

Review of Cornell University Project on Village Studies in India - Continuing Tradition of Six Decades of Village Studies Conducted by American and Indian Scholars

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ABSTRACT

Rankhandi and three other villages (Jhabiran, Nagal, and Jakhwala) in Saharanpur district of Western Uttar Pradesh in India have sought attention of Anthropologists and Sociologists of Cornell University, other American Universities and Indian Universities since last 65 years. Many research studies have been conducted in these villages on different themes such as village social system, rural social structure, caste and inter-caste relations, social network, communication, women status etc. In the present research paper an attempt has been made to review these studies conducted in these four villages by understanding their historical underpinnings and current discourse. The main objective of this research paper is to review these field and explore this region in the larger context of sociological studies. There is a need to review these studies and re-study these four villages from the standpoint of rural-urban articulations, economic, social, political and cultural interfaces. This is the best sample of villages from the standpoint of many villages with longitudinal studies. At the same time, from the demographic point of view, Rankhandi and Nagal represent large villages and Jhabiran and Jakhwala represent small villages.

I. Background of the Topic

After Independence India was facing many problems related to development such as; health, education, communication, roads, transportation, infrastructure, agriculture and many more. More than three fourth of the population was living in rural areas and primarily depended on agriculture for their livelihoods and sustenance. Therefore, it was vital to frame integrated community development plans for rural development. First Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru invited academicians, agriculture scientists and social scientists in India to carry out research projects which can be useful in designing development programmes and projects in India.

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In this background Cornell University of America showed interest in village studies in India and Professor Morris E. Opler from Cornell University visited India in early 1950s. He was searching suitable field sites in India for carrying out research and field work on Indian villages. He visited Lucknow University in Uttar Pradesh and one of the Ministers in Government offered him to visit a village Rankhandi in Saharanpur district in Western Uttar Pradesh in his constituency and the village became field study centre of Cornell University Project. This link was further extended and continued from Cornell University and other universities of America and from time to time linguistics, anthropologists and sociologists visited Rankhandi and other villages in Saharanpur district for their fieldwork. This link was further continued through Meerut University by Professor Brij Raj Chauhan. Thus, Rankhandi became field study centre for Department of Sociology, Meerut University, Meerut. Faculty and students of the Department were visiting and revisiting Rankhandi and other villages in Saharanpur district for their research projects and assignments. Rankhandi is among those few villages in India that have found their names in sociological research and literature most frequently at global level in last 65 years. Besides Rankhandi sociological studies in Saharanpur district have also been conducted in other three neighbouring villages viz. Nagal, Jhabiran and Jakhwala.

In the present research paper, an attempt has been made to compile the published and available research work on Rankhandi and its neighbouring villages. It is done with a purpose so that an inventory of sociological studies conducted on these villages could be developed for future research. This inventory will be useful for conducting longitudinal study on these villages as well as in developing research design for the studies to be conducted in other villages of India. Moreover, purpose of this paper is to explore roots of sociological studies in Rankhandi and its neighbouring villages in a historical perspective so that interpretation or theory can be developed to understand the processes of change and development in Indian villages. In all 22 published research references and 2 internet references could be found on studies conducted in these four villages viz. Rankhandi, Nagal, Jhabiran and Jakhwala in Saharanpur district of Western Uttar Pradesh.

II. Geographical Setting and the Villages

Saharanpur district is situated in Western Uttar Pradesh. It is the border district of Dehradun in recently created State of Uttarakhand. The north and northeast of the district is surrounded by lower range of Himalaya i.e. Shivalik Hills. The river Yamuna is in west of the district which separates it from Haryana. In the east is Haridwar and in south Muzaffarnagar. The district is important road and rail junction between plain and hill regions of North

India and the States of Haryana, Punjab, Uttaranchal and beyond. It is famous for wooden carving and furniture industry cluster. The district has a paper mill in which raw material comes from forests of Shivalik Hills.

The district has five sub-divisions (Tehsil) namely Saharanpur, Deoband, Nakur, Behat and Rampur Maniharan. All the four villages i.e. Rankhandi Nagal, Jhabiran and Jakhwala are in Deoband Tehsil. Deoband is in south-east of Saharanpur and the border area of Muzaffarnagar district. Deoband has a very famous religious university named Darul-Ulum in which students come from all over India and few students from abroad to study Muslim religion. The university played important role in the freedom struggle of India. Deoband also has an old temple of Hindu Religion Goddess.

Rankhandi is a large village dominated by Rajput agricultural caste. It is 6 kilometer from Deoband in south-east direction with concrete road. It has about 20 caste groups. The main feature of the village is that it is divided into seven parts each one is called *patty*. It has schools, intermediate college, college, bank, post office and hospital. It is a Panchayat unit for 15 villages. Village Nagal is also a large village and is on the main road and railway line of Saharanpur and Muzaffarnagar districts. It is block headquarter, having all urban infrastructure like; hospital, schools, cinema hall, banks, post office, bus stand and railway station. It has mixed caste groups. On the same road, both Jhabiran and Jakhwala are small villages situated 3 kilometres and 7 kilometres away respectively in the south of Deoband. Jhabiran is dominated by Tyagi caste and Jakhwala by Rajput caste.

III. Studies Conducted in Rankhandi Village

Following is the review of sociological studies conducted in Rankhandi village. This review has been categorized in different themes.

1. *Studies on Communication*

Based on his fieldwork in Rankhandi Gumperz (1955) published a research paper on phonological difference in dialects of different caste groups in conversation based upon their rank in social order. The hypothesis is very clear in this paper that social stratification is also reflected in phonology of different caste groups. Again Gumperz (1957) published a research paper on how there is a communication / language problem among the beneficiaries (villagers) and officials in implementing rural development programmes. The hypothesis one can draw from this publication is that poor communication can hamper the proper implementation of the rural development programmes and at the same time beneficiaries cannot feel ownership with programmes. Gumperz (1958) again published a paper on his fieldwork in Rankhandi on dialectical differences of different caste groups in conversation based upon

their rank in the hierarchy of social stratification. This verifies the hypothesis of Gumperz developed in his first publication on Rankhandi. Again Gumperz (1964) verifies and tested its previous hypothesis by taking religion as independent variable and how it can hamper or facilitate social communication. Based on some villages including Rankhandi in different regions of India, Dube (1958) developed a hypothesis that human factors can play important role in facilitating or retarding the growth of community and rural development programmes. These human factors are related to level of responsiveness for change at both levels i.e. beneficiaries and administrators, degree of positive or negative communication and programmes having dissonance or agreement with the local culture.

2. *Studies on Village Social Structure*

Hitchcock also spent long time in Rankhandi for his fieldwork. The most popular research work on Rankhandi was published by Minturn & Hitchcock (1966) in an ethno-methodological form on Rajput of Rankhandi village and from then Rankhandi became popular in the sociological literature with its nickname as Khalapur given by Minturn and Hitchcock. Being the large village Rankhandi has seven residential parts demarcated with *patty*. *Khala* means a small seasonal river or opened sever. *Khala Patty* on the bank of *Khala* is the largest one and based on this *patty* Minturn and Hitchcock gave nick name to this village *Khalapur* in their book and further publications.

3. *Studies on Inter-Caste Relations*

Michael Mahar also spent quite substantial time for his fieldwork in Rankhandi. Mahar & Chandrasekhar (eds.) (1972) developed an interpretation that untouchables in India irrespective of religious reforms and Government intervention, occupy a very low place in society. Introduction of this edited book was written by Morris E. Opler on the north Indian themes; caste and untouchability. Mahar wrote an article on agents of dharma (religion) in a north Indian village. Longitudinal study conducted by Kolenda (1989) focused on changes in castes relationship dues to changes in ideology and utopia in the higher castes. Again Kolenda (1995) focused on structural transformation in Rankhandi in terms of caste and village based occupations by taking the case of micro-enterprises of *gur* (primary form of sugar) making. For his Ph.D. in Jawaharlal Nehru University, Arvind Chauhan did his field work in Rankhandi. Based on his Ph.D. work, Chauhan (2004) published a research paper on caste, class and agrarian relations in the village.

4. *Studies on Social Network*

Brij Raj Chauhan revitalized the fieldwork in Rankhandi in indigenous form partly with self-financing and partly with sponsorship. Chauhan (1980) in

his first publication on Rankhandi appeared on developing a hypothesis how village elites can be influential in bringing socio-economic changes in village community. Chauhan (1990) again conducted a study of three villages in Meerut region including Rankhandi on rural-urban articulations and developed a hypothesis that interactions of the villages with wider world helps in developing networks through principal mediators and in turn it affects the economic, cultural, social and political spheres of village community.

5. *Studies on Women Status*

Minturn (1984) conducted longitudinal study by collecting data in two phases in Rankhandi; first in 1954-55 and second in 1974-75. He testified that there were changes in the differential treatment for child rearing of Rajput girls in Rankhandi over a period of 20 years and hence infant mortality and female infanticide among the Rajput girls were decreased. It has happened with promotional policy of Government for girls' education and increase of education of women in Rankhandi. Minturn & Kapoor (1993) conducted a longitudinal study during 1955-75 on the status of women in Rankhandi. According to them factors like socialization, education and economic growth have played important role in changing status of women. Kolenda (1998) also worked on the pattern of fertility and mortality declining among the children in Rankhandi village by using cross tabulation method. The main reason for it was awareness among the women for health services and availing prenatal, natal and postnatal care. Kolenda (2003) again published a book with comparative study of villages in north, central and south India. Fourteen of her papers, written between 1976 and 2001, are collected in this volume.

6. *Sociological Studies Conducted in Nagal, Jhabiran and Jakhwala Villages*

Nagal, Jhabiran and Jakhwala villages have also sought attention of sociologists for field study. Dube (1958) studied a nearby village of Rankhandi named Jhabiran. Jhabiran is a small village while Rankhandi is a large village. The caste component of these two villages is also different. This study can be significant to understand the comparative caste and social dimensions of two villages and develop hypothesis for future studies. Recently Satayanarayana (2005) published an article on the patterns of peasant mobility in Jhabiran village. This is a longitudinal study which covers 40 years.

In 1980 three research scholars from Department of Sociology, Meerut University came to Rankhandi for fieldwork on a UNESCO sponsored project on Rural - Urban Articulations under the leadership of Professor Brij Raj Chauhan. These research scholars requested the school Principal to spare one student who can help them in rapport building with villagers so that

they can collect data easily. Naresh Singh, then student in 10th standard in the school was selected for the task and he accepted this responsibility. He was also introduced with Professor Brij Raj Chauhan.

Naresh Singh completed his M.A., M. Phil. and Ph. D. from Department of Sociology, Meerut University. He also qualified National Education Test of University Grant Commission in 1986 and received Research Fellowship for M. Phil. and Ph. D. He was also conferred with “Professor Radha Kamal Mukherjee Award for Young Social Scientist” for the year 1989 by the Indian Social Science Association. Singh (1992) selected his own village Jakhwala as part of M.A. research project assignment. It was quite challenging from the perspective of maintaining objectivity in research being field study village as his own village.

Nagal was studied by a student of DAV College Dehradun. Ram (1958) for his M.A. dissertation studied changing patterns of inter-caste relations in Nagal village. Later on, this study became base for other studies in the village. Nagal is a large village situated on the state highway in between Deoband and Saharanpur This village gives altogether different perspective for understanding rural-urban articulations. To begin with Singh (2001) firstly studied social mobility among the scheduled caste in this village as a part of M. Phil. Research Course. Later on, Singh (1987, 1998) had chosen this village for field study for M. Phil. dissertation and Ph. D. thesis in which he studied impact of urban institutions on rural social structure.

IV. Conclusion

The purpose of the references cited in this research paper of the field studies conducted in Rankhandi and three other villages of Saharanpur district in Western Uttar Pradesh was to explore this region in the larger context of sociological studies. Question is posed here what should be done with these studies? The answer can be traced from the sociological tradition of village studies. Firstly, there is a need to review these references and re-study these four villages viz. Rankhandi, Nagal, Jhabiran and Jakhwala from the standpoint of rural-urban articulations, economic, social, political and cultural interfaces. This is the best sample of villages from the standpoint of many villages with longitudinal studies as proposed by Chauhan (1974). At the same time, from the demographic point of view, sample as Rankhandi and Nagal represent large villages and Jhabiran and Jakhwala represent small villages. Purpose of writing this research paper was to put the old threads of Rankhandi and other three villages together by developing an inventory of the studies conducted and published on Rankhandi and other three villages. This will help in developing a theme of research in sociology on the Indian village studies.

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