CHAPTER II

THE VILLAGE

An attempt is made here to discuss the meaning of the term "village" as conceived by the people and administrators, types of villages, size of the village, names of the villages, lay-outs of the villages, village institutions and their significance, housing layouts and their designs and the building material used for housing in the villages in Thailand in general and of the village under study. This is to understand the nature and the extent of changes occurred in the village under study.

Meaning of the Term Village:

In Thailand the meaning of the term town, village and country, is not clearly understood by the people and the administrators. The meaning of the term "town" is taken to be the Province. Charles Mudge writes that "There is a tendency for Thai words denoting localities to mean both a smaller and a larger type of locality. For
example, Ban means both house and village, and Meuan; means town, district or Kingdom. Just as the English word "town" is used to translate the Thai word "Chungwat" or province, so English word "village" is used to translate not only "Muban" (which is sometime translated "hamlet") but "Tambon" (which is elsewhere translated "commune" or "village group"), and even "Ampur" or administrative district."¹ The author further writes that "This confusion in concepts is a part of a more widespread confusion about the meaning of the word "village". The concise Oxford Dictionary gives: "Assemblage of house, etc., larger than hamlet and smaller than towns." This sets no upper and lower limits in terms of numbers of houses or inhabitants. Common usage suggest that a settlement of more than 20 houses, about 100 inhabitants, may qualify as a village, while the

transition from village to town is somewhere around 3,000 population mark. Much large populations frequently referred to as villages and smaller ones are referred to as towns: this partly depends upon the previous history and the rate of development of the settlement. Moreover, there is another difficulty. In spite of the world-wide tendency for human habitations to cluster together, there are also wide scattered habitations. In some regions the pattern is of isolated homesteads only; elsewhere, one way find a combination of both clusters and isolated homesteads. Confronted with all this diversity, the administrators tend to apply the term "village" to an area with a given population rather than to an actual cluster of houses or organized community."²

Types of Villages:

There are three types of village in Thailand.

These three types of villages are described below:

"The ribbon type settlement is common and it strung along a canal, or river bank or along a major highway or road. The larger of these villages may extend for several miles, with houses often only one deep along the axis of the village with rice fields starting at the rear of the household compounds."  

The second type of settlement is clustered and is surrounded by rice fields or in an around a grove of fruit trees or cocunat palms. The third type of settlement consists of isolated farm houses as the topographical features did not allow them to cluster together. These isolated or scattered houses are clustered together for the purpose of administration. The ribbon settlement, and the isolated

settlement are also called strip village and dispersed village respectively.⁴

The cluster settlement pattern is found in the northern and southeastern regions and both cluster settlement and scattered settlement are found in southern regions.

The villages are separated from each other by rice fields. But in case of dispersed villages whose households extend a long distance along the river banks it is difficult for the casual observer to understand where one ends and the next begins.

However, the boundaries of the villages are administratively clearly demarcated.

In case of ribbon type settlements, or strip villages and isolated settlements of farm houses or dispersed villages, political or administrative

units may not coincide with social communities. "Within the strip villages, the local spatial orientation of the villagers may be framed with reference to the local temple, which plays an important part in the daily life of the community."5 The inhabitants of the dispersed village generally meet only during festivals held at the nearest Wat.

Hence the inhabitants of these types of village form social communities if they are oriented to each other on certain occasions.

Size of the Village:

In Thailand generally the villages vary in their size. Their size range from fifty families to 200 families. The clustered type village will have a hundred families and the large villages will have 200 families.6 The size of the village


depends upon some of the factors. John E. deYoung writes that "size of a village is correlated with regional variations in soil fertility, with availability of irrigation water, with general population density, and other factors." 7

Further if the villages grow in their size, it becomes difficult to administer the village by the Government officials. Hence the villages are suitably divided for the purpose of administrations. "The system of local administration divisions is not static." 8 The administration units, viz., Ampur villages (Muban) and communes (Tambon) are not static. If these administrative units grow in size and if they are found difficult to manage, they are suitably divided on their examination according to the guiding principles by the Government.


The following are the guidelines for setting up a commune and a village.

"(a) A commune (Tambon) should consist of no less than 10 villages (Muban), and should not have less than 2000 inhabitants, unless it is mountainous, forest or waste land.

(b) The area should be neither too big nor too small. The commune headman (Gamnan) should be able to oversee every village in the commune and it should not take more than a day to traverse the commune on foot.

(c) The commune should as far as possible have natural boundaries such as rivers, swamps and mountains.

(d) The commune should have an adequate income.

Similarly, these are the guiding principles for setting up a village.
(a) Every village should have less than 200 families.

(b) Before a village is subdivided, proof must be given that either the area or the village population is too large for one headman to look after.9

But in spite of these guidelines, "there has not been much attempt to standardize the size of the local administrative units and that these variations depends on all kinds of local factors."10

It is also worthwhile to understand the meaning of the administrative term "Muban". This term is applied to the population which comes under one village headman or "Puyaiban", but though the administrative area may coincide with physical settlement pattern, it does not necessary

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do so. The larger villages are often divided into two or more "Muban", while several separate small clusters of dwellings may be combined into a single "Muban".

**Names of the Villages:**

In Thailand the villages are called either after Nongs (Pond) or Plongs (Plants), Nong Kha (Pond of ginger), Nong Tao Nok (Pond of tortoises), Phai Par (Forest of Bamboos), etc. These names are placed after the word "Ban" i.e. village. These names are taken for the villages because of their importance to the villagers. The following example will indicate the importance of such names. The word "nong" is said in McFarland's Thai-English Dictionary to mean "a marsh, a bag, a swamp", but this does not convey the right impression. These English words suggest a piece of wet, spongy ground. But Nong, if it is a good one, may have some water in it all the year round; if it is not
so good it usually dries up into an expanse of hard mud. The Nong is important for the village as a watering place for animals and in many cases as a source of domestic water supply. It is also the home of fish, which during the season spread all over the paddy fields and, when the water recedes, return to the Nong. Part of the Nong may be specially deepened as fish tank. The village under study, viz., "Ban Plong" which means the villages of plants.

The Houses in the Rural Thailand:

The houses in northern and northeastern rural Thailand are generally built on a raised platform 1.50 to 2.50 metres above the ground with a view to seek protection from river floods. In the southern region elevated houses are less

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common.\textsuperscript{12} The houses which are built on elevated platforms also provide protection from wild animals and thieves. The places beneath the houses are used for keeping cattles, resting during leisure time, chit-chatting when the people are off their work, or for carrying on activities like basket-making, spinning and weaving and pounding rice. From this, it can be seen that the places beneath the houses are put to use for different purposes.

William J. Klausner has studied the Ban Nong Khon (village pond of a log lumber) where all the houses were built in the same style, raised on poles with an open "basement" beneath.\textsuperscript{13} William J. Klausher further writes about the change in


the principal use of the places beneath the houses. He writes that "although the house style may have initially been influenced by a desire to be protected from snakes, wild animals and floods, today one describes the principal advantages in terms of coolness and the availability of a relatively secure extra basement room where cattle and poultry can be kept at night.

During the day, a shady site is available for spinning, weaving, basket making, repairing of thatch for the roof, and the pounding of rice.¹⁴

Dealing with the traditional house in rural Thailand, Chardsi Bunnag writes that "the 'nipa' but which is a small house on bamboos or wooden stilts with bamboo frame, nipa walls and roof, slatted floor 5 feet above the ground."¹⁵

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¹⁵ Chardsi, Bunnag: Thailand: Country Monograph on Rural Settlements, Research Report No.9, National Housing Authority, Institute for Housing Studies, Netherlands, p.11.
From this it can be seen that initially the principal function of the house style was to provide merely protection. Now to the people house style is principally advantageous as they use the space beneath their housed for different purposes.

The Layout, Design and Functional Use of the House:

It may be of interest to note the typical layouts of the rural houses, their designs and their functional use. Regarding typical layouts and designs of the houses, Chardsi Bunnag writes that "a typical layout of rural houses is simple, a rectangular or square multipurpose room with or without terrace."16 He further writes that "most of the houses have only fundamental functional components, as a sleeping area,

multipurpose area, kitchen terrace, and toilet. The sleeping area is approximately 50 per cent of the houses is in the multipurpose area which is also used for receiving guests, eating, resting, and working. The toilet is normally located far from the house. A part of houses in some cases is used as a grain silo, or the silo may be annexed to the house.¹⁷

The layout of the houses and their designs as given by Chardsi Bunnag are reproduced here with a view to gain insight into these. From this it can be said that generally in rural Thailand the layout and the design of the houses are simpler. The multipurpose room is used in day time for cooking, eating, receiving guests, etc., and in the night it mainly is used for sleeping purpose.

Building Material and Technology:

A variety of building materials are used for house construction. Traditionally the materials most commonly used were bamboo and wood as these materials were available in plenty. The most modest structures had bamboo plaited walls, or leaves in bamboo frame, a thatch roof and wooden foundation poles, floors and beams. If the resources permitted, the entire house was built in wood with a thatch roof or a tin roof; the latter a symbol of prestige.  

The provincial variations are there in the use of building materials. These variations are seen in the use of materials either for substructures, walls or roofs. In this connection, Chardsi Bunnog writes that "for substructures, wood or bamboo are still dominant, while

reinforced concrete is also being used, especially in the Southern region. The upper and the ground floor still relies highly upon wood in all bamboo, with reinforced concrete or brick/soil increasingly common in the Southern region. Wood, bamboo, and corrugated galvanized iron sheets and grass/bamboo mats, are used for doors, windows, ceilings and stairways. Roofs are predominantly covered over by corrugated galvanized iron sheets, with the northern regions displaying the highest reliance upon grass and southern region displays the highest utilization of tiles. Thus the use of building materials largely depends upon the availability of the materials, climatic conditions and the economic standing of the house owner.

The traditional materials such as bamboo, bamboo mats, and grass are being replaced to some extent

by the modern materials such as reinforced concrete, corrugated galvanized iron sheets, tiles and bricks. But the modern materials are used by those who can offered to pay the cost of the materials.

Ban Plong: (A Village Under Study):

The village under study, viz., Ban Plong is a clustered village. It is located in Kang-An sub-district of Prasat district. It lies at a distance of 4.5 kms to the South of the district town. Buses regularly ply from Prasat town via Ban Plong. As road is metalled the bus services are available to the people throughout the year. Besides, some people also use their motor-cycles and bi-cycles to visit the district town. The Ban Plong borders with the following places:

North: Kam Pol and Kang-Jan villages in the Kang-An sub-district.

South: Kom-Paneng village in Kang-An sub-district.
East: Ta Bow in Ta Bow sub-district.

West: Kan-Jan village in Kang-An sub-district.

The meaning of the "Ban Plong" is the village of Plants (Ban means village and Plong means plants). Some 130 years ago five to six families from the neighbouring areas came with a purpose to settle here. The area then was covered with plants of various types. They removed the plants and cleared the area for the construction of houses. Later on families continued to come here for settlement. The availability of water from the pond might have attracted the families to come and settle at this place as the water is the basic need of human life.

There are more than 225 houses. This is a larger village with 190 families. The total population of the village is 1,297 persons. The people are ethnically Thai and are Buddhists.
The village is located on plain ground surrounded by rice fields. The soil in the village varies from sandy clay to clay. The villagers are mostly rice farmers. The size of the village under study might have been governed because of the availability of water from the pond.

The Layout of the Village:

The layout of the village Ban Plong is given here (Figure No. 1). The houses in this village are arranged in compact groupings for the purpose of protection and efficient administration. The houses are situated along more or less straight paths running from one end to the other in every direction that cross each other and lead to wat, the school, the stupas, the wells, the pond, the highway and the rice fields beyond the village boundaries.

There are clearly recognizable pockets of houses either square, rectangular and triangular in their shape. The smallest pocket of houses
THE MAP OF SURIN PROVINCE, AND THE DISTRICT UNDER STUDY
FIGURE No. 1
THE MAP OF BAN PLOONG
PRASAT DISTRICT, SURIN PROVINCE
THAILAND

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contains seven to eight houses while the biggest one contains 40 houses. The rest of the pockets of houses fall in between the smallest and the biggest pockets of houses.

The wat (temple) and the school are situated at the out-skirts of the village on the east and west sides of the village respectively. The Stupa is located at the central place of the village. The pond is on the extreme side of the east beyond the village boundary. In between the Stupa and the pond lies the vegetable garden. The highway passes from outside the village in south, south-west and west-north directions.

As the village is big it is divided into two units for the purpose of efficient administration. These units are called the north village and the south village. Each unit of village has its own headman. Even though the village is divided into two units, for the purpose of administration, but for the other purposes i.e.
Socio-cultural and religious, etc., is treated by the villagers as one unit. Both the units use to visit the same Wat, take advantage of the same school, use the water of the same pond, etc., Thus the village as a whole act as a social unit.

**Layout and Design of Houses:**

The layout of the houses in the village is simple rectangular or square room or a hall where activities such as cooking, eating, receiving guests or friends, sleeping, etc., take place one after other. Some of the houses have separate rooms for cooking and eating, receiving guests and sleeping. The toilets are located in the compound of the houses. The style of the houses are given below. The houses built in the recent past on the ground are better in the layouts and design and are decent in look. The old traditional houses have an ugly look.
Most of the houses are built on raised platforms four to five feet above the ground.

Even though the elevated houses initially assumed protection either from flood or animal intruders, today these houses, according to the villagers, are more comfortable because the air easily circulates in them and the houses remain cool than the houses situated on the ground. The space beneath houses is the extra-place available to the family and is used for different purposes depending upon the needs of the family. This space is generally used for pounding rice, basket-making, weaving, spinning, for keeping agricultural implements and animals. During leisure time the members of the family and/or the neighbours gather beneath the space of the houses for chit chatting and recreate themselves for a while to refresh from the routine manual work. This is the social function of the space.
Building Materials used House For Construction:

A variety of materials are used for house construction in the village. The old houses revealed the use of traditional material such as bamboo, wood, and corrugated iron sheets. The houses generally have bamboo plaited walls or wall of wooden planks, wooden floors rested on wooden beam and poles. Some of the houses are entirely constructed by using wood for floor and walls and tins. The Photograph Nos. 1, 2, and 3 given here show the traditional house styles in the village under study. The house are seen built in the raised wooden platforms. The walls of these houses are built by using wooden planks. The roofs are of either iron sheets or tiles or a combination both the iron sheets and tiles. For the circulation of the air either windows are provided or the wooden walls of the houses are partially constructed. Sometimes the house is constructed on the ground (Photograph No.3)
the main house is seen roofed by using iron sheets and the walls are of bamboo poles tied together. The left and the right sides of the house are roofed by using iron tins and the walls are seen absent. The space provided here is put to extra use. (Photograph No. 3) The fruit trees and flower trees and plants etc., it is used either for keeping agricultural implements other articles or for animals or for chit-chatting during leisure time, etc. The houses constructed in the recent past deviate from the traditional use of the building materials.

(Photograph No. 1)
Traditional House Style
(Photograph No. 2)
Traditional House Style

(Photograph No. 3)
Traditional House Style
These houses are built on the ground by using bricks for walls, tiles for roofs and wood for door and windows. These materials are costly than the traditional materials. But only the well-to-do families have constructed such houses. Generally, the quality of material used for house construction depend on the economic standing-high-and low-of family. These houses are better in design and look. Photograph No.4 shows the modern house style obtaining in the village under study. The design of this is very beautiful. It is built on the ground. The current coloured tiles are seen used for flooring. The walls are constructed by using backed bricks plastered with cement and lime. The white colour is given on the walls. The windows are of wooden frames and the glasses are fitted in the modern frames. The doors are of seasonal wood. The roof of the house in the whole, the house is better in design and nice to look.
(Photograph No. 4)
Modern House Style
Interaction Centers or Social Centres:

It is an attempt here to identify interaction centres or social centres where the activities of the village are concentrated and the villagers and outsiders come to participate in these activities. The centres help in creating functional community.

The social centres in Ban Plong are the Wat, the school, the rice mill, public wells and pond. Among all these, the wat and the school as institutions are very important in the day-to-day life of the villagers. These are the community-oriented institutions. Hence, it may be interesting to understand the significance of these institutions and places in the life of the villagers.

The Wat in the village is located away from the residential area on eastern side of the village. In rural Thailand the Wat is generally situated away from the residential area at the outskirts of the village with a view to give maximum privacy and seclusion to the monks to
engage themselves in sermons and other activities peacefully. The campus of the village wat surrounded by a compound consists of a temple of Lord Buddha, an abbot a residential place of the President of the Wat, residential place of the monks, a sermon hall, a school of monks, a bell tower and a pond.

A layout of the wat is given here (Figure No. 5). The Abbot is the residential place for the Abbot who is the President of the Wat. (Photograph No. 5)

ABBOT : The Residential Place of the President of the Wat.
The temple (Photograph No.6) is situated on the ground. This is a small structure of tin sheets and brick walls. The Buddha image is installed here. The monk's and other persons to perform and attend religious functions. The temple is the socio-cultural centre of the village where the villagers meet for the celebration of festivals and the performance of religious activities. The people from different villages also participate in the religious activities of the Wat (temple). This facilities in establishing communications between the villages.

(Photograph No.6)

THE WAT TEMPLE OF BUDDHA
The Wat school (Photograph No. 7) here is a modern structure beautifully designed having a porch to enter into it. It is roofed with tiles and walls of it are bricks plastered with cement. The sides of the Wat school are partially closed. The main function of this school is to deliver sermons before the gathering. Beside this, it is also used as assembly hall or the travellers visiting the wat use this as lodging place.

(Photograph No. 7)
The Wat school and Sermon Hall
There is monk's residential place (Photograph No.8) having a bell tower. It is an old structure built in the traditional style. The front sides as well as the left and right sides of it are not covered. The back side is closed by wooden poles. This may perhaps be the older structure in the Wat. The Wat also consists of a small pond and a well. The water of the pond is used for bathing and washing clothes. The water of the well is used for drinking purpose.

(Photograph No.8)

The Monk's Residential Place
The Stupa (Photograph No. 9) is located at the central place of the village. Near the Stupa, there is a meeting hall where people on occasion assemble to discuss the matter of local importance. It is built on a raised platform.

(Photograph No. 9)
The Stupa in the Village
The village school (Photograph No. 10) is situated on the eastern side at the outskirts of the village. Generally, in Thailand, the wat and the school are situated outside the residential area of the village with a view to have peaceful atmosphere to carry on the activities. There are 19 teachers including the Head Master. Of these only eight teachers stay in the village and the other residing outside the village come to the school everyday.

The school has six class rooms with instruction given through grad six. There are 473 pupils in school. The school is fully equipped. Many of the parents provide their children with desks and chairs themselves and thus extend their co-operation to the school in carrying its educational activities. The parents of the school children on occasions come in contact with the school teachers. Therefore, the school may be a functional centre for the village.
(Photograph No. 10)
The Village School
There is no market place in the village except two small stores which sell some of the basic necessities of life such as sugar, soap, kerosene, canned milk, tobacco, stationery, cosmetics, articles, etc. As the district town is very near, the villagers also patronize town stores.

There is a rice mill in the village where people grind their rice. Women usually bring their rice to the mill for polishing and chit-chat till they get their rice polished.

There is a village pond (Photograph No. 11) on the east side of the village beyond its boundary. It is a big pond, the water of which is used for bathing, washing clothes and for irrigating the vegetable garden. The garden lies between the village and the pond. The pond and the garden also provide occasions for social interaction among the people.
(Photograph No. 11)
The Village Pond
This village maintains contacts with the outside communities for administrative, educational, agricultural, health, recreational and other purposes. The children after completion of their grade six in the village go to the Prasat city if they wish to continue their education. The villagers sell their agricultural produce in the Prasat city market and also buy the items of household necessities. The Government officials also visit this village in connection with their official work. Thus there is regular contacts of the villagers with the city people and vice-versa.

The wat, the school, stores, rice mills, assembly hall, pond, well etc., are the social centres where people come in interaction with each other and a functional community is created.
The foregoing account of the villages in Thailand and the village under study is summarized as follows -

The meaning of the terms "village and town" are not clear to the people and the administrators. The problem of the meaning faces with some difficulties. Therefore, the administrators apply the term "village" to an area with a given population rather than to an actual cluster of houses or organized community. There are three types of villages or settlements, viz., ribbon type settlement, clustered settlement and isolated settlement. The villages generally vary in their size. Their size range from fifty families to 200 families. The size of the village depended upon regional variations, viz., soil, fertility, availability, of water for irrigation, etc. If the size of the village becomes larger, then for the purpose of effective administration, the village is suitably divided
into two units according to the guidelines laid down by the Government. The villages are generally called after their Nongs (Pond), Plongs (Plants), Non Kha (Pond of gingers), Nong Tao (Pond of torties), etc. These names are taken by the villagers, because of their significance to them. Traditionally the function of the house erected on raised platforms was to provide protection either from thieves, flood water and animal intruders.

Now, the villagers view the house style in terms of its advantageousness to them. A change is seen in the outlook of the villagers in viewing the traditional house style. A typical layout of the house is simple in that it is either rectangular or square. In a multipurpose room house, the house-hold activities take place one after the other. Traditionally, the materials most commonly used were bamboo and wood as these were available in plenty. A change in the use of traditional materials is
also seen. The modern materials like concrete tiles, tins and bricks are also used for house construction. The style and the material used for house construction reflect the socio-economic position of the owner family. These are the general features of the villages in Thailand.

The following is the summary of the account of the village Ban Plong selected for the present study.

The village Ban Plong is named after "Plong" i.e., plants. In Thai, Ban means village. The Ban Plong means the village of plants. This is a clustered type of village which consists of 225 houses with 190 families. Total population 1,291 persons. The village is suitably divided into two units - north and south - for the purpose of effective administration. A layout of the village showed clustering of houses in number of pockets. The houses in these pockets range from seven to eight to forty. These pockets of
houses are connected by internal village roads running from one end to the other of the village. Most of the houses are built on the raised platforms four to six feet above the ground. The space beneath the houses are used for carrying on number of activities, viz., pounding rice, spinning and weaving, basket-making, keeping animals and chit-chatting during leisure time. Initially the purpose behind constructing elevated houses was to seek protection from animal intruders and thieves. The villagers view the space beneath house as social centre or interaction centre as the family members and their neighbours to recreate themselves beneath the house. The modern houses beautiful in designs are also constructed on the grounds. The good quality materials are used for the construction of houses. Therefore, some of the villagers are seen to be change-oriented. The wat, the school, rice mill, stores, assembly hall, pond and well
are the social centres. Here, the interacting people form a functional community.