India is predominantly an agricultural country. Even today agriculture contributes 46.4% of national revenue. In undivided India there were about seven lacs villages. With partition though their number was reduced yet 82.0% of India's population still lives in villages.

From times immemorial village has been the unit of social organization of Indian society. When the permanent settlement known as village came into existence is not clear. Only conjectural calculations have been made. The earliest human inhabitants of the Panjab are represented for us only by crudely clipped stone tools. It is assumed that these primitive folk who made stone choppers and hand axes, were hunters and food gatherers. When we come, however, to the beginning of the continuous story of man in Panjab, some 5000 years ago, we find him already established, however, rudimentary fashion both as a herd- and a farmer. He was living in permanent villages set in the little valleys amongst the hills or occasionally on the great plain itself. It has been pointed out that prior to the immigration of Aryans, the Dravidians who lived in this land were agriculturalists and lived in villages.

Village finds prominent mention in classical texts of the land. According to Rig Veda (generally dated in latter half of second millennium B.C.) society developed in series of ascending formations, starting from family (graha or kula) and gradually extending to the villages (grama), the class (vis), the people (jana) and the country (rashtra). The terms grama is still used in India for a village. "Valmiki Ramayana" and "Mahabharata" mention two types of villages namely "Grama" and "Ghosa". Both were differentiated on the basis of their size. Ghosha was smaller than grama. Both types of villages were in the charge of Gramani who was appointed by the King. Gramani, however, was not free to act as
he liked" on the contrary, he had to work strictly under the advice of the village elders — "the Gram Vridhas" who were chosen by an assembly of the village. In the post-vedic period and especially in "Mahabharata" we find further mention of other type of human break ups such as small hamlets (palli), town (Khavata or pattan) and City (Nagaram). Both Ramayana and Mahabharata further detail the inter-village and intra-village organization. A basic unit of administration and organization was the village under the charge of Gramani who was appointed by the king. But the Gram vridhas had a control upon him and used to correct him if he "acted against the customary practices". Gramani was supposed to act as an agent between the village and government. There was hierarchical organization of administration from below to top. As Dube, points out that villages were under a Bas-Gramani and this was the first unit of inter-village organization. The higher organization were Vimsatipa (group of twenty villages) and finally a group of thousand villages under Adhipati. In post-vedic period Manu the law giver of Hindu Society refers to "Grama" "pura" (town) and "nagaram" (City) with the above mentioned administrative set up of the village. Villages were supposed to look after the maintenance and management of several public utilities such as wells, tanks, cow-pens, groves, parks and pastures etc. Even today villages in India represent the similar character. "A thousand villages or so constitute a cultural area or at least a subculture area, and the rural community within this region invariably has a number of common cultural characteristic and social forms and values". 

Bandan-Powell mentions two types of villages viz "Raiyatwari village" and the "joint village" of the past. In raiyatwari village which is so widely prevalent, the group of holdings in no sense form a propriety unit; and the term community is properly applied to the group of landholders only so long as
it is employed to indicate the connection which a group of cultivators
must have when located in one place, bound by certain customs, with certain
interests in common, and possessing within the circle of their village the
means of local government and of satisfying the wants of life without much
reference to neighbouring villages. All traces of early customs
show the villages just in the same condition as raiyatwari villages
of to-day." Joint villages are not of one variety. The "fact that which is
joint may be in time wholly or partly divided or partitioned, And
when estates are joint the principle of union need not be the same throughout.
The differences in this regard may be found in the "aristocratic" and "democratic"
constitution of villages. Some "villages" are so far "aristocratic" that they
hold in fractional shares which indicate a family property held in descent from
a dignified ancestor; others are democratic in the sense that the groups of
families have a real common descent, but have adopted a more equal mode of
sharing or that they are voluntary associations of settlers*. In all cases the
entire village form something like a unit estate. The adjoining waste is here
an integral part of the property, and is at the absolute disposal of the owners
as much as any other land, and when the waste comes to be partitioned,
it will be definite principles, usually, but not always, having relation to the
existing share in the arable area. In majority of cases there is
complete separation of the individual or household holdings, and this may have
been the so from the moment of first settlement. Very often the arable is divided
and the waste not, either because it is more conveniently kept as a grazing ground
or because it not yet wanted for the extension of cultivation.

Social System

The basic elements of community social system were: i) Joint family;
ii) Caste; iii) Jajmani System; iv) Village Panchayats, and v) Religion. The
whole interactional system, values and norms revolved around these elements. The kinship system, personality and cultural systems, group dynamics, educational, local and state administrative systems were all the by-products of these elements. They provided social stratification, determined the rewards and sanctions and thus facilitated social life. The role of these systems and consequently the community remained relatively unchanged. The communities were predominantly agriculturists and there was no change in the occupational pursuits. They had elected authorities which organized and managed their own affairs. This led to the acceptance of social and economic interdependence, and to the creation of harmony and social stability.

Political instability at the centre and geographic factors, however, very often disturbed with this harmony and societal stability. "As soon as a conqueror arose, whether from within or from without, he, not by natural bounds to the expansion of his dominions. His armies could march on and on, his power could extend over great regions, tribal governments and city states could offer no resistance to his might and the typical state came to be based not on free political institutions but on military power. The political history of early India thus comes to be the classless formation and disintegration of large states despotically governed."

These frequent changes in the power structure of the society and frequent pushing of the older inhabitants and absorption of the new elements affected the life of village communities. Uncertainty of the political life and interest of the political powers in money and taxes led to stagnation of village communities, in which changes occurred only due to natural forces or due to certain functional necessities of the communities.

This gave the village communities a relatively self-sufficient nature which with rise of a new power and extinction of old became closer and closer
in their existence. At the social frontiers Brahman by virtue of their superior status gained more and more power and society under their control tended towards more and more rigidity and dependence upon Brahman, Brahmanic creed and traditions for which Brahmanas were the only competent authority. It seems that anything which they disapproved or disliked they gave it the form of scripture and with the lapse of a few years it became the cultural norms and value patterns of Hindu society. These Brahmanic restrictions further closed the community life and families in the village communities established their relations, enjoyed traditional hereditary rights and obligations from generation to generation. Social reform movements which struggled against the stagnation of the community life relapsed into traditionalism and a part of Hinduism. Even the Mohammedans could not save themselves from the dominating impact of Hindu social life. The common man observed the same restrictions on marriage, interdining, societary relations and observed the same customs, norms and traditions.

The same was the case of Sikhism. The Great Nanak preached social equality of all races and tried to unite all creeds by common ties but his followers after struggling for years to establish the doctrines of their leader ultimately surrounded themselves with the fence of caste more or less impassable. The factors responsible for inability both of Muslim creed and Sikhism to penetrate into the old established walls were that majority of Muslims and all the Sikhs did not come to India as migrants but they were converted from Hindu creed to new creed. In their crossing the floor they took away with them their sub-castes to which they perpetuated. In mass conversion these sub-caste elements contributed toward the superiority and privileges of one group over another. Therefore, in their day to day social life and thus within the fold of Hindu social system these groups came to be considered as two distinct castes. Both the groups accepted their new separate status. Another factor which may be pointed out was that
the basic principles of the rival creeds developed from Hindu religion to which the masses were well adjusted. While observing new creed they stuck to the old too till the new was taken over by the old and assimilated into its jargon. But both the Sikh and Muslim systems did affect the life of the society and institutional structure. After the conversion they dropped certain traditional ideas and observances and ceased to call themselves Hindus. Their numerical dominance over the Hindus in village communities did affect the Brahmanic influence.

But the communities in their social life hardly deviated from the traditional path in which the collective responsibility and obligations played prominent role. O'Malley in this regard remarked: "The chief social institutions as they existed in their integrity, were not individualistic but collectivistic. The unit was not the individual but the family which regulated the relations of its members inter se. The inter-relations of different families were governed by the village community and caste, the former of which was a collection of families organized for the purposes of communal self-government, while latter was an aggregation of families united by rules as to marriage, diet, occupation and intercourse with the rest of the community, but not localized like the village community. The individual scarcely existed except as a member of a group. Self-determination was only possible within the limits which the latter imposed. The affairs of the caste and the family, however, were matters with which state had no direct concern. The relations of their members were governed not by their secular law but by Hindu law and customary relations.

The economy of the village communities throughout the ages remained agriculture-oriented marked by "low stage of division of labour based on insufficient differentiation of agriculture and industry. While principally engaged in agriculture, the farmer family also engaged itself in domestic spinning. Similarly the artisan who was often given a plot of village land by the village Committee
carried on agricultural activities for some time in the year.

The means of transport being almost non-existent the village communities were virtually isolated groups. This isolation was broken occasionally by a village fair, by the coming of visiting dramatic party and occasions for marriage when the villagers left their villages. "Within the village, the economic life based on primitive agriculture and artisans' industry was on a low and almost stationary level. For ages, the same primitive plough driven by bullock, added to the elementary instruments of the artisan, constituted the sole productive force of the village humanity. The productivity of labour being low as a result of this low level of technique of production, there hardly survived for the mass of people either surplus products (after satisfying the needs of self-preservation and land revenue claims of the often rapacious government) or time for organizing a high standard of material and cultural life". The self-preservation standard were further threatened in face of catastrophies of food and famine, which were often of serious nature, whenever they occurred, due to ineffectual transport facilities. This led to development of superstitious outlook, defeatist and fatalistic mentality. This mysticism was imported to the children drummed into their mind from childhood, and smothered the mental initiative, the experimenting impulse, the investigating urge."

Nature Of Village Culture

Frequent risings, internal upheavals, influx of invaders and rise and falls of dynasties did affect the cultural life of the people. At the same time essential cultural characteristic of each culture, however different at the beginning, elapsed ultimately into the same sterile, superstitious, narrow stereotyped social and intellectual dogmas of the Brahmanic scripture and society. The marked point which indicated the existence of micro-cultures within the cultural cosmos was the mode of settlement of the people at any place which
suited their convenience. The existence of these micro-cultures is visible in the ceremonial life of the people of the Panjab at their auspicious occasion. Another element which indicates their existence is the dialectic which they use in their day to day life. But in the background of these sub-cultural units was the uniform ignorance and superstitions serving as a vicious circle from which the uplift of the communities was impossible.

Village Communities During The British era,

This remained the same state of social existence of the village communities till the Britishers took over the country. Their anxiety to exploit the India's material resources make the country for the first time a single economic unit. Their conquest of India was for the first time a conquest of a superior and modern civilization—a characteristic which all the rulers of India lacked. They brought about radical changes in land tenure and introduced private ownership in land. Land became a commodity in the market which could be freely mortgaged or sold. With the change in the ownership of land changes also occurred in the mode of revenue collection. A part of a year's production which the village community paid in kind was now paid in cash. The payment of revenue became compulsory. When a landlord could not pay land revenue due to the state he was constrained to mortgage or sell his land. The farmers were now directly connected to the state authorities and village Panchayat or community pictured nowhere. The economic changes affected the communal social life of the village. Thus the new land system not only deprived the village of its agricultural economic functions but also led to the loss of its judicial functions. It also broke the bonds which organically tied the village peasant to the village collectively.

Partition of the joint family became frequent and the land faced fragmentation at the successive breaking up of the family. People, thus, failed to
internalize the new changing situations and they tended once again to the old value patterns for their existence. The traditionalism and superstitious outlook was further aggravated by the rise in the moneylender class which exploited the economic helplessness and poverty of the masses. They took the full advantage of the ignorance and poverty of the cultivators who could not detect their unfair means and frauds. The land also passed from the hands of the cultivators to non-cultivating money lenders. Thus the countryside was rapidly being stratified on the land basis into Parasitic Land-lending class, land owners and agricultural servants and tenants.

In spite of all these economic limitations, the village communities were undergoing a change. The process was accelerated with the rise of nationalism among the masses. The major currents and forces which were responsible for the changes were: i) Incentive for commercialization of agriculture; ii) new administrative set up; iii) rise of urbanization; iv) new legal system; v) impact of new social groupings; vi) class struggle; vii) political movement and strengthening of national consciousness; viii) social reform movements; and ix) improvements in the means of transportation and communication.

These all external forces made the life of the village communities more dynamic than earlier times. But the impact of these forces was checked by the dominant economic forces as a result of which the life of the people was poorer, now. Consequently, the British left the Indian village communities with a poor lot and in a worse state of economic handicaps from the state of economic handicaps from the state where they started ruling them. At the same time they made the people conscious of these handicaps to some extent. It was the creation of this mass consciousness, among some sections of society which was their major contribution toward the social life of the Indian Society. The National Government, the leaders of which prior to assuming the power were fully
conscious of the poverty and misery of the masses on one hand and their inability to change on the other, took the benefit of their consciousness of nationalism and with the assumption of power the national government came forward with national planning and community development programs for the welfare of the masses. How far they have been successful in their motivations requires an objective evaluation. The present study is undertaken to evaluate the progress of community development in the perspective of its ability to change the village communities.

REFERENCES AND NOTES


10. Ibid, pp. 9-38.


CULTURAL MAP OF PUNJAB