RURAL DEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGY TO DETER MIGRATION IN INDIA RE-EXAMINING THE IDEOLOGY OF CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi said that the future of India lay in its villages. This has been proven with the recent outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic and the surfacing predicament of our urban centers.

Developed on the Industrialization model, the current state of the metropolis is of rampant overcrowding, high rates of unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and resources to cater to the growing population. 40% of each city's strength composes of the migrant population, demonstrated through the migrant crisis, a direct repercussion of COVID 19.

This paper explores the ideology of how rural development can act as a tactic to counter the high rates of rural-urban migration. It establishes the need for rural push, as India is predominantly an agrarian economy, with the vast disparity between the urban and rural centers due to its urban bias. It seeks to define development in holistic terms. It studies the models of 'cluster' as conceptualized by V.K.R.V. Rao, and detailed by Architect Charles Correa through his book, The New Landscape.

The paper reexamines the theory of cluster development through existing models proposed by the government of India. Namely, PURA (Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas), DRI (Deendayal Research Institute), and Rurban under Shyama Prasad Mukharjee Rurban Mission. It analyses the models, their strengths, weaknesses, and reasons for their failure and success to derive parameters for the ideation of an archetype model. A new model of rural development that talks of the simultaneous development of existing adjacent villages, by the introduction of set unique functions, that may turn into self-sustaining clusters or agglomerations in the future, which could serve as the next step for Indian village development based on the cluster ideology.

Keywords: Counter migration, models of rural development, cluster development theory, India.

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Introduction

The recent outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic highlighted some integral issues that have plagued the Indian cities since independence, a prominent one being the Migrant Crisis. Migrant flow (rural to urban) is largely borne by large metropolia such as Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta. The migration rates have grown from 19.8% to 24.1% in the last 30 years and currently stand at 54.3 million (Census Commissioner of India, 2011). With 22% of India's population falling below the poverty line and 80% of India's poor residing in the rural areas, (The Word Bank, 2012), the urban centers act as magnets of employment, infrastructure, and livelihood opportunities. It comes as no surprise that urban centers of today are composed of 40% migrant population (Sushant Singh, 2020).

The reverse migration that triggered due to the pandemic has been the second-largest mass resettling in India since the partition in 1947 (Mukhra, et al., 2020). The financial burden, limited employment opportunities, and the fear of the unknown are critical reasons that have driven panicked laborers, children, and pregnant women to walk hundreds of kilometers to reach their native places. Additionally, the undetermined prospects, lack of vocation, and financial crisis that awaits at home, only adds to the state of the deteriorating mental health after such an undertaking.

Although government initiative schemes like Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan (PMGKRA) guarantees employment for 125 days (now extended to 5 months) to every worker, they do not warrant such a promise for the rest of the 7 months, leaving the workers in a lurch. The economic load of jobless migrant workers threatens to further stagnate the economic slowdown in India.

With the current state of our city centers and the unsettled nature due to the pandemic, it seems unlikely that the migrants will return soon. However, this provides us with a unique opportunity to shift the focus of development to the rural sector. Rural India accounts for 66% of the population, 57% of the land area, and only contributes to 18% of the GDP (Trading Economics, 2019). Further, the Indian economy is based on predominantly agricultural and allied activities. The mindless migration has only highlighted the lack of attention to the rural sector and the bias of the socio-economic policies towards urbanization and industrialization. (Marla, 1997)

The rural fabric holds great potential for development. A large percentage of the rural poor do not have access to basic infrastructure facilities such as healthcare, electricity, or clean drinking water. The unemployment rates currently stand at 2.8 million as per the august report of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) (Sharma, 2020). The outdated technology, under-utilization of the scarce resources, lack of land reform policies, and uncertain nature of agriculture provide scope for massive improvement and upgradation. Additionally, a majority of marginal workers operate in the informal sector and engage in temporary, unskilled work characterized by low pay and job insecurity. The necessity to enhance the skills of the workers and create job opportunities within the rural centers becomes paramount to ensure the financial stability and security of the citizens. Job opportunities can be created through the deployment of resources and construction of the lacking infrastructure facilities. Furthermore, the need to formulate a more intensive rehabilitation scheme based on knowledge led job creation that would turn into self-sustaining systems, would be more beneficial for the long term.

Defining Rural Development

The traditional economic definition of development is measured by an increase in Per Capita Income, Human Development Index, and Economic stability. However, according to leading economist Amartya Sen, the idea of development is to include income, health, education, social facilities, and more importantly, a concept of 'freedom of choice.' The Capacity Building approach highlights development as more than just improvements in fortune, but the capability of economic, political, and social systems to provide for a long term, sustainable growth. More importantly, development is not a sum of wellbeing and cannot be brought about by just making the people economically better. Economics is a part of the scheme, not its entirety (Clifton, 2013).

The conventional concept of rural development aims at the better utilization of all available resources to improve production capabilities and enable communities to build a mechanism to self-evolve and raise the standards of living. The infrastructure planned is aligned to improving agriculture and allied activities, the creation of crafts and cottage industries, and all-inclusive usage of human resources. The primary purpose is to alleviate poverty and unemployment. It includes the goals of raising community solidarity, increasing agro needs, and institutionalization of equality. (Marla, 1997)

The concept of rural development has undergone many changes since independence and evolved greatly. The world bank quoted in its sector policy paper that rural development was "a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people--the rural poor" (Bank & McNamara, 1975). Another definition included that "Rural development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women, and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of they want and need " (Marla, 1997). Michal Todaro proposed that "Rural development encompasses improvement in the levels of living, including employment, education, health and nutrition, housing, and a variety of social services" (Todaro, 1997). The contemporary definition adds that it deals with the formulation and implementation of public policies and programs which would provide for the general welfare of the public in a democratic society (Weidner, 1970).

Due to its multidisciplined and multifaceted nature, the paper focuses on infrastructure planning as a means of rural development. The resources to be economic-social-political building, where the systems interact with each other, into self-organizing, self-sustaining, and more importantly, self-evolving entities (Barder, 2012). It may include a monetary grants system from the government or private sector, that eventually leads to the people becoming financially, socially, and politically independent. A concept of infrastructure planning that may serve as a preliminary catalyst for development.

Research Methodology

The paper starts with establishing the need to shift the focus of development to the rural fabric due to its desolate state, to deter rural-urban migration in India. It explores the existing definitions of rural development and establishes infrastructure provision as the scope explored in the paper. It explores the conceptual framework of cluster development as introduced by VRRV Rao and

Charles Correa as the literature review. It further studies the models of development implemented through government-led schemes in India, namely PURA, DRI, and NRum. After a thorough analysis of the schemes, it proposes a new model of development, derived from the overarching parameters established, through a combination of the schemes.

The Theoretical Basis

The idea of Cluster Development

The idea of a 'cluster' was first introduced by Gadgil in a note submitted to the Directorate of Economical and Statistics. (Gadgil, 1954) Professor V.K.R.V. Rao revived the approach and was the first to develop a model on it, to overcome the non-availability of a single village as a unit of development. Rao described it as an approach that would enable villages to support each other functionally so that the entire cluster becomes a viable economic unit. He emphasized that the scale of the villages in India was too small to organize a development ideology individually, and if tried, would prove to be non-viable. He proposed that adjacent villages be taken and clubbed together to form sizable and feasible rural communities, which would inculcate a sense of belonging, that could only be brought by a person to person contact. He emphasized on the decentralized activities to be provided in several villages. This would compel the villagers to traverse between the villages, strengthen the transport systems, and initiate bonhomie. V.K.R.V. Rao conceptualized the theoretical framework of the cluster theory, which were later expanded and elaborated through various fields. (Marla, 1997)

A detailed model based on the cluster theory was proposed by the leading Indian architect and urban planner Charles Correa through his book, 'The New Landscape.' The idea was to develop new growth centers located centrally and equidistant in a cluster of villages that would serve as employment generation agencies. Through the provision of social infrastructure, small-scale cottage industries, and healthcare units, basic amenities and livelihood opportunities would be rendered to the rural areas. Furthermore, a transport network comprising of buses, trains, and cycles would run to and fro, as a way of rationalizing the resources, yet increasing connectivity and movement between the center and settlements. The new center could be connected to the urban metropolis via a train network.
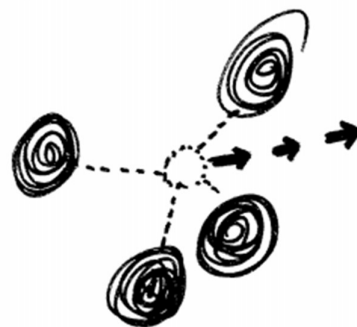
Village cluster growth: New employment (cottage industries, etc.) and social infrastructure (a health centre, a school) located centrally to a cluster of villages. Inhabitants continue to use existing stock of housing until the whole cluster gradually coalesces into a new growth centre. This would also allow the rationalisation of the transport system: cycle and bullock-cart from village to new centre, buses between centres, etc. all the way up to trains and aeroplanes connecting the large metropolii.

Figure 1: Village Cluster Growth
Source: (Correa, 1998)

Correa believed that the key to countering distress migration was in changing the land distribution patterns to increase land holdings. Key market distributions were to be identified and strengthened with resources. All new industries and major offices were to be located at the village and town levels. Construction of the growth centers was to be labor-intensive due to the

availability of workers, who could be trained with an additional skill set. The abundant workforce could act as a counter for the lack of technologically advanced resources of construction in rural areas. Further, a self-building system of construction was to be adopted to cut out the middleman's monopoly of the developers. Cheaper, self-buildable construction materials such as mud and bamboo could be utilized as it would be labor and skill intensive.

Through a series of diagrams, Correa explains the spatiality of a prototype center and its expansion possibilities.
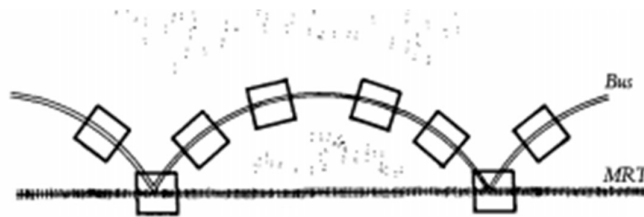

Figure 2: Prototype Cluster
Source: (Correa, 1998)

A series of sectors (residential and work) to be arranged along a primary MRT, traditionally a train or metro line that runs inter-state or inter-city. A bus line to be installed as a connector to the sectors since it would be a flexible mode of transport.
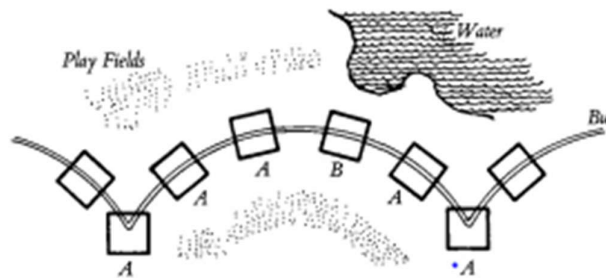

Figure 3: Expansion of Units
Source: (Correa, 1998)

As the system grows, secondary sectors such as B start to develop along with the primary sectors of A. An additional bus line can be installed as well.
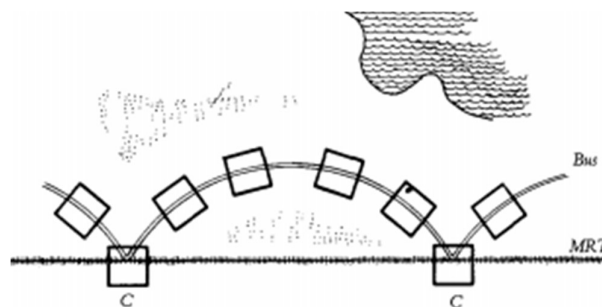

Figure 4: Nodal Settlements
Source: (Correa, 1998)

The sectors adjacent to the MRT, namely C grow in importance as the connector sectors. These are to be established as hubs or commercial units due to their location and ease of access to the transport facilities. These major nodal points are also to be reinforced with social infrastructure, and anything that may be necessary for the growing population.
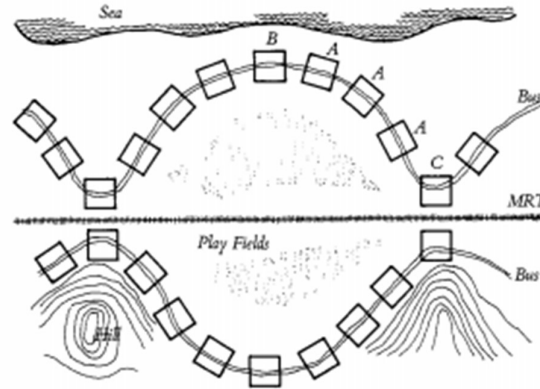
Figure 5: Replication of Cluster
Source: (Correa, 1998)

The system can be replicated at the opposite end of the MRT and further grow along with it. Small clusters start to develop along the MRT that may function separately but are connected.
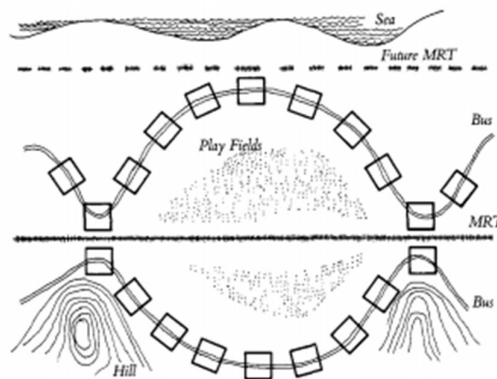
Figure 6: Future Growth
Source: (Correa, 1998)

A future MRT may be developed along the existing line when the traffic and density grow beyond expectations. It can be replicated using a similar principle.

This self-evolving model of rural planning highlighted some key parameters for the selection of the cluster system formation.

- The system to be near a Mass Transit Line such as a railroad connection.
- The separate sectors or villages, to be connected by a roadway which can run public transport facilities such as buses and trucks.
- The nodal sectors are to be of primary importance with a tendency to grow as commercial sectors due to ease of access. Hence, employment generation interventions are to be planned in them.

- The system can be replicated into various small clusters of villages along the transit line.

Correa employed the cluster methodology as it would provide for a multi-level and multi-typology-based infrastructure for a set of villages. Furthermore, it could cater to the provision of social, economic, political, and cultural infrastructure for a set of villages, that would not have been possible for each independent village. The model was unique since it suggested an unconventional paradigm of planning which had not been implemented in India. Instead of creating cities in various scales and tying the infrastructure-dependent villages to them, it formed a separate ideology. A part to a whole concept, where each village functioned as an autonomous body, and at a larger level, adjacent villages came together for collective infrastructure. The villages aggregated together to formulate a population basis for urban level infrastructure, instead of being dependent on the nearest cities or metropolis.

Studying the Existing Models Testing Cluster Development

PURA

Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) was a scheme conceptualized by President A.P.J Abdul Kalam, which was discussed in his book 'Target 3 Billion,' co-authored with Srijan Pal Singh. It was the first scheme discussed by the government of India that moved to provide amenities in rural areas, rather than subsidies, that were viewed as quick fixes without long-lasting impact. It served to improve the quality of life in rural areas and bridge the urban-rural divide. The idea was to provide livelihood opportunities and urban amenities in clusters of Indian villages. The infrastructure planning was four-fold: to create physical, electronic, knowledge, and economic connectivity. This included social amenities such as potable drinking water, education- schools and colleges, healthcare, and telecom services. Increasing physical connectivity by enabling mobility so that the villagers could access the common infrastructure facilities such as hospitals and markets by providing roads. Electronic connectivity via telephone lines and internet connections were to create accessible virtual interaction platforms. Knowledge connectivity was to transform rural areas into learning hubs for agriculture, forest protection, and corporative production markets. Lastly, small scale industries, agro-food processing, and warehouses were to contribute to the economic income generation.

The scheme was planned for over 7000 PURA complexes around India and was tested under seven pilot projects, one being in Vallam, of Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu for a population of 3 lakh and 65 villages (Kumar & Singh, 2020). The PURA complex had 3 connectivity: (physical, electronic, and knowledge), including Wi-MAX internet. It also set up the Periyar Maniammai College of Technology for Women, primary to postgraduate level schools, vocational training centers, and the converted of 200 acres of wasteland into viable cultivable land. This led to independent economic activities, with several large-scale employment generation entrepreneurs and philanthropic institutions and investments. The model eventually worked independently of any government initiative and was in most terms, self-reliant (Kalam, 2005).

It was understood that PURA would be a customizable model as per the available skills, resources, and local capacities of the cluster. It was what Kalam described as 'decentralization of the last

mile solution to be the key.' It was officially announced as PURA 1.0, on Kalam's speech on the republic day in 2003, and seven primary projects were implemented between 2004-2007. PURA 2.0 was launched in 2010 as a venture between the government and private sector partnerships, of which nine proposals were approved. However, by 2012 it became clear that the model needed restructuring as none of the proposals received bureaucratic clearances from the state and central government. After the 2014 change in the political scenario of India's leadership, the scheme officially folded as no resources were allocated for it in the Union budget. Its successor lies in the formation of Shyama Prasad Mukharjee Rurban Mission (Rurban) that stands on the structural framework of PURA. (Wong, et al., 2020)

The first stage of seven pilot projects showed that the scheme was self-sufficient, but only needed to garner political support. 40-50 million rupees were spent on each project to develop infrastructure. However, little is known about the current state of the implemented PURA complexes. An evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Rural Development between 2008 and 2009 stated that the pilot phase of PURA was not successful for the following reasons:

- The projects lacked a detailed business plan.
- The growth potential for each cluster was not identified
- The pilot projects did not focus on increasing the economic activities enough to sustain the PURA complexes.
- The lack of ownership by the state government led to the creation of poor infrastructure facilities. (Wong, et al., 2020)

The benefit of the PURA scheme was that it identified common parameters (physical, electronic, knowledge, and economic connectivity) to be implemented in each cluster complex. The infrastructure was urban scale and catered to a large population basis, of 3-5 lakh residents in a cluster, or 100 villages per cluster. However, the developmental model ceased to exist due to bureaucracy and budgetary allocation issues and changes in government ideologies.

DRI: Chitrakoot Campaign

The Deendayal Research Institute (DRI) set up in 1986, under the guidance of Nanaji Deshmukh was a model of self-reliance of village communities. Conceptualized for 500 villages in India, it aimed to redevelop rural communities based on societal reconfiguration following the principles of 'Integral Humanism' of the Bhartiya Sanskrit. Naturally, its first project of the Self Reliance Campaign (2002) was the development of the Chitrakoot District in Uttar Pradesh, due to its historic significance in Hindu mythology where Lord Rama spent 11 years in exile in the epic Ramayana.

The ideology of the rural development model was of 'Social Reconstruction through Total Development.' The mission aimed to take up 100 villages surrounding the Chitrakoot district and turn them into a self-sufficient village community. A cluster development approach was followed for resource conservation and the decentralization of available amenities.

The Chitrakoot model divided the villages into clusters of 5, where a 'Samaj Shilpi Dhampati' (society sculptor couple) was appointed to look after the development and wellbeing of the cluster. These social workers were newly married couples selected from the villages themselves, appointed by the DRI. The cluster was to become self-reliant in all aspects, following the norms through social reform. From fighting socio-cultural constraints and unemployment to increasing health awareness and literacy, all aspects were under the purview of the Samaj Shilpis. The idea of the people's power being more potent than political power and being used to bring about political decentralization and reshaping the society was addressed in the model (BL, et al., 2016).

In terms of development, a 5-pronged approach of rural industrialization, decentralizing the decision-making process, ecological concerns, leading a simple and modest life, and swadeshi was followed by the entire community. Rural Industrialization through the generation of the agriculture industry, entrepreneurship, health and education facilities, and litigation free society were tested (Kakuta, 2003). Currently, the Chitrakoot model boasts of a 1% migration rate, year-round food security for marginal farmers (as they own a plot of a 1.5 acre each), high levels of employment, and 85% families shifting above the poverty line. It is in all terms, self-independent.

NRuM

The Shyama Prasad Mukharjee Rurban Mission (SPMRM) under the National Rurban Mission (NRuM) of the Ministry of Rural Development was launched in 2016. It stated that most of the Indian rural fabric was composed of clusters in small proximity and not stand-alone settlements as it is believed. These clusters had immense potential for growth and with the integration of economic drivers, they could be developed. This classification could be termed as 'Rurban.' The mission aimed to develop 300 clusters in the subsequent 5 years, through the provision of economic, social, and physical infrastructure (Government of India, 2016).

> *The National Rurban Mission (NRuM) follows the vision of "Development of a cluster of villages that preserve and nurture the essence of rural community life with a focus on equity and inclusiveness without compromising with the facilities perceived to be essentially urban in nature, thus creating a cluster of "Rurban Villages".*
>
> NRuM, 2016

The mission's outcomes were to bridge the urban-rural divide, reduce poverty, stimulate economic development, and attract investments in rural India. A list of clusters under each district was identified and approved for infrastructure provision. Cluster selection was based on the following parameters:

- A Rurban cluster would be composed of geographically contiguous villages with a population of 25,000- 50,000 in plain and coastal areas.

- The most probable growth centers in a district that could potentially lead to economic transformation were selected.

- The cluster was to be of a maximum 5- 10 km radius.

The ministry would further consider parameters such as Decadal growth rate in rural population, presence of economic cluster, proximity to transport corridors, and the presence of pilgrimage and places of tourism. Parameters such as rise in land value, presence of decadal growth rate in non-farm workforce participation, good governance initiatives by Gram panchayats, percentage enrollment of girls in schools, and performance in Swatch Bharat Mission were to be taken into consideration. They ranged from economic, social, political, and existing infrastructure perspectives.

The mission's success was highlighted with a report published in 2020 which stated the preparation of 286 successful cluster action plans, and 240 detailed project reports in 18 states under the SPMRM (Government of India, 2016). The investments and the infrastructure provided was based on need, including electricity lines, roads, drinking water, cowsheds, education schools, skill development, agro-food processing, healthcare centers, etc. (Government of India, 2015).

The Importance of a Cluster Network

Each of the models has proved that the cluster ideology works for the development of the rural fabric. It is important to note that India's development strength has always been its informal network systems and interdependency. It was never of the ideology of the self-evolved, stand-alone systems, rather the creation of culture, community, and interrelated nexus building. From water connectivity to market systems, the villages are inter-dependent. It is time to enhance and strengthen those networks. Hence, the system of clubbing villages is not only important as a means of centralization of the limited resources but also to garner a threshold population for the infrastructure to work, as discussed by VKRV Rao. Further, since a larger population set can be catered to, the level of infrastructure can be urban level, and more specialized, especially for the grassroots levels. An expert center in healthcare or sports training that would have been awarded to a city based on its population basis can exist within the rural fabric. Furthermore, by clubbing the villages, a multitude of infrastructure that ranges from social, political, cultural, or economic can be provided, which would not have been possible for each individual village. Hence, even though models of 'Adarsh gram' (the model village) and self-sufficient villages such as Konchur Sustainable Village, have been created, they are only able to provide small interventions. Cluster unity yields a larger level of infrastructure and hence, a greater chance of impact and development.

Conclusion

The theory of cluster development as tested by the models implemented makes a few things evident: First, the PURA scheme proved that the ideology of cluster development for the rural fabric worked. It reinstated that a holistic infrastructure provision of an urban scale could kickstart the economy of an area and lead to an overarching development. Most importantly, it set the basic framework of a rural development strategy that was entirely village centric, and not city dependent, similar to what Correa spoke about. However, bureaucracy, red-tapism, and lack of detailed business plans ensured that the scheme did not run for more than three terms.

Second, the Chitrakoot scheme was successful in the formation of a model that reshaped the societal fabric. However, it was a specific case example of the 'Hindutva' philosophy and worked in Chitrakoot due to its historic significance in Hindu mythology. The limitation of the model was that even though it was conceptualized for the whole of India, it failed to account for the diversity of India's fabric. Socio-politically, India's fabric is more varied. The appreciation of the religious aspect is not the same in every state, let alone in every village. For a state like Haryana wherein a 2 km radius, the village population can vary from Jat to Gujjar, to Hindus or Dalits majority, the religious beliefs are radically different. Furthermore, implementing a centralized ideology through societal reconstruction into a caste and faith ridden system is extremely unfeasible.

This, however, does not discount the fact that Chitrakoot proved to be a case example of the success of cluster development. It served as an epitome of the fact that rural advancement could largely counter migration, as it recorded rural-urban migration rates at 1%.

Third, the success of NRum was based on the fact that it extensively outlined the process of cluster selection, and a precise methodology to be followed. It detailed the strategies and requirements for infrastructure provision and centralized an organized framework of the PURA initiates it was built on, to resonate and incorporate additional features. However, the translation of the proposal as detailed out by the report became an infrastructure provision solely on a need basis, instead of a planned development approach. The report highlighted the construction of water tanks, cowsheds, electricity poles and lines, and other such small scale amenities for individual villages. The impact that the PURA schemes had by the creation of colleges and healthcare facilities, was lost in the translation of Rurban. Further, it did not manage to kickstart the economy of the regions selected, and did little for the evolution and maturing of the cluster as a whole.

There is a need for upgradation in the model that incorporates the features proposed by NRuM, DRI, and Rurban. A model built on the existing framework and follows the methodology of cluster selection as recommended by the Rurban mission, which includes feasibility of cluster sizes, its proximity to mass transit lines, the population set catered to, and other parameters of decadal growth rate, land value, and good governance. The infrastructure provided must lead to holistic development and follow the socio-economic-cultural-political capacity-building approach, through physical, electronic, knowledge, and economic connectivity. Furthermore, it must evolve into an entity of self-organizing, self-sustaining, and more importantly, a self-evolving cluster. A model that provides several different infrastructure facilities in multiple villages, so that each village grows as centers for the particular activity in the long run, with ancillary activities to support it. This would enable further connectivity between the villages as the villagers would traverse to the adjoining settlement for the particular function of healthcare, sports, education, etc. For this, each selected cluster will have to be studied, and according to its immediate and long-term plans, and infrastructure would have to be planned. An analysis of its strengths, socio-economic needs, and possibilities that can trigger expansion will have to be evaluated.

Investment in Rural India is of paramount importance post-COVID 19. The system of cluster development that provides urban level infrastructure at the grassroots levels in every individual village basis could be the game-changer for India.

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