The Indian Village: A Multi-dimensional Space

CHAPTER II

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The village as a physical/real space

The village is probably the most significant unit of Indian society. It is the theatre where the totality of rural life unfolds itself and functions. To an Indian, a village means many things. On its definition stands the political shape of the country; on its interpretation depends the economic progress of the nation. The description of an Indian village means, in effect, the narration of the very face of the country. An Indian village is in fact the mirror of India, of both the past and the present, and on its future depends the future of the nation. The importance of the village in India’s socio-political life has been so paramount that it has even led to the conceptualisation of a new political theory—‘Villagism’—in India (Prasad, 2003:161).

The definition of an Indian village and the analysis of the definition are difficult tasks. It is a contradiction that in a country dominated by more than six lakh villages; we have great difficulty in defining a ‘village.’ There are differences of opinion about the definition and concept of a village. Prasad writes:

It should be noted that all the six hundred thousand odd units, so-called villages, cannot be treated as such because tens of thousands of them consist of but a few houses. Only a place at least with twenty families can be considered a village and defined as such. (2003:161)

But Dube, on the other hand, does not give importance to the number of families residing in a village and defines the village in different terms as “a unit of social structure, which cuts across the boundaries of kin and caste and unites a number of unrelated families within an integrated multicaste community” (2006:204). It is at this juncture that we face certain relevant questions as: What are the main characteristics of a village? Does the description of a village depend only on the number of houses or
families? Or does it depend on the population figures? What are the sociological backgrounds of these groups of people spread in six lakh far flung places known till now as villages?

The concept of a village differs slightly from country to country. Whereas to the Western schools of thought the concept is more or less recent and modern, the Eastern schools make it more classic and basic. Prasad supplies a lot of information on this topic. According to him in Britain or the U.S.A. the village is thought to be:

...intermediate between the hamlet and the town. A hamlet is defined there as a settlement with several families and some form of commerce but not with a big population. A settlement with more than a thousand people is popularly known as a town. (Prasad, 2003:164)

Hence it can be assumed that a settlement in the U.S.A. with a population of less than a thousand people and some sort of commerce is known as a village. But there are exceptions too. There are even villages with more than ten or twenty thousand people, as for example, in the northeast of U.S.A. But in India, there were no two opinions on the concept of a grama in ancient, medieval or modern India as long as it denoted “a group of families living in a certain place” (2003:162). But the difference between a hamlet and a village in the west is only of recent origin. “The finer distinction between a hamlet and a village as noticed in the West is more or less recent compared to the distinction between the grama and palli in ancient India”(2003:162).

One of the most popular western definitions of a village is “an assemblage of houses larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town” (2003:162). This entirely coincides with the conception of a village in ancient India. It is interesting to note that in Indian treatises, epics and myths, this subtle distinction between the village and the hamlet was noticed. The conception of grama and palli means exactly what their western counterparts – village and hamlet – signify. Rig Veda, composed around 1500 B.C. and one of the most ancient scriptures of the world, defines a village as “an aggregate of several families sharing the same habitation” (Dube, 1955:145). An aggregate of families
or *kula* formed a village or *gram*. The opposite of the village was named a forest. The family was thus the unit of social organisation. However, there is no indication of the number of families that was required to constitute a village:

The general definition of the village did not suggest any minimum number of families. But from other references in the *Rig Veda* it is clear that the size of a village is not as important an attribute as its constitution and functioning. (Vidyalankar, 1964:157)

In the Vedic period most people lived in villages. The village was then under the supreme control of a village headman who was called a *gramini*. He administered the village with the help of a village council. The administrative organisation of the village was more or less a democratic one, with the *gramini* being elected by the *janas* or the people.

When we come to the epic period, the distinction between small villages and large villages is seen in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In these epics too, some details are available on villages. For instance, small villages were called *Ghos* and large villages *Gram* (Shankar, 1998:2). A similar classification of villages is also reported in the *Manu Smriti* of the 1st century B.C. Manu distinguishes village, town and city – *grama*, *pura* and *nagara* (1998:2). According to the *Mahabharata* (c.A.D.400), a village had certain characteristics, for example, multiple types of inhabitants, cattle farms, and small hamlets. Giving a full account of the description of an Indian village and the Indian village organisation during the *Mahabharata* period, Dube writes:

Through the Mahabharata we get an outline of the system of village and inter-village organisation. According to the epic, the village was the fundamental unit of administration and had as its head the *gramini*, who was its leader and chief spokesman; one of the major responsibilities of headman was to protect the village, which had a radius of about two miles, and to safeguard its boundaries. The administrative system was organised on the basis of the grouping of villages, each group having its own recognised leader. Thus a group of ten villages were
under a *das-gramini*, and this was the first unit of inter-village organisation. Two such groups, that is, twenty villages, used to be under a *vimsatipa*. A group of a hundred villages was headed by a *satagramini* or *grama-satadhyaksha*. Finally, a group of a thousand villages was under an *adhipati*. (1955:65)

We also come to know that in ancient India, society developed in a series of ascending formations starting from the family (*griha* or *kula*) and gradually extending to the village (*grama*), the clan (*vis*) the people (*jana*) and the country (*rashtra*) (1955:1).

The great poet Kalidas who lived in the 5th century A.D. also gives a description of the Indian village but no hard and clear-cut picture can be traced throughout his works. Among the earlier authors in India, a precise description of an Indian village was provided by Chanakya or Kautilya who lived around 200 B.C. during the Maurya period. Kautilya’s *Arthasastra* gives a clear and categorical definition of a village:

Villages consisting each of not less than a hundred families and of not more than five hundred families of agricultural people of Sudra caste, with boundaries extending as far as a *Krasa* (2,250yds.) or two and capable of protecting each other shall be formed. Boundaries shall be denoted by a river, a mountain, forests, bulbous plants, caves, artificial buildings (*setubendha*) or by trees such as *Salami* (silk cotton tree) *Sami* (Acacia Suma) and *Kshiravrksha* (milky trees). (Prasad, 2003:163)

Kautilya gives us some ideas about the village group too. The villages were organised under unions of 10 called *Samgrahana*, of 200 called *Karvatika*, of 400 called *Dronamukha*, and of 800 villages constituting a *Mahagrama* and administratively termed *Sthatnuja*. It is recorded in Kautilya’s treatise on the administration of villages:

There shall be set up a *sthaniya* (a fortress of that name) in the centre of eight hundred villages, a *dronamukh* in the centre of two hundred villages and a *sangrahamana* in the midst of a collection of ten villages. (Prasad, 2003:164)
Some information is available regarding the villages under the Gupta dynasty, which ruled from 320 A.D. Under the Gupta kings, the lower administrative unit was the village. At the same time, in South India:

The largest administrative division was the mandala, which was subdivided into valanadus or into nadus and kottams. The lowest administrative units were the kurram (union of villages) and grama (village), each under its own headman who was assisted by assemblies (ur, mahasabha). The village headman had his counterpart in the nagarapati of cities. In certain rural areas, the village assembly consisted of the adult population, in others of Brahmanas or a few great men who were selected by a kind of ballot. (Majumdar et al. 1970:188)

Hence, it is seen that a village has no exact or commonly accepted size limit. Tagore states his opinion about the Indian village as follows:

Instead of each family living among its own fields, the Indian village is generally a concentration of many households with their holdings scattered over great distances. The village community in India is thus close and compact. (1928:13)

India’s economic prosperity lies in her villages. Her economic development depends more on all round rural progress than on the towering skyscrapers in the towns. There are villages in India, which are bigger than many western towns. No definition by population or revenue income has yet turned them into towns. Tagore says that in India, “Villages with populations of four or five thousand are not rare and there are occasionally villages with as many as ten thousand inhabitants” (1928:18). The Indian village is the symbol of economic self-reliance. Some of them resemble, even today, townships, eastern or western. Due to the harmonious growth of agriculture and industry, and because of the country’s abundant manpower, the Indian village is, even in the modern age, largely self-sufficient and home to a largely contented community. The most authentic documents on the patterns of living in India have been the census figures and the masterly analytical reports. Let us see what the census reports say about a village. The 1951 Report records:
Arrangements for the census count were made village-by-village and town-by-town. We have thus got account of all the different places where people live. The total number of such places is between 561,107 and 558,089 villages and 3,018 towns. Out of 3,569 lakhs of people whom we counted, 2,950 lakhs were found in villages and 619 lakhs in towns. (Census of India, 1951:41)

Like every social phenomenon, the village can be considered as a historical category. The emergence of the village at a certain stage in the evolution of the life of man, its further growth and development in subsequent periods of human history, the varied structural changes it experienced during thousands of years of its existence, the rapid and basic transformation it has undergone during the last hundred and sixty years since the Industrial Revolution — all these constitute a very fascinating and challenging study. When we examine history, we find that the growth of the village is closely connected with the growth of agricultural economy. The emergence of the village signifies that man passed from the nomadic modes of hunter-gatherer life to a settled one. This was mostly due to the improvement of tools of production, which made agriculture possible and hence settled life in a fixed territorial zone possible and necessary. Desai is of the opinion that “with the invention of the plough, man could develop stable agriculture, the basic source of assured food supply” (2006:13). With the development of agriculture, man’s nomadic mode of life came to an end. Man stopped wandering from place to place in herds in search of means of subsistence. They settled in a definite territory and organized villages, which were based on an agricultural economy. Thus we see that agrarian communities with villages as their fixed habitation and agriculture as their main occupation came into existence. This was a landmark in the history of mankind, and it inaugurated a higher phase of social existence:

At a certain stage in the development of agricultural economy, due to the greater productivity of agriculture, a section of the community was freed from the necessity of engaging in food production and could therefore concentrate on secondary industrial or ideological activity. This gave momentum to the growth of technology, arts, science and philosophy. (2006: 14)
With different types of peoples living in different parts of the world, different types of villages came into existence with the development and spread of agriculture. This was mainly due to differences in geographical environments in which those peoples lived:

The history of the village, in time and space, reveals such diverse village types as the Saxon village, the German Mark, the Russian Mir, the self-sufficient Indian Gram, the village of the feudal Europe which was an integral part of the manor and finally the modern village, which is an integral part of national and world economic systems. (2006:14)

To know more about the Indian villages one has to depend on the ancient Indian texts. Malaviya (2006:171-76) gives us an idea of the village as described in texts dating from the 5th century BC. The Buddhist and Jain texts of the time give us extensive information about the villages of those days. The canonical books of the Buddhists elaborately refer to the arrangement of villages, towns and forts. Gama, nigama, kula and nagarka are often mentioned. The Jain texts refer to settlements such as ghosa, kheta, kharvata, gram, palli, pattana, samvaha, uagara, matamba, etc. The average village referred to in the Buddhist Jatakas consisted of families numbering up to 1000. The village dwellings were fairly close to one another, so much so that a fire starting in one might spread to the whole village. The villages almost invariably had a gate, the gram-dwara. Beyond this was usually found the village orchard, and then the gram-kshetra, that is the cultivated area of the village. The crops were protected from pests, beasts and birds by fences, snares and field-watchmen. The gram-kshetra was extended, as and when the need arose, by cleaning the forest. Beyond this arable area, used to be the village pasture, which was invariably held in common and the cattle of the king or the commoner, all had equal rights over it. The Jatakas also refer to gopalaka (meaning “protector of the flocks”) a village official or employee, a sort of a common communal shepherd whose main job was to open the flocks at night or, in the alternative, return it to their owners by counting heads. The cultivated area of the village consisted of individual holdings. It appears that the demarcation of areas was done in a well-planned manner.
There seems to have been a system of co-operative irrigation with the water channels dividing the holdings. About the possession of the grasslands used for grazing the cattle, Malaviya remarks:

No individual could acquire, either by purchase or inheritance, any exclusive right in any portion of the common grassland or woodland. Great importance was attached to these rights of pasture and forestry. Even when the king made grant of some village to some priest or other dignitary, in effect, it was not a conferment of free rights over village lands. (2006:174)

Malaviya also furnishes information about the administrative staff in the villages during that period. The village administrative staff comprised the Adhyaksha (the Headman); the Samkhayaka (the accountant); the Sthanikas (village officials of different grades); Anikasta (veterinary doctors); and Jamgha Karika (village couriers). Besides these, there used to be an officer to look after village sanitation (Chikitsaka) and a horse-trainer (Ashwa-Damak) with a view to build up a cavalry for needs of war. These officials were granted land, free of rents and taxes, but they were forbidden to alienate it by sale or mortgage. In Chandragupta’s time, around 300 B.C., the villages were divided into three categories according to their population: Jyeshtha, the bigger ones, Madhyama, the middle ones, and Kanishtha, the smaller ones (2006:175).

In later times were appointed the following officers and public servants in a Madras village, at the beginning of the 19th century, as revealed in the 1812 Select Committee Report of the House of Commons, the famous Fifth Report:

1. The Headman: - In charge of general superintendence, collection of village revenue, police work, and settlement of village disputes.

2. The Accountant: - In charge of keeping accounts of cultivation and maintenance of registers of allied affairs.
3. The Watchmen: - These were of two types, the superior and the inferior. The first one had to get information of crimes and to escort and protect persons travelling from one village to another. The activities of the inferior one were confined to the village and included, among others, guarding the crops and assisting in measuring them.

4. The Boundary man: - Responsible for prescribing the limits of the village and giving evidence about them in cases of disputes.

5. The Superintendent of the Tank and Water Courses: - Responsible for distribution of irrigation water.

6. The Priest: - Responsible for the performance of village worship.

7. The Schoolmaster: - In charge of teaching village children to read and write 'in the sand.'

Besides these, are mentioned the astrologer, the smith and carpenter, the washer man, the barber, the cow keeper, the doctor, the dancing girl, the musician and poet (2006:176).

Karve (2006:186) describes the different types of villages seen in India in the 20th century. These villages are situated on a high plateau of the Deccan. They are nucleated villages with the habitation clearly defined from the surrounding cultivated fields. In such villages, while the habitation area is well marked, the boundaries of the village together with its fields are never perceived. The fields owned by one village merge into those owned by another except where a hillock or a stream or a highway forms the boundary.

The second type of village is found on the west coast (the Konkan) near the coastal region. The villages are generally strung length-wise along the two sides of a road. The houses stand in their own compounds with their fruit and coconut gardens and are fenced on all sides. One walks or drives between fences on both sides of the road all the time. There are numerous tiny streams joining the Arabian Sea and there are also
spurs of the western mountains (the Sahyadri), coming right into the ocean. In such villages, the gardens of coconut and areca nut palms, plantain, jack fruits and cashew nuts are planted near the house and fenced in, while the rice fields may lie a little away from the houses, though in some areas they come right to the steps of the houses. There is no sharp distinction between the habitation area and the cultivated area.

The third type of village is found in the Satpura Mountains on the northwestern boundary of the Marathi-speaking region. The houses are situated in their own fields in clusters of two or three huts, all belonging to a single close kinship group. They are either the huts of a father and grown up sons, or brothers and their wives. Sometimes a woman and her husband may have a hut in the same cluster as that of the father and brothers of the woman. The next cluster of huts may be as far as a furlong or two away, depending on how big the holding of each cluster is. The village boundaries are in many instances not defined by streams or hillocks because the houses belonging to one village are situated on separate hillocks or divided by streamlets.

The function of the roads is different in these three types. In the first type (the tightly nucleated villages) there are two types of roads: a) the roads connecting different villages and meant for inter-village communications; b) the internal streets or narrow alleys connecting housing areas. Sometimes a main arterial road may pass through or near a village. In the case of the villages of the second type, the main road in the village is generally the main arterial road joining the villages of the coast for miles and miles in one linear direction. Such roads are seen in most villages of the west coast from Bombay to Kanyakumari.

In the third type of village there are no village streets because no houses are aligned along streets. There are only footpaths leading from one house cluster to another:

A village is thus an ever-changing nucleus of habitations from which tiny clusters separate and remain attached or separate completely to form a new nucleus. Generally, an Indian village is, socially a complicated structure. The complexity is reflected in the way houses are built and roads existed. (Karve, 2006:38)
People of more than one caste live in a village. A map of a village will show almost invariably that the habitation area of each caste is separated from that of the other by a greater or a lesser distance. Sometimes a few castes may live in houses situated side by side, but others live apart. The castes, which are always separated from the others, are those whose touch is supposed to pollute the rest -- the so-called untouchables. The *Kumbhars* (potters) also live a little away from the rest of the village. Villages, which have weavers in their population, also have a separate area where weavers live. If there are a number of Brahmin houses in a village, they may have an exclusive area for themselves. The shepherds live so far away that their habitation area is termed a ‘*wadi*’ of the village. This tendency to have separate sub-areas for habitation within a large unit called a village can be explained in various ways and on different grounds like caste hierarchy, ideas of impurity and pollution, the need for certain occupations to have room for carrying out the different process needed for their craft.

Indian villages can be classified according to its physical form too. This is the most useful and objective type of classification. Nandi and Tyagi (2006:207) describe the different orders of villages found in North India. According to them the following different orders can be distinguished in India. Each type has a fairly wide range of variation, so that instances may not be rare when it becomes difficult to determine if a particular example should be placed in one category or another:

1. Shapeless cluster or agglomerate with streets not forming an integral part of the design. These may be of the massive or dispersed type, in which the village is reckoned to consist of an assemblage of discreet clusters of comparatively small size. It may be noted here, that in villages belonging to this order there may be a tortuous or irregular road; but this grows according to local requirements, not as part of the original design.

2. Linear cluster or assemblage with a regular open space or straight street provided between parallel rows of houses.
3. Square or rectangular cluster or agglomerate with straight streets running parallel or at right angles to one another.

4. Village formed of isolated homesteads, a number of which are treated together for convenience of collection of rent or tax.

The construction of houses in the villages is interesting. The layout of the houses may differ from area to area and according to the profession of the villagers. Spate (2006:193) gives a vivid portrayal of the layout of the villages and the houses in the Deccan. It is an agricultural area and the houses are generally built on to each other, or at least the mud walls of the compounds are continuous. In front of the house is a porch, used as a place for drying agricultural produce, as a formal reception room, as a place of female gossip when the master of the house is out, and above all as a sleeping-room in the stifling summer nights. Behind this is the main room, some 25 ft. square, part of which is a cattle pen, at threshold level; the remainder raised some 2 or 3 ft. is the general living-room, for sleeping, eating, more intimate entertainment of guests, and perhaps handicrafts. The most prominent object is the pile of grain stored in gunny bags and sadly depleted towards the end of the agricultural year. Behind are a separate kitchen (with a corner for the bath) and the back yard with manure-pit and haystacks.

In a representative village, the services are mostly grouped around the main village lane. It is also the market place for the weekly bazaar. There are about eight shops (four groceries, two cloth shops, one tailor shop, one of miscellaneous nature) and a number of booths selling tea and bidis, the cheap crude cigarettes of the Indian masses. Near the market place is the room of the village panchayat or caste council, an ancient institution generally fallen into disuse, but now being fostered as the first step in local government. Associated with this tiny 'urban core' are the government establishments—the police station, the post office, the grain warehouse etc. There are three mosques and more than half a dozen temples. There are also an Ayurvedic dispensary, a school for the Muslims and separate schools for boys and girls. The village also has two or three public wells.
The untouchables of the village live in outlying slums or sub-villages, sometimes located several hundred yards away from the main village of which they are service components. A typical sub-village may consist of two rows of huts with a narrow pathway or ‘street’ in the middle. The huts of the untouchables have thick mud walls, roofed with palmyra thatch, and low mud porches scrupulously swept. To enter, one must bend double; the only light comes from the door and from under the palmyra leaves and the furniture consists of a few pots and pans, a couple of wooden chests, and the essential paddy bin, 4 to 6 ft. high and 3 to 4 ft. in diameter, raised from the ground, and built of hoops of mud. Poor as they are, these dwellings are yet homes, and obviously loved as such: their cleanliness, the surrounding mango tress, and coconut and palmyra palms, redeem them of utter squalor.

While Spate portrays the village and houses in the Deccan, Kathleen Gough (2006:345) describes a representative village in Tamil Nadu. She has chosen a village in Tanjore district called Kumbapettai, a Brahmin village that lies eight miles north of Tanjore town. In the centre of the village is a single street containing thirty-six occupied and twelve unoccupied Brahmin houses. The Brahmins living in the village are small landowners, apart from six families who have recently sold their lands. Holdings of wet paddy on the outskirts of the village range from three to thirty acres per family. Near the Brahmin street are three streets of non-Brahmin tenants and servant castes comprising twenty houses of Konan tenants and cowherds; seven of Kallan paddy merchants and small cultivators – twelve of toddy-tappers, cultivators since prohibition; six of recently arrived Ahambatiyan and Patalyatchi tenants; four of temple priests; three of potters; one of Tevatiyan prostitutes and low-caste temple dancers; four of Ambalakkaran fishermen; two of Maratha coolies; one each of blacksmiths, goldsmiths and carpenters; two of barbers; one of washer men; one of Muslim watchmen and one of Gypsies, who are now employed as road sweepers. The bulk of agricultural labour is done by landless labourers, formerly serfs, of the Pallan caste, who lived in eighty-nine houses in five streets, beyond paddy fields outside the village proper. Kumbapettai has no Parayans but employs two families from the next village to remove the dead cattle and beat drums at funerals.
Until about twenty years ago Brahmin families living in the village owned village land and held economic control over their tenants and Adi Dravida labourers. Forty years back all non-Brahmins of Kumbapettai were either tenants of Brahmins or specialised village servants working for the Brahmins and each other. Konans, the dominant non-Brahmin caste of the village leased land on an annual share cropping tenure from the Brahmins, from which they retained one-fifth of the crop for their maintenance and cultivation expenses. In addition, some worked as cowherds and gardeners for Brahmins and were paid monthly in paddy.

At present, Kumbapettai has moved about halfway in the transition from this relatively stationary feudal subsistence economy to a much wider-scale, expanding capitalist economy. First, one third of the land has in the last twenty years been sold by impoverished Brahmins to more prosperous traders or professional men from Tanjore and neighbouring towns. Further, twelve Brahmin families who have houses and own lands in the village have temporarily emigrated to towns, some to Madras, where they work as clerks in government offices, as teachers or as vegetarian restaurant owners. Some of these absentee landowners come home twice annually at harvest time to receive rent in kind from their tenants; others give their land on sub-tenure. Other non-Brahmins have become partly or totally emancipated from the feudal system in modern forms of work. Most of the seven Kallan householders, descendants of the ones who came fifty years ago earn a living as paddy merchants. Ten out of the sixty-seven non-Brahmin families have managed to buy between one and four acres of land from the Brahmins, which they cultivate themselves. Members of all castes when they can afford it, visit the cinema theatre in Tanjore and in the nearby town. The villagers often travel on buses and trains. Few families now receive clothing from their landlords. Most are required to buy it from the town themselves. Most important, the village as a whole is now in debt to the town. In short, the village is annually participating to an increasing extent in the wider urban economy.

The Brahmins were until recently, by reason of their economic power, able to prevent disputes within their village from passing into the hands of the local police, or,
alternatively, to negotiate with the police in such a way that their own authority, and traditional custom, were upheld. But today Brahmins complain that with the gradual loss of their economic power over the lower castes, the loyalty of tenants and labourers is no longer what it was, and the unity of the village is declining. The unity of the village was formerly dramatised in rituals at the annual temple festival of Uritaicciyamman, the mother-goddess of the village. This goddess like all village deities is a non-Brahman deity; though she is worshipped by the Brahmins and is regarded by them as an aspect of Sakti. Annually, however, at the large temple festival, all castes combine in rituals, which are sponsored by the Brahmins and conducted by both Brahmin and Non-Brahmin temple priests.

To sum up, the major share of India’s rural population lives in nucleated villages, which most commonly have a settlement form described as agglomerate. Such settlements, though unplanned, are divided by caste into distinct wards and grow outward from a recognisable core area. The dominant and higher castes tend to live in the core area, while the lower artisan and service castes, as well as Muslim groups, generally occupy more peripheral localities. When the centrally located castes increase in population, they either subdivide their existing, often initially large, residential compounds, add second and even third stories to their existing houses, leap-frog over lower-castes to a new area on the village periphery, or, in rare cases where land is available, found a completely new village.

Within the shapeless agglomerated villages, streets are typically narrow, twisting, and unpaved, often ending in culs-de-sac. There are usually a few open spaces where people often gather. It may be adjacent to a temple or mosque, at the main village well, in areas where grain is threshed or where grain and oil seeds are milled, and in front of the homes of the leading families of the village or under a close-by shady tree. In the village, depending on the size of the village, might be found the panchayat hall, a few shops, a tea stall, a public radio hooked up to a loud speaker, a small post office, and perhaps a dharmsala. The village school is usually on the edge of the village in order to provide pupils with adequate playing space. Another common feature along the margin of a
village is a grove of mangoes or other trees, which provides shade for people and animals and often contains a large well:

There are many regional village patterns. Hamlets, each containing only one or more castes, commonly surround villages in the eastern Gangetic Plain. Scheduled Castes and herding castes are likely to occupy such hamlets. In southern India, especially in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, villages have a more planned layout, with streets running north-south and east-west in straight lines. In many tribal areas the typical village consists of rows of houses along a single street or perhaps two or three parallel streets. (Prasad, 2003:175)

In areas of rugged terrain, where relatively level spaces for building are limited, settlements often conform in shape to ridgelines, and few grow to be larger than hamlets. Finally, according to Prasad (2003:189), in particularly aquatic environments, such as the Gangetic delta and the tidal backwaters of Kerala, agglomerations of even hamlet-size are rare; most rural families instead live singly or in clusters of only a few households on their individual plots of owned or rented land.

Most village houses are small, simple, and single-storey structures, housing both people and livestock in one or just a few rooms. Roofs typically are flat and made of mud in dry regions, but in areas with considerable precipitation they are generally are sloped for drainage and made of rice straw, clay tiles or other thatching materials. The wetter the region, the greater is the pitch of the roof. In some wet regions, especially in tribal areas, bamboo walls are more common than those of mud, and houses often stand on piles above ground level. The houses usually are windowless and contain a minimum of furniture, a space for food, water, and implements, a few shelves and pegs for other possessions, a niche in the wall to serve as the household altar, and usually a few decorations, such as pictures of gods or film stars, family photographs, a calendar, or perhaps some memento of a pilgrimage. In one corner of the house or in the exterior is the earthen hearth, where all meals are cooked. Electricity, running water, and toilet facilities are generally absent. Secluded spots on the edge of the village serve the latter
need. The hot sun quickly decomposes the waste matter of humans and cattle. According to Shankar:

The streets are unpaved and electric supply is not adequate. The roads remain very dusty for a few months and water supply is somewhat polluted in most cases. Sanitation is generally very poor and the sewer systems are practically nonexistent. (1998:165)

Almost everywhere in India, the dwellings of the affluent households are larger and usually built of more durable materials, such as brick or stone. Their roofs are also of sturdier construction, sometimes of corrugated iron, and often rest on sturdy timbers or steel beams. Windows, usually barred for security, are common. The number of rooms, the furnishings and the interior and exterior décor, especially the entrance gate, generally reflect the wealth of the family. There is typically an interior compound where much of the harvest will be stored. Within the compound, there maybe a private well or even a hand pump, an area for bathing, and a walled latrine enclosure, which is periodically cleaned by the village sweeper. Animal stalls; granaries, and farm equipment are in spaces distinct from those occupied by people.

Nomadic groups also may be found in most parts of India. Some are small bands of wandering entertainers, ironworkers and animal traders. A group known as the Banjari, originating in Rajasthan and related to the Gypsies of Europe, roams over large areas of central India and the Deccan, largely as agricultural labourers and earth workers. Many tribal people practice similar occupations seasonally. Finally, in the semi-arid and arid regions, where agriculture is either impossible or precarious, herders of cattle, sheep, goats, and camels live in a symbiotic relationship with local or nearby cultivators.

The Village as a Social/Lived Space

Villages form the basis of the cultural, social and economic life of the country. The real Indian society still lives in the villages. The essence of Indian life and culture can be seen primarily in the villages. The village community anywhere in India, be it in
Uttar Pradesh or Tamil Nadu or Kerala, has a typical basic form. This form may vary slightly or substantially from region to region or state to state. However, the essential features remain the same. According to Powell:

All Indian villages were regarded as having been originally constituted in a single typical form; this form being, consequently spoken of as of archaic date and of ‘Aryan’ parentage. So conceived, the village community, was asserted to represent a group of persons or households who cultivated and owned their land in common. (1989:2)

Though the Indian village communities may differ locally in detail, and may exhibit signs of decay and change, for the purposes of this study they may be denoted by a representative form to which all approximate. The evolution of the village community in India is quite interesting and a quick glance at the Indian village community is attempted here. A close inspection and analysis of the Indian village reveals that a well-knit, organised village community existed in India even in the Vedic age. The village community seen today is not of recent origin. It started evolving centuries back. A basic feature can be seen in any period – the basic unit was the family, which consisted of a large number of people that included the parents, children, a large number of relatives and also people associated with them. The family at that time was quite large. A number of families were organised under a headman and many such groups amalgamated into larger groups, which ultimately led to the formation of a small kingdom. The evolution of the rural community in India falls primarily into three phases or stages:

a. Rural society during the ancient period (From about 4000 B.C. to the end of the Hindu rule in 4th century A.D.)

b. Rural society during the medieval period (From the end of the Hindu rule to the end of the Muslim rule. c.1707)
c. Rural society during the modern period (From the end of the Muslim rule and the coming of the British in the first half of the 18th century to the present).

Villages seem to have originated when families in the ancient period decided to live together in the interests of their security, preservation and labour. This took place probably much before the Vedas. In the Vedic literature itself there are detailed mentions and descriptions of the village community of the period. The smallest unit of social life in those days was the family and a village was composed of several families. Many villages united to form a nation (Dube, 1990:98-106). The concept of a nation was certainly very narrow then. Since the people living in the villages were born out of the same forefather, naturally they had common traits and characteristics.

For the sake of convenience, the study of the village society in ancient India can be divided into a number of phases such as the mythological period, the puranic or post-Vedic period, the Buddhist period and the Maurya, Gupta and later periods. During the mythological period, (c.4000 – 3000 B.C.) “The village was the primary and elementary unit of administration” (Singh, 1990:64). Information can be obtained of the society of this period from the epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana. Apart from the detailed and comprehensive description of various aspects of social life that they provide, the epics are also a treasure house of information about the socio-economic and religio-political organisation of the villages. We also understand that, “forts were built at a particular place for the defence of the people and the people living around the fort constituted a village” (Singh, 1990:66).

Villages had their own inter-village organisation. For defence and other administrative purposes, villages were clubbed together to form a federation of villages. While, the leader of a village was known as ‘gramin’, the other heads were known by different names:

The head of a group of ten villages was known as ‘Das gramin’ and the leader of a group of twenty was called ‘Vinshatic’. The head of a group of hundred was
known as 'Shat gramin' and the leader of a group of thousand villages was 'Adhipati'. (Singh, 1990:67)

Ample information about life in the puranic age (from c.3000 B.C. — 600 B.C.) is obtained from works like the *Manu Smrithi* (Butlet, 1967:85-92) of the 1st century B.C. It gives detailed information about the structure of the village society. Manu says that the members of the rural community found solutions to the problems that they faced. The leader of the village during this period also was known as the 'Gramin'. The leader of a hundred villages was called 'Shatesh' and that of thousand villages 'Shastresh'. There were smaller units of organisation too with ten villages and twenty villages. In this period the leader of ten villages was named 'Vinshi' and twenty villages 'Deshi' (Shankar, 1998:89). We also understand from the literature of the period that the organisation of the village community and the rural community in India had been growing continuously since the Vedic and post-Vedic times.

According to Desai, Buddhist literature also gives a vivid picture of the socio-economic and political structure of the rural community of the Buddhist period (c. 6th cent. B.C. — 4th cent. B.C.). During this period there was a scientifically planned and streamlined structure for the village community and the administration of the village was entrusted to a village *panchayat*. The rural community had a democratic structure and was well geared to take care of the various aspects of human life (Desai, 2006: 188). The structure of the rural community remained more or less the same during the periods of the rule of the Mauryas, the Guptas (c. 4th century B.C. — A.D. 600) and the period soon after that. During this period, the rural community was recognised as the basic unit of the social, economic and political structures of the nation. There was some difference in the structure according to the new needs and requirements. There was a quasi-democratic system of government, the vestiges of which can still be found in the form of the village *panchayat*.

During the medieval period (c.A.D. 600 — 1707) the political scene of the country changed much and the rural society too underwent a great transformation as far as the political, economic and cultural conditions were concerned. Another factor to be noted in
this context is the change in the patterns of living of the rural community. When we come
to the modern period too, we see that the rural community in India has taken long strides
during the period. This period commences with the end of the Moghul rule in India
(1707) and the advent of the British rule. The modern period may rightly be divided into
two, namely, the pre and post independence periods.

During the British rule or the pre-independence period the country was
administered centrally. The system of decentralisation in administration that was an
essential part of the Indian administration and political system hitherto, was given up.
The period also witnessed the relegation of agriculture to the background because of
scientific, industrial and technological developments. The Zamindari, Rayatwari systems
and the new system of land settlement were introduced during this time. At the same time
the British also brought about changes in the specific systems of government of the rural
community. They did not want the villages to become self-dependent and self-sufficient
as once they were. The post-independence period saw the rural community in India
undergoing a lot of changes. The leaders of the Indian independence movement were
fully aware of the fact that India cannot grow and prosper unless the village society
became prosperous. Hence they demanded the amelioration of the adverse conditions of
the village community. Efforts were initiated to make a scientific study of the rural
community and formulate programmes for the welfare and prosperity of the rural society.
Apart from successive governments and official agencies, non-official agencies and
individual institutions have also made serious attempts to better the conditions of the
rural folk.

The classification, which we have seen above, is based on time. There are other
classifications of the rural society based on other parameters. Let us look at a couple of
them. The famous sociologist Peake has made an interesting classification of the Indian
rural society on the basis of the character of the people living in the villages (Misra,
1988:107-123). He has classified the rural society into three: Migratory, semi permanent,
and permanent. In the migratory type of society, people resort to such professions that are
not of a permanent nature. They are migratory in character and even those engaged in
agriculture change their location of cultivation often. Since these people do not stick to a place but move away often, this type of society is called migratory rural society. The semi-permanent rural society is an inferior type of rural society as far as the permanent place of agriculture of the residents is concerned. Here the people do not live anywhere in a permanent manner. They change their places, but again return to their original places to stay there for some time. They stay for a longer time at a particular place when compared to the migratory type of people. In the permanent agricultural rural society, people live permanently in certain villages and also resort to agriculture at a fixed place. They neither shift their place of residence nor their place of living. Most village studies are based on this type of society.

Yet another classification of the village society is into traditional, modern and postmodern societies (Ahuja, 1999:72-74). A traditional society lays emphasis on religion (and magic) in behavioural norms and values, implying continuity (deep links) with a real or imagined past. It widely accepts rituals, sacrifices and holy feasts. Broadly speaking, a traditional society is described as one in which an individual’s status is determined by his birth and he does not strive for social mobility; the individual’s behaviour is governed by customs, traditions, norms and values having deep links with the past, and the social practices of people vary only slightly from generation to generation; social organisation (stable pattern of social relationships of individuals and subgroups within a society that provides regularity and predictability in social interaction) is based on hierarchy; kinship relations predominate in interaction and the individual identifies himself with primary groups; the individual is given more importance in social relations than what his position actually warrants; people are conservative; the economy is simple, i.e., tool economy (and not machine economy) prevails and is conspicuous; economic productivity above subsistence level is relatively low; and mythical thought (and not logical reasoning) predominates in society.

Modern society, on the other hand, focuses on science and reason. Modernity is a substantial break with traditional society. According to Hall and Gay (1996:126) the six distinctive characteristics of a modern society (which also distinguish it from traditional
society) are the decline of religion and the rise of a secular materialistic culture (religious characteristic); the replacement of a feudal economy by an economy in which a money system provides the medium for exchange in trade (economic characteristic); the dominance of secular political authority over the state and the marginalisation of religious influence in state/political matters (political characteristic); the decline of a social order based on simple division of labour and the development of new divisions of labour based on specialisation, the emergence of new classes, and changed relations between men and women (social characteristic); the forming of new nations (community characteristic – ethnic or national) having their own identities and traditions to suit their own purposes, e.g., rejection of aristocracy and monarchy by France, Britain accepting monarchy only as a symbol, Egypt rejecting monarchy and accepting democracy, and so on (cultural characteristic) and the rise of a scientific, rationalist way of looking at the world (intellectual characteristic).

Thus, while the traditional society is characterised by ritual, custom, collectivity, community ownership, status quo and continuity, and the simple division of labour, the modern society is characterised by the influence of science, emphasis on reason and rationality, belief in progress, viewing the government and the state as essential in bringing about progress, emphasis on economic development and a complex division of labour, perceiving human-beings as capable of acquiring great control over nature and the environment, and seeing the world in terms of dualisms or opposites.

Post-modern society, or late modernity, concentrates on critical awareness and is concerned about the damaging effects of applied science on nature, the environment and humanity. It points out the risks and unintended negative consequences of the pursuit of progress. From nationalism (emphasised in modern society), it moves to the process of globalisation. Instead of giving importance to economic development (as in modern society), it gives importance to culture. Unlike modern society (which sees world in terms of opposites or dualisms), post modern society views unities, similarities and connections as important (Ahuja, 1999:236).
When we come to the actualities of the Indian village, the socio-cultural dimensions of the rural community offer a most interesting picture. Thus, rural people, whose main occupation is agriculture and who are very close to nature, have close personal ties of kinship and friendship, and lay stress on tradition, consensus, and informality. The density of population in villages is so low that it not only affects production and distribution but also the total life of the community and the peoples’ living standards. Both birth rate and death rate are high in villages in comparison to cities, which adversely affect the quantitative and the qualitative growth of the rural people. Another aspect of the life of rural people (which requires study) is their distribution in age and sex groups. “About 45 per cent of rural people belong to a proactive age (15-59) and about 55% are sustained by working people” (Manpower Profile, India, 1998:135). The preponderance of children aged below fourteen years and the aged above sixty years considerably influence the economic and social life of the working section of the people. Similarly, the fact that the number of females per 1000 males is higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas and that 33 per cent of rural women belong to the working force (as against 56.1% of rural men) “affects sex mores, social codes, social rituals, and social institutions” (Ahuja, 1999:299). The family structure, caste composition, religious variations, economic life, land relations, poverty, and the standard of life in the villages also affect the villager’s life.

The village family

Family being the basic unit of society is the primary institution that controls and regulates the various aspects of society. In order to analyse how the family unit contributes to the structures of a rural society, we need to first look at a few definitions of the family. Elliot and Meril define family as follows:

Family may be defined as the biological unit composed of husband, wife and their children. The family may also be considered as the social institution, as socially approved organisation for meeting definite human needs. (Singh, 1990:137)

Another definition of family by Burgess and Locke is as below:
Family is a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption, consisting of a single household interacting, communicating with each other in respect of social role of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister and creating and maintaining a common culture. (Singh, 1990:138)

Family then, as a reproductive or a biological unit, consists of a man and a woman having a socially approved sexual relationship, and whatever offspring (natural or adopted) they might have. As a social unit, a family is referred to as:

A group of persons of both sexes, related by marriage, blood or adoption, performing roles based on age, sex and relationship, and socially distinguished as making up a single household or a sub-household. (Ahuja, 1999:97)

While the above definitions focus primarily on biological or blood relationships, Aileen Ross’s definition of family includes the physical, social and psychological elements of family life. According to Ross, family is “a group of people usually related as some particular type of kindred, who may live in one household and whose unity resides in patterning of rights and duties, sentiments and authority” (1961:31).

Again, there are also different forms of families. Scholars have classified these forms differently, on the basis of their approach and methods of analysis. Chattopadhyay (2006:155) has given three types of family on the basis of the people who live in one: simple (man, wife, and unmarried children), compound (two simple families, say, ego, his wife and unmarried children, and ego’s parents and unmarried brothers and sisters), and composite (lineal and collateral joint families). At the same time, on the basis of authority, families have been classified as husband-dominant, wife-dominant, equalitarian, and autonomic families. Burgess and Locke have classified them as institutional and companionship families on the basis of the behaviour of the individual members (Ahuja, 1999:98). In the former family, the behaviour of the members is controlled by mores and public opinion, while in the latter family; behaviour arises from mutual affection and consensus. Families are classified, on the basis of kinship ties, as
conjugal (priority given to marital ties) and consanguine (priority given to blood ties). Zimmerman (1956:20) has classified them as trustee (where members have to conform to family norms and they have no individual rights), atomistic (in which conventional mores lose their significance and each member can make his own choice) and domestic (which is an intermediate type between trustee and atomistic).

When we come to Indian society, generally, two main types of families can be observed: the single unit family consisting of the father, mother and children; and the joint family that consists of the grand parents, uncles, cousins, nephews, etc. The family provides emotional, social and financial security to its members. Often the resources of the entire family are pooled and each man looks upon the head of the family as responsible for meeting all his needs and those of his wife and children. Each member is loyal to the family name, prestige and property. The village family is generally an extended one in which sometimes two or three generations live together. The family head may not necessarily be the breadwinner: “The oldest man in the family usually remains the head and is consulted in important decisions about the children and property and marriage” (Zaidi, 1970:41).

In India, the structure of the family unit varies considerably and is determined by numerous variables. Caudwell et al (1988) identify four major family types, which include: a nuclear family which is a conjugal couple with their unmarried children; a stem family which includes two married couples in different generations; a joint family which includes married siblings living together; and finally, a joint-stem family which is the classical full pyramid where the older couple has with them more than one of their married children and usually grandchildren. Any of these can be extended if other persons, usually relatives live with them. There is also the possibility of eroded families. For instance:

If a widowed mother lives with younger couple because both couples shared residence before the death of the widow’s husband, this is an eroded stem family; but if the widow joined the younger couple for support only after the death of her husband, this could be regarded as an extended nuclear family...any family
structure more complex than a nuclear family [is] called a large family, irrespective of relative numbers of members. (1988:111)

The joint family is the oldest of the above four types and it is seen that the members of a family remain together constituting a joint family as long as the economic conditions are favourable. Mandelbaum argues along these same lines:

People tend to remain in joint families longer when economic factors favour such families. The poorest and lowest groups tend to have the fewest joint families, but even at these social levels, most families become joint for at least a time after a son marries. (1970:54)

Attwood referring specifically to rural families in Maharashtra states:

The ideal family is the patrilineal, patrilocal joint family, consisting of a senior married couple, their sons, and their sons’ wives and children. Owing to various contingencies of fertility and mortality (and economic opportunity), this ideal is often not attained in practice; and when it is, it appears only as a phase in a long cycle of family growth and dissolution. Nevertheless, there are good economic reasons why this family type serves as a conscious goal for many villagers. In brief, the family can be more productive and more secure if it combines the skills and experience of a senior couple with the vigorous toil of one or more junior couples. It is vital to combine the specialized efforts of men and women, and equally vital to combine those of the senior and junior generation of adults. (1992:17)

It is also seen that there is a relationship between family type and land holdings. Caudwell et al illustrates this relationship:

Among those with no land at all, 71 per cent are found in nuclear families; with land up to 1 acre, 65 per cent; with land from 1 to 4 acres, 58 per cent; and with
over 4 acres, 46 per cent. With more resources and a need for more labour, there is more point in keeping a larger family together. (1998:129)

Family and familism play a decisive role in the material and cultural life of villages and in moulding the psychological characteristics of the rural collective. While the joint family continues to be the predominant form, nuclear family also exists as a result of the growth of market economy in the agrarian areas, the migration of youth to the cities, and the impact of urban socio-economic forces on the rural society. In spite of this change, in comparison to the urban family, the rural family is far more homogeneous, integrated, and organically functioning. The ties between parents and children, husband and wife, siblings and siblings and among affinal kin are stronger and last longer than those in an urban family.

Another characteristic of the rural family is that it is generally agriculture-oriented, that is, a very large majority of its members are engaged in agricultural occupations. Since the members of the rural family form a single economic unit, cooperate with one another in agricultural operations, hold property in common usually managed by the oldest member of the family, and since they spend most their time together, their beliefs, attitudes, aspirations and values are generally similar. The interdependence of members on each other enables them to develop more collectivist family consciousness and less individualistic emotions. Though the impact of urbanisation, individualisation, education, etc., has weakened traditional authority structures, created centrifugal tendencies, and reduced economic homogeneity based on a single economic activity, yet the family has not become atomistic, and the family as an institution continues to be strong. Ahuja states:

It will not be illogical to hold that though the rural family is undergoing a qualitative change, the dominance of familism is dropping off, family ego is diminishing, and the rule of custom is being replaced by the rule of law, yet family is not disintegrating. (1999:300)
The most important type of family system that prevailed in India, and still prevails to some extent, is the Joint Family System. Let us see the salient features of this system. The concept of the joint family has varied with different scholars. While Karve (1953:26) regards 'co-residentiality' as important in jointness, Gould (1988), Desai (1956), Dube (1990), and Kolenda (1997) do not regard co-residentiality and commensality as essential ingredients of jointness. Desai (1964) gives importance to fulfilment of obligations towards kin, even if the residence is separate and there is no common ownership of property. According to Karve “the traditional ancient Indian family (Vedic and Epic periods) was joint in terms of residence, property, and functions” (1953:21). She has given five characteristics of the joint family: common residence, common kitchen, common property, common family worship, and kinship relationship. The word ‘common’ or ‘joint property’ here (according to The Hindu Succession Act, 1956) means that all the living, male and female members, up to three generations have a share in the paternal property. On this basis, she defines joint family as “a group of people who generally live under one roof, eat food cooked at one hearth, hold property in common, participate in common family worship, and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred” (1953:22).

According to Desai (1956), co-residence and common kitchen are not as important dimensions of joint family as intra-family relationships are. He thinks that when two families having kinship relationship are living separately but function under one common authority, it will be a joint family and calls it functional joint family. He defines a traditional joint family as one, which consists of three or more generations. He defines two-generation family as a marginal joint family. Mukherjee (1965:352-98), on the other hand, while giving five types of relations – conjugal, parental-filial, inter-sibling, lineal and affinal – has maintained that a joint family is a co-resident and commensal kin-group which consists of one or more of the first three types of relations and either lineal and/or affinal relations among the members.

There have been also some other significant classifications of the types of families. Desai (1956:38) has given five types of family – nuclear, functionally joint,
functionally and substantially (in terms of property) joint, marginally joint, and traditional joint. Kapadia (1959:74) has given five types of family: nuclear (husband, wife and unmarried children), nuclear with married sons (what Desai calls Marginal Joint and Ross calls small joint family), lineal joint, collateral joint, and nuclear family with a dependent such as a widowed sister, etc. Ross (1966:34) has given four types of family: large joint, small joint, nuclear and nuclear with dependants.

Taking all these types of families together as given by different scholars, a joint family may be defined as “a multiplicity of genealogically related nuclear families, joint in residence and commensal relations and functioning under one authority” (Desai, 1956:38). Gore has said that a joint family should be viewed as “a family of co-parceners and their dependents instead of viewing it as a multiplicity of nuclear families” (Gore, 1968:6-7). He holds that in a nuclear family, the emphasis is on conjugal relationship while in a joint family, emphasis is on filial and fraternal relationships. According to Gore, joint family is of three types: filial joint family (parents and their married sons with their offspring), fraternal joint family (two married brothers and their children) and filial and fraternal (combined) joint family.

In addition to the above, there is the fissioned family too. A nuclear family, which has been separated from the father’s or the married brother’s family, can be considered as a fissioned family. This fissioned family can be totally independent or dependent on some other nuclear family related through some type of kinship. The joint families can also be classified in terms of types of kin (primary, secondary, tertiary and distant) involved. Thus, there are three joint family types — large range kinship family with primary, secondary, tertiary and distant kin; intermediate range kinship family with primary, secondary, and tertiary kin; and small range kinship family with primary and secondary kin.

The joint family displays certain specific characteristics. These characteristics can be thus described: The joint family has an authoritarian structure, i.e., the power to make decisions lies with the head of the family (patriarch). It has a familial organisation, i.e., the individual’s interests are subordinated to the interests of the family as a whole. So
also, the status of members is determined by their age and relationship. The status of a man is higher than his wife; in two generations, the status of a person in the higher generation is higher than the status of a person in the lower generation; in the same generation, the status of a person of higher age is higher than the status of a person of lower age; and the status of a woman is determined by the status of her husband in the family. So also, the filial and fraternal relationships get preference over conjugal relationship in a joint family, that is, the husband-wife relationship is subordinated to the father-son or brother-brother relationship. It is also seen that the joint family functions on the ideal of joint responsibility. If a father takes a loan to marry his daughter, it is also the responsibility of his sons to repay the loan. All members of the joint family get equal attention. A poor brother's son will be admitted to the same school (even if costly) as the rich brother's son and finally the authority in the family (between men and men, men and women, and women and women) is determined on the principle of seniority. Though the eldest male (or female) may delegate the authority to someone else, yet even this delegation is based on the principle of seniority, which limits the scope for the emergence of individualism.

It cannot be said that the joint family is disappearing in India, or that a stage can be envisaged when the joint family will be totally lost from the mental horizons of the people; only the 'cutting off' point of jointness is changing. Instead of large joint families, there will be only locally functioning effective small joint families of two generations or so. At the same time, a nuclear-fissioned family (of husband, wife and unmarried children) will not be totally independent but will be functionally dependent on (remain joint with) some primary kin like father or brother, etc. This is evident from the work of various scholars such as Desai, Kapadia, Ross, Gore, Shah and Sachidananda who have conducted empirical studies on the structural changes of families in India in the last four decades.

Desai (1964:41-43) studied the families in Mahuwa (Gujarat) and found that the nuclearity is increasing and jointness is decreasing. He discovered that the spirit of individualism is not growing, as about half of the householders are joint with other...
householders. Another finding was that the radius of kinship relations within the circle of jointness is becoming smaller. The joint relations are mostly confined to parents-children, siblings and uncles-nephews, i.e., lineal relationship is found between father, son and grandson, and the collateral relationship is found between a man and his brothers and uncles.

Kapadia (1966:112-116) studied rural and urban families (18% urban and 82% rural) in Gujarat (Navasari town and its 15 surrounding villages). His main conclusions are that in the rural community, the proportion of joint families is almost the same as that of the nuclear families and when viewed in terms of castes, in villages, higher castes have predominantly joint families while lower castes show a greater incidence of nuclear families. But in the urban community, there are more joint families than nuclear families. In the ‘impact’ villages (i.e. villages within the radius of 7 to 8 km. from a town), the family pattern closely resembles the rural pattern and has no correspondence with the urban pattern. Taking all areas (rural, urban, and impact) together, it may be held that the joint family structure is not being nuclearised. The difference in the rural and the urban family patterns is the result of modification of the caste pattern by economic factors.

Familism is a salient feature of Indian society. Burgess and Locke have defined it as “the acceptance of the welfare of the family group as the central value to which the interests of the individual members are subordinated” (Singh, 1990:142). This unique feature of the Indian society exhibits the strong hold of kinship and kin obligations. Every person expects that his relatives should help him. The wealthy man in the family feels guilty if he does not give a helping hand to the less fortunate members. This kinship ties not only the members of a joint family, but also the members of the same caste. Even today, relatives from villages and towns invade the house of a kin and stay there as long as they want. The guests are content with the simple food served and other primary facilities. This familial integration is sometimes identified as ‘Kula dharma’ (Singh, 1990:143). The strength of kinship ties is also seen in the institutions of arranged marriages. At the time of celebration of marriages, festivals, feasts etc. all the relatives are invited. The members of the family look after all the old, handicapped and ailing.
This shows the strong sense of belonging to the kin group and the caste group. Traditionally, the village is the source of training for its children. They remain the responsibility of the mother or the grandmother until they are ready to go to schools or to the field to work:

The mother is often protective and to a certain extent permissive. The role of the father is only the peripheral in the early life of the child. The image of the father created in the mind of the child is one of the authority and power. (Zaidi, 1970:42)

The role of the father in the village is a harmonious balance between a strict teacher and sympathetic and informal friend. “Spare the rod and spoil the child” is an old adage, which the villager still believes in. A child is mostly punished for disobedience. This attitude reflects one of the fundamental values of the society. “Respect for the elders is a very important virtue in the village society, and disregard of it is not tolerated by the family” (Zaidi, 1970:42). The parents often decide the future careers of their children. The father always has in mind the future of his children. The parents always wish their sons to be educated and obtain a good job. Under the present village conditions, the father does not wish his son to continue living in the village where opportunities are rare; he would prefer his son to move to the city and seek pastures new.

In the context of village culture, the role and status of a daughter are quite different from that of a son. The daughter leaves the parents after the marriage and goes to live with her husband. A daughter in a traditional village family does not provide any financial support to the parents. In fact, the parents consider it something shameful to accept financial help from a daughter or her husband. The qualities deemed essential in a good daughter are her doing good, studying hard, conducting herself properly and obeying her elders and husband. She should also have a good moral character, irreproachable behaviour and good housekeeping abilities. As for the son, his status is higher than that of the daughter, and he is supposed to look after his parents in their old age. Bad company, gambling, addiction to drugs and liquor, disobedience and misuse of money are disapproved in a son.
Hence we see that in India, the family is a very important social institution. It remains the primary unit of production and consumption. The family works on the land and the exchange of services is largely carried out between families. "Traditionally the family is the most important social institution within the village. If a family member has to make a choice between family duties and outside obligations, then certainly family duties come first" (Wiser, 1971:152). Research has revealed the importance and documented the influence the family has on the individual. According to Mandelbaum:

Each person learns the fundamentals of his culture and society from his family; he experiences his main satisfactions and shares his personal achievements with other family members. In his caste-group he is primarily identified as a member of his family, and he assumes the reputation of his family in the village. His whole life experience is embedded in his family relations. The main transitions of the life cycle are family celebrations, and the grand occasions of a person's life are mainly those that occur in the context of the family. (1970:41)

Although the family remains a vital institution and an important influence in an individual's life, in recent years there has been a shift in its role in India. Today, individual achievement is also highly respected. One does not automatically "assume the reputation of one's family" anymore (1970:41). What one achieves based on one's own initiative is an important and valued aspect of life. Another change visible in recent years is reflected in the source of knowledge and learning. Traditionally, "each person learned the fundamentals of his culture and society from his family" (Mandelbaum, 1970: 41). But today, newspapers, periodicals, television, films etc; are important conveyors of culture, and children learn many of their values by reading and watching the above. Their aspirations, goals and ideals often reflect more of what they see in newspapers and magazines and watch on television and films than what they learn from their parents and grandparents.
The Marriage System

Marriage is perceived by sociologists as a system of roles for a man and a woman whose union has been given social sanction as husband and wife. “The equilibrium of the system requires adjustment between the two partners so that the role enactment of one (partner) corresponds to the role expectations of the other” (Ahuja, 1999:112). Indologists look upon Hindu marriage as a sanskara, having the three objects of dharma (fulfilment of religious duties), rati (sex), and prajananam (procreation). Marriage performed for dharma was called dharmik marriage, while one performed for sexual pleasure was regarded as adharmik marriage. Marriage was considered sacred because of several reasons. Dharma was the highest aim of marriage and the performance of the marriage ceremony included certain rites (like havan, kanyadan, panigrahana, saptapadi, etc), which were considered sacred. The rites were performed before the sacred god Agni by reciting mantras from the sacred scriptures Vedas by a sacred Brahmin and the union (between man and woman) was considered indissoluble and irrevocable. The chastity of the woman and the faithfulness of the man were given great importance.

Even today, the sanctity of the marriage is recognised by Hindus; in spite of the fact that marriage is performed for companionship and not for performing duties and whenever found a failure, it is dissolved by divorce. Mutual fidelity and devotion to the partner are still considered to be the essence of marriage. According to Kapadia, “Hindu marriage continues to be a sacrament; only it is raised to an ethical plane” (Kapadia, 1966: 163). In simple words, marriage in Hindu culture is a spiritual union between a man and a woman for spiritual realisation. Hindu culture also recognises (besides the above-mentioned brahma marriage) seven other forms of marriage with lesser and lower ideals. Four of these marriages—gandharva (entering into sex before getting the social sanction of society), asura (eloping with a woman), rakshasya (forcibly abducting a woman from her home) and paisacha (man molesting a girl when she is asleep or intoxicated or in a state of unbalanced mind) had such a low ideal that they were termed as adharmik marriages. The remaining three – daiva (woman is married to a priest, a man of intellect and money, belonging to an aristocratic class), prajapatiya (entering wedlock for
biological function of sex satisfaction and having children) and *arsha* (woman marrying a man of intellect and character (sage) who is reluctant to enter marriage, so that she may get intelligent progeny and good home environment) — were given the label of *dharmik* marriages. The main reason for recognising the four- *adharmik* marriages as marriages was to confer the respectful status of a wife on the ‘injured’ woman.

The regulation of *mate selection* in Hindu society is subsumed under the concepts of endogamy, exogamy and hypergamy. *Endogamy* is a social rule that requires a person to select the spouse from within the caste and sub-caste; *exogamy* forbids selection from the same *gotra* and *sapindas* and according to hypergamy, a boy from the upper caste can marry a girl from the lower caste and vice-versa. In early society, caste endogamy was functional because it preserved the occupational secrets of the caste, maintained the solidarity of the caste and checked decrease in the membership or strength of the caste. In the present society, through it makes marital adjustment easier, yet it has proved to be dysfunctional in some ways since it creates inter-caste tensions which adversely affect the political unity of the country, makes the field of mate-selection limited and circumscribed, and creates problems of dowry, child marriage, etc.

The exogamous taboos were designed for restricting free marital relations between parents and offspring and between siblings. It was imposed for preventing transmission of family defects through heredity and for the fear that there may be clandestine love affairs and consequent loss of morals. However, these arguments are not accepted today for the reasons that decay of lineage is not reported among non-Hindu communities (say, Muslims) who practice cousin marriages. Kapadia has said that the “rule of *sapinda* exogamy was of the nature of a pious recommendation and remained so till the end of the eighth century” (Kapadia, 1966:127). Today, though this rule is followed by and large by all Hindus, yet cases of cousin marriages are not unknown.

The mate selection today involves three important issues: party to selection, criteria of selection, and field of selection. While earlier, parents selected mates for their children, now children believe in joint selection by parents and children, though cases of individual selection (i.e. selection by children themselves) are not rare. The criteria of
selecting mates by parents are quite different from those of children. While parents give importance to family status, caste, dowry and so forth, children give importance to education, character, physical appearance, skills, etc. The joint selection today keeps in mind the needs of the family as well as the interests of the person acquiring a spouse. No wonder, studies of scholars like Shah (1964), Cormack (1961), etc. showed that a very large number of young boys and girls wanted to select their mates in consultation with their parents.

Changes in the marriage system among Hindus may be analysed in seven areas: object of marriage, process of mate selection, form of marriage, age of marriage, economic aspect of marriage (dowry), stability of marriage (divorce), and widow remarriage. Of these, we have already discussed change in two areas, viz., change in the object of marriage (from dharma to companionship), and change in mate selection (party, criteria, and field of selection). Change in the form of marriage refers to change from polygamy to monogamy and change in age of marriage points to change from pre-puberty marriages to post-puberty marriages. The remaining three changes may be examined by analysing marriage legislation.

The Marriage Legislation enacted in India relate to the age at marriage, field of mate selection, number of spouses in marriage, dissolution of marriage, dowry, and remarriage. The important legislations relating to these aspects are The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 (amended in 1978, dealing with age at marriage), the Special Marriage Act, 1954 (dealing with age at marriage, freedom of children to marry without parental consent, bigamy, and dissolving marriage), the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (amended in 1986, and dealing with age at marriage with parents' consent, bigamy and annulment of marriage), Anti Dowry Act, 1961, and the Widow Remarriage Act, 1856.

The first three Acts (of 1929, 1954 and 1955) pertaining to the age of marriage prescribe the marriage age of girls as 18 years and for boys as 21 years. The difference in the Acts is that the 1929 Act (amended in 1978) does not invalidate the marriage for violating the provisions in the Act. It only prescribes punishments for the bridegroom, parents, guardians and the priest (but not for women). The 1955 Act makes invalidation
of the marriage possible for violation of the age provision. This (1955) Act covers marriages performed with the consent of parents but the 1954 Act covers marriages performed through courts, with or without the parental consent. Both these Acts (1954 and 1955) prohibit bigamy and permit divorce also on various grounds and put restrictions on marriage within the degrees of prohibited relationships, unless custom permits such marriages. The Anti-Dowry Act, 1961, has made giving and taking dowry a legal offence. The Widow Remarriage Act, 1856 permits widows to remarry but forfeits them the right of maintenance from the property of the first husband. The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, has given a share to the wife and daughters in man’s property equal to that of sons and brothers.

Social legislation is necessary for providing a new direction to culture and society by permitting change and removing evils by filling up the gap between social opinion and the social needs of the people. The function of the social legislations is to adjust the legal system continually to a society, which is constantly outgrowing that system. While social legislation is essential, the will to implement it is more crucial.

When we come to the Muslim society, we find that it is stratified not only among Shias and Sunnis but also among Ashraf (Siayed, Sheikh, Pathan, etc), Azlab (Momins, Mansooris, Ibrahims etc.), and Arzal (Halalkhour, etc.). The Ashrafs are the noble born, the Azlabs are lowborn, and the Arzals are the lowest of all. All these groups are endogamous and inter-marriages among them are condemned and discouraged. Muslim marriage, called nikah, unlike the sacramental marriage of the Hindus, is considered to be a civil contract. Its important objectives are control over sex, procreation of children and perpetuation of family, upbringing of children, and ordering of domestic life. But it will be wrong to say that Muslim marriage has no religious duty. It is an act of devotion and an act on ibaddat. Jang is, therefore, correct in maintaining “nikah, though essentially a contract, is also a devotional act. But is surely not sacrament like Hindus” (Ahuja, 1999:115). The Muslim marriage has five features: proposal and its acceptance, capacity to contract marriage, doctrine of equality, preference system, and mahar.
Marriage is an important occasion for each and everyone in the family. It is an occasion of joy and gaiety. The whole village takes part in the celebrations. Although marriage is technically a social and legal contract between couples, it is more significantly a tie between two families. It has generally acquired a religious significance owing to the religious orientations of the people. The customs and ceremonies of marriage in each community are clearly defined. As a general rule, a lot of money is needed for a wedding. There may be differences in the amount of money spent on different marriages but basically the ceremonies are same for every one, within the same community.

The lion’s share of the marriages in the villages is arranged marriage. There are very strong social and religious conventions that support arranged marriages. Marriages in earlier times were more a tie between two families than between two individuals. In most cases, the father or the eldest brother arranges it. Sometimes uncles, cousins and brothers-in-law also take part in marriage negotiations. The young couples are not always consulted about each other’s suitability. Usually the negotiations are made, the dowry is agreed upon and the date of the wedding ceremony is decided before the couples hear about it. Usually they are told that they are to be married to the son or daughter of such and such a person. The couples, being conscious of the cultural demands and generally adhering to the community beliefs and values accept the proposals without much ado. Besides, many village girls who do not have many occasions to meet men prefer that their parents find husbands for them. The womenfolk of the village are generally not aware of their rights and so till recently, most of them, and even now some of them, accept their subordination to men.

When the poor economic condition of the villages, is considered, the most important aspect of a village marriage is the expense involved. The marriage ceremony, which has become a sign of the family’s social and financial status and of its conformity to the customs and traditions of the community, is also an occasion to exhibit family power and prestige. Since the expenses involved are very high, most of the village
families have to borrow money. In most cases, the father or the older brother borrows the money.

The dowry system is one of the greatest evils of the Indian society. Parents never wish for a girl child, as they have to bear the burden of a big dowry at the time of the girl's marriage. This even goes to the extent of killing the newborn girl child:

The dowry system is considered as one of the greatest evils of the whole country at present. In many cases, particularly in rich families, there are no contracts relating to dowry at all. There are mere expectations and fulfilments of expectations. (Misra, 1998:94)

In almost all cases, the bridegroom's family expects the bride's father to give his son-in-law enough to establish a home. It may be in the form of ornaments, money, clothes, bullocks, wristwatch, land etc., the usual presents being clothes, utensils, a couple of ornaments and some money. Usually the groom's parents look for a rich family from which to choose their daughter-in-law and the father of the bride accepts the situation because there is a greater responsibility in the case of a daughter than a son who is never thought a liability to a family.

Child marriage was a common practice at one time. Children were promised in marriage even at birth. This promise, which traditionally becomes an engagement, is therefore binding; unless the child refuses to uphold the promise of his parents when the child comes of age. Marriages are generally decided much ahead of time. The criteria for a good wife are usually skill in looking after the house, being a good cook, being able to sew, taking care of the cattle, having a fair complexion, good moral character, good family education etc. The life of a good village wife is not easy. In addition to the household chores she has to look after her husband and children. Sometimes she also has to help her husband in his work in the field.

Births too, like marriages, are occasions for rejoicing in the villages where people are unmindful of the population pressures and the need for family planning. A male child
is always preferred and so, on his birth there is great rejoicing and festivity. Usually the birth is celebrated by distributing sweets to relatives and friends. The naming ceremony is also very important.

**Kinship System**

Let us also examine the kinship system and its socio-cultural correlates. Marriage is a link between the family of orientation and the family of procreation. This fact of individual membership in two nuclear families gives rise to the kinship system. Kinship is defined as “a social relationship based upon family relatedness” (Ahuja, 1999:120). The relationship, which may be consanguineal (based on blood) or affinal (based on marriage), determines the rights and obligations of related persons. As such, kinship system is referred to as “a structured system, of statuses and roles and of relationship in which the kin (primary, secondary, tertiary and distant) are bound to one-another by complex interlocking ties” (Ahuja, 1999:121). Part of the reciprocal behaviour, characterising every relationship between kin, consists of the terms by which each addresses the other, i.e., by personal name or by kinship term (*pitaji, dadaji, behanji* or equivalents of the same in other languages) or by the combination of personal and kinship terms (‘Ram’s father,’ ‘Rita’s mother,’ etc). The kinship terms (of address and reference) which could be elementary (which cannot be reduced to any other term, e.g., *mata, pita, kaka, chacha, bhai, bahan, etc.*) or derivative (which is compounded from an elementary term, e.g., *bahnoi, mausa, etc.*) or descriptive (which combines two or more elementary terms, e.g., *mauseri bahan, phuphera bhai etc.*) can be differentiated as isolative (applied only to one kin as defined by generation, sex and genealogical connection, e.g., *bhai, bahan, pati, patni, etc.*) or classificatory (applied to persons of two or more kinship categories (e.g. cousins, used for father’s brother’s son as well as mother’s sister’s son) (Ahuja, 1999:167). Since the classificatory terms ignore one or more fundamental criteria (e.g. sex, age, generation, affinity, collaterality, bifurcation, etc.) they reduce the number of kinship categories from thousands to a very modest number.

After family, kinship groups play a very crucial role in daily life, rituals and social ceremonies. People turn to their kin not only for help in the exigencies of life but also on
regular occasions. The important kinship groups, after the family, are *vansh* (lineage) and *gotra* (clan). *Vansh* is a consanguineous unilateral descent group whose members trace themselves from known and real common ancestors. It may be either patrilineal or matrilineal and is an exogamous unit. The members of a *vansh* are treated as brothers and sisters. Lineage ties remain up to a few generations only. The main linkage among the families of a lineage is common participation in ritual functions like birth, death etc. The *vansh* passes into *gotra*, which though is a unilateral kin group, is larger than the lineage. It is an exogamous group. The matrilineal kin (related through mother) are as important in an individual’s life as patrilineal kin (related through father).

The kinship features in North and Central India differ from those in South India. Karve speaks of the salient features of kinship in North, Central and South India (Karve, 1953:170-79). The socio-cultural correlates of kinship system are language, caste and (plain and hilly) region. In spite of the effect of these three factors on the kinship relations, it is possible to talk of kinship organisation on some collective bases, for example, on caste and zonal basis. Though kinship behaviour in the northern zone changes slightly from region to region and from caste to caste within each region, yet comparative study shows that it is possible to talk of an ‘ideal’ northern pattern referring to practices and attitudes generally found to be common among a majority of the castes.

Some of the important features of the kinship organisation of the Northern zone are: kin junior to ego are addressed by their personal names and senior to ego by the kinship term; all children in ascending and descending generations are equated with one’s own sibling group (brothers and sisters) and all children of one’s sibling group are again equated with one’s own children; the principle of unity of generations is observed (for example, great-grandfather and grandfather are given same respect as father); within the same generation, the older and the younger kin are kept distinct; the duties and behaviour patterns of the members of three generations are strictly regulated; some of the ancient kinship terms having Sanskrit origin have been replaced by new terms; for example, *pitamaha* is replaced by *pita*. Suffix ‘ji’ is added to kinship terms used for kin older than the speaker (for example, *chachaji*). In Bengal, instead of ‘ji,’ the suffix ‘moshai’ is
added; marriage among close kin is not permitted; after marriage, a girl is not expected to be free with her parents-in-law, but when she becomes a mother, she achieves position of respect and power, and restrictions on her are lessened; the family is so structured that children, parents and grandparents either live together or social kinship obligations towards them are clearly met; apart from the joint family, which represents a person's intimate, and nearest circle of relations, there is always a larger circle of kin who play a part in his life. This kindred represents the circle of his patri-kin or matri-kin who may stand by him when the immediate family no longer suffices.

The salient features of kinship organisation of Central India are not much different from those of the North India. The important features of kinship in Central India are the following: every region follows northern India in practices of marriage, that is consanguinity is the main consideration, which rules marriage; many castes are divided into exogamous clans and among some castes, the exogamous clans are arranged in hypogamous hierarchy; the kinship terminology shows intimacy and closeness between various kin; in Gujarat, mamera-type of cousin marriage (with mother's brother) and levirate (marriage with husband's brother) are practiced by some castes; the custom of periodic marriages in Gujarat has led to child marriages as well as unequal marriages, which are practiced even today; in Maharashtra, there is impact of both northern and southern zones in kinship relations, for example, the clan organisation of the Marathas is similar to that of the Rajputs, which is arranged in a ladder-like manner. Clans are grouped into divisions and each division is named according to the number of clans it comprises; for example panch-kuli, sat-kuli etc. (The highest is panch-kuli followed by sat-kuli. The panch-kuli can marry among themselves, or can take a girl from the sat-kuli, etc. but panch-kuli do not give their daughters outside the panch-kuli); some castes like Marathas and Kunbis in the central zone practice bride price too, though dowry custom also exists among them; though the family system in Maharashtra is patrilineal and patrilocal, yet unlike in the north, where a wife permanently stays with her husband after gauna and rarely goes to her father's house in castes like Marathas, she moves to and from her father's house very frequently; though the kinship terms are mostly northern yet some terms are borrowed from the Dravidians in the south; for example, the use of the
terms *anna* and *nana* for brother along with the term *dada*, similarly the use of the terms *akka*, *tai* and *mai* for sister; the kinship system of the tribals in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh is somewhat different from that of the caste Hindus. The difference exists in terms of kinship terminology, marriage rules, and clan obligations. Thus, it may be stated that though the kinship organisation in the northern and central zones is almost similar, yet it can be described as a region of transition from the north to the south. “A state like Maharashtra is a region of cultural borrowings and cultural synthesis” (Karve, 1953:174).

The southern zone presents a complicated pattern of kinship system. Though patrilineal and patrilocal family is the dominant family type for the greater number of castes and communities (for example, Namboodris), there are important sections of the population which are matrilineal and matrilocal (for example, Nayars); also there are quite a few castes whose systems possess features of both patrilineal and matrilineal organisations (for example, Todas). Similarly, there are some castes / tribes who practice only polygyny (for example, Asari, Nayars) and yet others, who practice only polygyny and polyandry (for example, Todas). Then there are polyandrous patrilineal groups (for example Asari) and also polyandrous matrilineal groups (for example, Tiyans, Nayars) and polygynous patrilineal groups (for example, Namboodris) but no polygynous matrilineal groups. Similarly, there are patrilineal joint families and also matrilineal joint families. All this show varied patterns in kinship organisation in the southern zone. A close analysis of these patterns is interesting.

In the matrilineal family, the kinship relationship of women to one another is that of a daughter, mother, sister, mother’s mother, mother’s sister, and sister’s daughter. In the kinship relationship of women with men, males are related to women as brother, son, daughter’s and sister’s son. The kinship relationship of males to one another is that of brother, mother’s brother and sister’s son. All these kinship relations are based on blood. Matrilineal joint family, called *tarwad* is found amongst the Nairs of Malabar and Travancore and a few other groups. The important characteristics of *tarwad* are: the property of the *tarwad* is the property of all males and females belonging to it; unmarried sons belong to the mother’s *tarwad*, but married sons belong to their wife’s *tarward*; the
manager of the tarward property is the oldest male member in the family; called karnavan (his wife is called ammayi); karnavan is an absolute ruler in the family; on his death, the next senior male member becomes karnavan. He can invest money in his own name, can mortgage property, can give money on loan, can give land as gift, and is not accountable to any member in respect of income and expenditure; when the tarward becomes too large and unwieldy, it is divided into tavazhis. The tarwad before the 1912 Act and after 1912 are two different things. Earlier, the tarwad property was indivisible, but now it can be divided. Earlier, karnavan was an absolute ruler of the tarwad, but now his authority has become limited. Earlier, members of the tarwad were not entitled to maintenance unless they lived in the family house, but now members have become entitled to maintenance outside the ancestral house. Earlier, ancestor worship of the karnavan was common, but now it is no longer common. Earlier, relations between husband and wife were formal, but now the relations have become informal, personal and more close and intimate. Earlier, the self-acquired property of a member of a tarwad went to the tarwad after his death, but now it goes to his widow and children, and in their absence to the mother and the mother’s mother. Thus, the tarwad of Nairs has now disintegrated after the enactments of the 1912 Act (Travancore), the 1920 Act (Cochin), the 1933 Act (Madras), and the 1958 Act (Kerala). The woman’s property now goes to her sons and daughters and then to her father and husband. Kapadia (1966:348) has drawn attention to the fact that more than 90 per cent of veedus (houses) have only one tavazhi; this shows the extent of atomisation of the tarwads in the last few decades.

Ahuja (1999:124-26) analyses the clan organisation and marriage rules in the south. A caste is divided into five exogamous clans. The important characteristics of clan organisation are: each clan (composed of a number of families) possesses a name of some animal or a plant or some other object and a person from one clan can seek a spouse from any other clan except his own. However, this choice is theoretical because of the rule of exchange of daughters. In marriage, there is not only the rule of clan exogamy but also of family exchange of daughters and because of the marriage rule of exchange of daughters, many kinship terms are common. Marriage between maternal parallel cousins, that is, between children of two sisters, is not permissible. Sororate marriage (that is, marriage
with wife's younger sister) is practiced. Also, two sisters can marry two brothers in one family.

There is a system of preferential mating in the south. In a large number of castes, the first preference is given to elder sister's daughter, second preference to father's sister's daughter, and third preference to mother's brother's daughter. However, today cross-cousin marriage and especially the uncle-niece marriage is beginning to be considered as outmoded and a thing to be ashamed of among those groups which have come in contact with the north Indians or with western culture. There are also certain taboos. The taboos prescribed for marriage are: a man cannot marry his younger sister's daughter; a widow cannot marry her husband's elder or younger brother (that is, levirate is a taboo); and a man cannot marry his mother's sister's daughter.

Marriage is dependent on the chronological age differences rather than the principle of generational divisions as in the north. Yet, another feature of marriage and kinship in the south is that marriage is not arranged with a view to widening a kin group but each marriage strengthens already existing bonds and makes doubly near those people who were already very near kin. A girl has to marry a person who belongs to the groups older than her, and also to the group younger than her parents, that is, she can marry any of her older cross cousins.

The dichotomy of status and sentiments expressed in such northern terms like kanya (unmarried girl), bahu (married girl), pihar (mother's house) and sasural (husband's house) are absent in south. This is because in south, a girl after marriage does not enter the house of strangers as in north. One's husband is one's mother's brother's son and so on. Marriage in the south, thus, does not symbolise separation from father's house for a girl. A girl moves freely in her father-in-law's house.

The Status of Women

The position of women in Indian Society has been a very complicated one. They held a position of equality and respect along with men in the Vedic period. Gradually
their status declined and in the nineteenth century there was an utter degradation. Their condition improved in the Gandhian era and in the decades after independence. Researches have established that women held a position of equality with men during the Vedic period. Both boys and girls underwent upanyanam ceremonies to be initiated to the Vedic studies:

In fact, the education of women was looked upon as so important that the Atharva Veda asserted “the success of women in her married life depends upon her proper training during the Brahmacharya”. (Kuppuswamy, 2000:313)

There were some very famous women in the past:

Some of the renowned Vedic women are Lopamudra, Viswavara, Sikata, Nivavari and Ghosha. Aswalayana Gruhyasutra required posterity to read every day the works of great women like Sulabha, Maitreye, Gargi. Unfortunately, there is no record of their work. (Kuppuswamy, 2000:313)

Kuppuswamy further states that in the Upanishadic period there were many Brahmvadinis who were life-long students of philosophy. Women like Maitreye and Gargi were the gems of the Upanishadic period. In the Bhrihadaranyak Upanishad Gargi challenges the sage Yagnavalkya. One of the celebrated Upanishadic passages is the conversation between Maitreye and her husband Yagnavalkya. In the Buddhist period also there were reputed women scholars like Sanghamitra, the sister of the great emperor Ashoka, who went to Ceylon to spread Buddhism. Among the authors of Theragatha are 42 women, 32 of whom were unmarried. According to the Jaina tradition Yayant, a princess who remained unmarried received ordination from Mahavira (2000:314). On the basis of these facts from literature, Altekar writes: “we may therefore conclude that many girls in well-to-do families used to be given a fair amount of education down to about 300 B.C.” (1962:120). Marriage, though considered a religious and social duty and though an unmarried person was not eligible to participate in the Vedic sacrifices, it was not compulsory for every girl. According to Shastri:
The extent of the word ‘Amajur’, which means a girl who grew old at her father’s house, and the reference to the attendance of maidens, young women at the ‘Sumana’ festival as well as the unmarried female rishis as Apala-Atreya, suggests that matrimony was not compulsory for a woman and that no limitation had been placed on the age of marriage. (1952:187)

In the Rig Veda there are references to the customs of ‘Niyoga’ where a widow could marry the brother of her deceased husband with the permission of the elders. She could also marry other persons. “The Rig Veda does not mention anywhere the practice of the burning or burial of widows with their dead husbands” (Shastri, 1952:189). With regard to property rights, according to the Rig Veda, both husband and wife were joint owners. As Dutt writes:

...Hindu women held an honoured place... they inherited and possessed property; they took share in sacrifices and religious duties; they attended great assemblies and state occasions; they also distinguished themselves in science and learning at their times...[They were] considered as intellectual companions of their husbands, as the friends and loving helpers in the journey of life of their partners, in their religious duties, and the centre of their domestic bliss. Hindu wives were honoured and respected in ancient times. (1899:79)

This position of the Hindu woman in the early Vedic times was very different from the lower status to which they were degraded after about 300 B.C. As Altekar writes:

The reasons why daughters were not unpopular in ancient India during the early centuries are not difficult to understand. They could be initiated in Vedic studies and were entitled to offer sacrifice to God. The son was not absolutely necessary for this purpose. Further, the marriage of the daughter was not a difficult problem. The daughter herself solved it. There was no dread of widowhood because levirate and remarriage were allowed by the society and were even fairly common. (1962:165)
With the consolidation of Aryan power, and the Aryans marrying non-Aryan women, very soon non-Aryan women were prohibited from participating in religious sacrifices as they did not know Sanskrit and had no education. Gradually all women, Aryan and non-Aryan became ineligible for Vedic studies and religious duties. The increased complexity of the Vedic sacrifices rendered the wife's association a mere formal affair. Gradually, upanyanam for girls became a mere formality. Since girls were not educated, early marriages became common. About A.D. 205 some Dharmashastras declared that marriage was a substitute for upanayanam for girls and since it was performed at about eight or nine years, marriages too were performed at this age. Thus the end of upanayanam, the neglect of education and pre-puberty marriages led to disastrous results upon the status of women. Gradually niyoga and widow remarriage were prohibited. Wives were instructed to look upon their husbands as Gods. "When kingdoms became large, kings kept big harems and this led to the seclusion of women" (Kuppuswamy, 2000:325).

From 200 B.C. — A.D.1800, the position of women deteriorated further. The institution of sati, the prohibition of remarriage, the tonsure of the widow, the spread of the purdha, the prevalence of polygamy etc. made their position quite dreadful. Thus there was a great gulf between the status of women in the early Vedic period and in the 19th century. Desai says:

Ideologically woman was considered a completely inferior species, inferior to the male, having no significance, no personality; socially she was kept in a state of utter subjection, denied all rights, suppressed and oppressed; she was further branded as basically lacking the ethical fibre. The patriarchal joint family, the customs of polygamy, the purdah, the property structure, early marriage, sati or a state permanent widowhood, all these contributed to the smothering of the free development of woman. (1957:123)

Thus, in the Puranic, Brahmanical, and medieval periods, the status of women was lowered by the imposition of several restrictions. Pre-puberty marriages came to be practiced, widow remarriage was prohibited, the husband was given the status of God for
a woman, education was totally denied to her, the custom of *sati* was introduced, purdah system came into vogue, polygyny came to be tolerated and women were forbidden to offer sacrifices and prayers and read religious books. In the Muslim period, more restrictions were imposed on them due to the rigidity of the caste system and the imposition of Brahmanical austerities on the entire society. But even at this time, rural women took full part in agriculture and the craftwork of the husband. They had the freedom to sell milk, vegetables, fish and other produce in the nearby towns. Even now one can see hundreds of village women with head-loads of merchandise moving to towns every day. These women enjoy considerable freedom and equality.

However, the situation did undergo some change owing to the Bhakti movement, which permitted some social and religious freedom to women. In the British period, the status of women improved a little because of the spread of education, Christian missionaries’ interest in girls’ education, abolition of social customs like *sati*, enactment of some legal measures like Widow Remarriage Act, 1856, Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, etc. The Civil Marriage Act of 1872 made marriage a secular ceremony and provided for the registration of marriage. This law also increased the marriage age of girls to 14 and permitted inter-caste marriage and also enforced monogamy. Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India abolished *sati* and in 1829 made it a crime. But it took three quarters of a century for the Hindu society to accept these social changes.

The social movements initiated by enlightened leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Justice Ranade, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Maharishi Karve, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Annie Beasant, Mahatma Gandhi, etc., and the growth of women’s organisations like Bharat Mahila Parishad (1904), Women’s Indian Association (1917), National Council of Women in India (1925), and all India Women’s Conference (1927) helped to raise the status of Indian women. Women like Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi (1835—1858), Pandita Rama Bai (1858—1922), Toru Dutt (1856—1877), Svarnakumari Devi (1855—1932) and Annie Besant (1847—1933) were some prominent women who inspired both men and women and who worked for the emancipation of Indian women.
The change in the status of women got further impetus after independence because of the enactment of new laws (Special marriage Act, 1954, Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, Hindu Succession Act 1956 and Anti-Dowry Act 1961). Women’s condition got better because of the laws pertaining to women’s employment such as Factory Act 1948, Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 and Maternity Benefit Acts. Other factors which affected women’s status were the effects of education, the leadership provided by educated elite women, increasing opportunities of employment, the change in the rigidity of the caste system, and so on. It was the American Mission, which first started a school for girls in Bombay in 1824. By 1829 about 400 girls were enrolled in this school.

The need for linkage between programmes oriented to women and the national policy towards weaker sections has come to be increasingly realised. Several commissions have been appointed by the central and the state governments to suggest measures for protecting women’s rights in various fields. Two such commissions were appointed by the Central government in 1971 and 1992. The National Commission for Women (NCW), set up in January 1992, was directed to look into women-related issues, probe the status of women, examine various legislations and point out loopholes and gaps and assess the causes of discrimination and violence against women and suggest possible remedies. The latest development in this field is the Supreme Court’s direction to set up a Women’s Grievance Cell at all places where women work.

Some observers associate the changing status of women with factors like increase in divorce and female share of divorce petitions outnumbering that of men, increase in inter-caste marriages, decrease in number of crimes against women, and so forth. However, the factors which really point out the high status of women are the involvement of women in paid-work and acquiring economic independence; increase in the number of higher and better-paid positions in different departments occupied by women; increase in the number of female entrepreneurs and managers; increase in the number of women in legislative bodies; increase in the number of girls studying in universities, colleges and professional institutions, and so forth.
Earlier, the priority for most girls was marriage at the right time and leading a life based on the roles of wife, mother and daughter-in-law. Parents remained more concerned about the family background of the prospective son-in-law before fixing the marriage of their daughters. The demands of dowry were high. Walking out of marriage i.e., separation or divorce, did not have social or legal sanction. Women after marriage had, therefore, no option but to try and make their marriage work. The relations between husband and wife were supposedly based on mutual trust where he appreciated and helped her in her efforts of adjustment, based on patience, humility and understanding and she apparently trusted him. However, the family hierarchy was well defined. The father-in-law was the boss and his word was law; it had to be obeyed. And, more than anything else, a woman had to respect social norms.

But today, a large number of women with more education and with the capability and qualifications to work for a livelihood find adjustments difficult. Housekeeping and bringing up children are no longer a full-time job for a woman. Today, the main criteria for selecting a girl as life partner are her education and her employability. This is an age of earning couples. Girls have taken up the challenge even in the villages. Working couples leave their kids behind with their parents or even in crèches and pick them up in the evening. Marriages have become later by choice because couples tend to give due weight to their career graphs. ‘Live-in’ relationships are being tolerated and divorce is no longer a social stigma. The traditional institution of marriage seems to be slowly losing its sanctity. The old joint family system is also breaking. This has also affected the bringing up of children. A child in a nuclear family is a loner and tends to be self-centred. Old values are being replaced with modern values of equality, individualism and rationality. Though males have yet to be domesticated to share the daily chores, they have been made to realise that they do not hold dominant positions in the family. Thus, women have now greater privacy, more opportunities, and freedom of action and nearly equal rights. They have broken away from many of the shackles and the unfairly restrictive practices of the past.
The Indian Constitution provides to women the right to equality, freedom, property, education, constitutional remedies, and protection from exploitation. The state has also been enacting special laws for safeguarding the interests of women. In the social field, these laws relate to various aspects of marriage (like, mate selection, age at marriage, divorce, alimony, dowry, restitution of conjugal rights and remarriage), adoption of children and abortion. The economic laws pertain to: right to property or inheritance, equal wages, working conditions, maternity benefits, and job security. The political rights provided to women are female enfranchisement and eligibility for the legislature.

The reasons for the denial of rights may be related to individual, economic and demographic factors. The individual factors refer to the personality characteristics of those males who possess low intellectual ability (IQ), who suffer from immaturity, depression and frustration, who are alcoholics, who have unrealistically high expectations from women and/or who expect them to remain docile and passive. As regards the economic factors, non-earning women are more frequently denied rights than earning women; women in the low and middle-income families are more generally denied rights than the upper-income families; and among earning women, those engaged in non-professional or low status jobs enjoy fewer rights than those engaged in professions or high status jobs. Lastly, as regards the demographic factors, women in the upper castes are not so frequently denied rights as compared to women in the intermediate or the lower castes; the older males deny rights to women more generally than the younger males; and rights denied by women to women are more common than the rights denied by men to women:

Males who deny rights to women can be identified. These men are those who have depressions, inferiority complex and low esteem; lack resources, that is, have personality disorders; have possessive, suspicious and domineering nature; were victims of violence in their own childhood; and face stressful situations in their families. (Ahuja, 1999:133)
On the other hand, women who are denied rights most may be identified as those who have feelings of helplessness, suffer from inferiority complex, have poor self-image, lack social maturity, and are economically dependent. We may also identify six types of denials of rights: money-oriented, pleasure-oriented, power-oriented, victim-precipitated, denier's pathology-resulted, and stressful family situations-resulted.

Thus, if we were to describe the woman of contemporary times, we could give her the following characteristics: She has struck a perfect balance between tradition and modernity and she seems to be determined to try and prove to man that she is equal to him. While earlier, a woman has had an identity always through a male (either she was known as somebody's daughter or wife or mother) and her plight was like a satellite that kept orbiting around one planet - the man, today she has an opportunity to shine independently and reflect an identity of her own. She is no longer confined to orthodox beliefs, but capitalises on her own potentials and merits, and has carved a niche for herself that was once forbidden by society; she has begun to take responsibilities and decisions for her life rather than just playing wife's and mother's roles. Her aptitudes and skills are slowly breaking down all chauvinistic barriers. There has been a metamorphosis in the woman, from the conservative woman of the 1940s and 1950s, she became the feminist rebel of the 1960s and 1970s, the super woman and mother-wife-career woman of the 1980s, and the empowered woman of the 1990s and the 2000s, who demands and enjoys her rights and is not afraid to stand-alone. She makes her own decisions, and is not a doormat. She doesn't take any kind of injustice meted out to her. She can think for herself, she makes a life for herself, and she instils important values in her children too. The new woman is part of the old woman. She is not afraid to be tough, aggressive and assertive. At the same time, she is not afraid to be feminine, sensual, gentle, caring, and considerate. She can be a career woman as well as housewife and mother. She loves the people around her - family, friends, workfolk, etc., but she also loves herself as a person. She is full of aspirations, expectations and desires. But if she fails, she does not act like a weak woman.
Taking the general status of women in contemporary society, it may be averred that there is now more representation of women in parliament, state assemblies, municipal corporations and panchayats. There are more women entrepreneurs, more bureaucrats more professionals, more managers and more administrative officers. However, rural women are still traditional, deeply ritualistic, and fiercely conservative in their behaviour.

Of course, there are women who work as housewives, teachers, nurses, clerks, stenographers, telephone operators and also women of lower classes who work as labourers, domestic maids, sweepers and rag-pickers, etc. for whom life hasn’t changed much. They are subordinated in our society and are still not economically emancipated from men. In social, psychological and moral dimensions also, their situation is not identical to that of men. When they start their career as adults, they are evaluated by the society with a different perspective. Since only a few women escape from the traditional feminine world and since they do not obtain from society or from family the assistance they need to become the equals of men, they fail to get recognition as successful role-performers.

Caste System

Two main criteria of social stratification are caste and class. Some other recognised units of stratification are age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Social stratification is different from social differentiation. The term ‘differentiation’ has broader application as it makes individuals and groups separate and distinct from each other for purposes of comparison. For example, within class strata, income, occupation and education provide basis for differentiation and comparison. Stratification occurs where differences are ranked hierarchically.

The Rig Vedic society was originally divided into three varnas or classes namely the Brahmins (priests), the Kshatriyas (warriors) and the Vaishyas (farmers and ordinary people). A fourth varna called the Sudra (servants) was added to the group soon after the invasion of India by the Aryans (c. 3000 B.C.). This fourth group consisted mostly of the
conquered people. Still another group of people – the fifth – lived outside the limits of the villages in utter poverty and they were called the *panchamas*:

They were treated as untouchables and their mere shadow could defile a twice born (*dwija*) — the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, and the Vaishyas. These five divisions of the Vedic society were the fore runners of the Indian caste system. (Ahuja, 1999:145)

*Varna* can be seen as the division of people into groups on the basis of aptitudes, abilities and vocations. The aptitudes and abilities are classified as those for scholarship; for administration and defence; for protection and distribution; and for unskilled labour. The first group of people who were engaged in priestly function, teaching, medicine, etc. came to be known as Brahmins and the second group engaged in fighting, ruling and administration were called Kshatriyas. The third group who were engaged in agriculture, trade and commerce were known as Vaisyas and the last group engaged in unskilled work was Sudras. The Brahmins were expected to possess the qualities of self-restraint, austerity, purity, serenity, simplicity, wisdom and philosophic insight into truth and reality. The Kshatriyas were to have the qualities of courage, strength, firmness, skillfulness and administrative ability. The Vaisyas were assumed to be hard working, intelligent and quick in decision-making. The Sudras, who seemed to be deficient in abilities and aptitudes as a result of centuries of subjugation and marginalisation had to work under others and accept their supremacy.

Each group had its own duties. While the Brahmins offered prayers, performed ceremonies and sacrifices, and taught the scriptures, the Kshatriyas protected people from external aggression and internal disturbances. They governed the country and maintained law and order. The Vaishyas were engaged in agriculture, trade and commerce. The Sudras who were not permitted to read the Vedas or observe Vedic rites or recite mantras had to do things ordered by others. A person or a group was entitled to a *varna* membership by satisfying the qualifications. Any individual or a group could find a place in any *varna* if he/it satisfied the qualifications. So a membership of a *varna* was not determined by birth but by qualifications. Hence a Sudra could become a Brahmin by
merit and a Brahmin became a Sudra if he did not study the Vedas. The Bhagavad Gita states that the four varnas are constituted on the principle of guna i.e., natural and acquired qualities and character and karma, i.e., calling and profession.

The exact origin of the caste system is controversial. It is assumed that by some process the varna system changed into the caste system. The term ‘varna’ means external appearance, colour, kind, letter, sound, etc. Many have erroneously concluded that varna is based on colour. Some have even related it with the colour prejudices in many parts of the world. Although it is true that in the later period of Indian history colour was correlated with varna, i.e., people of the varnas that were higher in the hierarchy of the system were fairer than others, in many parts of India, colour was not a deciding factor. Dark colour did not cause a person to be included in an inferior varna. It should also be noted that many important Brahmins as Vyas, the author of the epic Mahabharata, and many Hindu gods and goddesses like Vishnu, Krishna, Kali were dark in colour. “The word varna is appropriately translated as class and not colour or caste” (Hutton, 1961:66). It is believed that the word caste is of Latin origin. “The word caste probably was derived from the Latin ‘castus’, which implied purity of breed” (Risley, 1915:67). Hence it can be observed that the term caste is a foreign concept, which was superimposed upon the original concept of class. The origin of caste is often traced to a statement in the Purusha Sukta of the Rig Veda, which may literally be translated as, “The Brahmins sprang from the head of Brahma, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyias from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet” (Purusasukta Rig Veda, X 90,12).

“Many scholars consider this a later addition to the Vedas that was intended to give continuity and sanctity to the already exciting system of the four varnas in the society” (Kuber, 1967:97). In any case, the mantra should be interpreted in the proper social context. The social system was personified in the Purusha Sukta and different varnas were given different functions as parts of the body. The varnas were based upon function and not upon birth, although there was a correlation between family occupation and the varna of a person. In Vedic society, however, the representation of things was chiefly
symbolic and not literal. That birth in a family was not the sole determiner of a person’s varna is evident throughout the Vedic period.

After the Vedic age, there was deterioration in religious values, and during the Brahmanic and Puranic periods the Brahmins started to interpret the scriptures in such a way as to establish their supremacy. Many tribes from the adjoining areas got mixed with the mainstream of the population. The mixture of different varnas produced many classes or castes. There is also some evidence of a tussle between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas in which the Brahmins got the upper hand. The Brahmins while retaining the right to read and interpret the scriptures, and the power of excommunication, gave the right of administration to the Kshatriyas (Ahuja, 1999:146). This certainly paved the way for the rise of Brahmin influence and the decline of the other varnas.

In the present day, caste refers to a group of people who engages in different types of social relationships, namely marriage, dining, working etc., with members of its own group and would shun such relationships with others. The membership of this group is by birth, and a member’s profession, economic condition, social status and even political choice are often closely related to the ‘mode’ for that group or caste. However, scholars have put forward so many theories emphasising in various ways the social, the economic and the religious antecedents to explain the origins of the caste system (Ghurye, 1969; Hutton, 1961; Risley, 1915) that it is not possible to zero in on any one of them as the singular cause for the system. As Shankar suggests:

There does not seem to be an adequate definition for caste because it is nebulous and there are always exceptions. It is better to understand the caste system as a product of interaction between various forces throughout the Indian history than to explain its origin and function solely in terms of any one of them. (1998:7)

At the same time, an analysis of the caste system in terms of its social, political, economic and religious dimensions, as recognized by the scholars working in this field (Ghurye, 1969; Huttton, 1961; Jayaraman, 1981; Mayer, 1960, Prasada, 1910; Srinivas, 1964), is useful in understanding the formation and change in caste attitudes in the
villages because it is possible to describe the dimensions separately and even measure them.

The social dimension of the caste system is related to social interaction between families in a village, and interaction within a single family, which is the unit of social organisation in Indian villages. Marriage, eating and drinking together, friendship, worship, games etc., were the occasions for social interactions related to the caste system and are indexes of social distances between castes. The political dimension of the caste system was related to the power structure in the village. The organisation of the village council (panchayat) and the power wielded by its members were related to caste system. The economic dimension of caste system related a caste to its economic condition, which was generally dependent on the occupation of its members. Although the correlation between caste membership and economic condition was positive, it was far from perfect. People were not always very rich at the high end of the caste hierarchy, nor always very poor at the low end. There were always exceptions. The religious dimension of the caste system was related to the beliefs of the people about what they considered to be religion according to their age and varna.

The varna system, which was originally based upon a concept of the inherent nature and action of a person, and which was used to classify the Hindu society so that the right person should be given the right profession, worked well in the beginning. The system was not very rigid and a person had some freedom to move from one varna to another under certain conditions. When the varna system deteriorated into the caste system, social and economic exploitation of the lower castes by the upper castes began.

The caste system in Indian villages based on occupations became rigid in the course of thousands of years. The village structures and the economic and social relations among different castes living in individual or clusters of villages became so ossified and inextricably entangled with every facet of village life that they withstood outside pressures and survived for centuries. Changes in the central governance from the Hindus to the Muslims, and from the Muslims to the British did not affect the internal structure of the village community.
‘Varna Ashrama Vyavastha’ became the corner stone of the Indian social organisation. The peculiar feature of this system is the linkage of the concept of innate endowment with birth and this is at the basis of the Indian caste system. Thus the four castes, the Brahmins, Kshtriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, came to be ‘innately’ associated with the intellectual, the political, the production groups and the working class. As a result, a man is Vaisya not because he has the aptitude to produce wealth and engage in occupations connected with this, but because he is born into a particular family. In the villages, the hierarchical positions on the caste ladder and the customary behaviour patterns were accepted. Inside the village, the clusters of houses belonging to different castes were situated at different sites. Though the clusters were not far from each other, the sites were distinctly separate from each other. The cremation grounds and the ponds in which funeral ‘sradhas’ were conducted were separate for the Brahmins and non-Brahmins.

The intra-caste relationship was more rigid in different non-Brahmin castes than in Brahmin castes. Marriages in all castes were strictly within the caste. For consideration of different social problems arising within the caste and irregularities committed by individual families, regular caste meetings were convened and specific decisions were taken. Any family disobeying the decisions and directions was ex-communicated. A man is born into a caste and dies in it. Neither success nor failure can change a man’s position. A person of a particular caste can marry only within the caste. He cannot marry either above or below except by breaking the caste rules. A man of higher caste could marry a woman of lower caste (anuloma) according to the famous lawgiver Manu, but not vice versa (pratiloma). The members of the highest caste were strict vegetarians. The caste membership determined the customs and rituals regarding birth, marriage, death, etc. Generally caste determined one’s occupations, particularly among lower castes. Each caste is thus an autonomous social unit. A curious side feature of the caste system was the attempt made by some caste communities to escape from their traditionally accorded lower status through a complete reinvention of themselves and their castes. An example in point is that of the smiths of South India during pre-British times who changed their name to ‘Viswa Karma Brahmins’. Later, under British rule this tendency received
special encouragement during the periodic census enumerations when the low castes changed their caste names in order to move up in the hierarchy.

The caste system provided for various functions necessary to social life from priesthood to scavenging. The sanction of religion was used to keep the members of the various castes to conform to their own caste rules. The caste order was preserved by two methods. Each member was enjoined to observe his caste rules because that is the only way in which he could obtain perfection. The *Bhagavad Gita* says, “one’s own duty, though defective, is better than another’s duty well performed” (Santokh, 1972:58). According to the ancient lawgiver Manu, a man could hope for birth in a higher caste in his next life by carefully fulfilling the duties of his caste in this life. Breach of caste discipline was considered a sin. The second method to preserve caste order was the formation of a barrier to inter-caste marriages. One could not marry outside one’s caste and there were restrictions about ones eating and drinking with one of a different caste. There were also fixed occupations for different castes.

On occasions of marriage or other functions in any caste Hindu family, people from other castes were invited and were served sweets and fruits. But cooked food was generally served only to the people of their caste. The Brahmins did not take cooked food from families belonging to any other caste. Among the Brahmins, there were many sub-castes. Brahmins of higher sub-castes did not marry in lower sub-castes and did not take cooked food in such families. But in the families of high caste Brahmins all other caste people took cooked food. Each caste moved in its own groove and accepted the customary position and relation with other castes. There were no caste tensions and resentments. The people of the lower castes did not feel that since the Brahmins did not take cooked food in their houses, they should also not take cooked food from Brahmin houses.

Untouchability was another phenomenon of the caste system. There were religious, social and economic causes for the institution of untouchability. Those belonging to a particular caste known as ‘Sudras’ were considered as untouchables. The untouchables suffered from various social, political, economic and religious disabilities,
many of which were traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by higher castes. They were prohibited from walking on the roads that were meant for the use of the higher castes. They were not allowed to take water from a public well and were prohibited from making use of public places. The higher castes in the south would wear the dhoti in a manner that it would not touch the earth, because the earth would have been touched by an untouchable:

The Harijan children could not use the schools that were meant for the children of higher castes and hence they were deprived of the facilities for education. Similarly they could not sit on a palanquin or ride on a horse. They were subjected to great humiliation in the religious fields also. They were not only prohibited from entering temples but were also not allowed to use the cremation ground. (Singh, 1990:190)

Untouchability in India goes a long way back. Till the early 1930s, the *de jure* definition of the depressed classes, as they were then known, was in terms of the religious concept of pollution. The depressed classes were defined as “Hindu castes, contacts with whom entail purification on the part of high-caste Hindus” (Michael, 1998:171). Today, the number of people belonging to the scheduled castes has gone up very high. One out of every six Indians belongs to this category – ex-untouchables by law but still partially untouchables in practice. The important ex-untouchable castes are Chamar, Dusadh, Musahar, Bhuiya, Dhobi, Pasi, Regar, Dom, Bhogta and Halalkhor in north India and Paraiyans, Pallans and Chakkillis in Tamil Nadu and Mehar, Balshi, Bauril Meghwal, Rajbans, Mazhabhi Sikhs, etc, in other states. “The highest number of untouchables is found in Uttar Pradesh (21%) followed by West Bengal (12%), Bihar (9%), Tamil Nadu (8%), Andhra Pradesh (8%)and so on” (*Manpower Profile*, India, 1998:35). About two-thirds of these people are concentrated in six states. About 84%of them live in villages and are working as cultivators, sharecroppers, marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. About 42% of these people fall in the category of workers. Of the total workers, only 4%work as scavengers while, the rest work as weavers (12%), fishermen (8%), toddy-tappers (7%), basket and rope-makers (5%), washermen (5%), artisans (1%),
shoe-makers (1%) and so forth. Though our constitution outlawed the practice of untouchability and The Untouchability (Offences) Act of 1955 declared it as a legal offence, yet, since Hindus are still deeply steeped in their concern for purity and pollution, the practice of untouchability has not been completely uprooted from the social and religious life of the country.

The social stigma of the untouchables manifests itself in all walks of life. They were denied access to temples and to the services of the Brahmins, and were shunned by the higher castes. They were considered to be born impure and were destined to live as impure. The rest of the society was so concerned about purity that they permanently kept the untouchables in a state of economic, social and political subordination. The stigma, congenital according to one's caste, lasts a lifetime. Though many *dalits* have given up their traditional caste-based occupations, yet a good number is still engaged in 'polluting' occupations. The change and diversification from 'polluting' occupations have not only removed the stigma of their untouchability but has also enabled many to rise in class mobility. The disabilities of status are now largely confined to the village. Discriminations in the matter of using the public wells or the temples are not so widespread as before. The immobility of the Harijans has also given way to mobility. This has been made possible by migration from rural to urban areas, education and entry to public service and into politics.

The changes among the *dalits* have come through three avenues: state policy in regard to untouchable groups, reform movements at various periods of time, and the process of Sanskritisation and westernisation. Great religious leaders and social reformers like Buddha, Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya and others tried to raise the consciousness of the people and help the lower castes. Under the influence of important religious leaders and reformers, caste attitudes have shown fluctuations throughout Indian history. In modern times, Mahatma Gandhi worked for the emancipation of the lower castes. In order to give them respectable status in the society, he called them 'Harijans' or 'the people of God'. Due to his efforts, the condition of the Harijans has improved considerably. Although the caste system is still alive, it is weakened by social reforms and legislation.
Many religious leaders and social reformers could not control or put an end to the caste system because they looked upon it as a religious problem. But, as Swami Vivekananda recognised, it “is predominantly a social problem” (Vivekananda, 1976:55). The caste system remained very hard and rigid in the rural areas up to the 1940's when the caste councils were very powerful and caste decided the status and opportunities of the individuals. Not only the power structure but also the ownership of land existed on caste lines. But fortunately, after the 1950's, with the spread of education, the means of communication, the growth of competitive economy etc., self-contained classes have been transformed into mobile classes. While many higher castes have lost their previous status, many lower castes have gained economic and political power and have emerged as dominant castes.

There is also a change in the habitat pattern based on caste. While earlier, the areas in which houses were built, depended on caste membership, today there is no relation between caste and habitat. Another factor important in the caste system in rural areas was occupational, economic, and social mobility. Now the members of a caste do not necessarily perform caste-determined occupations. As a result, some castes slide down the economic ladder while some castes go up. Earlier it was the caste that decided the attitude of the village folk towards education. But now a ‘sea change’ has occurred in this case and even the most backward castes have started imparting education to their children, including their girls. The religious life of rural people was earlier determined by caste. But now it is no longer affected by caste. Religious practices are slowly changing in villages. Caste leaders are no longer the leaders of the social, economic, political and ideological life of the villagers. New legislative measures also have affected the inter caste relations among the villagers. Thus caste has undergone vital changes in varied fields.

Though there are some scholars, such as Ghurye, Desai, Prasad, Kapadia, Dumont, Beteille, Gould, Dube, Madan, etc., who hold the view that the caste system is not transforming itself fast enough and that changes are only gradual; when we critically observe the caste system in the villages today, we can see that it is weakening or
disintegrating. Kaliprasad is of opinion that most of the upper caste people accept the lower caste people as their fellow-diners and that class divisions are being levelled up fast. Murphy (1953:65) concludes that caste has come to be challenged. Mukherjee (1958:54) opines that both the economic and social aspects of the caste system have greatly changed and has found change more pronounced in urban areas than in rural areas. Srinivas (1964) has maintained that the mutual rights and obligations among the castes are crumbling down. Kuppuswamy (1962) and Prasad (1954) have also pointed out some basic changes in the caste system.

All in all, the following major changes in caste functioning may be pointed out in the present times: The caste system, although it is not in the process of abolition, has a weakened religious basis which is making necessary adjustments with modern attitudes. Caste is no longer able to limit individual freedom and does not now determine the occupational career of an individual though his social status continues to be dependent on his caste membership. Very serious efforts are being made to grant equality to the backward castes. It should also be mentioned, at the same time, those inter-caste conflicts are increasing and casteism has also increased. Another notable feature is that caste and politics have come to affect each other. But caste does not act as a hindrance to social progress and to the country's development.

**Village Occupations**

Let us now examine the main occupations in the village. Obviously, the chief occupation in the village is farming. The farmers grew different types of crops according to the region where they lived. Rice, wheat, gram, millet, pulses etc. were the chief crops. At the same time, there were a number of other associated and inter-connected occupations:

The next most important chief occupations are basket making, sheep keeping, shop keeping, pottery making, tailoring, frying grain, barbering, washing, selling milk, driving horse-drawn vehicles, bidi making etc. (Barnabas, 1969:41)
In addition, while a few villagers were employed with the government services, railways, factories and other public and private firms, a great majority were agricultural labourers. Misra classifies agricultural labourers into three types: “Domestic servants, attached agricultural labourers by annual contract and free unattached agricultural labourers” (Misra, 1998:27).

The domestic servants, who stayed full time in the household and took all their meals in it, were paid in cash or kind according to their age and skill. They looked after the agricultural work in the field and the cattle, bullocks and cows kept by the family. They did not do any menial work like washing utensils or sweeping the floor. For these jobs there were women labourers. The attached labourers were expected to work everyday in the farm and were paid for their work in kind. The wages were paid once a week. They were also given a little land to cultivate and allowed to take the produce. They were usually contracted on an annual basis. The free labourers, on the other hand, were not bound by contract to work throughout the year in anybody’s farm. Their daily wages were the same as those of the attached labourers.

In addition to the above types, there was also another type of workers known as bonded labourers. Although, the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act of 1976 ended the system of forced labour, it still continues in many parts of the country. Bonded labourers are known by different names in different parts of India:

In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka bonded labourers are known as ‘Jeethams’, in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh as ‘Halis’, in Orissia as Gothees, in Tamil Nadu as Pandiyals and in Kerala as ‘Adiyas’ and ‘Paniyas’, and in Uttar Pradesh as, ‘Koltas’. The bondage generally originates mainly from economic and social pressures. (Sharma, 1990:52)

Not having any choice, they are “driven by poverty and hunger into a life of bondage, a dark bottomless pit from which, in a cruel exploitative society, they cannot hope to be rescued” (Yojana, 1 May 1987:32-33). According to the figures released in May 1977, on the basis of a state government sponsored survey, conducted as per the
Supreme Court order, Tamil Nadu had the maximum number of 24000 bonded labourers, in the country, engaged in 30 different occupations (The Hindustan Times, 13 May 1997).

There are many sections of people in the village who do great service to the village community. Misra describes the different artisans usually found in the Indian villages (1998:76-134). There were also a number of independent and semi-independent occupations that were essential for life in the villages. The people of the village would not go to a distant town for their everyday needs and so they attracted to themselves, and provided for, a little group of resident artificers and servants such as carpenters, potters, blacksmiths, cobblers, washermen, sweepers, cattle keepers, men to keep watch and ward, barbers, and so on. The village carpenters made new ploughs, agricultural implements, household furniture, doorframes, shutters, etc. The skilled carpenters were in great demand and earned good wages. Many moved to towns and cities and opened workshops in urban areas with the arrival of modernity. They were also marginal farmers and combined agriculture with carpentry. The village blacksmiths' work was sharpening the ploughshare for which they usually got annual grain payment in the past. They made simple iron and household implements and sold them in the market. The combination of agriculture and smithy continued, yet agriculture was their main occupation. The potters, like other artisans combined agriculture with their pottery work. Apart from the regular sale of pots, they supplied special wares on occasions like marriage, thread ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, etc. They also made roof tiles and dug wells and fixed burnt earthen rings in them. Pottery business faced competition from the aluminium utensils industry. Village households were using more and more aluminium pots for cooking and factory made buckets for drawing and fetching water, and so the demand for earthen pots declined. There were also oilmen families in the village who “used to take on their heads jars of oil conveniently placed in baskets from house to house and sell them regularly” (Misra, 1998:27). They had traditional oil crushers (ghanies) for pressing mustard and coconut. The Brahmin families, who had large number of coconut trees, processed the ‘copra’ in their houses and took them to the oilmen for pressing it into coconut oil. The confectioners were another group in the villages. They sold parched rice and sweet meats in the village. They also opened sweet stalls in the village and nearby towns. The families
of goldsmiths made gold and silver ornaments for the womenfolk. Since the poor villagers could not afford many ornaments, the goldsmiths catered for the families of zamindars and money lenders who used large amount of gold ornaments. Their workmanship was not poor but the villagers always justifiably had the impression that they adulterated the metals and that the likelihood of customers being cheated by them was high. In the twenties and thirties gold and silver were cheap. Due to their bad reputation, they did not have a good business then and with sky-high prices of gold and silver and change of fashion of ornaments, their business declined. In the old days, the women of the villages used very small quantities of gold ornaments, as most of them were poor. Their gold ornaments were confined to nose rings and earrings and rarely necklaces. All the required ornaments were purchased from the big shops in the towns and the village goldsmiths had naturally no work. The cobblers were seldom seen in villages as almost the whole population went without any footwear. The cobblers used to make chappals and sell them at their little wayside shops. The barber has always been an essential village service personnel. Apart from his usual job of haircutting and shaving he also practiced a rude kind of surgery. He also rendered many other services to the village families, working as a messenger carrying the good news of birth, invitations of marriage, and bad news of death of relatives in the family. In some areas it is the barber who carries the present of cloth, sweets and ornaments to the houses of relatives on the occasions of marriage and other functions. Many barbers have changed to other professions and some have opted for saloons in the urban areas because of the higher income. The washermen in the village cleaned the clothes of the caste Hindu families of the village. They did not clean the clothes of other Harijan communities who cleaned their clothes themselves. They also did some ritual washing especially on the occasion of death and also chopped wood needed for cremation. It was the washermen who took out the bangles from the hands of the women who became widows. Another class of village servants is that of the milkmen. Besides supplying milk, they carried the palanquins and loads of fruit, vegetables, sweets, milk or curd from different families to their relatives in other villages on occasions like marriage and other special occasions. Their function as milkmen was not so important because most of the village farmers reared cows. There were other service classes like the drummers and conch-blowers who were needed only on special
occasions. These two classes belonged to the Harijan community. The sweeper community did not do scavenging work in the village as they did in the towns. They were generally landless agricultural labourers. Drum beating was only a side business. The sweeper families also made baskets and gathered hides. Although these groups were untouchables, their work of drum beating and conch blowing were considered essential in all religious and social functions. All these groups of people are essential for the smooth functioning of a village. In many cases, they are not paid for the job, but are given a fixed annual allowance of grain, cash and perquisites. In some parts they have smallholdings of rent-free land, which like the duty are hereditary.

In connection with the different rural occupations, let us also have a look at the peasant economy of the village. Agriculture is the mainstay of the rural economy. So the entire social and economic structure revolves around it. The produces of the village community are sent not only to the towns and cities, but to foreign lands as well. In addition to rice, wheat, sugarcane, jaggery, cotton, tobacco, oilseeds, rubber, spices, etc., which are from the villages, handloom and potteries, are also traded from the villages. In this way, Indian villages still contribute a major portion of the national income.

The peasant economy also enjoins a series of obligations and duties on the inhabitants of a village. Kuppuswami speaks about the obligation of the craftsmen and service class as follows:

The farmers belonging to the agricultural caste constitute the pivot of the whole system in the rural areas. The craftsman like those belonging to the carpenter caste or blacksmith caste or the potter caste; those belonging to the service castes like the barbers and washermen; and the landless labourers belonging to the Harijan castes, all have obligations to serve the needs of the farmer. (2000:69)

Most of the economic transactions in the villages are based on exchange of goods or services. Thus there is considerable division of labour in the peasant economy. The artisan and service groups attach themselves to certain families of the farmers and the link goes on unbroken from generation to generation. The mutual obligation being so
tight, neither the farmer nor the members of the dependent castes can break away from each other.

In the traditional village, there is hardly any scope for social mobility. A man cannot change his caste since it is fixed by birth; nor can he change his status by increasing his income or wealth since there is not much scope for it in the village. An important feature of the peasant economy is the predominance of the sacred over the secular. The caste obligations persist because they are sacred and governed by dharma. When someone fails to discharge his obligations, the people of the village and those in the surrounding villages condemn him and hence the families are careful not to transgress the normal obligations.

Many families in the villages find it very difficult to make both ends meet. Agriculture is the main source of income for the villagers and it is dependent on monsoons and summer droughts. Hence none can forecast the kind of harvest that the villager would get. "Agriculture is the source of livelihood for 70% of the population. About 20% of the landholders hold 70% of the total land and 50% of the landholders are marginal farmers with less than one hectare of land" (Ahuja, 1999:307).

According to the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) definition, approved by the Ministry of Rural Development, a rural household with an annual income of less than Rs.11000 is described as a poor household. The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) after four years of study of 33000 rural households in 16 states observing 300 parameters released in December 1996 a report which revealed that 39% of the rural population was living below the poverty line or earning less than Rs.2444 per person per year. "According to the NCAER survey, however, the all-India annual income per family in Indian village was Rs.4485 in 1994" (The Hindustan Times, 4 Dec. 1996). The main cause of poverty in villages are low agricultural productivity, poor quality of livestock, low level of education, spending a large percentage of annual earnings on social ceremonies, absence of dynamic community leadership and so on.
Social legislation

Social legislations that were brought forward at different periods of time helped the village society in different ways. Some of the laws helped to get rid of the innumerable social evils that existed in the society and others helped to better the living as well as the working conditions of the people. Kuppuswamy (2000:138-145) discusses the important legislations that were enforced during the pre and post independence periods in India. Before independence, a number of laws were promulgated to bring about a change in the social conditions with respect to marriage, the position of women, juvenile delinquency, child and women labour, wages, working conditions etc. One of the most important social legislations in pre-independence days was the Act to abolish Sati. Leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lord William Bentick were responsible for passing this act. There were other revolutionary social legislations also that attempted to protect the rights of women. The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856. The first widow remarriage according to this Act was performed in Calcutta in 1856. As a result of this act, social reformers started homes for widows and widow remarriage associations in different parts of the country. They gave education to the young women who became widows and enabled them to remarry. The Female Infanticide Prevention Act of 1870 was enacted to prevent newborn female children being put to death. This evil practice had arisen because of the difficulty in getting a bridegroom from the same sub-caste and the heavy dowry and marriage expenses.

A number of laws concerning marriage were also enacted in the pre-independence period. The Special Marriage Act of 1872 provided for marriage irrespective of differences in religion. Till then marriage was looked upon as a sacrament only, but this act provided for civil marriage and registration of marriage. The Act was amended in 1923 to permit intercaste marriages also. Attempts were made to raise the marriage age of boys and girls. In 1860 The Indian Penal Code prohibited the marriage of girls below 10 years. In 1872 the Brahm Act fixed the marriageable age of girls at 14 and boys at 18. The Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 1929 raising the marriageable age of
girls to 14 and boys to 18. But this Act remained a dead letter because it never reached the village people for lack of publicity.

The law of inheritance used to be interpreted in such a way that the earnings of a member of the Hindu joint family were his own if his education was a general education, but earnings would belong to the family if he had been specially trained for a profession. To remove this difference and enable a man to have full right over his earnings from his profession, the Hindu Gains of Learning Act was passed in 1930.

A number of labour laws were also passed in the pre-independence era. The Workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859 helped the planters of Assam tea gardens to prosecute labourers who wanted to run away from the plantations. The Employers and Work Men (Disputes) Act 1860 made the worker liable to pay penalty for breaches of contract. These laws protected the employer and not the worker. The 1908 amendment abolished the system of penal contracts and the right of planters to arrest workers. The 1915 amendment abolished the indenture system. The Factory Act of 1881 prohibited employment of children below seven to work in cotton textile mills and also fixed hours of work for children. The 1922 Act limited the hours of work of adults to 60 hours per week. Again the 1931 Act limited hours of work to 54 per week and the 1946 amendment reduced it to 48 hours per week. The Workmen's Compensation Act 1923 required the employer to give compensation for accident, disease, disablement and death, when these are due to the working conditions. This may perhaps be the first step towards social security in India. The trade union movement in India started in the 19th century. The earliest recorded strike in India took place in Nagpur in 1877. Though trade unions existed, it was the Trade Union Act of 1926 that provided for the registration of trade unions. The Industrial Disputes Act of 1929 provided the machinery for settlement of disputes. The Payment of Wages Act 1936 provided for regular and prompt payment of wages.

The Children's (Pledging of Labour) Act of 1933 was passed to prohibit the pledging of the labour of children. But in spite of this enactment, many parents, in a number of villages continue to pledge children as bonded labourers. The Madras
Children’s Act of 1920 provided that no child under 14 could be imprisoned, and with this law came juvenile courts and juvenile homes. The 1922 Act defined a child as a person under 15 and prevented employment of children below 12 years. The Employment of Children Act of 1938 regulated the employment of children in certain industrial employments. Under this law children below 15 were prohibited to take up employment in places that may be harmful to their health such as bidi making, cement manufacture, cloth printing, dyeing, making fire-works etc. The Beggary Act of 1940 tried to end begging.

There has been considerable social legislation since independence too that improved the social and living conditions of the Indian village folk. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 abolished all caste restrictions as a necessary requirement for a valid marriage. The act enforced monogamy and gave Hindus of all castes the same rights with respect to marriage. It also gave a secular outlook to marriage. Finally the act defined the term ‘Hindu’ in the widest possible manner to include all groups. The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 overcame the prejudice against women getting the property of the father by conferring absolute rights over the property possessed by a Hindu woman. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956 permitted the adoption of a son or a daughter and made adoption more of a secular act. The widow too got the right to adopt. Another landmark was the Dowry Prohibitions Act of 1961 that made the giver as well as the receiver of the dowry punishable. But this is another legislation, which has become ineffective. The Family Courts Act which was passed in 1948 provided for the establishment of Family Courts with a view to promote conciliation and settlement of disputes relating to marriage and family affairs. The Children’s Act of 1960 was passed to provide for the care, protection, welfare, education, and rehabilitation of neglected or delinquent children. The Minimum Wages Act 1948 provided for minimum rates of wages. The Untouchability (Offences) Act 1955 was aimed at improving the condition of the Harijans. But the status of the Harijans in the villages hardly improved because the upper castes continued to practice untouchability. The labour laws too have been changed after independence in the spirit of the Directive Principles in the Constitution. The Factory Act of 1948 raised the minimum age of workers to 14 and made provision for
their annual medical examination. The Motor Transport Workers Act 1961 stipulated 8 hours of work per day and 48 hours per week. The Employment Exchange Act 1959 provided for the registration of the unemployed.

The Employees State Insurance Act 1948 was passed to grant certain benefits to employees in case of sickness, maternity and injury etc. The Employees Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act of 1952, which initiated the institution of Provident Funds including Family Pension Fund and Deposit Linked Insurance Fund for employees working in factories and other establishments, followed this. The schemes were introduced in 1971 and the Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme in 1976. Many Social Welfare Legislation like The Bidi and Cigar Workers' Act 1966, Contract Labour Act 1970, The Bonded Labour System (Abolition Act) 1976, The Cine-Workers Welfare Fund Act 1981 were passed after independence.

Thus, we can see that a number of people-friendly Acts were passed in both the pre-independence and post-independence periods to help the common man and to get rid of many social evils and wicked practices that existed in society. The acts abolishing sati and promoting widow remarriage were landmarks. Many precious lives were lost as a result of the evil practice of sati. With these acts widows could be remarried. These laws gave a new life to many unfortunate women. Similarly acts preventing infanticide and child marriage were a boon to children. These laws put a stop to the practise of killing newborn girl children and marrying children at very early ages. Other laws prevented imprisoning children and paved way for the juvenile homes in the country. The trade union acts also improved the working conditions of the workers in the plantations and in the factories. The legislation, which made dowry illegal, did not make matters better as it failed to have any effect on the society. But the law against untouchability had a remarkable effect. In short, though these laws did not make any drastic and sudden changes, they created great ripples in the society and gradually found their mark. Many of these laws while bettering the conditions of the village people helped to bring them closer to modern trends and practices. For example, when the marriage age of children was increased, it helped them to go to the cities and study in the schools and colleges there,
and thus bring to the villages new and modern ideas, articles and contrivances from the cities. With better working conditions in the factories in the towns and cities, people from the villages flocked into the towns in search of jobs and this led to migration and its problems. Thus the acts passed at different times affected the village and its patterns.

Power Structure

Any discussion of the structures of power in Indian villages has to start with an analysis of the agrarian class structure in post-independent, rural India. Such an analysis reveals four major classes: three classes in the field of agriculture, namely landowners, tenants and labourers, and a fourth class of non-agriculturists. According to Ahuja (1999: 300-02), landowners constitute 22%, tenants 27%, agricultural labourers 31%, and non-agriculturalists about 20% of the rural population. A large majority of the cultivators are marginal cultivators. The available land per family in villages is less than one acre, about 75% of the total sown area is for food crops and about 35% of the total produce is sold by cultivators. The marketing of agricultural produce is largely in the hands of middlemen who have their own interests and who control both credit as well as the disposal of produce. All of this leads to a rather unpleasant economic reality. “A large number of agrarian proletariat, a large number of uneconomic holders of land and a small number of artisans and self-employed people in villages reveal a miserable economic life lived by these people” (Ahuja, 1999:303).

At the same time, Ahuja’s classification of cultivators in rural areas into the three categories of landlords, tenants and labourers is objected to by Thorner (1956:128) and Gupta (1991:261-270) on the ground that one and the same man can belong simultaneously to all three of these categories. A person may himself cultivate a few acres of land he owns, give some land on rent and in emergency may work another’s field as labourer. Thorner has used three terms to analyse the agrarian relations: ‘malik’ for agricultural landlords, ‘kissan’ for working persons (including tenants) and ‘mazdoor’ for agricultural labourers. The ‘maliks’ are of two types; those who are absentee landlords and those who reside in the village in which they own land. These rich landlords wield considerable economic, social and political power. Though the emergence of cooperative
and credit societies in the villages has no doubt affected the power of the 'maliks' and the moneylenders since the villagers no longer depend on them for their money needs, yet they continue to be powerful by virtue of their traditional social status. The 'kissan' and members of his family perform field labour and may also work as agricultural labourers. Generally, the agricultural labourer can find work for wages for only about six months a year in the village. The rest of the period he indulges in some kind of self-employment or is largely jobless. Thus, he essentially lives below the poverty line. The landless ‘mazdoor’ earns a living by working on other people’s land. When unable to find work in villages, the majority of this class migrates to towns and even other states and work as construction or industrial labourers.

It may also be observed that the traditional structures of power in the villages have undergone considerable changes, especially since independence. Traditionally, the power holders in the village may be classified into four groups: those who have power based on the ownership and control of land; those who have power based on their caste; those who have power based on numerical strength, and those who have power because of the positions they hold. In the traditional system, the main contexts of power were the zamindari system; the caste system and the village panchayat. The villagers referred their social, economic and other problems either to the zamindar or to their caste leader or to the village panchayat. The jagirdari and zamindari systems were in fact land revenue systems. The jagirdar was an intermediary between the tiller of the soil and the state, but he behaved practically as the owner of the land as far as the peasants were concerned. He collected revenue from peasants for supporting them and also for the military force which he maintained. The zamindars were big landlords but possessed no title. As Ahuja remarks, “The ownership of land and their economic status were the fundamental sources of jagirdars’ and zamindars’ power in a village” (Ahuja, 1999:306). The caste leaders also had high social status in a village, since caste councils were very powerful and could impose severe sanctions and even ostracise defaulters from the caste. The traditional village panchayats, which were informal organisations, consisted of village elders from amongst all the major castes in the village. The members gathered whenever issues involving the interests of the village were to be decided.
After independence, the *jagirdari* and *zamindari* systems were abolished and many land reforms were introduced which weakened the traditional power structure and created a new power structure. In the place of hereditary leaders and caste leaders, elected persons with political backing became leaders of the village and of the *panchayat*. Thus individual merit or political affiliation, and not caste or class, became an important factor in leadership.

**Self-sufficiency and Change**

There is a tendency to think that life in villages has been self-sufficient and has existed without much change or adaptation from time immemorial. The village was considered to be “a little republic, self-sufficient, having its own functionaries and surviving the ruin of empires” (Johnson, 2000:112). This romantic view of village life was held by many writing history books. For instance, Kumar presents the village as a miniature world self-sufficient in itself and contends that the absence of sharp differences in incomes in the villages creates a climate devoid of conflict and strife (Attwood, 1992:31). But Dumont argues that in such romanticised ideas of the ‘village community’ being self-sufficient and autonomous, the nonegalitarian aspects of village life go unmentioned and unrecorded (Dumont, 1966:158-59). Srinivas also maintains that this represents both an oversimplified and idealized picture of village life and this notion continued with few alterations for more than hundred and fifty years (1994:21).

The idea that villages were self-sufficient and harmonious economic units came about because crops harvested in the village fields enabled the villager to pay taxes to the government, provided food and seeds for the next season, and the means to pay essential artisan and servicing castes such as the carpenter, blacksmith, potter, barber, washer man and priest. The Gandhian concept of the village also centres on the idea of a self-contained or self-reliant economy. The appearance of self-sufficiency in the village was magnified by a caste-wise division of labour. But it can be observed that the transitional village community was not economically very self-sufficient. A close scrutiny reveals a few gaps. For example, salt was not produced in most villages and so also spices, which had to be imported into many villages. Gadgil (1948:69) points out that sugar-cane
farming was limited to certain regions. Similarly oil and jaggery, widely used by villagers, also had to be purchased in towns and weekly markets. Even the co-operation among the villagers was selective and occurred mostly out of necessity. For example, farmers with adjoining plots consulted and negotiated with each other during sowing season in order to plant complementary crops. During the harvest, the villagers pooled their resources and hired trucks to transport their crops to towns. They also shared their water and energy costs from common wells. However, we don’t see many instances of this co-operation extending out to other areas of life in the village. Hence, the romantic notion that the village is harmonious, economically self-sufficient and politically autonomous has been disputed by scholars like Attwood (1992), Bandyopadhyay and Von Eschen, (1988), Srinivas (1994), Wade (1988) and others. In short, it may be better to conceive of the village society as part of a larger system; economically, politically and socially interconnected and interdependent with other villages and towns.

The idea of the unchanging village does not hold up in close scrutiny. For instance, close contact with the nearby towns as a result of progress in transport, communication and information technology has helped the villages to receive the merits as well as the defects of the towns. Many modern amenities due to technical and technological advances have diffused into the villages also. Till a few decades back, the villagers’ only source of drinking water was the open wells, which often caused a number of parasitic diseases. Illnesses due to unclean drinking water were common in India. Now, in many villages drinking water comes from hand operated or motorised water pumps. A long line of women with pots in front of water pumps or wells is a common sight in many villages. Pipe water supply now reaches many villages. Village electrification has also been extensive. This has helped the villagers to use electric fans, televisions, stereo players radios etc. Gobar Gas Technology that uses cow dung and other wastes to create methane gas for fuel purposes has also been introduced. The fuel is mainly used for cooking, lighting, and heating purposes. Dandekar (1980:208) argues that this technology is best suited for many villages.
Newspapers, magazines, radio and television are common in many villages. They give the villagers information about local, national and international politics, economics and weather forecasts. But the primary use of these forms of media is as entertainment. Villagers spend as much as six or seven hours every day enjoying these media. The newspapers are read out loud by a literate member of the family and the other family members pay attention to the news items. For those who do not subscribe to newspapers the village teashop is the alternative. Hartmann’s study of villages in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala in the 1980's reveals that “radios were owned only by those villagers of higher economic, caste and educational status” (1989:195). But this condition has changed and now many villagers of lower economic, caste and educational status own not only radios but also television sets.

The presence of television sets is changing the mores of life in village families. While earlier evenings were spent conversing with family members, friends and neighbours, now they are spent watching television. Instead of going out, people spent more time in front of the ‘idiot box’. People are sleeping much less today than ten years ago and their daily schedule is organized around their favourite programme. Conversation within the household often centres on television programmes. Television is turning the village culture into something that mirrors the city culture. It affects people’s perception of themselves, their society and the world at large. Television also facilitates the introduction of new ideas into traditional societies and helps modernisation. Salzman argues:

Each village, whether rustic or urban, pre-or post-industrial...is becoming more and more global, as, electronically, the world increasingly comes to each village and neighbourhood, hamlet and settlement, quarter, and suburb. (1993:1)

In conclusion, it may be said that the Indian rural society, though it has a very rich and ancient past and is quite different from the urban society, has also changed much due to social, scientific and technological developments. It is also true that the rural societies are not uniform throughout the country and differ from place to place according to their
geographical conditions and traditions, and their proximity or distance from towns, cities and centres of learning and industry.

The Village as a Conceptual/Mental Space.

The village is also definable in terms of its culture of belief systems, knowledge streams, and ritualistic practices that its inhabitants share. Perhaps in the Indian village, this feature is particularly relevant, since the centuries-old traditional culture, is nowhere better reflected than in the realm of the average villager, with his firm faith in the notions, attitudes and systems handed down through the generations by his forefathers. Beliefs and rituals thus play a very important role in the life of the villagers. Most of their social and cultural prejudices and attitudes can be explained in terms of beliefs that have a long history. It is both a history of their tribulations against the forces of recurrent calamities, as well as a part of their cultural heritage. Though these beliefs have been changing during the last few decades, possibly owing to the rising tide of modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation, it is a fact that this internal field of faith and belief remains largely intact even today.

Most people in the village are favourably inclined towards religion. They are basically religious and conservative in outlook. Religion not only controls the various aspects of life, but because religion and culture are intimately related, it influences the personality of the individuals, their conduct and behaviour, their philosophy of life, their modes of thinking, and their customs and traditions. Prayers are performed as a part of religious duty in order to placate the Gods and for favourable results. Sacrifices and rituals are also done for the same purpose. The purohits and sanyasis move about and propagate the principles and characteristics of the religion. In other words, it affects the very character of society at every level, and is indeed the ‘Alpha’ and ‘Omega’ of Indian life.

Since the world is considered transitory and an illusion (maya) in Hinduism, the fact that the highest goal of the Hindu is to eliminate earthly concerns, desires and personal existence itself has introduced a large element of asceticism, intellectualism,
detachment and withdrawal. In no other country has so many renounced the world, and is there so much fasting and mortification as part of faith. However, as practiced in the villages, Hinduism certainly contains a worldly outlook. It means that the regulation and influence of the world forms a part of religion in the villages. According to Dube (1990: 261), Hinduism as it is practiced in the villages is not the Hinduism of the classical, philosophical systems of India, for it possesses neither the metaphysical heights nor the abstraction of the latter. It is a religion of feasts and festivals in which prescribed rituals cover all the major crises of life. In addition to the Hindus, the village population also includes the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and even Jains and Buddhists. Most often these people belonging to different religious denominations co-exist peacefully and amicably.

Along with religion, there are a number of other traditional knowledge systems that feature in the lives of the villagers. Before the arrival of the English system of medicine, people mainly depended on traditional Ayurvedic doctors, the vaidyas, when they fell ill. Most often, the occupation of the vaidya was a hereditary one, with the knowledge and practice staying within certain families and being handed down through the generations. Often, if the head of a vaidya family knew a particular herb for curing a particular disease, or a specialized kind of treatment, he kept that knowledge secret and on his deathbed handed over the secret to one of his sons. Vaidyas were not available in every village. But in a cluster of three or four villages there was always one:

Some of the vaidyas read Sanskrit and Ayurvedic Shastras and had passed the Ayurvedic examinations from Sanskrit institutions. They were learned persons and tried to diagnose diseases and treat them on the basis of their knowledge derived from the celebrated works of Charaka and Susruta. (Misra, 1998:60)

The Ayurvedic system depended on herbal drugs and so the treatment was prolonged and the recovery slow. Many suffered from malnutrition and epidemics like cholera, smallpox, malaria, filaria and other diseases, which worsened the situation. Child mortality rate was also quite high as there were no trained nurses or midwives in the villages. There was also little sense of hygiene. Allopathic treatment and the use of allopathic drugs were extended to the rural areas only by 1920. It took still more time for
the functioning of an efficient medical system in the villages. Instances of fake sadhoos appearing at religious places and administering drugs for the cure of diseases to credulous patients were quite frequent. Illiterate people had the firm belief that epidemics like cholera and small pox were caused by the curses of goddesses and that other diseases like high fever and diarrhoea were caused by evil spirits. Therefore communal worship of goddesses at the time of epidemics and the treatment of sick children by the tantriks who chanted mantras to cure them were common.

After medicine, astrology had an important place in the village. The astrologers in the villages mainly prepared the horoscopes of newborn babies and studied the horoscopes of people who came to consult them and predicted their present and future calamities or brighter prospects according to the planetary positions in the horoscope. They even predicted the life spans of different individuals. Their services were in great demand for the comparison of the horoscopes of the bride and bridegroom and to fix an auspicious hour for marriage. They also told people the best time for thread ceremonies, laying foundations of buildings, house warming, etc. The astrologers also had the ritual function of reading the almanac of the New Year and predicting the general prospects of the state and its people, the prospects of rains, crops, prosperity and adversity.

It must be noted that the belief in astrology is based on the human fear of the uncertain and unknown future. Most people in rural areas, and even some educated urban people, believe that the future events of one's life can be predicted through astrology and that the course of unfavourable events can be counteracted by propitiation and worship of planetary gods. Thus, for beginning important events, for serious illnesses and at the apprehension of unavoidable calamities, astrologers are consulted. The pundits played a major role in the popularisation of astrology. They were learned Brahmin scholars, who were teachers of Sanskrit in schools. They taught grammar, literature, Ayurveda, astrology and other branches of Sanskrit literature. They were highly respected in the rural society and their advice was always respected. They were not priests because priesthood was practiced by Brahmins of lesser position.
Superstitious beliefs were very common and each village had a bundle of such beliefs. As Zaidi says: "It is generally believed that the simple village people in almost all developing countries are fatalistic in their attitude to the supernatural and the unseen" (1970:91). The Indian villagers were no exception and were ardent believers in fate. Their strong belief was that everything was predestined and however much they tried, they could not change what was bound to happen. In a sense, this was a kind of fervent fatalism, which Spiro defines thus:

Fatalism generally refers to a ready and uncritical explanation of a phenomenon in terms of the doings of unknown agent or agents. It is characterized by a rigid belief in the supernatural and a passive dependence on Nature’s taking her own course. (Spiro, 1966:78)

Fatalists believe that man has no control over his means of livelihood and that God assigns it to him. To most villagers man is a helpless creature. They are resigned to fate and will not believe that any man could change what has already been ordained for him. They are rigid in this belief and therefore are usually indifferent and even apathetic to making efforts for the improvements over their situation. The greatest resistance that has been put against the family planning programme is related to villagers’ fatalistic faith that births and deaths cannot be controlled by human effort. Another expression of their faith in the efficiency of prayer and the limitations of man’s control of nature is their attitude towards scientific medicine. They have a firm belief that if a man is destined to die no medicine can save him. In connection with the fatalistic view of life, the villagers performed a number of rituals at various times to propitiate the gods and to curry their favour, or in other words to get the gods to intervene in fate on their behalf. A questionable practice that goes in the name of such rituals is the animal sacrifice at shrines and temples of goddesses. In many village temples, a large number of male goats are sacrificed to make the goddesses happy. Sometimes, in its extreme form, this takes the shape of human sacrifice to propitiate the goddesses.

Some other popular beliefs and rituals will be of interest. Though, generally, there is not too much difference among the different castes in the modes of observance of
many similar kinds of rituals, there are also certain rituals which are performed exclusively by some castes. Various rituals are performed during the life cycle of a person. When a child is born, the first ceremony is held on the sixth day at which time the child is usually named. Another ceremony is performed when the child eats solid food for the first time. The next ceremony is the cutting of the hair. Piercing of the ears follows. Previously the ears of both male and female children were pierced. But now it is done for the females only. While the above is applicable to most castes, the thread ceremony is observed primarily by the Brahmins.

There are innumerable agricultural rituals observed by the rural folk. At the commencement of the sowing season, the farmers invite the priest to perform some prayers and give religious blessings to assure a successful harvest. Prayers and a feast are arranged at the time of harvest too. Cultivators in some areas do not sow seeds or transplant the saplings on Tuesdays and Saturdays, as these days are considered inauspicious for sowing. In many places the first harvest is done on a Thursday or Friday. There is also a belief that if anyone puts oil on his head and then touches the fruit bearing trees, their growth will be retarded.

There are many other superstitions and practices which have been mixed up with religion, worship and rites, and which have been communicated by the older generations to the younger generations. Many of them are followed by the younger generations mechanically, though they realise that there is no meaning in them. Many such beliefs are associated with inauspicious functions like funeral rites and auspicious functions like marriage and thread ceremonies. In funeral rites, for example, it is believed that the spirit of the dead moves around in the surroundings where the person lived, until the relatives of the dead person perform certain rites to propitiate the spirit and help it to attain heavenly status. The village folk strongly believe in the supernatural and invoke the mercy of these forces whenever they are in danger or feel that all means of help have been exhausted. In matters of diseases, floods and other natural calamities, they perform a number of ritualistic ceremonies implying their superstitious beliefs in the unseen. Another confirmed belief of the villagers is in ghosts and spirits. An important
supernatural being is the ‘Jinn’ (genii), now considered a part of the total belief system of the Muslims. There might also be a trace of Hindu concept of the demon in these beliefs. Innumerable stories about ghosts are narrated by mothers and grandmothers to children. As Karim explains:

There is a wide range of popular beliefs among the villagers about supernatural beings living about the community unseen. These beliefs, besides being strong motivational forces in social behaviour, indicate the basic insecurity of life in the village. (1955:29-41).

There are many superstitious beliefs also among villagers. If an owl hoots at might when a person is lying ill in the house, it is believed that the person will soon die, The first sight, in the morning, of a barren women is considered inauspicious to begin a day. If a married women dreams of fruit trees, she will bear a child in the near future. When one’s palm itches it indicates that he will receive money. There are also beliefs about what one should and should not do. One should not comb one’s hair or look in a mirror at night, for it will shorten one’s life and make him poor. Cutting nails or hair at night would make one poor. When a child breaks its baby teeth, it should be deposited in a rat hole. By doing so his teeth will become fine, sharp and even. These beliefs about supernatural beings, the popular superstitions and the fatalistic attitudes of the villagers are a part of community life in Indian villages. These beliefs are so important to the villagers that no logic or convincing proof of their falsity will have any effect. The child learns of these beliefs as a part of his cultural conditioning, both at home and in the village and then internalises them as a part of his personality. These beliefs constitute his inner world of meaning and determine his behaviour in many situations. These attitudes must be taken into account in any understanding of the villager’s social behaviour.

Thus, we see that the people in the villages were highly religious and offered prayers and sacrifices to different gods and goddesses. They strongly believed in fate and thought that everything was predestined. They blamed their fate for all the disasters in their life. It is perhaps the fear of the future that made them believe in astrology. The villagers often went to the astrologers and consulted them before every important event
and fixed an auspicious time. There were many rituals connected with the life of a villager. As agriculture was the main occupation of the villagers, some rituals were connected with agriculture also. The uneducated villagers were gullible and often superstitious too. They believed in the supernatural forces.

**The Changing Scene Of Indian Rural Life**

Indian society continues to be an overwhelmingly rural or agricultural society. In contrast to the tribal and pastoral societies, the village community is socially more cohesive. This is due to kinship bonds and the possession of agricultural lands. The Indian villages present picturesque scenes in spite of the scarcity and poverty experienced by the village folk. Villages still abound in fruit trees, ponds, paddy fields and greenery. There are small clusters of hamlets surrounded by banana and palm trees and mango groves. The houses are mostly thatched with brick or mud walls. An important characteristic of villages is the village market, which is held once or twice a week and which serves as the meeting place for persons from the surrounding villages. People bring their marketable articles to sell and take home items for consumption. The village men and women come to the markets in their best dress and buy all the things necessary for their household from the markets. Vendors from far away places come to the village market to sell their wares. The village market is often a colourful place buzzing with activity. There are different types of shops in the village that cater to the needs of the villagers. One can see grain shops, tea stalls, shops that sell betel leaves and nuts, cigarettes and bidis. There may also be commercial establishments like flour mills, cycle repair shops, tailors’ shop, textile stores etc. Villages often have some kind of elementary schools and places of worship. Zaidi, who has made a study of the village, says:

The simple villagers earn their subsistence partly through cultivation of smallholdings and partly through other lucrative subsidiary occupations like selling milk, fishing, making handicrafts and doing manual labour. The personal impression that the villager is a lazy man who whiles away his times either in useless gossip or in sleeping and procreating is not well founded. (1970:16)
Almost till the end of the nineteenth century the Indian village society was quite traditional and fairly stagnant. The system of production and the economic and social relationships remained largely unchanged for generations. Ancient customs and rules determined social and economic relationships. In a sense society was a closed system, permitting little alteration or little change. Though the economy was opened up to the impacts of world economic forces, due to the impact of import and export systems during the British period, most of the rural economy was self-sufficient. Village production and distribution systems were highly traditional, without innovations or experiments, and the villagers remained for the most part immobile and rooted to their lands.

After independence, a sea change took place in every aspect of the Indian village life. This change has not been confined to social life only, but has also affected economic, political, moral, material and spiritual life; in fact every facet of life in the village. This process of adjustment and acclimatisation is an inevitable part of social life because the dynamic character of the society can be maintained only through changes. The architects of modern India were determined to make changes in all fields especially in the rural field as it was the rural society that was infested with the evils of conservatism, caste system, untouchability, lack of education, and so on.

A great change has come over the attitudes of the villagers towards the different factors of life. Villagers who were the devotees of agriculture from time immemorial have changed their preference to other occupations. They now prefer other jobs with a stable and fixed income. Even five or six decades back, their attitude to agriculture was quite positive with the population less and the yield more. The amenities of life were cheaper and there were very few things within the individual level of aspirations that were beyond him. But later the demands of existence increased and the pressure of population was felt more acutely. The holdings were divided and further sub-divided leading to proportionate decrease in the deployment of resources.

There are many reasons for the widespread dissatisfaction of the villagers. They have no steady income. Their crops do not give sufficient yield and so they do not have enough money for household needs. Their loans and debts are on the rise without any hope
of repayment. The widespread diseases and the lack of medical and educational facilities have brought a sense of helplessness and economic insecurity to the villagers. While many see no way for the alleviation of their difficulties, some expect a change for the better when their sons grow up. In the traditional Indian village, with its joint families living in caste groups in different parts of the village, there was certain solidarity though there may be all kinds of factions and quarrels within the village between castes, within the castes and between the families. When the village people move into cities they generally try to retain the same kind of solidarity by settling down in a particular part of town. But with the development of new localities as a result of town planning, and also the non-availability of suitable locations, families of different casts and different religions find themselves living in one urban block and probably miss the old village solidarity. It is in this context that many villagers feel that their lot has not changed during the last sixty years. They feel that if things have changed or improved at all, the beneficiaries are not they themselves but others living elsewhere. Only a few feel that their situation has improved. Desiring a greater and assured economic security and social prestige, the villagers who are farmers wish for occupations as teachers, businessmen, or government officers:

The village folk no longer consider the cultivation of one’s own land respectable, rewarding or giving psychological compensation. For them a job — even if of low income — is respectable, rewarding and psychologically satisfying. Village life has few comforts to offer and the older villagers enthusiastically encourage their wards to take up jobs in the urban areas. (Zaidi, 1970:53)

In the village of olden days, the older people were looked upon as repositories of knowledge and wisdom. But with modern formal education, introduction of new sources of knowledge like books, newspapers, radio, television, Internet, etc. the ability of the elders cannot remain unchanged. This is one of the reasons why there is today the general feeling that the young lack respect for the elders. In the traditional rural society the illiterate youngster had to go to the experienced elder to get information. But now this is no longer needed and the older people feel neglected.
With the high emphasis given to education, the villagers are sending their children to schools and colleges. Only very seldom do they send their children to the old model Sanskrit schools. Women’s education also has received great stimulus in the post-independence period. As a result of education, the belief in superstitions, ghosts and other supernatural things have greatly lessened. Rural electrification has broken the darkness of the village to some extent and also the belief in ghosts. Besides, young people have started to question the beliefs and practices for which there is no evident rationale. There is also a marked change in the condition of women, landless workers, coolies and children etc. Conservatism is on the decline and new values and new patterns of life are emerging.

Industrialisation has affected the life of the people in the villages. There have been three important effects of industrialisation on family organisation: First, the family, which was a principal unit of production, has been transformed into a consumption unit. Instead of all family members working together in an integrated economic enterprise, a few male members go out of the home to earn the family’s living. This has affected not only the traditional structure of the joint family but also the relations among its members. Secondly, factory employment has freed young adults from direct dependence upon their families. As their wages have made them financially independent, the authority of the head of the household has weakened further and in many cases, along with men, their wives also have started working and earning. This has affected intra-family relations to some extent. Finally, children have ceased to be economic assets and have become liabilities.

A major source for the change of the Indian village has been the process of modernisation. The process of modernisation can also be approached in terms of economic development. It involves a change from the traditional techniques of production toward the application of scientific knowledge; in areas of agriculture, from subsistent agriculture towards commercial production using improved seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, tractors etc.; in the area of industries, from the use of human and animal power to the use of power-driven machines. Development of rapid modes of
transportation and communication through use of modern technology is another result. As Nagpaul opinions:

It involves a transformation of social, political, and economic organisation, from change-resistant, sacred outlooks to change-ready, secular outlooks, from personal bonds to impersonal relations, from status-based relations to contract based relations. (1996:368)

With all these changes, the rate of urbanisation became quite fast that at least one third of the total population now live in cites and towns. There is also a contemporary problem of over-urbanisation, as a result of migration from rural areas at a rate higher than the expansion of employment opportunities in the cities. Most migrants eke out a living in the various service occupations resulting in the rapid growth and expansion of urban slums. The main feature of modernisation is the building up of an open society in which individuals of talent, enterprise and training can find places in the society appropriate to their achievements. Let us now look at the results of urbanisation and its effects on the village community. Ramachandran defines the characteristics of an urban place as follows:

A population of not less than 5000, a demographic density of not less than 400 persons per square kilometre, and 75 per cent or more of the working population engaged in non-agricultural activities like manufacturing, trade and commerce, service, etc. are said to be the important characteristics of a town/city or ‘urban’ place. (1998:101)

Rural and urban communities may be distinguished from each other on the basis of several criteria like occupation, size, density of population, environment, homogeneity-heterogeneity, social stratification, mobility and system of interaction. In addition, while rural social organisation is caste-based, urban social organisation is class-based and largely secular (D’Souza, 1985 and ICSSR Report, 1974:161). Rural-urban interaction is important because urbanisation and urban growth have their impact on rural areas; and activities in rural areas have their effect on the towns and nearby cities. The
rural people depend on the urban centres for their banking and credit needs, purchase of agricultural equipments and other supplies, sale of farm products and commercial recreation. Nagpaul says that urban centres depend a lot on village areas:

The urban sector is dependent on the rural sector for food supply, cheap labour, and vast market of its manufactured goods. The urban professionals like doctors, lawyers, etc. draw a large number of their patients/clients from rural masses because hospitals and courts are situated in towns and cities. (1996:155-156)

Another change seen is the development of a rural-urban fringe around cities. The cities have penetrated into rural areas to a distance of 14-15 km. As a result, the villages in the fringe area undergo a process of change which manifests itself in changes in land uses within the village; occupational changes, and changes in the social and economic life styles of the people of the village.

A major phenomenon that affects rural-urban relationships is migration. According to Prasad, “urbanisation is the movement of population from rural to urban areas” (2003:384). He holds that urbanisation involves not only movement of population to cities but also changes in the migrants’ attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour patterns. Most rural migrants who move to urban areas are young males who take up unskilled and semi-skilled occupations. Even those ruralites who receive higher education prefer to settle down in cities. This migration from rural to urban areas exerts pressures on urban public services and creates problems of social disorganisation. The natural environment of the ruralites is different from artificial environment of the urbanities. Rural work is determined by seasons and weather while urban work is carried out indoors in predictable conditions. Both sectors, therefore, develop somewhat distinctive sub-cultures of their own which further shape their social institutions and personalities. More and more people are moving from rural to urban areas, draining off young males from the rural sector, feminising the rural household, increasing rural-urban contacts, and diffusing urban ways of life far and wide into the villages.
In modern times, migration has also been identified as a development-fostering process. The mobility of human populations all over the world has become an important component of economic development and social change. Throughout the developing world, the rates of rural urban migration continue to exceed the rates of urban job creation and to surpass greatly the capacity of both industry and urban social services to absorb this labour effectively:

Migration today is being increasingly looked upon as the major contributing factor to the ubiquitous phenomenon of urban surplus labour and as a force which continues to exacerbate already serious urban employment problems caused by growing economic and structural imbalances between urban and rural areas. (Torado, 1967:1-2)

Rural-urban migration is not only an integral part of industrialisation and economic development but it may also become a major instrument of social change both at the places of origin as well as those of destination. The urban setting is the fertile ground for the generation of social and economic changes and these are spread in rural areas by the process of rural-urban migration. Rural-urban migration in India is a search for economic progress. In the majority of cases, the 'push' factor is more powerful than the 'pull' factor. The person who migrates has to take care of his personal needs and requirements and also the well being of his parent family and other relatives at the place of his origin, in addition to his own nuclear family, which stays with him either in the city or remains back in the village. Migration of adults is to a great extent economically motivated. Economic incentives play a main role in the decision to migrate. The migrants almost always move from places of lower economic opportunities to areas of greater potential opportunities. Migration has attracted people from all socio-economic and educational strata of the society. Irrespective of their educational attainments and occupational skills, people move out of the village in search of employment. The rural distress is so acute that there is a one-way traffic in the movement of populations, i.e. from rural areas to urban areas. Migration in reverse direction is very rare, except when
compelled by non-availability of jobs, problems of adjustment, emotional strains and other compelling factors.

The migrants contribute to the economic progress of their family and their village in many ways. One major consequence of migration is the transfer of cash or other resources to the migrant's family remaining in the village. "This is more correct in the case of rural to urban migration and not rural to rural migration which results in much lower remittances, owing to lower earning capacity of the migrant" (Connell et al, 1976:92). Actually, it is the migrants placed in the lower social and economic categories in the city who contribute more than those placed at higher socio-economic levels. The former type obtain only low-paid jobs in the cities and have to keep their families at the places of their origin, which necessitates their sending regular remittances to the villages. The latter type is more cultured and status-conscious, and keeps their families with them and hence spends a larger part of their earnings in the city. The remittances from the migrants raise rural incomes and consumptions. They also encourage technological changes. The money may be spent on productive investment and development and diversification of agricultural or non-agricultural activities or spent on having education or to relieve the poverty of those who remain in the village. The money may also be used unproductively and may even erode work habits since resources are expended without the need for any effort on the part of the recipient. The urban life has cut the roots of the joint family system and has reinforced the nuclear family system. Cities provide immense opportunities for education and new occupations. Those who come to cities and take up new occupations different from their traditional family occupations, show a greater shift in their attitudes than those who follow the traditional occupations.

The village society today has changed a lot due to urbanisation. It mirrors cosmopolitan models of life. It is very common to see cars and motorcycles rushing along the village roads. Modern home appliances like electric fans, television sets, refrigerators, gas stoves, steel cupboards, etc. decorate village houses. More people build latrines next to their homes or attached to their homes instead of defecating in nearby fields. Village teenagers have given up the traditional village attire and now wear jeans and T-shirts and
shoes. Girls wear modern dresses and copy the modern hairstyles they see on television. Thus all through the village, one can see the reflections of urban styles of life and work. People in the village spend more time in watching television. Villagers have begun to imbibe many of the ideas, images, principles, and values they see on television and evidence suggests that their behaviour begins to reflect some of those values and images.

The migrants not only send money to the members of their family or other relatives in the village but also provide economic and other kinds of assistance in various ways. On their visits to the village they bring various items from the city, which spread urban culture in rural areas. Items such as radio and television help the rural masses in their contact with the outside world and in enlightening them with new ideas and thoughts. Though these items become the property and 'status symbol' of the parent family, the whole village community is greatly profited. The migrants also make their contribution to village welfare activities such as the construction of schools, clinics and community centres, and the repair of roads, wells, etc. Connell et al opinions:

A steady and substantial flow of remittances seem to occur where migrants have a strong commitment to return; where the native village households are exceptionally poor, and most clearly, where the original act of migration was an attempt to get relieved from this poverty. (1976:93)

The migrant also transmits urban ideas or customs like the discipline of the workplace, the concept of fair wages, ideas of health and hygiene, perceptions about the usefulness of books, newspapers and education, notions such as dignity of labour, and so on. Although the migrants may choose to live at the new urban workplace they invariably think of their village with love, pride, allegiance and nostalgia.

Urbanisation has created many problems such as overcrowding and slums, unemployment and poverty, crime and juvenile delinquency, drug trafficking and pollution, violence and sexual harassment of women, tensions and strains etc. According to the 1998 UNI report (The Hindustan Times, 9 May 1998), between one-fourth and half of the urban population in India's largest cities lives in makeshift shelters and slums.
Overcrowding encourages deviant behaviour, spreads diseases, and creates conditions for mental illness, alcoholism, and riots. Another effect of dense urban living is people's apathy and indifference. City dwellers do not want to get involved in other people's affairs. Water supply and drainage are very poor in cities. The transportation and traffic in all Indian cities are extremely unsatisfactory. So is the case of sanitation. Many Indian cities and towns pollute the environment by discharging its sewage and industrial effluents into the nearby rivers. The exhaust fumes of motor vehicles make city life terribly unhealthy.

The population movement from the rural to the urban areas has also led to a decline of authoritarian power. The individual has started functioning without any restrictive familial controls. Formerly, when the man of the family worked and all family members helped him in his work, there was more intimacy among the family members but now since he works in the industry, away from the family, the intimacy in relations has been adversely affected. The effect of industrialisation on the pattern of family relationships is also evident from the decline in self-sufficiency of the family, and the attitudinal changes towards the family. Industrialisation has, thus, contributed markedly in the creation of a new social and physiological setting in which the survival of the early joint family with its authoritarian organisation has become very difficult.

Another stimulus, which helped change, was westernisation. It implies change in dress, diet, style of eating manners, etc., on the lines of western practices. An important change that has taken place with westernisation is in the medium of instruction. With the introduction of English education, schools were thrown open to all people. It helped the young to seek government employment and jobs in good commercial establishments. Western education also paved a way for vital change in the outlooks and attitudes of the Indian youth. Exposure to English literature, history and political institutions made them adopt a humanitarian outlook and promoted in them an active concern for the welfare of human beings irrespective of caste, creed and other considerations. It also promoted, egalitarianism, secularism, rationalism and a critical outlook. As the style of living changed, many gave up their inhibitions toward meat eating and alcohol. Western styles
of dressing, dining, learning to appreciate western music, participating in ball dances, etc. became common. Humanitarian outlook among the westernised elite led to social reform movements and later on, to the independence movement. They were aware of the existing social evils like child marriage, taboos against widow marriage, seclusion of women, hostility to women’s education, untouchability, taboos against intercaste marriage and intercaste dining.

Sanskritisation or Brahminisation had put a taboo on meat eating and alcohol consumption in contrast to Vedic religion, which approved both. Westernisation promoted both. Highly westernised Brahmins shed their inhibitions about the two. Among the lower classes there were no taboos against widowhood, divorce and remarriage. The wife did not look upon her husband as a deity. In one sense, their customs were in tune with westernisation. A section of the Brahmins adopted western ways because of the prestige of the ways of the masters and the monetary benefits of secure careers in the government and commercial offices. The lower castes chose westernisation as the means to enable them to move up in status in the society and to some extent to escape from the inequities of the caste system.

Politically, the villagers have become more conscious and the frequent elections to different political bodies have made them conscious that they have some role to play in the administration of their country. There is a great deal of political activity in the villages these days, both in the positive sense as well as in the negative sense. Common people have learned to exert pressure on the local leaders and members of the local bodies and legislative assemblies for the redressal of their grievances, gaining of local facilities and other general benefits. But at the same time, pressure is also being wielded for attaining personal favours. In addition, the village people have also been divided on party lines and often local problems are taking party colours and there are tensions and factional fights which were not prevalent before the forties. But still, many of the villagers are still relatively ignorant of the larger political developments in the state or at the centre and are yet to fully understand the importance of their right of franchise.
In the economic sphere, many classes of people who controlled the economic life and played vital roles in the lives of the villagers have declined or disappeared. Some old classes continue without improvement in their conditions, while some other classes continue with a change in their positions. Some new classes have also emerged. The landlords have disappeared and the money lending classes have declined, though the new generations of old moneylender families have directed their business to other lucrative avenues. The marginal farmers, tenants, agricultural labourers and artisans continue to follow the same occupation and remain as poor as before, while a small group of solvent farmers and traders have become more prosperous and form the class of the new rich in the villages. These families are often successors of the previous moneylenders or large farmer families. Now they have assumed the roles of contractors, traders and small businessmen. At the same time, institutional agents of economic change are also making their presence felt in the villages:

The village people are coming into contact with the agents of economic change, namely agricultural extension officers, the village level workers, officials of the banks and co-operative societies, family planning officials, block development officers, etc. Many of these officials are stationed in the villages and have become a part of the village people. (Zaidi, 1970:45)

Before the 1940's these types of people were not there in the villages and the villagers came into contact only with the officers of land revenue, irrigation, tax collection and the court. Many steps have been taken to improve the rural economy and thus the rural society. The abolition of the Zamindari system was one such. As a result, the vested interests in agriculture were removed and people without land received land. The Bhoodan movement of Acharya Vinoba Bhave accelerated this phase. Later, various steps were taken to change the land tenure system and also to bring about reforms in land ownership. Provisions were made to give land to the landless and the members of the weaker sections were indemnified from the evil effects of the traditional moneylenders. As a result of the nationalisation of banks in 1969, not only were new branches opened in the rural areas, but also institutional finance was made available to the agriculturists,
artisans, and other village folk. Because of the availability of loans at nominal interest rates, agricultural production went up and new cottage and small-scale industries were set up in the rural areas.

The abolishment of Privy Purse, the nationalisation of banks and other steps, which were part of a larger agenda of government initiated socialism, weakened the institution of capitalism in the country. The industries that affected the life of the ordinary people were taken up by the government. Because of the public sector, the institution of private enterprise which is a part of the capitalistic order and based on private profit motive and exploitation of man by man did get a jolt. All these things had their repercussions on the village life and economy. The Five Year Plans and the land reforms after independence helped in raising the standard of life of the villagers. The traditional method of cultivation has given way to the scientific mode of cultivation. Artificial fertilisers, high-yield seeds, tractors, modern agricultural methods and irrigation facilities have improved the agricultural production.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw a rapid expansion in educational facilities. Educational institutions were established for women alone and so women who had hitherto received little education could advance their learning. Children were trained by expert teachers in institutions and were made fit for good professions. The traditional schools that transmitted only traditional knowledge were restricted to the children of the upper caste. With the starting of innumerable educational institutions, the Brahmins and other castes changed over to secular education. English education enabled the young men and women to enter government services, banks and other concerns. The new education system also helped to create a changed outlook regarding the vital aspects of life.

The village occupations too have felt the wave of change. The labourers and artisans were usually paid in grain and cloth for the work done. But with the passage of time they began to be paid in money. Many of the artisan families also gave up their traditional jobs and went seeking pastures new. Many village carpenters and cobblers moved to towns. Some opened shops in urban areas. Although, more villagers have taken to the habit of wearing footwear, the village cobblers have little work to do. The
availability of factory made sandals and shoes have left them with only repair work. So most of them have given up their profession and have taken to other odd jobs. The work of the village blacksmith has been declining as people have started buying factory-made implements from the markets. The flooding of the markets with steel cutlery also adversely affected the village blacksmiths. The business of the potters too is on the decline. They are facing competition from the aluminium industry and more recently from the steel and plastic industry. The oilmen also find it a losing battle. People no longer buy oil from them. The old practice of carrying oil on the head and selling it from door to door is no more. Oil is available in cans, bottles and pouches at reasonable prices in shops. The village confectioners are also now rarely seen in the villages, with the arrival of modern bakeries, pastry shops and packed sweetmeats that can be preserved for a long period. The introduction of new technologies in village handicrafts has been another reason for the decline of the old crafts. So, as Jannuzi remarks, “New goods and classes of people have entered the village. Large number of persons from each village has gone out of it to distant towns or cities to work. The closed and rigid society is broken and a free society is emerging” (Jannuzi, 1990:108).

Among the service classes, though the barber is still in high demand, the number of barber families in the villages is on the decline. Some have opened saloons in urban areas and have so modernised their job that their income is much higher than the customary income of their counterparts in the village. At the same time, members of the barber families who have received education in schools and colleges seek other more lucrative jobs. As for the washermen, with the widespread use of washing machines, and with polyester cloth, detergents and washing materials available everywhere, there is an increasing amount of home washing and hence the washing loads of the washermen are also getting reduced. With the disappearance of palanquins and with the advent of the large scale processing and distribution of milk, the milkmen have largely lost their caste functions. The milkmen families now supply milk to nearby semi-urban centres and milk societies. With the arrival of freezers, refrigerators, milk pouches and milk powder the milkmen are not in great demand. They are now engaged in agriculture and other occupations.
As faith in daily rituals and associated habits are declining, the demand for the priest is also less. But the traditional needs for the service of the priest on special occasions such as birth, marriage, thread and funeral ceremonies and community or individual *poojas* of gods and goddesses still continue. On the one hand, new members of priestly families have in many cases received good education and have become doctors, teachers, officers, clerks, etc. and thereby have moved away from their family profession. On the other, a number of priestly families find themselves in abject poverty, and are not equipped for modern professions. It appears that in the near future, the priests will become so scarce that people will have to run to distant villages to arrange a priest for a special function or cease to employ priests altogether.

Despite changes, the basic structure of the village with its cultivators, essential artisans and service classes still stands as a rock, though with some erosions:

There is no revolutionary change in the village production structure. From decade to decade, in the working of the village production structure, some old things fall into disuse and some new things from the cities are introduced. But the old system moves on assimilating the new things from time to time. (Misra, 1998: 145)

Any observer can notice the old and new elements in the village society in an important social function like marriage in a big landowner’s family. The agricultural labourers are busy in drawing water, cleaning courtyards, fixing *shamianas*, peeling vegetables and doing many other sundry jobs. However, the weaver does not supply any clothing for the marriage anymore. Many pieces of handloom cloth used in the rituals of the marriage are purchased from the cloth store in the market place. But the carpenter and blacksmith still supply the wooden and iron articles necessary for the marriage rituals. So also does the potter supplying the earthen pots necessary as auspicious articles. There is some dependence on them as the articles supplied by them are not easily available in the village market place. Such articles are made to order. All other commodities used are purchased from the market. The drummers and the conch blowers play important roles as they did in the past. If it is a son’s marriage, a band party from the town accompanies the groom while the village drummers perform the auspicious ritual duties in the groom’s
house. The traditional socio-economic structure and the customary relation gradually wear out. But it is not an abrupt or revolutionary transformation.

The pre-independence period was the period of *vaidyas* and traditional Ayurvedic doctors. In the 1930s, allopathic medicine gained ground. But, since medical services were seldom available in emergencies, the villagers did not have a high opinion about the dispensaries. From the late fifties, however, the health care scene changed. Medical colleges and hospitals were started. More primary health centres were established in villages. Besides, taluk and district hospitals also started functioning and the number of qualified private practitioners working in semi-urban and rural areas also increased. This also brought about a sea change in the attitudes of the villagers, probably aided by higher levels of education: “The superstitious beliefs that the diseases are caused by the goddesses and evil spirits have vanished, to a great extent. Vaccination and inoculation are common in the villages” (Misra, 1998:103). Due to advanced transport facilities, serious cases are being easily brought to bigger hospitals in towns. Now people are being given free medical aid and also provided with free medical services as a result of which the villages are no more haunting places of diseases. The span of life and longevity has gone up. The maternity and infant mortality rates are also diminishing rapidly. Undeniably, all these have improved the quality of life in the average village.

The rapid expansion of transport and telecommunication facilities has also contributed to the opening up of the village. The availability of good roads and modern transport facilities, and the presence of radio, television, telephone, newspapers, and of late even computers, the Internet and mobile phones means that the village economy and village society are no longer isolated and closed as before. The habits, fashions and practices of distant lands now spread quickly even to remote villages. This, of course, has positive as well as negative effects. As Kuppuswami notes, “Many evils of the city life such as liquor shops and sale of drugs were unknown in the villages decades back. Even teashops at different village centres were not common before the Second World War” (2000:111).
The common village sights that one saw some fifty years back are no more seen in the villages. The village drummers who used to come along the narrow path in the paddy fields announcing the festival in the local temple are no more seen. In olden days: “The Kurava women came at noon with their parrot cages and the Chetti women with infants on their hips. Saturdays were alms days. The beggars got rice and clothes and sometimes gruel” (Surayya, 1998:19).

These people are very seldom seen now and remain only in the nostalgic memories of the older generation. Thus, the old form of villages is seen no more. As seen earlier, the villages are fast disappearing now. The recent globalisation and advance in technology has sounded the death knell of the villages. As towns are overcrowded and land is cheaper in the villages, people turn to villages for starting new factories, educational institutions, housing complexes, airports, techno parks, container terminals and special economic zones (SEZ). The recent incident in West Bengal where the villagers were evicted from their lands to start factories for the corporate giants is an example. Hence, a day may come when it will be difficult to see a village.