

**Communication of Modern Ideas and Knowledge
in Indian villages - a sixty-year journey of Independence.**

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Introduction

India is witnessing a 'newspaper revolution' argues Robin Jeffery. According to him three things have contributed to this phenomenon - rise in literacy, rise in income levels and political awareness.¹ Post liberalisation, riding on the back of information technology and satellite television, the reach of the Indian news media and in general the mass entertainment media has increased manifold. Almost two thirds of India's one billion population lives in rural parts of the country. Hence any form of mass communication can be termed as successful, if it is able to reach the Indian villages where the 'masses' live.

Post independence, governments in India have been struggling to reach to its people broad ideological issues like democracy, equality, rights, obligations, justice, globalisation and the rule of law and more specifically issues like adult franchise, family planning, vaccination, education for all, communal harmony etc. These are ideas of modern times. This paper looks at how well Indian mass media have been able to communicate these modern ideas to its people?

In 1956, Dr Y B Damle, a renowned sociologist from *Pune*, conducted a field study covering seven villages in the *Pune* district.² His study explored the communication of modern ideas and knowledge in Indian villages.

The present study is a longitudinal study conducted in three villages of *Jaoli Taluka* of *Satara* district in the state of Maharashtra. The study was occasioned by the researcher's intimate knowledge of the communities living in the region and the fact that Damle's study was done

¹ Jeffrey, Robin, *India's Newspaper Revolution*, Oxford Publications, 2000.

² Y. B. Damle, Communication of Modern Ideas and Knowledge in Indian Villages - *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Special Issue on Studies in Political Communication. (Spring, 1956), pp. 257-270.

exactly 50 years ago, a reasonable period to compare it with this study, given that the telecommunication revolution in India was set moving by the launch of INSAT1B way back in 1983.

The diffusion of the following modern ideas were studied for the purpose of this research:

1. Information about national politics, national and local leaders, elections and voting.
2. Knowledge of revenues and taxes.
3. Knowledge of religion, caste structure in the village.
4. Information on police jurisdiction.
5. Information on National policies and programs
6. Knowledge of International policies and world political structure and geography.
7. Birth control and family planning.³

Methods and Procedure

Observation and interviews were the main tools. During several visits to the region, the researcher realized that personal interaction without the display of 'officialdom' was a better way of getting information in the villages. Hence the schedule containing the questionnaire was kept hidden. Along with interviews, every village was also mapped, depicting the important structures, Govt. buildings and temples.

³ Please refer Appendix II for the sample questionnaire.

Location:

The villages selected were *Arav*, *Shindi* and *Chakdev*, in the *Jaoli Taluka* of *Satara* District of Maharashtra. *Arav* and *Shindi* are in a valley between two mountain ranges, *Chakdev* is on top the mountain above *Shindi*.⁴ The nearest town by road is *Khed* in *Ratnagiri* district. The only road to approach this area is from *Khed* via the *Raghuvir Ghat*. The construction of this road began in 1984-85 and was completed in the year 2002. Till then there was no road connecting this area to the rest of the world. At present, the condition of the road is very bad; the heavy rains have washed the tar away. At best it can be described as a *kaccha* road.

The only public transportation available from *Khed* is the rickshaw. One can hire a rickshaw for Rs.400 near the ST Stand at *Khed* up to *Shindi*, a cost that is prohibitive for the villagers. No ST (State Transport) buses ply between *Khed* and this area. The nearest one can go to this area by an ST bus is the village of *Khopi*, about 7 kms. from *Khed*, from where one has to catch a privately owned jeep which costs Rs.25 per head up to *Shindi*. Jeeps and tempos are available from *Shindi* and *Arav* once daily. These are privately owned and charge Rs.35 and Rs.45 to go to *Khed* from *Shindi* and *Arav* respectively. The other public transport available is the ferry, which connects all the villages on the banks of the *Koyna* reservoir. The nearest towns by ferry are *Bamnoli* (16 kms./3hrs. from *Arav*) from where one can travel to *Satara* (20 kms.) and *Tapole* (21 kms./4 hrs. from *Arav*) from where one can travel to *Mahabaleshwar* (35 kms.) by bus. The ferry service is available only once a day each way. The *Taluka* office of *Jaoli* is in *Mahabaleshwar* and it takes minimum two days to get any official work done at the *Taluka* office. In summer, the water in the *Koyna* reservoir recedes and one has to walk up to the village of *Morni* or *Kusapur* (about 10 kms.) to catch the ferry. During the four month long monsoon season from June to September,

⁴ Please refer to the map showing all the places mentioned in this study in Appendix I.

this region receives over 6000 mm⁵ of rainfall rendering the area inaccessible. No vehicles ply from *Khed* because the road is landslide prone and dangerous. The ferry service is discontinued during the monsoons. The schools are closed and have their annual vacation during the monsoons. Even the local population avoids leaving the villages. The area is surrounded by protected forest – The *Vasota* Sanctuary which is rich in flora and fauna and the villagers often have to face the *gaurs* wandering into their fields. The forest is also bear infested and citing a leopard is not uncommon. Thomas J. Wilbanks argues that there is a direct association between modern thought, technological change and accessibility to transportation facilities. Personal communication networks too tend to correspond to transportation networks and are more closely related to accessibility to transportation than economic viability.⁶ The lack of proper transportation and roads could be one of the reasons why these villages still seem to be untouched by modern ideas, thoughts and development.

Findings

1. *Arav*

Arav (formerly known as *Aravali*) was displaced by the *Koyna* waters and was rehabilitated in the same place later, on the banks of the reservoir. The total area of *Arav* including agricultural land is 649 hectares. There are 37 households and the total population is about 175, with the male – female ratio almost equal. *Arav* is 32 kms. from *Khed*, which is the nearest town by road, about 16 kms. to *Bamnoli* by ferry and 21 kms. from *Tapole*. The road to *Khed* passes via *Navi*

⁵ *Satara District Gazetteer published by the Government of Maharashtra, 1963.*

⁶ Thomas J. Wilbanks, *Accessibility and Technological Change in Northern India Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 62, No. 3. (Sep., 1972), pp. 427-436.

Morni, Valvan and *Shindi* villages and is a *kaccha* road. There is electricity in the village and also a transformer. None of the villagers knew where the electric line came from. There is no shop in the village and one has to travel to *Bamnoli, Tapole* or *Shindi* to buy essentials goods.

To travel by road, only private transportation is available and it costs Rs.45 to go to *Khed* by a private vehicle, which is available only once a day. Ferry is available from *Arav* village only post-monsoon, when the *Koyna* reservoir fills up. During summers one has to walk to *Kusapur* or *Morni*, which are about 10 kms. from *Arav* to catch the ferry. *Arav* is on the fringes of *Vasota* sanctuary and there is always a danger of being attacked by Gaur (Bison) or other wild animals.

Most of the population is of *Hindu-marathas* and *Hindu-jangams*. There are five Neo-Buddhist households. The language spoken and understood is *Marathi*. Only one villager claimed to know a little English. Many of them understand *Hindi*. There is no community hall and marriages are conducted by erecting a temporary *mandav* in one's own courtyard. Most of the villagers are aware of their family deity and also of the village deity. However none of them have knowledge about the origin of the name of the village. Only one woman claimed that they have been living in the village for more than 6 generations. Festivals celebrated are *Ganpati* and *Holi*. The main occupation of the villagers is farming, rice and *nachani* being the main crops. The village is inaccessible during the rainy season. None of the villagers know about the rain records. Water is supplied through pipeline. There are no wells in the village. No cooking gas is available and the villagers cook with the help of a *chulha*.

There is a school up to the 4th standard in the village and for further studies children go to *Waghavle*, about 14 kms. from *Arav* for further education. The children walk to the school on Monday morning and return home on Saturday. Some of the villagers have studied up to the 7th standard.

There is no public health center and no doctor in the village. One has to travel to *Bamnoli* or to *Khed* for medical aid. A midwife does emergency deliveries. If no vehicle is available, they carry the patient in a *doli*. A *Gram Sewak*⁷ visits the village every month from *Mahabaleshwar*. None of the villagers could recall the name of the *Gram Sewak*.

There is no police station and the nearest one is in *Tapole*. However there is a *Police Patil* who maintains law and order and resolves petty disputes.⁸

No newspapers are available unless one visits the nearest town. The ones most read are *Pudhari* and *Ratnagiri Times*. There are two wireless public telephones. Both are coin operated but the reception is poor and sporadic. Cell phone reception is nil. There are a few dish antenna based television sets in the village. The most watched channels are *Sahyadri* and *E-TV Marathi*.

⁷ The Village Panchayat Officer (Gram Sewak) is responsible for the maintenance of records and accounts of the Village Panchayat under section 61 of the Bombay Village Panchayats Act, 1958.

⁸ Under the Bombay Village Police Act (VIII of 1867), the control of the Village police is with the District Magistrate. The District Magistrate may, however, delegate any of his authority to the District Superintendent of Police. Each village or a group of villages has a Police Patil. The Police Patil is required to collect information regarding suspicious strangers and send it to the police station. He has to keep a strict watch over the movements of notorious characters under surveillance of the police. He is to give information to the police station of any offence committed in the village. When the patrolling policeman goes to the village, he has to give all the information he possesses about all events in the village. It is the duty of the village Police Patil to render assistance to any sick traveller. He is also responsible for maintaining law and order in the village.

Only one villager knew about the Prime Minister *Dr. Manmohan Singh*. Another woman knew *Sonia Gandhi* but not *Manmohan Singh*. None of them knew other leaders. Most of the villagers knew *Shiv Sena* and Congress. Everyone knew that the Panchayat administers the village⁹ and some of them knew the name of the *Sarpanch*.¹⁰

Almost all the villagers know about the Census, elections and voting. All the adults are aware of family planning and birth control. Officials from the *Taluka* office in *Mahabaleshwar* visit the village to collect the taxes.

2. *Shindi*

Shindi is the nearest to the town from *Khed* which is 23 kms. by road than the other villages and has an area of 824 hectares. There are about 50 households with a population of about 190. There is electricity in the village and also a transformer. All villagers know about load shedding. There is a shop in the village, which stores essential items. This is the only shop for the nearby villages of *Valvan* and *Chakdev*.

There are two privately owned jeeps in *Shindi*. Rickshaw is the public transportation available and it costs Rs.400 from *Khed* to *Shindi*. The other public transportation is the ferry. However,

⁹ Panchayats are local, village level governing elected governing bodies. The Bombay Village Panchayats Act of 1958, makes panchayats responsible for all-round development of the village including sanitary and health measures, construction of and repairs to roads, maintenance of birth and death registers, provision of water-supply.

¹⁰ Every panchayat is presided over by the Sarpanch who is elected from amongst its own members. The Panchayat elects one of its members to be Upa-Sarpanch.

one has to walk a minimum 10 kms. to *Morni* to catch the ferry. Private vehicle is available only once a day and it costs Rs.35 per head to go to *Khed*. *Shindi* is very close to the *Vasota* sanctuary and many villagers have seen leopards, bison and other wild animals in the vicinity of the village.

Most of the population is of *Hindu-marathas* and *Hindu-jangams*. There are a few Neo-Buddhist households. The language spoken and understood is *Marathi*. There is no community hall and marriages are conducted by erecting a temporary *mandav* in one's own courtyard. Most of the villagers are aware of their family deity and also of the village deity. However none of them have knowledge about the origin of the name of the village. The main festivals celebrated are *Ganpati* and *Holi*. The main occupation of the villagers is farming with rice and *nachani* being the main crops. One villager claimed to have grown coriander, green peas, potato and *chana*. The village gets very heavy rainfall during monsoons and is inaccessible during the rainy season. Water is supplied through pipeline. There are no wells in the village. No cooking gas is available.

There is a school up to the 4th standard in the village and for further studies, most of the children go to *Waghavle*, which involves a walk over and a climb over the mountain range *Parbat*. It takes about 4 hours to reach the school. Some of the villagers have studied up to 7th standard.

There is no public health center and no doctor in the village, the nearest one being in *Khopi*, about 14 kms. from *Shindi*. A midwife does emergency deliveries. A gram sewak visits the village every month from *Mahabaleshwar*.

There is no police station and the nearest one is in *Tapole* and law and a *Police Patil* maintains order.

No newspapers are available unless one visits the nearest town. The ones most read are *Pudhari* and *Ratnagiri* Times. There is one wireless public telephone. When this researcher tried the phone, the reception was of good quality. Cell phone reception is nil. There are a few dish antenna based television sets in the village, though reception is of average quality. The most watched channels are *Sahyadri*, *Zee Marathi* and *E-TV Marathi*. Some of the villagers have watched films.

Most of the villagers knew *Shiv Sena* and Congress. Only one villager knew about the *BJP* (*Bharatiya Janata Party*). Everyone knew that the Panchayat administers the village and some of them knew the name of the *Sarpanch*.

Almost all the villagers know about the Census, elections and voting. All the adults are aware of family planning and birth control. Officials from the *Taluka* office in *Mahabaleshwar* visit the village to collect the taxes.

One villager said that Pakistan was our enemy and that America was a friend. Some of the villagers knew about Australia and Pakistan mainly due to cricket.

3. *Chakdev*

Chakdev is a village on a plateau surrounded by cliffs on all sides. The nearest town by road is *Khed* and *Ambavli* by walk. There are two ways to reach *Chakdev*. One way is to travel up to *Shindi* or *Valvan* by a vehicle from *Khed* and then climb up the mountain through the jungle (a very tiring 1-2 hour journey). The other way is to travel to *Ambavli* village from *Khed* by the ST bus and climb to *Chakdev*. This route has an incline of about 60 degrees most of the way and is dangerous in some places. One has to climb a series of ladders totaling about 300 feet¹¹ fixed on the cliff to reach the village. It takes about 5 hours to climb to *Chakdev* from *Ambavli*.

Chakdev has an area of 154 hectares; there are 12-15 households with a population of 51. There is electricity in the village and the line is drawn from *Valvan*, a village near the base of the mountain. All villagers know about load shedding. The nearest shop is the one in *Shindi*.

There have been instances of bison attacking the villagers while they take the herds for grazing. The *Police Patil* of *Chakdev* was attacked and lifted on the horns by a bison and his stomach was torn. Though he survived the attack both his collar bones are broken due to which he can not lift heavy weight, which is as good as a disability in a place like *Chakdev*.

All the villagers are *Hindu-Jangams*. They bury their dead in the cemetery next to the Shiva temple, one of the peculiarities of the *Jangam* sect. The language spoken and understood is *Marathi*. There is no community hall and marriages are conducted by erecting a temporary *mandav* in one's own courtyard. All of the villagers are aware of their family deity and also of the village deity. However, there are different stories about the origin of the village. The most

¹¹ Please refer Appendix I for a picture of the cliff and a part of the ladder.

important festival in *Chakdev* is *Holi*.¹² *Ganpati* festival is also celebrated. The main occupation of the villagers is farming with rice, *nachani* and *rajgira* being the main crops. The village gets very heavy rainfall during monsoons and is inaccessible during the rainy season. There is a common cement water tank in the village. Water from a stream almost a kilometer away is diverted by a pipeline to fill the tank. In summer, this water source dries up and the only supply is a perennial natural well called *Ram Taki* which is located in dense jungles and down the hill requiring a 15 minute descent from the village, carrying pots on shoulders or on the head.

The village had a school, which shut down about 12 years ago due to dwindling population of children. Now the children go to *Waghavle*, which involves a walk and a climb of about 6 hours.

There is no public health center and no doctor in the village, the nearest one being in *Khopi*, about 14 kms. or *Ambavli*, which involves a descent down the mountain. A midwife does emergency deliveries. There have been instances of emergency births and the women in labor have been carried in a *doli* to *Ambavli* using the dangerous route of the ladder because it is the fastest. A *gram sewak* visits the village but not regularly. There is no police station and the nearest one is in *Tapole* and law and the *Police Patil* maintains order. There has been no crime reported for years.

No newspapers are available unless one visits the nearest town. The ones most read are *Pudhari* and *Ratnagiri* Times. There is one telephone and one television set at the *Sarpanch*'s house, both

¹² This researcher witnessed two fascinating events at *Chakdev* during *Holi* this year. One was the total lunar eclipse that occurred that night. The second was a tradition where the villagers in *Chakdev* light two holis. One at 12 am at the edge of the cliff facing *Khed*. Only after this holi is lit, the villages below light their holis. According to the villagers of *Chakdev*, this tradition is being followed for hundreds of years. The second holi is lit near the village at 4 am.

wireless. Cell phone reception is very good if one goes up to the cliff facing *Khed*. The most watched channel is E-TV *Marathi*, *Zee Marathi* and *Sahyadri*. All the women gather at the *Sarpanch*'s house at night to watch television, which they dominate. They watch *Marathi* soap operas and films. Only a couple of men-folk watch the television for a very short time.¹³

Most of the villagers knew *Shiv Sena* and *NCP*. None talked about the Congress or the BJP. Everyone knew that the Panchayat administers the village and all knew the name of the *Sarpanch*.

All the villagers know about the Census, elections and voting. All the adults are aware of family planning and birth control. Officials from the *Taluka* office in *Mahabaleshwar* visit the village to collect the taxes. Knowledge about national and international affairs was nil.

Apart from these villages, 25 children from the school in *Waghavle* were interviewed. *Waghavle* is located in the valley next to the valley of *Shindi* and *Arav*. The village is accessible by road from *Arav* (14 kms.) and *Shindi* (21 kms.). The school is closed during the monsoons. Children from 16 villages study in this school. The school has free lodging and boarding facility, provided with the help of a grant from a private organisation. The findings from these interviews are as follows:

1. Out of the 25 children interviewed, only 5 of them knew the name of the Prime Minister.
2. Almost all the children only 'knew about *Gandhi* and *Nehru*'.

¹³ This researcher has visited *Chakdev* six times during the past year and stayed there overnight every time. During none of the visits the researcher has found them watching anything else than the soap operas.

3. Some of them knew about Pakistan from their geography lessons. Some of them have heard about America. One of them said that Pakistan was our enemy.
4. All knew *Shah Rukh Khan* and *Salman Khan*.
5. Most of the children love to watch and play cricket and the favourite cricketers are *Sachin Tendulkar* and *Dhoni*. Some mentioned *Rahul Dravid* and *Saurav Ganguli*.
6. Only 6 children knew the name of the *Sarpanch* of their village and the local MLA.
7. *Pudhari*, *Ratnagiri Times* were the newspapers they knew about. They read the newspapers very rarely when their teachers brought them from town.
8. None of them were aware of international issues and problems. None of them were aware of National issues too.
9. Most of the children knew their religion and caste.
10. A few children have traveled to town including Mumbai, but seen almost nothing except the vicinity in which their relatives stay. Only one boy has traveled far, up to *Kedarnath* in his holidays.
11. All the children have seen the computer, but since they are not allowed to touch it, none of them know how to operate it. The schoolteacher starts the machine and shows them how to draw in 'Paint'. None of them know about Microsoft or other software.

Apart from the interviews conducted during this study, this researcher has made a number of observations and conducted in-depth interviews with some of the villagers in the area. From the interviews, personal observations and this study, the following common findings can be drawn:

1. Most of adult villagers have basic formal education up to 7th standard and can read *Marathi*.

2. The villagers know about the local administration, census, elections, polls, family planning, polio vaccinations, land revenue and taxes. This means that the government schemes reach the villages.
3. Almost none of the villagers know about national and international politics, leaders or issues.
4. All the villages have at least one dish based telephone and at least one television set. However the most watched programs are soap operas and films and not news or information based programs. Some villagers own a transistor radio, however, very few listen to it regularly.
5. No newspapers are available in any of the villages in the area. If any news is communicated, it is done orally by the *Sarpanch* during the village meetings.
6. Only one villager knew *Amitabh Bacchan* and a few knew *Shah Rukh Khan*.
7. The condition of roads is bad and transportation expensive and infrequent. The villages are cut off from each other and the rest of the world during the monsoons.

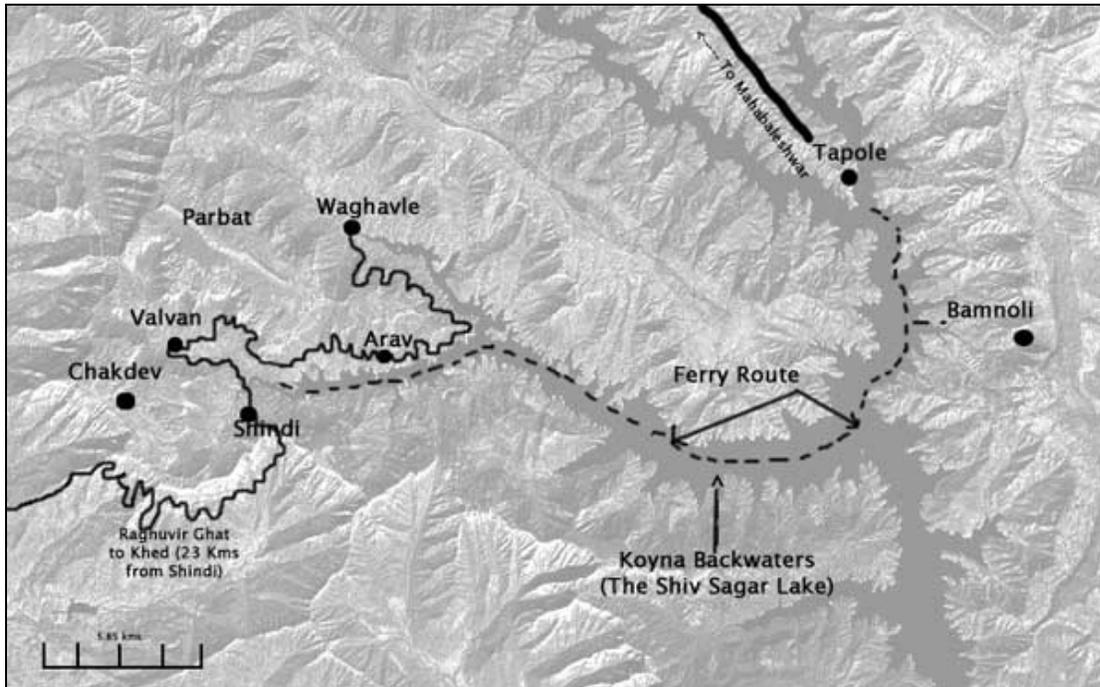
Conclusion

It appears that the government of India is better able to reach the villages and the villagers in India than the private, commercial mass media. The availability of telephone, television and radio though not very common, is the only real improvement over the condition described in *Dr. Y. B. Damle's* study. In terms of knowledge of international and national affairs, knowledge about leaders, knowledge about international and national politics and impact of news ideas, findings in this study are almost similar to the findings in *Dr. Damle's* study.

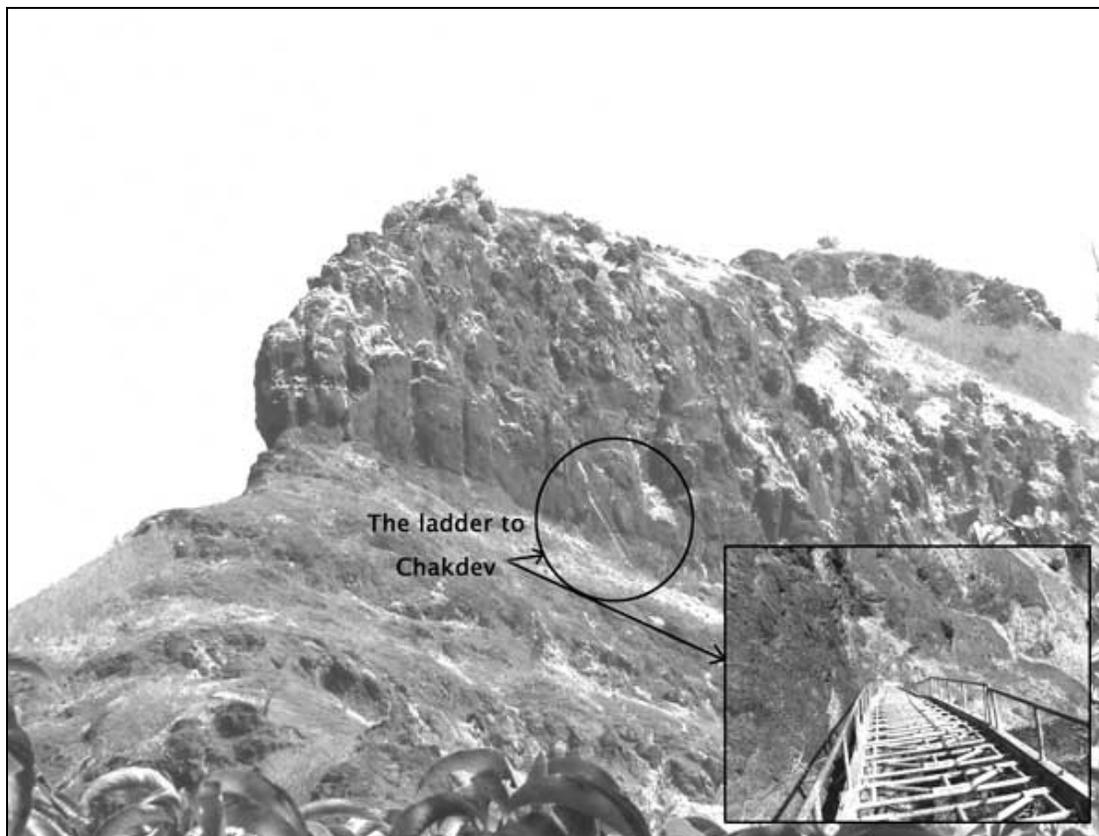
The lack of modern means of fast and modern communication media have made the villages in this area a victim of 'time biased' media.¹⁴ Robin Jeffrey argues that Indian-language newspapers act as both mirrors and prisms. As mirrors, they reflect regional concerns back to the societies they serve and as prisms, they refract those concerns to an Indian nation and in turn interpret national and global issues to their regions. The lack of access to daily newspapers demonstrates, that one or the other two factors that Robin Jeffrey points out in his argument may have failed in the case of these villages - either they have no money to buy newspapers or worse, there is lack of political and social awareness. The latter, if true, would mean that while the Indian government reaches to its people, India's democracy does not. These Indian villages are in a time warp when it comes to modern thought, ideas, knowledge and development.

¹⁴ Harold Innis, in his book *The Bias of Communications*, 1951 states that the key to social change is found in the development of communication media. Time-biased media like speech, stone or clay are heavier and stable, leading to stable societies, which do not change. The space-biased media like the newspapers and electronic media are light and portable and hence can reduce distances and bring about change in a society. Oral communication, speech, was considered by Innis to be time-biased because it requires the relative stability of community for face-to-face contact.

APPENDIX I



Map depicting the villages mentioned in the study



The ladder on the cliff to climb to Chakdev

Sample Questionnaire

Name of the interviewee:

Age:

Education:

Languages known:

Family deity:

Village deity:

Q. How did your village get its name?

Q. What is your religion / caste? Do you know your village's cast break-up?

Q. How is the village administered?

Q. Which Taluka does your village belong to? Where is the head office?

Q. Do elections take place in the village?

Q. Are you on listed on the voters list?

Q. Is your name listed in Maharashtra Gazette?

Q. Is there a maternity clinic in the village?

Q. Is there a school in the village?

Q. Is there a shop in the village?

Q. Is there a telephone?

Q. Have you seen a computer?

Q. Which is the oldest temple in the village? How old? Who is the poojari?

Q. Which house is the oldest in the village? How old?

Q. Occupation of the village?

- Q. Is there any police station in village?
- Q. Have you heard of the Polio Campaign?
- Q. Is there a gram sevak? Do you know his name? Where does he come from?
- Q. Is there a public health center? Government Hospital?
- Q. Is there record of birth, death and sex ratio?
- Q. What is the population of village?
- Q. Where do the marriages are take place?
- Q. Is there electric sub station, transformer in the village?
- Q. How many cattle you have?
- Q. Do you know about rain records?
- Q. Is there well, water tank, taps in village?
- Q. Do you know about family planning?
- Q. Which newspapers do you read?
- Q. Do you watch T.V.? If yes, which programs do you watch?
- Q. Have you seen a film? Can you name any actors?
- Q. Do you watch cricket? Who is your favourite cricketer?
- Q. Do you pay tax?
- Q. Does anybody have LPG in village?
- Q. Who is India's Prime Minister?
- Q. Do you know what is globalisation?
- Q. Do you know India's enemies? Friends?
- Q. Do you know about America, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Australia?