

Chapter III

RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

A. INTRODUCTION : A POLICY PERSPECTIVE

Public policies in India have been inconsistent, piecemeal and adhoc in their approach. They have emanated from the Constitution, the Five Year Plans, the committee reports and declarations of the Government on specific problems and sectors. The plans and programmes of one sector have been dealt with in isolation from the other related fields. The approach from the very beginning has been that of a segmented one. While we have a fully developed and a well-defined public policy on industry, the same is lacking with regard to rural development (including agricultural sector). A rural development policy with a long-term, holistic perspective is yet to emerge fully in India.

The lack of a holistic approach has resulted in dichotomies between planning and implementation, plan and non-plan activities, core programmes of community development and sectoral programmes of various departments on rural and urban development.¹ The policy analysts point out that the dichotomy between planning and implementation is artificial and, in fact, the possibilities of evading responsibilities have contributed to the acceptance of many policies by policy-makers in India and elsewhere in the developing countries.² Therefore, it is futile to blame only the failure of implementation for poor performance of development programmes. The fault also lies with the conceptualisation and formulation of

appropriate policies and strategies.³ As the Task Force on Indian Agrarian Relations puts it while commenting on the land reform programmes; "the very conception of the policy was based on the assumption that its implementation can be distorted through reinterpretation."⁴

A perusal of rural development programmes since the fifties will show that they were conceived on a piecemeal basis, shifting emphasis from one aspect of rural development to another as they engaged the attention of the policy-makers. The journey started with the launching of the Community Development Programme along with the National Extension Service which was described by the First Five Year Plan as the method through which the Plan sought to initiate a process of transformation of social and economic life of the villages.⁵ Taking sustenance from the vision of Gandhi and Nehru on rural India, the Programme was concerned with the total development of the community as a whole with a major thrust on agricultural development. But soon the enthusiasm of initial years evaporated with the problem of food shortages and the failure to increase food production. The pressure generated by the food crisis drew the attention of the authorities to the pressing needs for increasing food production. As a result, the emphasis shifted from Community Development to growth in agricultural production. Thus, the new agricultural strategies were adopted and a concerted drive was made to modernise agriculture in selected areas. The result was the increased food production which is known as the Green Revolution. But soon the belief that the new technologies held the key to the problems of slow growth as well

as to those of socio-economic equities in rural societies turned out to be an illusion in the wake of the limitation of the Green revolution, viz., that it remained confined to a few pockets, a small number of crops and selected farmer groups.⁶

The poverty alleviation programmes of various types were launched during the last two decades as correctives to the adverse effect of the Green Revolution and by way of direct attack on poverty and effective land reform measures. But these attempts, it is pointed out, have remained largely ineffective till now, owing to the absence of adequate structural reforms and improved access for the rural poor to agricultural and common lands.⁷ The working of the Indian polity has shown that the big landed and business interests could consolidate themselves to tilt the policy implementation in their favour. Unlike the socialist countries like China, India could not emphasize on radical policies of changing social structures and had relied mostly on technocratic and reformist policies. The reform measures were able to abolish intermediaries to a significant extent and the ceilings on holdings have no doubt prevented further concentration, but they have failed to redistribute land to the landless in any significant measure, which is actually the major cause for the persistence of rural poverty.⁸ The landless poor seem to have obtained minimal enduring benefits from both the growth and anti-poverty programmes.

But, in view of the limitations emanating from the nature of the Indian polity and the role of the ruling elite, a drastic restructuring of rural institutions through radical land reform

measures has to be ruled out in the immediate future.⁹ It is believed that democratic decentralisation through local self-governing institutions like the Panchayati Raj could serve as an alternative to the radical measures for changing the power-structure in rural societies. Various committees and scholars of high repute have pointed out that the democratic process of these institutions, through 'empowerment', 'conscientisation' and politicisation, can alter the "ascriptive basis of legitimacy yielding place to democratic one."¹⁰ This has been evident from the working of the Panchayati Raj in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh where the leadership is slowly passing into the hands of a new relatively younger generation belonging to the low-and middle-income groups.¹¹ The role of the Panchayati Raj in West Bengal in implementing development programmes and land reforms has been quite praiseworthy notwithstanding its limitations and failures in many respects. According to one study, the state of West Bengal over the last one and a half decades has witnessed a sustained growth in agrarian production, and the State exhibits the unique feature of having seized more land than was originally estimated to be surplus.¹² The performance of West Bengal in land reforms and rural development stands out in "sharp contrast to the results achieved in the rest of the country.... the trend in West Bengal appears to be towards re-peasantisation."¹³

Unfortunately, the cumulative trends towards centralisation in our federal system and the greater accretion of decision-making authority at the higher levels have thwarted and resisted the

initiative for decentralisation at the district level and below. This has happened inspite of the greater concern shown for democratic decentralisation by the various committees and successive five year plans. The quest for democratic decentralisation started with the setting up of the Balwant Rai Mehta Team which was appointed to look into the problem of the Community Development Programme and National Extension Service. The Team found that : "development cannot progress without responsibility and power. Community development can be real only when the community understands its problems, realises its responsibilities, exercises the necessary powers through its chosen representatives, and maintains a constant and intelligent vigilance on local administration."¹⁴ The recommended pattern of the three-tier Panchayati Raj with some variations here and there was adopted by most of the States. However, the thrust of the B.R.Mehta Team Report with regard to democratic decentralisation was relegated into the background and the Panchayati Raj was narrowly conceptualised as an instrument for implementing development programmes. In this role, too, the Panchayat bodies were kept starved of power and fund. Again, with the launching of new agricultural strategy to mitigate the food crisis in the sixties, the technocratic elements took precedence over democratic decentralisation. Yet, the dynamics of a democratic polity in a situation of population pressure and poverty has been such, that the issues of equity and social justice could not be relegated to the background for long.¹⁵ For this, a number of employment programme and poverty alleviation programme were launched. With the expansion of these programmes, and setting

up of different development agencies, the need for integration of the Panchayati Raj bodies with these programmes and agencies was greatly felt. At this juncture, the Asoka Mehta Committee (appointed by the Janata Government in 1977), pointed out that Panchayati Raj, like democracy at the national level and State level, is both an end and a means and the establishment of democratic decentralisation between district and the state level is an imperative from the political and socio-economic development perspectives.¹⁶ It took a broader view of rural development and pointed out that the evolution from rural to urban way of life is a continuous process with sequences from a tiny hamlet to a sizeable city. The question of urban-rural relationship is to be viewed in the context of the needs of a developing economy and the attendant processes of affording higher levels of service and facilities to rural area. This could be achieved by linking up rural areas with urban focal points. The Report further strongly recommended the revitalization of the Panchayati Raj. It pointed out that, besides developing political consciousness and shifting the elite base, these institutions can help rural people in cultivating a 'developmental psche'. This was a reflection of a mood of how the society was changing its course towards democratic decentralisation. Even before the Committee brought out its Report, the West Bengal Government, under the leadership of Left Front, sprang a surprise by reviving the Panchayat Raj and bringing P.R.I. in effective operation and assigned them the function of planning and implementation of rural development programmes. The result has

been quite successful, as already stated earlier.

The growing interest in decentralized planning and administration is "attributed not only to the disillusionment with the results of the Central planning and the shift of emphasis to growth-with-equity policies, but also to the realization that development is a complex and uncertain process that cannot be easily planned and controlled from the center...."¹⁷ The new thrust and the mood have been well-reflected in the reports of various committees that were appointed by the Government in the 1980s.

The C.H. Hanumantha Rao Group on District Planning has pointed out that "the generation of poverty is a function of the concentration of power and the monopolisation of resources by the ruling elite. People's participation at the local level would, therefore, help bring about a redistribution of both control of resources and of power in favour of the rural poor..."¹⁸ The G.V.K.Rao Committee on Administrative Arrangements for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation (CAARD) also refers to the gap between profession and practice in the political system which allows island of elite affluence to emerge and grow in the midst of mass poverty deprivation and destitutes..."; and has recommended restructuring of district administration and making the Panchayat institutions effective for political and administrative decentralisation, which will channelise the growing unrest and awakening at the lower levels into a "positive force for nation building."¹⁹ The L.M.Singhvi Committee has taken the broadest

view of the whole scenario and has pointed out that the Central and State Governments and the judiciary do not represent a preoccupying part of the common Indian villager's daily life. The Committee states : "There are gaps and anomalies in the democratic experiences of the Indian citizen, particularly in the countryside. Panchayati Raj institutions in our rural and municipal bodies in our urban areas represent, first and foremost, the possibility of truly dependable and durable institutional assurances for overcoming those distances and gaps. Without local units of self-government, we cannot hope to establish a viable and vibrant democracy. It is in this perspective that rural and urban development are in effect two sides of the same coin and are parts of a composite continuum of what may be called democratic urbanisation."²⁰ It is in this integrated vision, the Committee pointed out, that local self-governing institutions like the Panchayati Raj, have to be reviewed, restructured, reclaimed, renewed and revitalized.

Unfortunately, as in the past, the recommendation of the Report was not accepted in its true spirit and was implemented in a half-hearted manner with the immediate political gains in mind. Thus, the 64th constitutional Amendment Bill on the Panchayati Raj fell far short of expectation. Further, it was vehemently opposed by the opposition parties on the ground that the Bill, instead of furthering the cause of decentralisation, would make the hands of the Centre more powerful. It was alleged that the Bill, by providing access of the centre to the Panchayati Raj or the local level directly, bypassing the State by way of direct funding, had

encroached upon the constitutional powers of the State and had adversely affected the federal balance. Thus, the opposition, on the basis of its strength in the upper house (Rajya Sabha), forced the then Prime Minister to withdraw the Bill. Now, the P.V. Narashimha Rao Government has passed the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act which has given constitutional recognition to the Panchayati Raj. It defines Panchayats to mean institutions of self-government. It also makes it mandatory for every State to constitute Panchayats at the three levels, the village, block and district, sensibly not insisting on the intermediate level in tiny states. Unlike the 64th Amendment Act, this 1993 Act has cared to maintain the constitutional position that it is entirely within the competence of the State legislatures to decide what powers and authority the Panchayats should have. The Government has also passed the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act constitutionalising the Nagarpalikas (Municipalities) with the identical references to economic and social justice as in the 73rd Amendment Act. The passing of these two Acts relating to rural and urban self-governing institutions has far reaching implications - the Acts in a way have constitutionalised a third stratum of Government at the below the district level.²¹ But as a keen observer of development administration points out, the passing of these Acts separately has "thoughtlessly constitutionalised an artificial dichotomy between rural and urban when all previous thinking has stressed the continuum between the two."²² The attempt to cover this frantic lapse by giving constitutional status to District Planning Committees for consolidation of the plans by Panchayats and municipalities fall short of the

requirement of an alternative district government or a third tier in federal structure of the polity — as these high status district bodies will be constitutionally limited to preparing only draft plans.²³

In view of the shift in economic thinking in favour of the basic needs and the problem of elitist bias in development, we require "a political corrective : the participatory thrust of our development planning should be stronger."²⁴ In a period when democracy has become people's concern, the participation of a citizen in the "electoral process for the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha cannot give him a sense of full and meaningful participation in the democratic process and he is unable to "feel great power even greater responsibility of being a citizen in the democratic republic that is India."²⁵ Such a broader perspective does not necessarily "entail the rejection of instrumentalist view, but does lead us to a horizon where the proposition that democracy at levels below the centre and state should be treated as an end."²⁶ The arrangements in the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts may be far less than required for this broader perspective of development and democracy through a third tier federal structure; may be, a more radical change is far from being realised ~~as~~ but the passing of these two amendment acts have opened the gate of wider horizons indicated above. Keeping the perspective developed so far in the foregoing analysis, we shall now, in the next sections, attempt to examine the evolution of rural development in India since Independence right up to the present day.

B. RURAL DEVELOPMENT - BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

1.a. The Compulsion of Famines : Rural development in India began as a "humanitarian act".²⁷ Famines in India have been endemic and severe. Therefore, the Famine Commissions of 1880, 1898 and 1901 were set up to mitigate the severity of Famines. The roots of the policy on rural development lie in the recommendations of these commissions.

The Famine Commission of 1880 defined the objectives of agriculture and rural development as : "the improvement of internal communications and the removal of all obstructions to the free course of trade accompanied by the extension of irrigation in suitable localities and on improved agriculture that we must look for obtaining security in future against disastrous failures in the food supply."²⁸

Thus, the foundation of the rural development policy was laid. The Commission of 1901 emphasized the role of the Agriculture Department in the improvement of agriculture and establishment of co-operative societies as agencies of rural welfare.

b. Reforms of 1919 and 1935 : With the introduction of reforms of 1919, rural development get a powerful fillip. The system of 'dyarchy' included some departments in the Transferred List to put in some elements of local knowledge and participation. This fillip was pushed further by the Government of India Act, 1935.

which conferred autonomy on the Provinces in a sphere of activities covering all the ingredients of rural development. The Congress, which remained in power from 1937 to 1939, endeavoured to implement rural development programmes, but the compulsions of the Second World War stopped the momentum. The War period saw attempts to improve agricultural production. But that was more for catering to war needs than for the welfare of the people.

Two features characterised the rural development efforts in the pre-independence period. The first was that the British administration wanted to restructure social institutions to some extent because of the belief that agricultural production depends on the receptivity of the Indian farmers; and the second was that the responsibility of the government was to conduct research and make the fruits of the research available to the farmers.²⁹

c. The Community Development Programme : The Early Pioneering Efforts :

The period of early pioneering efforts of Community Development can be traced back to the Non-Co-operation Resolution of Gandhiji in 1920 and to the establishment of the Sriniketan Institute of Rural Reconstruction by Rabindra Nath Tagore in 1920. These were followed by the experiments of the Rural Reconstruction in Martandam, Baroda, Firka, Gurgaon, Nilokheri etc. These attempts aimed at making rural folk self-reliant and development oriented by inculcating self-respect and spiritual, physical, social and economic upliftment.

B. RURAL DEVELOPMENT : AFTER INDEPENDENCE

1. The Etawah Project : The Etawah project was launched immediately after the independence in 1948 which can be considered as a forerunner of the first series of the Community Development Projects in 1952. It preceded them by four years and set the pattern for the community projects to follow.

It was concerned with productivity, social improvement and developing initiative, self-confidence and co-operation permanently so that people could develop spiritually, physically, technically even after the Programme is lifted.³⁰ The Project was characterised by staff meetings, simplicity, directness, informal discussions, reviewing of programmes, and setting of modest targets jointly by all including field staff.

2.a. The Community Development Programme : Though limited in scope and inadequate in resources, the experiences in Baroda, Sriniketan, Martandan, Gurgaon, Sevagram, Nilokheri, Etawah etc. formed the basis for the Community Development Programme which was launched in 1952. In fact, they provided and "enriched the eclectic kit."³¹

The Community Development Programme was essentially multi-disciplinary in character, while the core of the programme was agricultural development. This was due to the influence of the Report of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee under the Chairmanship of V.T. Krishnamachari who was critical of the way

agricultural development was being pursued. The Committee pointed out : "The economic aspects of the village life cannot be detached from broader social aspects; and agricultural improvement is inextricably linked up with a whole set of social problems."³² The Report made it clear that, all aspects of village life are so interrelated that no lasting solutions can be achieved if individual aspects of it are dealt with isolation. The experience gathered during the Grow More Food Campaign became the key element of the Community Development Programme which made a bold departure from the past in the sense that it aimed at the development of man as a whole. It was the first of its kind which attempted "to change the interrelationship" between the three major sub-systems operating in the rural areas", (1) producer-farmer sub-system, (2) credit and input supply sub-system, (3) and district administrative sub-system" along with the methods of their operation.³³ Therefore, individual farmers including landless labourers and artisans, cooperatives and administrative machinery from the district to the village were involved in the Community Development Programme. The programme was designed to transform the social and economic life of the village through the active participation and initiative of the village community.

b. Evaluation of the Community Development Programme : In spite of its multi-disciplinary character, the focus of the Community Development Programme remained agricultural in which there were some limited successes. Encouraged by the initial success the

demand for the programme grew and the programmes were expanded to most parts of the country due to the rising political pressure. Under the circumstances, the inadequately equipped Community Development Programmes which were expanded beyond their capacity failed to satisfy the rising expectations. The Community Development Programmes had to be contented with the work of infrastructural development like roads, schools, etc.

The increasing population and the need for more grains amidst stagnant agricultural production led the policy makers to develop some fresh thoughts.

3.a. New Agricultural Strategy : The Intensive Area Development Programme and the Intensive Agricultural Area Programme : India's food crisis in the beginning of the 1960's demanded positive and specific steps to meet the growing requirement of food grains. Thus, new agricultural strategies were adopted which were largely influenced by the Report of the First and the Second Team on 'India's Food Crisis and Steps to Meet It' sponsored by the Ford Foundation, U.S.A.

The Integrated Area Development Programme (IADP) and the Intensive Agricultural Area Programme (IAAP) were launched to boost agricultural production. These programmes emphasized the use of modern technology in the field of agriculture. The credit and other input facilities such as fertilisers, improved seeds, were provided to the agricultural farmers. The efforts were made to

involve scientific research institutions of agriculture and animal husbandry in the agricultural development. Thousands of demonstrations were organised to disseminate modern technology to the farmers. The problem of food crisis, followed by stagnation and severe drought in many parts of the country, led to the overwhelming emphasis on technocratic approach in the midst of which the thrust of community development was lost. The salient features of the New Agricultural strategy were : "(i) Stress on the High Yielding Varieties (HYV), (ii) optimum utilisation of production in areas with assured irrigation and rainfall by higher inputs through intensive agricultural programme (iii) introduction of short duration crops; and (iv) effective uses of irrigation potential." ³⁴

b. Evaluation of New Agricultural Strategy : The new agricultural strategies definitely resulted in appreciable increase in food production, but aggravated the problem of inequalities not only between the rich and the poor, but also between the developed and the backward regions. Guy Hunter had been very critical of such programmes which were by their very design suited to the rich and the big farmers. ³⁵

4.a. The shift in the Focus - Towards Distributive and Social Justice : Soon it was realised that the regional and the class inequalities and the strategy which could aggravate such inequalities needed correction. As the Fourth Five Year Plan states : "Available information does not indicate any trend towards reduction in income

and wealth. Nor is there any indication that there has been any lessening of disparities in the standard of living of various classes. There is also the complaint that even in institutions like co-operatives which were fashioned to promote socio-economic democracy, the propertied classes and the rich dominate."³⁶ The Fourth Plan, then, set forth to correct such imbalances by stressing the development of different groups and regions for imparting distributive and social justice.³⁷ It pointed out that our efforts should enable the people from dry areas, backward regions, small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers to participate and share the benefit of development.³⁸ Accordingly, the 1970's saw the proliferation of programmes designed to fulfil the objectives as referred to above. Some of the examples of such programmes are Drought Prone Area Programme, (DPAP), Desert Development Programme (DDP), Tribal Development Area Programme (TDAP), Command Area Development Programme (CADP), Small Farmer Development Agency (STDA), Hill Development Programme etc.

The Drought-Prone Area Development (DPAP) was launched in the Fifth Plan as an integrated area development programme in agriculture with the emphasis on developing better dry farming practices and cropping pattern. Since its inception in the late sixties, upto March, 1980, it covered 55 blocks spread over 74 districts in 13 states. The Desert Development Programme initiated in 1977-78 covered arid regions in twenty districts of five States. The main emphasis in the programme was on measures to check ~~emphasis~~ ~~in the programme was on measures to check~~ desertification together

with projects which would facilitate development of productivity and productive resources of the area and its people. The programmes for tribal people and the hill areas, viz. the Tribal Sub-plan and Hill Sub-Plan were launched during the Fifth Plan. These Sub-plans were evolved for hill areas and areas with concentration of tribal population. The objective was to reduce the economic and social backwardness of these areas. With the initiation of the Small Farmer Development Agency and Marginal Farmers' and Landless Labourers ~~(MFAL)~~ Agency (MFAL), the focus of rural development shifted from mere growth to programmes specifically designed for the development of small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers and to growth with social justice. The programmes involved helping the target group to adopt improved agricultural production such as minor irrigation and to help them to diversify their farm economy through subsidiary activities like animal husbandry, dairying, poultry, horticulture etc.

b. Evaluation : The realisation in the early 1970's that growth per se would not lead to percolation of benefits to the lower strata of the society, turned the attention of scholars, planners and administrators to the concept of integrated rural development programme. The thrust of rural development should be two, according to M.L.Sudan, (1) providing certain social goods and services in terms of social and economic infrastructure and (2) increasing the income of rural poor.³⁹ Most of the past programmes, according to him, have failed in providing sufficiently both the thrust and the right technology. The availability of drinking water, electricity,

rural roads, medical facilities, and educational facilities was far from adequate and the inequalities have grown. The SFDA/MFDA were limited in their scope in the sense that they were land-based programmes addressed to the small and marginal farmers confined to agricultural and allied activities. The agricultural labourers, non-agricultural labourers, rural artisan craftsmen, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe were left out. Even among the small farmers, only those who could afford investment derived greater benefits. Therefore, a great pressure was generated towards the end of the decade to co-ordinate all existing programmes into a nation-wide programme which would at the same time "incorporate into an improved version of much criticised SFDA."⁴⁰

5. Recent Trends : Integrated Rural Development : The momentum for integrated rural development was gathering in the 1970's which received a great impetus through the leadership of C.Subramaniam's budget speech of 1976 calling for the need for "a systematic and integrated use of natural resources, and a part of this process, enabling every person to engage himself in productive and socially useful occupation and earn income that would meet at least the basic needs."⁴¹

The Draft Sixth Plan visualised growing poverty, unemployment and regional diversities, and laid emphasis on the planning for integration of various programmes and establishing appropriate "linkages for optimal utilisation of local endowment consistent with the Plan objectives, local needs and environmental

balance. The new approach will aim at integrating field programmes reflecting the economic activity of the rural family whose employment and development is basic objective."⁴²

The Seventh Plan also approached rural development from the premises of the Sixth Plan, but with the caution that it would not yield results, "if overall growth of economy itself is slow and benefits of such growth are inequitably distributed."⁴³ The Seventh Plan, while evaluating the past programmes, pointed out that even IRD had been more successful in developed regions with "well-provided infrastructure" and with a high level of "awareness of beneficiaries." Accordingly, it laid emphasis on rural employment programmes such as NREP and RLEGP. It also took into consideration variations in different regional settings giving IRD the distinctiveness in the hill areas, north-eastern regions, deserts and border areas.⁴⁴ The poverty in these areas, it pointed out, was acute and it was difficult to formulate its criteria.

The IRD was an attempt, therefore, to integrate the different ongoing programmes. S.K.Rao opines that it was a package of services not limited to one item, but took into consideration infrastructure, forward and backward linkages, social and economic forces integrating the theme of "rural transformation and change" in a true sense.⁴⁵ According to him, it was not intended to solve all the rural problems or to bring complete social change, but it was an attempt "where a specific task is

given, and is applied to limited number by structurally sizable organisation. . . . In the past field administration rarely had such task of catering to the weaker section with locally suitable programmes."⁴⁶

C. PROBLEMS OF ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

I. The Origin : The organisational design which emerged during the initial years of the launching of the Community Development Programme has largely shaped the form and the nature of the rural development administration, Gaikwad and Palmer opine that all types of new programmes like I.A.D.P., D.P.A.P., C.A.D.P., S.F.D.A. did not result in radically new innovation because C.D.P. design has been greatly influential and deterministic due to the following features :

"(i) Focus on individual cultivator

(ii) Restructuring and reorganisation of district administration by establishing new administrative units on area(block) basis

(iii) Provision of necessary facilities (including extension of knowledge) for agricultural production to individual cultivator through co-operative and block agencies.

(iv) Provision of welfare facilities by the block agency at the block level and rural settlement."⁴⁷

The idea of the block was conceived as far back as the Report of the Famine Commission in 1945 which was further developed by the Etawah Project in 1948 and was given the final shape by the Report of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee, 1952.

The CD design, it is alleged, was limited and inadequate. Even then, it had been regarded as an important innovation in the sense that it made the block a unit of administration with the B.D.O. as the captain of the block team and the V.L.W. a multipurpose worker, so that farmers would not have to run from pillar to post for fulfilling their requirements.

II. The Emergence of Politico-Administrative Structure for Rural Development : The District Collector, the BDO and the VLWs were the kingpin of the CDP design. The District Collector at the district level was the co-ordinating authority, the captain of the team of the technical officers of the developmental departments. The role of the Block Development Officer in the Block was like that of the District Collector at the district level excepting his limited powers compared to the District Collector. The VLWs were the link persons between the Government and the people performing multi-purpose work. Besides these, the attempt to institutionalise people's involvement and participation was made by a system of a parallel people's organisations devetalled to the Government Agency at all levels. But such attempt "did not go beyond the creation of adhoc bodies and some concomitant adjustments."⁴⁸

Hence, the Balwanth^{Rai} Mehta Team was set up to study the community Community Development Programme, especially from the point of view of assessing the extent of popular participation and to recommend measures through which such participation can be achieved. The Committee found that such adhoc bodies like Block

Advisory Committee had failed to show any "durable strength nor leadership necessary to provide the motive force for continuing the improvement of economic and social conditions in rural areas and to invoke people's initiatives."⁴⁹ It recommended the Constitution of a three-tier structure of local self-governing institutions, i.e., the three-tier Panchayats organically linked up with each other with the necessary power and authority devolved onto them and a decentralised administrative system working under them. Thus, the administrative machinery devised for uplifting the condition of the rural mass consisted of the generalist, the technical specialist and the political leaders. This had given the block, and to some extent, the district, a character of a matrix organisation.⁵⁰ According to Donald Ralph Kingdom, "matrix organisation is at one and the same time normal hierarchy and a problem-solving entity" which has "the functional structure and the project structure."⁵¹ The complexity of the design was that "people are expected to communicate not only with their bosses and subordinates but with peers and near equals both laterally and diagonally in the performance of their tasks."⁵² Therefore, "the matrix structure is as confusing to operate on as it is to describe; it dilutes authority and increases requirements for coordination and control."⁵³

The rural development administration set up in the district and in the block resembling, to a large extent, the matrix organisational structure, called for improved coordination and communication. Involvement of non-officials, the elected political elements through the Panchayati Raj made rural development

administration a politico-administrative structure requiring a participatory administrative culture.

D. CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION IN INDIA

Unfortunately, a study of the rural development literature shows that the rural development administration in India does not possess a participatory administrative culture. It also suffers from the lack of effective and meaningful decentralisation. It has the following attributes which hinder the successful implementation of rural development programmes :

1. Rigidity : It has been pointed out by critics that rigidity, due to the "rules and procedures", as they exist today, governs in a negative manner the working of departments dealing directly with field problems and hinder the process of rural development.⁵⁴

Indeed, too much of compliance with rules and regulations defeats the purpose and objectives; and the administrator becomes the "prisoner in the tight grip of those rules and procedures".⁵⁵

Adherence to rules and procedures only makes the individual a cog in the machine, reducing him to an "automation in a huge governmental system operating within a framework of rules and regulations."⁵⁶

It means that it does not 'innovate' to adapt to a needed situation in rural development (which is itself an innovative process). As S.K.Rao comments, "the machinery is inclined to be correct partly for safety, and partly due to habit of yesteryears. It is taking orders and giving them but it is not evolving any different devices. Its strength is keeping the balance, its steadiness and its evenness. It has not started any liberating and enabling movement."⁵⁷

II. Target and Empathy : Back in the seventies, Guy Hunter, V.M. Dandekar and others had warned against unrealistic and high targets which never took into account the capabilities and limitations of field administrations. This is still continuing and is affecting IRDP adversely. Hunter had suggested some "modesty in targets" without which field staff would be tempted to fulfil targets either by jugglery of statistics or by encouraging farmers to accept their proposals irrespective of suitability, desirability and feasibility.⁵⁸ This tendency will make the value of supervision useless. Supervision done on the target basis (depending on the Reports and Diaries of the Field Staff) is bound to be superficial. The paradox is that "no one believes in these figures and nevertheless, everyone must engage himself in so much paper work which is worse than wasteful, it is intellectually corrupting."⁵⁹ The "implementors lack full and proper understanding of the programme and thus 'easy to perform task' often get priority over primary tasks."⁶⁰ In this context, Rakesh Hooza observes that the "lack of understanding of, or empathy for, the beneficiary is another problem of our rural development agencies. Either the functionaries do not think of beneficiary at all or he thinks of him as target or statistics. More enlightened functionaries develop a prototype concept in the mind about the rural poor. It is rare that we find a member of the guidance or delivery mechanism attempting to categorise the beneficiary. Such categorisation may be on occupation, income, caste, etc. lines, it may also be based on the degree and manner of receptivity or otherwise to the benefit."⁶¹

III. a. Coordination : The problems of multiplicity and departmentalism are interlinked with each other and with the problem of coordination. It is departmentalism which is largely responsible for multiplicity of organisations. P.R.Dubashi has defined departmentalism as "manifestation of functional factors in administration" each functions and subject-matter having its "hierarchy of departmental structures."⁶² The tendency of opening up of new projects for every problem that emerges has resulted in the multiplicity of agencies. As community life is not compartmentalized, such a compartmentalised approach is inimical to rural development. Nitish De comments that these multiple agencies pursue different schemes, sometimes overlapping with each other; "without any reference to what other schemes from other departments are being responded to by the same target group."⁶³ The walls that lie between these departments and agencies are not easily penetrable. There are instances when many departments have refused to allocate funds in areas covered by Community Development Blocks, which have made nonsense of the concept that the block funds would supplement departmental activity."⁶⁴ This has affected the very basis of rural development.

Referring to the problem of Area-Function dichotomy, Mohit Bhattacharya has pointed out that the multiplicity of functional departments has led to the balkanisation of the field, as each has carved out boundaries of its operation, whereas functions on the ground have natural interdependency.⁶⁵ He has concluded that this departmentalism is reinforced by vertical insularity. All these make the client to run from pillar to post.

The Round Table on Rural Development on India organised by UNESCO has found the "existence of a tall hierarchy to perform a task that really required a horizontal organisation" leading to the splitting of tasks and overlapping.⁶⁶

b. Coordination at the District level : Attempts to overcome such problems through the formation of co-ordination committees have been futile. The meetings of the Committees have been routine affairs in which no departmental representative is serious. This is because the District Collector, who is to act as coordinator, is so overloaded with responsibilities that he has not been able to do justice to all of his roles. The Committee on Administrative Arrangement for Rural Development (1985) had taken note of this problem and suggested that the "development functions at the district level should be separated and entrusted to an officer called the District Development Commissioner, who should be much senior in rank to the present District Collector, to give undivided attention to development matters and also establish the "primacy of development administration over house-keeping function."⁶⁷ The Committee also suggested restructuring of planning and implementation at the district level, merging of the District Rural Development Agency gradually into the office of the District Development Officer and ending the proliferation and fragmentation of functions at the district level.⁶⁸ This would take care of the problems of horizontal and vertical coordination at the district level.

c. Coordination at the Block Level : The structural matrix of the block organisation with dual control is also responsible for creating

problems of horizontal and vertical coordination. Technical officers in the district and higher level ask for greater control; on the other hand, the BDO also asks for more control leading to a situation of divided control and responsibilities.

The meetings of Block Planning Committees and other coordination meetings have been routine affairs as in the case of the district level. Nothing comes out of such meetings where departmental representatives attend only to fulfil the required procedures. Realising the problems of coordination, the CAARD Report (1985) has recommended that "the Block Development Officer should be the sheet-anchor of the entire rural development process"; therefore, "the level of this office" should be upgraded and designated as an Assistant Development Officer "equal to that of Subdivisional Officer."⁶⁹

d. Problems in Autonomous Development Agencies and Projects :

Many agencies and projects (such as Small Farmer Development Agency, now known as District Rural Development Agency, Comprehensive Area Development Programme, Drought Prone Area Programme, Tribal Developmental Programme, etc.) which have been created to avoid departmental mentality and to adopt a developmental approach facilitating participation and flexibility have also belied hopes. Manned by the bureaucrats from the departments, they have not been able to follow in practice the management and development-oriented approach. Most projects organisations exist for funding purpose, whereas the line departments that execute work do not like to submit themselves to the discipline of project organisation.⁷⁰

Many experts have found the cases of leakages in the sense of benefits from target to non-target group and from target area to non-target area.⁷¹ The accent is on higher expenditure, not on the result, and on making more enquiries and devising procedures without "understanding of the implication of programme."⁴⁵

Therefore, the solution is to go for simplicity in rules and procedures, but with sincerity, in which case, even regular departments can do better and avoid financial extravagance, to a significant extent. On the question of being more participatory and flexible also, these project organizations have not been appreciated that much. For example, Pachauri, in an admirable essay on monitoring rural development, observes; "there is non-availability of managerial skills at the field level in formulating programmes. It is done at the whims and fancies of the local officer and no systematic attempt is made to get to the roots of the problem."⁷²

C. THE OFFICIAL-NON-OFFICIAL RELATIONSHIP - THE OTHER DIMENSION OF COORDINATION

The Official-Non-Official relationship is a very sensitive and ticklish issue in Development Administration. It is often pointed out that the political elements injected through the Panchayati Raj institutions have helped in the politicization of bureaucracy. As Kuldeep Mathur has observed, "development in a country like India, is marked by disagreements, clashes, violence and other political battles in which bureaucracy is one of the

actors and therefore its role becomes politicized." ⁷³

The issue of Official - Non-official relationship has been so sensitive and controversial that contradictory reports abound. The Bongirwar Committee gives the encouraging picture of the relationship which is harmonious giving way to enthusiasm and even helping in inculcating sincerity in the development process. ⁷⁴ The Vyas Committee, on the other hand, concluded that "the role of the officials and non-officials is sometimes overlapping" and "there have been instances of tension over matters like postings, transfers, disciplinary control of services, and even the use of jeep." ⁷⁵ There are studies pointing out that bureaucrats have felt "a sense of injured pride, loss of power and prestige." ⁷⁶

Srivastava summarizes the unsatisfactory state of affairs as explained by various scholars as follows :

- "(i) they are considered to be part of the natural process in a period of transition;
- (ii) evolution of administrative and political roles in isolation from each other;
- (iii) defects in organisational pattern and lack of clarity in the demarcation of the two sets of functionaries;
- (iv) excessive politicisation of non-officials and interference in routine administrative matters;
and
- (v) lack of mutual cooperation and trust." ⁷⁷

The politico-administrative part of the development administration is only one among myriad of relations which develop in organisational functions. According to Amal Ray, the "political and the administrative part" were expected to supplement one another and "function in a temper of mutual trust and goodwill" but, interactions between the 'elected' and 'administrative' do not occur "within the framework of specified operational boundaries and built in ground rules."⁷⁸ This, according to him, is due to the lack of clarity between function of deliberation and the function of execution. The issue is still important as a set 'pattern and habit' in organisational relation between the two has not evolved yet.

IV. Communication : The communication system in any organisational structure is the heart of the organisational structure which transmits fresh blood to the body. In case of the matrix organisation such as, the Block, or even the District level organisations for rural development with a politico-administrative-structure, the flow of communication to all directions become a necessary condition. But the presence of mostly authoritative, one-way, top-down or down-the-line communication in India's rural development administration is one of the serious problems. The process of rural development requires an extensive feedback system for understanding the perception of not only the lower level staff but also of the people. This cannot be achieved by down the line communication with a tall hierarchical structure, where decision is routed through several intermediaries with too many relay points

resulting in delay, distortions, overlapping and short-circuiting of message.⁷⁹

In our politico-administrative and matrix set up, mutual understanding in the organisational working is highly needed, which can never be possible with down the line communication, as it does not take into account the psychology of the receiver i.e. whether the receiver is receptive to the message sent, is never appreciated.⁸⁰

Amal Ray has found in his study that the frequently used methods of formal communication such as 'written messages' are "time-consuming and inimical to efficient work" but these are preferred by the staff on the ground of 'self-protection' and "documentary evidence" because in the "present government organisation there is no or little mutual trust."⁸¹ This study also found communication between the field units at Taluk Level lengthy, cumbersome and slow in which any problem between "the field unit of a different department.... is sorted out through what is known as 'proper channel' techniques" i.e. "the lateral communication between authorities at Taluk level begins only after some problem is routed upwards through the totality of command channels in the field organisation of the two or more departments involved."⁸²

The same method is applied for intra-departmental vertical communication and in the absence of a "regular mechanism for upward communication, no specific task is set for the taluk-level field officer to transmit to the higher officials their perception of field situation and job difficulties."⁸³

U.G. Chidyal has highlighted a new dimension of the communication problem arising due to the politico-administrative structure in rural development administration. He points out that in view of the politicisation of development administration, the system of communication has become concealed, indirect and unidentifiable due to constantly operating indivisible sources of authority.⁸⁴

Thus, the "line of command is quite frequently disturbed by direct and quite often, invisible channels of communication between the political executives and their satellites, the permanent executives and their hierarchy and technical experts and their coterie of kindred souls."⁸⁵ Therefore, the field functionaries are forced to seek patronage of higher level authorities and comply with their orders by means of informal contacts for survival. It is not that informal communication method is inimical to rural development, but the invisible manner in which it takes place is not desirable. The open system is advocated, therefore, which, by loosening rigidity, will do away with such concealed way of doing things and become more participatory. The shortening of the communication channels and effective decentralisation and participation of not only lower level staff but also of political popular element is the urgent need for rural development.

V. Decentralisation and Participation : Decentralisation and participation are the most important issues of rural development administration. Decentralisation is usually considered to take four major structural forms - decentration within central government, delegation to locally elected units outside the central government, delegation to agencies distinct from the central government, ^

government and privatisation involving non-governmental agencies and structures.⁸⁰

The present trend towards decentralisation is a way of increasing the effectiveness of rural development programmes by making them more relevant and responsive to the local needs and conditions, allowing greater flexibility in their implementation and providing a means of coordinating the various agencies involved at the local level. Despite being reckoned, these virtues of new trend are far from being actualised in India.

a. Centralised Rural Development Administration : The system is so centralised that the process of carrying "details down along hierarchy of command" is there, which "maximises the possibilities of disputes and suspicion as well as the probability that local variations in need will be ignored."⁸⁷ Instead of devolving or delegating power to locally elected unit or the field organisation, the field organisation has been made to look "to sanctions and approvals upward almost at every step which is frustrating for the field administration and dysfunctional for the activities in progress on the ground."⁸⁸ This is due to the "dichotomy between status and task" in the system in which "tasks are pushed down to the lower operational levels, authority rests with the higher echelons."⁸⁹ Most of the time, the district is left with little or no decision-making powers...." since a major portion of the district outlays are apportioned among the line departments who make the decision at the state level about their district wise allocation."⁹⁰ The centralisation has been so strong that the term 'policy' now a days

embraces, "even the minute matters of detail, such as, transfers and postings of B.D.O.s or the allotment of cars or scooters."⁹¹

b. Administration and Rural Organisation : The Administrative system which is imbued with an authoritative centralised culture is hardly expected to foster decentralisation and participation not only to its lower echelons, but also to people's organisation. Therefore, the functionaries in higher and lower levels have been found behaving in a "die-hard bureaucratic, wooden-headed manner."⁹²

In spite of the recommendation of the Administrative Reform Commission to hand over all the aspects of agriculture development (excluding those of state and national importance) to Zilla Parishads, very negligible roles have been given to them in most of the states with some exceptions.⁹³ Many schemes involving substantial expenditure are either not transferred to Panchayat bodies or are being taken away from them on the pretext of requirement of high technical knowledge.⁹⁴

E. THE STATE AND THE PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS :

I. The role of the State has not been very conducive to the development of Panchayati Raj Institutions as viable developmental agencies and also as effective means of local self-government. From the time of the submission of the Report of the Balwant Rai Mehta Team, many states have not taken up these Institutions seriously. The Panchayati Raj Institutions were neither allowed to function effectively, nor were they given adequate powers and autonomy. These Institutions were starved of financial resources

and by-passed on many occasions, where special-purpose agencies were created to undertake development programmes.

As has been revealed by the CAARD Report, 1985, it is only a few states in the country like Maharashtra, Gujrat Jammu and Kashmir, U.P., Karnataka, and lately, West Bengal, which have made some progress in this direction. . . . but even in these states. . . . the real planning functions have not percolated to the district level, nor have Panchayati Raj Institutions been involved in the process."⁹⁵

This situation has led to the formation of two Committees at about the same time by the Government of India. These Committees have given contradictory reports on conferring power to Panchayati bodies and on their role as development and planning agency. The Dantwalla Committee⁹⁶ followed the technocratic approach and was against the idea of the delegation of planning and development responsibilities to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This, the Committee, pointed out, was due to the fact that Panchayati Raj acts as a 'gate-keeper' and prevents the benefit of development from flowing to the weaker sections. The Committee felt that, the elites dominated these bodies. This Committee was also against bringing down planning responsibility to the block level and favoured the district for this purpose on the ground of technical requirements. On the other hand, the Asoka Mehta Committee set up by the Janata Government in 1977 supported decentralization and delegation of developmental responsibilities to Panchayat bodies. It regarded 'political will' as an important element in the development process. The Committee was of the view that elite

dominance would go away slowly as the democratic process will help the weaker section to be more assertive since they are numerically in a majority. The important question raised by the Committee was that no fair trial had ever been given to Panchayati Raj Institutions in the development process. It should be given a fair chance to prove itself.⁹⁷ The Committee was not prepared to view the Panchayati Raj as a god that failed and pointed out its role in making the average citizen politically conscious involving him in development process and generating a new leadership which was modernist and pro-social change in outlook. The Committee recommended a two-tier system of the Panchayati Raj and favoured the district as a unit of planning for development. The L.M. Singhvi Report also conceptualised the Panchayati Raj as self governing institutions and wants these institutions to be closely involved in planning and implementation of rural development at lower levels. The Singhvi Committee recommended that village Panchayats should be made viable and suggested integrating administrative structures with the Panchayat institutions. This Committee also suggested Constitutional recognition to these institutions. Fortunately, the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1993, has provided for the constitutional protection to these institutions. The Act extends the system of Panchayati Raj all over the country and it is mandatory for the State Government to Constitute them at all the three levels.

II. Panchayati Raj Institutions - the Instrument of Political and Administrative Decentralisation : The importance of Panchayati Raj Institutions as units of local self-government is recognised throughout, yet its role as an instrument of development is debated. Those who refuse to accept these institutions as an administrative machinery point out that coordination and management are purely administrative problems and these institutions having political thrust can never act as a management tool. Such sharp distinctions between administrative and political functions at the local level of development administration is not accepted by the more enlightened view, such as :

"at the local level of Local government, the exercise of plenary powers of the government does not arise. Local government can, therefore, be considered far closer to being an administrative structure as well. . . . it would be more correct to say that, Panchayati Raj is development administration plus a political component; the elected functionaries manning Panchayati Raj bodies brought into being and shuffled through democratic processes, have, beside their stipulated administrative responsibilities, a distinct political role and contribution flowing therefrom."⁹⁸

Exactly this line of thinking is reflected in the CAARD Report which opines that the "political decentralisation would allow the forward-looking mass-oriented and dedicated elements in society to turn political democracy at the local level

into instruments of furthering economic democracy not of buttressing status-quo but of transforming the rural economy and society in the desired direction through harnessing of political energy and productive capabilities of the common goal."⁹⁹ Thus, the Committee recommended that steps should be taken to develop substantial and effective power to democratically constituted level of local governance that is concerned with the determination and implementation of rural development programmes. In other words, Panchayati Raj Institutions should be "activised both to provide a forum for the resolution of objectives, conflicts of interest and a technical organisation for planning and administration, that is, capable of formulating development plans (in consultation with other government entities), and of carrying them into practice."¹⁰⁰ Along with this, the Committee wanted to diversify the base of Panchayat Institutions in order to check the power of the rich and to allow the effective involvement of a variety of classes and interests.

III. Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Development : Uphoff and Esman, Johnston and Clark, Shelton Wanasinghe, M. Shivian, A.R. Desai, Iqbal Narain and a host of other scholars agree that local organisations can play a very effective role in the development process by performing functions of planning and goal-setting, resource-mobilisation, provision of services, integration of services, control of administration and making of claims. In the absence of any other viable local organisation in our country, it is the Panchayati Raj Institutions which can take up these functions effectively. Given a fair chance, it can provide

flexibility and relevance to the development plans, thus give solution to the problems of linkage which is so much needed in IRD. It has been confirmed by a study of 16 Asian Countries that countries where local organisations have reached the people, are accountable to the people with effective roles in rural development; the results have been far better in the accomplishment of objectives of rural development compared to those countries which lacked all such organisational base.¹⁰¹

The increasing need of the participatory thrust and equity considerations and the failure of percolation theory or trickle-down approach demands a wider perspective in development thinking and planning. The need, therefore, as Iqbal Narain points out, is to build "development conscience which does not occur in vacuum or overnight." It requires development-oriented leadership if such consciousness is to percolate down to the masses.¹⁰² He argues that Panchayati Raj can be of great help in "inculcating aspirations, building up of attitudes and development of forward-looking and action-oriented bent of mind. . . . which ultimately constitute. . . . the developmental conscience."¹⁴³

Shiviah, the leading exponent of Panchayati Raj Institutions, argued that the "degree of universalism, impartiality and rationality is very less in the Indian bureaucracy even at the higher central and state levels" which is worse in the grass-root levels where the "power structure is heavily loaded against the poorer and ritually 'low' castes."¹⁰⁴ The bureaucrats,

according to him, are only marginally better than non-officials in respect of parochial caste and other loyalties. To bridge this empathic gap, a structural innovation like Panchayati Raj is very useful. In a prismatic society, loosening of the 'rigidity' of the lower bureaucracy through democratic structural inputs is necessary for social and economic development. Panchayati Raj can serve to bridge both "the structural and empathic gap to a significant extent."¹⁰⁵

It is widely recognised that an 'elitist bias' in distribution and an 'elitist premise' of development bureaucracy in India negate the gains of respectable economic growth. The Panchayati Raj Institutions can help in correcting such biases through democratisation and participatory process which result in 'shuffling of elite', as is evident from some States where Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes have improved their representation and there is a marked shift of leadership "towards a younger, more energetic, better educated and relatively lower income groups."¹⁰⁶

F. THE TASK AHEAD

Rural Development is a complex and a gigantic task of social transformation in its entirety to bring economic prosperity and viability, social justice, freedom and equality in rural India. The Indian development model which is regarded as unique and unprecedented anywhere has the four basic pursuits :

"(i) national integration of an enormously intricate and diverse social structure

(ii) economic development for raising the standard of living of people whose income levels had remained stagnant or had declined over a century

(iii) social equality in a society that for centuries has been based on the principle of inequality and stratification

(iv) political democracy in a culture that had evolved authority based on status, hierarchy and concentration of power in the hands of small elite."¹⁰⁷

According to S.K.Rao, the three elements of "production, quality of life and human resource development". . . . could be aided by reorienting administrative system which are "regarded as generative of transformation into a modern society".¹⁰⁸

Therefore, the need of the hour is for the reorientation and modification of the buresucracy into the 'humanistic participatory' one in which the bureaucrat is "more wheeling dealing, less adhering to administrative norms, less attached to importance of hierarchy and seniority."¹⁰⁹

The task ahead is difficult but not impossible. What is important, "is to listen, keep our eyes close to the ground, find solutions by finding new ways of looking at problems and above all ask questions that are correct and relevant with reference to wisdom that has always existed among our people."¹¹⁰

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