

VILLAGE STUDY

Villages in India reflect the wider kaleidoscopic nature of rural society, which in one hand is rooted in ancient traditions whereas on the other hand forces of modernization are working in tandem. The rural villages are organically interlinked society which has evolved through times. It is a reality that mirrors the very heart of India. Villages are the centres of self-sufficiency, embodiment of collectivism. Though society is still rooted in age old customs of caste, feudalism and patriarchy the process of modern participative democracy has ensured the principle of equality. The effectiveness of participative institution provides the basis of redistribution and egalitarianism which is the feature of a democratic society. Villages are the epitaph on which the foundation of democracy is written.

Social order & its' Impacts:

In the villages of India, the residential quarters are often built based upon a strong caste system. The ties of caste & community in a village often cut across the economic classifications of a population. For example, a poor person from a particular caste or community will have more loyalty with & will identify more with economically well-off person of same caste/community. At the same time, social mobility within a caste/community may not always depend upon the economic status of a person. The Britishers themselves had fueled the casteism by creating *zamindari* (the upper caste persons responsible for collecting land revenue for the British on a commission basis) & *Ryotwari* (the lower caste peasants who received occupancy rights of land only after payment of money to Government). This system though was officially abolished in India after Independence; still the percentage of land holding by lower caste persons is lesser than higher caste persons.

To understand the social interactions amongst various communities separated by physical spaces, the field studies are required so that implications of the same upon semi-urban areas can be deduced. The marriages as well as family relations are found to be stronger amongst people of same community. At the same time, the loyalty a caste/community group feels may not surpass the religious boundaries & tensions may be created between followers of different religions when larger issues arise. This situation is far more serious in rural areas & may give rise to law & order situations as the reach of police authorities in far-flung rural areas may not be immediate.

The essay on modernization, occupational mobility, and rural stratification by Sharma (1970) is based on fieldwork in Rajasthan in 1965–66, that is, in the early post-Independence phase, when substantive changes were not yet in evidence. The author observes that occupational diversification depended on structural and cultural factors, and in terms of both, the upper castes were in an advantageous position. They had a near monopoly of jobs with high incomes, prestige, and power. The author concludes that modernization is not a Universalist phenomenon in India and it does not necessarily weaken traditional institutions like caste.

“Particularistic” modernization strengthened traditionally privileged and elite groups, and weakened the position of the expropriated. One example of this nature was Muzaffarnagar rioting in the year 2013 where, for the first time in the history of the district, the large scale rioting happened in rural areas. Such scenarios, if studied well by village visits, will produce ways to tackle & prevent the law & order situations well within time in other rural & semi-rural centers. Similarly, the causes & impacts of gender-related unreported crimes, incidences of which are high in rural areas, can be studied by visiting the villages.

2. Socio-Political Scenarios:

The studies of social structures start with a group of individuals & in such scenario, the small group of individuals residing in a hamlet or a small village constitute first basis of studies of bigger groups e.g. towns & semi-urban areas. The interactions of a human being with another in sociological aspects do not differ much in urban setting though the variables of interaction e.g. the language, the physical environment, the motives etc. may differ.

According to Sir Charles Metcalfe, "*The village communities are little republics having nearly everything that they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations.*"

Srinivas (1975) on methodology and perspectives on village society, begins by referring to the lack of a tradition of fieldwork in the social sciences, other than in social anthropology (or, to an extent, in sociology), and the consequent damage done. Lack of fieldwork affected the growth and development of the social sciences by alienating them from grassroots reality, which in turn resulted in woeful ignorance about the complex interrelations between economic, political, and social forces at local levels. According to Srinivas, the reason for the lack of a fieldwork tradition was the implicit assumption that people are like dough in the hands of planners and governments, and the illusion that, through “social engineering,” “directed social change,” and the like, governments could change the lives of the people. Srinivas refers to participant observation as a great asset and a highly productive methodological aid, particularly in the study of culture and social life. He shows the relevance of participant observation as a method even for those interested in regional, state, or national studies. It can serve as a system of apprenticeship, can help in interpreting other data on social institutions, and can be a crucial aid to intellectual development. Participant observation need not be only for small communities.

Beteille (1972), focuses on constraints to fieldwork, and explains how these very constraints can serve as a source of insights into society and culture. The article provides a graphic account of the tribulations involved in participant observation when living in a highly stratified village.

By contrast, Nehru never identified with the idea of the village as the site of future transformation. He considered the notion of “village republics” as characterized by various ills. He was critical of caste hierarchies and saw no virtue in reviving the traditional social order. He was sceptical of the Indian village becoming economically self-sufficient.

Ambedkar had first-hand experience of village life as a Dalit child. To those who wished to perceive the village as representative of Indian civilisation, Ambedkar offered a radical critique of the Indian village. He characterised village republics as being nowhere near democratic, but as being the ruination of India. To him, the village is a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and communalism – marked by exclusion, exploitation, and untouchability.

Rural settlement pattern

The layout of the streets and arrangements of building patterns in the villages gives out certain settlement patterns. The most common patterns found in villages are rectangular or square, checker board, elongated, linear, circular or semi-circular, L and T shape, triangular pattern.

1. Rectangular or square pattern. This pattern is mostly found in areas of uniform topography. The rectangular shape of the cultivated fields rise to this pattern. The main lanes of the villages intersect at right angles at the centre. Smaller lanes go to the interior of the housing more or less parallel to the former main lane. Such patterns are found in areas of Marwar plateau, Nirmar upland and in Narmada valley.

2. Linear pattern. This type of pattern is typical of area where Main Street of the village runs parallel to the railway lines, roads or water front. Such pattern are found in middle and lower Ganga plain, parts of the Himalayan region and along the coast ,especially in Malabar and Konkan.

3. L - Shaped pattern. The L- shaped pattern form where at the junction of main road two rectangular blocks of houses meet to give a L-shaped pattern. In some villages, a smaller limb extends towards the cultivated field giving the L-shaped pattern a T shaped pattern.

4. Circular pattern. The settlement takes a circular pattern when the habitats are situated along the bank of a pond or lake. Such settlements are found in Upper Ganga-Yamuna doab. Settlements along the meandering bend of the river takes horse shoe pattern.

Socio-Cultural Aspect of Villages

Agriculture being the main stays occupation of villages; they have close relationship with nature. The social ethos of village life depends on close ties of kinship and friendship. They lay stress on customs, traditions, consensus and informality. Caste and class structure do take special place in social fabric.

Family

Family is the indispensable part of rural life. The bonding of familial ties plays a vital role in various aspects of village life. It's the pyramid of psychological support structure. Joint family structure is dominant in villages. With the coming of globalisation and market economy nuclear families have sprouted but still there is emotional attachment with the greater family. Rural family is far more homogenous organically interlinked. The ties between family members are strong and last longer than their urban counterparts. The economy of families is mainly agriculture and the whole family forms a single economic entity, cooperate with one another and hold property in common. This interdependence among members helps develop a collective consciousness among the village folk. The centrifugal forces of modernity and globalization have eroded the base of social life of villages, yet the family as an institution has stood the test of time.

Caste system

Caste as an institution plays a major role in social arrangement pattern in Indian sub-continent. Varna and Jati refers to two broad institutional arrangements within Indian caste system. Varna is the four fold division of society into Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The caste system in villages was rigid once upon a time. The coming of market economy, communication, education, rural-urban migration has dissolved the caste hierarchy and made the self-contained castes into mobile classes. The power structure and land holding in villages are determined by caste. The monetary economy of village was also determined by caste lines.

The effect of globalization has diluted the caste and class structure has gained prominence. Traditional crafts previously determined according to caste are no longer performed by the certain specialized caste. Education has given the social mobility to castes. Certain caste has lost its dominance and submerged to the lowest class group whereas previously held lower caste have moved upwards in the social ladder armed with education and economic stronghold. Religious life of rural people which was rigorously determined by caste is no longer affected by it.

Economic necessity and knowledge economy is the determinant of the new type of social relationship. The age old system of caste has lost its foothold in today's society. The laissez-faire system of economy has produced class within caste system. The constitution of India has guaranteed equality of all citizens under the democratic set up of society. In such a democratic establishment equality and fraternity among the citizens should drive the society forward. This is the core principle of the founding fathers of our constitution.

Religion

Agriculture dominates the basic mode of livelihood in villages. Before the advent of modern irrigation and agricultural techniques; most of the rural farmer depends on Indra (God of Rain) for their harvest. The dependence on the forces of nature like rains, natural calamities and displeasure of gods points the basic nature of religious belief prevalent in rural society. The dependence on the natural forces and lack of proper reasoning and scientific outlook give rise to various superstitious beliefs among the people. Education and rational outlook can be a panacea for such ills. The religious beliefs dominate the intellectual and practical life of village people. Religion has permeated onto the cultural norms of the society. Religious beliefs also have influenced the folk songs, paintings, marriage customs and social festivals. Rituals provide sanctity to the religious codes and dominate the life of rural people. The specific sets of rituals are codified for particular caste.

Temples are religious and social institution in villages. The primary function of temples is offering prayers to various gods and deities. It also serves as centre for various social causes such as organizing cultural activities, social gathering, education, social welfare work, political gathering, propagating ethical values, dispensing judgement by village elders and so on. The same functions are also performed by the monasteries situated in various parts of Indian villages.

The propagation of modern scientific outlook and education has changed the way religion has been perceived. Secular and liberal democratic philosophy has been able to break the yoke of orthodox belief system associated with religion. Present day religion is more integrating and has superseded the caste traditions to form a more egalitarian society.