

URBANIZATION AND PEASANT CULTURE: A CASE STUDY¹

J. S. YADAVA

I

We mean by urbanization a general process of becoming urban. People may become urbanized in their thinking and behaviour although they may not move to a town or city. They may not change from agricultural work to industrial work and still they may be urbanized. The contention here is that though urbanism (urban way of life) is distinct from peasant way of life they need not be exclusive of each other. Rural-urban dichotomy is a useful conceptual frame of reference only and is not a reality. Thus urbanization also includes spread of urbanism from the cities outwards. Further, urbanization is an aspect of the broader and more inclusive process of modernization which is a very complex process and is activated by a variety of socio-economic and political forces. It is difficult to separate urbanization from modernization particularly in fringe areas where the two processes strengthen and accelerate the tempo of each other.

In the present study we attempt to investigate some of the implications of rapid urbanization in rural areas. A case study of Haiderput village in the Union Territory of Delhi has been taken to throw into relief the process of urbanization and its implications.

Delhi has been the centre of activity in the affairs of the country ever since the beginning of Indian history. But the coming of Independence has heralded a new era of rapid growth of the city. It has accommodated a large refugee population from West Pakistan, which among other things necessitated rapid expansion of the city. Being the capital of the new Republic, Delhi has received considerable attention in the sphere of office and residential building activity and in industrialization also. As a result of these development activities, the limits of the city have been fast expanding engulfing the neighbouring rural areas. The improved means of both personal and impersonal communication have further contributed towards increased nearness and confrontation of metropolitan culture of the city with peasant culture of Delhi villages. What are the implications of this increased contact, between urban and rural areas of Delhi for the people living in neighbouring villages in terms of human relationships?

In our study of urbanization of a peasant community we have taken World War II as the base-line. This is so because the War provides a point of departure when the social life in Haiderpur was for the first time *significantly* influenced by the markets in Delhi. The necessities of the War created scarcity of various goods including food-grains, vegetables and fodder in the markets of Delhi resulting in a sharp rise of prices. This proved a boon for the people in neighbouring villages, including Maupur, who earned ready cash by selling their agricultural products and labour at enhanced rates in Delhi markets. This extra cash in villager's hands and frequent visits to the city tended to modify the pattern of social interaction in the village and marked the beginning of urbanization of rural life.

II

Maupur (pseudonym) which forms the focus of the present study, is a nucleated village with 1406 inhabitants and is located eight kilometers north of the city of Delhi. Maupur of pre-World War II was a comparatively isolated, small, multicast "peasant community"² (e.g. Redfield, 1956). It was characterized by economic interdependence of the castes and of the members of family units. Agriculture was the main economic activity. Most of the people in the village were associated directly or indirectly with and dependent upon agriculture. Individual economic pursuit was uncommon except in a few cases who were employed outside the village. The villagers had "face to face" relations (eg. Cooley, 1919). There was almost no alternative to seek help and co-operation of kinsmen and other villagers in activities like agricultural operations, house construction, or crises of life such as birth, marriage, diseases and death, because until the 1940's the cash economy had not made much impact on the village life. As a result there existed an authoritarian system of relationships within the family and between the castes. Power used in the broad Weberian (1948) sense moved along the set grooves of sex, age and caste. The head of the household was important in matters concerning intra-interfamilial relations. Similarly, in intercaste relations, the members of higher castes could enforce their will upon the lower caste people. In short, there existed a pattern of dominance and hierarchy in interpersonal relationships in the village.

III

But now Maupur is fast undergoing social and cultural transformation under the impact of forces of urbanization and modernization. The village is increasingly exposed to the outside world. A metalled road links the village to the city of Delhi, and a bus plies between the village and the city every half an hour. As a result of the fast expan-

sion of the city, Haiderput village is now only three kilometers from the northernmost colony of Delhi. A sizeable number of persons (roughly on an average 125 persons per day) goes to Delhi by the city bus or on bicycles. 163 persons own bicycles, two persons own motorcycles and two rich families own one car each. The villagers go to the city for regular work, on an occasional business or for entertainment and seeing a movie. Some people prefer to visit Delhi just to buy the items of daily consumption such as vegetables.

Radio and recent addition of television have further revolutionized the system of communication between the village and the outside world. There are 51 radio-sets, one panchayat television set in the village. Newspaper is another important medium of communication. Eleven persons get personal copies of English, Hindi, or Urdu daily newspapers. Besides, each of the six tea-stalls in the village gets Hindi/Urdu newspaper for its customers. This improved means of both personal and impersonal communication together with other socio-economic political and ideological forces have affected the lives of the people in Maupur resulting in increased urbanization of the village.

IV

Urban influence is observable in many spheres of social life in Maupur. Rather, city life has become an important reference point to the villagers. It supplies the model and norm for behaviour and for the identification of the self, particularly among the younger generation.

Urban influences are more noticeable in the material culture of the village. There has been a marked change in the dress of the people in Maupur. The old-style *dhoti* and *kurta* are now giving way to urban style shirts, pajama and pants. Many young men are seen in the village streets wearing pants, buishirt, suits and neckties. Shoes with laces and sandal (*chapals*) are preferred and only rarely one finds a Maupurian young man wearing the village-style *juti*. Women, particularly of younger generation, prefer *saris* to the traditional village dress of *lamgha* (long petticoat). The young school going girls wear tight *silwar* and *kameez* like their counterparts in the city of Delhi.

Things like fountain pens and wristwatches are owned by many people and are a necessity as well as an adornment for young educated persons. Many families own radio and/or transistor sets. Modern furniture such as chairs, sofa-sets and *newar* beds are decorating many houses in the village and are indicative of urban influence in style of house furnishing.

Urban style cutlery and crockery like glass tumblers, spoons and china cups and plates have been some of the significant additions to the list of articles of daily use. The construction and decoration

of the houses in the village have been influenced by the urban style of house construction. The streets are paved and are mostly clean. There are street lights in the village.

The food habits of the villagers have changed considerably. One or more vegetables or pulses usually figure in the menu at each meal. The traditional village food of *rabri* and *gass* (preparation from millets) have been dropped by most families in Maupur. Tea, favourite drink in urban areas, is popular also with the residents of Maupur.

Urban influences on the pattern of social interaction and value system are not easy to observe and present statistically. At a very general level certain variations and modifications in the social systems of Maupur are apparent. However, these modifications cannot be attributed exclusively to urbanization. By and large, there is a trend toward smaller and nuclear type of family organization. There are 121 nuclear families (56.06%) of husband, wife and unmarried children as opposed to 95 joint families (43.94%) of different shade. Even in cases of joint families a distinct tendency of decrease in size is discernable. The later do not usually include distant consanguineal or affinal relatives. The extent of kin ties have shrunk considerably and kin relationships have become less intense and even less obligatory. However, the kin interaction tends to be more localized within the smaller kin groups of family, with definite gain in intimacy and intensity. The villagers more often use personal names or occupational designations for reference and address instead of kinship terms. The authority of elders and aged is being challenged.

There is a greater dissociation between caste and occupation as well as lesser emphasis on the notion of purity and pollution in inter-caste relationships. There has been a decrease in the opportunities of earning one's livelihood by following traditional caste callings, while there has been an increase in occupational opportunities of a new kind in the market economy. With the closing of certain old and opening of many new occupational opportunities together with other social and cultural changes there is much diversification of occupational pattern among all the castes in Maupur. Now, more persons are engaged in occupations other than their caste callings. Of the total adult males above twenty years of age 216 (63.91%) are engaged in occupations other than their respective caste callings. There are 116 persons (34.32%) who are engaged in some kind of regular service in the offices, factories, and other government or private agencies in Delhi city. Agriculture as a profession has undergone radical change in the scheme of its operation. The landowner "cultivators" have dissociated themselves from most of the agricultural operations. They usually lease out their land, orchard, or crop on contract to others, the latter actually carry on the agricultural operations themselves or

through employed labour. These tenants, rentiers and labourers belong to all castes including Brahman and the Harijan. Thus, the economic opportunities have become "caste free" in theory and to a large extent in practice also giving Maupur an urban tinge.

Education, another urban feature, has markedly influenced the village life. The villagers are increasingly becoming aware of the value of formal education for their children. There are two schools in the village, a primary school (1st to 5th standard) for girls only and a co-educational school (1st to 8th standard). At present 288 boys and 118 girls are getting education in village and outside institutions. About 50% of the people in Maupur are literate; male and female literacy being 70.8 and 24.6 per cent respectively.

Agriculture continues to be the major economic activity in the village, but its scheme of operation has undergone considerable modifications. Cultivators who were "peasants" have become "farmers". The villagers' outlook towards land has changed. Now, they look towards land not merely as a sacred possession inherited from ancestors, but as an important source of income also. Land has become a marketable commodity. In addition to agriculture and outside jobs, some of the villagers earn their livelihood by operating or working in five small scale household industries which have sprung up last year (1967-68). Many other villagers are now keen to establish their own small scale industries.

In terms of outlook, attitude and value system the people in Maupur are urbanized to a considerable extent. Life in Maupur tends to be clock oriented, and the people, particularly of the younger generation, are time conscious. Work is sold and bought by the hour or other time units, for which reasons quantity and quality of output is reckoned carefully against labour, equipment and other production costs. Work is becoming naked; productive activity is increasingly separated from all non-work activities and interests. Interpersonal relations also tend to be contractual and impersonal to a certain extent. Cash transactions are playing important roles in most social and economic activities in the village. This, together with increased literacy and other factors, has led to the growth of individualistic spirit. Consequently, the traditional authoritarian system at the family, caste and community levels is facing an increasing challenge.

V

We have discussed in brief some of the implications of urbanization for a rural community. Maupur is increasingly exposed to and is dependent upon the outside world particularly the city of Delhi. Urban influence is more marked on material culture. The patterns of social interaction and value system in the Village have also been

influenced by urbanization. Interpersonal relations tend to be contractual and impersonal in nature. Cash transactions have important place in most social and economic activities in the village. Life in Maupur tends to be clock oriented and the people are time conscious.

This study was attempted to throw into relief the process of urbanization of a rural community. It has shown how the people in a village have been urbanized while still living in a village setting and practising agriculture along with other vocations. Thus, fringe is preparatory for urban growth and the planners should keep this urbanizing influence of the city in their plans of urban development and urban growth.

NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. The data for this paper were collected as a part of my Ph.D. work at Delhi University. Some of the points discussed here have received detailed treatment in my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "A Delhi Village in Transition: Study of Changing Family, Caste and Power Pattern" (1968).
2. Louis Wirth (1940): "The urban society and civilization", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 14, pp. 743-755.
3. Robert Redfield (1956): *Peasant society and Culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press. See also I.T. Sander (1953): "Characteristics of Peasant Societies: Chinese Peasant" in *Societies Around the World*, Vol. 2, pp. 19-35. Ed. T. Lynn Smith, New York: The Dryden Press. Charles J. Erasmus: (1967) *Upper Limits of Peasantry and Agrarian Reform: Bolivia, Venezuela, and Mexico compared Ethnology*, Vol. 6, pp. 349-380.
4. Cooley, C.H. (1909): *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
5. Eric R. Wolf (1955): "Types of Latin American Peasantry: a preliminary discussion", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 57, pp. 452-471.