

# **THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF VILLAGE COMMUNITIES IN INDIA**

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The Origin and Growth of Village Communities in India by B. H. Baden-Powell

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**B. H. BADEN-POWELL**

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VILLAGE COMMUNITIES IN INDIA //

BY  
B. H. BADEN-POWELL, M.A., C.I.E.



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(26)

## PREFACE

IT cannot be necessary to write a formal preface to so small a book. But I may be allowed to make use of the space for two purposes. First, I have to express my thanks to Prof. W. J. ASHLEY, M.A., of Harvard University, and late Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, not only for the suggestion that a short account of the Indian village should be written, but for valuable advice and criticism in the course of writing it.

Secondly, I have to say a few words about the (not very frequent) Indian words (Hindi, Persian, etc.) which occur. I have avoided them wherever I could; but sometimes they are needed for the sake of readers in India, or because there is no satisfactory equivalent; partly also because they show that the thing indicated is, or is not, indigenous; that it has been borrowed from the Moslems, or is an older Hindu institution. Now, the only tolerable way in which such words can be given in print, is by transliterating into Roman character; and people then say "we do not know how they should be pronounced."

But for practical purposes, it is quite easy to pronounce Indian words at least intelligibly. Only remember that they are *not English*, and in particular, that the letter "a" (without accent) which so commonly occurs must *never* be pronounced with the pe-

cular sound of the English "flat," "that," "many," etc. It is *uniformly* like the *s* in "bun," so that the Hindi syllables *mani*, *ag*, are read like the English word "money." Each vowel has a short or unaccented use, also a broad or accented, thus :—

a—ā	(as in English)	"bun"—"ba(r)n"
i—ī	" "	"pit"—"peat"
u—ū	" "	"pull"—"pool"

(*ś*) is regarded as a diphthong, and is always with "ay" (*śī* = "tale"), *ṣ* is always long as in "post."

These sounds are invariable. I have not marked the variations in the consonants, except to write *q* when the Arabic (*k*) is indicated. But it will be well to state the *śh* is *never* sibilant (as in "this" or "thin") in Indian dialects, it is only *ś* with an aspirate; *g* is always hard, *never* as in "gin" (which would be *ǰ*).

OXFORD, July, 1899.

B. H. B-P.

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# INDIAN VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

## I

### GENERAL HISTORY OF THE QUESTION OF INDIAN VILLAGE ORIGINS

THE object of this little book is to explain, in the compass of a few pages, and as untechnically as possible, the nature and origin of Indian village communities, with special reference to the commonly received theories about them. Many people have heard vaguely that the villages represent an ancient "communal" holding of land; others have heard that this theory has been much doubted. They would perhaps like to know more about the subject without having to make a prolonged or very detailed study.

These Indian communities are living, and not, like the "Teutonic mark," dead. The importance of observing and understanding them for the purposes of the comparative history of institutions, and for

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economic science in general, is admitted on all hands. But often as "the village" is alluded to in histories or other books on Indian subjects, it is dealt with chiefly as the creature of theory—a thing in the air, rather than an existing institution, which can be studied with reference to historic facts, times, and places, and to tribes and families of known race and location. And the year 1870 (or some nearly approaching period) may be taken as the birth-time (in England) of a general theory regarding the origin and nature of Indian villages. This theory obtained such wide currency that it soon seemed to be beyond the reach of question. All Indian villages were regarded as having been originally constituted in a single (typical) form; this form being, consequently, spoken of as archaic date and of "Aryan" parentage. So conceived, "the village community" was asserted to represent a group of persons or households who cultivated and owned their land "in common"; it was, in short, an important and widespread oriental survival of that "ownership in common" which was believed to have been universally antecedent to the development of individual property in later times. The best known exposition of this theory is to be found in the works of the late Sir H. S. Maine, especially in his "Village Communities of the East and West,"<sup>1</sup> and in several lectures, afterwards collected

<sup>1</sup> The first edition is dated 1871. My quotations are from the third edition, and indicated by the letters "V. C."

in a book entitled "The Early History of Institutions."<sup>1</sup> Let us, however, not misunderstand the author's position in these works. He treats the conception of "the village" as if it were based on a certainty. The evidence he possessed established so much, at least, that they were joint-bodies or close, self-managing communities. That was enough. He never proposed to go into detail, or give a complete account of their origin or history. The village is conceived in the abstract, and is introduced as a well-known phenomenon. It is the extreme generality of his view, expressed, as it is, in lucid phrases, that caused it to be so easily and so widely read and remembered.

About ten years after the publication of these works, it fell to my lot (under circumstances which need not be detailed) to prepare an account of the Land Systems and Land-Revenue Administration of British India. This was first published in Calcutta. And ten years later a new and more complete work on the same subject was prepared and published at Oxford.<sup>2</sup> At this time the village theory was in full possession of the field, and was supported by all the authority of Sir H. S. Maine's name, as well as recommended by the charm of his style and the suggestiveness of his method. It is true that, as far as concerns the general

<sup>1</sup> Dated 1874-5; indicated as "E. H. I."

<sup>2</sup> "The Land Systems of British India," 3 vols.; Clarendon Press, 1892. In the sequel this is referred to as "L. S. B. I."