

EXTRACT

The Indian Village—Its past, present and future. Extract of the address delivered by Rao Bahadur T. S. Venkataraman, B.A., I. A. S., F. N. I., *General President of the Twenty-fourth Indian Science Congress, 1937.*

No apology is needed in these days for talking about any aspect of 'village and village life'. The city and the town which were holding a complete thralldom over the public mind all these years are losing their glamour somewhat in spite of their admittedly alluring attractions, and the 'village' would appear to be getting increasing recognition, particularly in our country and in recent times.

India is situated in a comparatively densely populated area of the globe—about half the population of the world being crowded into a tenth of the earth's land region. This has had its effects on the type of agriculture practised in the country, the selection of crop for cultivation and the life of the people as a whole.

India also possesses a civilization and culture which was at least contemporaneous with, if not antecedent to, the civilization of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome. After making considerable progress this civilization has, however, remained in a more or less quiescent and pertified state in our villages for well nigh two to three thousand years, little influenced by the great progress made by the West during the latter part of the same period. It is only within comparatively recent times that the Western civilization has come to spread into and influence, the country side.

The Aryan colonists on entering India found plenty of land to settle in, and the obvious advantages of group formation brought into being two main types of villages. One was the type similar to what is now termed 'ryotwari' where each family or group of persons took up as much land as they could cultivate depending on the number of cattle and able bodied men in the unit. Site for the village was chosen at some convenient spot such as the banks of a river or canal or proximity to other sources of water supply. The persons constituting the village chose a Headman who exercised all powers on behalf of the whole community. This type of village was generally associated with peaceful conditions.

The other type called 'Joint village' by Baden Powell, was founded by powerful families or class not necessarily agriculturalists. The government of such village was by the well known Panchayat system and occasionally a group of such villages belonged to the same clan or owed some kind of allegiance to the same warrior chieftain in return for the protection they enjoyed at his hands. In these villages the cultivating classes were sometimes in the position of tenants. 'Ryotwari' village sometimes got converted into 'Joint villages' through conquest by some warrior chieftain.

The village of South India would appear to have attained a high degree of perfection absolutely unaffected by Aryan influence from the North, so much so that certain authorities hold that some of the Aryan village institutions were copies of the Dravidian.

The headman was an important officer in village government. His office was hereditary and apparently a vestige of the ancient village chief. He was remunerated by grant of inalienable right to certain lands and later by being allowed to collect and utilize certain taxes from the villagers.

He was assisted by and later on effectively controlled by the village panchayat. This was a council of elders not elected and more or less self constituted from

the elders of the village who naturally and easily commanded the respect of the villagers. Justice was dispensed in the village temple and an oath before the local deity was potent in preventing persons from bearing false witness. The panchayatdars also knew the parties almost personally and were thus able to dispense quicker justice. The panchayat administered the village funds and thus commanded facilities for catering to village needs.

The village was practically autonomous and once the tax from the village as a whole was paid it had little to do with the central government and was not affected by change of dynasties. Taxes were levied for communal purposes as distinct from those by the emperor; and there was a common village fund which entertained the village guests, provided for the indigent and arranged for recreations, shows and performances of acrobatic and jugglery feats. The temple, the village tank, the guest house as well as other public utility concerns had a claim on this common fund. The central government helped in cases where works of common utility were beyond the capacities of the village. This help was given either by the waiving of certain Imperial taxes or by contributions in kind. The tax was sometimes levied in the form of manual labour and this is responsible for the huge and elaborate temples found in S. India. Occasionally also loans were raised by mortgaging the revenues of the village for definite periods.

There was not much sanitation in the modern sense of the word and no scavenging. Regular sweeping of the village streets was not common and the watchman who was responsible for sanitation thought his duty done when he pulled any carcass out of the streets. Diseases were naturally few on account of the healthier open life and there was no organised medical relief. The kitchen store contained most requisites for common ailments and the elders generally knew a few simple remedies from experience. The science of healing was, however, well advanced for the then conditions and comparatively cheap being based on easily available herbs and both metallic and organic compounds. The streets were broad. Each caste which pursued its own profession lived in separate parts of the village and it was surrounded by a common and free grazing ground. The land during the Hindu period did not belong to the king but to the people who occupied it; hence, perhaps, the traditional and great attachment to landed property which still exists.

Each village had a class of artisans who were hereditary and being non-cultivating were given definite shares of grains at harvest. In return for this the farmer was entitled to the services of the artisans both for his household and agricultural needs. Most villages had a school teacher who was maintained by voluntary presents from the parents of the children attending his school.

The village grew all the crops required to meet all its simple needs and the surplus of good ears was stored in the village granaries as a provision against future unfavourable seasons. Land was plenty, needs few and there was a great deal of contentment. The villager's outlook and knowledge were limited rarely extending beyond the confines of his own village. This had been the condition for well nigh two to three thousand years.

During this same period the West, on the other hand was rapidly evolving itself from a condition even more primitive than that of the Indian village to that of modern times. Various inventions and discoveries had enabled man to gain partial mastery over his environment and both time and space had been largely conquered.

Life has now become more complicated in all directions. The code of conduct which formerly was regulated by the simple ten commandments, has now to be regulated by a whole army of learned lawyers and the ever growing volumes of law books. One very important result of the contact with the West has been the

development of the export and import trades which have affected profoundly the kind of crops grown and both the occupation and mode of the life of the villager. It steadily dragged him out of his isolation and threw him into the world currents of commerce and industry. Economics of the village was upset. The more enterprising and intelligent of the villagers are attracted by the commercial life and tended to shift themselves to the nearest town or city temporarily in the beginning but often permanently in the end. It is no wonder that such great changes have brought in their train a variety of problems.

One out-standing feature connected with Indian agriculture of the present day is its great dependence on the monsoons. Any one who has had to do with crop growing will realise how erratic the monsoons are both in time and quantity of precipitation. The unevenness and uncertainty of results in spite of his best efforts in the matter of cultivation and selection of seed, caused by factors beyond his control—such as drought, floods, and cyclones—render the agricultural income of the villager unsteady and uncertain. Secondly the villager is so little in touch with world markets wherein the results of his labours are evaluated and sold, that a large portion of his profits is intercepted by the intermediate agencies that market his produce. This is why the increase in the export trade has had comparatively little effect on the prosperity of the village as such. Thirdly, land available for crop growing has not increased to the same extent as increase in population. True some new lands have been brought under the plough and yields from existing lands have increased somewhat, but such increase is much less than the increase in population. The prevailing sentiments, both social and religious, that directly encourage large numbers of children were definitely needed in the olden days of plenty of land and low population. These are obvious misfits at the present time when conditions are just the reverse. Fourthly possibility of large augmentation in acre production is severely handicapped by a variety of causes such as subdivision and fragmentation of holdings and the prevalence of rigid social customs and religious sentiments which cause the waste of such valuable manures as night soil and cattle dung and adversely affect the business aspect of agricultural production.

* * * * * The continuous subdivision of lands has been a long standing feature and in certain parts has reached a considerable degree of fineness. It has gone so far as to divide the waters of a well each sharer being entitled to so many hours of lifting water from it. The Indian is, however, so much attached to his land be it small, and unremunerative, that he continues to own it if not forced out by other circumstances. Its possession is not always considered as a business proposition but as necessary for status. This leads to the evil of absentee-landlordism. This state of affairs rules out large scale operations by outside capitalists who have the resources for up-to-date agricultural methods generally beyond the reach of the average cultivator. Another disadvantage is that it precludes fencing of the property, a valuable aid in raising agricultural efficiency. It also leads to constant and unavoidable disputes resulting from these long and irregular boundaries.

Further India is unique in possessing an enormous amount of cattle without making profit from its slaughter. The old and the weak are allowed to deplete the fodder stock of the village with the result that the fitter and hence the more useful ones do not get their due share. Cattle maintenance is not looked upon as a business proposition and the sentiment towards them is too deep seated for a rapid change.

With regard to village labour it may be stated that at certain periods, a large force of labour is needed and there is no demand during other parts of the year. This is particularly the case where the bulk of the area in the village is under the same crop. In the absence of work and hence wages all the year round, the

labour migrates to other places with the result that at the time of peak demand there is labour scarcity.

The villager is being made increasingly aware of the changes around by the extension into the village of such symbols of modern life as the post and telegraph, the bicycle and the motor bus. Economically he finds himself in a very disadvantageous position owing to his steadily diminishing agricultural income in contrast with increasing expenditure due to changes in living even in his own household. Innovations in dress and habits and new wants like tea and coffee are steadily forcing up family expenses. While the community life of interdependence has ceased to exist, the medieval social structure like the joint family system still persists rendering the villager's life unbalanced. Extra profits from an exceptionally good year are more often wasted in urbanizing his surroundings than being put by as reserve against lean years. Expenses on marriages and funerals are other sudden items of expenditure. The margin of extra income is so narrow that the loss of a buffalo or the long illness of the working member in the family is known to drop the villager down in the social scale sometimes never to recover to his original position. The only security he can offer against such debts is the land, his only possession in this world, and once pledged he finds it difficult to redeem it.

It may be remarked here that one common complaint laid at the door of the Indian by others and of the villager by the towns-men is what is termed 'low standard of life'. There exists, however, considerable confusion as to what the term really means and though it is but vaguely understood, it is nevertheless readily resorted to, when there is no room for sound and logical reasoning. To put it briefly and in easy language a higher standard of life may be defined to consist in getting more out of life's opportunities to the advantage of both the individual and his society. A rise in the standard of living must add to the productive efficiency of the individual or it is no HIGHER though it may be a DIFFERENT standard. All real progress and civilization are interpretable only on this basis. But when a townsman, weak in physique through wrong and unsanitary living, with a diversity of unnecessary and unhealthy wants and unnecessarily and perhaps also harmfully dressed, talks of his higher standard it is an obvious misapplication of the term. It is a case of a more EXPENSIVE and not HIGHER standard of life. A healthy cultured villager with his fewer and simpler needs but greater depth of character is easily the superior.

The merchant, with his desire, for commerce has a tendency to synonymise 'higher standard' with 'increased wants and greater purchasing power'. While an increase in wants as the result of a fuller life—such as books, works of art or facilities for quicker locomotion—does represent a higher standard, it ceases to be such when the increased wants are unnecessary, wasteful or harmful to the individual or society.

The most serious of the unfavourable changes coming over our village is the steadily increasing exodus of people from the village to the town. One main reason for exodus is the growing inadequacy of agricultural income not supplemented by income from other sources. A second reason is the shifting of main activities of life to the town. Educational facilities and other urban conveniences are increasingly attracting the villagers to the town. When the person has lived in the town for sometime, he often develops a dislike for village life with its limited comforts.

The rapid increase of population in our country and China has become a byword and this renders incumbent a further increase of agricultural production. Science has so far not succeeded in growing crops on the roofs of houses or on road sides in towns and the best achievements of agriculture have been in the

country side. The clearly indicated line of advance for the future, therefore, lies in improving rural conditions and rendering our villages better and more efficient in the discharge of duties set to them by the country as whole, viz. (1) the proper and adequate feeding of the steadily increasing population, and (2) rearing a healthy stock of men and cattle and maintaining them in a fit condition. Both town and village are needed for the full and complete development of our country as a whole. But each has certain specific advantages and inevitable defects. In crop growing, when one comes across two types both of which possess desirable characters, the crop servant—called the breeder—tries to raise hybrids between them for producing kinds which might combine in themselves the good points of both and eliminating as far as possible the defects of either. A similar procedure is indicated between the town and the village and such a process is already in progress and it is desirable to speed it by conscious endeavour. * * * *

As the efficiency of any programme of rural improvement depends primarily on the chief agent in it, the villager, it is important to consider means for increasing his efficiency. If we compare the villager with the townsman, one point in which the latter often scores over the villager is his literacy if not always his education. Though it is true that the village teacher did exist in the olden days and atleast certain classes of the population received some kind of school and even higher education and though there is evidence that reputed universities did occasionally flourish in certain rural parts, regular schooling and education were not considered essential. Education given in the village school should obviously possess the rural and agricultural outlook and be vitally linked with the every day life of the village. Nature study lessons fit in well with the agricultural life of the villager and I have often wondered why the village vacations should be timed to the conveniences of metropolitan examinations rather than to the busiest agricultural seasons in the village when the boys could perhaps help their parents in the field and gain first hand knowledge of subjects taught in the school room. A second characteristic of the villager as contrasted with the townsman is often the slower moving intellect of the former. The linking up of villages with towns and other villages through better communication facilities, will remedy the situation. Yet another common defect of the villager is the lack of so called 'business' habits and 'business' mentality. This again is due to his environment and tradition. Nature's processes with which the village agriculturalist is primarily concerned do not generally need the punctuality of the man of business or commerce. The absence of insurance measures in our villages as in Denmark and Switzerland against crop failures and cattle epidemics, which are by no means uncommon, is largely attributable to the absence of education and business outlook. The villager's income would be both enhanced and rendered steadier by the import of the 'business' mentality into his activities such as agriculture and cattle maintenance. The villager's outlook on the world is often narrow because of the isolation and the absence of literacy. Whether he likes or not, the villager is being dragged into the world currents of commerce and industry and his horizon needs to be broadened by education.

In this study of the Indian village, the villager and village life, we have frequently noticed the need and advantages of industrializing the village. We have found that industries are desirable in the village to find employment for the people all through the year, to stabilize labour, to tone up the villager in various directions and to supplement and steady his income. The large scale industries, which have developed in the country have helped the villager but little. On the other hand, they have adversely affected the village tending to draw labour and brains away from the village. What is needed is the establishment

of cottage industries in the village itself so as to improve the conditions for living in it.

It is obvious that the closer such industries are linked up with agriculture and agricultural products the better they would fit in with village economics. Cattle being an important adjunct of agriculture, industries like cattle breeding and production of milk and milk products at once suggest themselves. Bee keeping, poultry breeding, fruit growing and canning and preparation of tinned and infant foods for the benefit of the townsman would fit in well into the village. Other suitable industries would be the partial preparation of manufactured products in the village itself as a rural industry. Cotton ginneries, seed decorticators and oil presses belong to this group. Minor industries connected with products or articles available in the village or vicinity, such as coconut industry on the West Coast and fish curing in seashore villages, help to keep the villages prosperous. Other handicrafts and domestic industries, where the needed material is imported from outside and worked in the village during the off-seasons, include weaving, dyeing and the manufacture of toys and trinkets. The mechanical efficiency obtained in the village as the result of such rural industries gives the village a 'maistry' class who should prove increasingly useful in the repairs and upkeep of farm machinery and water lifting pumps which are spreading in the country.

The purchase and sale of articles connected with cottage industries, need grouping together through co-operative organizations for best results.

As a class our villages lack the conveniences and amenities of urban life, convenience like means for rapid transport, the post and telegraph, the newspaper and the ever increasing improvements associated with the development of electricity are major blessings which it is desirable should be extended to the villages as quickly and as completely as possible. It is the absence of these in our country side that it is partly responsible for the prevailing distaste to village life. The village is easily healthier than the town in such important factors as pure air and open spaces and if only certain urban facilities are implanted in the village, its attractions for settlement should prove irresistible.

The general tendency for retired government officials not to return to the village but settle in a nearby town has struck me as unfortunate and is indicative of the general trend. While in certain cases perhaps the decision might be due to urban educational facilities, there is little doubt that the general unattractiveness of village life also enters into the decision. For permanent results the urge for rural improvement should be implanted in the village itself. This could be achieved only by improving the chief natural agent in such work—viz. the villager—and making it attractive for him to live and have his being in the village itself.

To sum up, there is little doubt that the villages of old were more populated than they are today largely because of conditions prevalent at the time. Those conditions will never return however much or sincerely we may hanker after them. The town and the characteristics associated with urban life are definite products in the march of events and need to be accepted as such. Though there are drawbacks associated with urban life the town has its own good points which need extension into the village to keep rural life in tune with the changes around us. At the same time the countryside has advantages like open spaces and absence of congestion which can never be reproduced in the town.

Life activities that were village centres in the past are increasingly getting town centred to the disadvantage of the former. In the interest of the country as a whole, relationship of mutual help need to be established between the two. The town should extend to the village its greater knowledge, quicker living and

of cottage industries in the village itself so as to improve the conditions for living in it.

It is obvious that the closer such industries are linked up with agriculture and agricultural products the better they would fit in with village economics. Cattle being an important adjunct of agriculture, industries like cattle breeding and production of milk and milk products at once suggest themselves. Bee keeping, poultry breeding, fruit growing and canning and preparation of tinned and infant foods for the benefit of the townsman would fit in well into the village. Other suitable industries would be the partial preparation of manufactured products in the village itself as a rural industry. Cotton ginneries, seed decorticators and oil presses belong to this group. Minor industries connected with products or articles available in the village or vicinity, such as coconut industry on the West Coast and fish curing in seashore villages, help to keep the villages prosperous. Other handicrafts and domestic industries, where the needed material is imported from outside and worked in the village during the off-seasons, include weaving, dyeing and the manufacture of toys and trinkets. The mechanical efficiency obtained in the village as the result of such rural industries gives the village a 'maistry' class who should prove increasingly useful in the repairs and upkeep of farm machinery and water lifting pumps which are spreading in the country.

The purchase and sale of articles connected with cottage industries, need grouping together through co-operative organizations for best results.

As a class our villages lack the conveniences and amenities of urban life, convenience like means for rapid transport, the post and telegraph, the newspaper and the ever increasing improvements associated with the development of electricity are major blessings which it is desirable should be extended to the villages as quickly and as completely as possible. It is the absence of these in our country side that it is partly responsible for the prevailing distaste to village life. The village is easily healthier than the town in such important factors as pure air and open spaces and if only certain urban facilities are implanted in the village, its attractions for settlement should prove irresistible.

The general tendency for retired government officials not to return to the village but settle in a nearby town has struck me as unfortunate and is indicative of the general trend. While in certain cases perhaps the decision might be due to urban educational facilities, there is little doubt that the general unattractiveness of village life also enters into the decision. For permanent results the urge for rural improvement should be implanted in the village itself. This could be achieved only by improving the chief natural agent in such work—viz. the villager—and making it attractive for him to live and have his being in the village itself.

To sum up, there is little doubt that the villages of old were more populated than they are today largely because of conditions prevalent at the time. Those conditions will never return however much or sincerely we may hanker after them. The town and the characteristics associated with urban life are definite products in the march of events and need to be accepted as such. Though there are drawbacks associated with urban life the town has its own good points which need extension into the village to keep rural life in tune with the changes around us. At the same time the countryside has advantages like open spaces and absence of congestion which can never be reproduced in the town.

Life activities that were village centres in the past are increasingly getting town centred to the disadvantage of the former. In the interest of the country as a whole, relationship of mutual help need to be established between the two. The town should extend to the village its greater knowledge, quicker living and

manifold amenities of the modern age. Contributions from the countryside are of equal importance. It alone can produce the raw materials of commerce and industry and thus help in the growth of towns and cities. It alone can supply adequate and wholesome food to the millions of our land whether resident in the village or town. Lastly, the countryside alone can imbue the urban 'business' civilization with the deeper character and larger humanities which are nurtured in the villager through his more direct and constant contact with the great forces of Nature and of life. Our duty then is clear: namely, to improve the *Village*, the nucleus of our country life and infect its Chief Agent, the *Villager*, with a chosen culture of the virus of modern age through *Education* and *Industrialization*.

Agricultural Fottings

BY THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, MADRAS

A Superior Groundnut Variety. Improved crops mean more money for the ryots.

The Government Agricultural Research Station at Tindivanam, South Arcot District, is almost entirely devoted to the improvement of oil seed crops, on which intensive breeding and selection work has been carried on during the last six years.

The most important among the oil seed crops of the Madras Presidency is the groundnut with an annual acreage of about two and a half millions or roughly about 50% of the area in the whole of India, and the produce of Madras alone is worth about 150 million rupees. With a view to obtain the most profitable varieties for South India nearly a hundred varieties from the various groundnut growing regions of the world have been carefully tested at the Agricultural Research Station, Tindivanam during the last six years.

Saloom or A. H. 25, a selection from one of the African varieties, has proved to be superior to all the other spreading or the runner varieties, under South Indian conditions. The duration is nearly 135 days; the increase in yield over the local variety commonly grown has been as high as 20% to 30% in parts of Nellore, Guntur, North Arcot, South Arcot, Salem, Trichinopoly and Madurai Districts. Besides being a high yielder, the variety is superior to others in that it is more drought resistant and is, therefore, well suited to be grown under rainfed conditions, particularly in areas of low rainfall. The smooth and cylindrical nature of the pods facilitates easy harvest of plants with most of the pods in tact. It has another desirable quality, namely bold kernels, which is valued in the market. This new variety is not intended for the irrigated season for which the local variety is preferable.

Though the variety was first made available to the ryots only three years ago, it has found favour with the groundnut growers of the Presidency and the demand for the supply of seed has considerably increased. The reason why the area under the improved variety is not more than what it is at present, is due to the fact that sufficient supply of seed is not available, on account of low multiplication of seed: unlike small grained crops, in groundnut, the yield is only about twelve times as much as the seed rate. As it is not possible to supply all the seed that is in demand for sowing, groundnut growers who have been raising the improved variety will do well to utilise all the produce entirely for sowing purposes.

It may be added that the correct seed rate for the rainfed crop on red soils is about 60 lb. of kernels per acre.