CHAPTER FOUR

TYPES OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS

The identification of type has been one of the major concerns in settlement geography, particularly, in the study of rural settlements. Settlement type expresses four sets of relationships which exist between (i) the number of sites and houses; (ii) house and house; (iii) house and street; and (iv) street and street. Site, street, and house are the three main components of settlement morphology. A large variety of morphological types, between the extremes of completely agglomerate and completely dispersed, has been observed in the study area. The intervening range represents different degrees of agglomeration and dispersion.

In a completely agglomerate settlement all the houses are concentrated on one habitation site. At the other extreme, in a completely dispersed settlement, such as isolated farmsteads, there are as many sites as houses. Such settlements have no _majra_, since each house is surrounded by its fields. Morphologically these settlements remind one of the _einzelschafts_ of Germany, but their genesis is different. The conceptual differentiation between the types is valid only for those settlements which have more than one house.
In the understanding of settlement morphology, it is important to know of the type of settlement at the time of its origin, that is, whether it was agglomerate or dispersed and whether the agglomeration or dispersal was primary or secondary. These questions have been discussed in Section B where an analysis of the landscapes of the selected settlements has been attempted.

Theoretically speaking, the gregarious nature of mankind suggests that at the time of origin all settlements would have been agglomerate. Man has an instinctive tendency to stay grouped in a family and in a clan. A nuclear family in the beginning is agglomerate, but as it grows it becomes an extended family and ultimately disintegrates into many nuclear families. It is unlikely that human occupancy began through dispersed units which consisted only of one nuclear family. A band of nuclear families forming the first living group seems more probable. It sustained itself through division of labour. The land owned by the composite band became a settlement unit, termed mauza in India.

Thus, agglomeration, a result of the normal gregarious instinct of man, has become the normative process and agglomerate settlement a norm. Agglomerate settlement is the landscape expression of the process of agglomeration, both being
characterized by an inherent dynamism. This instinct, a survival mechanism is surely and ultimately biological but is transmitted from one generation to another as a cultural heritage. Dispersed settlement is formed against this instinctive behaviour of man.

In the region, two kinds of agglomerate settlements have been observed. In the first, all the houses are under the same roof; in the second, they are built separately on the same site. Also, agglomerate settlements are either nucleated or non-nucleated. In the nucleated variety there is a focal point around which all the houses have been built. There is a severe competition among different groups of people to locate their houses as near the node as possible which in its own turn accentuates agglomeration. In a non-nucleated agglomerate settlement, all the houses are on the same site, but have no distinct point of nucleation.

The major determinants of types are cultural and historical and not physical. These include socio-cultural factors, religious features, water points, defence needs, cattle culture, persistence of cultural traits and type of agriculture.

Settlement is mostly established by a clan and not by an individual. Therefore, socio-cultural factors such as clan ownership of both majra and mauza, dominant clan, clan
organisation of social space, and need for clan solidarity and clan contiguity have been the most important considerations in the creation of settlements. The clan which founds the settlement is usually the dominant clan. Agglomeration and dispersal of a settlement also depend upon the attitude of the dominant clan towards other classes which offer various services to the former.

In the context of India, caste prejudices and the doctrine of ritual purity have greatly influenced the type of settlement. Ritually, the Indian society is divided into two classes, pure and impure, which interact only in terms of secular functions. The dichotomous division of Indian society has resulted in several separate blocks of buildings within the same mauza. The development of the notion of ritual purity in the dominant clan is positively correlated with the dispersal of settlement. The impure groups rendering various services are settled by the dominant clan at a symbolic distance within the same mauza. This is so because 'vested in it are the rights of ownership, control and use of scarce resource of underground water and wells, cultivated land and grazing grounds, and the habitation site.'(1) Such a system helps in preserving the contiguity as well as solidarity of the clans of different castes.
The landscape expression of religious features such as khera or sthan (generally a small structure of stones or brick and cement), the place of ancestor worship, samadh, chhatri, and temple have encouraged the process of agglomeration. Khera forms an integral element of a Gujar settlement. A popular saying among Gujars asserts that 'behra bina ghar nahi; khera bina gaon nahi.' There is no house without a behra; and no village without a khera, or house is incomplete without a behra and so is a village without a khera. All over the region, every village has at least one khera or sthan, generally located outside the majra signifying that the village ancestor is keeping a vigil over the settlement. Most of the inhabitants are related to each other and worship the same ancestor. Even though such religious features are not always points of nucleation, they do attract people and promote agglomeration.

The source of water has also influenced the siting of settlements, their types and size. Field enquiries have revealed that the initial settlers had to walk long distances to fetch water in huge and heavy stone vessels. The development of well-digging technology solved the problem of procuring water, but it was an arduous and expensive task particularly where the water-table was deep. Not too many wells could be dug. People, therefore, tended to cluster around a well, wherever dug. On the other hand, a semi-agglomerate settlement emerged where its
inhabitants included both high class Hindus and Sikhs as well as Chamars. Their co-existence necessitated the construction of two separate wells which attracted the settlers to two different sites within the same mauza and resulted in a semi-agglomerate settlement.

Traits of cattle culture too contribute to agglomeration. The need for tethering the milch cattle of the entire clan in the common open space and keeping farm cattle in the bara (a common cattle shed) usually at the outskirts of the majra, implies agglomerate character of the settlement. Only well-to-do families in the study area have separate baras in the farm and live in dispersed settlements.

The persistence of traditional mode of living of the people originating from the Plains, where agglomerate settlement is an ancient heritage, has promoted the growth of agglomerate settlements in this region too.

The type of agriculture, whether it is plough or hoe cultivation, also influences the type of settlement. The use of plough needs communal cultivation and results in clustering of houses whereas in highly mountainous regions the fields are too small to permit plough cultivation and digging stick or hoe replaces plough. Such a cultivation requires intensive labour which is provided easily by staying in the field itself. The
fields are very small and can support only a few people. Hence dispersed settlement becomes more prominent in such areas.

Lastly, unsettled conditions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also promoted the process of agglomeration because 'the more agglomerate and larger was the settlement the greater was the probability of the settlement surviving the vicissitudes of the cycles of natural hazards and insecure civil conditions and hence, greater was the quantum of guarantee of its stability as an element of cultural landscape.' By agglomerating their settlements the farmers defended themselves against wild animals and enemies. The emergence of British power in this region was accompanied by political stability. The peaceful conditions encouraged new settlers to live away from the already inhabited area. This dispersal was reinforced by the clearing of forests which increased not only the area under cultivation but also lessened the danger from wild animals. Two spatial expressions of the clearing of the forests and settling have been identified, (i) the cleared patches surrounded by forests and containing a small, unit settlement, and (ii) the cleared belt contiguous with the cultivated land of the existing principal settlement and containing some
scattered settlement units. (Fig. 35) The degree of dispersion is larger in the former than in the latter and is related mainly to the individualistic attitude of the new settlers.

Conclusion

The interplay of various factors discussed above makes it clear that it is difficult to identify any part of the study area as the domain of only one settlement type. Nowhere in the region do we find areas containing exclusively agglomerate or dispersed settlements. Of course, a tendency of agglomeration in the Dun and the Siwalik Hills and of dispersal in the Lesser Himalaya is easily discernible. A mixed fabric of settlement types ranging between the completely agglomerate and completely dispersed becomes at once conspicuous.

References and Notes


Alternative strategies in the creation of cultivated land

Fig. 35

Forested area
Cultivated land
Settlement

Fig. 35