
MULTICHRONIC VILLAGE STUDIES AND THE THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The present paper focuses on the changing aspects of the village life in Kerala with reference to its occupational diversification and social structure. The traditional occupations and services of the villagers in Kerala are caste based. This is an attempt to provide a brief picture of changes of the Kerala villages. The anthropological analyses on village studies include caste, occupational mobility, economic change, etc. Anthropological studies were looking societies in terms of culture and society and the particular cultural formation of the Indian subcontinent has its historically created design and the influence of Historical Particularism and Cultural Relativism have become inbuilt in anthropological analysis since the first quarter of the 20th Century, which is the major turning point of anthropology in India to propose new Indian paradigms and theories. All the Indian theories, propositions, and concepts have been applicable in different 'multichronic' periods of societal formation. With the term 'multichronic', I mean the various periods of various diachronic and synchronic studies. The paper concludes that the villages in Kerala are under the process of extensive socio-cultural transitions.

Keywords: Social Change, Village Studies, Structural Functionalism, Indian Theories.

Introduction: The present paper focuses on the changing aspects of the village life in Kerala with reference to its occupational diversification and social structure. The changing aspect of village life is analysed in terms of economic activities of the heterogeneous population whereas the social structure is analysed by the theories, structural functionalism and the structuralism. An analysis on subsistence and economic activities of the population of village portray the processes of social change. The traditional and modern occupational status of the village people is identified as the subsistence or economic activities and the changes in them is the most important situation of social change of the villages in Kerala. An attempt is also made to provide the theoretical development in India in analysing the village communities.

In Kerala, the villages were not isolated and there exist continuity among the villages. When an outsider travels either by rail or road will get the impression that the entire land has been urbanised for houses march along both sides of the way without an open space that separate villages in the north giving the impression of a continuous conurbation. Anthropologically, villages must be viewed as cultural milieus, and each milieu provides only limited resources. The existence of different ethnic groups as well as diverse eco-cultural set-up provided instability as well as disparities in the villages besides the hierarchical advantages as well as disadvantages intertwined with the Hindu castes, and the other communities. The traditional caste based occupations were virtually not providing adequate amenities to the people are a general observation across Kerala. The social structure of most of the Indian villages is based on the inhabitants of the villages. Some villages comprise of castes or castes and communities. Some villages have tribes only, or a

composite of castes, tribes and religious groups. Moreover, the ecological setting of the villages also varies.

In the Indian context, the anthropological village studies of Wiser (1936), Ghurye (1942), Srinivas (1942) and Hutton (1946) were some of the significant attempts of the "Constructive Period of the village studies". Morris Opler's 'Village Life in North India' (1951), Srinivas's 'Caste in Modern India and Other Essays' (1962), Oscar Lewis's 'Group Dynamics in a North Indian Village' (1954), Majumdar's 'Caste and Communication in an Indian Village' (1958), etc., are some of the important studies conducted during the "dawn of the Analytical Period of village studies". Of these, the works of Wiser (1936), Srinivas (1942), Opler (1951), Lewis (1954), and Majumdar (1958) analyse the caste and its dynamics within the villages of India, and hence they can be referred to as village studies as well as caste studies.

Village Studies in Kerala: Aiyappan (1965), an eminent anthropologist of Kerala, had made a study entitled 'Social Revolution in a Kerala Village'. This book is based on a study of his own village, Maruthayur near to Pavarty and about 5 KMs away from Guruvayur in Thrissur district in Kerala. In 1982 he published another work entitled 'The Personality of Kerala', which traces the earliest roots of the culture of Kerala. The book deals with the archaeological and socio-cultural aspects, and a brief description of some castes and tribes of Kerala. It has mentioned the castes like Nambutiri Brahmins, Nayars, Temple servant castes, Izhavas [Ezhavas], Washerman, etc.

The study of Mathur (1977) on the Anjumoorthy village is relevant when discussing on the Kerala villages. In his paper on 'Socio-economic changes among the Weaker Sections of the population of Kerala', Mathur explains the socio-economic changes

among the Weaker Sections of Anjumoorthy, a multi-caste village in the Palakkad District. The Weaker Sections in Anjumoorthy belong to the Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes and constitute 75 per cent of the total population of the village. The study describes the economy of the Weaker Sections, and identifies them in terms of access to the control over the means of production, socio-political and religious institutions. Mathur also points out that though there has been a perceptible change in economic opportunities, some of the basic traditional structures still persist particularly among the Weaker Sections, Izhavas, Kammalas, Harijans and other serving castes. For instance, the washerman, barber and artisan castes even today discharge their traditional functions in the village. The paper has briefly explained the changes in the technology of cultivation, economic and organisational change, and political and ritual change.

Bhanu and Mahendrakumar (2000) have made a village study, the Kottakkal village, in Malappuram District of Kerala. The study has identified the traditional and modern aspects of life and culture of the heterogeneous people comprising Hindu castes, the Christians and the Muslims. The study essentially points out some of the major socio-economic and cultural transformations that took place in the village.

The study on Vallachira village in Thrissur District in Kerala (Mahendrakumar, 2006) provided a detailed analysis of occupational diversification and occupational mobility taking place in a Kerala village. The pattern of occupational mobility and the economic or more precisely the pecuniary motivation resulted in the proposal of a new theory - Pecuniarisation - to the field of study of complex societies in anthropology.

In Kerala, the caste occupations have not completely disappeared, whereas in many cases it has rejuvenated and even modernised for the existence of the rural mass. A considerable number of people find difficulties in attaining modern secular occupations. Therefore, they started to explore the possibilities in the traditional sector, which resulted in the strong coming back of a number of traditional occupations, particularly those having more monetary benefits, and these findings based on a village study in Kerala set the base for the theory of Pecuniarisation.

Occupation has also become determinant for the differentiation of separate human groups. The traditional occupations and services of the people of the villages in Kerala, like any other Indian village, are mostly caste based. Therefore, the changes in the caste-based occupations are an important turning point in the social structure of the village life in India. The pattern of livelihood is essentially a major

cultural determinant of the people, and it is guided by the occupations.

The occupational structure and the economic system in general are becoming more open and on the other hand caste and kinship are actually becoming more closed. Pace of changes of the villages in Kerala has become obviously fast in the present day. At present, the social structure of Kerala is undergoing radical changes due to occupational diversification and occupational mobility.

Extensive out-migration and emigration is a decisive element of change of the rural communities. The impact of out-migration is not higher than the impact of emigration. Out-migration has taken place mainly in the major metropolitan cities and also to the major industrial centres in India. Prakash (1998) has rightly pointed out that the emigration to the Gulf countries is one of the main factors of economic development of the rural areas of Kerala. Moreover, the higher levels of literacy and education have helped the people to achieve good employment opportunities throughout India and abroad.

At present, there is no population as out of the environment of economic and cultural changes. Economic change is firmly connected to the cultural change and vice versa. Therefore, cultural change cannot be studied without taking into consideration the economic changes and environmental changes. This paper does not discuss the ecological anthropological views and it is a limitation of this paper. As far as the economic and cultural changes are concerned, the change from traditional economic activities to modern economic activities is the causative factor. When people have opportunities to change their traditional occupations, their "work culture" as well as life styles are subjected to transformations. At the moment, the percentages of traditional and modern occupations are 25 percent and 75 per cent respectively (Mahendrakumar 2006).

In India, the caste system was the determining factor of the occupations of people. The Occupational Information Unit of the Directorate General of Employment and Training, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation, Government of India, have published the National Classification of Occupations (NCO) in 1958, and it has identified 2485 kinds of occupations consisting of non-traditional and traditional occupations all over India. The principle of "type of work performed" was adopted for the classification of occupations. The history of occupational classification dates back to 1946, in that year the then Directorate published the "Guide to Occupational Classification", and it was an industrially biased occupational classification, framed after the British pattern. Even today, in every village, it is possible to observe the nuances of the traditional

occupations, services, roles and duties of different caste groups.

Since Independence, the Govt. of India realised the importance of rural development. Therefore, a number of development and welfare measures have been initiated in order to bring the rural masses to the mainstream of national development. The initiation of various welfare measures in the field of education, health, sanitation, family planning, housing and special welfare programmes for the Weaker Sections including Women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes made it possible to improve the living standards of the rural masses including the poor. On the other hand all these planned programmes were directly and indirectly diversifying the occupational scene. The diversification of occupations has strengthened the inter-caste, inter-village, village-town, and national and international relations. The communication skills of the people living in different socio-cultural levels also have improved. These changes are increasingly reflecting on the life-style of the people and it has ultimately changed the very pattern of traditional interaction and the social structures of the villages in Kerala.

The traditional village economies of Kerala were very backward than the present due to the rudimentary level of technological achievements. In the mid-fifties, the Kerala economy was characterised by ineffective production, absence of developed capitalist methods of production and a tremendous influence wielded by religious, tribal, and caste customs, resulting in immobile social relations (Lieten, 1975:450). However, with the modernisation and developments in the villages in Kerala, the traditional economy based on the caste based occupations and services have been changed considerably. The caste consciousness within villages has not been disappeared but it is implicit in the social living of the permanent settlers of villages as well as urban areas and even towns. "N.K. Bose points out that an increase in caste consciousness does not indicate strengthening of 'the caste system' and that the strengthening of caste as a mode of group identification in recent years may be due to differential rate of social change among the castes in a region. It may also be due to the slow expansion of the structure of opportunity in an economy of scarcity (1965,1968)" (quoted in Sinha, 1974: 236). Bose's opinion is still worthwhile when we observe the pace of change of the village economy and the caste consciousness in the villages of Kerala.

In the view of Upadhyay and Pandey (1993), Bose's general proposition has been that caste, as an economic system and as a regulator of social life, is disintegrating at different rate in different regions of India. This proposition supports the changes in

Kerala villages. Further, Bose proposed that fundamental structural change and even breakdown of caste system would be possible only when the economic base of the system was qualitatively transformed.

According to the present analysis on the changes in Kerala villages, breakdown of caste system will not be possible with the change of the economic base of the caste system. Economic base of the caste system can be referred to as the occupational base and changes in occupations do not affect most of the latent aspects of the caste system. Endogamy still exists even if in some villages where there are great many changes have occurred in the traditional occupational area.

The occupational freedom, that is the freedom to choose any vocation according to the interest or capability of the individuals and not the families of a caste or a caste group, is the mainstays of the present profile of development of the people. It has considerably been relied to reduce the gap between the poor and wealthy in the villages of Kerala. The occupational freedom has been gained due to a few important matters like the Land Reforms, and other social movements.

The concept of 'purity and pollution' was observed even after Independence and until the extensive spread of modern education. The concept of 'purity and pollution' plays a significant role in maintaining particular distance among caste groups. The higher castes and lower castes possessed entirely different beliefs and practices. Perhaps it may be because of the strict behaviours of the higher castes towards the lower castes, and they were often incapable of competing with the higher castes in terms of power and wealth.

A village study is essentially the study of a particular unit of the whole network of villages, and the comparative study of two or more villages can be considered as the study of two or more micro units, which can be conceived as part-cultures. As the villages are part and parcel of the whole network of India, the villages show some general characteristics, but in contrast they show obvious differences on the eco-cultural composition. Here the term 'eco' is for ecology and the ecological setting of different villages in India hold diverse characteristics. Similarly, the cultural setting also changed according to the particular conglomeration of population of different cultural milieus. Again, the assembly of population comprising of different castes and communities, and the permutations and combinations vary from place to place.

In India, villages are the microcosmic units that together shape the structure of the country. According to the 1961 Census, there are 5,66,878 villages in India. As per 2001 Census, 6,38,588 villages

and according to 2011 Census there are 6,40,867 villages. In the case of towns the number has increased from 5161 to 7935 from 2001 to 2011 Census. In Kerala, according to 2001 Census there were 1364 villages whereas according to the 2011 Census the number came down to 1018. It is interesting that the number of towns have increased according to the 2011 Census, and the present number is 520 towns as against 159 towns as per 2001 Census. The increase in number of towns shows the extent of urbanisation. A number of village studies have come out till date, on various aspects of the villages. The studies on the villages vary from socio-cultural, socio-economic, historical, geographical, and physical aspects to the diverse eco-systems. Anthropologists have conducted extensive studies on various villages. For example, Dube (1955, '58), Majumdar (1958), Lewis (1958), Mayer (1960), Epstein (1962), Srinivas (1962, '66, '72, '76), Ghurye (1963), Aiyappan (1965), Ishwaran (1968), Bose (1975), Alexander (1975), Mathur (1977), Mahendrakumar (2006), and others.

Village Studies and the Theoretical Developments: The theoretical and conceptual development in village studies developed along with the ethnographical accounts on various villages. The first full-length anthropological study using anthropological methodology became a turning point with the study of Robert Redfield in 1930 on a Mexican Peasant community, and its influence reached across globe. Since then, Anthropologists have recorded different aspects of socio-cultural changes in India. Accordingly, there emerged some theoretical contributions based on the village studies in general and ethnographic studies in particular.

Structural Functionalist and Structuralist Approach in Village Studies: The traditional social structure of the villages in India is based on the people and their institutions. A.R. Radcliffe Brown's (1976) Structural Functionalism is one of the appropriate theories for explaining the occupations and services of various castes and communities of the Indian villages. With the theoretical framework of Structural Functionalism, Indian societies are organised on the basis of caste and the network of this actually existing relations can be depicted as the social structure empirically. Any change in the elements of the nexus would reflect on the whole society. In India the caste groups and the members of caste are the elements and units in the traditional social structure.

The structural functional theory of Radcliffe-Brown and the structural theory of Levi-Strauss are helpful in providing the general principle of the social interaction and its model making respectively. Nevertheless, those concepts are not substantial to provide the very particular characteristic of the socio-cultural change that is taking place in the multi-caste

villages. Social and cultural interaction patterns of various people are quite dynamic and integrated. The Structural Functionalist and Structuralist Approach in village studies were effectively employed in a village study in Kerala for the first time in 2002 by the author and later on it was published in 2006. Till then, the Indian village studies were encircled with the genre of study of Robert Redfield and his Indian disciples.

Indian Theories and Concepts: Robert Redfield proposed Great Tradition and Little Tradition based on a study on Mexican Peasants in 1950 and his Indian disciples, namely, Milton Singer who applied Great and Little Traditions in India. Mc Kim Marriot, a disciple of Redfield, proposed Universalisation and Parochialisation based on a village study on the Kishangarhi in U.P. in 1955. Surajit Sinha proposed Tribe-Caste Continuum based on the study of Bastar tribe, and L.P. Vidyarthi proposed Sacred Complex based on the study Hindu Gaya in 1961, and Nature-Man-Spirit Complex based on the tribe Maler in 1963. The theory Sanskritization, the concept Dominant Caste, Westernisation, etc., were proposed by M.N. Srinivas. Pecuniarisation was introduced in 2006.

In the words of Ainapur (1968:2), "several concepts [and theories] such as "Tradition", "Sanskritization", "Fringe", Region" and "Frontier" have been developed by Redfield, Srinivas, Majumdar, Mayer, and Bailey respectively, while studying the rural situation. Most of them have stressed the position of caste in the rural social order ... in the rapidly developing situation of change in India, a re-evaluation and re-formation of these concepts [and theories] and approaches in the light of further studies of the rural community is warranted. It may be that the very concept of caste would need to be redefined."

Sanskritization is a much-discussed Indian anthropological theory till recently and it is not a concept, and Srinivas modified the denotations and connotations of the theory according to the changes and also to suit to various contexts. Nevertheless, some studies, for example Ishwaran et al. (1968), have vehemently criticised the theory and discarded it at least from their studies. The theory of Pecuniarisation was proposed in 2006, based on an anthropological study on Vallachira village in Kerala, by the author is the most recent theoretical development taken place in the field of social cultural anthropology in India.

Pecuniarisation: The theory - Pecuniarisation - holds the idea that village people have become more money minded and "the economic well-being or wealth of an individual is the main basis for power and prestige in the villages more than the prestige attached occupations. This shift from the old concept of occupations to a new concept provides a pattern and it can be referred to as Pecuniarisation. Downward and upward occupational mobility

pertaining to any particular occupations is the basic character of this phenomenon and this process is taking place all over Kerala. The theory of Peculiarisation includes the same motivation of the two-way process of occupational mobility; where the adoption of the traditional occupation of a caste by any other caste either as an individual or as a group merely with an economic motive is defined as Peculiarisation. Moreover, among a heterogeneous population, the non-caste people also followed some traditional economic activities and they started to adopt other vocations in the line of other people, hence they too possess the very pattern. Therefore, the theory of Peculiarisation is applicable to them also." (Mahendrakumar, 2006:187).

In general, the studies on village communities vary from cultural milieu to milieu. The Structural Functionalism is applicable in analysing the social reality of Indian villages empirically. The most abstract theory Structuralism is capable of providing structural models since it views empirical reality as raw materials for making models. The Indian Theories, namely, Universalisation and Parochialisation, Westernisation, Sanskritisation, and Peculiarisation, are useful in analysing social processes in Indian villages. The Indian Propositions like Tribe-Caste Continuum, Great and Little Traditions, and Nature-Man-Spirit Complex are the analytical tools to study Indian Village and Tribal situation. The Indian anthropological concepts,

namely, Dominant Caste of Srinivas, Frontier of Bailey (introduced through 'Caste and Economic Frontier: a village in highland Orissa' published in 1957), Region of A.C. Mayer, Frontier of D.N. Majumdar, etc., are not well taken care of because they are concepts alone, which neither have the capability to address the fundamental social process nor closer to the levels of any of the propositions or abstract theories.

Conclusions: The Kerala villages are under the process of extensive socio-cultural transitions. The way of life of the people is also getting changed day-by-day. The way of anthropological analysis on village studies include caste, occupational mobility, economic change, caste-tribe relations, higher caste-lower caste interrelations, etc. Anthropological studies were looking societies in terms of culture and society and the particular cultural formation of the Indian subcontinent has its historically created design and the influence of Historical Particularism and Cultural Relativism have become inbuilt in anthropological analysis since the first quarter of the 20th Century, which is the major turning point of anthropology in India to propose new Indian paradigms and theories. All the Indian theories, propositions, and concepts have been applicable in different 'multichronic' periods of societal formation. With the term 'multichronic', I mean the various periods of various diachronic and synchronic studies.

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