

CHANGE IN RURAL ECONOMY AND SOCIETY AROUND THE MEDIUM SIZE TOWNS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi often said that India lives in her villages. Two out of three Indians still live in the villages even at the end of second decade of 21st century. The traditional village society of Pre-independence India has experienced a lot of change in economy and social interaction through the seven decades of national planning. A strategic change has occurred from 1980s with the success of Green Revolution. Liberalization of economy is another landmark to change the Indian villages with the preponderance of non-agrarian economy. Therefore, emerging village economy and society has attracted the global attention especially among the developing nations. It has great significance for a country like India where majority of the population (around 68.5%, according to census, 2011) live in rural areas. The new economy and culture of post 1990s by dint of liberalization and globalization has brought up techno-economic backlash that has waved the traditional society and economy of Indian villages from the very beginning of the 21st century through the concept of PURA. With this new economy and techno-centrism traditional agrarian economy has experienced a wider change, resulting into newer diversity in rural economy which has a great reliance on non-primary activity, leading a gradual change. Earlier traditions are gradually disappearing.

Keywords: Village Society, Agrarian Economy, Socio-economic Transformation, Techno-economic backlash, Globalization

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi often said that India lives in her villages. Two out of three Indians still live in villages even at the end of second decade of 21st century which is rapidly experiencing change from late 1980s. Therefore, emerging village economy and society has attracted the global attention especially among the developing nations. Village studies, once an important mode of research (Harris et. al, 2010) has largely been neglected in India in the early plan period that has

got new momentum after Green Revolution. Researches on rural economy and village society (Jodhka, 2014) in India now are getting newer dimension and dynamic outlook due to its rapid change from traditional economy and historical social relation to a new form of village society by dint of economic planning, structural and infrastructural change as well as institutional reforms, technological input and most obviously the modernization (Boyce, 1987). India is predominantly a rural society constituting more than two third of its total population; though over the years contributions of agriculture and allied activities to the national income have been steadily falling with the consequent rise in the shares of non-farm income. It is agriculture and allied activities which still provide employment and income to a substantial segment of the rural workforce (Rao et. al., 2003). During the Post-Independence period, rural India had absorbed the impact of institutional, structural, and technological improvements (Boyce, 1987) leading to multifaceted changes and transformations of rural economy though it was not possible to bring change beyond the traditional society. Green Revolution is a major watershed in changing rural economy. Mr. Harish Manwani, Chairman, Hindustan Unilever Limited delivered a speech (July, 2012) at the Annual General Meeting recently on Rural India and how it is emerging as a powerhouse said that Green Revolution propelled the food grain production from a mere 50 million tonnes to 245 million tonnes in 2010-11. GDP per agricultural worker is 75% higher in real terms. Today, as much as 40% of India's total consumption is accounted for by rural India. But post-nineties liberal economy with its subsequent change economic structure and process by the blessings of GATT agreement and rejuvenated market economy have deconstructed rural economy as well as social relation with a remarkable change. New liberal economy has prompted economic growth and new form of social relation by communication technology and mass media. This new village economy has initiated new mode interaction beyond the conventional kin-caste-creed relation.

All those new input in rural economy has rendered rapid success through PURA (*Provision of Urban Amenities into Rural Area*).by which land based rural economy is gradually shifting to non-land based economy with growing mobility and dynamic social relation especially in the large prosperous villages. The transition in composition of output and occupation from agriculture to more productive non-farm sectors is now considered as an important source of economic growth and transformation in rural and total economy (Chand, 2017). As a result, progressive change has occurred in asset-holding positions of different castes and classes, broadening of peoples' perspectives due to expansion of contacts and communications, growth and diversification of infrastructural facilities and also socio-cultural aspects of village livelihood. Villages therefore are now more dynamic due to increasing rural-urban interaction. Availability of urban amenities has remarkably developed within the last fifteen years or so resulting reduced rate of permanent migration towards nearby urban centres. Thus, the study of

changing perspective of village economy and emergence of new rural society are important in the perspective of social change.

TRANSITION IN VILLAGE ECONOMY OF WEST BENGAL

It is clear that Indian village is undergoing major changes, not only economically, but culturally also (Gupta, D. 2014). During the last 72 years after independence the nation has witnessed considerable changes in the social sector too. Like India, agriculture is perhaps the most important sources of livelihood for majority of rural population in West Bengal even today.

Before independence non-agricultural occupations like carpentry, barberry, clay modelling, Black smithy, small trading, jewellery making etc were the means of livelihood for many household in regard to self sufficiency of village economy but land base was the driving force of village economy and culture. Independence from colonial rule in 1947 in many ways marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of rural society and agrarian economy (Jodhka, 2014). With the marginal success in agriculture after two plan periods majority of the caste people do not exclusively carry out either the traditional occupation or the secular options rather in the mid-way of two (Sharma, 1968). Thus the idea of development through 'trickle down force' was obstructed and the planner urged for target group oriented programme through IRDP, DADP, HADP etc. Apart from some specific success, agriculture was facing stagnation before 1970s in India and 1980 in West Bengal.

In contrast to earlier period, post-1977 has witnessed moderately progressive land reforms and formalization of democratically elected Govt. DVC and other big dam projects completed within 1970s, enhanced the scope for double cropping. Green Revolution and land reforms and canal irrigation occurred side by side in this state but the fear of losing land induced many potential losers to sell or rearrange their lands in such a way that they can be escaped from legislation a (Bayers, 1974). With the change of political ideology due to the emergence of proletariat in West Bengal from 1977 where backward class people have the opportunity to act as the driver of mainstream society, gradual changes in land reform, productivity, agricultural technology etc. Such a change in social structure in village level has brought out discernible impact on occupational structure in village society. The emergence of backward castes took place in most of the villages (Vaddiraju, 1999) roughly from 1980s in west Bengal.

Green revolution emerged as the illuminated candle with significant change in technological adaptation, input and output in agriculture, market orientation of cereals and especially solving the problem of food scarcity. But social structure or poverty rarely got any significant change. Land reforms also became the most critical debate in the idea of national and state planning. In the absence of political will (Joshi, 1976); land reforms could succeed only in regions where the

peasantry was politically mobilized as it was found to occur in West Bengal under Left Front regime (Bose, 1999). In an interview with a business magazine in July, 1994 the chief minister of the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Joti Basu boasted about this impressive achievement and had no hesitation in identifying its cause. Our land reforms he asserted are responsible for it (ibid). As 40-1980 was different. Gazdar and Sengupta (1999) report that there was a significant acceleration in the agricultural growth rate in West Bengal during the decade of 1981-82 to 1990-91. The food grain in West Bengal had grown by 403-6.5 percent per annum between the early 1980s and early 1990s. The situation during the period of 1940s-1980s was quite different. Stagnation in agriculture was the most reliable picture which was explained by Boyce (1987) as the role of agrarian structure, in particular the distribution of owned land and other assets that lead to prolonged stagnation.

Village economy thus got the momentum with the new form of structural reform in agricultural production. But village economy did not clutch out from land based production system. Thus, though the stagnation was faded out, there was no substantial change in economic basis of social interaction. Liberal economy of early 1990s put a new jerk both in economic function and social interaction.

Modernization in this regard has discernible impact in Indian society, especially after 1990s with the progressive change in trade, transport and mass media mainly in the urban areas. Rural areas are also experiencing stupendous change from eighties by the blessings of Green revolution with the concomitant change in agricultural technology, high productivity, market relation in agricultural product etc. Under such changes the basic denominator of rural economy, the land and land dependency of rural society was perceptibly changed. With the gradual changes in land reform, productivity, agricultural technology and political ideology were changed with the emergence of proletariat in Bengal where backward class people have the opportunity to act as the driver of mainstream society. Such a change in social structure in village level has brought out discernible impact on occupational structure in village society. The new economy and culture of post 1990s by dint of liberalization and globalization has brought up techno-economic backlash that has waded the traditional society and economy of Indian villages from the very beginning of the 21st century, through the concept of PURA. With this new economy and technocentrism traditional primary or agrarian economy has experienced a wider change, resulting into newer diversity in economy which has a great reliance on non-primary activity, leading a gradual change. Earlier traditions are gradually disappearing.

OBJECTIVES

The study primarily aims at focusing the trend of changing nature and patterns of Indian villages. Therefore, the major objectives of the study include the following:

1. To find out how and why the selected villages are emerged as new rural societies,
2. To explore the salient features of socio-economic condition and to detect economic transformation of rural societies in the study area,
3. To examine changes in occupational structure of present generation,
4. To detect the development of transport network and connectivity,

VILLAGE PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

Burdwan being the granaries of West Bengal have prosperous agricultural economy especially in the eastern part where these two villages are located. Both the villages are the abode of large as well as medium farmers also with land less people. Being the large village connected with bus route with the district head quarter within a distance of twenty kilometres have an easy access to the urban centre by bus route connectivity with a time distance of only 30minutes or less.

For the present study two villages are taken into consideration, namely Kurmun and Barshul, located very close to Burdwan town. Kurmun is located in Burdwan-1 block; the distance of this village from burdwan town is 17km. according to 2011 census, it is a large village with the total population of 8478 having the density of 659.77persons/sq.km. Total number of households in this village is 2001 with moderate literacy rate is 65.01%. On the other hand, village Barshul is located in Burdwan-2 block at a distance of 10km from the Burdwan town. The village holds 5483 population with the density of 1697persons/sq.km consisting of 1320 households. Literacy rate is higher than Kurmun (75.52%).

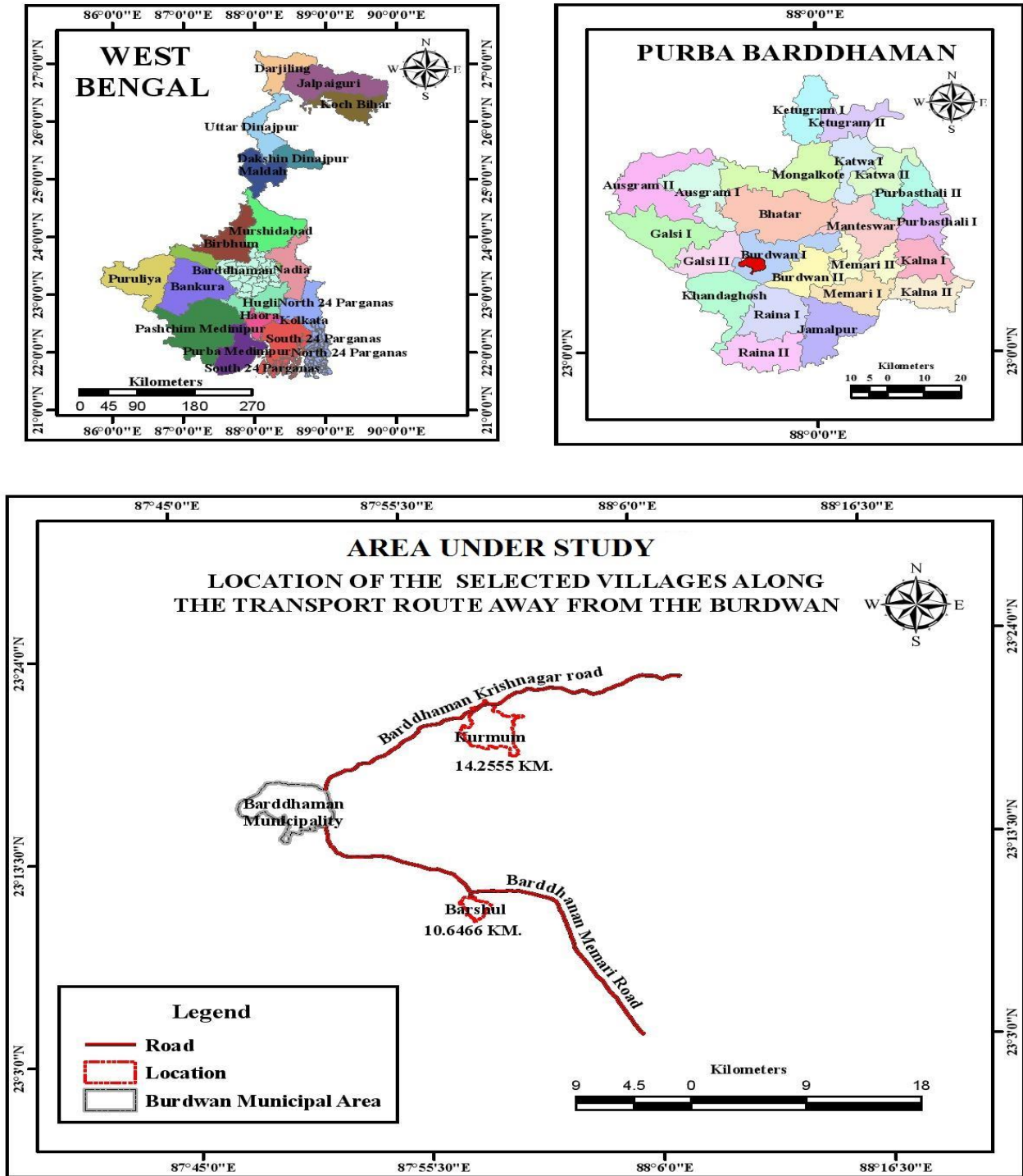


Fig. 1: Location Map of the Study Area

These two villages have a good connectivity, nodal location, adequate rural market facility, good infrastructure. These factors make these two villages more developed than the other surrounding villages. The village economy was boost up due to hierarchical socio-economic structure with the presence of large and medium size farmers from the beginning of 1970s facilitated by canal irrigation of DVC planning. Single cropped paddy field thus transformed into double cropped area which easily captured the Green Revolution technology at the end of 1980s with the enthusiastic attempt of large and medium size farmers. With the promotion of Green Revolution in the surrounding small villages, these two villages were the facilitator in providing technological and machinery help to the surrounding areas.

DATABASE AND METHODS

The study is both descriptive and analytical. In the descriptive aspect, it attempts in describing the nature and process of economic transformation at village level and for analysis, it seeks to interpret forms modernisation as well as changes in economic and social relations. The approach is mainly empirical study with field work though historical outlook of the villages has been enquired through secondary data. Thus, it has been examined through both primary and secondary sources of information (Census Year Book, District Statistical Handbook, Reports on District Planning and Development etc.) where primary database (Semi-structured questionnaires and interviews) is the strength of this investigation to justify socio-economic change. The selection has been made primarily on the basis of degree of modernisation factors such as promotion of urban amenities to rural areas, development of transport networks, supply of drinking water etc. All the villages are situated in the close vicinity of Bardhaman town-the district head quarter of Purba Bardhaman district holding not only the central position of South Bengal but also the nodal position of regional transport system. However, the selected villages belong to more or less same cultural region with nearly similar socio-economic conditions. A large volume of sample of adults has been drawn for each village on the basis of information collected through survey schedule with the help of Stratified random sampling method. It can be noted here that the samples are approximately equal proportionate with due representation of caste, income, occupational and educational status group. All together 150 samples, out of which 65 and 85 have been selected from the Borsul and Kurmun respectively.

To grasp the change over time, inter-generational data has been collected from primary survey through questionnaire and openionaire of three generations with slight alteration of conventional age bracket- Young adult -within the age group of 15-30 years, Middle aged adult (30-45 years) Older adult (45-60) and old age people (above 60years). All these four generation have the experience of different strategic change in the rural society of India and west Bengal. Villagers having the age more than 60 have the idea of transition of pre and post Independent period.

People in the age bracket of 45-50 have the idea of impact of early plan period with slow change of traditional rural society before seventies. Mature adult have the experience of socio-economic change after Green Revolution while the last age group have the experience of change in the rural society in the post 1990s.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In general, by using the term 'village society' an image is developed in the minds of Indian that a group of people living in a village, having a culture with some norms, beliefs and customs and vehemently associated with primary production system. But new economy and culture in terms of liberalization and globalization and the techno-economic backlash have waved the traditional society and economy of the Indian villages from the very beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, an enquiry into what has been happening to the economy and society in the countryside largely significant.

The economic and societal changes in rural areas are becoming prominent especially from the very beginning of new millennium for those villages which are close proximity to the town due to development of transport, communication, access to technology and promotion of urban amenities in the rural areas, the traditional large villages with nodal location or close proximity to small and medium size towns are experiencing new mode of economic functions which are strikingly different from agriculture.

The scenario was totally different even before 1990s, as agrarian economy was the base and land-based production was overwhelming coupled with minimum presence of non-farm activity. But now a day rural economy does not depend only on agriculture; rather diversified employment opportunities are gradually emerging, even secondary and tertiary sectors are gradually promoted in the rural areas especially in the large nodal villages with the transport nodes or suitable communication with the urban centres that have in turn established a different kind of rural-urban linkages. Combined with rapid population growth, the labour force in the rural areas is still growing. Agricultural production is no more discernible for to the accelerating income growth. At the same time agricultural employment has a minimal growth. Under such a critical juncture rural non-farm sector has emerged as the major support to rural economy as well as employment in the form of contractual labour throughout the year, non-formal secured jobs, wage labour in non-farm sector that are enabling steady growth of rural economy.

With the above perspective, the two villages (Kurmun of Burdwan-1 block and Barshul from Burdwan-2 block) are showing significant change in rural economy and village society on the basis of time related judgment – 1970-80s, 1990s-2000s and 2010-2020s.

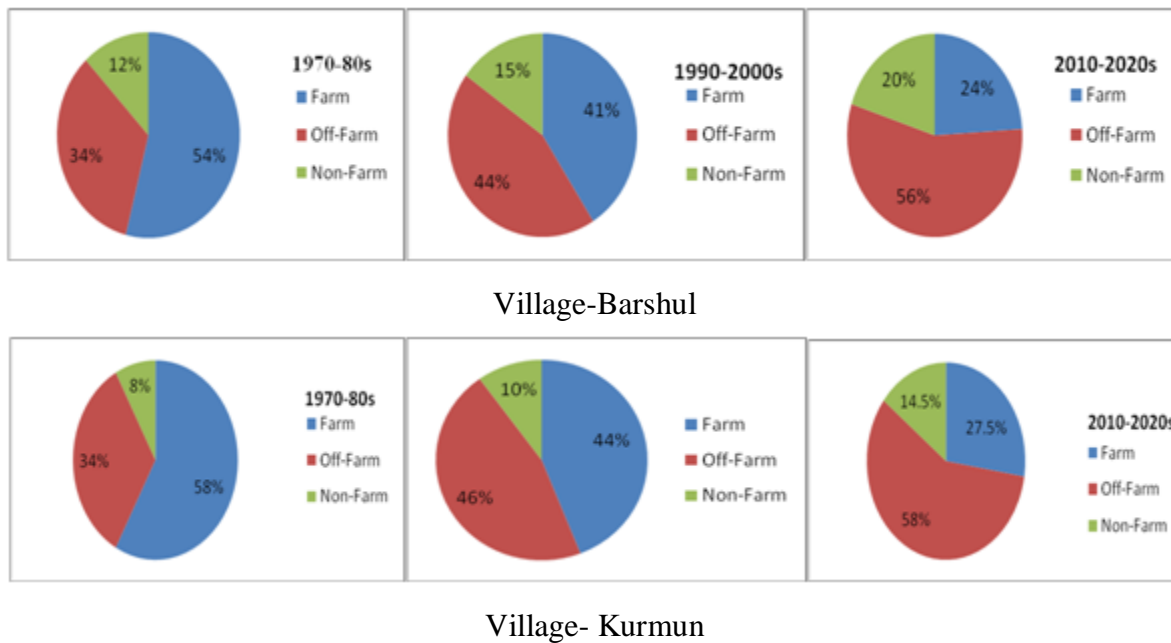


Fig. 2: Village wise distribution of Farm, Off-farm and Non-farm activity within three time phase

In case of Kurmun and Barshul changing scenario of rural society is also observed. Both Barshul and Kurmun villages are showing decreasing dependency on agricultural activity day by day (Fig.2). Rural educated labour force in recent period prefer to opt off-farm and non-farm activities with a less preference to farm operation, i.e, during specific seasons they engage themselves in agriculture and rest of the time they earn from off-farm and non-farm practices for their better livelihood. Less dependency on agricultural practice is ofcourse due to low amount of profit , increasing labor rate, risk in production due to hazards. Growth pattern in various sectors reveal sizable diversification of the rural economy towards non-farm sector.

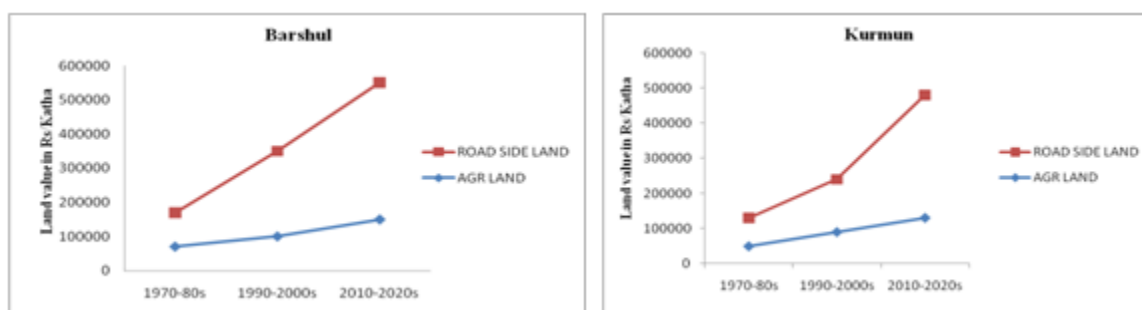


Fig. 3: Trend of Land Value with the context of time

Increasing non-farm activities require small amount of land with best possible accessibility especially around road side. Such demand for land has ascertained hiking the land price rampantly in the suitable location. Thus the land value of the villages under study shows a sharp rising trend especially from 1980s (Fig.3). Logically the road side land value is increasing more faster than agricultural land due to it better suitability to non-agricultural use. road side land of the villages are highly suitable for non-farm activities that facilitates urban connectivity required for such non-agricultural functions .

It is well known that development is dependent on appropriate and adequate infrastructure, such as power, transport, communication, water and irrigation. The modern mode of transport and communication has an important role for integrated economic development. It plays a major role in the economic uplift of a country or a region as it promotes internal and external trade, economic use of natural resources, mobility of skilled labour-force, diversification of markets, provision of fuel, reduction in employment, increase in agricultural and industrial production etc. In the same way development in transport and communication network has a great importance in the development of village economy and society.

The modern mode of transport and communication has an important role for integrated economic development. It plays a major role in the economic uplift of a country or a region as it promotes internal and external trade, economic use of natural resources, mobility of skilled and unskilled labour-force, market link, etc. Similarly, development in transport and communication network has a great importance for the development of village economy and society. The villages which are situated at the node of roads or very close to urban centre have the access to reach the town by public transport services. But liberalization of economy with increasing market facility has increased demand of goods and services in the rural areas of India. Therefore, the idea of self sufficient village is fading out with the growing dependence on urban areas. The development of transport network even in the interior villages by dint of PMGSY has provided not only the link but also increased mode and frequency of transport within the last one and half decade. Not only the public vehicle, personalized and rented vehicle are available in the remote villages. In the prosperous villages and nodal villages bikes have outnumbered the bicycle. Rural youths within a distance of 30-40 kilometers commute almost daily for employment or supplying wholesale goods in the rural areas. Not only the personalized vehicles, public vehicles have also increased within the last fifteen years. In the study area auto rickshaw and electronic battery driven rickshaw have stupendously increased within last five to ten years.

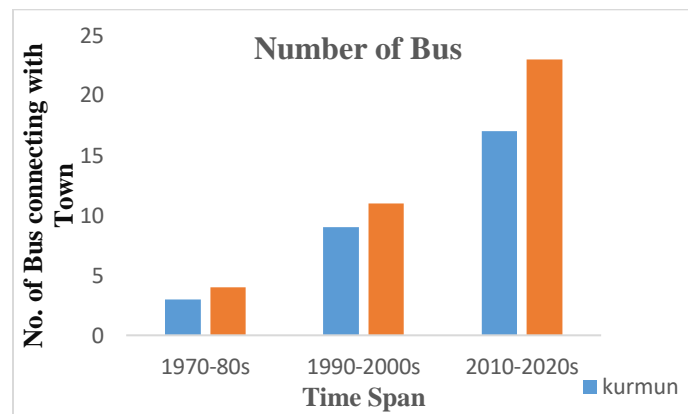


Fig. 4: Increasing Number of Bus

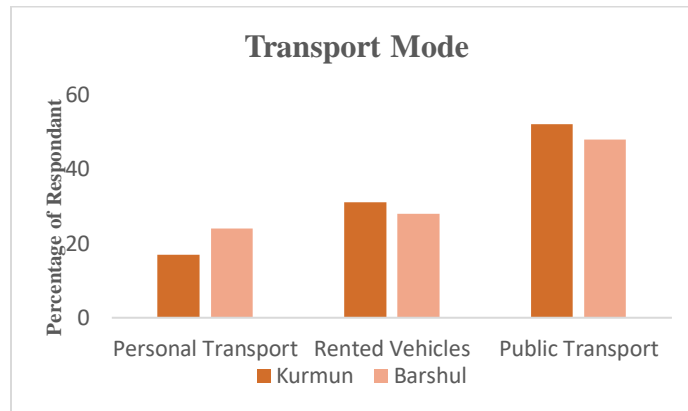


Fig. 5: Different Mode of Transport

The number of bus services is increasing day by day with the rapid increase of urban mobility. It is revealed that both for the two villages, numbers of available bus are increased over time. Barsul is more frequently connected with the town by the bus services rather than Kurmun (Fig.4).

Rapid development of personalized vehicle is the recent time phenomena (Fig.5). Within the last ten years stupendous rise of two wheelers in most of the villages is the very common phenomena while business man and service holder have a tendency to own a four-wheeler to access urban services like health, marketing of specialized goods etc. the survey results tune with that scenario. Though the maximum villagers till depends on public vehicles for commuting to urban centres, but the choice of rented vehicles is also increasing day by day. Even the people of lower economic groups also use the rented vehicles.

Many villagers have their own two-wheeler and some of them have four-wheeler also, which they use for daily communication. Not only are the vehicles, household gadgets getting popularity in the rural areas of India for the last one decade or so. Hilsenrath (1993) has rightly said that the stage high mass of Rostow model (1959) is now becoming popular in the small and medium size towns of Africa. In India household gadgets are now the integral part of elite or rich in the rural areas (Fig.6) where the colour T.V. set has entered from 1990s, refrigerator from 2000 AD, inverter and A C machine from 2010.

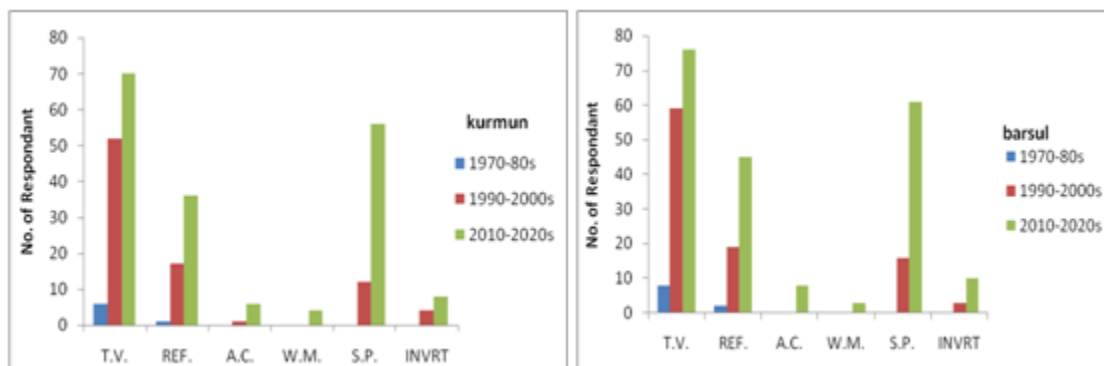


Fig. 6: Changing Trends of Consumption of Consumer Goods

In the villages some agricultural land and fallow land is converted into settlement area and also in market centre with the passage of time. Village market centre is progressing day by day with modern facilities. So, the people the villages especially those which have close proximity to town area feel less need to depend on the town as most of basic their needs is being fulfilled in their local place. Due to such rapid access of consumer goods in the rural market centres the rate of permanent migration has decreased and the need for migration is replaced by commutation (fig.7). Therefore, rate of permanent migration has decreased from the very beginning of new millennium for such large villages with nodal location and easy access to nearby urban areas.

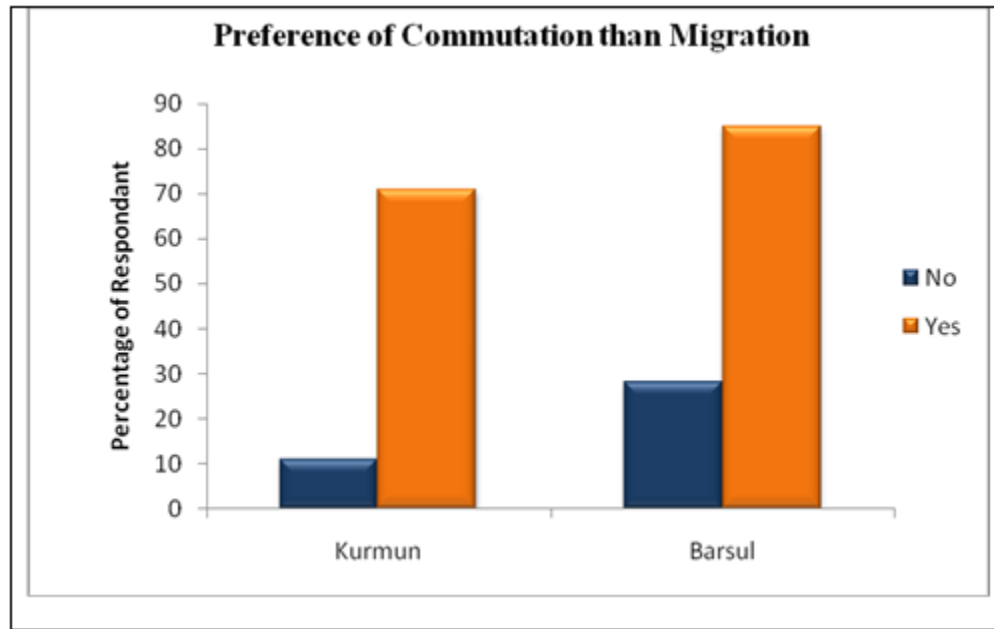


Fig. 7: Preference of commutation than migration

Emerging Diversification in Rural Economy with Time

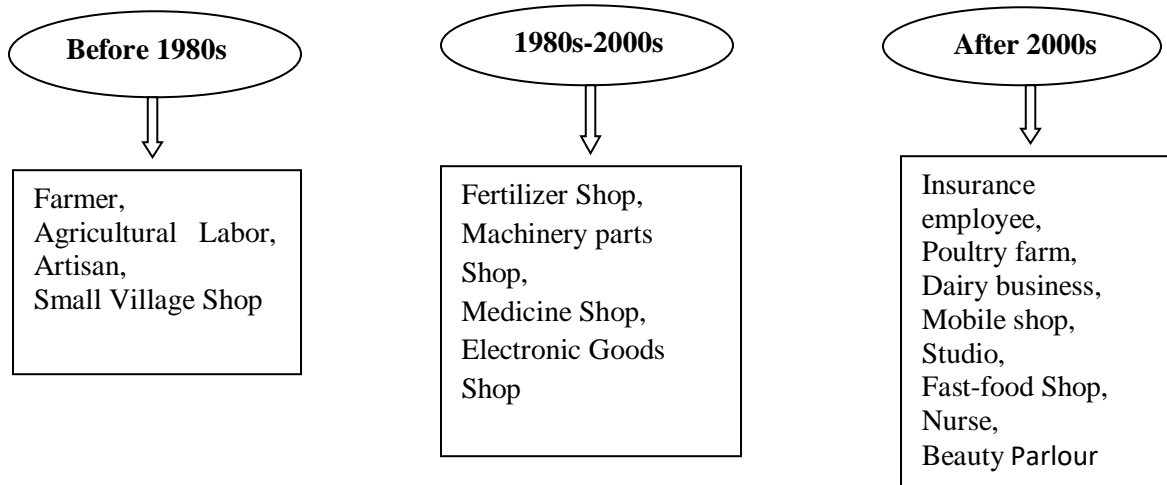


Fig. 8: Diversification of rural economy over time

The traditional village society of India that is the village communities all over the Indian sub-continent have a number of common features. The village settlement a unit of social

organisation, represent solidarity of different forms that of the kin the caste where the traditional agriculture is the main driving force. That scenario is almost faded out.

The wave of change in rural society gives an impact on social relation and cultural practices also. In case of both Barshul and Kurmun, most of the youth male members have a tendency to go to urban areas for better job opportunity or agro trade or manufacturing etc. almost neglecting agricultural practices. Agricultural mechanization is compensating this vacuum. Many elite families have permanently migrated to the Burdwan town during 1980s and 1990s. The scenario of rapid migration towards urban centres has changed a little bit. Apart from health and higher education facilities, infrastructure like power, communication, facilities of consumer goods are available in the rural areas. Rural urban linkage also provides small trading and small scale industry, especially agro- based industry, poultry farming in the road side villages. As for example both in Kurmun and Barsul modern bakery, electronic shop have been developed within the last fifteen years. Therefore, a strategic change has occurred within the last forty years by the blessings of emergence of new activities and occupation. A general outline of such change can be outlined as indicated in fig.-8.

Economic and social change over time is not only the postulates but the reality. It is observed that these prosperous villages show marked change in economic structure and social relation. In agricultural practices, dependency on land is reduced from one generation to next. The present generation are more interested to earn through non-primary sector (e.g. small business, non-agricultural labour, retailing work, small service works etc) which in turn create opportunities for buying consumer goods and household gadgets such as television, motor cycle, smart phone etc. Thus, all these lead to young generation to change their lifestyle which undermines the traditional culture of the villages. Therefore, symbolic importance for ancestral property (land) is also undervalued. Only older generation is emotionally persisted in their ancestral tradition. Therefore, new village economy in the study area shows diversity with production orientation and technological dependence where more skilled labours and diversity of occupation are essential character. Village roads, village shops are becoming smart, village society is access by 24-hours electricity, pipeline water supply. PURA is now the reality of the prosperous villages close to urban areas which will be smart villages within the coming decade.

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