

CHAPTER - II

INDIAN VILLAGE TRADITION AND CHANGE

#####

1. INDIAN VILLAGE.
2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS.
3. MAIN FEATURES.
4. CASTE SYSTEM.
5. BALUTEDARI OR JAJAMANI SYSTEM.
6. CHANGING NATURE OF THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY.

#####

CHAPTER - II

INDIAN VILLAGE TRADITION AND CHANGE

1. INDIAN VILLAGE:

India is a country of villages. According to 1981 population census report 77.8% of the Indians live in villages. The village has been a significant centre of Indian life since very early days. The significance of a village can be stressed by pointing out that it was more or less an independent administrative unit and had a distinct Socio-cultural character. Hence the study of Indian society should largely mean the study of India's Villages.

According to Dr. A.R. Desai, " The rise of the village is bound up with the rise of agricultural Economy in history. The emergence of the village signified that man passed from the nomadic mode of collective life to the settled one. This was basically due to the improvements of tools of production which made agriculture and hence settled life on a fixed territorial Zone possible and necessary."¹ The main Economic activity in a village is, thus, agriculture and hence the social structure of a village is also developed as per the needs of the - agricultural and allied activities.

The size of the villages in different parts of India varies considerably. The size of the villages in the plains is

a bit larger where as the size of the villages, situated on the hilly areas is relatively small. Similarly we find a vast difference in terms of land, structure of population, flora and fauna and others. But the habitation of the village depends upon the proportion of rains, weather, nature of land and the crops. If the supply of water is enough the people clear the forests and settle down. This is the primary stage of the rural community so the early settlements in India were situated on the banks of rivers.

Harold. J. Peake defines the village community as follows.
" The village community consists of groups of related or unrelated persons large than a single family occupying a large house or a number of dwelling places close together sometimes irregularly, sometimes in a street and cultivating originally in common a number of arable fields, dividing the available meadow and between them and pasturing their cattle upon the surrounding wasteland over which the community claims rights as far as the boundaries of adjacent Communities."²

This definition is applicable to all types of villages. Basically a village is a group of families permanently residing in a definite geographical area.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS:

Table-1 gives an idea of the variation in the number of inhabited villages and their total population during 1951-1981.

TABLE - 1

	1951	1961	1971	1981
1	2	3	4	5
Total No. of Villages.	5,57,675	5,62,749	5,71,221	5,51,650
Rural Population	298,644,381	360,298,168	439,045,675	525,457,335
Total Population	361,088,090	439,234,771	548,159,652	685,184,692
% of Rural population to total population	82.7%	82%	80%	77.8%

Source : P. Padmanabha Census of India 1981, Series I, India.

Since Independence the pace of industrialization has increased. However the percentage of rural population to total population has not much changed.

A fair idea of the structure and composition of the population living in villages of various size with reference to the total rural population of India can be had from Table-2.

TABLE - 2

POPULATION OF VILLAGES 1981

Population Range	No. of Villages (000s)	Population (Mn)	Percentage Villages	Distribution of population
1	2	3	4	5
Less than 200	120.1	12.2	21.6	2.4
200 - 499	150.7	51.2	27.1	10.1
500 - 999	135.9	97.1	24.4	19.1
1,000 - 1,999	94.5	131.5	17.0	25.9
2,000 - 4,999	46.9	137.3	8.4	27.1
5,000 - 9,999	7.2	47.1	1.3	9.3
10000 & above	1.8	31.2	0.3	6.1
Total	557.1	507.6	100.00	100.00

Excluding Assam.

Source : Statistical outline of India - 1986-87
Tata Services Limited,
Deptt. of Economics & Statistics,
Bombay House, Bombay-400 001. (India)

The table shows that there is a wide variation in the size of the villages and there are as many as 4,06,700(73%) villages where the population of each village is less than 1000.

3. MAIN FEATURES:

The main features of a typical traditional Indian village are summarised below:

1) ISOLATION:

Indian villages are scattered away throughout the Sub-continent. Each village is at some distance from others. Due to lack of communication between them, isolation has become a characteristic of Indian village. There has been very little contact with the outside world. The inhabitants used to go away from their villages only on such occasions as the festivals, fairs, wars, famines, etc. Otherwise contacts with the outside world were almost negligible. The isolation increased in case of the villages which were situated in far off hilly areas.

2) ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY:

The economic self reliance, is an enevitable result of the isolation. The villagers had first to think of their subsistence. So a system of division of labour was evolved. The essential goods and services were produced to quench the basic needs of the Society. Provisions from outside were not possible. Thus the villages had to be economically self-reliant. As the occupations of the people became hereditary, the self reliance of the village was strengthened.

Dr. M.N. Srinivas has stressed this Economic self

reliance in his study of 'Ramapura' village. " A self - sufficient Economy is possible only if sub-caste adheres to its traditional occupations. The occupations are complementary. This is true to a great extent in 'Ramapura' even today, though every caste has agriculture either as its main occupation, or practises agriculture along with its main occupation. The members of the peasant caste practise agriculture, the Barber Shaves, the Washerman washes Clothes, the Potter makes Pots, the Banajigas are traders, the Ganiga Werks the Oil Press and Sells Oil, the Besthas are fishermen, the Idigas sell toddy, though they no longer tap it, the Medas make baskets, and the Koramas are Swine-herds. The untouchables are labourers and servants."³

The Balutedari or Jajamani system is a natural outcome of this forced need of self-reliance and the resulting division of labour.

3) AUTONOMY:

The villages created an independent machinery for their administration. The panchyat system was developed in order to look after day to day administration of the villages. The important function of the panchayat was to give judicial decisions. Judiciary was based on religion. The Panchayat would give punishment to the Criminals. But the appellate Court was the king, if some one has to appeal against the judgement of the Panchayat. The Panchayat had also to perform

Other functions of public welfare like village defence, collection of land revenue, digging wells, constructing roads, public temples etc. These panchayats were of democratic nature.

As Charles Met Calfe noted so - forcefully as late as in the nineteenth century: " The village communities are little Republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations."⁴ Even though this statement may not be accepted in to, it is true that very little change in the administrative set-up used to occur in the villages even with overwhelming changes in the size of states and kingdoms or in their dynasties.

4) CASTE AND HABITATION:

In the Indian rural community, the rank, status and the nature of social relations was determined by caste. The community is divided on the basis of castes. Residential areas in the village are also based on caste.

Dr. Irawati Karve in her studies of the Indian villages says that " A map of a village will show - almost invariably that the habitation area of each caste is separated from that of the others by a greater or a lesser distance. A few castes may live in houses situated side by side but others live apart. The castes which are always separated from the others are those whose touch was supposed to pollute the rest, the so called untouchables. Their habitation area has generally a distinct name."⁵

Castewise divisions of residential area is thus a characteristic of Indian village.

5) CULTURAL UNIFORMITY AND COHESIVENESS:

Rural society in India is more or less the peasants society. Almost all the people are in the same occupation. They live at the same place for a longtime. They do not have contact with other cultures. So in many respects, there is a homogeneity in the village community. This commonness is seen more in respect of cultural tradition, customs, religious faith, the ideas of morality, language, festivals etc. Similarly as all the people have the same or complementary occupations, they do develop a sense of identity.

We thus find that villages in India are more cohesive as compared with the cities.

6) LACK OF SOCIAL MOBILITY:

Occupational mobility was almost unknown in traditional Indian village. The occupation of the family continued from generation to generation and the status given by that occupation also remained almost the same. It was impossible for an individual to change his place in caste hierarchy by using his intellect, skill and wealth. Social and Cultural change in the rural area was also relatively very slow.

7) IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC OPINION:

The traditional rural community in India comes closer to the concept of a primary group. Each factor of individual life was concerned directly with the group. So in the rural community the public opinion was very much respected. No person dared to violate general public opinion or the opinion of the elders in the village, because every one was affraid of punishment given by caste panchayat. The punishment given by caste panchayat was often more severe than punishment given by state jidiciary. Naturally in such small community public opinion had a lot of influence.

8) IMPACT OF RELIGION, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS:

Even now we find that the influence of religion, customs and traditions in rural community is much more than it is in the urban areas. Belief is more powerful than logic in the context of religion. So at the time of natural calamities, We find the tendency of the villagers to take shelter of god, and religious practices.

These are the main characteristics of traditional Indian village. In order to understand the nature of village life, we should also known briefly the salient features of the caste system pervading the entire Indian social life.

4. CASTE SYSTEM:

The caste system is regarded as a distinguishing characteristic of Indian society. We shall try here, to present a brief outline of the nature of the Indian caste system, without entering into the theoretical controversies regarding its origin.

Several attempts have been made to define caste. According to Sir Herbert Risley, "Caste is a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or devine, professing to follow the same herediatory calling, and regarded by those who are competant to give an opinion as farming a single homogenous Community."⁶ While dealing with terms of stratification cooley has pointed out that " When a class is some what strictly herediatory we call it a Caste."⁷ Similarly the anthropologists Majumdar and Madan regard " Caste as a closed class."⁸ Dr. Ketakar in his definition lays emphasis on endogamous and herediatory nature of caste. According to him "A caste is a social group having two characteristics, 1) membership is confined to those who are born of members, and includes all persons, so born, 2) The members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group."⁹

CHARACTERISTICS:

Caste in India is so complex a phenomenon that it is

very difficult to give a few characteristics applicable to all castes all over India. However, Dr. G.S. Ghurye's analysis is by far the most acceptable one and hence we have briefly summarised the characteristics presented by him.

1) SEGMENTAL DIVISION OF SOCIETY:

The caste system has divided the whole Indian society into separate groups in which status, social duties and rights vary from one group to another. The caste of every individual is determined not by his selection but by his birth. Each caste has its own rules and regulations.

The castes have regular standing councils known as panchayats for dealing with violations of these rules and offences by their members. In such a society caste feeling amongst the individuals is more dominant than social feeling. The artisans usually owed moral allegiance to their caste first rather than to the community as a whole.

2) HIERARCHY:

The discrimination of superiority and inferiority is the important feature of Indian caste system. Everywhere in India there is a definite scheme of social precedence amongst the castes, with the Brahmin at the head of the hierarchy and Shudra at the bottom. The other castes - the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas and their respective sub-castes - have struggled for precise social positions in society. As this system is

based upon the birth of an individual, change from one caste to another and there by the change in relative status is very difficult.

3) RESTRICTIONS ON FEEDING AND OTHER SOCIAL INTERCOURSES:

The caste system has imposed artificial restrictions on the members of different castes in the matter of accepting food and water and also on free social mixing. For this purpose, "All food is divided into two types, viz. 'Kachcha' and 'Pakka', the former being any food in the cooking of which water has been used, and the latter all food cooked in 'ghee' without the addition of water. As a rule a man will never eat 'Kachcha' food unless it is prepared by a fellow caste-man, which in actual practice means a member of his own endogamous group."¹⁰

The sociological significance of this restriction is that, it has resulted into barriers on intercaste contacts, widening the social distance between different castes and into practices like untouchability.

4) DISABILITIES AND PRIVILEGES OF DIFFERENT CASTES:

Caste groups are segregated in almost all parts of Indian villages. In the traditional caste society the higher castes enjoyed superior position and special privileges. Whereas the low caste members, the shudras, suffered from various disabilities and deprivations.

Socially the lower caste members were separated and segregated. The arrangement of the houses in various castes were in relation to their occupational convenience in the village. Dr. Ghurye has pointed out some of the disabilities of these castes for example, "It is recorded that under the rule of the Marathas and the peshwas, the Mahars and Mangs were not allowed within the gates of Poona after 3 P.M. and before 9 a.m. Because before nine and after three their bodies cast too long a shadow, which falling on a member of the higher castes - especially Brahmin defiles him."¹¹

In the matter of Education both teachers and pupils used to make it very difficult for low caste boys to sit in the class-rooms. In religious matter we find the disability of lower castes more obviously. The low castes members were deprived of entrance in the temples. There were a number of other deprivations in regard to sacraments, religious rites etc.

5) RESTRICTIONS ON THE CHOICE OF OCCUPATIONS:

The equation of castes and certain occupations was a tradition coming forth by centuries. It was impossible to do other occupation by renouncing one's hereditary occupation. The occupations like agriculture, defence, service etc. were not limited to any single caste. But in case of other occupations heredity was given initiative. He had no choice to do any other occupation in another village also other than

his own village.

In this manner in the traditional Indian society each caste or group of allied castes followed a traditional occupation of its own and this occupation became hereditary.

6) RESTRICTIONS ON MARRIAGE:

Westermarck has rightly regarded "Endogamy as the main characteristic of the caste system."¹² If some one marries with the person from another caste, he had to endure a social boycott. Thus the caste became endogamous group. If it was a sub-caste, it also became an endogamous group. Inter-caste marriage was strictly prohibited in Hindu society. Those who violated this rule were often ex-Communicated.

These are the main characteristics of the traditional Indian castes.

5. BALUTEDARI OR JAJAMANI SYSTEM:

If we turn to the social structure of a typical traditional Indian village we see that the economic and professional relationships between various castes are organized in a systematic way. This system is called as 'Jajamani' or Balutedari. We shall briefly describe the Balutedars which will give us a fairly good idea of the occupational divisions in an Indian village.

BALUTEDARS AND THEIR DUTIES:

Traditionally the Balutedars are 12 in number. But this number is not fixed for all the villages. Some Balutedars like a potter, serve more than one village. The general nature and duties of the 12 Balutedars are given below:

1) MAHAR:

The Mahar is the Chief Balutedar who assists the Patil in administrative work of the village. The important duties of Mahars are: 1) To sweep the roads in the village and especially, the temples at the time of festivity and fairs. 2) To send the invitations of the fairs. 3) To decorate the frames of the houses in the village. 4) To drag away the dead animals. 5) To help the Patil to keep the government records, etc.

2) SUTAR (Carpenter):

This Balutedar is very useful to the peasant because he would make implements for agriculture. He also helps in the construction of a house.

3) LOHAR (Smith):

He would make necessary implements for agriculture like 1) Ploughshare, 2) A pitcher, 3) A grabbing hoe, 4) A small-wood bill an axe etc.

4) CHAMBHAR (Cobbler):

He would make leather bucket, other instruments, whip, bridle, footwear etc.

5) KUMBHAR (Potter):

The kumbhar would make earthen pots, pitchers, small pots, receptacles, etc.

6) NHAVI (Barber):

This Balutedar is found in all villages. He cuts the hair of the people. He also bears a torch in the social and religious festivity in the village.

7) PARIT (Washerman):

He would wash the clothes of the rich family members in the village.

8) GURAV:

His duties are to offer worship to the village deity, to keep the temple clean, to supply the plates made of leaves packed together at festivals, to invite the village people at the Bhajans and Kirtans in the temple.

9) KOLI (Fisherman):

His duties are to keep the 'Chawadi' (A meeting place) clean. He also cleans the vessels in the marriage ceremonies.

10) MANG:

He would make ropes and strings for the farmers. He would summon the people for the governmental works and speak out the message of the government in the village.

11) SONAR (Gold Smith):

He has to make the images of god at marriage ceremony. Besides he provides the gold and silver ornaments to the people as per their orders.

12) GRAMJOSHI:

His works are to worship the village deity and carry out funeral rites. He is also consulted for auspicious days etc.

Besides these 12 Balutedars there are 18 Alutedars namely Teli, Tamboli, Sali, Dhanagar, Shimpi, Mali, Gondhali, Davari, Bhat, Thakar, Gosavi, Jangam, Mullani, Vajantri, Ghadasi, Kalawant, Taral, Bhoi, etc. The Balutedars and Alutedars taken together give us a broad outline of the Economic or occupational divisions in traditional Indian society. The fact that the caste system and Balutedari system were closely related is quite obvious.

We have so far tried to present a broad outline of the social organization in traditional Indian village. In the remaining part of the chapter we shall point out the major factors responsible in bringing out change in village life.

6. CHANGING NATURE OF THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY:

Due to various factors the village community is rapidly changing. Dr. A.R. Desai has rightly pointed out that "Like all other Phenomena the rural society too has been

changing since its emergence. Its technology, Economy and Social institutions its ideology, art and religion, have undergone a ceaseless change. This change has some times been imperceptibly slow, sometimes strikingly rapid, and at some movements even Qualitative in character resulting into the transformation of one type of rural society into another type."¹³

The pace of change increased during the British rule which also was responsible for bringing out some fundamental changes. The process of rule change took rapid stands after Independence. We shall now refer to the main aspects of change in rural society in India.

1) MEANS OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION:

During the British rule, because of the growth in the means of transport and communication, the isolation of villages came to an end. Villages were introduced to the changes of the outer world because of which their Economic self-sufficiency also ended.

The growth of modern means of communication like Telephone, News papers, Radios, Television etc. are reaching even in the remote rural areas. Through these means the life styles of village people and their ways of living and thinking are undergoing remarkable change.

Dr. A.R. Desai has referred to "Prof. Ogburns

observation that the invention of radio led to about 150 major changes in rural social life."¹⁴

2) EDUCATION:

Education has played a very important role in bringing about a real change in the attitudes, behaviour and thoughts of the village community. It has reposed a sense of the individual happiness and a self confidence among the rural masses. Their attitudes towards some social evils like blind faith have been changed because of the progress of modern Education. Because of the spread of women's education the status of women in rural community is also gradually changing.

S.C. Dube has graphically described the impact of education in village life. "With the opening of a school in the village education was placed within the reach of a much larger section and even some untouchable children started attending the school. Some ambitious parents sent their children to the higher schools in the city where they could learn English."¹⁵ This is true in case of all the villages.

3) CHANGING NATURE OF CASTE:

Traditional caste structure has close ties with village economy. In the classical system of relations among castes in a village, the jajmani system, the various non-cultivating castes provided specialized services for the cultivators and received food stuffs in return. In this

context also the situation is gradually changing. Many of the traditional services are no more required because of the introduction of new methods of cultivation and the input of new factory made implements.

Dr. A.R. Desai has pointed out a different type of relationship developing in the village. "Thus the jajmani system of traditional, personal, Exchange relations is being replaced by contractual, impersonal, pecuniary relations. Many cultivators who could summon sudden aid if quickly needed from among their traditional associates of other castes now can hire labour only if they have the cash. This process is familiar one and has been going on in India for a century or more. But in recent years the full effect of the change is being widely felt."¹⁶

4) INDUSTRIALIZATION:

The Britishers emphasized industrialization. It emerged into a method of centralized production system, as a result of which the self-sufficient village economy was affected to a great extent. The aims of production also underwent many changes because of the extreme stress on industrialization. The institution of caste system and Balutedari system underwent fundamental changes with the increasing industrialization and newly emerging occupations.

S.C. Dube in his studies 'Indian village' already pointed this change which is also seen all over India.

People are now taking to new occupations. "A goldsmith has opened a teashop. Washermen and similar other castes are accepting menial jobs in the city. These are not their traditional occupations. Besides muslims, some non-komti Hindus have set up general shops in the village; in the traditional system only Komtis could do so. Thus people are either giving up their traditional occupations, or they are taking to occupations which by tradition belong to some other castes."¹⁷ In this way industrilization brought increasing, change in commerce and trade. Villages were being used as markets to sell new products manufactured in modern industries.

5) TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES:

The research in the field of agriculture has brought about a change in the rural life. Electric motors, improved seeds Chemicals and fertilizers, pesticides and many other modern devices are being used in the land cultivation, in the villages. The nature of village economy is changing because of the new techniques and technical devices in the field of rural agriculture and allied activities.

M.N. Srinivas has stressed this technological change in his study of 'Rampura' Village', "The new enterprises not only taught new skills and changed the pattern of life of those involved in them but also their outlook in significant ways."¹⁸

6) OVERALL CULTURAL CHANGE:

Culture plays a very great role in changing the rural social system. The ancient social system reflected all its values through the institutions like caste, family, village, panchayat etc. The system of Balutedari in this period showed the feeling of unity, co-operation and faith among the village people. But Britishers brought about a change in these values. This resulted in bringing down the extreme impact of religion over the politics and education. The induction of reason lessened the grip of blind respect and traditions. The attitude of the village people today in respect of entertainment has also been changed.

7) POLITICAL FACTORS:

The villages in the ancient times were self sufficient and self controlled. After Independence the political life of village community underwent a basic change. The panchayat Raj gave an opportunity to the village people to participate in the political affairs and encouraged them to create local leadership. It also resulted in a political awakening among the rural masses. Our constitution has granted the right of adult franchise. The traditional leadership has been abolished. Any common man can take an active part in the political affairs of the country in a democratic system of government.

According to A.R. Desai, "Panchayat Raj is also claimed as active political participation and also would establish a genuine political control from below, from the vast majority of the weaker, poorer sections of rural India."¹⁹

Thus, due to various factors the village community is rapidly changing. The change in economic activities and relations is prominently observed. Eventhough it is true that material culture changes with more speed as compared to the other aspects of culture. We do observe that social relationship is also gradually changing. Hencefourth we shall concentrate on the specific aspect of change in inter-caste relations and especially the relations between Savarna and Asavarna sections in the village.

REFERENCES

1. A.R. Desai : "Rural Sociology in India"
Popular Prakashan, Bombay.
Fifth Edition 1978. Page-13.
2. Harold J. Peake : 'The village community'
In "Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences".
The Macmillan Company and the free
press, New York. Collier-Macmillan
Publishers, London. Page-253.
3. M.N. Srinivas : 'India's Villages'.
Media Promoters and Publishers Pvt.
Ltd., Bombay.
Second(Revised) Edition, 1960
Page-29.
4. A.R. Desai : Op.Cit. Page-181.
5. Ibid, P.191 :
6. Sir Herbert Risley: 'The people of India'
2nd Ed, Thacker, Bombay.
Calcutta and London, 1952. Page-5.
7. C.H. Cooley : 'Social Organization'
A Study of the Larger Mind Scribner's,
New York, 1929. First Pub., 1909.
Page-11.

8. D.N. Majumdar : An Introduction to Social
and T.N. Madan. Anthropology, 1967
Third impression, Asia Publishing
House, Page-221.
9. S.V. Ketakar : 'History of caste in India'
Taylor and carpenter, Ithaca,
New York, 1909. Page-15.
10. Dr. G.S. Ghurye : 'Caste and Race in India'
Popular Prakash Bombay,
Fifth Edition, 1969. Page-7.
11. Ibid. p.11. :
12. Edward Westermark : 'A short History of Human
Marriage'. Macmillan, London, 1926.
Page-59.
13. A.R. Desai : Op.Cit. P-87.
14. Ibid. Page-88 :
15. S.C. Dube : 'Indian Village' Allied Publishers
Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, First Indian
Edition, 1967. Page-217.
16. A.R. Desai : Op.Cit, P-694.
17. S.C. Dube : Op,Cit, P-223.
18. M.N. Srinivas : Op, Cit,P-237.
19. A.R. Desai : Op, Cit, P-533.