

First Lecture

“Village” in Indian History: Constructs and Currents.

Brief Outline

As suggested in the title, the lecture will be divided in two parts. The first part would deal with notions or conceptions of the Indian village and the second part would be on the contemporary history on the Indian village, looking at the empirical processes of social, economic and political changes.

The village acquired the status of a sui-generis category in sociology of Indian during the colonial period. Though villages undoubtedly existed during the pre-colonial period, it was not necessarily seen as the “essence” or the primary unit of Indian civilization.

The colonial constructions of the Indian village have also been a subject of debates and dissention among the students of Indian society. Apart from the questions of empirical validity of such simplistic and ahistoric notions of village, scholars have raised some ideological and political questions. Why did the colonial administrators approach India and the Indian village in the manner in which they did? What were the uses of such a conceptualization of the Indian village?

What influences have the colonial forms of knowledge had on the later imaginings of India? In this section, the talk would focus on:

- a. The nationalist notions of village; the implications of such notions for the manner in which Indian nationalists thought of India’s pasts and its futures? How did the idea of village influence the formulation of developmental policies after independence?

We can identify several different notions of village in writings of the nationalist leaders. In this section, I will discuss the manner in which Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar looked at the Indian village. Though they all agreed with each other on the validity of treating village as basic unit of Indian civilization, they disagreed on its substantive political value. For Gandhi village was a very important category, ‘a site of authenticity’. For Nehru, village represented the traditional India and it was ‘a site of backwardness’. For Ambedkar, the leader of India’s untouchable communities, village was ‘a site of oppression’.

These competing ideas on village also had implications for the manner in which policies for rural development and agrarian change were formulated during the post-independence period.

- b. Implications of the colonial forms of knowledge on the manner in which the new disciplines of social sciences, particularly, the sociology and social anthropology,

launched their researches on the Indian society. Here my focus will primarily be on the tradition of “village studies” during the 1950s and 1960s.

The lecture will also touch upon the contemporary trends in the study of village. How is the village talked about today? Its declining value in the Indian society. Bharat versus India; globalization, growing hegemony of the urban middle classes and marginalization of the village.

Readings:

Beteille, A. (1980) ‘The Indian Village: Past and Present’ in E.J. Hobsbawm et. al. eds. *Peasants in History: Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner*, Calcutta: Oxford University Press.

Jodhka, S.S. (1998) ‘From ‘Book-View’ to ‘Field-View’: Social Anthropological: Constructions of the Indian Village’, *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 26 (3). Pp. 311-32.

Jodhka, S.S (2002) ‘Nation and Village: Images of Rural India in Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar’. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Volume 37 (32) August 10. Pp. 3343-54. **2002.**

Srinivas, M.N. (1960), ed. *India’s Village*, London, Asia Publishing House (first published in 1955).

Srinivas, M.N. ‘Indian Village: Myth and Reality’. Reproduces in Vandana Madan ed. *The Village in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press (2002).