

## Call and Definition of Rural University

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**Abstract:** There are many rural institutes in India awarding degrees in rural management or rural development but just two rural universities operating in rural higher education: 1) Gandhigram Rural Institute at Dindigul and 2) Mahatma Gandhi Chitrakoot Gramodaya Vishwavidhyalaya at Satna. Even the Ministry of Human Resources Development fails to elaborate on the concept of rural university, it has mentioned National Council of Rural Institutes as a monitoring agency over rural institutes of higher learning which consider rural structure of higher education as that which can make ultimate difference in the lifestyle and living of the rural population.

**Key word:** Rural University

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### I. Introduction

Merriam Webster dictionary has defined university as one made up of an undergraduate division which confers bachelor's degrees and a graduate division which comprises a graduate school and professional schools each of which may confer master's degrees and doctorates (university). Interestingly, the concept of university is considered urban. So, the question is: is there any rural concept of university or is there any rural university?

Well, the concept of rural university is difficult to define. **The website of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India fails to elaborate on the concept of rural university.** One possible explanation could be the university operating in the rural area. Another explanation could be the university educating rural people to promote sustainable development. Under the circumstances of rapid urbanization, the first explanation would not hold true for a longer period of time because the region which is considered a rural area today may not remain so even after five years. The second explanation has different implication in the sense that the rural people who get education may/ may not prefer to contribute to promote sustainable development. Moreover, the moment the rural crowd migrates to the urban area, they no longer remain rural people. In other words, the very concept of rural university is a dubious one.

So the question is: why are we discussing about rural university and what is the need of rural university? Now, for a pretty good time the word rural invited association with agriculture. However, with modernization, industrialization and telecommunication revolution, agriculture fast lost its sheen as a profession. Farmers have a sense of disenchantment and mistrust about the future of their profession. The rural folk in general and the farmers in particular no longer want their children to join the profession of farming as they are induced to migrate to cities due to social factors such as attraction of cities, better standard of living, better educational facilities, need for status and so on. Again the farmers' anxiety is not misplaced as reported in the newspaper *'The Hindu'*:

Over half of all agricultural households are indebted, and these are not small debts; the average loan amount outstanding for a farm household in India today is Rs. 47,000. For marginal farmers, making under Rs 4,000 per month, which doesn't even cover their consumption, loans of over Rs 30,000 must be extremely heavy burdens (Rukmini, 2015).

On the other hand, rapid industrialization and consequent urbanization has created tremendous duress on urban resources aggravating the issues like environmental degradation, pollution, poverty, malnutrition, slum creation, lack of basic amenities like water, electricity, etc. **Destruction of villages and the problems created by urbanization can be minimized only if urban facilities are created in the rural area.** Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said: "To preserve the spirit of the village is essential but why can't we invigorate them with the facilities associated with the cities?" (Rurbanisation: a transformative process to foster sustainable, equitable and inclusive growth, 2013).

**It is a well-known fact that higher education is a stepping stone to creating such facilities.** However, this education should not be a typical university education where the students are issued degrees by teaching theories of subjects in the classroom which are of no use in terms of employment generation.

Then **what should be the structure of higher education in rural area?** Such kind of structure has the rural folk as its target audience and training of rural human capital as its objective. Just because the target

audience is rural folk, such training should not be limited to literacy or just use of innovative techniques in agriculture. In other words, rural world should not be seen as an isolated unit of agricultural production. Such education should be an integration of agro-based activities with other productive sectors and should be able to generate employment opportunities at rural areas. At the same time, such education should aim at the consolidation of rural folk into a socio-economic fabric which maintains the ecological balance, protects local heritage, preserves traditional, cultural activities against the process of acculturation and supply leisure and recreational activities. Such preconditions for the revitalization of rural world compel us to think about using the university as an interface to materialize it. As this university functions for the rural world, it should be called a rural university.

However, **the concept of rural university is fraught with challenges.** Gandhiji's views on education entitled 'NaiTalm' can prove useful. As a matter of fact, Gandhiji's views should be modified to suit the contemporary needs. Besides agriculture and agro-based products, syllabus of rural university should also consist of courses which are relevant to the rural set-up. Those courses which are irrelevant in terms of employability skills and life skills should not be incorporated in syllabus. It should also include courses on health, sanitation, environment, gender sensitization, civic amenities and so on. Learning by doing should be the driving principle of such curriculum. So, instead of emphasizing on the conventional classroom teaching-learning method, activity-based field work should be encouraged. As a matter of such curriculum should be designed along the line of CBCS which would enable the learners to learn about vocations of different types. At the same time, such curriculum should incorporate development of skills like communication skills, soft skills, IT skills as well proficiency in the language of English in order to remain updated. Such type of curriculum will demand different type of teaching pedagogy. The evaluation method of such curriculum should be different from the conventional method. The learner should be evaluated on the basis of his participation and involvement in the activity-based field work. This structure would need to do away with the system of compulsory classroom attendance method otherwise, the very purpose of engaging learners in field work would get marred. Avoidance of compulsory classroom attendance coupled with activity based field work would incentivize the learners to enroll for higher education.

This structure would have to rethink about the way in which the degree is being awarded. Because, the learners are from the rural world, the dropout ratio is likely to be higher than the conventional structure. In the conventional structure, the degree certificate is awarded at the completion of programme after stipulated time. If the learner leaves his study in the middle then he is considered a dropout. This system should be done away with in the rural education structure. If a learner leaves in the middle, he should be given diploma certificate. Under such circumstances, the learner's incomplete studies would not go waste. This structure would also have to think of the way in which the females can be enrolled in the programmes run under rural higher education structure. At the same time, such structure would require teaching staff which is dedicated, self-motivated, innovative and willing to work in the rural world.

Though Ministry of Human Resources Development fails to elaborate on the concept of rural university, it has mentioned National Council of Rural Institutes as a monitoring agency over rural institutes of higher learning which consider rural structure of higher education as 'that can make lasting difference to the life and living standards of the rural masses (About us). By and large, the concept of rural higher education derives its crux from what Gandhiji had professed as naitalim.

There are many rural institutes in India awarding degrees in rural management or rural development but just two rural universities operating in rural higher education: 1) Gandhigram Rural Institute at Dindigul and 2) Mahatma Gandhi Chitarkoot Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya at Satna.

Suggestions

**Rural universities in India can flourish only if the government of India frames a well-defined policy for the same through legislation and its effective implementation.** The government should set up a separate autonomous body other than UGC which designs curriculum relevant to the rural world. Such curriculum should be employment-oriented and customized to the local needs. It should identify the infrastructural needs for such universities and should ensure that they are catered to. It should also serve as an agency responsible for training human resources required in rural universities. It should serve as a monitoring agency which also looks after the effective delivery of curriculum.

## **II. Conclusion**

Rural university can become an effective force in containing the migration towards the cities. It can function as a knowledge hub as well as an agent of rural transformation, thus by, contribute in realizing Narendra Modi's initiative of Rurbanisation.

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