
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO RURAL SOCIETY

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- define rural society;
- differentiate between tribal, peasant, and urban societies;
- identify the types of village in India; and
- talk/write knowledgeably about a few important rural studies conducted in India.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the course, 'Rural Development—Indian Context'. The purpose of this unit is to acquaint you with the concept of rural society. According to 2001 Census, 72.22 per cent of Indians live in about 6,38,691 villages. You know that in 1901, 89.2 % of Indians resided in villages and by 1961 this percentage had reduced to 82.03. It shows a declining trend which is bound to continue. There is, however, no doubt that even today a significant proportion of Indians lives in and derives livelihood from villages. Thus, 'rural society' assumes a considerable significance in any form of discussion on development.

In this unit we discuss the concept of rural society; we will also attempt to answer some questions like what is meant by the terms like 'village', 'countryside', or 'folk society'? The unit will also discuss the distinctions between different types of rural society, relationships between rural and urban societies and also some of the important rural studies conducted in India. In the remaining units of this block we will discuss *rural demography*, *rural social and economic structures* and finally *rural poverty*.

1.2 THE CONCEPT OF RURAL SOCIETY

The Bureau of the Census of the United States defines a rural community on the basis of the size and the density of population at a particular place. In India, on the other hand, the term 'rural' is defined in terms of *revenue*: the village means the 'revenue village'. It might be one large village or a cluster of small villages. According to the Census Commission of India, a village is an entity identified by its name and a definite boundary.

You may have observed that the Indian villages exhibit a great deal of diversity. Different states in India have different numbers of villages. According to the Census of India – 1991, the largest number of villages (1,12,566) is found in undivided Uttar Pradesh, followed by undivided Madhya Pradesh (71,352), undivided Bihar (67,546), Orissa (46,553), and Maharashtra (39,354). The smallest villages having the smallest populations are in the states of Sikkim (440) and Nagaland (1,112).

We see that on the one extreme are the 'affluent villages' of Punjab, where many families receive handsome amounts of money regularly from those of their young members who live and work abroad. Some writers have preferred to call these villages 'gray villages' because they have large populations of old people whose children are away. At one time many of these old people also were away working in foreign lands, and after making sufficient wealth, they returned to their soil to lead retired lives or to work as commercial farmers.

On the other extreme we have the extremely poor villages of Bihar, Orissa, or Chhattisgarh, where for one square meal, the parents are sometimes forced to sell their children to liquor vendors or moneylenders. Several villages in arid parts of Rajasthan are now uninhabited because of inhospitable environment. Villages at the outskirts of towns and cities are usually known as 'fringe villages', which undergo gradual transformation as they lose their identity by and by, and eventually become parts of the urban world. Take the example of New Delhi, where many residential colonies, such as Wazirpur, Patpar Ganj, Mohammad Pur, Chandrawal, etc., are named after the villages that used to exist there earlier, but have now been completely assimilated within the expanding universe of urban life. Some villages have now grown into towns, such as Kohima. All this points to the diversity of Indian villages.

In other words, while speaking about the Indian village, one has in mind several types of communities, some multi-caste, some having the members of just one caste. Some are close to the centers of civilization, the towns and cities, while some are situated in remote backward areas, and some are more developed than others in terms of material possessions and facilities (such as electricity, schools, dispensaries, etc.). If you move from one region to the other, from one state to the other, you will come across immense diversity in the lifestyles and material conditions of villages. Notwithstanding the huge variations, which are bound to take place in a vast country like India, there are certain general features that all rural communities have in common.

The term 'rural' is used in contrast with the term 'urban'. Some scholars think of a continuum, i.e., a kind of continuity from the rural to the urban. The left end of the continuum consists of the rural, whilst the right of the urban. Societies having all, and also 'pure', characteristics of the rural or urban are found at the poles. In between are placed societies, which are in bulk, having a mix of the characteristics that are attributed to the rural and urban worlds. Societies tilted more to the rural end of the continuum have more of the rural characteristics; similarly, societies placed more towards the urban end display more of the urban characteristics. Change takes place from rural to urban, rather than in the other way. This change is called urbanization, which is defined as the almost permanent migration of populations from rural areas to the urban. The changes that result because of urbanization are irreversible; so,

when ‘urban people’ migrate to rural areas, as has happened and is happening in the villages of Punjab, because of one or the other reason, they carry with them the stamp of urban influence.

What then is the ideal nature of a rural society? As a consequence of the constant interaction between the rural and the urban societies, most of the societies deviate considerably from the ideal models of either the rural or the urban society. Thus, the societies that are designated as *rural* bear the influence of *urban* areas invariably.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Write your answers in the space provided.

b) Check your answers with the possible answers provided at the end of the unit.

1) Define the concept of the degree of urbanization?

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1.3 THE IDEAL MODEL OF THE RURAL SOCIETY

You might have noted earlier that the term ‘rural society’ is used almost interchangeably with terms like ‘village’, ‘countryside’, or ‘folk society’. Of these, the term most commonly used in sociological literature on rural society is the *village*. The term ‘countryside’ is chiefly popular in the western world. It primarily denotes a quiet place, away from the hustle and bustle of the city, where one is in close proximity to nature. One chooses to retire to the countryside. It is not a place bereft of facilities, as villages are in the developing world. There are ‘pubs’ and recreational centers in the countryside. What it lacks is the ‘fast life of the city’.

Let us now look at the term ‘folk’, which attained popularity through the works of Robert Redfield. It implies a person or persons belonging to a small traditional and homogeneous community. By implication, a folk society is traditional and homogeneous. This category is best understood in terms of culture and stands in contrast with the fast-changing and heterogeneous urban society. As we spoke of the rural-urban continuum earlier, in the same way, Redfield has written about the folk-urban continuum. A folk society is ‘past-oriented’, so said Redfield, in the sense that its members are content with their lot, with what they have, and they proudly hold their *tradition* high. By *tradition*, sociologists mean the ‘conventionalized modes of social behaviour and thought’, i.e. the behaviour and thought that were established long time back are considered valuable and applicable at all times, present and future.

In comparison with a rural society, we find that an urban society is ‘future-oriented’. Here, people are not satisfied with what they have, and they unceasingly want to change virtually everything they have. If urban dwellers are ‘forward-looking’, the folks are ‘backward-looking’. If *change* is the catchphrase of urban living, *stability* is that of the folk society. Let us now turn to the term, ‘rural society.’

From sociological point of view, the term ‘rural society’ implies the following:

- In comparison with the urban society, it is a small society, meaning thereby that it has a small population and extends over a shorter physical area. Various

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institutions (such as police stations, hospitals, schools, post-offices, clubs, etc.) may or may not be there, and if existent, they are not available in plenty.

- Density of the rural population is also low, and it may be clustered according to the criteria of social status. In other words, people occupying the same status may share the same neighbourhood, and may observe considerable social, and sometimes physical, distance from others, especially those lower in hierarchy.
- A sizable number of rural people are engaged in agriculture, which is the mainstay of their lives. In addition, a rural society has several other groups, engaged in various other occupations of arts and crafts, usually known as artisans and craftsmen, who regularly supply their services to agriculturalists in exchange for grains and cereals.
- Rural society has some full-time and a large number of part-time specialists. Craftsmen and artisans also indulge in agricultural pursuits, especially during the monsoon and the agricultural produce of such specialists and small agriculturalists is mainly for domestic consumption.
- Rural society is regarded as the repository of traditional mores and folkways. It preserves the traditional culture, and many of its values and virtues are carried forward to urban areas, of which they become a part after their refinement. When scholars say that 'India lives in villages', they mean not only that villages constitute the abode of three-quarters of Indians, but also that the fundamental values of Indian society and civilization are preserved in villages, wherefrom they are transmitted to towns and cities. One cannot have an idea about the spirit of India unless her villages are understood.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Write your answers in the space provided.

b) Check your answers with the possible answers provided at the end of the unit.

1) What is an 'affluent' village'?

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2) Give three salient characteristics of a 'rural society'

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1.4 TRIBES AND PEASANTS

The term 'rural society', as we said previously, includes a wide variety of people and villages of differing sizes and compositions. Generally, a rural society is an agrarian society, which includes agriculturalists, artisans, craftsmen, and other occupational groups, and they are all dependent, in one way or the other, upon agriculture, but these are not the only people who live in villages. Communities of people, who are called 'tribals', also live in villages, and some of them have been having long-standing relations with other non-tribal communities. Then, there are villages exclusively of tribespersons. To bring out this distinction clearly, sociologists have introduced the concepts of 'tribes' and 'peasants'.

According to the recently circulated Draft of National Policy on Tribal Populations of India, there are 67.8 million Scheduled Tribespersons, constituting about 8.08 per cent of India's population. There are 698 Scheduled Tribes spread all over India barring the States of Haryana and Punjab and the Union Territories like Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry. Orissa has the largest number (sixty-eight) of Scheduled Tribes. By definition, the Scheduled Tribes are those people who are notified as such by the President of India under Article 342 of the Constitution of India. The first notification, in this regard, was issued in 1950. The President considers several characteristics such as the primitive traits of the tribe, its distinctive culture, its geographical isolation and social and economic backwardness before notifying it as a Scheduled Tribe. Seventy-five of the 698 Scheduled Tribes are identified as Primitive Tribal Groups. They are more backward than the Scheduled Tribes. They continue to live in a pre-agricultural stage of economy and have very low literacy rates. Their populations are stagnant or even declining.

It is clear from the foregoing that in defining *a tribe*, emphasis is laid on the isolation of its members from the wider world. Because a tribe has almost negligible relations with the other communities, it tends to develop its own culture, which has little resemblance with the culture of those communities that have enjoyed long-term interaction among themselves. That is the reason why tribal communities in anthropological literature are known as 'cultural isolates'. The implication of this metaphor is that one can understand a tribal society without bothering to study the external world, of which the tribe may be an 'island'. A tribal society is characteristically a 'holistic' (i.e. complete) society.

The term 'peasant' also shot into prominence with the works of Robert Redfield. For the first time, however, the term was defined in the writings of the American anthropologist, A.L. Kroeber. His oft-quoted definition of peasants is as follows: "Peasants are definitely rural – yet live in relation to market towns; they form a class segment of a larger population which usually contains also urban centers, sometimes metropolitan capitals. They constitute part-societies with part-cultures. They lack the isolation, the political autonomy, and the self-sufficiency of tribal populations; but their local units retain much of their old identity, integration, and attachment to soil and cults."

If tribes are isolated, *peasants* are not. *They* are agriculturalists – attached to soil, as Kroeber observes – who intend to produce primarily for their subsistence, but they have to produce a little more, because they do not manufacture and produce everything they need for their survival. They have to transfer and sell whatever little surplus they have to the markets located in urban areas so that they acquire the things they do not produce. Peasants are dependent upon urban markets, the consequence of which is that they are constantly in touch with urban societies. Therefore, for understanding them, we need to look at their relationship with the outside world of which they are a part. Kroeber's words that peasants are a 'part-society with part-culture' imply their constant interaction with other communities. The impact of these interactions

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can be seen on all the aspects of their life. Along with Kroeber, one remembers George Foster's words: 'Peasants constitute a half-society.'

Now let us try to find out as to whether the tribal societies, which were isolated, exist in India? We infer that they might have existed in the distant past, but whatever historical material we have been able to garner indicates that there have always been relations of exchange between communities of tribespersons and others. Do you know that tribals supplied honey, medicinal plants, toys, baskets, nets, medico-religious knowledge and supernatural healing to other communities. In exchange, they got salt, grains, cereals, clothes, etc. In fact, their isolation increased when harmful external contacts with moneylenders, land-grabbers, liquor vendors, and other usurpers of resources led to devastating effects on tribes. The only option for tribes to escape from these exploiters was to move to isolated areas, so that they could have a temporary respite from their exploiters and oppressors.

Several tribal communities in India practice settled agriculture, with the result that it is difficult to distinguish them from peasants. Some sociologists propose the term 'tribal peasants' to designate them, for they combine the characteristics of both the tribal and peasant societies. In several cases, tribes or their sections have settled down close to villages, and started supplying certain services to other communities. With the passage of time, they have become inseparable parts of those villages. That is how tribespersons have got incorporated into villages.

In India, tribes are associated with other modes of production as well, such as hunting and food gathering, shifting cultivation, fishing, horticulture, and the practice of arts and crafts. Instead of relying on just one way of acquiring food, they combine various economic activities. The combination of different economic pursuits is dependent upon the ecological cycle of the area they inhabit, as their habitat provides them with the seasonal economic avenues that condition their practices such as hunting, fishing and/or gathering. In comparison with full-fledged agrarian villages, tribal habitations are small and spread over large areas. Each habitation is a cluster of few huts inhabited by people related by the ties of kinship. For such clusters, the term generally used in sociological literature is 'hamlet'. A hamlet may be a part of a large village, or a group of several hamlets spread over a large area may be administratively classified as a village.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Write your answers in the space provided.

b) Check your answers with the possible answers provided at the end of the unit.

1) Define the term Scheduled Tribe.

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1.5 RURAL AND URBAN SOCIETIES: DIFFERENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS

After having learnt about the various characteristics of the rural society, it will now be easier for us to compare it with the urban society. Just to revise: rural and urban societies, or the village and the city, constitute two ends of the continuum. Over a

period of time, rural societies undergo a variety of changes. Some of them are assimilated into urban societies; some start resembling urban societies in certain material and social terms, but retain their identity as *a village*; while some remain less affected by the forces emerging from cities. It may be so because of their location. Villages closer to the centers of urban growth are likely to change appreciably and faster than their counterparts located in interior areas. With the passage of time, villages may grow into towns, which later on grow into cities. Continuity may, thus, be unmistakably noticed in the transition from the village to the city.

For cities, which grow from the village, the term used by Robert Redfield and Milton Singer is 'orthogenetic cities'. These cities 'emerge from below', i.e. from the village, rather than get imposed on a population from outside. When a city is imposed on a populace, as happened during the colonial period in India, it is called 'heterogenetic city'. Such a city, 'emerging from above', does not have its origin in local villages. The social consequences of these two types of city are not alike. In an orthogenetic city, the migrants coming from villages will have less of a 'culture shock' on encountering the city and will not suffer much from any sort of 'cultural inadequacy' while dealing with the city dwellers. By contrast, both the experience of a culture shock and the feeling of cultural inadequacy will be tremendously high for rural migrants in a heterogenetic city. It is so, because an orthogenetic city carries forward the traditions of the village and the villagers can identify the segments of their culture in it and can relate with them easily. In a heterogenetic city, by contrast, members will feel completely out of place, because such a city contains the elements of a tradition which grew somewhere else, with which the local people have no familiarity. Consequently, they will feel out of place in it.

The point that has been stressed through out this lesson is that generally rural and urban areas are dependent upon each other. There is a mutually supportive relationship between them. Sociologists have analyzed these relations in economic, political, social, and cultural terms.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: a) Write your answers in the space provided.

b) Check your answers with the possible answers provided at the end of the unit.

1) List three main differences between a rural and an urban society.

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1.5.1 Characteristics of Villages

Villages are principally food-producing units and they are agriculture-based. They produce not only for their own subsistence but also for the urban societies, which are non-food producing units. An urban society is not an agrarian society. A tribal society, in theoretical terms, has subsistence economy; people produce primarily for their own consumption. Tribal economy does not generate surpluses. A peasant society, in contrast, has to generate surpluses not only for acquiring things that it does not produce, but also for the city. Those who produce on a commercial basis, on a mass scale, with the basic objective of multiplying their gains, are known as *farmers*.

Whether the producers are peasants or farmers, they all supply food to cities. City dwellers, once their economic needs are met with, devote themselves to the development of arts and crafts, and other non-agricultural pursuits. The innovations that take place in cities diffuse to villages. Thus, in economic terms, land is the primary means/unit of production in rural societies, which is not the case in urban areas. In industrial-urban cities, however, the production and distribution of industrial goods and services becomes the primary resource base. So, the occupational structure is highly diversified in cities. Also, there is a greater degree of occupational specialization needed there. Thus, full-time specialists, whose occupations require higher education and skills, characterize urban societies invariably. In addition, semi-skilled and unskilled workers who support specialists in various ways are also found in cities.

Economic interaction is closely linked with the political. Although each village has its own council (called a *panchayat* in India), which takes up and resolves disputes between/among the people and communities in the village, the ultimate seat of authority, controlling villages, is situated in urban areas. The political power centered in cities controls villages. Prices of goods that villagers bring to city markets to sell are decided by urban political powers. Often, villagers protest against such controls. We are familiar with the protests made by Indian farmers when the prices of sugarcane or oil-seeds are fixed much below the expectation of their producers. When the prices of furs were reduced sometime back, the agro-pastoralists (those who practice agriculture as well as rear animals for profit) also launched protests.

The practice of internal mobilization for achieving their objectives is not unknown among village communities, but sometimes it does not build up enough strength because of a lack of support or poor publicity. The result is that villagers' exploitation at the hands of the city powers continues unabated. Marshall Sahlins has called peasants 'underdogs', who are not able to muster enough revolutionary fervour to bring about a change in their state of existence. Along with economic dependence, villages are also politically dependent upon cities. In both economic and political terms, the city enjoys supremacy over the village.

Let us now come to the third aspect dealing with the social and cultural factors pertaining to rural societies. We have learnt previously that rural societies are relatively more homogeneous in terms of their social and economic characteristics. Their technological and organizational aspects are also simpler, in the sense that they can be learnt easily. Also, changes among rural societies occur at a slower pace. The geographical, social and economic areas of interaction of the villagers are restricted. That is why some people call rural societies 'small-scale societies'. The role of tradition in controlling the behaviour of people is very strong. Religion also plays a significant role in governing the lives of people and individuals have limited freedom to choose their occupations or mates. In other words, the range of choice among the rural people is highly restricted. Their territorial, occupational, and upward social mobility also is limited.

1.5.2 Characteristics of Cities

In contrast, urban societies are characterized by, as Louis Wirth noted, large size, high density of population, and heterogeneity. Cities have a large population, and its growth is much faster because of the migration of people from rural to urban areas. In villages, the rate of growth of population is slower, and the population mostly increases as a result of high birth rate. Migration of people to villages is comparatively much less. Surely, there have been cases of tribal people migrating to villages in search of subsistence, but their number is too negligible to bring about any significant change in the village. Cities are 'cultural mosaics'; they have people from different cultures and backgrounds. Thus, the way of life of people shows a wide variety. The range with respect to income, housing, education, etc., is quite large. Technology is quite

complex, and its knowledge cannot be acquired at home, as happens in rural societies. The son of a blacksmith, for example, in a village learns the art of smithy at home, observing his father and other male relatives at work and holding apprenticeship under them. In urban societies, these crafts become highly sophisticated, and their teaching and learning is transferred to specialized institutions. As technology becomes complex, so do the organizations and the societies that use them.

You know that change in urban societies takes place at a fast pace. Urbanites have a larger area of interaction. They interact with people who live in different territories, and work in different organizations. In a nutshell, they come in contact with people who hail from different walks of life. For regulating such a wide variety of interaction, the urban society needs to impose, as Wirth said, formal mechanisms of social control. Mechanical time, records, and formal rules become essential for purposefully regulating the urban living. This is in sharp contrast to villages, which have face-to-face relationship. Here, the same people meet everyday, time and again, with the outcome that each adult knows most of the aspects of the life of the other. Relationships in villages are informal, by comparison to formal and specific relationships in urban societies. The same urban dwellers may meet everyday for business, but will not achieve the kind of intimacy that villagers possess because of regular and socially intense interaction. Relationships in villages are not of *the means to ends* type, as they are in cities. Mobility, both in space and occupations, is highly pronounced in urban societies as compared to the rural ones.

To sum up: rural and urban societies can be distinguished in terms of a number of variables, each of which exercises its impact on the other. Cultural features from villages are carried forward to cities where they are refined, systematized, and developed. They are then sent back to villages. Similarly, innovations taking place in cities percolate down to villages.

Check Your Progress V

Note: a) Write your answers in the space provided.

b) Check your answers with the possible answers provided at the end of the unit.

1) Elaborate on the meaning of the phrase 'folk-urban continuum'.

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1.6 LITTLE AND GREAT TRADITIONS

For analyzing the relationship and the ceaseless interaction between rural and urban societies, the concepts of *little and great traditions*, which Redfield proposed on the basis of his study of Mexican communities, have been found to be quite useful.

Redfield proposed the concept of 'little community', which may be imagined to be like a village. A little community has the following characteristics: small size, largely self-sufficient, homogeneous, and relatively isolated. Its members are generally unlettered, i.e. their tradition is not based upon reading and writing. They accept their tradition as it is, without subjecting it to any critical scrutiny. If there are contradictions

and paradoxes in their tradition, they continue to remain. People make no attempts to remove or reconcile them, or to answer questions that have remained unanswered in their tradition. In a little community, the tradition is accepted as infallible and transcendental, and it forges and maintains unity among the people.

1.6.1 Characteristics of Little and Great Traditions

The tradition of the little community is known as ‘little tradition’. It may be defined as:

- the tradition of the *unlettered* (i.e.. non-literate and illiterate) *many* people inhabiting a particular area,
- who are *unreflective*, i.e. they do not critically examine or comment upon it, and accept it as it is;
- this tradition is *cultivated at home*; and
- is *transmitted* from one generation to the next as part of the *process of socialization*.

The type of society with which the little community unremittingly interacts is the city. Redfield, and many other scholars, have viewed city as the center of civilization. In fact, both these words – city and civilization – come from the same root in Latin. City is also the abode of a group of intellectuals whom Redfield calls ‘literati’, whose job is to create the tradition of a higher level by refining and systematizing the little tradition. The tradition of the literati is known as the ‘great tradition’, which has the following characteristics:

- It is the tradition of the *lettered* people who are *few* in number.
- They are *reflective*, i.e. they think about the tradition, make it sophisticated and systematize it, thus making it *universal*.
- This tradition is *cultivated in separate and distinct institutions*, such as temples, mosques, churches, synagogues, etc.
- It is *transmitted* as a part of the *specialized, rigorous, and long learning*, in which the individual is expected to internalize the tradition correctly.

If the little tradition is of villagers and the unlettered people of cities, the elites and scholars, such as the Brahmins, Imams, priests, rabbis, etc., guard the great tradition. The tradition of these scholar-elites is universally held. At the same time it is to be realized that *little* and *great* are ideal types, while in reality the situation is complex. Let us now analyse the whole concept critically.

1.6.2 Critical Assessment

Redfield’s approach is popularly known as the ‘cultural approach’, because he looks at the interaction of the lifestyles of the two communities, the village and the city. This interaction is an outcome of the relative dependence (economic and political) of one on the other. Little traditions and great traditions interact constantly, as a result of which continuity is established between them. Cultural traits from the little tradition are carried forward to the great tradition where they are systematized. As great traditions have universal applicability, the cultural elements they systematize also become universal. Accordingly, the process whereby cultural features of the little traditions become parts of the great traditions is known as *universalization*, a term proposed by Redfield. The reverse process of the mobility of cultural traits from the great tradition to become parts of the little tradition is also possible. A little tradition has a narrow coverage and is confined to a local area. When it accepts elements from the great tradition, it might modify them so that they are compatible with the characteristics of the society in general. As the incoming cultural traits are changed

and coloured to suit local conditions, knowledge and thoughts, the process is termed localization or parochialization. These terms were used for the first time in McKim Marriott's famous article on the village of Kishangarhi in Aligarh.

Many scholars think that Redfield's analysis is extremely simple for understanding the complexities of Indian civilization. Some propose the idea of multiple traditions in India, rather than just two traditions. But, the concepts of little and great traditions help us greatly in understanding the cultural continuity between villages and cities in India. In this context, certain observations of Milton Singer, which are given below, are highly relevant:

- The Indian civilization has evolved out of the folk and regional cultures. The local stories and folklore have evolved into great epics such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other religious scriptures after being refined and systematized over a long period of time.
- Cultural continuity is a major feature of the great traditions. It is based on the idea that people throughout the country share common cultural consciousness.
- Consensus exists in India about sacred books and sacred objects. It is one of the major bases of a common cultural consciousness that people in India share.
- Cultural continuity with the past is a major feature of the Indian society. As a result most of the modernizing thoughts and ideologies of progress do not lead to a linear form of social and cultural change. Rather, the modern institutions are 'traditionalized' in India. They adapt to the social organization of communities instead of constraining them to adapt to modernity.

Check Your Progress VI

Note: a) Write your answers in the space provided.

b) Check your answers with the possible answers provided at the end of the unit.

1) Enumerate three salient characteristics of the *great tradition*.

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1.7 TYPES OF VILLAGE

You know that villages have been classified on the basis of size. According to the Census of India – 1991, 94.7 per cent of villages had less than five thousand people. According to the size of population, the villages were divided into three categories:

- 26.5 per cent villages were inhabited by less than five hundred people;
- 48.8 per cent villages had a population falling between 500 and 2000; and
- 19.4 per cent villages had a population falling between 2000 and 5000.

It is clear that villages of the medium-size were almost fifty per cent of the villages in India.

Another classification of India villages divides them into *nucleated* and *dispersed* villages. It is well known that villages comprise homestead land (*âbâdî*) and cultivable land. In nucleated villages, all the households are clustered together in a compact unit,

surrounded on all sides by cultivable land. When households are distributed over a large area, and each cluster of a few houses is separated by cultivable land, it is known as a dispersed village. Most of the villages in India are of compact nucleated type. Dispersed villages are found in the coastal areas of Kerala in south India, in Bhil settlements to the east and north of Gujarat, and in Coorg and western Mysore.

M.N. Srinivas proposes that detailed studies of these two types of village need to be carried out to see differences in their respective organizational patterns. For example, he notes that in nucleated villages the responsibility of defending the village from robbers and wild animals falls on all the inhabitants. In dispersed villages, each farm has to protect itself against the enemies. The kin group owning the farm must have enough people to defend itself when the need arises. It is quite likely that houses in dispersed villages are built with an eye to defense. One may hypothesize that dispersed villages are associated with large kinship groups and martial traditions.

1.8 IMPORTANT RURAL STUDIES CONDUCTED IN INDIA

The year of 1955 is of tremendous significance for *village studies* in India. For the first time, in that year, four books and several papers on the Indian village were published. The four books were: S.C. Dube's *Indian Village*, D.N. Majumdar's *Rural Profiles*, McKim Marriott's *Village India*, and M.N. Srinivas' *India's Villages*. In the same year, a conference on the state of Indian society was held in Madras under the chairpersonship of Irawati Karve in which Robert Redfield also participated. In this conference, village studies and their scope were discussed. The proceedings of this conference were disseminated in the form of a book titled *Society in India*.

The late 1950s produced certain monographs on villages, and they are still regarded as of crucial importance. They were: G.M. Carstairs's *Twice Born* (1957), S.C. Dube's *India's Changing Villages* (1958), D.N. Majumdar's *Caste and Communication in an Indian Village* (1958), F.G. Bailey's *Caste and the Economic Frontier* (1957), and Oscar Lewis's *Village Life in Northern India* (1958). Albert Mayer's book titled *Pilot Project India* (1958) summarizes the main achievements of the Etawah project. In 1959 came A.R. Desai's edited volume titled *An Introduction to Rural Sociology in India*. Adrain Mayer's work *Caste and Kinship in Central India* (1960) was the first book length study of kin relations in an Indian village. André Bêteille's *Caste, Class and Power* (1964) was a study of the changing dimensions of rural stratification. A general description of a village in Rajasthan was provided in B.R. Chauhan's 1967 book titled *A Rajasthan Village*.

Since then, there have been a number of monographs on villages. Among the recent books, one may look at Gloria Goodwin Raheja's *The Poison in the Gift* (1988), which is an examination of the nature of caste system in a village of Saharanpur. For students of rural history, A.M. Shah's *Exploring India's Rural Past* (2002) will be of tremendous value. One of the most recent anthologies on the rural society in India is Vandana Madan's *The Village in India* (2002).

Check Your Progress VII

Note: a) Write your answers in the space provided.

b) Check your answers with the possible answers provided at the end of the unit.

1) Define a nucleated village.

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1.9 LET US SUM UP

This unit intends to introduce the basic features of the rural society in relation to other kinds of society, such as tribal and urban societies. Their relationship has been analysed in terms of the concepts of folk, urban societies, little traditions and great traditions. It has been shown that rural/folk and urban societies are characterized by significant differences of attitudes and values. However, while using this differentiation we have shown that villages in India are of many types. A major distinction is made between nucleated and dispersed settlements. We also discussed the useful idea of a *continuum*, where we conceptualized one of its ends consisting of rural societies and the other of urban societies. These two types of society have always been interacting. An Indian village was never a self-sufficient unit, as many British colonial officers tended to believe. It was always dependent upon the outside world – other villages and cities – for various things. As a result, the rural society was always absorbing various types of changes that were being introduced in it from outside. Though with the passage of time the rural population in India has reduced, yet seventy-two per cent of our people live in villages. Towards the end of the unit, we have also made a mention of some important rural studies conducted in India .

1.10 KEY WORDS

- Rural Society** : This term is used for a small society, which comprises only a few hundred households, who mostly produce their own food. Agriculture is the mainstay of their life. In this society, the number of people engaged in non-agricultural pursuits is small, but these members also practice agriculture.
- Tribal Society** : This term is used for a small society, smaller than the typical agriculture-based society. It is largely isolated from other societies and the centers of civilization. The tribal communities practice a large number of economic pursuits, ranging from hunting and food gathering to settled agriculture. There are many villages in India where tribes and non-tribal people live together.
- Urban Society** : This term is used interchangeably with two terms—towns and cities. Characterized by a much larger area and population, an urban society grows faster because of the migration of people from villages to cities. An urban society, whether pre-industrial or industrial, is basically a non-agrarian society. It is heterogeneous, complex, and future-oriented.
- Great Tradition** : It is the tradition of the intellectual class called ‘literati’ who live in cities.
- Little Tradition** : It is the tradition of the unlettered people in villages and cities.
- Universalization** : The process, by which cultural traits from the little tradition get carried forward, reflected upon, and systematized to become a part of the great tradition, is called universalization.
- Parochialization** : The process, by which cultural traits from the great tradition get carried downwards to the village where they become a part of the little tradition, is called parochialization.
- Fringe Villages** : These are the villages that are found at the meeting points of typical rural and urban areas. They depict the characteristics of both the types of social organization.

1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) The degree of urbanization is arrived at by dividing the number of people living in towns and cities by the total population of that country, and then, multiplying the fraction thus obtained by one hundred. If a country has a large population dwelling in villages, then its degree of urbanization will be low, whatever the absolute number of people living in urban areas. India has a low degree of urbanization in comparison to Australia, although the number of people living in Indian cities is far more than their counterparts in Australian cities.

Check Your Progress II

Rural Poverty

- 1) The general impression of an Indian village is that it is a conglomeration of mud-and thatched houses inhabited by people of different castes who struggle to make both ends meet with highly limited resources. Although scarcity and poverty are differentially distributed in Indian villages, on the whole they are rampant, that is why, the programmes of poverty-alleviation and development are urgently needed for them. Contrary to this image are the 'affluent' villages in Punjab and Haryana where, speaking in relative terms, there is no scarcity, resources are in plenty, and facilities generally found in cities are easily available. Out-migration from these villages is usually to the developed world, where people wish to go with the sole intention of maximizing their assets and affluence.
- 2) The three salient characteristics of a rural society are:
 - i) It is small in size with a low density of population.
 - ii) Members of the rural society are engaged in agriculture, which is the mainstay of their life; and
 - iii) A rural society is 'tradition-bound', i.e. the same way of life, norms and folkways, customs and practices, and beliefs and values, tend to perpetuate over time, and the extent of change among them is considerably low. That was the reason why Robert Redfield characterised a rural society as 'past-oriented'.

Check Your Progress III

- 1) 'Scheduled Tribe' is a constitutional term. There is an all-India list of Scheduled Tribes. Each of the Scheduled Tribes is a community of people that has been relatively isolated, because of which it is backward, less developed, and sometimes suffers from acute poverty and scarcity. In order to bring it at par with other developed communities, it is essential that its interests are protected and taken care of. All the states provide such protection and the needed extra support under the policy of what is known as 'compensatory discrimination', 'protective discrimination', or 'positive discrimination'. The list mentioned above lists the names of the tribes/communities that need such discrimination and each of the listed communities is called a Scheduled Tribe.

Check Your Progress IV

- 1) The three main differences between rural and urban societies are:
 - i) Villages are primarily food-producing units, while urban society is non-agricultural.
 - ii) Villages are small in size and their growth rate is slow. In their case, out-migration is higher than in-migration, which in many cases may touch zero. Cities are larger in size and their growth rate is high. In-migration is considerably higher than out-migration, because of which cities keep on growing.
 - iii) Villages are relatively homogeneous. They have some kind of cultural uniformity. The extent of cultural variation among communities inhabiting a village is not discernible. By comparison, cities are heterogeneous. They comprise communities with different cultures, where each one of them tries its best to maintain its identity and cultural purity. City is a cultural mosaic.

Check Your Progress V

- 1) Continuum means 'continuity'. By folk-urban continuum is meant 'continuity from the village to the city'. One end of this continuous scale is the village; the other is the city. Both these social formations are in ceaseless interaction. That is the reason why villages show the profound impact of city life on them, and certain cultural traits from villages are developed in cities. The continuum also shows that the development is from the village to the city. Over time, villages are transformed into towns and cities.

Check Your Progress VI

- 1) The three salient characteristics of the great tradition are:
 - i) It is the tradition of the literate people.
 - ii) It is the tradition of the people who are fewer in number.
 - iii) It is the tradition of the people who are reflective. They critically think about the tradition, remove the glaring contradictions it suffers from and make it sophisticated by systematizing it.

Check Your Progress VII

- 1) A nucleated village is one where all the households are clustered together forming some kind of a nucleus, and all around it are the fields that belong to those households. It is distinguished from a dispersed village where the houses are distributed over a large area, in which each cluster of a few houses is surrounded by fields generally belonging to them. Most of the villages in India are nucleated villages.