the same time in the village Panchayat, the village Co-operative Credit Society, and other activities or institutions of the village. Communalism may spread unchecked unless the notions of caste superiority are done away with.

Caste and Economic Classes

In rural areas there are no economic classes as they are understood in economics. There is no class organization and no class consciousness. The individual has no option to choose his occupation or the economic class. He has to follow the profession followed by or allowed by his caste. At best, castes can be grouped into certain economic groups according to the vocation of its members. Some economic activities are

considered as 'open-to-all' and there are some vocations which are considered as the caste-vocations. Agriculture is considered an 'open-to-all' occupation. Though land is in the hands of a few castes like the Brahmins, the Marathas and the Lingayats, other castes can also cultivate lands or do agricultural labour. The cultivators' class of Rural Karnatak consists of the Pancham Salis, the Marathas, the Uppars, the Chachtris, the Raddis, the Hanbars, and a host of other castes. As each caste thinks in terms of its members, even to the detriment of the interests of other castes, there can be no class organization or consciousness which are pre-requisites to the existence of an economic class. In the non-agricultural vocations where some skill and training is needed, the professions are in the hands of some groups which are functional castes. For each industry or vocation there are some particular castes whose names are the same as those of their vocations. Thus there are the Navi, or the barber caste, the Kammar, or ironsmith caste, the Badig, or carpenter caste, the Agasha or washer-man caste, etc. These vocations are the monopoly of the castes concerned. No individual who does not belong to this caste can take to this profession. The functional castes have the advantage in maintaining the hereditary skill and experience in a rural craft. This advantage was real in days of old, when the parent was the only teacher and the home the only training college. At present these functional castes which are too slow to adapt themselves to the changing conditions, have been partly responsible for the decay of the rural industries. With the opening up of the training institutions in different branches of industries there is no need for training at home now.

Most of the functional castes have for their occupation a simple craft or division of labour which has no scope for development. In many cases the subdivision is carried too far. Among the Vaddars, a class of labourers, there are the Bandi-Vaddars or those that carry earth or stone in a cart, the Mann-Vaddars or those who dig earth and Kala-Vaddars or those who blow up or break stones into pieces. A Kala-Vaddar would starve and perish but would not carry stone in a cart or dig earth from the ground. Among the Harijans, the Holey a removes the hides from the dead animals, the Dhor tans them and the Samagar prepares shoes out of them. Samagar even when he has no work would not do the work done by the other two groups. In the functional castes class consciousness exists in the form of caste consciousness. But there can be no class organization as these castes are generally based on vocations with limited scope.

On the whole the caste system is an impediment to a healthy growth of a class organization.

Caste and Marriage

It was pointed out that an endogamous group consists of 700-800 families. The female population which is already disproportionate to the male population is unevenly distributed in different endogamous groups, so much so, that in every group it is very difficult to find a suitable match for a boy or a girl. The educated, in particular find it impossible to get educated girls.

Customs and Expenditure

Next to caste, customs exercise great influence in the rural economy. The customs may be broadly divided into, caste-customs, the religious customs and social or general customs. Whatever may be the kind of custom they are like the laws of the society and abided by as such. These customs also affect all aspects of their life and many of their economic activities. The religious customs prescribe the number of feast and fast days and the manner of observing them. They even prescribe the kind of dish to be prepared. An individual has no liberty to regulate his expenditure according to the equi-marginal theory of expenditure.

Customs and Indebtedness

There is a good deal of co-relation between custom and rural indebtedness. The debts in rural areas are in the form of small borrowings usually in kind, current debts for crop finance and other types of short-term and long-term debts. The first two kinds of debts do not run into overdues, as they are paid off at the time of the next harvest. It is the third kind of debt that is usually not paid back and creates a permanent encumbrance on the borrower. If the objects of these borrowings are analysed it would be seen that except in very few cases, all these debts have been incurred for ceremonies like marriage, bed-ceremony, birth-ceremony, or death ceremony. According to Sir Manilal Nanavati and Prof. Anjaria, 50 per cent of the rural indebtedness is due to expenditure on these ceremonies. In certain areas this percentage is as high as 75. Every caste and religion have customs which regulate or prescribe the minimum amount and mode of expenditure at the time of different ceremonies, connected with birth, marriage and death. A member of that caste has to spend this amount whether he has this amount or not. As the rural budgets are not usually of a surplus nature, borrowings are resorted to. Many economists scoff at the villagers for unnecessarily spending or wasting amounts on ceremonies. Really speaking the individual is not at fault here. It is the social customs which tyrannise the individual into spending these amounts. The individual who is considered foolish for his ways of spending, really deserves all our sympathy.

as he has to incur debts not infrequently against his will or wish. In fact, the individual is perfectly wise and justified in spending this amount as long as the social values of spending on ceremonies remain unchanged as they are.

Beliefs and Superstitions

There are certain beliefs which are held in common in the rural areas that greatly influence the life of the rural people. Some of these beliefs are those that are handed down by posterity; some others are induced by circumstances and not a few born of the logic of the rural man. The rural man has his own ways of arguing. Usually his conclusions are based on faulty premises. He mistakes effect for the cause and vice versa. He interprets the perceptions in the light of his traditional beliefs. He looks at every new reform with suspicions under the belief that old is gold and that new things should be avoided. Even in the matter of agricultural improvement cultivators were not prepared to use oil-cake manure. One year, few adventurous people of a village were induced by the officers of the Agricultural Department to use manure and for want of rains the crops failed that year. The whole village jumped to the conclusion that crops failed because of the use of manure. In another village a stud bull was maintained in an enclosure for the use of village cows. One cow tried to leap over the fence and got its leg maimed. A conclusion was drawn by the villagers that if the cows are sent to the stud bull their legs get maimed. This way of arguing is very common. There are three or certain beliefs about omens. Palmistry and astrology are generally believed in. Usually when a person wants to undertake anything new, he consults the astrologer whether he has success in it. The priest is consulted regarding the auspicious hour of commencing work. Among all beliefs the fatalistic belief naturally affects rural progress.

Fatalism as a philosophy of despair has its utility but in usual practice it discourages action and enterprise. Fatalism still holds sway in the rural areas and though there is the theory of Karma or action, it is not imbibed by the village folk. Then the belief that marriage is a necessity and that children are God's creation and gifts is creating formidable difficulties in the way of controlling births.

Illiteracy

The extent and the adverse effects of illiteracy are too well-known to be discussed here.

Conclusion

It may thus be seen that social factors exercise more influence than economic laws. This fact should be recognised and borne in mind while evolving any scheme of rural reconstruction.