Village in India: Myths and Realities

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[The Indian village was portrayed as a "Closed" and "Isolated" system. In a report of the select committee of the house of commons, Charles Metcalf, a British administrator in India, depicted the Indian village as monolithic, atomistic and unchanging entity. He observed, "The Indian village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations."]

Recent historical, anthropological and sociological studies have shown that Indian villages was hardly ever a republic. It was never self-sufficient. It has links with the wider society. Migration, village economy, movement for work and trade, administrative connection, inter-regional market, inter-village economic and caste links and religious pilgrimage were prevalent in the past and were connecting the village with the neighbouring villages and the wider society. Moreover, new forces of modernisation in the modern period augmented inter-village and rural-urban interaction.

What is Village

In India, for purpose of government functioning the 'Rural' is defined in terms of revenue. For the Indian government, the village means a revenue village. It might include one big village or a cluster of small villages. However, for Census Commission, a village is identified by its name having definite boundaries. The Census of India has defined a village as, "The basic unit for rural areas is the revenue village which has definite surveyed boundaries. The revenue village may comprise several hamlets but the entire village has been treated as one unit for presentation of census data. In un-surveyed areas, like village within forest areas, each habitation area with locally recognized boundaries within each forest range officer's beat, was treated as one unit."

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Determinants of Rural Social Formation

Rural sociologists have argued that rural social life or rural way of life is the result of the interplay of few factors. These factors have determined the social formation of village life. Whether caste, clan, kin, polity or economy, all these have been determined by a set of factors which are specific to the village habitation. They are as under:-

1. *Geographic Environment:*
a. Location
b. Climate
c. Topography
d. Natural Resources
e. Isolation

2. *Social Environment:*
a. Predominance of Primary Group contacts.
b. Social Differentiation
c. Social Stratification
d. Migration and Mobility

3. *Cultural Environment:*
a. Simplicity of cultural expression
b. Social control
c. Rural Knowledge and skills
d. Level and standards of living.

Rural Social Structure in India

India is a country of ancient civilization that goes back to Indus valley civilization which flourished during the third millennium B.C. Since then except for a brief interlude during the Rigvedic period (Circa 1500 – 1000 B.C.) when the urban centres

were overrun, rural and urban centres have co-existed in India. People live in the settled villages. Three main types of settlement patterns have been observed in rural areas.

1. The most common type is the nucleated village found all over the country. Here, a tight cluster of houses are surrounded by the fields of the villagers. An outlying hamlet or several satellite hamlets are also found to be attached to some villages in this case.

2. Secondly, there are linear settlements in some parts of the century. In such settlement, houses are strung out, each surrounded by its own compound. However, there is little to physically demarcate where one village ends and another begins.

3. The third type of settlement is simply a scattering of homesteads or clusters of two or three houses. In this case also physical demarcation of villages is not clear. Such settlements are found in hill areas, in the Himalayan foothills, in the highlands of Gujarat and in the Satpura range of Maharashtra.

Rural life is characterised by direct relationship of people to nature i.e., land, animal and plant life. Agriculture is their main occupation. Long enduring rural social institution in India are family, kinship, caste, class, and village. They have millennia old historical roots and structures. They encompass the entire field of life: social, economic, political and cultural of the rural people.

Village and Economic System

The impression that the village in Pre – British India was economically self – sufficient was created by the existence of Jajmani system, payment in grain, and poor communication which limited the flow of goods. The fact that the weekly markets in neighbouring villages existed in traditional India proves that there was dependence on towns for items not locally available such as, silver and gold which was essential for weddings. These markets not only serve on economic purpose but also political, recreational and social purpose. Again, not all the artisan and servicing castes lived within a village, particularly in the case of the smaller settlements.

The proportion of smaller settlements must have been very high during the pre – British period because it was during British rule that large irrigation projects at all India level were undertaken in different parts of the country. Irrigation enabled a large number of people to be supported on a given area. Village studies have shown that certain castes provide services to a number of villages. Villagers have always depended on villagers in nearby villages .The urban population depended on the village produce for its basic needs of the food grain, raw materials for processed food and handicrafts.

The extension of the colonial economy to India brought the Indian villagers to the world market for products like jute and cotton. The availability of new economic opportunities during 20th century, especially after First World War, with industrialisation and urbanisation has made the village a part of the wider economic system.

M.S.A. Rao has identified three types of urban impact on villagers in India. Firstly, there are villages in which a sizeable number of people have taken employment in Indian cities and even overseas towns. They send money regularly to their families which are left behind in the villages. The money earned from urban employment is used to build fashionable houses in their villages and invested in land and industry. Donations are also made to the establishment of the educational institutions etc. All this increases the social prestige of their families. Thus the urban impact is felt by such villages even though they may not be physically situated near a city or town.

The second kind of urban impact is seen in villages which are situated near an industrial town. Their lands ate totally or partially acquired. They receive an influx of immigrant workers which stimulates a demand for houses and market inside the village.

The third type of impact on village is the growth of metropolitan cities. As the city expands it sucks the villages lying on the outskirts. Many villages

lose their land which is used for urban development. The villagers in these landless villages who get cash compensation may invest in land far off places or in commerce or squander the money. The villagers generally seek urban employment. Those villages on the fringe of city whose land has not yet been acquired or particularly acquired may engage in market gardening, dairy farming and poultry keeping.

To sum up, we can say that the Indian village was not economically self -sufficient even in the British times. Industrialisation and urbanization, which began during British rule and gained momentum after independence, have made the village a part of the wider economic network. Planned development of the countryside has made further dent in the rural economy.

Village and Caste and Kinship System

The village consists of a vertical interdependence of castes, i.e., relationship among different castes. It is reflected in Jajmani system. But these vertical ties are cut across by the horizontal ties of cate and kinship, i.e., the relationship within the caste, which extend beyond the village to other village and even towns. One's relative live in different villages and one has to interact with them on different occasions, like births, marriage and deaths. One may also have to depend on them for help in times of need. In north India where village exogamy exists along with caste endogamy, one has to look outside the village for a marriage partner for one's son or daughter.

In South India where village exogamy is not a rule and marriage between a woman and her mother's brother or marrying one's mother's brother's daughter is preferred, one may still have to look outside the village for a marriage partner. Since caste endogamy is the rule one's kin normally belong to one's caste. Intra caste relations and other caste matters are regulated by a caste panchayat whose members belong to different villages. In pre British India, the horizontal expansion of caste ties was limited by the political boundaries of a number of small kingdoms as well as poor roads and communication. With the unification of the country brought about by the British and the introduction of better roads and railways, cheap postage and printing, there was a rapid spread in intra-caste relations because it was easier to keep in regular touch with each other.

Thus we can say that the village has always had ties with other villages and towns for kinship and for caste purpose. This was limited in Pre-British India when communication was poor and small kingdoms existed whose boundaries acted as effective barriers. The horizontal spread of caste ties greatly increased during British rule and since independence it linked the village to a much wider area.

Village and Religious System

A study of the religion of any Indian village shows a double process of interaction at work between the religious beliefs and practices of the village and the wider Indian civilization. Mckim Marriot taking the concepts of 'great tradition' and 'little tradition' from Robert Redfield points out that certain elements of ritual and belief are contributions from village life which spread upward to the formation of India's great Sanskritic tradition, while other elements represent local modification of elements of the great tradition communicated downward to it. Marriot has given the terms 'Universalisation' and 'Parochialisation' respectively to refer to the two aspects of this double process of interaction between the little and great traditions.

M.N. Srinivas's concept of Sanskritization also shows the interaction between religion at the local level and all India Hinduism which is Sanskritic. Sanskritic elements are spread from the higher castes to the lower castes. The spread of Sanskritic theological ideas increased during British rule and after, due to the development of communications and spread of literacy. Western technology – railways, printing press, radio, television and films have helped the spread of Sanskritization. They have popularised the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, and other religious stories about the lives of saints like Mira, Tulsidas etc. and made the village a part of the wider universe.

Village and Political System

Indian villages had been described by British administrators in the early nineteenth century as

' little republic' with their simple form of self-government and almost no interference from the higher political authority except for claiming a share in the produce of the land and demanding young men to serve in the wars. The village functioned normally, unconcerned about who sat on the throne in the kingdom of which they were territorially a part. They were also described as being economically self-sufficient having nearly everything that they wanted within themselves. This description of Indian village is an over simplified one.

It was only after gaining independence that some social anthropologists who made intensive field studies of Indian villages began to question the conventional description of the Indian village. On the basis of their findings they demonstrated that the Indian villages has been a part of the wider society and civilization and not 'little republics' as described by British administrators.

In pre-British India the village was politically autonomous except for paying tax to the local chieftain or the king and providing him young men for his wars is incorrect. The village in pre-British India were not passive in their relation to the state. The villagers were not helpless in their relationship with rulers. Villagers could rebel and support a rival to throne. British rule changed the relationship between the village and the ruler.

Political conquest was followed by the development of communications. This enabled the British to establish an effective administration. Government employees like the police, revenue official and other came to the village. The British established a system of law courts. Major disputes and criminal offences had to be settled in courts. This greatly reduced the power of the village panchayat.

Since independence, the introduction of parliamentary democracy and adult franchise has made the village even more fully integrated with the wider political system. Villagers not only elect members of local bodies like the gram panchayat but also elect members of the state legislature and parliament. Regional and national political parties are active in the village doing propaganda and mobilising support for their parties. Although the village is a political unit with an elected panchayat to run the day to day administration. It is part of the district which is part of the state. The state is a part of the Indian Union. There is interaction between these different levels of the political system.

Conclusion

To sum up, we can say that, although the village has a definable structure and is a clear entity for the villagers themselves, it is also a sub- system within the larger political, economic, social and religious system in which it exists. In Pre British India the absence of roads and poor communications limited interaction between villages and between villages and towns. Nevertheless, the interaction was there. Even traditionally the village was not self-sufficient economically. Essential items were not produced in most of the villages and they had to visit weekly markets and towns for them. Again every village did not have all the essential artisans and servicing caste and there was mutual dependence between villages for this purpose.

Socially too, the village has never been an isolated unit. Kinship and caste ties have extended beyond the village. This is more so in the north, where village exogamy is practised. With the unification of the country under the British rule the barriers to the horizontal spread of caste ties were removed. The building of roads and railways, cheap postage and printing press helped members of a caste spread over a large areas to keep in touch. Since independence the importance of votes in getting one's candidate elected has further increased the horizontal unity of the caste.

As far as the religion of the village is concerned a continuous interaction between the localised little tradition and the great tradition of Indian civilization takes place through the double process of universalisation and parochialisation.

Politically, although in pre-British India the king was willing to allow villagers to govern themselves in day to day matter, the payment of a substantial portion of the produce was a symbol of villager's dependence on the king. Besides, king performed several duties towards the villagers. The British brought most of the country under their rule. The introduction of uniform law and a centralised administration made the village a part of the wider political system of the country. The introduction of

parliamentary democracy and adult franchise increased further the integration of the village with the different levels of the political system.

Thus, there is an integration and continuity between the village and the wider units of Indian society. This is very much visible today but it also existed in traditional India to a large extent.

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Austro-Franco-German Proposal for a European Post-C-19 Recovery

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[*While providing a brief overview of the conference on "75 Years of Europe's Collective Security and Human Rights Systems", held in the first week of July this year under the aegis of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, the authors report about an action plan named 'Vienna Process: Common Future – One Europe'. Under this framework, the contributing policy-makers and academics are expected to continue engaging in meaningful activities to reflect on the trends and developments comprising he European reality while concurrently affecting the lives of millions. The ultimate avowed objective of this conference is said to be to contribute to a more just, secure and peaceful European future. Ed.*]

The conference named "75 years of Europe's Collective Security and Human Rights System", which took place on the 1st of July at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, brought together experts related to the reality of the Old Continent and its Union over the course of the past 75 years of its post-WWII anti-fascist existence. It was jointly organized by four different entities (the International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies IFIMES, Media Platform Modern Diplomacy, Scientific Journal European Perspectives, and Action Platform Culture for Peace) with the support of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, numerous academia supporting and media partners.

The conference gathered over twenty high ranking speakers from Canada to Australia, and audience physically in the venue while many others attended online – from Chile to Far East. The day was filled by three panels focusing on the legacy of WWII, Nuremberg Trials, the European Human Rights Charter and their relevance in the 21st century; on the importance of culture for peace and culture of peace – culture, science, arts, sports – as a way to reinforce a collective identity in Europe; on the importance of accelerating on universalism and pan-European Multilateralism while integrating further the Euro-MED within Europe, or as the Romano Prodi's EU Commission coined it back in 2000s – "from Morocco to Russia – everything but the institutions".

The event itself was probably the largest physical gathering past the early spring lock down to this very day in this part of Europe. No wonder that it marked a launch of the political rethink and recalibration named – Vienna Process.

The panel under the name "Future to Europe: Is there any alternative to universal and pan-European Multilateralism? Revisiting and recalibrating the Euro-MED and cross-continental affairs", was focused on discussing the determinants of Europe's relations with its strategic Euro-MED and Eurasian neighborhood, the possible pan-European political

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