

Imagining Life in a Punjabi Village

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This article explores the rhythms of traditional Punjabi village life: the ways that Punjabis set up their villages and dwellings and live their lives with a perception of the interrelatedness of the human, natural, and spiritual orders. The article looks at how they eat, celebrate their festivals and break the monotony of their challenging agrarian life style. The article also addresses the potential challenges that the “traditional” village has to deal with in the face of global change.

By nature, village activity transcends distinctions, synthesizing the natural and human orders; boundaries of work and play; perspectives of adults and children. Or rather, ideally, it does not synthesize these areas of life, but expresses an awareness of interrelationship that any number of subsequent developments have disrupted: urbanization, division of labor, industrialization, commercialization, globalization. Not least among these disrupting factors would be education and scholarly analysis. Once masses of people are taught to distinguish “high” from “popular” culture, possibilities for naïve production becomes much more restricted. When produced for external consumption—purchase or display outside the home environment—the intimate ties of an artifact to the cosmos, the dwelling, the functions it was intended to serve, and the artisan(s) become broken.

The appreciation of folk art by outsiders thus signals the disruption of organicity. The buyer’s pursuit of the folk-artifact’s appeal and economic value; the twinge of the viewer on recognizing a quality she knows she is unable to produce; the urge of the scholar to describe and classify—all have something in common. These are inevitable impulses on the part of those who recognize the folk environment as largely other than their own. Whatever their motivations—economically, emotionally, aesthetically, or intellectually—perhaps their desire to possess folk art can be traced to their social experience which has cut them off from what they project into the forms of folk art.

For those sensitive to the pastoral vision, the contemporary Punjab, especially in the eastern region, evokes it to an extent matched by few places in the world. While growing, its cities still appear small enough not to give much competition to its overwhelmingly agricultural character. Cultivated plots are strikingly small, so that the texture of the plant life is varied and, in its hues of greens and browns, vibrant. The land is cut through by rivers and canals bearing life-giving water. Draft animals—cattle—still till the soil, with tractors having made significant inroads. The people and even the rather ramshackle settlements along the roads are colorful, too.

The impression of a bustling rural life little touched by modernity evokes an expectation of traditional village life sustaining it. In their outward aspect, the villages might confirm that expectation. What one sees from a distance is often an apparently unified architectural structure of simple dwellings enclosed by an external wall or walls. This is not, at the other extreme, the New England village where each structure asserts its identity and relation to the others to the outside viewer. The protection implied by the walls has a double aspect, or course: on the one hand, security for those within; on the other, threat from without. Lacking a context for that threat, the traveler could imagine himself or herself to be part of it

In reality, authentic and vital village life in the Punjab is moribund. The twin forces of modernity and out-migration have disrupted centuries-old demographics. The astonishing prosperity of the land (particularly since the Green Revolution of the 1970s) has enabled out-migration. Villages have been hollowed out to empty shells. Here and there is a multi-generation house (*haveli*) of older women and young children, where emigrant working adults (primarily men) send money and visit when they can. Elsewhere, there are dwellings that may be in formal possession but are virtually abandoned. Life in many villages is monotonous and uninspiring, characterized by a sense of missed opportunities. Some left behind resort to abuse of drugs and alcohol to ease the unrelieved monotony and isolation.

To recognize this disjunction between image and reality is not to say that inquiry into Punjabi folk culture should be abandoned. The forms of that life remain important to Punjabis themselves, of all backgrounds. But field study can only provide a portion of insight. A full picture requires investigation of historical sources, particularly British writers and scholars from the late eighteenth through the mid-twentieth century. British control of the region was not as disruptive as the forces of modernity and globalization now prevailing. Punjabi literature as well as folk songs, dances, and other material artifacts, provide insight into traditional ways.

I. The Setting

While limited in extent, the spaces and places of the village are rich in associations that make their way into local life. The surrounding fields become the source of sustenance, through labor. The stream that often traverses the

villages in the hills and the northern parts of the region is a link between the natural and social order, from realms beyond. The stream-bed may be channeled into new streams and branches for irrigation. The ubiquitous clay increases the soil's fertility; clay pits are the source for vessels and for the traditional adobe structure of buildings.

Under ideal circumstances, crops allow the village to be self-sustaining. The subtropical climate allows for two growing seasons per year. The main crop of the winter season (late November through early April) is wheat; the summer crop (July through mid-November) is rice. In addition to these grain crops, Punjabis cultivate pulses (legumes such as lentils, chickpeas, and other beans), green vegetables as well as eggplant, peppers, onions, garlic, and spices; and diverse fruits such as guavas, mangos, pears, and oranges. Cotton and hemp plants provide fiber for garments and household furnishings.

The economy of the village could not work without domestic animals, particularly cattle, whose milk allows for a nutritionally complete diet. In addition, they provide essential muscle power and fuel. Rather than hay, cattle eat chopped fresh grasses such as sorghum. In exchange, they provide milk, clarified butter, yoghurt and curd; labor for tilling fields and turning mill-wheels, and dung that is burnt as cooking fuel as well as for heating. There are two types of cattle, the cows (*Bos taurus*), and the sturdy water buffalos (*Bubalis bubalis*). Both are cherished, often living in close proximity to the family and lovingly cared for.

Horses do not take well to the heat of a subtropical climate, so few are raised in villages. But their use by holy men and soldiers makes a strong impression on the imagination that surfaces in folk art and belief. Chickens were traditionally raised for both eggs and their meat. Sheep and goats were not often raised in settlements, because cropland was too precious to spare the necessary pasture. But they have long been herded through the region by nomadic pastoralists, as one may see even today.

The most visible wild fauna of the Punjab include birds, especially parrots, sparrows, peacocks, and crows. As discussed below, their forms figure in the decoration of houses and fabrics (*phulkari* embroidery). Snakes, less visible but also common in or near dwellings, figure in decoration but also in folk religious practices, notably in connection with the cult of Gugga Pir that is widespread in the Punjab. The first three types of birds inspired the folk imagination in the most positive ways. While none of these creatures is completely negative, both crows and snakes (dwellers in and on the earth) have traditionally been associated with death.

On the periphery of the village there might be one or more dwelling places of holy me--*sadhus*, *naths yogis*--and shrines devoted to figures such as Gugga Pir, the horse-mounted figure mysteriously connected to a snake-deity. Also quite common is the presence of the tomb associated with a Muslim saint. Since Hindus and Sikhs practice cremation, the tombs only belong to the Muslim figures. This is in addition to a Hindu temple and a gurdwara.

The village is typically divided into sectors known as *pati*, *agwar*, or *mohala*, generally based on professions. There would be *mohalas* or streets of farmers, artisans, and, in larger villages, shopkeepers, situated near the market area. Status was indicated by distance from the village center, with the lowest castes living farthest away and the wealthy landlords and traders having their mansions closest in.

Social life in the village had several traditional focal points: the well, the communal oven (*bhathi*), the central banyan tree, the gathering-place (*sath*) and possibly a lodging for those who happened to visit the village (*dharmsala*). The well and the oven were gathering places for women, who welcomed the opportunity to socialize outside the domestic environment. Meetings at the well figure prominently in Punjabi folklore, as do the oven and its implements: the firebox, iron plate, clay pots, sickle, and grains.

The *sath* (deriving from the Indic for gathering) is a raised platform that may be under the banyan (*boharh*) or other large tree. Traditionally, it was mainly men who gathered on the *sath*, to rest from their work, share news and work out the affairs of the village. Occasionally, the *sath* would also become the setting for special entertainment: singing and acrobatic performances might take place here, either by the villagers themselves or by traveling artists.

The banyan tree provided shelter and relief from the sun for all: birds, cattle, and people. The girls and women of the village had a special relationship with it. During annual festivals, they would come to swing in its branches and sing and dance in its shade. Traditional Punjabi folk belief envisions the banyan, with its large and prolific branches, as an ancestral or guardian spirit. The nim tree, while not endowed with such sanctity, is also highly regarded, owing to the curative powers of its fruits and leaves.

II. Social and cultural activity

Depending on the size of the village, men in the village devoted themselves to specialized occupations. Common among them would be farmers (Jats); artisans would be the potter (ghumiar), the weaver (julaha), and the ironsmith (lohar). There might also be one or several carpenters (tarkhanh), traders (vapari), or an oilman (teli). As in most traditional cultures, there was little division of labor among women, either in terms of stage of life or individual differences.

Girls and women would dwell and work on similar tasks for the entire course of their lives. In their earliest years, they began to learn tasks that would be carried out in or near the home: food preparation, production of clothing, milking cows and other lighter work of animal care, as well as child care. Rhythmic tasks such as churning and, especially, spinning, were well suited for accompaniment by song. Laundering was one task in which a woman might specialize and it would take place in the river or stream. The tasks of water gathering—a major component of women’s labor in most traditional societies—was one in which the Jhiuari (water-woman) specialized. She carried water from

the village well to people's homes. The activities of baking bread at the communal oven would also take women and girls outside the home. Gathering dung and turning it into cakes was and still is a task characteristic of village life in this region. The dung cakes, gathered in round pyramids, still are a common site on the periphery of a Punjabi villages.

As is often the case in traditional societies, the work of women in the Punjabi village tended to be more monotonous than that of men, with less differentiation in relation to season and less opportunity for defined leisure. For men, daily passage between the fields and home might mean a clearer demarcation of work and rest. Their labor might be more arduous than that of women, but they could immerse themselves more fully in leisure. Conversation at the *sath* although of functional value to the village as a whole, was less task oriented as women's trips to the well or oven.

In terms of creative expression, however, women had, if anything, greater opportunities than men. People of both sexes could separately participate in performance art, formally or in their daily lives: singing, dancing, or telling stories. But most visual artistry was in the hands of women, because most of it was devised for the adornment of the home and the body, in garments. Moreover, foods prepared by women played a major role in festivals and in food-sacrifices at shrines.

Houses were constructed by the community, together with the carpenter, if one was available. Most of them were constructed of adobe: mud mixed with straw, grain chaff, and wood strips or chips from nearby. Wealthier families might be able to afford houses of brick, produced in regional kilns, whose chimneys are still a characteristic feature of the landscape. Wooden beams or planks could be used for roofs, doors, window frames, and pillars. In the homes of the wealthiest villagers, the doors and other wooden structures might be decorated by carving—the work of men. The adobe houses, while vulnerable to heavy rain, helped keep out heat in summer and retain it in winter.

As in the village as a whole, the layout of the home reflected the functions that took place within it, with similar patterns for the larger homes of wealthier residents and the smaller ones of people of modest means. In the front of the house was a courtyard, with a cattle shed and a storage area for fuel. At the other end was the kitchen, bounded by a low wall. Numerous activities might take place in the courtyard, such as spinning and weaving, preparation of grain, sleeping in hot weather, and the play of children. The interior of the house was approached through an entryway, which served as a sitting room for the males of the household. Nearby were the apartments of the women and children. People with more means constructed larger houses with similar layout, sometimes with a second story. The second story, looking out over the whole village, is called *chaubara*.

The forms of traditional decoration in the home suggest that these were not merely for aesthetic purposes but that they reflect beliefs about the various parts of the house in connection with spiritual forces as well as the natural order. The areas of the house such as doors, walls, floor, kitchen received characteristic

forms of decoration, often through the artistry of the women of the households. Doorways, embodying the passage between inner and outer worlds, were a particularly important locus for signaling prosperity. There are a number of popular sayings in the Punjab to the effect that one can determine the social, economic, and cultural status of the people within by looking at their door. Doorways were often elaborated with symbols and motifs to bring good luck and protection. While wealthier people might have carved wooden doorposts, lintels, and doors; doorposts might also be of stone. Carvings might consist of geometric patterns, or leaves and flowers. The especially significant lintel above the door might depict peacocks surrounded by latticework. The door itself might be divided into sections each framing a separate carved decoration.

People of more modest means decorated their doorways in the less expensive but more colorful medium of paint. The door itself might be decorated with plants and animals, or with images of deities. Red and green were especially popular colors for these paintings. Women decorated the interiors of their adobe homes with washes of white clay (*parola*), with a profusion of imagery from the natural world such as sun, moon, deer, peacocks, sparrows, and lions. The spaces of the kitchen were given particular attention. Patterns would be drawn on the hearth, low wall, the grain-bins, and even the stove, where milk would be heated or legumes simmered. On the stove, the figure of a rooster or lion might have been imagined as warding off stray dogs or cats from the food. Another popular decoration for the kitchen area was the cheerful sparrow, embodying new life and abundance. The bathing of sparrows in dust was popularly understood as their ritual for invoking rain, so they were also associated with life-giving water.

Patterns for decorating walls and floors were particularly diverse, with some of them presumed to have further symbolic significance. Surfaces would be prepared by plastering a thin layer of dung. When it was dry, a wash of white clay was applied. Colorful designs were executed with various pigments. Red pigment came from various sources, yellow from turmeric, black from the soot of oil lamps. Extracts of various flowers, fruits, leaves, roots, and barks were also used to provide color for paint.

Paint was generally applied with a finger or with handmade brushes. A piece of cloth soaked in the paint or dye and then gently squeezed so as to release the color was especially useful for decorating floors. The painting could be easily removed and redone with symbols appropriate for a particular festival or special event such as a wedding. The white clay wash might be mixed with pigments. As a more permanent decoration, pieces of glass or mirror might be embedded into walls. The large surfaces of the wall were commonly decorated with patterns of dots, animals and plant figures. Windows and niches would be framed by geometrical motifs, with zigzag patterns especially popular around doors.

A hand print (*thapa*) was a common design, representing the hand of an ancestor raised in blessing over the household. A print made with the golden color of turmeric paste or with ghee might be placed on the house of a bride and

bridegroom, to express rejoicing. In Hindu families, double prints, with one in turmeric and the other in clarified butter, indicated that a vigil was being kept in honor of the house goddess. Sets of five dots in red earth, limestone powder, or turmeric could be applied to the tops and sides of doors. Similar patterns appeared on granaries, iron lock-boxes, or carts.

The five-pointed star was a common design to ward off evil spirits. Birds-foot patterns were considered auspicious symbols of fertility and happiness and were also believed to hold power to avert evil forces. Sun and moon patterns, possibly representing the eyes of divine forces, commonly appeared on doorsteps, granaries, and threshing floors. In some parts of the Punjab, special designs were drawn on the walls of the room where a newly married couple were to consummate their union, in an uninhibited type of painting known as *dehra*. Themes of love and the sexual acts of the *Kama Sutra* were depicted, in places where they would draw the attention of the young couple. The painting typically depicted a sequence of images, from the engagement, to the marriage altar, to the arrival of the bridegroom, to the departure of the bride on a palanquin followed by the wedding party.

Another focus of creativity was the clay vessel. Pots and pitchers were commonly decorated with geometrical forms, such as zigzags, triangles, and crosshatched lines, in black. Sometimes parrots, sparrows, or peacocks also appear. Vessels, owing to their form, were understood as female figures, symbolizing the fertile womb and other aspects of woman's sexual anatomy and functions. The craft of the potter was regarded as so important to the life of the village that he was called Parjapati (creator). Newly wedded couples might visit him to offer devotion to his wheel. Metal was scarce, so that its use was restricted to implements for farming and other essential tools. The works of the potter's hands were thus essential for cooking, gathering water, and storing food. Among the items the potter produced were pots, pitchers, lids, strainers, cups, plates, and grinding bowls.

III. Celebration of life

As in all agrarian societies, Punjabis traditionally ate what they produced in and near the villages. Their love for milk and butter is well known. The farming being the primary activity, the day started early in the fields. Women would bring the morning meal (*chhah vela*) commonly of *roti*, curd, pickle, all wrapped in hand woven and embroidered cloths along with a small pitcher of *lassi*. In the winter months, this consisted of leftovers from the last night's supper along with fresh *lassi*. There was no noon meal and the last meal of the day was had at home. The custom of drinking tea, adopted from the British, only began to become widespread in the later part of the twentieth century.

Women would do the cooking in the home, using the hearth (*chula*), and the clay oven (*tandur*). Foods were diverse and nutritious. Punjabi breads are traditionally not leavened. In winter, corn was usually used; in summer, wheat flour. To make the flat bread called *roti*, the flour would be mixed with water

and kneaded to form a smooth and pliable dough, which would be flattened for baking, with the palm of the hand onto the griddle (*tava*), or with a roller (*velanha*) on a round piece of wood or stone (*chakala*). *Roti* would be eaten with *dal* made from any of a wide variety of legumes, with cooked mustard greens (*saron da sag*) or other vegetables. A popular dessert, traditionally as now, was the *khir*—milk pudding thickened with rice. In winter it was sweetened with sugarcane juice. Certain foods were associated with curative powers. To make *panjiri*, semolina was sauteed in ghee, sweetened with sugar, and mixed with nuts. This sweet was believed to sustain the health of expectant mothers.

As in many cultures, particular foods were associated with festivals. *Malpurhe* and *halva* (a rich sweet made of flour, ghee, and sugar) as well as *khir* were relished at festivals during the monsoon season. Sweet rice (*mithe chaul*) colored with saffron was a common dish for festival meals, particularly during the Spring (*Basant*). To prepare it, rice was soaked with water, sauteed in ghee, then cooked in water sweetened with sugar. Sweetened *roti*, made by mixing a jaggary (unrefined brown sugar) syrup into the flour before kneading, was enjoyed on special occasions.

The Punjabi **festivals** were closely associated with the rhythms of nature. The primary festival of the Punjab was the celebration of the winter harvest. Because the harvest falls in the beginning of the month of Vaisakh (early April), the festival is called Vaisakhi. With the wheat crop ready to be harvested, the village *dholi* (drummer) would play the drum in the evening heralding the festive days ahead.

The main activities of Vaisakhi were fairs and games, accompanied by buying and selling. A cluster of villages would collaborate in organizing the fair, including a market where traders from towns and cities would bring their wares. A cattle market was another part of the fair, with buffaloes and oxen brought from surrounding areas to buy and sell. The animals with their decorations added special charm to the fair. The oxen often would have ornaments on their foreheads, tied around their horns, and on their necks, while the buffaloes might be adorned with bells and colorful cords. Cattle also might play a part in the festivities by pulling carts in races.

Other games included the traditional Punjabi sport of “Kabadi.” In this game, two teams faced off from designated areas. The object of the game was to have one player from a team cross over to the other, touch one opponent, and get back to his team’s side—all in a single breath. To show that he was still on that breath, he would rapidly pronounce the sounds “Kabadi, kabadi, kabadi...” while making his foray. If he was successful, he won a point for his team. The opposing team, of course, sought to hold him or wrestle him down so that he would have to break his “Kabadi.” There might also free-style wrestling and arm wrestling. Tug-of-war was another popular sport, with the biggest men planted at the far ends of the rope. The fairs and games were typically occasions for buying, selling, and consuming alcohol.

The festival of Divali was the second most popular festival. It celebrated the summer harvest, at the end of the month of Katak (November), and it involved preparation for the winter ahead. This festival had roots in the Hindu epic story of the victory of good over evil as presented in the Ramayana. Local actors from several villages gathered to reenact the epic story in simple but vivid performances. The strongest man of a village might be chosen as Hanuman, the monkey-king, and a particularly fair-skinned man would play the part of Sita. Here in this folk theater the new generations imbibed their culture and religious beliefs. On Divali itself, lamps were lit on every housetop and firecrackers would be set off.

The Ramayana's moralistic themes exercised appeal across sectarian boundaries in the Punjab. The appeal may be accounted for by the Punjabi character, which generally manifests a strong fighting spirit, concerned with the upholding of right over wrong. In the Ramayana, Ram, aided by Hanuman, triumphs over the arch-demon Ravan. Other aspects of Hindu belief have made their way into the broader culture of the Punjab, notably the goddess cults with their chthonic (earth-based) elements that are based in the Himalayan foothills. By contrast, the dalliances of fun-loving Krishan have exercised little influence on Punjabi culture beyond the boundaries of the Hindu community.

In the Punjab, the monsoon rains usually arrive in late June early July. In the plains, the rains come in downpours usually lasting an hour or two, about four or five days of the week. Although the rainfall and ensuing mud is somewhat disruptive of daily activities, the monsoon season is welcomed. With it, the worst heat of the months of May and June when the mercury could reach 115 Fahrenheit, breaks. More importantly, the rains are essential for the crops to flourish and result in a good harvest. The month of Savan (July-August) was thus a special time of fun and frolic. As on Vaisakhi, men would gather to have wrestling matches, with trophies for the strongest men within a cluster of villages. The matches would be accompanied by singing and dancing. Women would gather separately to dance and sing. A lot of folk literature reflects of the songs associated with this season.

If the rains did not come in time, the women performed a ritual to invoke them. This involved gathering on the perimeter of the village to solemnize a mock wedding between a male and female doll (*gudde guddi da viah*). The cloth dolls were handmade, with features worked in black thread. They were clothed with miniature versions of a bride and bridegroom's garments: *ghagra*, *kurti*, and long *dupata* for the female; *lungi*, *kurta*, and turban for the male. According to tradition, mothers would teach their daughters how to make the dolls, not only for the rain ceremony, but presumably also as psychological preparation for the life-altering experience of their own weddings.

There were other secondary festivals that provided break from the monotony of life. The festival of Loharhi, marking winter's end, took place in the month of Magh (late January-early February). This celebration involved great bonfires to bid farewell to winter and welcome the spring, as well as to

encourage the winter crop to ripen. The young boys went around in groups collecting candies and peanuts from people's houses.

According to the local calendar, the year is divided into lunar months, with adjustments so that years begin at approximately the same season. The lunar months are divided into two parts, called *pakhs* of approximately fourteen days each. The first, or "dark," half of the month, when the moon is waning, is considered inauspicious. The morning after the night of the complete absence of the moon marked the end of that unlucky time, so people liked to bathe in some holy pool. With the appearance of the first crescent that night, the second, auspicious *pakh* of the month began. The first nine days of the bright half of the month of Chet (March/ April) constitute a particularly auspicious time known as Navratra—the "Nine Nights" of the Goddess. (There is another Navratra period in the autumn, during the bright half of the month of Asun.) Although this is a distinctly Hindu festival, it was common for many others to observe it.

On the new moon night just before the spring Navratra, Punjabi villagers often celebrated the festival of Sanjhi. Women would grow barley in earthenware pots, while girls and young women decorated the walls of their houses with designs of Sanjhi, a goddess figure envisioned as a newly wedded young woman. Tall and curvaceous, with a slender waist, she would often appear in a dancing pose, with one hand raised high in a gesture of protection and blessing. She might wear a red scarf over her head and veil over her face, and she was bedecked with jewelry. The girls collected materials to further decorate the image: colorful lumps of clay, or perhaps beads for jewelry; pieces of the cut white shaft of a peacock feather for teeth.

Sanjhi would be the central figure on the dung-coated and whitewashed wall, with a whole cosmos depicted around her. Above her head, in the celestial realm, would be sun, moon, and stars, as well as the face of the black thief, drawn with soot. On her left would be her attendants, a female slave-girl and a priest. On her right was the Gujari, a young girl with one hand on her waist, carrying a pot of milk on her head. Nearby might be a drawing of a Mirasan, or female Muslim entertainer, holding a large drum.

Further to her left and right, there were figures of as many banyan trees as there are male members in the family. One of the banyan trees, depicted with sparrows taking shelter in its branches and with a moon above was envisioned as Sanjhi's brother. The lower part of the drawing, representing the earthly realm, was filled with a profusion of animals, birds, and plant forms, as well as human beings, both imaginary and ordinary.

Invocation of the prosperity and health of the human and natural orders was a persistent theme of many folk rituals in the Punjab. The bat tree, images of which are common on doors, walls, and clay vessels, is the focus of rituals performed by married women during the last day of the dark *pakh* of Jeth (May/ June), to ensure the well being of their families, particularly their husbands. The women would put on good clothes and adorn themselves with jewelry before approaching the tree. They would sprinkle water on the ground around it, then use thin rice-flour paste to draw a design of two or three concentric circles. They

put several lumps of clay on the design and sprinkle them with water. Then they circumambulate the tree twelve times, dropping one pea each time to keep count. After offering sweets and fruits to the tree, the women light a ghee-fueled lamp, and then embrace the tree seven times.

IV. Conclusion

It is not possible to cover the scope of traditional life in the Punjab in a single article. This article is an attempt to sketch some of the main contours that shape the daily and seasonal rhythms that shaped village life; the fairs and festivals marking sacred celebrations; and the art and material culture that gave expression to individual and communal hopes and perceptions.

A great deal of research has yet to be done on aspects of village life in the Punjab. The Punjab is not uniform; hence, there is a great diversity of beliefs and practices to be found among different regions, all deserving further study. With every passing year, however, the Punjab is drawn deeper into the web of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization with dramatic effects on the fundamental structures of village life.

Nearly every villager in the Punjab has fairly easy access to cities, by means of new paved roads and motorized vehicles. The “eternal fairs” of shopping centers have rendered the seasonal fairs and markets obsolete. Movies and television have taken over from folk-song and storytelling as media of entertainment and communication of values and aspiration. Computers, too, are transforming rural life, bringing the Information Technology economy deeper into the countryside. It has often been said that South Asia lives in her villages, but as we move into the twenty-first century, her villages are moving right along with her into the uncertain future of a brave new world.

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