CHAPTER 5
THE VILLAGE IN SOCIOLOGY/SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

In the preceding chapters we have seen how the village came to occupy a pride of place in the colonial and nationalist constructions of Indian society. We have also seen how the idea of the village served different purposes depending upon the ideological-political location of the proponents (or opponents) of the village. In these constructions, the village was not seen simply as an objective social reality - a type of human settlement; rather, it had gathered many normative associations which could imbue the debate on the village with a peculiar emotional flavour. This emotionally charged and politically controversial character of the debate may partly be explained in the context of the conspicuous absence of empirical studies on the village.

Studies there were, no doubt, but most of them addressed some larger theoretical-political concerns. This was as true for scholars like Maine and Baden-Powell (the theoreticians of the village) as for many revenue officials who had to collect statistical information as part of their routine duties concerning land settlement and revenue administration. In either case, the village was incidental to their central concerns. The theoretically-minded scholar-administrators used the village as an instance to illumine their larger evolutionary concerns, while other administrators kept busy with identifying/erecting an efficient system of land revenue administration amidst the general confusion of the day. The latter dealt with the village, but the village was embedded in their unremitting pre-occupation with the optimisation of land revenue and/or the designing of an efficient and cheap British-Indian administration (see Chapter 2).
Nationalists fared no better in this regard. For them, the political stakes in the village were too high to encourage any dispassionate empirical study of the village. True, some of them did undertake empirical studies of the village. However, even in their supposedly academic publications, they ended up giving a call for the resuscitation of the village (for instance, see Mukherjee 1936). A concern for its reconstruction seems to pervade much of the nationalistic writings on the village. Needless to add, this concern, to a large extent, derived from their view of an ideal Indian village of the yore which they wanted to refurbish (see Chapter 4).

In effective terms, both the colonial and nationalist constructions of the village boasted grand generalisations without much systematic empirical substantiation. After all, they were being true to the spirit of their age; the ethnographic practice of participant observation had not made its entry on the village scene. Once the anthropological tradition of single village study gained ground, the earlier trickle of 'village studies' led to an ever-growing body of empirical research on the village.

The credit for firmly anchoring the 'village studies' in a distinctive empirical mode goes to the twin disciplines of sociology and social anthropology. Indeed, the inauguration and subsequent consolidation of the 'village studies' tradition has been central to the constitution of sociological enterprise in India. The present chapter presents a brief review of the methods and concerns of the sociological/social anthropological studies of/on/in the village. It underlines the major shifts in theoretical understandings, methodological approaches and substantive emphases over the last five decades. Our main endeavour here will be
to cull out the characteristic ways in which the village has been conceptualised in these studies.

Obviously, the 'village studies' in sociology/social anthropology is not a homogeneous research tradition. As any other vibrant disciplinary research tradition, it has not remained the same ever since its inception. Instead, it has been responding to multifarious currents and developments taking place within and without the discipline. In this chapter, we will try to identify some of the most significant turning points in the 'village studies' tradition while exploring both its thematic variations and its changing relationship with the overall context of national development. Our primary focus will be on the ways the 'village studies' tradition has responded to the demands of the developmentalist state. This interaction has two aspects: (1) a disciplinary research tradition emerges as a direct response to the practical (political) demands made on the discipline, which have far-reaching implications for the growth and development of the discipline itself, and (2) the mainstream thinking on development gets enriched by way of academic and expert inputs.

On both these issues, opinions have differed and differ even now. For long, sociologists have debated whether the 'village studies' tradition should be oriented more towards the role of sociology as a policy science. Alternatively, should not the 'village studies' be assessed and evaluated in terms of the contributions they have made to our understanding of Indian society and culture?

We shall address these and other related questions while presenting a brief review of the sociological/social anthropological work on the village. Though we will be concerned with a retrospective assessment of the village studies done so far,
we do not attempt here an exhaustive review. The village studies in India have been surveyed and reviewed extensively (see Chauhan 1974; Mudiraj 1974; Oommen 1985; Singh 1986; Niranjana 1991; Breman 1997; Jodhka 1998; Alexander 2000; Madan 2002).2 Our objective is to probe the strengths (and limits) of analytical approaches and methodological strategies which have dominated the conventional village studies. Even otherwise, given the enormity of literature generated by the village studies, it is well-nigh impossible to chart out a comprehensive review within the space of a chapter.

‘Village Studies’ in India: Contours of a Disciplinary Tradition

With the establishment of the British rule, the colonial scholar-administrators initiated surveys on tribes and castes in different parts of the country as part of their data gathering exercise. True, they did not focus on village community as such. However, the literature produced by such scholar-administrators as Denzil Ibbetson, H. H. Risley, Edgar Thurston, William Crooke, Henri Thomas Colebrooke and numerous others contained a wealth of data on the village life and peasant economy.

In institutional terms, for the first time, the Royal Commission on Agriculture (1926) drew attention to the abject poverty, squalor and disorganisation of the village societies. The publication of its Report in 1928 generated an interest in the affairs of the village. The Report focused primarily on low agricultural productivity, rural indebtedness, distress selling of land, security of land tenures, and other similar practices associated with land and labour in the village. It recommended several measures to address what it considered to be the genuine problems of the tenants. The Report, thus, marks the beginning of a systematic
attention on the village. Prior to this Report, the efforts to mitigate the problems of the village were mostly sporadic and episodic.

The content of the Report added a sharp edge to the nationalist propaganda concerning the debilitating effects of the colonial rule on the village economy. Later, thanks to the massive entry of peasants into the political arena, and the growing receptivity of the Indian National Congress to the peasant cause (as manifested in various peasant movements launched under its auspices, such as Champaran, Kaira, and Bardoli), a nationalist interest in village studies was created. Thus, the state initiative combined with the nationalist interest made the village the centre of scholarly attention.

The state had become aware of the urgent need to intervene in the organisation of rural economy if progressive deterioration was to be prevented. This realisation was accompanied by the acknowledgement that the authorities lacked intimate knowledge about agrarian conditions. This need for more specific and detailed information occasioned empirically oriented micro studies of the village. Taking the lead, Dr. Harold Mann, an agricultural economist and the Principal of Agricultural College in Poona (now Pune), conducted and guided numerous investigations into the Deccan villages. Their minute and detailed investigations into ecology, land ownership, land usage, crop patterns, farming practices, social identity of the inhabitants, patterns of income and expenditure, caste-wise occupations, etc. laid the foundation of a sound tradition of empirical research on the village. From the current sociological perspective, one can say that these researches had limited scope, as they wanted such data which could be expressed as facts and in figures. Being inspired to collect the data about the
village of their times, unlike the earlier colonial scholar-administrators, Mann and his collaborators were not interested in reflections on the origins of the village and its social evolution through the centuries.

The contributions of Mann and company to the 'village studies' tradition are immense. In their research framework the village held a special place. To quote G. Keatings and Harold Mann, 'the villages are perhaps now tending to be less relatively isolated units than hitherto, but they are still so to an extent that gives the knowledge even of a single village a very special value for the study of the whole rural conditions of the country (cited in Breman 1997: 26). Once Mann and his colleagues in Poona effectively established village surveys as a valuable method of social and economic investigation in the Indian countryside, it caught the imagination of many enterprising scholars and government agencies in other parts of the country even though they could not match the comprehensive and penetrating researches of the former.

Gilbert Slater (1921), Head of the newly established Department of Economics at the University of Madras, and E. V. Lucas (1920) in Punjab, initiated intensive studies of particular villages and general agricultural problems. Such studies evoked great interest and underlined the need for further studies. Village surveys were also organised by the Punjab Board of Economic Enquiry (1920s onwards), Bengal Board of Economic Enquiry (1935), Visva-Bharati under the auspices of Visva-Bharati Rural Reconstruction Board. Professors N. C. Bhattacharya and I. A. Natesan of Scottish Church College (Calcutta) produced *Some Bengal Villages: An Economic Survey* (1932). Professors P. J. Thomas and K. C. Ramakrishnan of the University of Madras (1940), T. K. Sankara Menon in
Cochin (1935), Congress Economic and Political Studies (1936), Gujarat Vidyapeeth (1931), and Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poona (1940) were other significant players in the field of early village studies.

Among the independent academic rural researches there were Ranade’s *A Social and Economic Survey of a Konkan Village* (1926), Mukhtyar’s *Life and Labour in a South Gujarat Village* (1930), Shukla’s *Life and Labour in a Gujarat Taluka: Oplad* (1937), and Mukherjee’s *Fields and Farmers in Oudh* (1929). Furthermore, there were Kumarappa’s study of *Matar Taluka* in Gujarat (1932) and *Why the Village Movement?* (1936) which carried the *imprimatur* of Gandhian nationalism. It is noteworthy that most of these studies focused mainly on peasant economy and economic problems, hardly shedding any light on the social organisation, political interactions and cultural aspects of the village. Barring Wiser’s (1936) study of the *jajmani* system, social anthropological monographs appeared on the scene only in the 1950s (see Ramkrishna Mukherjee 1969: 809-18).

A close scrutiny of the inventory of pre-ethnography phase of village studies makes it amply clear that

...the emphasis was laid increasingly on purely economic categorisation of rural society; and even the social relations which the villagers had evolved with reference to their economic organisation were not attended to properly or at all ... the income distribution, landholding, the expenditure pattern, and such other economic attributes of the villagers are often treated in meticulous details; but the social relations the rural folks had developed with respect to such economic attributes were, almost invariably, lost sight of (Ramkrishna Mukherjee 1969: 813).

Evidently, there were the studies of the villages from the point of view of economics and material well-being, such as conditions of life, income, land tenure, rural economic problems, and so on. Their work, however, could not concentrate
on the social structural aspects of the village 'for, the preoccupation of the social scientists with the economics of rural society which became more and more pronounced since 1940s began to push the living persons in the background, and instead of presenting the villagers as social beings presented them as ... abstract economic and social categories' (Ibid.: 809-10). Majumdar (1955) corroborates Ramkrishna Mukherjee’s reading when he says, ‘we have so far been content to leave the business of study and evaluation of rural life and its multifaceted problems in the hands of economists. There is a complete lack of first hand studies of our rural life and cultural setting’ (cited in Chauhan 1974: 82).

It was this groundwork of earlier researchers which became valuable for the later sociologists and social anthropologists of the village. We can delineate several phases in the development of the ‘village studies’ tradition in India: It began in the pre-independence period as largely a concern of the administrator-scholar and was led by the practitioners of the discipline of economics. Sociologists and social anthropologists arrived on the rural scene much later and mostly after the independence. Most of them began their work in the style of an ethnographer, concentrating on a single village and following a holistic approach. Interestingly, the village became a meeting point for anthropological and sociological pursuits, leading almost to the merger of the two disciplines in the studies of rural communities. Notwithstanding subsequent diversification in methods and approaches (Chauhan 1974; Atal 2003), the stage was set for the flurry of sociological writings on the village. Redfield’s (1955) influential formulations of the little community, with its attendant attributes of smallness, distinctiveness, homogeneity and self-sufficiency, provided the necessary intellectual inspiration.
The village, as the embodiment of peasant society, became the locale of what Redfield described as 'part society and part culture'. As Béteille (1974: 41) avers, 'the idea that village India is the locus of peasant society seems to be tacit assumption of a large number of sociologists and social anthropologists working in the Indian field'. Soon, the study of the village was to gather a momentum of its own.

By the 1950s, the village as a field of study was firmly lodged in the allied fields of sociology and social anthropology. There were numerous factors, not necessarily confined to the study of Indian society and culture, behind the emergence of the village as a field of study. The most important was the emergence of community studies in the United States of America (USA), particularly at Harvard and Chicago universities. Pioneered by Redfield's *Tepoztlan, A Mexican Village: A Study of Folk Life* (1930), the discipline of anthropology witnessed a gradual shift of interest from tribal to peasant societies. Simultaneously, sociologists, who till then had specialised in urban industrial societies, also showed interest in researching small-scale localities as a method by which to analyse the various aspects of social life in a comprehensive framework of institutional holism. Lynds' *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (1929) is a case in point. This growing convergence of interests made the village a field of operation for both the disciplines in the emerging social sciences outside the metropolitan West around the mid-twentieth century (see Breman 1997: 40-53).

The end of colonialism in Asia and Africa and the firm commitment to modernization by the newly independent countries, imparted a sense of urgency to the study of the transitional societies. The changing village community became a
perennial theme in the literature on modernisation and social change. What is invariably observed in such literature is a concern with documenting, explaining, and directing social transformation. Even those early studies which sought to give a comprehensive account of all aspects of village life, conceived their work within the presiding paradigm of change. For example, Dube (1958) underlines a sense of urgency about recording contemporary life and cultures, both in rural and urban areas, in order to assess and evaluate the human implications of change. Elsewhere (1969: 793), he makes a case for the relevance of village studies to provide the requisite background data from which more purposeful planning can emerge. Evidently, there was a perception that

a series of carefully planned theoretically oriented studies of representative village communities all over the country would provide the perceptive administrator and planner a more realistic appreciation of the Indian village scene. ...and may give valuable leads to planners and administrators ...Insights derived from such studies can be expected to save the development administrators from many costly failures (Dube 1964: 227).

The ethnography-dominated phase yielded to new concerns with institutional factors and change. There was a shift from earlier investigations of the interrelationships between different dimensions of social organisation (a characteristic feature of most studies till the early 1960s) to planning and its intended and unintended consequences. New questions put a premium on conflicts and the potential breakdown of the system. This was also the time when the theoretical switch from 'consensus' to 'conflict' implied a substantive change from the 'village' to 'peasantry'. Village monographs acquired a definite thematic concentration in lieu of previous descriptive accounts. Changes in orientations were so perceptible: social scientists were no longer impervious to the needs of th
system. As Oommen (1985) puts it in his review of rural studies, the sociological attention got focused on three types of studies:

1. those which could generate basic data about the socio-economic life of the people - essentially an informational input for launching development programmes,

2. those which analysed the social, economic and political processes in the context of the introduction of development measures, and

3. those which evaluated the impact of the development programmes, including their unanticipated consequences.

The Village as a ‘Little Community’: Method and Substance

We have to remember that the village community has not just been a dominating empirical interest of sociologists and social anthropologists. In the first flush of ethnographic studies, the village has, more often than not, been used as a perspective, a methodology that lights up the study of a variety of other phenomena and processes (see Redfield 1955). It was used as a methodological pretext to impart a new scope to the understanding of ancient civilisations. For the pioneers of anthropological village studies, the village was meant ‘not to understand India and her changes’. Instead, it was the effort to seek understanding of a great civilisation and its enormously complex changes through anthropological studies of villages. Questions of method were of primary importance. They addressed themselves to questions such as:

What forms of thought for understanding a small community are relevant when the community is an Indian village? What changes in ways to which anthropologists are accustomed when they work in isolated tribal communities are demanded when they work in a village that is part of a larger society, when they study a local culture that is part and cause and product of an ancient civilisation? (Redfield and Singer in their Foreword to Marriott 1955b: xi)
As Redfield and his followers were refashioning the methodological tools in their determination to move from 'primitive' societies to 'peasant' civilisations, in India, Srinivas was all set to spearhead a campaign to build Indian sociology on the basis of a switch from the *book view* to *field view* (see Srinivas 1955a; Srinivas and Panini 1986; Srinivas 1996a). Partly, Srinivas's call for the 'field view' was a reaction to the then fashionable understanding of methodology popularised by the American sociology. The latter had accorded a pride of place to survey research based on opinion polls and questionnaires. Also, Srinivas was responding to the then prevailing trend of Indological research based primarily on textual studies, mostly religious scriptures. In other words, his reactions and responses to these two methodological tendencies, one exogenous another homegrown, made him the most forceful champion of the methodology of *fieldwork* in Indian sociology. But, where to do this fieldwork? Obviously, in a bounded concrete space, a space that is at the same time a microcosm of Indian society. Expectedly, he zeroed on the Indian village.

So, in methodological terms, the study of the village was looked at as a strategic point of entry for the study of Indian society and culture as a whole. It was seen as productive of much more than knowledge about a single village. To Srinivas (1955d: 98), it was an attempt to answer a theoretical question apart from providing the anthropologist with insights into rural life. Clearly, in the case of Indian sociology, the stage was set for a shift from the study of 'preliterate communities', that is, tribes, to that of a civilisational society, that is, the village. To the extent that this methodological call was inspired by the British variety of structural-functionalism, it can also be read as a move away from Malinowskian
‘culture’ to Radcliffe-Brownian ‘structure’ (see also Patel 1998). As the pre-eminent locus for social investigation, the village helped meet the need to study Indian society as a totality while integrating the various groups in its interrelationship in a spatially-bound locality.

According to this line of thinking, the study of village was a way to reach the heart of a complex and changing society, though in the earlier village studies caste loomed large (see Béteille 1996b: 236). The methodological supremacy of the ‘village studies’ had many takers. In the epilogue to the revised edition of his *Caste, Class, and Power*, Béteille (1996b: 232) remarks, ‘By now the novelty has gone out of village studies, but they are still of very great value, both for the training in the craft of anthropology, and for the insights they provide into social processes, social relations, and social institutions’.

Once the methodological value of the ‘village studies’ was established, scholars moved on to delineating different substantive facets of the village as a sociological reality. In fact, the literature abounds on this theme, as it has given rise to a series of unresolved debate in Indian sociology (for illustration, see Dumont 1970; Srinivas 1996a). In much of the literature, the sociological reality of the village is seen as depending upon the existence of village as a coherent structural unit notwithstanding numerous divisions which criss-cross it. Given Srinivas’s reputation as an ardent votary of the ‘village studies’, we will begin our substantive review by devoting some space here to his views on the village.

For Srinivas, the village is a well-defined structural entity commanding the loyalty of all who live there. Though the villagers are generally affiliated to different castes, there exist numerous countervailing bonds which neutralise the
divisiveness of caste. First, the physical characteristics of the village themselves impart a strong unifying identity to the village. Most often the village is a close and isolated cluster of huts surrounded by fields and cut off from other villages and towns. This makes the village a 'tight little community' in which everyone is known to everyone else.

Second, a great deal of experience is common to the entire village be it agricultural activities, Hindu festivals, climatic sufferings owing to drought or floods, epidemics such as cholera, plague, or small pox. Third, physical isolation and the commonality of experience give rise to a certain patriotism of the village. The villagers do not get tired of enumerating the virtues of their village; they revel in criticising other neighbouring villages. The patriotism of the village comes out strikingly in opposition to the government which is viewed with general mistrust. Indeed, unity and solidarity of the village emerge most clearly in relation to the government. For example, very often a criminal from the village is afforded protection from the arms of the government such as police.

The unity of the village finds further expression in ritual contexts. Presence of functionaries who serve the entire village, e.g., watchman, headman, accountants, etc. gives the village a great deal of coherence. In other words, the village is a vertical entity made up of several horizontal layers each of which is a caste. Srinivas insists that, apart from the caste bonds, there is multiplicity of ties that run across the lines of caste in a mult caste village. He elaborates that a disproportionate attention on the divisive features of caste makes the observer ignore the counteracting tendencies. Occupational specialisation itself creates conditions for an all-embracing unity and solidarity of the village as it requires
interdependence among the castes. *Jajmani* relations embody this interdependence across caste groups. Families enjoying a monopoly are also competitors, which means that kinship tensions and economic rivalries may drive each family to seek friends outside the caste. Thus, 'Jita service, tenantship, debtorship and clientship' are vertical institutions which bring together families and individuals belonging to different castes and solidify the village as a single coherent whole. The elders of the dominant castes are the guardians of the social and ethical code of the entire village society. They settle disputes pertaining to other castes as well. They represent the vertical unity of the village against the separatism of caste (see Srinivas 1955b: 33-35). In sum, 'the village is a community which commands loyalty from all who live in it, irrespective of caste affiliation. Some are first class members of the village community, and others are second class members, but all are members' (*Ibid.*: 35).

However, Srinivas believed that the unity of the village was not axiomatic, but something that had to be shown to exist. Although he conceded that each village had a pattern and mode of life which was to some extent unique, he did not appreciate those who failed to find regional or even all-India uniformities of the village social structure. A close reading of Srinivas's work on the village tells us that when he talks of the village, in effect, he has a picture of the village characterised by the overwhelming presence of the dominant caste. In a way, for Srinivas, the dominant caste 'owns' the Indian village, as it is this caste that supports and maintains the total system. The dominant caste respects the code of every caste, even when some features of other castes are different from its own codes. In an Indian village autonomy of caste court is only partial, as dominant
Caste elders play an important role in the settlement of disputes among non-dominant castes. By implication, all other castes have a secondary presence in the village. The Brahmin, by virtue of his ritual position, seems both to belong to the village and not belong to it. The Brahmin is given some respect by virtue of his ritual position, but he is not allowed to take advantage of this to do what he pleases. For instance, in a fight between two villages a Brahmin priest of one of the villages would probably not be beaten unless he had personally participated in the fight. On the contrary, in the case of a member of the dominant caste, personal participation would probably not be necessary for him to be beaten. This only shows that somehow the village is seen as belonging to the dominant caste.

In an exactly opposite sense, untouchables are both part of and not part of the village. The Muslims too have such a position, and this is so because they are outside the Hindu fold. Some of those living in the village may be said to be full members while others are only partly so. People may not enjoy full membership because they are partly above the village (e.g., Brahmins), or because they are partly below it (e.g., untouchables), or partly outside it (e.g., Muslims). So, for Srinivas (1955a: 2-9), the village is a vertical unity of many castes. The horizontal alliances of a caste going beyond the village do not affect the community character of the village.

In other words, notwithstanding the existence of internal (caste) divisions and external links to other settlements (again primarily through caste alliances), for Srinivas, the village remains a significant social unit. As an overarching vertical entity amidst horizontal divisions, it is defined and constituted by relationships among villagers themselves, their local deities, and the land on which they live.
Based on an examination of Srinivas' ethnographic accounts of the Coorgs, Fuller (2002: 271) reads the unity of the village as predominantly a unity of Coorgs and other high-caste people. The ritual expressions of the unity of the village as evidenced at village festivals leave out untouchable Poleyas and semi-untouchable Medas. Poleyas are simultaneously included and excluded at these festivals. According to Fuller,

Since Srinivas wrote about the Coorgs, research has shown that Harijans consistently occupy an ambiguous position at south Indian village deities festivals. Harijans are widely required to attend as musicians [or, in other roles, such as sacrificial slaughterers] and are therefore firmly included in the division of ritual labour. On the other hand, they are rarely incorporated as co-equal worshippers of the village deity. Alongside the latter's festival, Harijans generally hold another for their own deity. Thus, the village community despite its already unegalitarian character partially excludes the untouchable castes and places them, so to speak, in a lower tier. This is consistent with the Harijan’s ambiguous position in the caste system as a whole, for they are both rejected from it as 'outcastes' and included by it because their economic and ritual services are required to sustain the system (Ibid.: 280-81).

Seen thus, the unity of the south Indian village is, in an important sense, ritually predicated on the Harijan’s exclusion. They are excluded because they ‘stay outside’ it. In south India, Harijans often live in their own colonies or hamlets outside the main settlement inhabited by the higher castes - Agraharams. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the Harijan colony or Cheri is normally separate from the main settlement or Ur. Though Harijans belong to the gramam/Kiramam) which generally includes the Cheri as well. However, for all ritual purposes, Ur to which the Harijans do not belong is distinguished from Kiramam (see Daniel 1984).

The extent to which the Indian village may be considered a single ‘community’ seems to be the issue for Dube as well (see 1955a: 202-15; 1955b). For him, village communities all over the Indian subcontinent have a number of common features. The village settlement, as a unit of social organisation, represents a solidarity different from that of the kin, the caste, and the class.
However, each village as a distinct entity has some individual mores and usages, and possesses a corporate unity. It also plays a vital role as an agency of socialisation and social control. Moreover, the different castes and communities inhabiting a village are integrated in its economic, social, and ritual pattern by ties of mutual reciprocal obligations sanctioned and sustained by generally accepted conventions. Notwithstanding the existence of groups and factions inside the settlement, people of the village can, and often do, face the outside world as an organised compact whole. So, for Dube, the village is a distinct structural entity like the kin-group, caste and tribe in the sense that all these entities control the conduct of the individuals. He, however, cautions that the fundamental similarities of the village do not mean that Indian villages have a similar pattern all over the country.

Likewise, for Marriott (1955a: 176), ‘the village of Kishan Garhi is like a living thing, has a definable structure, is conceptually a vivid entity, is a system - even if it is one of many sub-systems within the larger socio-politico-religio-economic system in which it exists’. Beals (1954: 403), too, believes that the village had existed earlier as an integrative whole. Later, the heterogenetic forces, specifically British administrative conceptions, and the disruptive intervention by the state, seem to have altered its earlier coherence.

As late as 2002, some social anthropologists still found the village to be a ‘real, live social category’ (Shah 2002: 4). Radhvanaj, the village Shah studied, was ‘a primary factor in social organisation and a potent social reality, a face-to-face group’. It was much more than a mere human settlement, as its territorial jurisdiction assumes tremendous significance through the ritual ‘dharavahi’ on
Bhado Ekadashi (Ibid.: 197). Shah pleads for care in the use of the term 'village'. According to him, there are two connotations of the village - the village site and the revenue land surrounding it. In areas of nucleated settlements, village stands not only for the village site but also for the territorial unit recognised for administrative purposes. The latter has been called mouza all over north India since at least the sixteenth century, and is translated variously as 'administrative village', 'revenue village' or 'survey village' (Ibid.: 13).

Patel (1998: 49-61) argues that empirical research of the village has been bolstered by the practical need of ethnographers to find a place to stay and a place to study. The village was a locale to do good ethnography, a place which could be called my village. She wonders how space became coterminous with social life, paradoxically in a context when colonial policies and capitalist relations had opened up the so-called relative insularity of villages. She seems to be highly critical of Srinivas, as the latter's emphasis on the village as a unit of ethnographic study helped perpetuate the image of the village as a self-sufficient and isolated unit. She asks why Srinivas laid so much emphasis on the village even though conceptually he did not agree with the position that the villages were closed units? What made his 'paradigmatic principles contradict his avowed intentions'? Moreover,

Why has Srinivas made space coterminous with social investigation? Is it that like others, he is also in search of his roots, the essential 'Indianness'? Does this mean that Srinivas, the Sociologist, then transferred this need to an investigation of the traditional in the village? Why does he not comment on exogenous changes taking place in his village? Why is the state so far away? Why is his ethnography so devoid of power and contestation? (Ibid.: 58-59).

Patel finds major fault with the village on account of its being the basis of ethnographic construction, and its equation as microcosm of India. For her, it is
unfortunate that Srinivas’s ethnography got bounded in the colonial ideological legacy which made space coterminous with village. Through a series of laboured arguments, she relates Srinivas’s thrust on the village to his ‘conservative’ ideology, and a nostalgic search for the roots. Srinivas’s reconstruction of the village gave the village as well as sociology a concrete structure of space, an anchor amidst tumultuous changes. She seems to argue as if Srinivas took refuge under the banner of the village to cope with the changes around him: These were the changes having a destabilising effect on one’s received identities. Srinivas wanted to shield himself from these changes. That is where the roots of Srinivasian conservatism lay. By focusing on the village he seems to deny the role that time plays in the process of change and thereby reinforces colonial ideas about the isolation of the village.

Marxists, look at the village primarily as the locus of a peasant society. The village becomes the site for Chayanovian ‘peasant family farm’, the corner stone of the rural economy (see Kessinger 1974). It has been a debatable point as to what extent the Indian village can be analysed as a peasant community (see Beteille 1974, 1980). However, they do not project the village as an isolated entity. For them, the village survives as a pre-capitalist formation at the periphery of the global capitalist system. Through its external links via the market and the state, the village is subordinated to capitalism at the centre (see Djurfeldt and Lindberg 1975). In the Marxist tradition, the study of the village gets embedded in that of the peasantry as a whole. Class differentiation in the peasantry, the location of the revolutionary consciousness, the processes of depeasantisation, proletarianisation, and the resultant class polarisation, agrarian social relations based on labour and
the extraction of surplus, and the characterisation of the mode of production in
Indian agriculture - such wide range of concerns seems to inform the Marxian
variety of 'rural studies' (see Oommen 1985). In fact, there have been a few village
studies in the Marxian mode.9

Also, Marxists have found it difficult to reconcile with the ghost of the old
notion of the self-contained Indian village community a la Marx. Some of them
have been put on the defensive and have tried to come out of the 'Asiatic mode of
production' framework while reworking some of the basic premises of Marxian
analysis (see Thorner 1980). In practice, both Marxists and non-Marxists, record a
more or less identical situation in which caste predominates in the village while at
a wider territorial level the solidarities of class make their intermittent appearance.

In this tradition, the predominant focus has been on the facts of peasant life.
While studying an Indian village, some of the scholars thought of combining
peculiarly Indian caste and the peasant society and economy. However, the work
carried out in this framework pales in significance when compared to the flood of
village monographs in the 1950s and 60s which mainly reflected the dominant
concern with caste rather than furthering our understanding of the Indian peasant
society (see Heesterman 1985: 181). Also, under the Marxist inspiration, there was
an underlying assumption which equated the 'traditional village' and its 'closed
peasant community' with 'pre-modern agrarian societies'. The end destination of
the village was believed to be the development of an 'open peasant community' for
economic and political organisation (through processes variously designated as
class polarisation, proletarianisation and depeasantisation). The former is typically
classified as 'corporate, self-sufficient, introverted, particularised, encysted; the
latter non-corporate at the community level, relatively dependent on larger economic systems, socially extroverted, culturally open - a type of social system whose bounds are blurred and whose boundary-maintaining mechanisms are weak’ (see Hill 1986: 45-46).

The village has also been imbricated with the contrasting interpretations of the jajmani relations, particularly in the work of economic historians and anthropologists (see Fuller 1989). To a very large extent, the concept of the jajmani system is linked to that of the ‘traditional Indian village’. Structural-functionalist studies of the village have highlighted jajmani as the economic system of the Indian village. Jajmani has been seen as the primary basis of the community characteristic of the village. By presenting jajmani as universally characterising the Indian village, the village could be made to stand for India, and the jajmani system, as the organising economic principle of this village India, could be exalted to the level of a fundamental civilisational concept. Indeed, thanks to the celebration of the jajmani, the ideas of unchanging India, self-sufficient villages, and a tradeless economy came together.

Scholars examining the linkages between the jajmani and the village have shown how it is incorrect to assume that there really ever was a uniform economic system of the type existing throughout village India. The supposed historical depth of the jajmani and its robust persistence accord an attribute of traditionalism to the Indian village. The administrative and political idealisation of the traditional village - timelessness and stability - finds its economic counterpart in the operation of the jajmani system.
Fuller (1989: 55) asserts that the strong functionalist tendency of the 'village studies' (of the 1950s and 1960s) was a factor in the predisposition to see *jajmani* relations as constituting a system in full sense of the term. The village studies' antipathy to historical research further contributed to the persistence of the concept of 'traditional village India' alive by way of *jajmani*. On the one hand, this characterisation of the *jajmani* obscured elements of change over time, while, on the other, it also indirectly deflected attention from regional variations.

Fuller has gone to the extent of calling the *jajmani* system a figment of anthropological imagination. He implicates both historians and economists in its invention. He notes that there exists a plentiful literature by economic historians to show that by the seventeenth century monetised transactions could be found in a large number of villages. The reasons could be state's revenue demand in cash or something else. And, finally, land rights could be and were in fact transferred in the pre-colonial period, suggesting that even patron-client relationships were not stable within a particular village.

Arguably, since *jajmani* was a pan-Indian occurrence, the case for an ideal-typical Indian village could be presented. This was the role long played by the notion of *jajmani* (see Wiser 1936; cf. Commander 1983; Fuller 1989; Mayer 1993). *Jajmani*, by the late 1950s, was being described as a system that existed within all Indian villages, and which encompassed both ritual and non-ritual relations between land-owning families and their clients. As Subrahmanyam (1996: 34) caustically remarks,

> Embedded in a barter economy, with the payments for goods and services often described as 'customary', *jajmani* became shorthand for an entire 'moral economy' which fitted both the anthropologist's notion of unchanging, traditional India, and post-independence claims for a self-regulatory and non-conflictual Ram-rajya based on enduring village institutions.
In recent times, however, the conventional conceptualisations of the village in relation to the \textit{jajmani} have been thoroughly exposed. Marxist-oriented historians of pre-colonial northern and western India, such as Fukazawa (1964, 1968) and Habib (1999) have emphasised that the village society, in effect, was a caste society and \textit{jajmani} relations were quite variable and did not transcend the caste framework. One of the larger implications of this critique of \textit{jajmani} is to locate the peasant family within a larger domain than the village.

Thus, in substantive terms, we see the study of the village passing through a number of phases. In the first phase, the village as community is the overarching theme. Subsequently, the studies of the village become part of the growing body of literature on the peasantry. Also, by way of \textit{jajmani}, the village becomes a pretext to explain the issues in economic anthropology. However, some of the old themes persist to a large extent. The idea of the unchanging village fails to die down. As Ludden (1985: 5) says it,

to scholars of political economy, from Karl Marx to Barrington Moore, Indian village society seems stolid in the extreme. To cultural sociologists from Max Weber to Louis Dumont, the explanation for Indian peasant's inertia lies in village traditions prescribed by the caste system, which persists and resists attempts by capitalist urbanites.

The Sociological Reality of the Village and the Sociological Enterprise in India

We have seen that the village studies were meant not simply to add to the empirical corpus of knowledge about the Indian village, but also to further a distinctive understanding of the Indian society and culture. Given this larger ambition of the village studies, it comes as no surprise that, in effective terms, such studies (i.e., studies 'of' and 'in' villages) turned out to be the mainstay of Indian sociology in its initial years of disciplinary consolidation. Indeed, these studies, to a large extent, have shaped the methodological strategies and theoretical contours of the
discipline (Chauhan 1974; Oommen 1984; Y. Singh 1986; Srinivas 1996a; Alexander 2000). However, they hardly constitute a unitary tradition of sociological analysis: The way they conceptualise and approach village differ considerably, as revealed in their emphases as well as silences. This is clearly evident in the debates centring around the sociological reality of the Indian village.

There is another angle to the historic importance of village studies so far as the sociological enterprise in India is concerned. ‘Village studies’ constituted the primary interface between the professionally-trained sociologists and the demands of the project of national development. The histories of the development and growth of Indian sociology unambiguously point out the close connections between the expansion of the discipline and the expectations placed on it by the state (see Oommen and Mukherji 1986; Y. Singh 1986). One wonders whether the same set of expectations would have been there had ‘village studies’ not acquired the prominence it did in Indian sociology. That Indian sociology acquired an added momentum for the empirically-grounded village studies helped establish its credentials and claims as a policy science capable of contributing to the task of national development.

In terms of the internal developments within the discipline, before Dumont and Pocock (1957a, 1957b, 1960) raised the issue, almost all the practitioners of ‘village studies’ treated the village as a structurally coherent unit (see Dube 1955a and 1955b; Majumdar 1955; Marriott 1955a and 1955b; Srinivas 1955a and 1955b). We have already mentioned that most of the village studies of the 1950s and the 1960s were influenced by the shifts in anthropological concerns from simple to complex societies.
Under the combined influence of community studies *a la* Redfield (1955) and the structural-functional variant of the British anthropology, the village was catapulted to be an entry point for gaining insights into the working of a civilisation. This definitely had certain important pay-offs. The grand generalisations of nineteenth-century ‘theoreticians’ of the village gave way to more modest and empirically substantiated claims by the new generation of sociologists and anthropologists. The earlier anomaly, where the conceptual revolution about the village had gone far ahead of empirical enquiry, was corrected in great measure. The singular focus on the ‘field view’ through village studies not only enriched and qualified the accumulated corpus of the work done by the scholar-administrators of the colonial period, but also helped take Indian sociology in a novel direction, away from the Indological traditions of knowledge.

However, the bulk of the village studies was premised on the idea of the village as a representative community, a microcosm representing the larger Indian society and culture. That is how, the study of a village could be claimed as generative of insights which have validity for social structure in general. For the votaries of ‘village studies’, the Indian village, as a well-knit community transcends the divisiveness of caste. For example, distinguishing between contextual exclusion and total exclusion, Srinivas (1996a: 28-37, 72) counters the point of view that village solidarity is nothing else but the solidarity of the local section of the dominant caste. By stressing complementarity of castes in the framework of village production, he projects the village as a multi-caste and hierarchical community. He adds, ‘caste, however, was not the only principle of social affiliation. The village was another such affiliation, and it was based on the
common interests which people inhabiting a restricted piece of territory possessed. These common interests cut across caste' (Srinivas 1996b: 135).

On the other hand, Dumont and Pocock (1957a, 1957b, 1960) question the sociological reality of the Indian village and proclaim that the village is not the ‘social fact which it has for so long been assumed to be.’ For Dumont (see 1959, 1970), village was not a ‘social fact of the first order’ and it was not ‘a social reality transcending caste’. Rather, the territorial factor, the relation to the soil is not, in India as a whole, one of the primary factors in social organisation.

For Dumont and Pocock, a field worker very often takes the village as a convenient centre for his investigations and all too easily comes to confer upon that village a kind of sociological reality which it does not possess. They posit the facticity of caste to the assumed reality of Indian village. They are convinced ‘the substantial reality of the village deceives us into doing what we normally would not do in a social analysis and into assuming a priori that when people refer to an object by name they mean by that designation what we ourselves mean when we speak of it’ (Dumont 1959: 26). Thus, for Dumont, village often becomes the vehicle for the story-telling of the researcher. It is nothing else but a pretext to unfold the prior research agendas and concerns of the researcher.

Despite Dumont, wholeness of the village life continues to be written about. For instance, Rajat K. Ray (1983: 277) writes that ‘Rural society, unlike urban society is an organic society. In spite of social and economic differences, it has a synthetic culture sustained by bonds of interdependence and sentiment between people in different stations of life’. In a different context (of rural livelihood systems), Karanth and Ramaswamy (2000: 7) not merely mention the
festival of ‘Palumaru Devara’ as a festival of the boundary of the village but state neatly:

Members of a village community have a strong sense of boundary of their universe, made up of their physical habitation. It is in terms of such a boundary that they relate themselves to those outside it as ‘us’ and ‘them’... The commitment to the boundaries of the village is celebrated by offering sacrifice to evil forces that are believed to be at work at critical times. It could be a drought, when the tank is full, standing crops are to be harvested or when there is a threat of an epidemic.

Village patriotism, which Srinivas had noticed in the 1940s in Rampura, continues unabated. Karanth and Ramaswamy add: ‘From the point of view of making use of the available resource, it is this boundary which imposes discipline and restrictions. Thus, persons from outside the village cannot conventionally graze the animals or fell the trees in the common pool resource of a village’ (Ibid.).

The debate centring around the sociological reality of the village has brought many issues to the fore such as the relationship between the state and the village in historical and contemporary terms, the nature, extent and the degree of the self-sufficiency of the village, and more importantly, the relative primacy of caste and the village as the organising principles of Indian society. The fact that village has a social reality which even in a state of physical absence does not fade away adds extra complexity to the debate. Also, it has been observed that village boundary, apart from its legal-administrative dimension, is often an artificial construct and far from unambiguous. Moreover, the village is not the same village for all its inhabitants.

Historically speaking, the insulation of the village from the state is in some measure typical of all pre-modern societies. In India, it seemed to receive particular reinforcement from ‘the brittle foreign-conquest character of larger political systems and from what appeared to be the peculiar economic and social self-
sufficiency of a village society regulated by the institutions of caste’ (Stokes 1978: 265). Thanks to the enormous corpus of village studies, these days the political and social as well as the economic self-sufficiency of the traditional Indian village is recognised at most as a dubious half-truth (see Srinivas 1996a). The central issue has been whether the village should continue to form the unit for the study of social structure and change.

Breman (1997: 44-47) finds out three characteristic trends in village studies. First, there are studies which shed light on regional variations in village structure and culture while trying to solve the issue of representativeness. Most of these studies were more directed towards kinship and caste. So much so that Dumont and Pocock wanted to replace the village by caste as the focus of sociological analysis of Indian society (see supra). According to them, what really counted were kinship, caste and religion. These institutions had sociological reality, so they claimed, whereas the village was merely a location where people happened to live and work. In a sense, some sort of formulaic treatment became the hallmark of ‘village studies’:

Whatever else one may or may not get in the anthropological monograph on the Indian village, one is bound to get in it a fairly detailed account of different castes in the village, their functional interdependence and their hierarchical arrangement. Social anthropologists seem to have developed a kind of common strategy for describing the villages they study. After a few preliminary observations on regional background, ecology etc., a detailed account is given of the ‘caste structure’ of the village. This then becomes the context within which subsequent observations on economics, politics and ritual acquire their meaning (Béteille 1974: 41).

Second, an understanding of the village was made part of a wider understanding of the manifold institutional ties which connect the village with the outside world. Village was no longer treated as a closed and undifferentiated setting, though the relative autonomy of the village was conceded. As Marriott
(1955a: 186) has argued, much of what characterises these little communities turn out to be not merely isolated indigenous developments but also reflexes of general state policy. According to him, little communities such as the village, even in their ‘traditional’ forms cannot be imagined as existing in isolation from intimate effects of the state. While village structures grow upward toward the state, state policy may determine what village structure shall be. He adds, the short-run perspective typically used by anthropologists is likely to carry with it the misleading implication that before the heterogenetic influences of recent times villages were somehow isolated and free from the effects of state policy. He is convinced that the social structures of little communities in the area of Indian civilisation must have been profoundly affected by state land policy (Ibid.: 187). In fact, Baden-Powell (1900) cites examples to show how certain governmental policies in pre-British times actually created lineage-group estates in villages of whole regions where no such estates had previously existed.

The spate of meticulous village studies makes one wonder how Moore (1966) could write the following in his widely influential work:

government above the village was an excrescence generally imposed by an outsider, not a necessity, something to be borne with patience, not something to be changed when the world is obviously out of joint. Because it had really nothing to do in the village where caste took care of everything, government may have seemed especially predatory. The government was not necessary to keep order. Its role in the maintenance of irrigation systems, pace Marx, was quite minor (Ibid.: 339).

Third, with the passage of time the studies started highlighting the structural and cultural heterogeneity of the village. They drew our attention to the conflict-ridden and inherently divergent interests of the members of the village community. As Breman (1997: 46) puts it, ‘...while the authors of the first wave of more holistic community studies were still inclined to suggest cohesion or even
harmony in the presentation of their fieldwork, in later publications emphasis shifted increasingly towards division and contrast as determinants of social relations both inside and outside the village. This tilt towards political economy which imparted a historical framework to fieldwork has been noted by other observers as well (see Béteille 1974, 1996; Oommen 1985). Beidelman’s (1970) analysis of the jajmani system is generally considered to be a forerunner of this approach. The ‘eternal village’ became incorporated in a framework of change, as Y. Singh (2000: 262) states:

Even when sociologist or social anthropologists studied ethnography of a village, a tribe or a community, an implicit focus on change existed in their frame of reference. With few exceptions, the study of change began to focus upon public policy, administration and planning process in rural and urban areas. Specialisations in sociology multiplied and studies became more analytical and self-conscious of theory and methodology. Still the major analytical categories were those of caste, class, tribe and community.

Most importantly, after Independence, scholarly attention was drawn towards the processes of change initiated under the auspices of state-led development and modernisation. Village became the locus of decisive state intervention. The state and its agencies penetrated village in a historically unparalleled fashion (for an early work, see Epstein 1962). Naturally, development seen as a state-directed process of change forced sociologists and anthropologist to pay attention to the planned intervention and social reconstruction in their village researches.

There came a time when the village started getting described in terms of the metaphors of ‘exchange’, ‘transaction’, network’, ‘linkages’ etc. Sociologists and social anthropologists, while focusing on social structure and processes of the village - its unity and extensions, pointed out the increasing outside contacts of the village, both in the traditional spheres covering ritual and kinship and in the
modern sphere encompassing the economic and the political. For many, the existence of these 'extensions' militates against the idea of treating the village as the community. They suggest that it amounts to placing a reality on a place where it does not exist.

In the main, village has been looked at mainly from two angles - as an empirical reality and as a conceptual tool. For some (e.g., Dube, Srinivas), there is the reality of the village in both the senses. For others (e.g., Marriott, Bailey), the village is not an isolate per se, but an isolable entity for the purpose of study. Thus, the village has been caught up in the methodological crossfire on account of its representative character.

Also, the village as a concept, from the early little republic characterisation to that of the little community, has entertained critical reflections as to its being a community. For some (see Dumont 1959 and 1970), the village is merely 'a demographic and architectural entity' and very often the site where relevant phenomena and processes merely find their articulation. Others have seen much sociological reality in the village highlighting its constitution as an overarching community arguing that the presence of dominance and hierarchy does not negate the validity of the village as a community.

In either case, whether the village itself is a problem of study or is merely the context within which other processes are studied, the need for taking the village as a base for studying the links and processes is recognised (for example, Bailey 1957 and Mayer 1960). Even when they accept the presence of multiple nexus with the outside world, or question its community character in terms of hard social fact, they do not reduce the village to the position of a 'geographical fiction kept going
by the myth-making nostalgic propensities of romantics' - a formulation used by D. P. Mukerji (quoted in Chauhan 1974: 82).

The Village as Representation: The Constructivist School

While conceptualisations of community within mainstream Indian sociology have largely been of the traditional primordialist or substantivist type (Niranjana 1991; Upadhya 2001), recent historical and anthropological scholarship (Inden 1986, 1990; Dirks 1987, 1990, 1992, 1997, 2001; see also Ludden 1993) has produced a different understanding of community. For the new wave of scholarship, most of the communitarian identities today are not anachronistic survivals from the pre-colonial times but have emerged in the recent past, in particular during the period of colonial rule. It calls attention to the historicity of particular identities and questions the authenticity and substantiality of many a long-standing social formation.

As against the substantivist understanding, scholars of this persuasion draw upon Foucault and Said while asserting that caste and other identities were invented under colonialism by the operation of certain political and discursive practices and processes. They identify colonial state as the primary source and dispenser of identity. Though this scholarship is primarily concerned with caste and religious identities, the arguments can and have been extended to the village (see Pant 1987; Cohn 1987, 1997; Dirks 1990, 1992, 1997, 2001; Bayly 1999).

Surprisingly, it was none other than Baden-Powell who has written, 'as to the villages being unchangeable, their constitution and form has shown a progressive tendency to decay, and if had not been for modern land-revenue systems trying to keep it together, it may well be doubted whether it would have
survived at all’ (cited in Srinivas 1996a: 10). However, in the context of the Portuguese colonialism in Goa, it has been argued that ‘the village is configured also as a socio-ritualistic praxis which is constitutive for the Ganvkaria-Ganvpan and which cannot be reduced to the juridico-economic and instrumental concept of the Communidade introduced by the Portuguese Orientalist discourse’ (Siqueira and Henn 2001: 1). Although Siqueira and Henn privilege the vernacular-subaltern notion of Ganvpan against Communidade, they are alive to the rupture that Portuguese colonialism engendered between the socio-ritual and socio-economic conceptualisations of the village. Even when there were differences in colonial visions and agendas between the Portuguese and the British, ‘the nineteenth-century British and Portuguese accounts often drew on the same intellectual frameworks and share a number of assumptions’ while constructing the Indian village (Axelrod and Fuerch 1998: 440).

Arguably, nineteenth-century orientalist visions and intellectual issues guided conceptualisations of Indian village. For instance, Baden-Powell’s interpretation of Mexia’s account of Goan village reveals his belief in the ryotwari village as the basis of his theory of the village (Ibid.: 460-64). Moreover, in the case of British India, it has been posited that the Indian village is largely a product of the ‘rule of records’, the pre-eminent governing technique at the disposal of the Raj (see Smith 1996). In their desire to govern India as rigidly as possible, the British inaugurated a massive data gathering exercise. Consequently, it is possible that the British categories of thought influenced the collection as well as recording of information. Put it simply, the crucial character of the village, in epistemological terms, was intimately linked to the construction of India in a particular image
during the British rule. In the process, a reification of the indigenous institutions, village in our case, took place and the Indian village was flattened and stereotyped. That is, techniques of rule have always included the ideological so far as it gave rise to new categories of thought and analysis. So far only Inden (1990) has applied this line of analysis exclusively to the construction of the Indian village.\textsuperscript{11}

In general, during the colonial rule, people were measured, classified, and quantified through censuses and other information gathering exercises. The compilation of massive data necessitated an analysis in intelligible terms (to the rulers, at least). This, in turn, led to the invention of categories and these categories were applied per force to the statistical data. Because governing practices entailed the counting and categorisation of people in terms of collectivities, people began to see and organise themselves in terms of those very categories (see Appadurai 1993; see also Kaviraj 1992). Modern governing practices thus reconstitute the meaning of community for one and all.

In other words, the state\textsuperscript{12} can be seen as constituting \textit{substantialised} communities. In the long run, these communities become actors in the political arena in their own right and thus further reinforce and perpetuate their received identity. Examples can be cited of the substantialisation of such identities as the \textit{rural}. Thus, there are cases where those areas which would classify on all the accepted indices of urbanisation as urban prefer (and at times manipulate their way through officialese) to officially remain rural so as to attract more funds from the developmentalist state and other gains which come by virtue of being rural (see Pandey 2003: Fn. 8). Similarly, in the state of Karnataka, rural has been used as a basis of the government policy of positive discrimination (mainly quota in jobs).
Also, there are instances where this substantialised rural identity has led to massive mass mobilisations on a variety of issues (see Joshi 1985, 1988; Byres 1988; Gupta 1997).

The point is not whether the identities thus ascribed or achieved are false or unreal. The significance lies in the fact that people are persuaded, coerced, tempted and mobilised on the basis of such constructed identities. In the next chapter, we will see how the identity called 'rural' itself has undergone shifts in its inflections. Suffice it say that one's identity as the rural, or from the village, is also a tool for making claims on the resources of the modern state and a way of negotiating with it.

Moreover, through their excessive focus on an overarching colonial knowledge, such writers ignore the presence of many colonial commentators whose empirical research and analyses contradicted the 'hegemonic texts' on Indian society, for example, Ibbetson (1849-1908).¹³ These oppositional voices seem to interrogate in different degrees and ways the claim to hegemony of the essentialising stereotypes. In this sense, the constructivist school negates the presence of contestory and alternative interpretations of Indian society even within the colonial establishment. As a consequence, its depiction of colonial knowledge turns out to be too totalising, for, it underestimates the influence and agency of counter-commentators and their critical texts within the process of the construction of colonial knowledge.

Sure enough, in the writings of the constructivist school there is a tendency to regard social identities as discursively constituted while ignoring the concrete political or economic structures within which such construction takes place. The
question remains whether constructivism could be considered a theoretical advance over the earlier understandings of Indian communities. Although it endeavours to demonstrate the ways in which identities are politically constituted, it has not fully succeeded in historicising the formation of groups and social identities (see Upadhya 2001: 46).

Also, the constructivist literature on Indian society points to interconnections between public or political discourses and academic theories. While colonial administrative practices and ethnology have been identified as the major sources of modern identities, the ways in which such identities continue to be politically constructed have hardly been examined. This continues to be the major analytical lacuna of the constructivist school, as the constructivists are too immersed in the study of colonial discourse. In fact, the relationship between society and the state that was established under colonialism has not changed in fundamental ways. People continue to be counted by census, and are regularly enumerated and surveyed. Moreover, ideas about society are constitutive, but not completely determinative of social processes. This is equally true of public discourses generated by institutions such as the state. It is not that colonialism simply invented communities which then took on a life of their own. True, the categories make the people but the how and why of this making entail multiple political processes such as colonialism, development, nationalist movements, social movements (Ibid.: 32-58).

Be that as it may, the constructivists have largely succeeded in questioning the empiricist faith in the substantiality of the outside world. They have brought to our attention how the realm of the ‘real’, the ‘factual’ is actually formed by
theoretical preconceptions. Such preconceptions, though implicit, often go unacknowledged (Niranjana 1991: 373). No wonder then a considerable body of village studies is silent on the discursive character of the village. To quote Niranjana:

> It must be re-emphasised that the ‘village’ is not just a domain of study, but also the outcome of sociological discourse. This recognition demands an examination of the village as a discursive space which constitutes the meeting ground of political/administrative strategies, while serving to contest several socio-cultural representations of Indian society. Most studies of the village community have adhered to the norms of scientific discourse in sociology, that is, the fact of the existence of the social world has not been queried. Even those who claim that the village in itself is not as important as the processes for which the village is a site, assume the objective status of the village (Ibid.: 377).

**Conclusion: Multiple Concerns and the Missing Theory**

A meticulous scrutiny of the village studies tells us about the ways in which the village has been treated as a historical and sociological category. In these studies, the village, as the fact of territory, has been conceptualised both in the sense of something that exists, and in the historical sense of something that is made. The village studies have yielded valuable insights on the structure and functioning of Indian society. In fact, the ‘village studies’ tradition has altered the perceptions about Indian society outside the narrow confines of the discipline as well (Beteille 1996: 245). It has also brought to our notice the analytical limits of the colonial ethnography on the village. However, somehow the ubiquity of village studies is belied by the lack of theoretical attention paid to it. The excessive concern with the documentation and description of field data has discouraged the effort to construct a theory of the village so as to fit and interpret the massive data generated so far.

This lack of consolidation and codification of the plethora of village studies has been lamented by many sociologists. Atal (2003), for instance, finds most of the village studies, though rich in data, to be discrete, descriptive and discipline
specific. The considerable data contained in such studies even now cry for proper stocktaking. As Atal (Ibid.: 179-80) puts it, ‘while methodological questions have been raised and debated, concepts have been evolved and conceptual frameworks have been formulated, no rigorous writing on theory has appeared so far’. He believes that of the three concepts - village, caste, and joint family - very little has been written on the concept of the village. Generally, the definition given by the census has been accepted, that too when it has been reported that in many cases administrative definitions were unsatisfactory (Ibid.: 158).

Clearly, village as a socio-cultural entity is bound to defy administrative convenience. Also, the obsession of village studies with caste has obscured the much-required theorisation of village itself. In most of the writings on the village, the twin conceptualisations of the village - as a republic and as a community - appear to haunt and direct the theoretical frame and method (Niranjana 1991: 378). Although the advantage of hindsight tells us that the unity, harmony, and coherence of the ‘traditional’ village were less complete than conceptualised in its representation, it will be difficult to say that the village did not and does not exist, notwithstanding the constructivist school. As argued earlier, one has to be careful in attributing the play of construction only to colonial representations while giving a clean chit to the post-colonial representation as if they depicted the real thing. Also, it will be too much of an imagination to impart a theoretical blueprint to village studies in retrospect, even as the latter passed through various overlapping stages: village colonised, nationalised, developmentalised, anthropologised, revisited and globalised (see Breman 1997). As Béteille (1996: 242) rightfully remarks:
This large enterprise ... moved on its course without any single theoretical master plan. There was no doubt disagreements about concepts, about methods of analysis and interpretation, and about the adequacy and reliability of data. But there was little of the kind of theoretical anguish over 'empiricism', positivism' and 'structural-functionalism' that was to torment a later generation of anthropologists. Those who were collecting and presenting materials about villages across the length and breadth of the country felt that they were doing important work, or moderately important work, and they were not greatly troubled by metaphysical doubts about the foundations or purpose of their work. They largely took it for granted that it is possible to write objectively and dispassionately about the life of a community without agonising endlessly over questions of ontology, epistemology, and metaphysics.

For us, theoretically speaking, the question is not whether the village, in an empirical setting, corresponds to the ideal of the community. Also, we are not interested in knowing whether the village had been politically insulated from the state in the past or it has had almost perfect economic self-sufficiency. We are rather interested in exploring the images of the village which the policy makers have at their disposal while framing various programmes of rural development. No development programme is conceived in a fit of absent-mindedness. A certain conceptualisation of the village does go into the making of such programmes. From where does the policy makers get their conceptualisations of the village? Do they solely rely on the census and demographic data about what a village is? In that case, why would development apparatus seek the services of trained sociologists, presumably for their excellent knowledge of the village? What have been the institutional mechanisms of give and take between the sociological knowledge of the village and the programmes of rural development? In whose favour the balance has been tilted? To what extent the village, as understood in the sociological and social anthropological literature has informed the policies and programmes of rural development? How and when the village becomes rural and the vice versa? And lastly, how the earlier dualism of 'the village and the state' gives way to the new one of 'the village and the development' with the state being the bridgehead? In the
next chapter, we will attempt to address some of these questions while probing into
the interconnections between the concept of the village and the discourse on rural
development.

Notes

1 We are using the term ‘village studies’ in the sense it has been used in the
conventional sociological literature (see, for example, Ramkrishna Mukherjee
1969: 805-16; Chauhan 1974: 82-114; Atal 2003: 159-85). The term ‘village
studies’ encompasses various substantive themes, as will become clear in the
course of this chapter. All studies under this rubric are not studies of the village per
se. However, they all have village, as a rule, as the empirical setting for carrying
out research work. Thus, Madan’s (1989) work on kinship falls under ‘village
studies’. For a comprehensive bibliography on ‘village studies’, till the early
1970s, see Lambert (1975). For two recent compilations of bibliography on
‘village studies’, see Breman (1997) and Madan (2002).

2 In the first Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology undertaken
by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), the term ‘village
studies’ has been used (see Chauhan 1974: 82-114). In the second Survey, it has
been substituted by ‘rural studies’ (see Oommen 1985: 117-38). In the third Survey,
interestingly, the title is changed to ‘rural development studies’ (see Alexander
2000: 184-327). Obviously, there is no consensus among practitioners of the
discipline over what qualifies entry under the category ‘village studies’. Also, as
the concerns of the discipline change, new types of studies accumulate which call
for new labelling. For instance, this seems to be the case with Oommen’s
categorisation of ‘rural studies’, as it includes in its purview studies of rural
mobilisations, peasantry, green revolution, etc. The third semantic mutation,
whereby it becomes ‘rural development studies’, confounds the confusion. Is it that
the studies concerning village in India are only rural development studies? Or is it
that, after the gradual decline of the village-based framework, studies are no longer
being conducted in the village setting? Or, does it mean that there is an overall
eclipse of the village studies, howsoever conceptualised? Some of them use terms
like ‘village studies in India’ (Mudiraj 1974) or ‘the study of the villages in India’
(Atal 2003) that really do not solve the problem of delimitation.

3 Mann (1872-1961) got ‘the facts at first hand’ by organising intensive studies of
two villages in the Bombay Deccan - Pimpla Soudagar (nine miles west of Pune,
conducted in 1913-15) and Jategaon Budruk (20 miles east of Pune, conducted in
1917-18). His work has recently been lauded for not having accepted the
essentialising categories of Orientalism. It has been argued that Mann and his
collaborators located Indian history in the Indian village which they saw as an
integral part of state structure since the early eighteenth century (see Constable
2000). They repudiated too the concept of an isolated, static, and ahistorical village
unit. In methodological terms, they sought empirical data which allowed socio-
economic conclusions to be drawn from quantitative evidence that was obtained
first-hand by using data collection techniques developed by practitioners like Rowntree.

It should be noted in passing that Mann applied similar methodology to his study of an English village. In that sense, he can be seen as a pioneering comparative sociologist insofar as the study of village in India is concerned. Also, he saw Indian rural problems as similar, and not a negative ‘other’ of rural English prosperity. In other words, in Mann’s work, one finds a noticeable dissonance with Inden’s (1986, 1990) characterisation of the colonial knowledge of the time. Constable (2000: 32) suggests that Mann’s functionalism seems ‘an economic precursor of later attempts to overcome colonial knowledge’s “essences” and displaced agencies in the form of the intensive village studies of post-independence sociologists, like Disalkar, Marriott, Mayer, Redfield and Srinivas in the 1950s and 1960s’.


Sociology and social anthropology have been used here synonymously and interchangeably. For the pioneers of the village studies, the distinctions between the two had no significant meaning, though, it has been a raging controversy in Indian sociology (see Beteille 1974; see also Atal 2003).

When Srinivas talks of the village, he essentially refers to by now much-celebrated Rampura (near Mysore, in Karnataka) where, he had conducted his fieldwork. This is the same village which he had occasion to ‘remember’ subsequently (see Srinivas 1976).

One finds remarkable similarity between Srinivas’s and Ambedkar’s views on the village (see Chapter 4). For Ambedkar too, the Indian village was essentially a Hindu village which excluded the untouchables (see Rodrigues 2002). Srinivas concedes the essential Hindu character of the village by locating untouchables and Muslims as respectively ‘below’ and ‘outside’ the village. However, he also considers Brahmins as not belonging to the village proper. On this point, Ambedkar differs, as his ideology and politics do not allow him to make the subtle empirical distinctions between the Brahmins as not belonging to the village and dominant castes as properly belonging to the village. For him, caste Hindus (‘touchables’) own the Indian village and the village is the working plant of the Hindu social order.

Dharavahi refers to the rituals associated with the sacrelisation of the village boundaries.

For a recent instance of a village study in the Marxist framework, see Chakravarti (2001).

For the strong linkage between the village and caste research, see Mandelbaum (1972).

Much of the literature in this tradition focuses primarily on the colonial state. However, Kaviraj (1992) finds this construction inherent in the very nature of modernity. So, for him, any modern state has a role to play in the constitution of substantialised communities.

See Bayly (1997).