



ISSN: 2319-6505

Available Online at <http://journalijcar.org>

International Journal of Current Advanced Research
Vol 5, Issue 7, pp 1097-1105, July 2016

*International Journal
of Current Advanced
Research*

ISSN: 2319 - 6475

RESEARCH ARTICLE

RETHINKING INDIAN VILLAGES: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 10th April, 2016
Received in revised form 09th May, 2016
Accepted 25th June, 2016
Published online 28th July, 2016

Key words:

Indian Society, Village Community, Caste System, Rural Development.

ABSTRACT

Community has been generally associated with those modes of social organization that are considered fundamental to traditional Indian society like jati, religion, village, panchayat etc. The primary aim here is to re-think and re-present one such category i.e. the conventional constructs of “village community” with the belief that presently, after around half a century of India’s Republic, it is conceived as disharmonic, fractured, contested, contradictory and continually in flux. By reviewing various village studies, it is realized here that Indian village could not retain its originality owing to various external forces like Colonial rule, State intervention and LPG, thus leading to structural transformation in the life style of village India. These agents were seemed as having positive and negative juxtapositions on simple rural society and thus leading to complexity of images and issues in contemporary village setting. Few glimpses of emerging picture of modern Indian village have also been referred in the paper.

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INTRODUCTION

Dynamics of Village Community in village studies: A Background

In the Sociological tradition the idea of community has been linked to locality, to identity of functional interests, to a sense of belonging, to shared cultural and ethnic value, to a way of life opposed to the organization and bureaucracy of modern mass society. Communities were viewed as closed collectivities or traditional groupings in which the question of individual choice did not matter. In this connection Tonnies (1955) is of view that living inside a community (Gemeinschaft) fostered a feeling of intense solidarity and belongingness, but the most important principle of communityness was that the solidarity was not based upon convergence of interest (as in Gesellschaften society). Community has been generally associated with those modes of social organization that are considered fundamental to traditional Indian society like jati, religion, village, panchayat etc. and are characterized by continuity, cohesion, boundness and adherence to tradition (Carol Upadhaya; 2001). Ronald Inden (1990) also affirms in his work about the village republic as a crucial pillar of Indian society.

Extending the debate, it can be referred that if we compare the village studies of 1950’s with the contemporary village studies, we find a shift from ‘treating the village as a locale for the study of a chosen aspect of rural life’ to ‘treating village as an interacting community with the outside world, both at regional and national level’. Contemporary debates about the conceptual discussions on the nature of a village community have raised the issue of the transitional shift in the ‘way of life’ of the villages. In this regard Madan (2002:1) believed that the village in India epitomizes the essence of

Indian civilization as it is considered a repository of traditional mores and folkways. In being currently lived social reality, it provides a framework for economic planning and social development, and other related efforts at modernizing traditional ways of life. It is thus also an appropriate forum for interdisciplinary research. Commenting on the progress of the village studies in India, Atal (2003; 160) says that the history of the studies of village community in India may be regarded as young as the Indian independence. No doubt, there were, in the past, some sporadic attempts by British scholars and administrators to investigate the aspect of rural life, but they did not generate a ‘movement’ in the academia. In the wake of the above presumed changes the lively issues and agendas for future reflections are - how is the nature of village getting affected and in turn presenting new challenges to the nation-state? How social scientists are posing their methodology to encompass the complexity of contemporary villages in India? This paper is persuading the synoptic view of issues emerging in the contemporary Indian villages. Present focus is on “village community” which was typically based on hierarchical inequality and functional holism and viewed to have represented a harmonic one through centuries. Intend of this paper is a re-consideration of the construct of prevailing village community. The primary aim here is to re-think and re-present the conventional constructs of “village community” with the belief that presently, after around half a century of India’s Republic, it is conceived as disharmonic, fractured, contested, contradictory and continually in flux. There is need for capturing the drastic shift in pre-conceptualized gemeinschaften understanding of villages. The village community, which were earlier considered to be isolated, static, and thus representing social solidarity are being tempered. The unity of oppositions representing value consensus and collective action (may be because of religious

dominance) are not true today. Religion operative system of caste, which managed the synthesis possible, is no more significant today. The Dumontian understanding of two polar oppositions of pure and impure on the basis of religion is no more effective in understanding the ground realities of village community. It has simply become traditional ideological myth, which has nothing to do with reality. Thus, the functional unity of village is being replaced by dialectic unity (in community sense) and finally leading to more individualism and gesselschaften category.

In this context Dube (1992; 37), rightly states that detailed and penetrating analysis of societies within functional analysis showed that the conceptual growth became somewhat superficial when it comes to explain change. All changes could not be accounted for by external influences, for it was soon found that most social structure had the elements of contradiction and conflict within them. Social integration was nowhere nearly as perfect, as it was assumed to be: most societies had only imperfect equilibrium. Elaborating this idea we can say that the village community in the past manifested through the unity of opposition (but not in a conflict mode). The unity was possible through religion (superstructure) and visibly maintained through caste system. But influence of internal and external pressures on the village resulted in breaking the unity of the opposites (the so called functional interdependence) and finally has put them in a conflicting situation.

The presumption here is thus that with the invasion of exogenous factors in terms of developmental programme through State and non-government interventions, the contradictions and the conflicting situations have sharpened and now the shift is from hierarchical inequality with harmonic tone towards competitive inequality and disharmonic society.

It is thus re-emphasized that the Indian village is thus no more to be treated as static and sui-gensis and is to should be understood on dialectical and transitional lines. It is being observed that previously it was the British rule in India, which tampered the economy and social aspect of village community, but now it is State, which is the agency to engineer the contrast to the previously existing village community. The State intervention has changed the economic, social and political sphere of the village. The village life is no more considered as private and isolated affairs, it is influenced by the social, economic, and political forces coming from outside. In continuation to the above process, even the economic forces of privatization, liberalization and globalization has shattered the imaginary boundaries to village community and made them spatially open arena for exposure, conflicts and modifications. Further, while attention has continuously been given to the depiction of all sections of rural population through fieldwork, two areas have begun to be focused upon, viz., the women in society, and the dalit or the subaltern studies with special vigor. The assumption here is that the point of view of the neglected sections in defining the situation and posing the problems has yet to be fully articulated. The dalit identity has been recognized and articulated more sharply in the literary field, and some headway has been made at the conceptual level through subaltern studies and linkage with ethnicity.

The above framework thus led the contemporary rural India to address itself to question of socio-cultural processes emanating from outside the village in both the public and private sectors in the institutionalized and non-institutionalized modes covering almost every facet of life. It is also observed that the different social units and sections of society are getting involved in ways more than one and redefining their interrelations. In the wake of the above presumed changes the lively issues and agendas for future reflections are - how is the nature of village getting affected and in turn presenting new challenges to the nation-state? How are the social scientists posing their methodology to encompass the complexity of contemporary villages in India? By reviewing various village studies, this paper is persuading the synoptic view of issues emerging in the contemporary Indian villages. Few glimpses of emerging picture of modern Indian village have also been referred in the paper.

Village as community in Pre-colonial era: An impression

In India, the village (gram) finds mention in ancient texts and later epics. It is distinguished from the city (*nagar*) and the town or the fortress (*pur*), while all three stands in opposition to habitations of recluses in the forest (*aranya*). However the emphasis was seen more in terms of social evolution of villages from nomadism to settled agriculture. Historians (Basham, 1954; Kosambi, 1965; Habib, 1999 and others) tried to describe the physiognomy and administrative aspect of villages. A detailed study of the growth and character of the village from the 16th to the 18th centuries has been discussed by Habib (1999) in his book on the agrarian system of Mughal India. His focus is peasant rights and tenancy, thus indirectly reflecting the nature of social and cultural life in those times. He describes that the majority of the villages then were peasant, as agriculture was a commonly followed occupation, and caste identity was a qualifier (see Madan; 2002).

Quoting Habib (1999; 144), 'the village in Mughal India stood in a dual position in its relationship with the world outside. A large amount of its produce had to be marketed outside, in order to meet tax claims; and thus a part at least of its economy was dominated by the requirements and vicissitudes of commodity production. At the same time, since the village few claims upon anyone outside its limits, its own inhabitants' need had to be met very largely from within it and it had, therefore, to function as a self-sufficient unit. The twin circumstances dictated that a system of individual peasant production with resultant differentiation should coexist with the organization of the village as a "community", a network of caste divisions and customary service or barter relationships'. Thus, the discourse on Indian village has depicted the village as the locale where caste appears in the form of a strange community of collective actors and peculiar political economy of subsistence exchange, the so-called 'jajamani system'. Later, Monier Williams characterized certain features which the Indian village possess - "The Indian village or township, meaning thereby not merely a collection of houses forming a village or town, but a division of temporary--- with its careful distribution of fixed occupation for the common good, with its inter-dining and inter-dependence of individuals, family and communal interests, with its perfect provision for political independence and autonomy". Thus each village has an inner world, a

traditional organic community, self-sufficient in its economy, patriarchal in its governance, surrounded by an outer one of other hostile villages and despotic governments.

The idea of Marx and Engels on village in their idea of an Asiatic mode of production is – the village is a strange world and the villager a strange sort of human, for he thinks that the village lands on which he labours belongs not to him who ploughs them but to the village as a whole. He merely possesses his land only by virtue of his descent from an ancestor and patriarch of the clan. Karl Marx thus adopting an evolutionary perspective, placed the village in Asia, just above the primitive and the barbarian social forms, and described it as a self-contained community. For Marx, the Indian village was the mainstay of a stagnant oriental social system, where property was held in common by a whole village, and class conflict was absent. For him the Indian village represented a distinct autarchic economic system- the Asiatic mode of production- combining agriculture with manufacture. The uniqueness of the system, he believed also contributed to the unchanging and stifling character of society.

Adding further, Marx said - these idyllic village communities... restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies----' (1853 a: 94). The Indian village was for Marx, passive and unresistant to what was thrust upon it. While he was critical of the stagnant nature of the village economy, he also accused the British 'intruders' of breaking up the Indian handloom and destroying the spinning wheel. Finally, regarding the changelessness of the Asiatic village, Marx characterizes that there was no separation of the cultivating householder (by virtue of owning his own land) from the village or the clan to which he belonged; secondly there was an absence of a division of labor among villages. Further in his scheme of historical materialism, clans are transposed into castes and the strict form of caste-order makes them unchangeable.

Sir Henry Maine focused village as 'Aryan village brotherhood' organized into separate households, each despotically governed by its family chief, and never trespassed upon by the footstep of any person of different blood. The ancient ruler has a right only to a 'share' of the produce. A principle of patrilineal descent was for him, the principle according to which social solidarity and social order of the authority and property has maintained. Baden Powell focused on Dravidian severalty village called 'raiyatwari' one. It is the one in which separate household have their distinct lands, ownership in those household is vested in the patriarch or head, representing the idea of the joint family. To Powell, since those simple needs had not changed after the moment of caste and state formation in ancient India, her village institutions therefore remained static.

Thus the relationship of castes in the village would be characterized by ties of group cooperation and solidarity rather than of competition between individuals. The payment made for goods and services would be determined not by a market but by Jajmani system. Thus the absence of a free-market, of individuals, of private property and of competitive spirit said to characterize the pre-colonial Indian village.

On the contrary, Pannikar's (1992) comment on the statistical survey of the country by Francis Buchanan in the 1810s (projected an idea of self-sufficiency and immutability of the village) reveals that such a narrow view did tend to ignore other significant issues, such as the greatly unequal, weakened, and unstable character of the rural economy which was reflected, for example, in the occurrence of peasant riots in the late-nineteenth century (See Pannikar, 1992; Dhanagare, 1991). It can thus be stated that projected view of the villages was lop-sided i.e. only evolutionary and neglected the dialectical issues within the village setting.

Various agents leading to unprecedented rural India: An overview

Agent of transformation has been rightly referred by Chauhan (2005; 295) that how increasing participation in the national, state level and panchayati Raj Institutions has brought social linkages into limelight, as well as a degree of local patriotism or dignity into operation. To him, mass communication now covers the rural areas. Problem solving mechanism in the form of voluntary agencies- local, national and international- are at work. International organized efforts through the U.N. agencies- the World Bank, the UNCTAD, UNICEF, the FAO and donor agencies at state levels are visible in rural areas. These have specific programmes of their own, and are deeply concerned with the manner in which the funds are allocated and utilized. In the formulation of projects, social base line studies are insisted upon. A new vocabulary in the identification of stakeholders, participatory planning, felt needs, and techniques of monitoring that could be centrally administered, were seen. It gave rise to new interconnections with user groups, micro financing, self-help group, water harvesting and capacity building for repaying loans, etc. How do the traditional tool of research and long drawn studies of village stand up to the challenge; or assert the capacity for retaining certain cautions become somewhat problematic. Then there is the question of taking into account the linkages of the international agencies with the state, the voluntary agencies at the local level as well as the people's representatives. At this juncture, it is realized that Indian village could not retain its originality owing to various external forces, leading to structural transformation in the life style of village India. These agents were seemed as having positive and negative juxtapositions on simple rural society and thus leading to complexity and dynamics in village social structure. They can be broadly and systematically divided under following heads: -

Indian Villages vs. Colonial rule – IST intimidate

It is true that under British rule, concrete steps were taken to describe and classify the village community. This was necessitated by administrative and revenue needs, as also the desire to understand the socio-economic conditions of the people who were being governed. Census reports as early the 1880s along with gazetteers, district handbooks, and regional surveys, brought together varied information on the village community. The presence of revenue collector, accountant, and police boundary man was the new categories in the traditions setting. Further, in 1901, an ethnographic survey of India was attempted as a part of the 1901 census. In 1916, Gilbert Slater carried out village-based surveys with a focus on economic issues. In this regard, Dumont (1966; 67) saw three connected but successive meaning in the term 'village

community'. In the first phase the village community is seen by British writers as primarily a political society, in the second phase as a body of co-owners of the soil, while in the third phase it becomes to Indians the emblem of traditional economy and polity, a watch word of Indian patriotism. On the aspect of British intervention into villages, Cohn (1968) rightly criticizes that colonial research stopped at the boundaries of village instead of penetrating into the domains of every life. Later Srinivas (1987) too wrote about how such scholarship, and specifically the work of intellectual like Maine and Marx cast misconceptions about village life into universal history. At this juncture it becomes difficult to rely on judgment by Maine as for Marx, that caste system was the chief obstacle to change and growth in rural India. Further it is also difficult to rely on Maine's description of the village as the least destructible institution of Indian society.

On the contrary, it can be realized that the British conquest of India had abolished the traditional feudalism and old Indian economic system. In place of village commune appeared modern peasant proprietors and zamindars, both private owners of land. The new revenue system superseded the traditional right of the village community over village land. Lord Cornwallis with Permanent land settlement (1793) prominently in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa forced the idea of fixed cash payment, intermediary strata of zamindars, peasant proprietors, commercialization of agriculture etc (also see A.R.Desai, 1976). Cohn (1987: 343) too argues that the stability of traditional social structure was due to rights on land enjoyed for well over two thousand years. It is assumed that it was the British who destroyed the old land control system by establishing an absolute, heritable and saleable right in land on part of individual/corporate group responsible for payment of land revenue to the government.

The British conquest suggests that outer covering of the so-called 'Capsulated -village' was attacked, which resulted into a shift from 'Organic inside, atomistic outside' to 'Organic inside as well as Organic outside'. Thus British conquest created first intimidate to the prevailing thesis of atomistic village, a negation of subsistence production to commercial production, an economic shift in qualitative and quantitative dimension.

Here it will be right to state Atal's (2005:304) critical remarks on the handling of villages during British reign. It can be stated that the Indian village became a subject of investigation and discussion as soon as the British began to administer India in the beginning of the 19th century. Three issues dominated the discussion for over a century: i) the nature of the village as the revenue paying unit, and the type of such units; ii) the village as a self-sufficient and autonomous unit; and iii) the place of the Indian village community in the stages of social evolution. The colonial government's efforts to understand village economy, mainly as an aid to more efficient revenue administration, became more systematic in course of time, particularly after its department of agriculture launched village surveys in some parts of the country. Further, a real shift in intellectual interest in the Indian village took place after the Second World War. There were two major developments. Firstly, the nationalist movement under Mahatma Gandhi made reconstruction of village economy and society a crucial component of the movement. Secondly, the newly established departments of economics and sociology in

a few universities also began to study village economy and society.

The above arguments project the changing village of India during colonial rule. It also reflects the administrative inclination but academic non-seriousness regarding exploring villages and thus projecting a superficial and biased picture of Indian village community. One may say that the intrusion/intervention of Britishers have given a 'new construct' to rural India both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Indian Villages vs. Nation-State - IInd intimidate

The programme for reconstruction of village economy and society became part of national development plan after independence. They gave a new impetus to village studies by sociologists and social anthropologists. The work of M.N.Srinivas, S.C. Dube, A.C.Mayer, McKim Marriott and others emphasized the connection of the village with the "surrounding region" discussing the relationship of villages with the world outside largely in terms of the 'exchange', 'transaction', 'network', 'linkage' etc.

Commenting on the concern on studying villages Atal (2005: 298) rightly refers that- some fifty years ago, when the village studies in India gained momentum and attracted both sociologists and social anthropologists, it appeared that people were giving up old concern with Indology and ethnology and moving whole hog towards the village...Concern with the village then was guided by two factors: i) need to document the existing reality before it gets changed through the waves of external influences- planned development, Westernization and modernization; and ii) study the process of directed cultural change and its consequences both to contribute to theory and to assist the planning processes of the country. While the first led to the intensive studies of single villages in tradition of ethnography, the second factor led to theme-specific studies not only by sociologists but also by political scientists, economists, and psychologists. He rightly adds that time has come to review both structural-functional and Marxist frameworks in the context of changing scenario of rural India. To him, the big difference between the 1950s and now do indeed include the Dalit awakening and the shift away from governmental action towards civil society initiatives. In this regard, Shah (1992) describes the rural poor as being diverse in their composition – farmers, landlords, artisans, dalit – because of which the process of change and resistance too had a diverse character (see Das, A, 1996; J Breman et 1997, Epstein al 1998). This could be seen in the direction of new farmer's movement, identity assertion, multiple identities and other social action in rural India.

Extending the changeology in village studies, Beteille stresses that social anthropology and sociology had sorely neglected the equations of power and property in the 1950s and 60s. Since caste, ownership, and control of land were issues central to village economy, unless one understood agrarian hierarchy, the significance of social relations would remain unclear (Beteille, 1974). Nevertheless, the field of economic relations itself became one of the sources of change in village social structure with the commercialization of agriculture and opening of the village to wider social and economic influences (See also Dhanagare, 1991; Bandopadhyaya, S & D Von Eschen 1991; Thorner, 1976 Beteille, 1974).

It can be stressed here that the village studies in Sixties and seventies shifted from single village holistic study to multi-village comparative study; problem oriented studies; Development analysis study and evaluative study related impact of planned changes. Many village studies focused on the debate about the nature and direction of changes occurring in the rural institutions like caste, jajmani system, joint family, kinship, village panchayat and others (see Sharma, 1997). In so many ways, 'outside agencies', such as political parties, social and religious organizations, government agencies and all other, impinges upon the perception of the people and led to the social, economic, political and psychological shift of the village community. Large segment of Indian population have become aware, either by self or by outside interventions, of their civil rights, democratic liberties, fundamental rights, human rights etc. Later by the 1980s village studies acquired new meaning. No longer just an observation centre that it was once for the fieldworker, today the village has become a major part of an overall strategy for development and change. Thus, the village becoming a 'fertile testing ground' for the activist and policy maker, it also motivated few social scientists in 1990's to go for restudy of the village.

Emphasizing on the state intervention and its implication on rural India Sathyamurthy (1996) asserts, aegis of a planned economy, modernization, and Green revolution led a rapid growth of food production and far-reaching uneven differentiation of peasantry. Economic development in India has resulted in a number overlapping imbalance: Between the agrarian and industrial bourgeoisie; between politicians and bureaucrats; between a rapidly differentiated middle peasantry and the agrarian classes below it; between upper castes and middle/lower castes; between middle castes and Dalits; between men and women.

After the mid 60's, it is the agricultural sector, which took the lead in the growth process. The so-called Green revolution witnessed the emergence and consolidation of powerful capitalist strata. The qualitative changes occurring in the country-side includes--a section of the old rent-receiving landlords was stimulated by the enhanced profitability of agriculture in the mid 60's to undertake productive investment in this sphere. At the same time, the rich peasantry who acquires right over land also started commercial agriculture. Through this admixture of landlord capitalism and rich peasant capitalism, a new class of agricultural bourgeoisie emerged, which consolidated its position after mid 60's.

Emerging Issues

- Agrarian reform introduced by Congress under the leadership of Nehru in 1952 brought a veritable revolution in the countryside.
- India's Community development programme has been acclaimed as reflecting the attempt to the objective of economically and socially democratic policy in the countryside since 1952. Over the last two decades, the focus on community development shifted to community participation.
- There is a need to emphasize the distinction between regular continuing relationship between village and the State. Although there is hardly any direct government intervention in the production and investment decision related to agriculture by farmers. But the government

does influence the legal, material and economic environment in which farmers operate.

- After independence state not acted as neutral referee to the caste activities and launched laws relating to untouchability, reservation etc. Government intervention in the form of reservation in education and jobs in favor of OBC, has also contributed to the worsening of the relations between similar and dissimilar castes.
- The concept of citizen has provided them an equal playfield to some extent.
- Universal franchise gave motivation to horizontal caste solidarity.
- Wells, tube wells and pump set for lifting ground water are mostly in the hands individual farmers. But they are subject to government regulation meant to serve the interest of equity and sustainability. Government provides infrastructure facilities to the rural areas.
- In order to strengthen agricultural development, the credit is flowing through institutional channel like NABARD, SIDBI, Cooperative banks, and other private banks.
- Now let us systematically understand the sharp implications of state intervention on village community under following heads (See Saxena; 2005):

Changing Social Aspect

With the rapid urbanization and means of transport and communication the hierarchical rigid order is weakened. Further the villagers for their self-interest (especially during elections) feel the social distance mechanism as dysfunctional. Now the higher caste people visit the house of lower caste people and take water and food from them. The lower caste people too have a tendency to sit on the cot along with higher caste, exchange hucca and take food. The distance in marriage practice is still surviving.

Declining jajmani system, caste panchayats and agrarian based economy; factions in elections, contacts with the outside world etc have really resulted into decline in village unity. Although the villagers know each other but still they don't intervene in day-to-day affairs of others (except few educated and power elite individual and groups). The villagers seem to be more rational and restricted in their interaction. It is found that the charm of festivals and Mela is declining, which really unite the whole of villagers. Electrification and new recreational items like T.V., radio has made the masses isolated in their house only. The "hukka culture" too has declined which used to integrate the caste people.

A study in Bihar (traditional oriented) reveals the struggle for dignity (*izzat*), as a part of the anti-feudal struggle, which has gone through two phases- In the 20's it was taken up by the economically advanced castes-Kurmis, Koeri's and Yadavas. They not only refused to undertake beggar (unpaid labor) for the landlords or sell their commodities at less than the market price, but also began to adopt formerly upper castes names, wear the sacred thread, etc (Jha, H 1977). Regarding Dalit situation, it is being pointed that as recently as late 70's, they were still being subjected to various indignities. It is only with the rise of the Naxalite movement that that there situation has changed. In the course of the lower castes acquiring dignity, they started practice of wearing clothes of one's choice, sitting on a cot etc. Further, there participation in festivals and social occasions has also changed.

In analyzing the rural society of Jammu region (see Saxena; 2005), it is observed that land reform in this region turned the weaker sections into have's of land and with this, they refused to work on lands of higher castes land resulting into intrusion of agricultural labourer from outside State's. Summarizing salient social Issues: -

- With the advancement of capitalistic mode of production and modernization the traditional vertical linkage of inter-caste jajmani system broke and replaced by national or regional horizontal linkage of intra-caste solidarity.
- Fundamental change in the caste is the beginning of a gradual decline in the jajmani system; and an integral part of decline is growing disjunction between caste and traditional occupation. This is also linked to population growth, the increasing scarcity of arable land and migration to urban areas.
- Hierarchical notion based on purity and pollution is on decline, and giving way to secular thinking.

Changing Economic/Technological aspect

Commercialization of agriculture, electrification, using of canals and tube wells for irrigation, tractors replacing plough and bullock carts, importance of cash etc have not only decreased the jajmani system but have also brought rationality in agrarian economy and exchange. The jajmani relationship is only restricted between untouchables (doing menial work) and the upper caste. With the advent of science and technology, the service caste people have declined, villagers no more goes to the barber for daily shaving, they do the same with their own razors and only goes for hair cutting; Potter's mud vessel is replaced by stainless steel, bone china and aluminum vessel, the mud walls are replaced by brick walls and cemented house, Dhobi's work is done by individuals themselves, by using new detergents. Most of the service caste people have either left their traditional jobs or continuing the same outside the village, the reason is to get more earning and to change their status in the villages. On the understanding of the term 'peasantry', originally it came into use at a time when most rural workers had the same relationship to the means of production and controlled only the labor of their own families. But with commercialization of agriculture, the picture has changed radically. The once homogenous categories became stratified and split into antagonistic classes based on buying and selling of labor power. The process begun during the colonial period, but it has advanced rapidly since green revolution. It has also led to progression of middle peasant thesis.

India's agricultural development has been uneven because of the variation in physical features, available technology and others. Added to this is the uneven pattern of investment in rural development. The new agrarianism that has emerged on the political arena has been strongly influenced by, and has in turn, influenced, different aspect of agriculture like, high yield variety seed, fertilizers and modern machinery. After the mid 60's it was the agricultural sectors, which took the lead in the growth process. The so-called Green revolution witnessed the emergence and consolidation. According to Rudolph & Rudolph (1967), the displacement of the large landowners by middle farmers may be accurately described as one of the most significant development of the post-independence period. The middle farmers today constitute the most

powerful group in the countryside economically as well as politically.

India has been experiencing the emergence of new agrarianism. Millions farmers are mobilizing themselves against the State. Sharad Joshi and other exponents of new agrarianism, advocates remunerative prices for agricultural commodities, electric supply at nominal rates etc. This has led to a vertical mobilization of agrarian classes. Summarizing salient economic issues: -

- Advent of Transport and communication has led to increasing labor mobility. It is realized that the place other than native place is used for work as they retain their dignity of work and self.
- The rural migrant succeeded in climbing up to a more dignified work in the city by upgrading their skills and strengthening their bargaining position. They simply came with the intention that they have nothing to lose but to gain only.
- Tube well capitalism has been introduced replacing wells and canals having uncertain water resource.
- Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana in 1999 emphasizes on formation of self-help groups for poverty alleviation, thus leading to diversification of labor.
- What is now called 'agriculture' has become mostly sets of industrial processes physically located in the open air rather than under a roof; i.e. they constitute 'agri-business'.
- External aid (international) by the country like U.S., U.K, Russia, Germany; agencies; agencies like World bank, Asian development bank; programmes like Indo-Dutch programme for alternative to development.

Changing political aspect

Change is also taking place in the political arena. F.G.Bailey in the late 1950s and early 1960s wrote on the idea of the village as a para-political system, functioning in nexus with a wider political environment (see Bailey 1963). These ideas of power and authority being governed by wider networks are reflected in Anand Chakravarti's (1975) work on the Rajasthan village of Deivsar. His analysis demonstrates that the state could be a catalyst for change in the social and political spheres, and how wider political processes like land reforms and Panchayati Raj could influence equations in the village.

In the contemporary rural India, it is found that villagers are more aware of their right to vote, factions are the visible examples of political mobilization of masses into different parties. The rural election resembles more like the urban elections having symptoms like bribery, conflict, faction, influencing masses with cash and kind, murders etc. The leadership too is not restricted to any particular caste especially higher caste. People from middle and lower caste groups (because of reservation policy) are more in competition for leadership. Further the dominance of older people is being replaced by youths in leadership pattern. Summarizing salient political issues: -

- A new political culture is also emerging in the villages, and the younger villagers are being inducted into decision-making.

- According to Srinivas (1996), with the idea of PRI becoming universal, certain changes have occurred in the power structure of the village. The most potent source of mobility to them has been adult franchise.
- In the panchayat elections in many states like Bihar, U.P., Punjab etc. the lower castes were brought into the center stage for the first time.
- The reservation in PRI's is giving some breathing space for dalit's to raise their voice and retain their dignity.
- There is emerging reservation politics of the OBC's and Sc's. The situation is making rural India more hostile and fractured.

Indian Villages vs. LPG (Liberalization, Privatization & Globalization) - IIIrd intimidate

These forces are the most powerful and deadly to the rural community as it exposes the village globally. In some sense it seems good but it is more destructive to developing country like India. It has brought new competitors for the total village and resulting to reshape the village setting. Summarizing salient issues: -

- The process of liberalization, privatization and globalization has restructured local and parochial configurations into the national and global network.
- Liberalization is leading to enlarging private sectors in irrigation and allied activities. Private Corporation is acquiring land for raising crops and forests.
- The current debate on globalization focuses on the role of international trade and market as a cohesive force.
- Prior to globalization, peasants never felt threatened, as there were no barriers to exchange, distribution or multiply seeds.
- The current debate on globalization focuses on the role of international trade and market as a cohesive force.
- Local communities feel both unstable and unsafe in the face of global market force-bolstered up by media and too are controlled by MNC's. The media impact on local communities and culture is so shattering that the consumer culture has pushed them to the threshold of extinction. Local economies are being swallowed by the global capitalism and traditional culture is being displaced by the ever-expanding global market and consumer culture.
- Aspect of Eco-agriculture like depletion of ground water resources and land resources are emerging.

Emerging dialectical and conflicting issues in village community

It is realized that village community is no more harmonic; rather it is highly competitive, disharmonic and vibrant. The gravity of situation can be grasped through following salient Issues: -

- The number of atrocities on the Dalits in the earlier years was by no means modest. According to the Report of the commission for the SC's and ST's, the incidence on them is increasing.
- The traditional dominant and new-emerging ones (like SC, women, OBC) constitutes a major challenge to Indian democracy. This problem is likely to be exacerbated by the emerging militancy of the Dalits.

Rural violence and bloodshed are likely to rise sharply in the immediate future.

- Acute competition generate among the backward caste themselves for access to resources which are scarce e.g. OBC Jats in U.P. (along with Yadav). Political reservation brings more inequality among so-called homogenous weaker sections.
- In India, the adverse effects of corruption on democracy have come into sharp focus in recent years in connection with issues of local governance and village politics. The local electoral politics are integrally linked with various development rackets and can even generate competitive corruption.
- Competition, pronounced value difference, deep cleavages of interest, wide inequalities, and a sense of denial and injustice between different groups give rise to conflict. All these processes are happening in rural setting.
- Emerging dalit leadership have corrupted the mentality and expectation of Dalit poor of grabbing opportunities by following norms that breach public trust, misuse of political and administrative power for personal gains etc.
- Under SGSY, government is giving loans for self help group. In Gujarat in Gandhinagar distt. the big losers are those to whom these development is supposed to benefit. They are under debt as they are not in a position to utilize the fund properly. (Nikita Sud; 2003 13 4085).
- Secularization of caste system on one hand has caused a separation of the caste from the ritual hierarchy of status, and on the other, has conferred on it a character of "power group" in political sphere.
- Agrarian unrest, especially farmer's agitation for remunerative prices, waiver of agricultural loans, electricity shortage, etc. is visible in rural India.
- According to Vidhyasagar (1996; 182), the principal beneficiaries of the Green revolution are Northwestern region and deltaic plain in south and irrigated parts of central region like Gujarat & Maharashtra. He showed positive correlation between the high productive distt. and farmer's movement. Emerging agrarianism took root in Punjab, Haryana, Western U.P., Gujarat, Maharashtra, Coastal Andhra and parts of Tamil Nadu. It may be noted that these regions have experienced a great penetration of market forces and capitalist development in agriculture. To some, these regions through famous movement showed greater inequality any masses and conflicts with states. These movements have also moved these farmers issue at national politics.
- With the rise of prosperity in rural areas the incidence if kidnapping, murders, theft and other evils are emerging at a faster rate, as evident in agricultural productive areas of Punjab and Western U.P.
- The 1990's have ushered in an era of far reaching economic liberalization reforms. Though initially this has least advanced in the rural sector but the signing of GATT treaty has brought Indian agriculture on the threshold of change and exposed the rural sector to the international market.
- Increasing rate of suicide among farmers in various states like Maharashtra, A.P, Punjab and U.P. reflecting

the decline of bonds of traditional social system and increasing sign of egoism and isolation among rural masses.

IMAGES OF CONTEMPORARY VILLAGE: IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

Although agriculture was the mainstay of the village economy, however, there are also a large number of villagers involved in many non-agricultural occupations, such as animal husbandry, fishing, forestry, arts, crafts and services. Since the village society has been changing, it is often said that the earlier literature on it no longer portrays the present reality and has therefore become useless. New villages are thus dramatically different societies. There improvement is manifested in a myriad of ways-in the physical health standard, in the quality of people's food, shelter and clothing, nature of consumption etc. New village works on the integral lines and talks on the issues of poverty alleviation, environment, ecology, sustainable development, equity, social justice, water conservation, people's participation, role and empowerment of women. Social security, primary education, health and family welfare, forest conservation and safe drinking water are the emerging issues of new villages.

Critical observations

- Economic development in India has resulted in a number of overlapping imbalances: between the agrarian and industrial bourgeoisie; between politicians and bureaucrats at the central and at the regional level; between the organized working class and marginalized workers; between a rapidly differentiating middle peasantry and the agrarian classes below it; between upper castes and middle/lower castes; between middle castes and Dalits; between majority community and minority; between men and women; between the state and women (Sathyamurthy; 1996; 20). These contradictions will definitely have due impact on the village setting, directly or indirectly.
- There will be significance of caste, gender and democratic rights for class struggle in rural India. Successful struggles against caste atrocities and demanding equal rights for lower castes have become burning issues in rural India.
- There is evident positive correlation between the areas of high productivity and the farmer's movement, it may also be noted that these regions have experienced a great penetration of market forces and capitalist development in agriculture. It includes states like Punjab, U.P., Maharashtra, /Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- The 10th five-year plan has accepted the objective of extending electricity to all villages by 2007 and all household by 2012. This may lead to drastic shift from manpower to mechanical power and will really transform rural environment.
- A shot in the arm for the PVC pipe industry has come from the 'Swaraj Dhara' scheme for rural water supply. The government offers even use of drip and sprinkler irrigation at subsidized rate. This is opening wider exposure of rural society to urban-industrial world and will enhance agriculture productivity. On the contrary, this may also lead to low water level and water crisis in near future.
- T.V and computers as modern means of communication, which cut across the lines of region and nation and opens the village globally. On these lines, the programme like *e-choupal*, *bhoomi* project, *gyandoot* etc are emerging. Private agencies like ITC group, Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and others are emerging to bridge the rural-urban divide through information technology (see Saxena and Rao; 2005).
- The Dalit assertiveness of the last few years has created antagonistic relationship between Dalits and other rural categories.
- Reservation policy had opened new avenues of upward mobility for Dalits. During the last half a century, opportunities for higher education and jobs in government department and entry in parliamentary politics have brought forth new generation of leaders from depressed sections of society.
- Self-help groups (SHG's) are emerging as new institutions, giving more space for the womens and other weaker section.
- Psychologically man avoids harassment of weaker section in public as it gives an impression that he is more modern in outlook. Rigidity and conservatism reflects traditionalistic. So younger generation are following secular and scientific ideology in their attitude.
- *Mera Gaon Mera desh*, a programme in Star News channel is presenting images of modern India village. This reveals the complexity of villages yet to be captured by the social scientists.
- Rallies, kar-sevaks etc, a mob for protest and party speeches are mainly rural masses, lured by the city life, they also are being addict to corruption, bribery and shrewdness (free alcohol, food, movies, money etc). This is leading rural population towards politicalization of rural life and other urban evils.
- It is observed that the concept of '*athithi deva bhava*' is declining in the contemporary village setting. Regarding the problem faced by the researchers it is found that the while going for research to the rural areas, the rural masses questions the visitors purpose, i.e. their welcome attitude, hospitality etc. have shattered. They have suspicious attitude towards the researcher and also try to manipulate the needed information (this action is guided either for deriving some benefits or reflecting their frustration with previous such attempt by the government, NGO's).
- According to Sen & Dreze (2002) the slow but steady march towards universal elementary education has eroded one of the crucial bases of social stratification in India. Further the decline of fertility, the accelerated increase in female literacy, and new constitutional provision for political representation of women are likely to facilitate further progress towards more equal gender relations.
- Many contemporary villages don't look like villages because of available infrastructure. If we look at the special census 2001, it takes account of the village amenities in terms of T.V., telephone, car, Scooters, etc. The rural development in rural setting is being

understood more on the lines of overall improvement in the quality of life of rural masses.

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