

IRRIGATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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In the growing mass of literature on 'Rural Development,' an in-depth study on the role of irrigation in rural development is like a whiff of fresh air emanating from the wet irrigated lands and rich crops that awaken the reader to the ground realities of an irrigated region. Brought out by the Institute of Rural Eco-development, this monograph is not the first publication of the Institute that has set for itself the task of promoting rural development through a series of analytical studies. A number of monographs have preceded the one being reviewed here, all aimed at bringing out a clear picture of rural development in the Middle Ganga plain.

Starting with a conceptual background where the earlier studies of the impact of irrigation in different command areas have been reviewed, the author takes us to micro studies of a few selected villages through a sequence that incorporates the extension of irrigation facilities and their impact, access to irrigation — universal or partial — followed by observations on management and planning of the irrigation system. The history of development or irrigation in the **Saryupar** plain, specifically Deoria district of eastern U. P., is virtually the history of irrigation in much of the middle Ganga plain. The era of slight irrigation, arrival of sugarcane and sugarcane factories, the post-independence effort of the State Govt. in installing tube wells, and the proliferation of private tubewells and pumping sets, is a familiar pattern common to almost all districts of the mid-Gangetic plain. A very serious question related to the colonial history which the author could have

raised and tried to answer is: Why the colonial rulers showed a lack of interest in the development of ground water irrigation, since pump technology was known to the British and it was also known that the Ganga plain has a huge reservoir of ground water? The peasantry in the north Indian plains, as elsewhere, was left to toil for months with their leather buckets and persian wheels using draft cattle as a source of energy, irrigating in the process a very meagre acreage.

The impact of irrigation is well documented in the monograph. It is abundantly positive as seen in the increase in cropping intensity and the yields of most irrigated crops. The phenomenal increase in the yield of rice from 5 to 16 quintals/hectare and of wheat from 4 to 20 quintals/hectare cannot escape the attention of even a casual reader. Dr. Singh is so convinced of the benefits of irrigation that he thinks of irrigation as a 'Catalyst for rural development since it has served to insulate agriculture against drought.. Surprisingly, he hardly thinks of the potential negative consequences, while himself admitting the tendency of monoculture which may at some date bring disaster. A mention of water logging (pp. 120, 123, 124) and associated problems needed greater elaboration and warning of the possible risks.

'Access to irrigation' is a significant investigation. This throws light on the extent to which large medium and small holdings benefit. In canal irrigated areas, the qualitative discussion of this problem concludes that the small land holders have to fall in line with the big land owners in their choice of crops, and are

often the last ones to get irrigation benefit. The uneven distribution of the benefit of irrigation, related to land ownership, is emphasized in the statement that the benefit of whatever rise in productivity there has been, accrued only to the medium and big farmers who constitute only a small fraction (roughly 20%) of the farming community (p. 119). This stands in sharp contrast to an earlier statement where the author says, 'irrigation can be regarded as a big social force that goes to reduce the gap between the poor and the rich evening (out) the inequality arising out of uneven distribution of land (p. 86).' Based on his field study, that he has do creditably executed, one expects the author to take a definite stand in his findings.

Singh has a very clear view of the bureaucratic indifference and feels that the lift irrigation has a decisive advantage over flow irrigation with less of management problems. The importance of conjunctive irrigation is stressed to relieve

the canal irrigated areas of some of their problems of over-irrigation. The book closes with a general perspective on rural development including development of infrastructure like roads, promotion of growth centres and the agro-industrial development.

The monograph fulfills its purpose in acquainting the reader with the role of irrigation in rural development in the middle Ganga plain. The organization of the book is well thought of, and a pleasant surprise is a complete elimination of orthographical errors. In a book of this kind one would have liked to be helped by a subject index at the end. Some of the words like *warabandi* and *chack* could have been italicised to suggest their vernacular origin. The book deserved a better quality paper. Yet, here is a book that discusses the ground realities and not the pre-conceived notions, and that is the merit of the book.

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