

AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE : Rural Transformation for Sustainable Development

Healthcare is a fundamental human right, not a privilege. Yet, in many parts of the world - including developing nations like India - millions of people continue to suffer due to inadequate access to quality and affordable healthcare. The ongoing health challenges, rising medical costs, and unequal distribution of services have made it imperative to revisit our priorities and recognize the urgent need for accessible and affordable healthcare for all.

Despite significant progress in medical science and infrastructure, a large portion of the population, particularly in rural and economically weaker sections, remains outside the reach of quality health services. Basic healthcare is often unavailable in remote areas, forcing people to travel long distances for treatment - an added burden when they are already in pain or distress. Even in urban areas, affordability is a major concern, with private healthcare becoming increasingly expensive and public hospitals overstretched and under-resourced.

One of the primary reasons for this disparity is the urban-rural divide in health infrastructure and the lack of adequate public spending. India, for example, spends just over 2% of its GDP on healthcare - one of the lowest among G20 nations. This leaves public health institutions underfunded, short-staffed, and often lacking in basic facilities or modern equipment.

When access to healthcare is limited by cost, it disproportionately affects the poor and marginalized. Catastrophic health expenses are among the leading causes of debt in low-income households. In such cases, families are often forced to choose between saving a loved one and financial survival. No one should have to make that choice.

The concept of universal healthcare is not merely an idealistic vision - it is a practical necessity. Governments must prioritize strengthening public health systems, expanding insurance coverage, and subsidizing essential medical treatments. Schemes like Ayushman Bharat in India are commendable steps toward providing financial protection to vulnerable families, but more needs to be done to ensure that such schemes are effectively implemented and reach those who need them the most. Furthermore, health literacy plays a vital role. Many health issues worsen simply because people are unaware of early symptoms or preventive care. Regular awareness campaigns and community outreach are essential to bridging this knowledge gap. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of our health systems and reminded the world of the importance of investing in healthcare. It also showed that accessible healthcare isn't just about treating illness - it's about preparedness, prevention, and promoting overall well-being.

Healthcare must be seen as a societal investment rather than an expense. A healthy population is more productive, economically stable, and socially harmonious. Ensuring that every individual - regardless of their income, location, or background - has access to affordable, quality healthcare is not just a policy goal, but a moral imperative.

DR. BANARSI LAL AND DR. VINOD GUPTA

Rural transformation is an inevitable and fundamental process of development. It is a more dynamic concept than rural development as it embodies a transformation in people's perspective on life. Rural transformation is a proactive and positive process of development of rural areas in the context of national and global social and economic changes. It involves bringing the features of urban areas into the rural settings, changes to systems and processes that favourably impact rural people's livelihoods. It is usually characterized by changes in female literacy, civic amenities, farm income, rural housing, economic and social conditions etc. The population of the developing world is still more than urban. Despite rampant urbanisation, India is a land of villages where about 69 per cent population still lives in the rural areas. As per 2011 Census, the population of rural India is about 12 per cent of the world's total population, which is more than the population of the Europe. Most of the rural population is employed in agricultural sector. All the great personalities of India such as Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam always advocated the need of transforming the villages as the villages are the keys for the inclusive development of the nation. So there is need to focus in the rural areas of the country. Presently government is striving to improve the infrastructure in the villages such as roads, sanitation, power and water to develop the villages. It is easy to say to develop the rural areas but to transform them is really a herculean task. But a well knit strategy with adequate financial support can transform the villages of India. A scheme known as Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rural Mission has been started by the government of India which is a reflection of former President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's idea of PURA (Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas). This scheme focused on the infrastructure development in the rural areas. It also includes skill development and economic development in the villages. Presently government is endeavouring to end the rural-urban divide by the idea of rural and providing the urban amenities in the rural areas. There is need to revamp the rural areas. There is also need to concentrate on agriculture, rural infrastructure development, skill creation, employment and health to boost the path of development in the villages.

Rural transformation is impacted by a wide range of elements such as market and ecosystem dynamics, national politics and local capacity for nation. Since the beginning of the new millennium the governments of developing nations have been focusing on improving substantially the socio-economic development and achieving the coordinated development of rural and urban areas. People living in rural areas are characterised by low capital investment, low savings and low production. The poverty level in rural areas is usually higher among women than men. Women continue to struggle with dual responsibilities of economic production and domestic

labour. Paradoxically, most of the developing nations still lack adequate provision for women to hold land rights independently of their husbands. Several attempts have been adopted to bring about rural development. Government has launched Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY). This scheme instills certain values in the village to foster mutual cooperation, self-help and self-reliance, enabling the poorest person in the village to come out of poverty and achieve well-being, preserving and promoting local cultural heritage. Under this scheme, every Member of Parliament would adopt a village Panchayat to be developed through government schemes and local initiatives. Selected Panchayats have already started getting priority for developing infrastructure under existing schemes like National Health Mission, MGNREGS, ICDS and now Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. This plan envisages a model village with the schools that have toilets, computers, health facilities, yoga centres, gym, solid and liquid waste management, drinking water etc. This scheme can make the villages self-reliant and self-sufficient. There is also need to develop the social and physical infrastructure of the rural areas. PURA (Providing Urban Facilities in Rural Areas) aims to reform the rural economy. This can also reduce the rural migration towards populated cities. There is need to concentrate on agriculture, value addition in food, health-care and education, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) etc. so that income and employment in rural areas can be enhanced. The poverty can be eradicated with the proper strategy.

Skill India Mission is another significant scheme for rural development. Through this scheme entrepreneurship in rural areas can be developed. It is an ambitious scheme. The National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship aims at empowering those who left out from the mainstream education system by imparting the skill development training to them. This can open new avenues of employment on a large scale. Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) can play a key role in imparting the skill development trainings to the rural people on the areas such as value addition, sericulture, mushroom cultivation, bee-keeping, poultry farming, dairy farming, commercial floriculture etc. This can open new avenues of employment and income in rural areas and farmers can fetch more returns. India can play the role of human resource capital if China is acting like manufacturing factory. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can play the significant role in benefitting the rural people. Farmers of one place can learn new things in agriculture from the farmers of another place. They can also see the weather forecasting and can also find out the marketing channels of their farm produce. The village problems and their solutions can be mitigated under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan. 100 per cent rural electrification can also play a great role in the villages' transformation. Rural roads are being constructed under

Pardhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana at a speedy rate. Roads can help to transport the farm produce of villagers to the urban areas. The job scheme Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has also shown positive results. This scheme is playing a twin role of job creation and economic development in the areas. It has been observed that water scarcity is increasing due to poor monsoons. Government is striving to mitigate the problem of irrigation under MGNREGS. For that purpose more funds and efforts are needed. Setting up of 300 Rurban Clusters under Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Rural Mission and strengthening of the Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) are steps in the right direction. Now some districts are getting two KVKs to mitigate the farming needs of the farmers. KVKs are providing technical know-how on agriculture and allied sectors to the farmers. They are helpful to increase the crops production and thus ultimately are able to increase the income and employment among the farmers. There is need to increase the crops yields in the rain-fed areas and also to increase the agricultural credit. There is also need to ease the burden of loan repayment of the farmers so that there stress can be minimized. The government is making special towards agricultural sector. The efforts towards enhancing the farmers' income should be applauded and announcement on doubling the farmers' income really shows the government concern in this aspect.

Rural sector needs to be rejuvenated and the rural-urban disparity needs to be reduced. Urban development has rightly been identified as the government ambitious plan for improving the infrastructure in rural areas such as roads, sanitation, water and power. Rural areas require physical and social infrastructure for their development. Rejuvenation of the villages is imperative at this juncture. This can help to increase the income of the weaker section of the rural people. If common people will not get the benefits then the approach to development would be a futile exercise. India is a highly populated country and there is a need of balanced and sustainable development. It has been observed that rampant industrialization is impacting the environmental and other concerns. This has disastrous effects on the rural economy. There is a need of strategy to eradicate the poverty across the nation and thrust should be given in the rural areas. Rural development will help to boost the economy of the nation. There is a need for continued focus on promoting high value agriculture and community-led participatory processes. Although India's sharp economic growth has brought considerable improvement in the rural areas but still rural areas lag behind in many aspects. Still there is an immense scope to bridge the rural-urban gaps.

(The writers Dr. Banarsi Lal is Chief Scientist and Head of KVK Reasi and Dr. Vinod Gupta is Professor & Head, Division of Agricultural Extension Education, SKUAST-J)

From Rehabilitation to Alienation: The Reality of Package employees

VIVEK KOUL

The government has often spoke at length about the dignified return of Kashmiri Pandits to the valley, presenting it as a moral, social, and political responsibility. However, the harsh ground reality paints a very different picture. Even the limited attempt to rehabilitate a fraction of the displaced population - specifically the 5500 employees under the Prime Minister's special employment package - has fallen far short of expectations. This scheme, envisioned as a beacon of hope for the return and rehabilitation of displaced Kashmiri Pandits, has instead turned into what many describe as a punishment package. Rather than offering stability, safety, and dignity, it has resulted in separation, alienation, and ongoing insecurity for the employees and their families. Under the terms of the package, the employees are required to work in the Kashmir Valley while most of their families continue to live in Jammu. This geographical and emotional separation has become one of the most significant sources of distress for these employees. Far from being settled in secure, government-provided accommodation, a majority are forced to live in rented houses scattered across the valley, often without any security cover. In a

region where targeted killings of minority community members still occur and security threats remain high, this lack of safety measures makes them extremely vulnerable. These employees, being easily identifiable and isolated in many areas, become soft targets for militants.

The recent attack in Pahalgam targeting Hindu tourists has intensified the atmosphere of fear among the PM package employees. Incidents like this reinforce the perception that the valley remains unsafe for members of the minority Hindu community, and that the government's assurances of security and protection often fail to translate into reality. For the employees, each such attack is not just a news headline but a reminder of their own precarious position, making day-to-day life filled with anxiety and uncertainty. In theory, the government has been working on providing secure transit accommodations for these employees at various locations such as Chowgam, Mirhama in Kulgam, Anantnag, and Zeewan. In practice, however, the progress has been dismal. Allotments may have been made on paper months ago, but the actual handover of possession to the employees has yet to take place. Even the most basic infrastructure at these sites is incomplete. Boundary walls - which are essential

for security - remain unbuilt, leaving the premises exposed and unsafe. The link roads that connect these accommodations to the main roads are in poor condition, riddled with potholes, and in dire need of macadamization. Interior roads within the complexes are equally neglected, making movement difficult and unsafe, particularly during adverse weather conditions.

The very locations of these accommodations raise additional concerns. Most of them are situated on the outskirts of towns, far from tehsil headquarters and in mountainous terrain. While such locations may be easier for land acquisition, they are far from ideal when it comes to accessibility, emergency response, and integration with local communities. Their remoteness makes them more vulnerable to security threats and hinders the delivery of basic services. Furthermore, the lack of amenities - such as proper lighting, water supply, drainage systems, and health-care facilities - makes these accommodations unsuitable for immediate habitation. The repeated assurances from the government about speeding up construction and ensuring the safety of these employees often seem more like public relations exercises than genuine attempts to solve the problem. Meetings are held, deadlines are

announced, and promises are made, yet the ground reality remains unchanged. The slow pace of work, bureaucratic delays, and lack of accountability mean that months and in some cases years - pass without substantial progress. Employees continue to live in rented rooms under constant fear, waiting for the day they can move into secure housing that was promised long ago. This failure raises a deeper question about the broader idea of bringing back the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community. If the government cannot successfully rehabilitate 5500 employees - people who have returned under a structured, state-supported scheme - then how realistic is the promise of resettling nearly five lakh displaced Kashmiri Pandits? Rehabilitation is not just about providing jobs; it is about creating an environment where people can live with dignity, security, and access to essential services. In the absence of such an environment, the promise of a dignified return remains hollow. The separation between these employees and their families also has long-term social and psychological impacts. Many of them are young parents who see their children growing up in Jammu without their daily presence. Spouses are forced to live apart for months on end, putting a strain on family life and

mental health. This arrangement, which was supposed to be temporary, has now persisted for years, eroding trust in the government's ability to follow through on its commitments. The employees' sense of alienation from both their home in Jammu and their place of work in Kashmir deepens with each passing day.

The lack of urgency in completing the pending works also reflects poorly on the coordination between various departments and the seriousness with which the issue is being addressed. Simple measures such as completing boundary walls, ensuring road connectivity, installing street lighting, and providing basic amenities do not require massive resources or complex planning. They require commitment, prioritization, and efficient execution - all of which seem to be in short supply. For the government, this is more than just an administrative challenge - it is a test of credibility. The way it handles the rehabilitation of these 5500 PM package employees will be seen as a litmus test for its larger claims of being committed to the return of the Kashmiri Pandit community. If the smaller, manageable task is left incomplete, the larger mission will be viewed with skepticism, not just by the displaced community but by the wider public. The

path forward requires more than words and symbolic gestures. It requires the government to treat this as an urgent humanitarian issue rather than a public relations opportunity. All pending construction work at transit accommodations must be completed without further delay, with proper security arrangements put in place. Roads must be repaired and made safe, amenities must be provided, and the locations must be made accessible and connected. Only by addressing these practical and immediate needs can the government hope to restore the confidence of the employees and demonstrate genuine commitment to the cause of Kashmiri Pandit rehabilitation. Until such steps are taken, the PM package will continue to be seen not as a return and rehabilitation scheme, but as a package of separation, insecurity, and unfulfilled promises. The employees who came to the valley under this scheme deserve better than to be caught in a cycle of bureaucratic delays, unsafe living conditions, and emotional hardship. Their experience should serve as a wake-up call for policymakers: rehabilitation is not achieved through speeches and meetings - it is achieved through concrete action, timely delivery, and genuine concern for the people whose lives are directly affected.

The gym is not a studio: reclaiming workout from the camera

DR. NAVIN KUMAR

The gym, once a sanctuary for physical and mental transformation, has increasingly become a stage for content creation. Driven by the rise of social media, workout spaces are transforming into backdrops for carefully curated videos and photos, where dumbbells serve as props and squat racks double as filming locations. This shift undermines the gym's original purpose - a space for focused effort and personal growth - turning workouts into public spectacles. This article explores the physiological and psychological consequences of this trend, supported by global data, and proposes actionable solutions to restore the gym as a place of authentic fitness.



**The Rise of Filming Culture**  
The global proliferation of social media platforms has redefined fitness culture. A 2024 report by Statista indicates that over 4.9 billion people use social media worldwide, with fitness-related content generating significant engagement. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have created a culture where workouts are often evaluated not by personal progress but by metrics such as likes, comments, and shares. For many, the gym has become a content studio, where the pursuit of a viral post overshadows the pursuit of a personal best.

This trend is particularly pronounced among younger demographics. A 2023 study published in Frontiers in Psychology found that 68% of gym-goers aged 18-34 reported feeling pressure to document their

workouts online. While social media can motivate some, it often shifts the focus from intrinsic goals like strength or health to extrinsic validation, eroding the essence of fitness.

**Physiological and Psychological Costs**  
The divided attention - between lifting and filming - undermines the focus required for safe, effective workouts. The pressure to impress an online audience often leads to

"ego lifting," where individuals lift weights beyond their capacity, sacrificing form. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) reports that improper form contributes to approximately 30% of gym-related injuries, including herniated discs and muscle tears. For example, a rounded back during a deadlift, often exacerbated by rushed filming, significantly increases spinal injury risk. Effective core engage-

ment is critical for compound lifts like squats and deadlifts. When attention is diverted to camera angles or lighting, individuals may neglect to brace their core, exposing the spine to improper loading and shearing forces - a leading cause of lower back pain. Filming also prioritizes explosive, visually appealing lifts over controlled movements. Neglecting the eccentric phase (lowering the weight) reduces muscle activation and increases injury risk, undermining long-term progress.

The filming culture also takes a psychological toll. The constant need to broadcast workouts shifts the focus from self-improvement to self-presentation. A 2023 study in Body Image found that frequent exposure to fitness influencer content correlates with a 20% increase in body dissatisfaction and heightened anxiety among gym-goers. This phenomenon, known as self-objectification, leads individuals to view their bodies as objects for external judgment rather than tools for strength and resilience. For fitness influencers, whose livelihoods often depend on online presence, the gym is a workplace. However, this model has permeated the broader population, creating a culture where workouts are validated by social media engagement rather than personal achievement. The intrinsic joy of exercise - rooted in the sensation of effort and progress - is often replaced by anxiety over capturing the "perfect" shot.

**Reclaiming the Gym: A Path Forward**  
Restoring the gym as a space for authentic fitness requires both individual and collec-

tion. Gym-goers should prioritize intrinsic goals, such as improving strength by 10% over six months or mastering proper form. We need to remember why we started in the first place. Was it to build a following, or was it to build a stronger, healthier body? The answer for most is the latter. Let's begin by leaving our cameras in our bags. Let's redirect our focus to the sensation of the lift, the burn in the muscles, and the feeling of accomplishment that comes from within. The gym is not a studio - it is a space for sweat, effort, and transformation. The rise of social media has blurred the line between fitness and performance, compromising safety and mental well-being. By refocusing on the intrinsic value of exercise, implementing thoughtful policies, and building a community of mutual respect, we can reclaim the gym as a sanctuary for personal growth.

Let's prioritize our form over our feed. While some gyms have started to establish clear policies regarding filming, a collective change in mindset is perhaps the most powerful tool. The gym is a shared space, and a community thrives on mutual consideration and a common purpose. Let's make the gym a place of sweat, not selfies. A place of hard work, not performance. Let us reclaim the floor, the equipment, and the purpose of our time there. The gym is not a studio; it is a place of self-improvement. Let us treat it that way. Let us lift for strength, not likes, and make the gym floor a place of progress, not spectacle.

(The writer is Department of Electronics, Langat Singh College, Muzaffarpur)