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CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL SOCIETY

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RURAL SOCIETY

- Rural society means a society that lives in villages and is dependent on the natural environment.
- The rural economy depends **predominantly on agriculture**.
- Rural societies are rich in **culture and traditions**.
- It is essential **for a banker** to understand the **basic structure of rural society**.
- Panchayati raj has been playing an important role in the development of villages and a banker has to **interact with the Panchayats for all developmental activities**.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social Stratification refers to a society's **categorization of its people into groups based on socio-economic factors** like wealth, income, race, education, gender, occupations, social status, or derived power.

Rural Structure

- The rural structure is constituted by family, kinship, caste, stratification, power, and religion.
- Divisions of labor and organic unity of the village **make it possible for everyone to perform the role assigned to him**.
- This is expected to result in mutual help and co-operation.
- The village is also an arena of conflict.
- It has its own traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and social mobilization.

Unit of Development

- The village is a unit of development and has several **formal and statutory institutions** like the **village water and sanitation committee**.
- **Political parties** have their agents in many villages, and large villages have party offices also.
- The village is not a **corporate group, but it has an identity, fixed limits (revenue and forest), village commons (Nistar land), and shared resources like wells and tanks**.
- It may also have temples, mosques, churches, and gurdwaras, open to all or to believers only.

Caste Structure

- Each village has several Jati segments, which have separate ties in some spheres.
- But there are also neighborhood ties, and personal and family friendships.
- Three aspects of inter-jati and interpersonal relations within the village merit special consideration;
 1. **the interdependence of Jatis through the exchange of specialized occupational services;**
 2. **the functioning of the village panchayat in addition to Jati panchayats; and**
 3. **the factional politics of the village.**
- Traditionally most Jatis have some craft or occupation linked to them. If a **village does not have a full complement of services rendering Jatis, it seeks Jajmani relations with those neighboring villages**. Kinship ties also extended to several villages, near and distant, and also to towns.

- in several regions there are inter-village jati panchayats such as the Misl in Punjab, the Khap in western Uttar Pradesh, and the Kudaria in northern Madhya Pradesh.
- Important issues concerning the Jati and serious disputes are taken up for consideration in these bodies.

Traditional Panchayats

- The villages used to have two kinds of panchayats - a Jati panchayat and a village panchayat.
- If the number of households belonging to a particular Jati was small, they generally linked up with another nearby village.
- In the village panchayats, elders from nearly all Jatis were represented. The sarpanch (i.e., headman) held office either on a hereditary basis or was elected by consensus.
- **The Jati panchayats used to hear property and family disputes and the village panchayats disputes between two or more Jatis or when the matter was so serious that it was likely to lower the prestige of the village.**
- To these were added statutory panchayats after independence. Some states also had statutory judicial panchayats - **Nyaya Panchayats - to administer quick and cheap justice in minor cases.**
- The traditional panchayats are now not as strong as they once were. Occasional conflicts have been reported between traditional and statutory panchayats.

Factionalism

- A Faction within a group or political party may include fragmented sub-faction, “parties within a party” which may be referred to as power blocs, or voting blocs.

- Members of the faction band together as a way of achieving these goals and advancing their agenda and position within an organization.

Dominance

In different regions, some Jatis came to be dominant landowners – for example,

- the Jats in the Punjab and Haryana;
- the Jats and the Rajputs in western UP;
- the Bhumihars and Rajputs in Bihar;
- the Patidars in Gujarat, the Reddys, Velams, and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh, and the Vokkaligas and Lingayats in Karnataka.

Various influences

- The effect of migration of an effective working population on the rural society has changed the rural structure.
- The strong bonds of family, kinship, and castes did not remain static and stable.
- Fortunes of families and castes have changed because of political changes.
- The spread of education and new socio-cultural values influenced by it have also brought about changes.

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

The major local institutions in rural areas are gram panchayat and, primary agricultural credit societies.

Panchayati Raj Institutions

- Restructuring of Panchayat Raj was introduced in **1958** at the recommendation of the **Balwantray G. Mehta Committee**.
- The Government of India concurred with the fundamentals of Panchayat Raj; a **three-tier structure including Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Parishad**.

Gram Panchayat

- The powers and functions of Gram Panchayats are broadly similar throughout the country.
- Gram Panchayat is the first tier in the Panchayat Raj system.
- The president (sarpanch) of the Gram Panchayat is elected directly or he is elected by the members of the Panchayat from amongst themselves.

Duties of Gram Panchayat

- The main task of Gram Panchayat is to develop and maintain the infrastructure of the village including water supply, health, and lighting arrangements.
- Supervision of primary schools.
- Welfare of backward classes, and collection and maintenance of statistics.
- It will act as the agent of panchayat Samiti in executing any schemes of development or other activities.

Panchayat Samiti - Intermediate Tier

The intermediate tier generally comprises the following categories of members:

1. Sarpanch of panchayats (ex-officio)
2. local MPs, MLAs, and MLCs,

3. persons representing women, scheduled castes, and tribes who are co-opted and whose memberships are reserved
 4. person; representing municipalities and co-operatives and such organizations.
- The panchayat Samiti operates through **its statutory committees**, dealing with production programs, social welfare, co-operatives, cottage industries, education, rural water supply, health and sanitation, communication and other allied subjects, and finance, taxation, and administration.

Resources of Panchayat Samiti

- Panchayat Samiti does not have its own resources.
- Their resources mainly consist of a share in the land or local cess and duty on transfers of property, Community Development grants, and funds allotted by the state government to Zilla Parishad for specific schemes.

Zilla Parishad - District Level Body

- This top-tier Panchayat Raj generally comprises the following categories of members; presidents of panchayat Samiti, local MPs, MLAs, and MLCs, persons representing women, and scheduled caste and tribes' representatives of co-operative societies and municipalities.
- Its developmental activities are; minor irrigation works, vocational schools, village industries, sanitation, and public health among others.
- All matters relating to Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti are under its supervision.

Amendment of Constitution

The main characteristics of the 73rd amendment 1992 to the constitution are as follows:

- All states to have a Gram Sabha in each village comprising all eligible voters in the village to which the panchayat will be accountable.
- The states to have a three-tier Panchayat Raj system (except the states whose population is less than 20,00,000) - Panchayats at the village, intermediate, and district levels.
- All the members of village panchayats, intermediate panchayats, and district panchayats **to be chosen by direct election**, and the method of election of the chairperson of the village panchayat to be decided by the **state Government**; chairperson of intermediate panchayats and district panchayat to be elected indirectly by the members from amongst the elected members only.
- Compulsory periodic **elections to be held every five years** under the supervision, direction, and control of the State Election Commission/State Election Commissioner and were superseded in the mid-term, a mid-term election to be held within six months. Of the total seats in Panchayati Raj bodies, **one-third are reserved for women. For SCs/ STs, seats are to be reserved according to the proportion of the population.**

Finances

- Panchayat Raj bodies receive finances from the **state Government in the form of grants.**
- They can also earn by **imposing taxes, tolls, and fees on the commodities** falling within their purview.
- **Every five years the state Finance Commission reviews the financial position of panchayats** and recommends principles governing the distribution of taxes and grants-in-aid to Panchayat Raj bodies.

- The state legislature makes laws for the maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and audits such accounts.

Duties

- Panchayat Raj bodies prepare plans for **economic development, social justice, and social welfare** and,
- subjects enumerated in the Eleventh Schedule relating to **agriculture, rural housing, drinking water, roads, waterways, rural electrification, adult and non-formal education, health and sanitation, public distribution system and community assets.**