



LESSON 15 RURAL COMMUNITY PART-I

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

15.0 OBJECTIVES

15.1 INTRODUCTION

15.2 MEANING OF RURAL COMMUNITY

15.3 FEATURES OF RURAL COMMUNITY

15.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN VILLAGES

15.5 CHANGES IN VILLAGE COMMUNITY

15.6 CONCLUSION

15.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING



15. RURAL COMMUNITY

15.0 Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to understand and learn about:

- Rural Community
- Feature of rural community
- Changes in rural community

15.1 Introduction

The earliest human communities were perhaps the loosely organised aggregations of a few families who carried on mutually interdependent activities in gathering food and defending themselves against their enemies. These primitive bands were migratory communities. Gradually man acquired skill and knowledge in agriculture. With the development of agriculture and the consequent stabilization of the source of food, the people began to lead a settled life and human communities became more stationary. The village emerged which signalled that man has passed from nomadic mode of collective life to the settled one. It is difficult to form a precise definition of the term village. Generally it is understood to mean a small area with small population which follows agriculture not only as an occupation but also as a way of the life. The village is the oldest permanent community of man. Kropotkin writes. "We do not know one single human race or one single nation which communities.

Rural is cradled in the rural group. The most impressive of the villages said to have existed five thousand or more years ago, are the lake dwellings of Switzerland and nearby sections of Germany, France, Italy and Austria. The houses were built on platforms supported by piles driven into the lake bottom. Bridges connected these houses with the shore where fields and pasture lay. Today, a variant type of these houses may be seen in Kashmir where these are built on boats supported by ropes driven into the Dal lake bottom. These houses are called 'House-boats' magnificently furnished and decorated and are hired out to visitors to Kashmir valley.

It has been traditional to classify communities as rural and urban, depending upon whether their populations are small and agricultural or larger and industrial or commercial. The physical and social conditions of rural and urban life are also



different. Consequently, there are differences in the personality and behaviour of urban and rural people. One of the earliest textbooks, written by Robert MacIver and Charles Page (1949), find that there must be two bases of all communities: (1) the occupation of a territorial area, and (2) the shared possession of community sentiment. For MacIver and Page entire nations can be communities, but territorially separated persons with strongly shared identities and sentiments would not qualify.

15.2 Meaning of Rural Community

A rural community is marked primarily by a small, sparsely settled, relatively homogeneous population that engages primarily in agriculture (although there are exceptions to this rule, especially in industrial societies). The traditional rural community tended to be a folk society. Robert Redfield (1941) describes the folk society as "a society, which is small, isolated, non-literate and homogenous with a strong sense of group solidarity...Behaviour is traditional, spontaneous, uncritical and personal; there is no legislation or habit of experiment and reflection for intellectual ends. Kinship, its relationships and institutions, are the type of categories of experience and the familiar group is the unit of action. The sacred prevails over the secular; the economy is one of status rather than of the market." Today, however, traditional rural community is losing its folk society character and flavour as described above.

15.3 Features of Rural Community

The rural community is marked by several features. The important ones are the following:

- i. **Community Consciousness.**
The village dwellers have a sense of unity. The relations between the village people are intimate. They personally know each other. Their customs, conventions and culture are common. They jointly take part in religious celebrations. Structurally and functionally the village is a unit.
- ii. **Role of Neighbourhood.**
In a village neighbourhood is of great importance. There is not enough of individuality and speed in the life of the village to disable one from paying attention to his neighbour—his sorrow, and joys. In the village people assist each other and thus they have closest neighbourhood relations.
- iii. **Joint Family.**
Though in the cities the joint family system is breaking down, yet in the villages it still retains its hold. The agricultural occupation requires the cooperation of all the family members. The men plough the field, the women harvest the crops and the children graze the cattle.
- iv. **Faith in Religion.**



The people in the villages have deep faith in religion and deities. Their main occupation is agriculture which largely depends upon the vagaries of nature. The farmer acquires an attitude of fear and awe towards natural forces and starts worshipping them.

v. **Simplicity**

The village people lead a simple life, it is not ostentatious. They are far away from the evils of modern civilization. They are a simple and plain people believing in God. They do not show pretensions. Their behaviour is natural and not artificial. They live a peaceful life. They are free from mental conflicts. They do not suffer heart strokes. They are sincere, hospitable and hardworking. The level of morality is high. Social crimes are very rare. Their life is governed by norms.

In this way, the village is a community whose members have a sense of unity, close neighbourhood relations, faith in religion, and a simple life in a joint family.

➤ **Traditional features of rural communities**

It would be a mistake to fit all rural communities into one set of image because all rural communities are not alike. Yet certain features have been found common to nearly all kinds of rural communities. These are:

- Rural society was based predominantly on agriculture. Land was the basic means of subsistence. Nearly all rural population was involved in agricultural way of life directly or indirectly. A substantial part of their income was drawn from agriculture. All faced common problems, performed common tasks and shared common helplessness before the awesome natural calamities (floods, droughts etc.), which man cannot control.
- The rural way of life used to be quite different from urban life. Thrift was an honoured value and conspicuous consumption was seen as an urban vice. A farmer's status was measured by his lands, his herds, his crops and the inheritance he could pass on to his children. Distrust of city people and disapproval of urban life was a predictable rural attitude. Rural people used to be suspicious of intelligence and book learning. Their life used to be simple without any fun and fair in the modern sense of the term. They used to have deep faith in religion and duties.
- The rural social system was marked with minimum of social differentiation and social stratification. It was mostly based on land and property relations. These relations determined the share of various socio-economic groups and the distribution of agricultural wealth among the various sections of the rural population.



- There was predominance of primary groups. On one hand, these groups were important in the development of the personality (socialisation) and on the other hand they used to exercise primary control over the lives of the rural people.

15.4 Characteristics of Indian Villages

- I. Isolation and Self Sufficiency. Almost till the middle of the 19th century, the villages in India were more or less self-contained, isolated and self-sufficient units. The inhabitants of the village had very little to do with the people outside. All of their essential needs were satisfied in the village itself. This feature of the Indian village is described graphically as follows. "Each village tends to be self-contained, in each will be found persons faith permanent rights in the lands as owners or tenants with hereditary occupancy rights; of these some cultivate all they hold, others with large areas at their disposal rent out to tenants on a yearly agreement a part or whole of their lands; below these in the scale are agricultural labourers some have a field or two on rent, some work in the fields only at times of pressure and are mainly engaged in crafts, such as leather work, or in tasks regarded as menial. In all but the smallest village, there are one or two skilled artisans, carpenters or blacksmiths who provide and repair the simple agricultural implements, bullock gear and water-lifts. The household requirements are supplied by a shop or two whose owners usually provide the first market for the village produce and add to their earnings in money-lending," In short, it was more at a society within itself, However, changing political and economic conditions are putting an end to the isolation and self-sufficiency of the Indian village. The rapid development of the means of transport and communication has broken the barriers between the village and city. The former is now socially and even economically connected -with the neighbourhood city or town. Political parties have made village the centre of their activities as much as the city.
- II. Peace and Simplicity. The second feature of an Indian village is the atmosphere of simplicity, calmness and peace prevailing thereip. In the village there is no noise and little sophistication. The humdrum activities of modern civilisation are rarely seen there. Though occasionally a car or a bus rolling along the kutchra road enveloped in thick clouds of dust may be seen there, but, on the whole, life in the village moves with traditional quietude and peace, the villagers lead a simple life, eat frugally, dress simply, and live in mud-walled houses completely lacking in the trappings of modern civilisation. But here also the old order is yielding place to a new one. The mud—walled houses are giving place to well designed buildings.



Fashion is making its inroads in the life of young men and women of the village. However, this change is gradual and slow.

- III. Conservatism. The inhabitants of the village are strongly attached to old customs and traditions. Their outlook is primarily conservative and they accept changes with extreme reluctance. They love old ways and are less eager to follow the advice of zealous social reformers regarding their marriage and other customs. Writing on Indian villages, Sir Charles Metcalfe wrote, "they seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasties tumble down; revolution succeeds revolution. Hindu, Pathan, Moghul, Marathe, Sikh, English all the masters change in turn, but the village communities remain the same."
- IV. Poverty and Illiteracy. Probably the most glaring and also depressing features of Indian villages are the poverty and illiteracy of the village people. They are generally poor with a very low income. They take coarse food and put on rough clothes. The pressure on land is high resulting in fragmentation of holdings and poor productivity. Besides poverty the village people are steeped in ignorance and illiteracy. The opportunities for education are meagre in the villages. The village school is generally in a dilapidated condition. Facilities for higher education are practically nil. Due to poverty the villagers cannot send their sons to city for education. Due to illiteracy they cannot improve upon their agriculture or supplement their income by other means. Poverty is thus the cause and effect of illiteracy and the backwardness of the villagers.
However, recently the need has been realised for rural reconstruction. An all India organisation under the name of 'All India Kissan Sammelan' has been formed to focus the attention of the government on the problems of peasantry class. There is greater realisation now that the country can march ahead only if its villages are prosperous. The governments, both at the centre and states, have launched numerous schemes like total literacy programme, fertilizer subsidy, crop insurance, free power, concessional water-rate, minimum procurement price and low interest loans for liquidating illiteracy and removing poverty of the people living in the villages, Agricultural production is becoming more and more mechanized and agricultural products are fetching high prices.
- V. Local Self-government. The villages in ancient India enjoyed a considerable measure of autonomy or self-government. The villagers managed their own affairs through the traditional institution of panchayat. The central government had neither the inclination nor the means for interfering with the self-government of villages. With the advent of Britishers in India and their introduction of a highly centralised system of administration the importance of panchayats began to decline. Their judicial powers were taken over by the British courts and the officers were appointed to look after the administrative affairs of the villages. This change produced unpleasant



results. Since the times of Lord Ripon attempts were made to revive the old system of village local self-government, but the progress was very slow in this direction. With the attainment of freedom now fresh efforts are being made to strengthen the panchayat system and make panchayats play a better part in the work of national reconstruction. The 73rd Amendment Act, 1993 has laid the foundation of strong and vibrant Panchayati Raj institutions in the country.

15.5 Changes in Village Community

Change is the law of nature. It is the need of life. Change is but natural in human communities. The village community is less susceptible to change than the urban community; but it does not imply that village community undergoes no change. It is also undergoing change though the speed of change as compared to urban community is slow. The change in village community truly is seen in different spheres.

i) Caste System. The British rule in India gave a serious blow to the caste system in the villages. The economic policy and the laws of British rulers induced the different castes to adopt occupations other than the traditional ones. The hold of caste panchayat was loosened. The status of a village man was determined on the basis of his economic position and personal attainments. The restrictions on food, dress, mode of living and other matters imposed under caste system were removed. Even untouchability was weakened. Thus caste system has now lost its traditional hold in the villages; however, casteism is getting strengthened on account of selfish political interests.

ii) Jajmani System. As remarked earlier in the chapter 'Social Stratification in India' the jajmani system, a feature of Village community in India has now weakened due to the governmental efforts to raise the status of the lower castes and impact of urbanisation. The occupations adopted by the village people are not entirely hereditary or based on caste system, nor the payment for services rendered by the lower caste is in kind; it is now mostly cash payment.

Earlier, it was observed that the various castes living in a village are interdependent because each one of them has a monopoly over an occupation. If some occupational caste is not found in the local area, then some other caste may take up its occupation, and develop specialization in it. For instance, the blacksmiths of Senapur, a village in Jaunpur district of Uttar Pradesh, also worked on wood because there were no carpenters in that area, and so they made and repaired agricultural implements for the landowner-peasants, the Thakurs. The interdependence between castes obtains in two ways:

i) A caste provides its goods and services to other castes in exchange for payment



in kind or cash, but this payment is done instantly, and if deferred, it is for the shortest period of time. A lot of haggling also enters this exchange. The relations here are largely contractual and impersonal. They are quite like the relations one will expect to find in cities and towns. In villages, such relations may exist between the merchant caste and the other castes. The latter buy goods and commodities from the shop of the local merchant, a man of the Vaishya caste, and pay him instantly. If instant payment is not made, the shopkeeper may advance credit, but before further merchandise is acquired, the buyer will have to settle all the previous accounts. In some cases, the merchant may charge interest for the amount on credit.

ii) By contrast to the first type of interdependence, the second type comprises relations that are broadly supportive, group-oriented, long-term and continuing, and they involve multiple bonds between people involved in the exchange. These relations are durable, unlike the relations between the shopkeepers and the buyers, where after one has bought the product and paid for it, the relation comes to an end. In villages, durable relations obtain mainly between food-producing families and the families that supply them with goods and services. These relations are called *jajmani*, the Hindi word for them as used in William H. Wiser's study of a village in Uttar Pradesh. In other parts of India, they are known by other names. For instance, in Maharashtra, they are known as *balutdari*. Notwithstanding the differences in the terms used, certain features of the system are common throughout India. Although the *jajmani* system is regarded as a characteristic of rural India, it has also been reported from urban areas. Sylvia Vatuk described the *jajmani* system that was in operation in Meerut City.

In the *jajmani* system, at the center is the family of the agriculturist (*zamindar*). It receives services from the families of occupational castes. One who receives services is known as *jajman*, the patron. The families that provide services are known as *kamin*, *kam karne waley*, or *kamgars* (workers). In other parts of India, terms such as *parjan*, *pardhan*, *balutedar*, etc., are also used for the providers of goods and services. All these words literally refer to the same people, i.e. those who 'work' for others, and one may call them clients. The implication is that those who do not 'work' (like *zamindars*, the big landowners) occupy the highest position in the secular ranking; those who 'work' for themselves, the self-employed workers, come next; and at the bottom of the system are placed those families that 'work' for others, carrying out various menial jobs. The castes, which happen to provide services to the agriculturalists, vary from one village to another. And, not every caste in the village happens to be a part of the *jajmani* system. The simplest definition of the *jajmani* system can be: it is a patron-client relationship.

Although the *jajmani* relationship seems to be between castes, in reality, it is between particular families belonging to particular castes. It is the relationship between families that continues to exist over time. *Jajmani* ties are hereditary, i.e. various families (belonging to various castes) keep on providing their specialist services to particular agriculturist families generation after generation. The latter do not have the right to discontinue the services of the families of serving



occupational castes. If they are not satisfied with the quality of the service, or they notice slackness on the part of the service-providers, they are expected to bring this matter to the attention of the council of the caste to which the erring family belongs.

These relations are not like wage-relations, which can be terminated after the transaction is over. They are durable, in the sense they continue over generations. They are exclusive, in the sense that one family will carry out its relations with only one particular family of the particular occupational caste. Because of whatever reasons, if a family is to move out of an area, it is its moral duty to find an alternative service provider for its patrons. Many sociologists have found that jajmani rights are also sold. The point is that no family (whether of the jajman or kamin) will move out of the relationship unless it has provided an alternative to the other.

Earlier, it was noted that there are multiple bonds between the patron and the client. The patron looks after all those families that work for him. He advances loans or gifts to them at the time of festivals and other similar occasions. He safeguards their interests and saves them from exploitation at the hands of others, i.e. the jajmani system is based on the ideology of paternalism.

The clients continue to provide services throughout the year to their patrons. At the time of the harvest, the patrons give their clients a portion of the produce, which in North Indian villages is known as phaslana. The jajmani system is an example of 'deferred payment', which is entirely different from that in the wage labour. Further, there is no bargaining on the amount of crop/produce given to a client. If the season is lean, all suffer, be he the patron or the client. And, if there is a bumper crop, then all are equally benefited. Generally, jajmani payments are made quietly, but there can always be situations where the patrons publicize the size of payments they are making, or the clients may show their unhappiness on receiving not-so-satisfactory payments.

Some sociologists think that the jajmani system is exploitative. The agricultural castes, which are invariably upper castes, seek the services of occupational castes, which are generally lower castes, without reciprocating adequately. The exploitation of lower castes continues under the garb of paternal ties. The opposite argument is that the jajmani system is functional. It gives security to lower castes that they will never go hungry. For the upper castes, it ensures a regular and uninterrupted supply of services. Because of these relations, the village emerges as a unified body, where the patrons organize rituals and activities that symbolically effect the unity of the village. For instance, it is believed that some deities (known as Bhumia, Kshetrapal, etc.) guard the boundaries of the village. The patrons regularly organize collective worship of these deities. The overall picture is that those who receive the largest number of services are the ones who are expected to care the most for the welfare of the village.



In the last fifty years, the jajmani system has undergone many significant changes. It has already been said that not every caste of the village participated in this system. In addition to the jajmani relation, there has always been contractual, wage-labour type of ties between the providers of goods and services and their buyers.

Further, with the rise of the backward class movements in the recent past, certain castes that were a part of the jajmani system have withdrawn themselves from it. The introduction of cash economy has also brought about changes, because payments in the jajmani system were always in kind rather than in cash. With the ever expanding commercial frontiers, new opportunities have come up in towns and cities, and many occupational castes have sought to take advantage of this situation. They move to participate in these opportunities after seeking withdrawal from the jajmani ties.

iii) Family System. The joint family system is no longer the peculiar characteristic of the village community. Nuclear families have taken its place. The family control over its members in matters of diet, dress and marriage has weakened. The family is no longer an economic unit, Several activities which once were carried within the family are now performed by outside agencies, The education of village girls has raised the status of rural women.

iv) Marriage System. Change can also be seen in the institution of marriage. Although inter-caste marriages are rare and parents continue to dominate the mate-choice, yet the boys and girls are consulted by the parents in the matter of matechoice. Love marriages and divorces are almost non-existent. The individual qualities like education, economic pursuit, beauty and appearance of the marriage partners are given preference over the old family status. There is now less expenditure on marriages. The marriage rites also have been minimised. The custom of child marriage is being abolished.

v) Living Standards. The standard of living in the village community is gradually going higher. The rural diet no more consists of coarse food only. It now includes vegetables, milk, bread, tea and vegetable ghee. The dress is getting urbanized. The youths put on pants and the girls put on frocks and Bell Bottoms. Even the old ladies put on blouses instead of shirts. The mill cloth is used in place of handloom cloth; Gold ornaments have replaced the old heavy silver ornaments. The young boys live bare-headed with well combed long hair while the girls use cosmetics. There are now 'pucca' houses to live. These are now better ventilated, well furnished, and in some cases electrified too. The ceiling fans can also be seen in some houses. Lanterns have replaced the earthen lamps in most houses. Gobar gas plants have also been installed in some houses. The sanitary habits of the people have improved. They now use soap for bath and washing the clothes. The safety razors are used for shaving. The drainage system is also better. The primary health centres have made the villages people health conscious. The threat of epidemics has lessened due to the vaccination and other preventive measures taken to the villages. The cannily planning program has



been understood by the village people who now adopt measures to control the family size. Schools have been opened.

vi) Economic System. Change has also taken place in the economic field; the educated rural youth seeks jobs in the cities rather than Gettle on the land. The demand for new scientific instruments of agriculture is increasing. The farmers have been taught new methods to raise their production, the rural cooperative societies have lessened the woes and miseries of the village people in gelding seeds, fertilizers and credit. The sahkara system is on the wane. More and more banks are being opened in the villages. The Government gives financial assistance and other facilities for setting up industries in the villages. The per capita income has increased, Economic exploitation has decreased and the farmers get good price for their products.

vii) Political System. The setting up of panchayats has led to the growth of political consciousness among the village people. The newspapers, radio and television in some areas have added to the political knowledge of the villagers. However, the political parties have divided the people into groups and led to group among them. Caste conflicts and group rivalries have increased. The community feeling has decreased. Selfishness and individualism are growing.

It is thus evident that the Indian village is not a static community. It is dynamic, Sir Charles Metcalfe was wrong to hold that the village communities in India seem to last where nothing else lasts.

The villages in India are at present passing through a 'transitional period. From the sociological point of view the old social relations, bonds and ties have disappeared. The community consciousness is steadily decreasing. Politics of the country has made deep in roads into the peaceful life of the village people and has divided them into political and sub-caste groups. The joint family system js fast disintegrating and morality has gone down. The only feature of the village community now left is agriculture.

15.6 Conclusion

Rural community is known for its smallness, homogeneity, simplicity, traditional means for regulation, group solidarity etc. It is natural ecological entity. Indian village community is known is for its autonomous character. It is also itself considered as a little republic. But in the era of globalization traditional rural communities have been changed, new social structure is visible in rural areas. Today rural community is a blend of tradition and modernity. As a sociologist it's our task to study rural relations and transformation for development of human beings.



15.7 References and Suggested Further Reading

1. MacIver R.M. & Page Charls (1977), Society: An Introductory Analysis, New Delhi: The Macmillan co. of India Ltd.
2. Nagla B.K. & Singh S (2019), Introducing Sociology, Rawat Publication.
3. Chitamber J.B. (1975), Rural Sociology, New Age Publisher, New Delhi.
4. Rawat H.K. (2017), Sociology: Basic Concepts, Rawat Publication. Jaipur.