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In most anthropological studies, village society or small community occupies a central place. Being a definable terminal unit in present day administration, the village has tended to become a unit of social inquiry too. The methodological issue here is not the appropriateness of the village as a unit of study (for this has been widely debated in relation to Indian studies), but the validity of what constitutes a "village" in the Sri Lanka context.

The different types of Sri Lanka rural settlements and their geographical distribution and historical evolution, the inhabitants' own perception of the different constituent groups and elements of village community; the geographical space within which relations and links are established and articulated, are the important dimensions which distinguish one settlement from another. Many students of village society seem to have confined these dimensions within narrowly delineated geographical boundaries. It is argued that the operative Sinhala village entity is to be found in a cluster of settlements rather than in a single village (gama).

Even given the general limitations from which village studies suffer from in regard to generalizability of their findings, the above noted narrow focus adds a further disability in that the findings themselves under-represent and therefore deflect reality.

In this paper selected village-based sociological studies in Sri Lanka are examined in order to demonstrate the above noted methodological inadequacy as well as to highlight the difficulties in applying the findings to policy formulation, and their adoption in policy implementation.

References

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