CHAPTER TWO

VILLAGE STUDIES: CONCEPTUALISING THE FIELD

VILLAGE STUDIES

The received literature on village studies need to be critically reviewed to help us assess the specifics of an 'urban village'. Like a 'village' the 'urban village' is also a part of the whole but nevertheless has a different meaning because of its spatial location. The changes or transition in an urban village are therefore mainly because of the metropolis of which it forms an integral part, which in turn is a part of the global economic and social forces.

Villages of India have always been a subject of intense scholarly interest because this country is predominantly rural. To begin with, the nineteenth century studies by Sir Henry Maine and and B.H. Baden Powell were the best known of that age.¹ Gandhi and Tagore gave it a central place in
their design of Indian society. The village for them was the principal locus of social life in the past and the future vigour of the Indian society would depend, more than anything else, on the successful reconstitution of its villages. The historian Niharranjan Roy has emphasized the high value attached to villages in the Dharamshastras.\(^2\) The medieval period gave prominence to the town or city but the village continued to be the basic unit of social organisation. That does not mean that the village remained static or unchanging. The stimulating contribution of N.K. Bose who sought to combine in his work the perspectives of ethnography, Indology and social history deserves special mention.\(^3\) The Indian village according to Bose had in the past a distinctive design which reflected the basic values of Indian civilization. Muslim rule brought in new crafts, new elements were introduced through settlement or conversion or both but no new design came up to replace the old. The changes witnessed were organisational rather than struc-
tural. At the operational level, the Hindu jajmani system prevailed at the village level though not quite in the idealized form in which it has been portrayed in by W.H. Wiser's study of Karimpur near Agra in Uttar Pradesh. M.N. Srinivas has drawn attention to the crucial importance of the vertical ties between landlord and tenant, between master and servant and between creditor and debtor. The earlier assumptions of the typical Indian village as a community began to show cracks and could not bear up to new evidence. In the past though the villages were not isolable, nor were they free of conflict and change which however were not structural in character.

Modern scholars closely scrutinised the issue of isolability of the Indian Village Community. The conceptual frames of F. Toennies Gemeinschaft and Gesselschaft, Robert Redfield's Great and Little Tradition, McKim Marriott's Universalization and Parochialization, Durkheim's Mechanical and Organic Solidarity were employed to understand the
process of change and dynamism at the village level. From these studies the notions of rural-urban dichotomy or rural urban continuum emerged, frames which are repeatedly put to use in studies today.

On the question of isolability, The Indian Village: A Symposium made a significant contribution. To begin with Morris E. Opler and Rudra Datt Singh in their joint study of village Senapur in U.P. district, summed up their findings in a dialectical tone declaring not "either/or but both": the village is in many respects a sentimental, religious, administrative and economic unity; it also has important extensions with its neighbouring villages and with the Indian state and Indian civilization. Similarly S.C. Dubey's "Cultural Factors in Rural Community Development" asks whether the village studies can help administrators to deal more effectively with national level action programmes such as community development which has formed an important part
McKim Marriott's *Village India* became a widely read book for its vital contribution to the study of change in rural India. Apart from McKim Marriott; essays by leading sociologists such as Kathleen Gough, M.N. Srinivas, Milton Singer, Alan R. Beals, Scarlett Epstein Bernard Cohn, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, were all very influential. Gough's paper stridently pointed out that the much vaunted integrity and isolation of the village was a thing of the past. Srinivas dilated upon the modalities of modernisation. Singer provided a scheme for analyzing the interactions between indigenous institutions and exogenous forces. Beals looked into the interplay among factors of change in a Mysore village. Scarlett Epstein brought out the diverse impact of modern institutional inputs in differently endowed villages. Authors like Bernard Cohn and Lloyd and Susanne Roudolph hold similar view. The studies put aside the ghost of an unchanging India.
The urban village Munirka has also undergone tremendous changes. The factors underlying such change or transition at different levels of operation. There is of course the interaction between metropolis and the urban village, but apart from that factor we must necessarily contextualise these wide ranging changes as resulting out of planning processes. These processes in themselves are part of modernisation (implicit in urbanisation) and development.

The studies of the past also confronted the issue of transition in India's villages. In the pages to follow we try to look into the approaches or methods of these past researches in order to outline why we have chosen to emphasise structure and its contradictions to explain the overall phenomena of change in the urban village of Munirka.

**Conceptualising the field**

When a researcher enters with the purpose of studying a
particular village and its changing relationship the first question which starts haunting the mind is where to begin?

'Encounters and Experience' of others in the past are always useful guides. The field work method of 'participant observation' appears most appropriate. Clifford Geertz emphasis on understanding from the "native's point of view",\textsuperscript{14} is widely acknowledged as an essential aspect of field work. A sociologist or social anthropologist enters the field with certain tools, aims and ambitions and with something of an explorer's outlook, or bent of mind. Or as Levi Strauss has put it, scholarship of this sort combines romance with science, with the anthropologist as "the astronomer of the social sciences".\textsuperscript{15} One gets initially attracted by the 'differences', 'uniqueness' or 'otherness' of the subject which is finally overcome, within the anthropological discourse which stresses the unity of humankind.

Understanding human society and its culture remains a
subject of intense debate without any consensus regarding various approaches to the subject. The field can nevertheless still be conceptualised in spite of these limitations. Michael Carrithers, for instance, opens his book with the central question in anthropology. "Given the diversity of human forms of life, what must be true of humans in general?" Or as Adam Kuper asks putting the question rather differently, if human beings are everywhere in some essential ways fundamentally alike, how is it that their beliefs, values, technologies modes of organization and perhaps even their national characters vary so much? 

Viewing such a method in the study of society and culture, Andre Beteille observes: "A hundred years and more after Spencer, Tylor and Durkheim, it cannot be said that sociologists and social anthropologists have a method that they would all agree to describe as the comparative method. There is much disagreement among them about it now as there was in the past, even though they have trimmed their ambiti-
tions considerably about' what they can expect from such a method in the study of society and culture." He went on to add that while it is doubtful that we will ever have a comparative method, like some ideal method of the natural scientists about whose proper use sociologists and social anthropologists will reach complete agreement, it is a fact that our deepest insights into society and culture are reached through comparison. The need is to improvise and to exercise our judgements as well as our imagination, and beyond that we can only hope that our comparisons - as well as our contrasts - will be illuminating and fruitful. Moreover, it will be futile to suspend our comparisons until the perfect classification or the perfect typology of human societies is placed within our group.

Apart from method assessing the field is no less a problem. Jack Goody has remarked that "there has been a tendency to primitivise the oriental civilisation." Goody's
argument is that where a line needs to be drawn between industrial and pre-industrial societies, it is drawn instead between "the West and the Rest". T.N. Madan points out how perceptions change over a period of time. Madan goes on to explain the Indian society as viewed by different works and their authors categorised as A Stagnant Culture with reference to work of Kroeber and Linton, Continuity and Change, as described by Mandelbaum, India from Below taking up the work of Joan Mencher, Kathleen Gough and Gerald Berreman and finally to Another India viewed from within as explained by McKim Marriott.20

Conceptualizing the field in India requires one to be aware of the changes that have taken place in the sub-continent. Beteille writes: "India became independent in 1947 after two centuries of colonial rule. It adopted a new Constitution in 1950 which embodies very different values from those that prevailed in the past, and where stress is on equality between individuals in place of hierarchy of
groups." He further insists, he does not mean to suggest that the old values disappeared as soon as the new Constitution was adopted, they are as mentioned earlier in evidence everywhere in contemporary India. At the same time, they now operate in an altered moral, political and legal environment.

Without denying the validity of these changes the approaches to the study of colonialism and culture in India much as they reflect histories in transition, remain controversial too. The various new arguments as put forward by Rosalind O. Hanlon and David Washbrook emphasize three broad trends namely the colonial discourse, the history from the margins, and the political economy approach. 22

M.N. Srinivas 23 in a similar vein in an article, 'On Living in a Revolution', argues that the changes which have occurred in India since 1947 are not revolutionary in character, though still very significant. Some of these changes
are (1) introduction of adult franchise, (2) banning of untouchability and making its practice in any form a criminal offence, along with constitutional provision for reservation of seats for members of SCs and STs, and (3) land reforms in the agrarian sector. The first two have had a winning success in the country but the last has met with mixed fortunes.

Broadly implied in Beteille's and Srinivas's arguments is the acceptance of a changing India, and of the leading role that the polity and the economy have in building the future. S.N. Eisentadt expresses a similar opinion. "But new civilizational settings and social organizations whether the Axial Civilizations those that ushered in Capitalism in the West, or the great revolutions, are not naturally brought about by the basic tenets of religion. Rather, they arise out of a variety of economic and political trends, (emphasis added) as well as ecological condition all inter-
related with the basic civilization premises and with specific institutions."24

Eric Wolf's25 *Europe and the Peoples Without History*, powerfully argues that some of the greatest changes in our experience are the consequences of large scale historical processes, driven by forces that are comprehensible to very few people. Since Columbus at least, we have all been caught up, often uncomprehendingly, in huge and complex networks of political and economic relations. This is why the books that have begun to edge out like Abbe Dubois's26 or Dumont's27 are of a new set ranging from Ronald B. Inden's *Imagining India*,28 Anderson's *Imagined Communities*,29 to Nicholas B. Dirk's *The Hollow Crown*.30 Such work offer new explanation in terms of structural processes, contradiction and change. This is how sociology and anthropology have come together in recent years especially in India. Keeping in view earlier studies and recent growing Gellner is at least partially right when he says that "though the subjects
can no longer be distinguished in terms of their field of inquiry, you can tell the scholarly communities apart: sociologists are to use the Weberian term, a Gesellschaft, while anthropologists form a more tightly knit community, a Gemeinschaft.\textsuperscript{31} Keeping in view earlier studies and recent growing trends we tend to examine our field of interest. Our field, the urban village of Munirka, invites us to examine both the Gemeinschaft and the Gesellschaft dimensions.

Munirka as an urban village remains an integral part of larger metropolis of Delhi. The fact that it is an 'urban village' and not a simple village tucked away in some corner of India, draws our attention more dramatically to the different levels of economic, political and social growth. But even as Munirka, by virtue of being an urban village enjoys the direct influence of the developmental processes of the metropolis, one should not hastily conclude that
everything in the village has been changed. For its own part it also retains its past heritage and cultural roots. On the other hand because it is a part of the larger metropolis, its structured location makes it especially susceptible to dramatic changes. The macro structure impinges on the urban village and its connection with its past drawing our attention to the fact that cultures are malleable. Such transforming order of transactional ties in a speedy network of 'transition' can be best apprehended through the conception of 'nexus' where the macro and micro dimension of town and country interact, often contradicting each other, and thus making the 'transition' far from smooth.

Munirka today exudes a sign of growing optimism expressed in the form of an expanding market place - the income from rents being substantial for the villagers, along with a changing political scenario for better or worse, and also a redefinition of primordial relationships with consequent impacts on the performance of rituals.
Themes

In order to provide a frame for above we shall examine below different analyses along the following conceptual approaches, namely, symbolic anthropology, cultural ecology structuralism, Indological or ethnological approaches, structural Marxism and political economy. At the outset it should be noted that we do not intend a contestation between these themes, nor select the best and ignore the worst, but, to keep our options open on their relative contributions and specific competences.

Symbolic Anthropology

In Munirka ritual observations are quite pronounced especially those rites of passages that deal with birth, death and inheritance. This is where symbolic anthropology can be of relevance to us.
The two major variants of symbolic anthropology grew under the guidance of Clifford Geertz and his colleagues at the University of Chicago, and by Victor Turner at Cornell. Whereas Geertz was primarily influenced by Max Weber and Talcott Parsons (including others of the Boasian tradition like Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict), Victor Turner on the other hand was tempted first by Emile Durkheim and later by Max Gluckman. Whereas Clifford Geertz's work represents a transformation upon the earlier American anthropology concerned mainly with operations of "culture", Turner's scholarship grew within the tradition of British anthropology and concerned itself with structural operations of "society".

Clifford Geertz, while acknowledging Parson's contribution writes that he never really bought it completely but often entertained the idea and even tried to employ it, though he gave it up as an impossible job in the end. What did impress him however was the Parsonian attention to the socio-cultural-cum-psychological side of human action which
gave rise to 'systems'. As for Victor Turner, trained in the Max Gluckman variant of British structural functional-ism, and influenced peripherally by Marxism as well, the normal state of society for him is not one of solidarity and harmonious integration of parts but rather one of conflict and contradiction. Turner, therefore, is not in the straight line of descendants from Durkheim as his interest is not just on solidarity but rather how it is constructed and maintained in spite of the conflicts and contradictions that constitute the normal state affairs.

For those who take their cue from Geertz, anthropology is all about of how symbols shape the way social actors see, feel and think about the world, or in other words, how symbols operate as vehicles of "culture". According to this view it is meaning rather than structure which is the key notion. The theoretical move in this case was to argue that culture is not something locked inside people's heads, but
rather is embodied in public symbols, symbols through which the members of society communicate their world view, value orientations ethos, and all the rest, to one another, and to future generations, as well as to the anthropologists.33 Geertz gave to "culture" a relatively fixed locus and a degree of objectivity, without reducing it to behaviouralist positivism. The other contribution of the Geertzian framework was the insistence on studying culture "from the actor's point of view"34 which simply meant that since culture is a product of acting, then in order to make sense of a culture, we must situate ourselves in the position from which it is constructed. Culture is not some abstractly ordered system, deriving its logic from hidden structural principles35 or from special symbols that provide the "keys" to its coherence. Its logic, and the principles of relations that obtain among its elements derives rather from the logic or organisation of action of people operating within certain institutional orders, interpreting their situations,
in order to act coherently within them.

Geertz was criticized on a variety of levels. On "Religion as a Culture System", it is charged he never paid attention to the systemic aspects of culture. In the Chicago School of symbolic anthropology David Schneider, who like Geertz, was also influenced by Parsons nevertheless concentrated primarily on the internal logic of systems of symbols and meanings by seeking out the "core symbols", (reminiscent of Claude Levi Strauss's concept of structure). Schneider in his own work cut culture off from social action much more radically than Geertz. He and some of his students were among the earliest of symbolic anthropologists to see practice itself a problem because social action was so radically separated from "culture". Coming back to Geertz though, the actor centered perspective is thought fundamental to Geertz it is not systematically elaborated upon, nor does he develop a theory of action or practice as such.
Lastly, according to some critics, Geertz and the
Geertzians\(^{38}\) have never been particularly interested in dis-
tinguishing and cataloguing the varieties of symbolic types
(signals, signs, icons, indexes etc.) nor on the other hand,
like Turner as we shall see later, have demonstrated any
particular interest in the ways symbols perform certain
practical operations in the social process - heal people
through curing rites, turn boys and girls into men and women
through initiation, kill people through sorcery and so
forth. Geertzians have not ignored these practical and
social effects, but such symbols have not been their primary
focus of interest.\(^{39}\) Geertz's heart has always been with
the "ethos" side of culture, more with the effective and
stylish dimensions than with the cognitive. It is not as if
Geertz leans all the way to one side and is away from the
other, nevertheless it is necessary to notice the emphasis
in his work. Even the most cognitive or intellectual of
cultural systems as for instance in Balinese calendars are
analyzed not to open a set of cognitive ordering principles but to understand how the Balinese way of chopping up time makes for their sense of self, of social relations and conduct, and flavours them with a particularly strong sense of the cultural ethos.\textsuperscript{40}

For Victor Turner, symbols are of interest not as vehicles of, and analytic windows onto "culture", nor as integrated ethos, but rather as what might be called operators in the social process, things that, when put together in certain arrangements in certain contexts say like the rituals, produce social transformations. Turner's Ndembu studies\textsuperscript{41} point out to ways in which actors move from one status to another, resolve social contradictions and wed actors to the categories and norms of their society. Along the way Turner identifies certain ritual mechanisms indispensable to ritual analysis, namely, liminality, marginality, anti-structure, communitas, etc. In Turner and his followers we get a sense of how symbols are put in practice
as in rituals. Geertz and his followers do not tell us as much of the effectiveness of symbols and how symbols actually do what symbolic anthropologists claim they do: Operate as active forces in social process.

Symbolic anthropology as we have just seen has limitations as well as certain advantages. It helps us to understand rituals and what locus they have in understanding cultural practices. Let us move on now to an examination of cultural ecology.

**Cultural Ecology**

The cultural ecology approach tell us how the environment or ecology stimulates, or prevents, the development of certain social and cultural forms. Another way to express the same would be to examine the ways in which social and cultural forms function to maintain an existing relationship with environment.
Does cultural ecology help us in anyway to know about the village? We believe it does, though it is not as if it plays the prime or supreme role in determining the transition. Cultural ecology helps us appreciate why shades of the past are still being carried on. Buffaloes, cowdung cakes, cutting of grass for fodder, all reveal the villagers' dependence on the environment. With the sprawling of the metropolis, houses are getting constructed in pasture lands, snatching away the earlier sense of belonging, and posing contradictions in their current mode of existence. It is not uncommon to find buffaloes tethered by the sitting room, or heaps of garbage lying all about the place. Construction activity is hectic and there is widespread proliferation of markets which leads to a contraction of open tracts, even the compounds of religious places of worship are sometimes occupied by shops. Today the cultural and social form gets determined through diverse ties which the urban village has with metropolis. Nevertheless the cultur-
al ecology of Munirka, which includes ingrained practices of the past, remains an important consideration if we wish to understand Munirka today.

In the anthropological domain the place which is given to processes of adaptation to specific environmental conditions still holds good. The environmental influence is perforce stronger in more primitive conditions where nature still has a larger role to play. But it plays a more indirect role in more developed situations, which is why ecology and not environment per se is the focus of interest. Marshall Sahlins wrote:

For decades, centuries now, intellectual battle has been given over which sector of culture is the decisive one for change. Many have entered the lists under banners diverse. Curiously, few seem to fall. Leslie White champions technological growth as the sector most responsible for cultural evolution; Julian Huxley, with many others, sees "man's view of destiny" as the deciding force; the mode of production and the class struggle are still very much in contention. Different as they, these positions agree in one respect, that the
impulse to development is generated from within.... The case for internal causes of development may be bolstered by pointing to a mechanism, such as the Hegelian dialectic, or it may rest more insecurely on an argument from logic.... In any event, an unreal and vulnerable assumption is always there, that cultures are closed systems.... It is precisely on this point that cultural ecology offers a new perspective....

All this is true so far as we do not give it causal primacy. In cultural ecology we talk not only of how the environment stimulates the development of social and cultural forms, but how also social and cultural forms function to maintain an existing relationship with the environment. It is to the latter aspect that we focus now. The main exponents of this area of study are Marvin Harris, Roy Rappaport and Stuart Piddocke, among others. These authors speak of the adaptive or system maintaining functions of particular cultures. For Harris the sacredness of the cow in India serves as a link in the agricultural food chain. Similarly, according to Rappaport the Maring Kaiko ritual prevented the degradation of the natural environment.
Kwakiutl potlatch likewise maintained a balance of food distribution over tribal segments.⁴⁷

In addition to the above, there were sociologists who took up the task of understanding the urban ecology. The urban as an ecological community⁴⁸ saw attempts by sociologists to develop a specifically urban theory or, more precisely, in the words of Leonard Reissman a "systematic theory of the city."⁴⁹ Robert Park and his colleagues at the University of Chicago did much to develop this line of scholarship. Park maintained that "The structure of the city, ...has its basis in human nature, of which it is an expression, and that because of this, there is a limit to the arbitrary modifications which it is possible to make (1) in its physical structure and (2) in its moral order."⁵⁰ In the words of Louis Wirth, who was also a student of Robert Park: "Human ecology as Park conceived it, was not a branch of sociology but rather a perspective, a method, and a body
of knowledge essential for the scientific study of social life and hence, like social psychology, a general discipline basic to all the social sources. \(^{51}\) As for Wirth himself, his views were quite similar. For Wirth, the urban trait complex could be derived on the basis of size, density and heterogeneity. These become conducive to specific behavioral patterns and moral attitudes. Later he was to write, "the city and the country may be regarded as two poles in reference to one or another of which all human settlements tend to arrange themselves. In viewing urban industrial and rural-folk society as ideal types of communities, we may obtain a perspective for the analysis of the basic models of human association as they appear in contemporary civilization."\(^{52}\) Gideon Sjoberg thought it was significant that for Wirth, "the effects of urban development are distinct and independent of those from cultural values or from industrialisation."\(^{53}\) Contrastingly Sjoberg argued that the enfolding socio-cultural system of the city (or the town),
whether pre-industrial or industrial, must be taken as a dependent rather than an independent variable. Likewise, Manuel Castells though not belonging to the same school uses the concept of "dependent urbanization" in his study.

Writers like Kingsley Davis focussed their attention on the demographic aspects of the urbanization process. Scholars like Philip Hauser and Bert F. Hoselitz wrote on similar issues that have to do with urban social structure and ecology. Max Weber himself along with others like Firey and Kolb stressed cultural and social values in accounting for ecology and social structure of cities, which also included the pattern of technology.

The studies of cultural ecology and urban ecology sharply point out the effect of ecology on cultural and social values and vice versa. This helps in understanding the overall scenario, but says little about social groups, social relationships, social structures and social institu-
tions. This is why it is time to move on to our third level, namely structuralism.

**Structuralism**

Structuralism generally includes approaches which stress that any institution or pattern of behaviour must be explained as a manifestation of deep structure of the human mind (Levi Strauss) or as modes of production (Marx, Althusser) or some other factor not immediately available to the naked eye. Structuralism thus seeks to establish whether human activity, or the course of history, or language, or individual egos are shaped by phenomena that are not on the surface. On the term "structuralism" the Penguin Dictionary of Sociology has this succinct comment, "The term is frequently used to refer to a particular style of sociological work, although it is not at all distinctive. At its most general level it simply refers to a sociological perspective based on the concept of social structure and the
view that society is prior to individuals. However, the label is also used to in a more specific sense for those theorists who hold that there are a set of social structures that are *unobservable but which generate observable social phenomena*...."62

The best known exponent of this position is the anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss who is a member of intellectual movement, particularly in France, that embraces anthropology, sociology, linguistics and literary criticism. He holds that cultural forms, especially, myths, typically take the form of the combination of opposite qualities, called binary oppositions, such as sweet and sour, or red and green. Analysis of myths and by extension of literary texts, takes the form of showing what binary oppositions are manifested. For Levi Strauss, explanation of the form of myths is to be found in unvarying qualities (structures) of the human mind. Certain Marxists, particularly Louis Althusser, have adopted a structuralist framework in seeking to explain social
phenomena by reference to the underlying structures of the mode of production. These contemporary structuralist positions have been heavily criticized as ahistorical, unverifiable and neglectful of human creative activity.

A closely related problem is whether laws or patterns of change are common to all societies, or whether different societies or civilizations develop in their own specific ways. With this query in mind let us take stock of what the structuralists have to say in order to illuminate the realities of village Munirka.

Levi Straussian structuralism avers that apparent randomness may have a deeper unity and can be systematically derived from the operation of a small number of underlying principles. In other words beneath the surface proliferation of forms, a few relatively simple and relatively uniform mechanisms operate. For Levi Strauss, "The value of a theory is that it unifies, and solves by the same means,
more problems than had previously been brought under the same heading." He further adds that however, its value is always provisional, since each theory is eventually replaced by another, representing a comparable improvement in relation to it as it did in relation to its predecessors. For example, the diversity of marriage rules exhibit different modalities of a single phenomenon, viz., the exchange of women. Levi Strauss insists that generalisation should not be confused with comparison. Only the latter is more or less ambitious according to the cultural limits it chooses or that are assigned to it. In respect of kinship and marriage, the distance between the so called complex societies and those wrongly dubbed primitive or archaic is much less than might appear at first sight. Far from setting up ethnographic societies as separate worlds, the study of peasant traditions or of the marriage customs of noble or royal families establishes all sorts of interconnections between those societies and ours that no one would have
suspected only 20 years ago.

/Indological or Ethno-sociological Approaches/

Louis Dumont, an exponent of Indological approach has some structuralist implications in his analysis of the structure of Indian caste system, without being a thorough structuralist of the Levi Straussian kind. Louis Dumont pointed out how 'hierarchy' characterizes Indian society in all its aspects. It drew a picture of society dominated by purity and pollution in which all power ultimately was subordinate to the ritual authority of Brahmins. "The social systems," Dumont wrote, "is as stable and powerful as it is opposed to our ethics and unamenable to our intellect." 64

Akin to Dumont's essentialist view of Indian society we have the writings of ethnosociologists like McKim Marriott whose basic point about India is that it is a culture sui
generis. Caste viewed from the perspective of Indians themselves, argues Marriott, is based on the idea of 'coded substance', South Asians do not insist on drawing a line between what Westerners call "natural" and what they call "moral" things. Rather Indians operate with a non-dualist view of the world in which moral codes are understood to be implicit in and inseparable from bodily substances.

Ronald Inden has recently criticised such formulations. He invokes post Hegelian philosopher R.G. Collingwood to argue that social science continue to lapse into spurious essentialism where "the agent of history is taken to be an ideal or material something that underlies, but is not itself affected by historical acts." Inden's aim is to turn the study of India away from the search of essences (like caste, Hinduism and sacred kingship) and towards the exploration of activities where the fact of agency cannot be ignored. This would draw attention to caste and village councils, royal courts, the performance of rites or the
building of temples and mosques.

C.A. Bayly's appreciative comment on Inden's work notes that,

the humanities in general have too often thought of social collectivities as impermeable, almost mechanical solidarities, infused with a will or intention which is prior to that of people who compose them. Instead Inden argues, historical communities ought to be seen as politics constructed by human agency. This agency may be individual or composite, unified or dispersed or what Collingwood called a 'scale of forms'. But in all cases, the boundaries between groups and institutions must be represented as being transacted, contested and constantly reformulated. The idea that castes, classes or ethnicities can be seen as 'substantized essences', acting in society, has distorted modern scholarship, and there is no better example of this, Inden thinks, then Orientalism in its Indological branch. 67

It is true that in the West, South Asia appears riven by age old religious prejudice such that its polity and economy are in shambles. According to this view primordial identities such as caste, religion, clan and tribe are all con-
spiring to rend South Asian society apart. Even nationalists writing in the Marxist tradition have, according to Inden, unconsciously reproduced much of this discourse; ruling classes and modes of production became mere surrogates for castes, Brahmins and religious mysticism, in entrapping India in its cultural stagnation.

**Marx and Structural Marxism:**

The focal theme of our analysis namely country-town nexus finds resonance in the work of Marx and Engels. For them "the historic division between town and country that characterizes all human societies from antiquity to the period of modern capitalism is both the expression and the basis of division of labour." In *Capital* for example, Marx writes, "The foundation of every division of labour which has attained a certain degree of development, and has been brought about by the exchange of commodities, is the separation of town from country. One might well say that
the whole economic history of society is summed up in the movement of this antithesis." Marx further commented, "Ancient classical history is the history of cities, but cities based on land ownership and agriculture. The middle ages (Germanic period) starts with the countryside as the locus of history, whose further development then proceeds through the opposition of town and country, modern history is the urbanization of the countryside, not as among the ancients, the ruralization of the city" (emphasis added).

In other words, in the feudal era, for the first time, the division between town and country comes to express essential contradictions which eventually brings about the transcendence of feudalism itself. "The towns enter into relations with one another, new tools are brought from one town into another and the separation between production and commerce soon calls forth for a new division of production between the industrial towns, each of which is soon exploiting a predominant branch of industry." For our concern, since
we do not deal with classical or middle ages but with Munirka an urban village, we tend not to dismiss Marx's earlier thoughts and draw lessons from them. We are sensitised to looking back from the present into what Munirka was in the past, in order to understand contemporary transformations, and not so much to write a history of this urban village.

Structural Marxism as in the contributions of Louis Althusser, Maurice Godelier, Emmanuel Terray, Marshall Sahlins and Jonathan Friedman remind us incessantly that the critical social relations are those that relate to the mode(s) of production, and one should separate this level from surface organization of social relations traditionally studied by British anthropologists, viz. lineages, clans, moieties, and the rest. These surface forms of what the British called "social structure" are seen as native models of social organisation that have been bought by anthropologists as the real thing but that actually mask, or at least only partially correspond to the hidden asymmetrical rela-
tions of production that are driving the system. Ecological considerations were not excluded but they were subsumed by the analysis of the mode of production. The Structural Marxists do not find material relations and ideology as opposed enterprises but the two levels were related via a core of social, political and economic processes. Culture was converted to 'ideology' and considered from the point of its role in social reproduction: legitimating the existing order, mediating contradictions in the base, and mystifying the sources of exploitation and inequality in the system. This perspective helps us directly, for we realise how culture as an ideology is trying to mediate the contradictions between town and country and how the performances of 'rituals' try to neutralize, dilute or mediate tensions that emerge as a consequence of the country town nexus.

In this regard it is necessary to appreciate the structuralist Marxists' point of departure. Althusser, for
instance, would as Maurice Bloch explains, have the anthropologist construct at least two modes of production when examining a rural urban nexus. One of them, would be capitalist (in a contemporary situation, that is) and would be constructed by theoretically analyzing information from a very wide geographical area, perhaps most of the world. The other, perhaps, a feudal one, would be constructed from information covering also a wider geographical area, but different from capitalist one. Then the anthropologist would construct the structural interaction or "articulation" between the two modes of production, and also how the two are made to mesh, given the fact of the dominance of the capitalist mode of production over the other. This means that the internal consistency of the capitalist mode will be little affected by the articulation while the internal consistency of the dominated mode of production will be distorted in all manner of ways by the articulation.74

Althusser's contribution is remarkable within the Marxian tradition for "instead of seeing superstructural elements, such as ideology and politics, simply as reflection of the economic base, he proposes a scheme in which ideology and politics are conditions of existence of the economy."75 The concept of the mode of production, is con-
ceived as a complex relation between the economy, ideology and politics. Mark Lilla is his work on Althusser said, "His earliest political teaching, elaborated in his writings on Marx, was that man is not the 'subject' of historical activity but only the 'bearer' of history which ideology and social structures produce through him. This became an article of faith in la pensee 68, which sought to drive 'subjectivity' and 'humanism' from every intellectual domain." For Althusser history must be regarded as "...process without subject." The complex interaction of their actions produces results that no one had intended and which no one would have foreseen. Consequently we cannot explain what happened with reference to actions of different individuals. In other words the result or the unintended effect can be understood only by referring to the "impersonal and inexorable forces." And thus his persuasion that modern capitalism mesmerises through the "Ideological Apparatuses of the State...."
To come back to the complex relationship of economy, polity and ideology let us take note of Althusser's position. Althusser postulates the irreducibility or the distinctiveness of the economic, political and ideological practices and allows for the multiplicity of contradictions, some of which are radically heterogeneous and have different origins. A mode of production is thus comprised of practices which are different from each other and second that the kind of causality that is ascribed to a mode of production is such that it takes note of the 'overdetermination' of an event by the different practices comprising the mode of production. Althusser asserts this again and again as for example when he states: "But History asserts itself through the multiform world of superstructures... the economic dialectic is never active in the pure state in history, these instances, the superstructures etc. are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or when
the time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes. 80

Coming now to the Marxian notion of contradiction, Althusser remarks that "there is always one principal contradiction and secondary ones, but they exchange their roles in the structure articulated in dominance while the latter remain stable." 81 If a structure is merely "a specific combination of its peculiar elements" then we have an example of a causation by a structure or structural causality. Not only is the structure constituted by contradictory relations between elements but the structure which is "merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements is nothing outside its effects." The whole or the structure has no cause outside it or beneath it - no inner essence of which it is appearance. It is only a complex of certain relations. 82
The contradictions in the village of Munirka can be seen on different levels, economic, political and ideological. The 'agents' of change in the urban village are mere 'bearers' of the structural relationship entrapped between the larger metropolis and the mere local urban village. The cultural and social transition as understood in the Althusserian perspective the urban village would somehow appear as shown in the diagram.

Diagram of the transition of the urban village as understood in the Althusserian Frame of Reference
Construction of the urban village as understood in Althusserian frame of reference seen in the dominant mode of production and hence transition as understood

Diagram I

TO URBAN VILLAGE (DOMINATED)

COUNTRY

Economy (communal, barren, clan, non-exploitative, non-capitalist)
Polity (panchayati, numberdari, decentralized)
Ideology (rituals, ancestor worship)

Diagram II

T₁ METROPOLIS (DOMINANT)

TOWN

Economy (capitalist-capital and wage)
Polity (appropriation-planning and administration for welfare)
Ideology (profit, state monopoly capitalism, bureaucratic)

T₁ and T₀
Induces change
Strengthens up antithesis
Finds more contradictions to feed upon (360 villages)

Net result - Urban village in T₂ phase is an outcome of the determinant mode of production

Diagram III

Nexus (Town and Country)
Structural Causation
Transition (No smooth)

T₂ URBAN VILLAGE

Economy (old ties + new ones like rent)
Polity (decentralized + centralized)
Ideology (Ritual → Invention of tradition)
Finally let us deal with school of political economy. "It is generally recognized that the relationship between economic behaviour and political behaviour is a central issue of social theory and that the study of political economy is an attempt to address that central issue." The political economy school gains inspiration mainly from world systems and underdevelopment theories in political sociology as cited in the work of E. Wallerstein, Andre Gunder Frank and others. In contrast to Structural Marxism where anthropologists study relatively discrete societies or cultures, the political economists focus on large scale regional political economic systems. Along with this focus they combine elements of traditional fieldwork in specific communities or micro regions, to study the effects of capitalist penetration upon those communities.

While in the school of cultural ecology there is rela-
tively greater emphasis on "primitive" societies, and the important external force is the natural environment, for the political economists, say studying peasants the external forces are the state and the capitalist world system. The latter school also show greater willingness to incorporate symbolic issues into their inquiries. Consequently their work tends to focus on symbols involved in the development of class or group identity, in the context of political economic struggles of one sort or another.

The school of political economy is nevertheless not without its critics. For instance, James Manor in his review of Rudolph and Rudolph's book In Pursuit of Lakshmi: A Political Economy of the Indian State writes, "This ambitious, complex volume has provoked extensive debate about the nature of India's political economy and about the author's approach to it. But in the process the Rudolph's assessments of political institutions and of state society relations (which is not quite the same thing as political
economy) have been largely overlooked. The political economy either therefore tends to be too political not economic/materialist enough." 88 The other kind of criticism levelled against "their relative inattention to questions of 'culture' and to mundane social dimensions of development they study. This may be because they have tended, perhaps inevitably, to take a view from the top down, to look at questions of capitalism and state formation from the perspective of successful and dominant groups, rather than of those who were losing out." 89 It is not as if we want to rule out the possibility of employing the political economic approach but merely to keep in mind some of their shortcomings which can be overcome partially by complementing it with other approaches.

In Munirka's 'political economy' economic and political ties intersect with each other in various spheres such as the market, polity, primordial relationship, and so on.
These are consequent upon state planning and capitalist process as can well be imagined. But what should also be noted is the 'contradictory' order of these spheres and how they get intertwined making the 'transition' far from smooth.

Our thematic strands as matters stand could be broadly classified as Symbol, Nature and Structure. The urban village Murnika is full of complexities at different levels of economy, polity and society. In trying to understand the different spheres we shall make use of the broad thematic strands which we have developed namely symbolic anthropology, cultural ecology, structuralism, indological or ethnological approaches, Marx and structural Marxism and political economy. At this stage we are not concerned with the supremacy of one approach over the other. It can only be achieved through a dialogue in between the approaches and the field data, which we shall engage in the subsequent chapters.
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Note on Criticism: What gets reflected is the often quoted debate between agency and structure. For some the emphasis should be placed on the way that individuals create the world around them: (Methodological Individualism, Ethnomethodology, Phenomenological Sociology. For others social structures are which determine the characteristic and actions of individuals where agency or special characteristics therefore become unimportant. Emile Durkheim emphasized the functional relationship between social structures. Marxists (Althusser) argue that social relations, not
individuals are objects of analysis. Individuals are only bearers' of social relations. Althusser on this ground was criticized as antihistoricist, antiempiri-
cist and decentering. A third approach tried to com-
bine both as in Peter Berger and Thomas Gluckman. They argue that there is a dialectical process in which the meanings given by individuals to their world become institutionalized into social structures and the struc-
tures then become part of the meaning systems employed by individuals and thus limit their action.


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83. John Toye (1988), "Political Economy and the Analysis of Indian Development", *Modern Asian Studies*, 22:1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.97-122. On similar quote, Hirschman has teasingly suggested that "the prestige of social science... may owe much to the lack of integration and communication among the individual discipline of economics, sociology, political science and so on" in A.O. Hirschman (1981), *Essays in Trespassing. Economics to Politics and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.266. More seriously, he has also argued that "the attempt to formu-
late an abstract, general theory of the link between economics and politics can lead only to banality or frustration" in Martin Staniland (1985), *What is Political Economy? A Study of Social Theory and Underdevelopment*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p.193. Political economy is thus an area of inquiry from which different types of political economic linkages may be theorized, depending on the particular problem being studied.


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