Chapter VII

Social Morphology: A Case Study of Sample Villages
SOCIAL MORPHOLOGY: A CASE STUDY OF SAMPLE VILLAGES

Morphology, which is primarily concerned with the layout, plan, and internal structure of settlements, forms an important aspect of settlement studies. The morphology of a village is closely related to the physical characteristics of its dwelling site, availability of surface water, nature of soil, cropping pattern, lay-out of the field plots and elements of the cultural landscape like historical events, social groups and their interactions, socio-economic condition of the inhabitants, community and caste structure etc. The physical morphology of a settlement is easily recognizable from the analysis of its dwellings site, topography and building materials etc., while its social morphology involves functional and social space, which are socially and culturally controlled. In fact, morphological structure, street patterning and arrangement of dwellings and location of secular buildings etc. are all governed by socio-economic and cultural factors.¹ The village community as an integrated living whole consists of a collection of units, arranged to form a social structure, i.e. a set of social relations.

The objective of the present chapter is to study the social morphology of three selected villages of different ecological settings in the study area, and to throw light on the influence of the physico-cultural and socio-economic factors, particularly caste and land ownership, on the village morphology of these selected villages of the Aligarh District.

1. Socio-Spatial Structure

The morphological structure of the sample villages in the study area is mainly determined by their socio-economic as well as physical attributes. Land ownership and caste system have played a crucial role in determining their spatial morphological structure. Field work studies of the sample villages have shown that Brahmins, although they occupy the highest rank in the social hierarchy, do not hold the central or the best available sites of these villages, whereas people of the second and third order of the social hierarchy, such as Khasatriyas and Vaishyas, occupy the central or best available sites. They have the largest land holdings in these villages. The lowest strata of the rural society, namely, people belonging to the scheduled castes generally live in congested residences on the periphery of the villages, away from the higher caste dwellings. At times, caste based hamlets also emerge within the village territory, having caste names like 'Ahiran', 'Kurmiyan', 'Chamraula', or
'Chamartola', 'Lodhian', 'Jatau Patti' etc. Such hamlets, though physically isolated from each other by intervening fields, grovelands, water bodies, streets etc., are functioning well-knit together as components of a single unit under the old Jaimani system. These dual characteristics of spatial segregation and functional integration of the socio-spatial structure of Indian villages have been very well described by K.N. Singh through his religio-ritual and secular dominance models.

1.1 Religio-Ritual Model

The Hindu social organization is based on the caste system. Caste is a very important feature of India's life and culture. No other social institution has played such a vital role as that of caste in the development of village society. The Indian society is split up into many self contained divisions of castes in which each caste has its own way of life, with its distinct profession, ideology and behaviour. People of one caste and clan are closely bound together by common traditions and beliefs. In all matters they are found very close and work in harmony. Different patterns of religio-ritual distances among various castes and jatis (sub-castes) have been found in the villages of different localities of the study area. The segregationist notions of castes such as purity, pollution, untouchability etc. maximises social distances between the higher and lower castes. The stigma of
pollution connotes a sense of ritual distance between different castes and determines the spatial arrangement of their respective dwellings in the villages. Traditionally, there is a Brahman-untouchable rituals continuum in which other caste groups occupy different positions based on their respective social status (Fig. 7.1a). Brahmans and Sudras, having their discrete social relevance, were placed at the two ends of the continuum. Such caste segregation, being maximum during the early days of the settlements, led to the establishment of caste-based hamlets in the villages. In the case of compact villages, the untouchables were confined to the periphery of the settlements in south, south-east and sometimes in the north, to maintain the supposed purity of air and village environment. But with the spread of education, enforcement of social laws and functional ties, the rigidity of the caste system is gradually losing its force, with the result that certain changes in socio-spatial structure of the villages seem to be emerging.

1.2 Secular Dominance Models

Maximization of distances among various castes, based on religio-ritual notions, is being diminished with the secular outlook of villagers, especially with respect to functional ties (Fig. 7.1b). Landowners, who mostly belong to higher castes like the Brahmans and the Rajputs, depend upon lower castes for carrying out agricultural and other allied activities on their lands. On the other hand, landless
HYPOTHETICAL SOCIO-SPATIAL STRUCTURE

A. 1. COMPACT SITES  

2. HEMLETED SITES

INDIAN VILLAGE-STRUCTURE

B. 1. RELIGIO-RITUAL MODEL  

SECULAR DOMINANCE MODEL

DISTANCE MAXIMIZATION BETWEEN  
DISTANCE MINIMIZATION

U-AND HIGHER CASTES  
U-AND HIGHER CASTES

R-RAJPUT  B-BRAHMIN  A-AHIR  K-KAYASTH

H-BHUMIHAR  M-KUMHAR  N-BARBAR  G-GONR  S-SERVICE

C-CASTES  U-UNTOUCHABLE-CHAMAR etc.

FIG. 7.1
labourers, mostly belonging to the low castes like the Jatavs and the Dhanuks, have to depend upon higher castes for their livelihood. This functional inter-dependence generates an atmosphere of co-operation in the countrysides in which caste barriers tend to be disregarded in spite of the stigma of untouchability attaching to the lower castes. This brings down the distance between these two social groups, making rural settlements compact and unified. It has been found that the dominant land-owning caste in a village of the first, the second or the third hierarchy of castes i.e. Brahmans, Kashtriyas or Vaishyas, determines the socio-economic position of the villagers. They wield power in the rural areas and manipulate the politics of the villager community in their own interest. People of the land owning caste invite families of different castes to settling in their villages. They allocate them cites for home stead, cultivable lands, and village resources, thus providing members of other castes a living under the traditional village Jaimani system.

Examples of the following three sample villages may be cited to show the spatial organization of different castes in relation to the locally dominant caste. The Jats, the Vaishyas, the Brahmans and Lodhyas have been the dominant land-owning castes who originally settled in these villages. Other castes were brought in as followers to make the
settlements function under the **Jaimani** system, and to provide them with goods, services and cheap labour for agricultural and allied purposes. The new socio-economic conditions have brought in significant changes in age-old social traditions. Now functional interdependence is least affected by discrimination based upon caste and creed. Agsauli, Barauli, and Tikari-khera, villages of the Aligarh District have been taken as case studies to analyse the socio-morphological structure of the built-up areas.

2. Agsauli Village

Village Agsauli is located at 27°44' North latitude and 78°29' East longitude in Sikandra Rao block of Sikandra Rao **tehsil** of the Aligarh District. It is situated about 14 Kilometres in the northeast from the Sikandra Rao **tehsil** headquarters. Metalled roads from this village lead to Ganga and Kachaura to its north and south respectively, while at a distance of about half a kilometre, where Kachaura road crosses the Kanpur-Achnera railway line lies the railway station of Agsauli. The settlement of the village is spread over a mound (tila) sloping gently from its centre towards its peripheries. It is a large sized agricultural village having a population of 5,845, according to the census of 1981.

I. Histogenesis

The early history of this village is obscure. A study of the historical sources and personal interviews with the
inhabitants of the villagers have made it possible for the present researcher to trace its histogenetic process. Its name is derived probably from the agasti (Sesbania grandiflora), a small soft wooded tree with big beautiful edible flowers, which is found here in large numbers. 1

This place is mentioned in the account of the strife between Ahmad Khan Bangash and Shujauddaula (1763). At that time, together with its surrounding areas, it was reported to be covered with dense forests. 2 The local people assert that it takes its name from a saint named Agasti who had established his ashram here. The ashram associated with his name is situated on Sikandra Rao-Kasganj Road and has a large temple attached to it. But it does not appear to be more than fifty years old. The area is dominated by Pundhir Rajputs. The settlement of Agsauli is compact, consisting of 1043 houses arranged in rectangular shape. The settlement pattern of this village is intimately related to its predominantly alluvial soil and its cropping pattern. It was only in the middle of the nineteenth century that the present form of settlement began to evolve and the village expanded in all directions, and acquired a rectangular shape. Expansion


in the south east direction could not take place proportionately because of the presence of a big tank there. In the light of present tendency towards the construction of houses and the presence of the tank in the south east, availability of land will be the main consideration in determining siting of the future dwellings and the expansion is most likely to take place in the north and north-east as well as in west and south-west.

The physico-cultural and socio-economic condition of the village has its impact on its morphological plan and layout. The presence of the mound, a large tank and arable land have all influenced the pattern of its settlement. Various social customs and traditions appear to have determined the clustering of houses belonging to different castes of the village. Its morphological structure, based on caste segregation, is very interesting. Residences of the people of different castes, such as the Rajputs, the Vaishyas, the Brahmins, the Koeris, the Chamars*, the Harijans*, the Dhimars and the Kumhars etc. are situated in different sectors, with minor intrusions (Fig. 7.2). It is interesting to note that all the four corners of the village

* Though traditionally Harijans embrace all categories of the lower castes classification given in this analysis which puts Chamars and Harijans in separate categories, is based on the perception of class distinction of the villagers in the areas surveyed by the present researcher.
are occupied by Pundhir and Jadon Rajputs, while its central portion is inhabited by the money-lending Vaishya families. Although, numerically the village is dominated by the Rajputs and the Chamars, economically it is dominated by the Vaishyas, who possess pucca houses in the heart of the settlement. A small market running from east to west divides the village into two parts. The Brahmins are concentrated on its southern part in a small strip parallel to village lanes and near the temple. The eastern and marginal areas in the south are occupied by the Chamars, the Harijans, the Dhobis etc. The village has a sizeable number of Koeris whose houses are concentrated mainly along the western margin of the village. Adjacent to the houses of Koeris a few houses of carpenters and lohars (ironsmith) are found. Muslim fakirs, who work mostly as agricultural labourers, live adjacent to the Harijans, while Dhimars and Kumhars (potters) have their houses along the northern margin of the village. A few houses of Garharias (shepherds) may be seen in the north eastern part of the village.

The building materials used in the dwellings of Agsauli village give indicate the economic condition of the villagers. About 67% of the houses of the village are kaccha. They are mostly composed of mud walls and thatched or mud roofs. The rest of the houses are paccas. They have burnt-brick walls with stone, burnt brick or wooden roofs. About
53% houses are double-storeyed and are owned by rich people, particularly the Vaishyas, the Rajputs and the Brahmins, reflecting the prosperity of their owners. The houses of this village, are, in most of the cases, rectangular in shape and though they have not been built to any set plan or architectural style, they are well suited to the geographical environment. Most of the older residential houses of the cultivators have a chabutra (raised platform) in front, which communicates with a dubari (entrance room), adjacent to the side wall, from which runs a passage for the entrance to open in the inner courtyard. The verandah or dalan is an inseparable part of each of these houses. Most of the new houses, constructed during the last decade, have no dubari and the main entrance directly opens in the inner courtyard.

There are 40 petty shops, two primary schools and one junior high school, one dharamshala, a seed store, a cooperative society which are the important service centres of Agsauli village. Two temples and a mosque are its religious centres. The village is electrified, but the supply of current is very poor. No medical facilities are available in the village. Its inhabitants have to go for medical aid either to Sikandra Rao or to Kasganj.

The occupational structure of the village is mainly caste-oriented. The Vaishyas mostly carry on the business of
money-lending, though a few of them have agricultural lands also. The Rajputs and the Brahmins are the chief land-owning castes, while the Chamars, the Harijans and the Fakirs are landless agricultural labourers while professionals like lohars, dhimars carpenters and koris etc. render different socio-cultural services to the inhabitants under the jajmani system. Out of the total population of 6585, about 31% are workers of which about 74% depend upon cultivation, while 9% are engaged in cottage industries like weaving, tanning etc. and 4% in trade and commerce, and the rest perform other services. Thus agriculture is the main occupation of the villagers, while the presence of a large number of non-working people indicates that there is considerable unemployment in the village.

3. Barauli Village:

Village Brauli is situated at 28°23' North latitude and 78°56' east longitude. It lies in the Gangeri Block of the Atrauli tehsil of the Aligarh District. The village is at a distance of about 18 kilometre south-east of the tehsil headquarters and about 38 kilometre north-east of the Aligarh city. It has a built up area of 16 hectares, with 265 houses, all arranged in rectangular shape. It is a medium-sized compact settlement. The village consists of five mohallas and has features of an old settlement with a multiple caste composition.
Histogenesis

The histogenesis of the village and its relation with its place names are lost in obscurity. The old people of the village say that their ancestors used to tell them that this area was once thickly covered with bar trees (Ficus indica). During the settling process it was gradually cleared and most probably it acquired its name from the tree. Paul Whalley also says that this region was once full of bar trees.¹

The spatial morphology of the village is governed by its level ground and presence of a large tank in the south. Its dwellings are concentrated in a roughly rectangular pattern. This reflects a compact nature of settlement. The village is a multi-caste settlement with a clustering of cultivating castes, though other castes are also diffused over the area.

The internal arrangement of social groups is largely governed by the caste and community structure of the village. The structure of the village reveals that Lodhey Rajputs (Hindu) and Pathans (Muslim) inhabit distinct quarters in the village settlement, separated in most cases by lanes and streets. People of other castes like the Barhis (carpenter),

the Dhimars, the Nais, the Chamars, the Dhobi etc. also live in separate blocks (Fig. 7.3). The predominant land owning castes are the Lodhya Rajputs, followed by the Pathans. The Lodhyas were the first to settle in the Barauli village; and then came the Pathans. Lodhya Rajputs occupy the central part of the settlement, with minor intrusions, while Pathans who come next in the economic, hierarchy of the village, occupy its northern part. People belonging to service classes under the jaimani system like the Barh's (carpenters) Nais (Barbers), the Dhimars or the Kumhars (potters) and the Dhobis (washer men), have their distinct blocks in the northern and north eastern fringes of the village, while landless agricultural labourers—mostly the Chamars and the Harijans are settled in marginal areas in the north, south and east of the main settlement. The functional morphology of the village is not very complex; because of the predominance of subsistence agriculture economy. Most of the houses are used for residential purposes as well as for keeping cattle and storing agricultural produce.

Functionally the houses can be grouped into three types: ghar (residential quarters), gher (place for used as cattle sheds and for storing things) and ghar-gher (used for all purposes). The ghera are mostly built in the outer margin of main inhabited site in the north western and western parts, while the central, northern and western sides contain
residential quarters. There are six petty shops which cater to the daily needs of the villagers. The village has one primary school and one junior high school. It has a temple and a mosque which are located in the Hindu and Muslim community areas respectively. Other public buildings of local importance in the village are the Panchayat Hall and Dharamshala.

Out of the total number of houses in the village, 48% are *pucca*, with flat roofs, while 46% are *kaccha*, made of mud walls and flat mud roofs. The rest of the houses i.e. 6% are of the mixed type. Mud walled with thatched roofed dwellings are inhabited by the poorer sections of the village community. On an average, there are about 6 persons living in one house. Housing conditions in the village are moderately good, although there are no set plans. Most of the houses have two *kothas* (medium size rooms) with a *dalan* (verandah), one *kothari* (small room) and a courtyard. There is no separate kitchen in two-thirds of the houses. Most of the houses have a rectangular ground plan. Economically prosperous Lodhay Rajputs and Pathans of the village have separate hand pumps for their domestic needs.

According to the census of 1981, the Barauli village has a population of 1579 persons, out of which about 29% is engaged in various activities.
Agriculture is the main occupation of the villagers, in which 70% of its working population is engaged, while 21% workers ply household industries like handloom, leather tanning, ghani oil, carpentry, pottery etc. and the rest are engaged in trade and other services.

4. Tikari-khera village

Village Tikari-khera is located at 27°41' north latitude and 87°11' east longitude in the Sasni block of Hathras tehsil at a distance of 18 kilometre north-east of Hathras city, about 8 kilometre to the east of Sasni and about 7 kilometre from Bijaigarh to the south-west. The Komri canal passes at a short distance to the west of the village and the track along the canal affords a pathway to it. The settlement of the village is spread over two sites. The main village, named Tikari, is situated on a level ground, while Khera, as its name indicates, is spread over a tila or mound in close vicinity of the river Senger. During the rainy season, the village is inundated due to flooding of the river. According to the census of 1981, Tikari-khera has population of 2099.

Histogenesis:

The Misli Bandobast of Hathras tehsil reveals that the village was founded by Tikam a Kirar Rajput, whence, according to one of the theories, it derives its name,
Tikari. The village was held by Raja Tikam Singh Jat from 1833 to 1869. Through interviews with some elderly people of the village, the present researcher came to know that it is also thought that it might have got its name from the shrub of *tikari* which is very common in the area.

The suffix *khera* indicates the presence of a mound, which contain Redware deposits of an earlier settlement.

The present built-up area of the village is divided into two parts, (Fig.7.4), connected by a *kachcha* road and winding cart-tracks (*chak roads*). The village has 445 houses. Like the other two villages discussed above, the internal arrangement of social grouping of the village is largely governed by its community and caste structure. The houses of Kirar Thakurs are situated on the mound, while the main inhabited site, which consists of an alluvial plain, is occupied by people of other castes.

Numerically, the Takurs are the leading caste followed by the Baghelas (Herdsmen), the Brahmins and the Jats. The central part of the settlement is occupied by the Vaishyas and the Brahmins, while the southern portion is inhabited by the Thakurs, except for a few houses of the Jats and the Kirar Thakurs along the south western margin of the village. The Harijans and the Chamars live in the north along the main track, while in the north-eastern portion lie the houses of the Muslims, the Koeris, the Kumhars and the Dhimars.
Thakurs, Jats and Brahmins are the chief land-owning castes of the village. Over half of the village land is owned by members of these three castes. They mostly live in spacious *pucca* houses with big courtyards. People belonging to other communities like Chamar, Harijans, Dhimars, Muslims, Dhobis and Barhi etc. live in one or two-room houses without any provision for ventilation or sanitation. The economic position of Thakurs, Jats, Brahmins and Vaishyas is sound, while Chamar, Harijan, Baghelas, Dhimar, Dhobi and Muslim are poor in terms of both land and wealth. Some of them work as daily wagers and casual labourers in the agricultural fields of Thakurs, Jats and Brahmins, under the *jajmani* system, while the rest of them are engaged in household industries, such as lock making, pottery, carpentry etc.

Some of the Baghelas follow their ancestral occupation, i.e. sheep and goat rearing. Vaishyas are engaged in trade and money-lending. Of the total population, about 25% is working and 75% is non-working. Out of the total number of workers, 78% are engaged in agriculture, while 9% and 4% are engaged in sheep and goat rearing and household industry respectively.

The spatial morphology of the village is governed by its level and fertile ground, which determines the shape of the settlement. The main inhabited site of the village is
level and fertile, surrounded by tanks on three sides, i.e. north-east, south-east and west. These factors contribute to the compactness of the settlement and its roughly rectangular pattern. Due to the hazards of the floods, a hamleted settlement is situated on a mound which, too is a compact and almost triangular habitat.

The functional morphology of the Tikari-khera village is the same as that of the other two villages discussed above because of the predominance of subsistence agricultural economy. Dwellings in the village are multi-purposes ones since they are used as residences, shops, cattle-sheds, fodder and fuel stores as well as workshops. The village has a primary school and a junior high school, in Tikari and Khera respectively. A primary health centre is located in Khera. There are two temples, one in the north and the other in the west of Tikari. There are four petty shops in the main settlement, which cater to daily needs of the villagers.

The foregoing analysis of the socio-spatial morphological structure of three selected villages of the Aligarh District i.e. Agsauli, Barauli and Tikari-khera, shows the existence of the habitations of most of the people belonging to services castes near to those of the higher castes, thus forming a closely knit social structure. This is due to the economic dependency of the former on the latter groups of castes under the jaimani system. The analysis of
the spatial patterning of different castes reveals that segregation is closely associated with the castes of the inhabitants, resulting in the formation of distinct settlement units.

Thus the pattern of the religio-ritual-cum-functional interactions is the factor that is responsible for spatial distribution of different castes which is clearly represented in the settlement pattern and the socio-spatial organization of the sample villages.

To sum up, the morphology of the three selected villages discussed above shows that while close socio-economic relationship between different castes results in compact settlements, caste inhibitions force people of different castes to live in separate settlement units.