CHAPTER V
VILLAGE STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS

This chapter describes the nature of the village system that TV has been installed in: The physical structure of the village, its social caste structure, economic strata, and distribution of political power, based on qualitative in-depth participant observation. The attempt here is to identify the nature of the social and economic units which constitute the village system, how they are interrelated, and how they determine the leeway, the alternatives, the initiatives, and the scope for action that different units have.

This context is being stressed since the differential opportunity-structure it predicates ought to be considered when interpreting the effects and the uses of action-eliciting TV programmes in agriculture, health, small industries and the like, for different strata groups. An understanding of the distribution of material resources (land, equipment, credit), and an understanding of the different life-experiences and life-chances that such distribution triggers are crucial in helping explain what kinds of people have the facilities to act on televised cues for improvement and growth, and what kinds of people cannot ever conceive of doing so.

This study village, Kamal, * is located in Matar, the most backward block of Kheda district. Bus travel from Ahmedabad city to Matar takes approximately two hours. The village is located on a mud road, which has a daily bus service except during the three monsoon rain months. The distance from Matar to the village is 5 kilometres.

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* A pseudonym.
Physical Structure

Kamal has two major hamlets or housing settlements, one newly settled and electrified, the other older and unelectrified, at a kilometre's distance from each other. Neither of the two have any piped water.

The unelectrified segment is towards the interior and on the banks of a small river which floods the fields every five or six years, leaving a deposit of sand which makes them uncultivable. Those who live here are either owners of marginal-sized holdings who also do share-cropping to make both ends meet, or landless labourers who work for wages. Most houses are thatched mud huts. The population of this segment is 1,361. It is much more densely-populated than the new settlement. Its contact with Matar block headquarters and the outside world is via a mud track to the newer segment which interfaces with the outside world.

The new electrified settlement on the roadside is less densely-peopled with a population of 504. It consists of large and medium landowners, traders, and the few in service professions. It has the village school, the local self-government office (panchayat), the cooperative milk dairy with the community TV receiver, the multi-purpose cooperative credit society, and the bus stop.

This housing pattern is a reflection of some of the basic unities and cleavages in the socio-economic structure of Kamal. People who are close to each other in social caste and in economic position in the agrarian production system tend to live side by side, untouchables near untouchables, wage labourers near wage labourers, landlords near landlords. It appears as if physical distance is a function of distance between position and rank in the economic hierarchy.
The socio-economic structure does not reflect the traditional Hindu caste structure which froze a one-time division of labour into persistent social categories, only. Distinct from the situation decades ago, today the socio-economic structure and the housing pattern takes cognizance of economic power based on assets acquired, and political status based on control of positions in the local self-government. All seven of the priestly caste Brahmin families live in the new settlement, even though only two of them could be considered among the larger landowners. Next in the caste hierarchy are the Patels, the renowned cultivator caste of the district that started trading in Africa at the turn of the century. All fourteen Patel families live in the new settlement, own large land holdings and together cultivate half of the cultivable area. Next in the caste hierarchy are the Kshatriya-Baraiya-Rajput caste. Living off theft and highway robbery over fifty years ago, due to lack of any productive resources, this stigma has not left them yet. Nevertheless, those forty-seven Baraiya households who have managed to acquire land now live in the new settlement alongside the high-caste Brahmins and the traditionally landed Patels, due to their new landed economic status. However, the remaining one hundred and thirty-eight landless Baraiyas live in the old settlement alongside other lower caste groups such as potters, barbers, and scheduled castes.

Thus, the new settlement houses the upper castes and the upper class, and has all the facilities, while the old settlement has the majority of the population, the lower castes with no economic assets to elevate their status, and the periodic floods.
Social Structure

The social structure of an Indian village is caste-based. Thus, the major caste groups in Kamal are:

--- a few Brahmin families, the old aristocrats of the caste system who lost their lands over the years and went into government jobs;

--- a little over a dozen Patel cultivator families who continue to dominate the agriculture-related transactions of the village (including money-lending), and now also control the new sources of power, i.e., decision-making positions in the new institutions that have been created since independence, viz., the dairy, cooperative credit society, and the panchayat;

--- the numerically dominant Rajput-Baraiyas who own small pieces of land or none, but are a power to contend with whenever it comes to polling because of their numerical dominance;

--- and fifteen scheduled caste families who own no land or very small pieces given to them by government, who live isolated from all others because of their low caste status.

Economic Structure

The economy of Kamal is based primarily on agriculture, like most villages in India. Hence, the relations of production consist essentially of relationships between categories of persons contributing in different ways to agricultural production.

The landowners are active cultivators and money-lenders. This combination may be noted elsewhere in India, too, and has served as an effective mechanism of bondage for labour, for varying lengths of time, sometimes a month, sometimes a year, sometimes a lifetime. They also accept repayment
of loans in the form of grain from small and marginal landowners or sharecroppers, valued at considerably less than the market price when the prices are lowest. They are the ones who have links with the grain merchants in the market towns, and it is thus through the large cultivator that the village has its links with the economy of the region.

Local traders and shopkeepers still function in a barter economy to a considerable extent, since the small farmer and landless labour who come to them for salt, sugar, oil, chilies and vegetables hardly have any contact with the outside world. Some of these stores serve as fronts for the money-lending operations of the large farmers who own all but one of those, too.

Labourers constitute the majority of the population and are sure of daily employment for only around a hundred days in a year, at around Rs. 3.50 a day (45 cents) and have to compete with each other to be employed. On one occasion, when they banded together to demand the legal minimum wage of Rs. 4.50, the landlords retaliated by hiring a truckload of tribal labour from the neighbouring villages from a labour contractor, so none of the village labour got employment. This is a frequent tactic in the region and effectively prevents any possibility of an organisation of the landless agrarian labour.

**Socio-Economic Dynamics**

To illustrate the nature of the social caste and economic class interaction in Kamal: During the study year, the Patel landowners frequently distorted and escalated several tiny misunderstandings to provoke internal divisions in the numerically strong Baraiya caste, lest they form a strong association that might threaten the Patel landowners' interest in cheap
submissive labour. A class association of the large landowners ensures com-
raderie between the large Patel and Baraiya landlords, gives the Baraiya
with land some social prestige by such affiliation, and divides the poten-
ially strong Baraiya caste impotently into a small aspirant group and a large
landless mass. Among the upper class, it would appear that caste considera-
tions are subordinated to class interests.

With no supportive class affiliation, the small farmers and landless
labour are left with caste as their only form of identity, and caste-rituals
as their signs of belonging, status, pride and identification.

It is not true to infer that social caste associations have no influ-
ence in the lives of the upper classes, or that aspirations for upward-mobi-
licity do not affect the poor. The following incident shows how enforcement
of caste practices can be transmuted into a class-defensive mechanism: One
of the largest Patel landowners decided to marry his daughter to an educated
Patel groom outside the gol (circle) of villages to which his family belonged,
since he could not find an educated Patel male worthy of his high school gra-
duate daughter within his gol. He was ostracized by his caste, who saw a
weakening of inter-village linkages that provide a kinship-base to the re-
gional class solidarity of the Patel caste, by such behaviour. He gathered
a small group of loyal Patels around him, and thus two competitive factions
in the Patel caste were born. This led to competition between them to con-
solidate their positions with more Baraiya landlords, and woo more labour
at lower rates than the other faction.

Political Structure

This village had been a stronghold of the Indian National Congress
Party since independence. After the split in the Congress party, the land-
less labour and very small farmers aligned themselves with the Indira-Congress while the large landowners aligned themselves with the Organisational Congress. The new Congress following was numerically greater. Apart from caste and class, numbers of heads become very important in determining who wins elections to political posts. Although the numerically dominant Baraiya caste could well determine who was elected to office and made decisions on allocation of resources controlled by the panchayat and the cooperatives, the class division between the landless and the landed among them, and the divisive games played by the landlords keep them from presenting a united front.

Socio-Economic and Political Interaction

A few cases are presented to illustrate the relationship of high economic strata, to social castes, to positions of power and control in the new political and developmental agencies in the village.

(i) The two largest landowners, two Patels, have full political control of the panchayat and the police machinery: one is the sarpanch (headman of the village council), and the other is the police patel. Apart from these positions, one of them is on the board of the village cooperative dairy and the cooperative credit society, which is the agency that disburses government rations, credit and agricultural inputs. The other is a big money-lender in the village. Both are prominent Old Congress members.

(ii) Head of the Baraiya caste association in the village is a large Baraiya landowner who lives in the new settlement away from the poor Baraiyas who live in the old section. He is Deputy Sarpanch of the
village panchayat and used to be Chairman of the cooperative credit society.

(iii) The present Chairman of the government credit cooperative society is the largest private money-lender who flourishes on loaning out funds provided for low-interest government loans at very high rates for his personal gain. His wife holds the seat reserved for women in the taluka panchayat.

(iv) The Chairman of the cooperative dairy is the largest Baraiya landowner.

(v) Two Brahmin households are large landowners. Heads of both these households have amicably divided up the village between them for provision of priestly services. This ritual function is subsidiary and yet helpful in the performance of their regular jobs as auditor of the credit society, and post master of the village post office that runs the government small savings scheme. It is held in some quarters that he accepts savings from illiterate depositors who cannot read the entries he makes in their pass books, and that he spends their savings on meeting his household expenses.

The complexity, subtlety and depth of these intermeshed relationships can be amplified at length. It should not be assumed that these control and monopoly mechanisms are as unsophisticated and as undisguised as the skeletal outlines presented might lead the reader to suppose. The process being stressed is how high economic strata in this village, irrespective of caste, have tended to protect their economic interests by taking over new sources of power that could have presented a threat to them, thus nipping all provisions for decentralised participatory democracy in the bud.
Built on prior economic advantage, with its roots in land assets, Kamal boasts a superstructure that controls all other aspects, too. The total amount of land owned is not meaningful as an absolute figure here, but as an indicator of other non-land resources and relationships it commands.

**Characteristics of Different Land-Ownership Strata**

The following section shows the different characteristics--socio-demographic, economic, etc.--of the landless labourers, small farmers and large farmers to stress the differences in resources that different land ownership strata bring to the communication mix.

Table 5.1 on socio-demographic characteristics shows that the large farmers stratum are a little older than the small farmers (one year on the average), who are in turn a little older than the landless labourer stratum. A larger percent of the heads of large farmer households are married and live in joint-family homes. As indicated earlier, one-fifth of the large farmers belong to the enterprising Patel cultivator caste while there are no Patels in the small farmer and landless labourer stratum. There are 14% Harijan untouchables among the landless labour and 7% Harijans among the small farmers, but no untouchables are large farmers. Though the Bariayas are the largest single caste group in all three strata, their proportion is least in the stratum made up of large farmers.

Table 5.2 presents the economic characteristics of the three land-ownership strata:

1. The landless rank their present position on the ladder of life lower than the small farmers, who rank themselves lower than the large farmers. Their self-perception is congruent with their relative position in terms of land ownership.
Table 5.1
SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
OF THE THREE LAND-OWNERSHIP STRATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Landless</th>
<th>Small Farmers *</th>
<th>Large Farmers *</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=48</td>
<td>N=116</td>
<td>N=66</td>
<td>N=231</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Mean age in years 34 36 37 36
2. Percent married 87.8 85.3 90.9 87.4
3. Percent in joint families 44.9 41.4 51.5 45.0
4. Caste distribution (in percent)
   a. Brahmins 6.1 1.7 3.0 3.0
   b. Patels 0 0 21.2 6.1
   c. Rajput Baraiyas 73.5 87.9 71.3 80.1
   d. Harijans 14.4 6.9 0 6.5
   e. Others 6.0 3.5 4.5 4.3

* Small farmers own 0.1-4.4 acres; large farmers own 4.5 acres or more land.
Table 5.2

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS
OF THE THREE LAND-OWNERSHIP STRATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Landless (N=48)</th>
<th>Small Farmers (N=116)</th>
<th>Large Farmers (N=66)</th>
<th>TOTAL (N=231)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mean rank of self on the 11-point ladder of life</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mean monthly family income needed (Rupees)</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Main sources of income (in percent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Agriculture</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Wage labour</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Trading</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Service</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Crafts</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Percent with supplementary income</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mean number of acres owned</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mean cattle owned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Buffaloes</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Bullocks</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Percent owning high-cost agricultural equipment</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. The mean monthly expenditure of the landless family is lower than the expenditure of the small farmer which is less than the expenditure of the large farmer.

3. The size of the monthly income needed by landless labour is less than what the small farmer says his need is, which in turn is less than what the large farmer says his need is.

4. The main source of income for landless labour is wage employment, as against self-employment in agriculture that is the main source of income for small farmers, and large farmers.

5. Landless labour who have the highest need of supplementary income, in fact have the least supplementary income.

6. The small farmers stratum owns 2 acres on the average while the large farmer stratum owns an average of 8.4 acres.

7. Landless labour have fewer cattle than small farmers who have fewer cattle than large farmers.

8. Fewer landless labour own high cost agricultural implements than small farmers and, fewer small farmers own high-cost agricultural implements than large farmers.

Thus, the classification into land-ownership groups adequately reflects differences in self-perception, income, expenditure and ownership of other economic resources.

To sum up the characteristics of the land-ownership strata: the larger the amount of land, the greater the chance of being high caste to begin with. Thus, the social and economic hierarchy are closely related. Large landlords perceive themselves as highest on the ladder of life, they spend more every month, need more income than the other two strata, own more cattle, and have
more agricultural implements. Given these differences in the three strata, what are the differences in the responses of these strata to the TV year?

Summary

This chapter has indicated the differentiation in the village population on whom the effects of one-year of development-TV exposure are being studies. These are being stressed due to the research practice of using aggregate scores for a whole village that perforce ignore these differences. Three major sources of differences have been highlighted -- caste, economic class, and political power, all very closely related to each other, with the stress on economic class influences. The failure to consider these groupings and influences is particularly glaring since social scientists have ample empirical data to indicate that people accept only those innovations that are supportive of the stability of their reference groups. It is the rigidity/flexibility of group structures -- with the socialisation they determine, the rewards that they provide and the norms that they generate -- that also explain a large part of the nature of the reactions of individuals within them. Responses to communication are no exception, particularly when the communication is motivated towards social change that could affect group control of scarce material resources in backward villages.