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AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH  
COMMUNITY ACTION:  
SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

by

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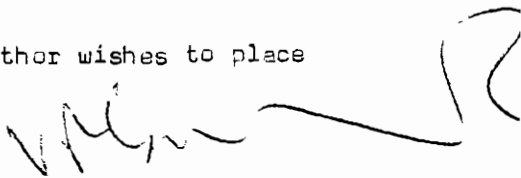
ABSTRACT (within 250 words)

The purpose of this paper is to generate discussion on certain basic issues pertaining scope and limitations of community actions for agricultural development. For this purpose a sociological-historical-cultural approach has been followed keeping in mind the two roles of agricultural development, viz., production of food with the optimum utilization of human energy and other resources and socio-economic transformation.

Various components of the environment that affect community participation in agricultural development are analysed. Community participation is influenced by the structure and organization of the community. These in turn are influenced by the nature of the technology used. This paper examines the close interrelationship between agricultural technology and social structure, organization, and processes. The interaction of four major components of the environment, viz., land-man ratio, nature of traditional agricultural technology, law of inheritance, and joint family system is analysed. This is followed by an analysis of micro-level realities covering the spatial distribution of settlements, pattern of land ownership, and pattern of social interaction. At the end, some suggestions are given keeping in mind the demands and constraints of the environment.

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to generate discussion on certain basic issues pertaining to agricultural development. While raising certain issues in the paper I have made generalizations. The paper also contains some naive assumptions outside my own field of specialization. In contemporary India past and present are closely intertwined and exist together. Patterns of behaviour in this vast pluralist society are extremely complex. I have tried to use a sociological-historical-cultural approach to illustrate these. Due to tremendous variations in the socio-cultural pattern and agro-ecological conditions it was difficult to provide localized data. This paper therefore abounds in generalizations and footnotes. My attempt was to glean the basic issues from these generalizations.

I am grateful to the Indian Council for Social Science Research for giving me this opportunity to organize my many scattered thoughts. I am also grateful to Prof. V.S. Vyas, Prof. Shreekant Sambrani and many of my colleagues at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, who gave their valuable time to discuss the various aspects covered in this paper. A special word of thanks is due to Dr D.D. Rarule, Director, ICSSR, who very patiently tolerated the delay in submission of this paper, yet never failed to send his fortnightly reminders.

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AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH  
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I. Introduction

The primary purpose of agriculture is to provide food to satisfy hunger and to ensure optimum mental and physical output by members for the benefit of society.<sup>1</sup> All societies have evolved systems of collective and organized utilization of their energies for the collection and production of food. With the development of their reasoning power, human beings have supplemented their own energies with the potential energies of other living beings and of organic and inorganic matters. They have also evolved technologies to reduce the unpleasant attributes of work, for the better utilization of their as well as other forms of energies, and to increase the productivity of resources available to them. Agriculture can be described as a collective and organized utilization of human and other forms of energies for the collection and production of food with the help of certain technologies and inputs for the satisfaction of hunger.<sup>2</sup>

The three key interacting and interlocking parameters of agriculture considered in this paper are land, human organization, and technology. The task of agricultural development is to plan and operationalize these interlocking parameters to achieve the primary objective of satisfaction of hunger at a minimum cost of human energy and natural resources.

By the very nature of its task, agricultural development is constantly concerned with the survival of not only the present generation but also future generations. As such, it has to be dynamic and perceptive.

Agricultural development has another important role to play in society. It is a powerful instrument for socio-economic transformation. Since it is concerned with the most crucial aspect of human life, its tremendous power can be used for modernizing traditional society. By the deliberate manipulation of forces operating on and generated by agricultural development, major changes can be effected in social and economic stratification, social mobility, and the overall culture of society.

The two rules of agricultural development, viz., production of food with the optimum utilization of human energy and other resources and socio-economic transformation may sometimes seem conflicting.<sup>3</sup> Efforts to use agricultural development as an instrument of social transformation could in initial stages lead to ineffective and inefficient use of resources and technologies and consequently to a high cost of production. Similarly, efforts to evolve most scientific, rational, and economic methods of production could accentuate social inequalities, economic disparities, and social tensions and conflicts. The dual objectives of agricultural development create uncertainties, confusion, and difficulties in decision making at all levels, in all institutions and agencies, and in all agricultural development programmes. How to achieve both the objectives is the perpetual problem. What should be the optimum, judicious mix of actions at a given level of development and in a given socio-political environment? How should the effect of one over the other be controlled? How should actions pertaining to both the objectives in terms of time and space be scheduled? These are the crucial areas of concern that have to be kept constantly in mind if both the objectives of agricultural development have to be achieved.

In the last two decades India has taken various steps to achieve both the objectives of agricultural development. Through various land reform measures it has tried to improve the land-men relationship. It has made efforts and is continuing to do so to bring about a more equitable distribution of land. It has introduced special programmes and special agencies to look after the interests of the weaker sections and the backward and underdeveloped regions. Simultaneously, it has built excellent research institutions to improve the quality of agricultural technology and various inputs. It has also developed an industrial production base to supply machines and new inputs for agriculture. It has taken various steps to improve the efficiency of the existing agencies and to develop suitable organizations for extending knowledge of modern technology and for supplying credit and other inputs to farmers.

To what extent these efforts helped in achieving the twin objectives of agricultural development is the moot question. Agricultural production has no doubt gone up considerably due to these efforts<sup>4</sup>. However, it is common knowledge that in spite of these efforts, the absolute number of people below the poverty line is just as large as it was two decades ago. Those people living in abject poverty constitute between two-fifths and one-half of all Indian citizens<sup>5</sup>. The hunger of a large mass of people is not fully satisfied. Malnutrition is rampant and India continues to be deficient not only in calories but also in protein.

Most of these observations are well-known and extensively documented. Similarly, reasons for this state of affairs have been extensively searched. In fact, our knowledge level pertaining to problems of agricultural development, especially involving the millions of poor peasants,

has reached a plateau. The burden of the findings, as I reported in my earlier paper<sup>6</sup>, and as has been reported by others<sup>7</sup>, in general, is:

1. Existing credit institutions have failed to provide credit and other facilities to the poor peasants.
2. Land reforms have failed to bring about an equitable and just distribution of land, especially to make more land available to the weaker sections.
3. Powerful vested interests often tend to monopolize credit and other facilities even when these are meant for the weaker sections.

rural leadership is essentially power oriented. Rural leaders generally come from the upper strata of the rural society. The "elite approach" to development mainly helped this class of people.

5. The administrative machinery is still insulated from the common masses. Used to handling law and order situations, it shows little understanding of the problems and processes involved in economic and social modernization of society.
6. With democratic decentralization, officials are under constant pressure from local political leaders, not all of whom are necessarily imbued with the spirit of social service and social justice. In many instances, complete dependence of officials on local politicians has been observed.

It is heartening to note that many Indian social scientists and technologists are now ready to face the discomfort of thinking about social issues which they somehow ignored in the past<sup>8</sup>. Agricultural technologists are constantly discovering that various social issues determine the effectiveness and efficiencies of new technologies. Swaminathan would like the economically sound technological package to be backed up by an appropriate programme of service and public policies, particularly in the areas of land reform and institutional structure at the village level. He recommends community nurseries for raising good nurseries of appropriate varieties and for timely transplanting by all farmers. For pest control he would like co-operative action on the part of the entire village community<sup>9</sup>. He observes:

Unless all farmers in a water-shed area cooperate and initiate group action, it is difficult to achieve striking advances in water harvesting in dry farming areas and water-use efficiency in irrigated and high rainfall areas. The social infrastructure for group endeavour is missing in most areas<sup>10</sup>.



Shenoy would like to redraw the ownership boundaries because "contour bunds have not strictly followed contour lines"<sup>11</sup>. Swaminathan, in a way, summarizes these concerns when he observes:

Given the necessary technology, inputs and public policy, it has become increasingly clear that two basic needs have to be met for achieving substantial and sustained progress in agriculture. One is an understanding of the basic aspects of biological productivity among the community as a whole; the other is cooperative management of certain production and post-harvest operations by groups of farmers with small holdings<sup>12</sup>.

In short, it is increasingly realized today that the existing public policy, the traditional land reform approach, the growth of agencies and institutions, and modern technology have influenced overall agricultural development only to a limited extent. It is also realized that the potential of agricultural development as an instrument of socio-economic transformation has not been fully utilized. The country has not been able to develop "social infrastructure for group endeavour", or "cooperative management of production aspects," while political elites demand "reorganization and restructuring of rural life"<sup>13</sup>.

In this paper, an attempt is made to analyse various components of the environment that affect community participation in agricultural development. Community participation is influenced by the structure and organization of the community. These in turn are influenced by the nature of the technology used. This paper examines the close inter-relationship between agricultural technology and social structure, organization, and processes. In contemporary India past and present are closely intertwined and exist together. As such, it is essential to examine the present environment in the historical perspective. Section II of the paper examines the interaction of four major components of the environment, viz., land-man ratio, nature of traditional agricultural technology, law of inheritance, and joint family system. This is followed by an analysis of micro-level realities covering the spatial distribution of settlements, pattern of land ownership, and pattern of social interaction. At the end, some suggestions are given keeping in mind the demands and constraints of the environment.

## II. ENVIRONMENT-I : Technology and Society

### Historical Perspective

Many social scientists and administrators have made an attempt to examine the complex interaction between the social structure and land control in India.<sup>14</sup> There are, however, few studies which examine the nature of traditional agricultural technology and the law of inheritance, and their implications for the social structure and land control. Historically, the land-man ratio, the nature of traditional agricultural technology, and the law of inheritance have materially affected the Indian social structure, social processes and culture. The discussion in this section covers these aspects of the environment. Due to limited historical evidence available on these aspects, the discussion is general in nature.

In India farming became a way of life since ancient times. The shift from the pastoral, nomadic, food gathering, and hunting life to settled agriculture was brought about by the invention and diffusion of various agricultural technologies and practices. The new technologies required the support of services for various tasks to be performed. These supportive services became, over a period of time, specialized functions. The social organization responded to the demand of the then new agricultural technologies by evolving new value systems, social structures, and social processes. The evolution of the traditional system of the four varna into complex functional division, as reflected in the multi-caste structure of Indian society, could possibly be traced back to the demand of agriculture. Various specialized, functional divisions were in many ways geared to the need of farming and farmer<sup>15</sup>. Bataille observes, "Caste has been particularly important in the social system centering around agricultural production, especially the control and use of land"<sup>16</sup>.

The early settlers on the Indian sub-continent slowly spread over the entire country, and over centuries evolved and patronized these food varieties which were most suitable to the agro-ecological conditions of the settlement. Indian farmers on their own developed and cultivated a vast variety of crops which differed in taste, shape, size, yield, responsiveness to soil, and suitability to climatic conditions. These characteristics got genetically fixed due to continuous, selective in-breeding over a long period of time. Along with this, people of each agro-ecological region, and often of each settlement, evolved their own culture and way of life, food habits, socio-religious customs, rituals, and economic and political structures. Over a period of time, the social customs became established, developed a momentum of their own, and often did not change in changing circumstances<sup>17</sup>. The tremendous variations in the cultural patterns of Indian society could be considered to be primarily due to the tremendous variations in its agriculture. Over a period of time the social system became extremely complex, which as Spencer pointed out long back happens to any social phenomenon<sup>18</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, the three interrelated key factors that affected the Indian social structure, social processes, and culture are: a) land-man ratio, b) nature of traditional agricultural tasks and technology, and c) law of inheritance. The interrelationship of these factors is examined in the following paragraphs.

### Land-Man Ratio

Over centuries India's population increased considerably due to natural growth, invasions, and immigration<sup>19</sup>. During this period there was little or no migration from India<sup>20</sup>. Increase in population resulted in a progressively increasing demand for food. Additional food requirements could be satisfied by increased productivity and/or by bringing more acreage under cultivation. Indian farmers in the past tried to increase food production primarily by cutting down forests and bringing more and more land under cultivation. They also made efforts to get assured irrigation by developing water resources as obvious from the large number of centuries old tanks, small dams, and canal systems which dot the country<sup>21</sup>. However, the primary purpose of developing the water resources was to bring more land under cultivation. As Blyn observes, "Acreage expansion was the predominant means of obtaining increased output till recently"<sup>22</sup>.

The abundance of suitable land resources for farming had four major influences on Indian agriculture, viz., a) overall indifference or outright hostility to flesh food, b) continuous heavy dependence on forests for fuel, construction material; household goods and implements, c) recycling of organic waste matter for keeping the fertility of the soil, and d) continuity of traditional agricultural technologies and practices.

Indian society has traditionally emphasized the importance of agriculture and of the agriculturists. Ethical values propounded by the Brahmins went very well with the needs of the farming community who joined hands with them to undermine the importance of animals as a source of food. This is in contrast to what happened in almost all Western societies. While foodgrain production was emphasized, production of flesh food was, by and large, underrated. The influence of these values was so overriding that those associated with the collection and production of flesh food were given a low status and rank in the Indian social structure. (It is worth noting that the need for flesh food is so deep-rooted in all human societies that even after centuries of teaching of brahminical values, an overwhelming majority of the Indian population is today ready to eat meat and fish<sup>23</sup>). They were considered to be in "polluting" professions. Thus, the concept of pollution and purity pervaded even into the production and economic spheres. Technology for processing of animal by-products could not sufficiently develop in the society. The prescription of low status and rank to those dealing with flesh food and animal byproducts could be considered a

control mechanism evolved by religious leaders and supported by the farming community because such activities on the one hand did not materially help them, and on the other would have undermined their dominant position in society.

Since forest resources were plenty, the population's need of fuel and construction material, household goods and implements, could be satisfied easily. Animal waste like cowdung and other organic waste matter was therefore used to maintain soil fertility; these wastes would have otherwise been used for fuel. Due to the abundance of cheap and conveniently available fuel, no need was felt for searching for alternate energy sources such as coal. The same was the case with metals. Even though iron smelting was done since long (recent archaeological findings indicate that iron smelting was done as far back as 1100 BC in India), its use was limited mainly to weapons and small implements. Since little use was made of iron and other metals in the construction of houses and implements, mining did not develop as a major economic activity. In other words, since no need was felt, no conscious efforts were made to discover and use fossil fuels and metals<sup>24</sup>. Similarly, no need was felt to evolve technologies for the conservation of forests, and land resources. When soil lost its fertility due to overuse or erosion, it was economical to abandon it and bring new land under cultivation. The abandoned land was left to nature for regeneration.

Traditional agricultural technology and production practices were applied to new areas brought under cultivation. Since these could provide the needed food, no need was felt for innovating new technologies and practices. "The plough appears to have retained its form since the Vedic times with minor modifications in its parts according to the genius of the people of the different provinces"<sup>25</sup>. The continuous use of traditional technologies and practices had far-reaching effects on the socio-economic system; these are discussed in the following section.

#### Nature of Tasks, Technology, and Practices

The tasks associated with agriculture were simple in that they could be performed by the direct application of human energy in its primary, raw form, and with the help of simple tools and implements. They were routine in nature since they could be performed by regular, mechanical actions or movements of the human body, and of the animals used for the purposes. The performance of these tasks did not involve complex, mathematical calculations and logical deductions. Generation after generation of farmers in a given agro-ecological area used a plough of the same design, ploughed perhaps the same piece of land, in the same fashion, to the same depth, sowed the same variety of seed at the same depth, in the same period, harvested the crop by the same tools and implements, in the same fashion, in the same period, and stored the grains in the same fashion, in containers of the same design.

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Under such an environment, actions and decisions were standardized, and passed on with little variation from one generation to the next. The nature of certain uncertainties like rains, pest attacks, and diseases was such that there were no viable alternatives available. In the absence of viable alternatives no decisions leading to actions could be taken. The only alternative was to woo the god by offering prayers and to wait patiently for conditions to improve.

The implications of the simple technology were many<sup>26</sup>:

1. There was little uncertainty about the availability of tools, implements, inputs, and services. Knowledge about designing, producing, methods of operation, and practices was easily available in the settlement. Whenever necessary, modifications were made in designs. However, the basic principles underlying the technology and the raw material for the production of implements remained unchanged.
2. The technology and practices could be easily transferred or adopted by all and by subsequent generations. The technology was such that agriculture did not require any formal education and use of higher order mental faculties. It could be the occupation of millions of common, illiterate, human beings.
3. Since agricultural technology and practices could be followed generation after generation without any major modifications, there was no pressure on the community to change its value and belief systems and culture.
4. Since agriculture could be routinized, it did not require the application of higher mental faculties. Hence, the status and rank of those practising farming remained either static or was always below those whose work involved the use of higher mental energies<sup>27</sup>.
5. Simple technologies required simple service support from a small number of people. This also put a sort of limit, in terms of spatial coverage, on the production units directly controlled by an individual farmer. This resulted in the formation of small settlements. As more and more areas were brought under cultivation a large number of small settlements sprang up and dotted the country. This spread of small settlements was decided generally by the availability of land and forest resources, facilities like water, and accessibility. Their size was decided primarily by the supportive services required by the farmers. Since various services were required by the farmers, and since a particular service was provided by a particular caste or sub-caste, each settlement either became a multi-caste village, or was located in such a manner that services were available in nearby villages.

### Law of Inheritance and Division of Property

To understand the pattern of land ownership it is necessary to see the interaction of a) the law of inheritance encouraging the division of property which consequently determines the investment capacity of an individual and his family, b) the integrative role of the joint family, c) land resource availability, and d) economic opportunities outside agriculture.

The law of inheritance deeply influences the socio-economic fabric of society. Traditionally, to an Indian, a family means a joint family. Under the traditional Hindu law of inheritance, sons enjoyed equal rights in the joint family property. This law supported the continuous division of property, i.e., capital assets built up by a family. It also made each son legally and morally responsible for the liabilities incurred by the karta of the Hindu joint family. From time immemorial families built up capital assets which were ultimately divided among sons, if not in one generation, then in the second or third generation. In turn, each son ultimately became the head of a joint family.

While the law of inheritance encouraged the division of property, the joint family, which is a unique institution, operated as an integrating mechanism. The assets built up by a family could be most effectively and efficiently utilized so long as the family remained joint. Collectively owned capital assets and the manpower of the family could further increase its capital base. More land could be brought under cultivation, or more land could be added to the family holding. In fact, a family generally remained joint so long as it continued to maintain or increase the per capita income and provided the same or a better standard of living to members even after additions to the family. A mere increase in income was not sufficient to keep the family joint. It was necessary that its economic activities be of such nature and order that they continue to provide economically meaningful, and socially and psychologically satisfying work to each additional member of the family. The failure of a joint family to satisfy these conditioning gave rise to conflict between father and son, brother and brother, uncle and nephew, between cousins and so on. From time immemorial such conflicts were common.

When conflicts arose, when a member(s) forgot his (their) sense of obligation to the family, the law of inheritance helped in the division of property in "mites and bound". It provided each member with an equal capital base and an equal opportunity to develop himself by using his own initiative, drive, and judgement.

In an agrarian society the institution of the joint family and the law of inheritance could operate in harmony so long as the land resources were abundant. Under traditional agriculture an individual could increase his income and total savings only by acquiring more and more land. An enterprising individual could always increase his land

holding by occupying and cultivating virgin land or by purchasing land from others. However, with land becoming scarce due to the increase in population, an individual could increase his landholding only at the expense of others. Also, due to the increased scarcity of land, it was difficult for an individual to build up his land assets fast.

The increase in population and the law of inheritance joined hands to fasten the division of properties leading to a tremendous increase in fragmented holdings. Since technology was constant, productivity of land also remained constant. This low productivity combined with small holdings made it difficult for an individual to collect sufficient savings in his life time to acquire more land. Within a generation or so whatever land was inherited by such a family was further divided among copartners who ultimately lost it under difficult conditions, thus adding to the number of landless labour. In such a social environment only feudal landlords and money lenders could prosper.

It is interesting what the farmers generally have to say about an individual's capacity to increase his landholding. Under traditional, subsistence agriculture, they say, no owner-cultivator can double his land holding in his life time even after making all possible effort, even if he eschews all vices and luxuries, and even when his family remains joint. A cultivator family can increase its landholding only under two conditions: a) when the family remains joint for at least three generations, and b) when the family has only one son in each generation for three consecutive generations. It is said that the fortune of a farmer is like a sheep's tail; it can flicker only a few inches this way or that. Most of the cultivator families with large landholdings were able to increase their holdings to this size due to one of the two conditions mentioned above. Other large landholders who themselves were not cultivators became large landowners due to a) the feudal system such as iqirdari and zamindari, b) forceful occupation of land, and c) money lending.

The generations long hard effort required to build up landholdings is mainly responsible for the extreme emotional attachment which farming families have for their land. It is constantly imbibed in the minds of new members of the family how earlier generations' collective, hard labour and pious living had built the landholding, the fruits of which they were enjoying. It is constantly emphasized that it is their moral obligation to follow the example of their ancestors and add to the family landholding. These families are an example of ideal behaviour to the rest of the community. It is while dealing with such families that land reforms create a deep resentment and generate the greatest overt or covert resistance. The resentment is not because land reforms challenge the ownership right. It is because people perceive that the reforms disregard the generations long honest effort it took to build the landholdings. Land reforms hurt the sensitivity of the masses since they challenge the deep-rooted ideals and the ideal behavioural pattern cherished and supported by society for centuries in a given socio-technical environment. Abolition of feudal estates, iqirdari, and zamindari could be achieved relatively smoothly.



The real resistance to land reforms, and the most painful experience for the society in terms of loss of and confusion about cherished ideals and ideal patterns of behaviour, begins when the real cultivator families who have built up their large landholdings after generations of efforts are challenged. Questions of moral and ethical values surface at this juncture making it more difficult to take hard decisions.

Since capital assets are built up by a joint family over generations, mostly by the labour of its own family members, the prosperity of a family can not be often linked with the contribution made by other members of the community at a point of time. It is the difference between the ~~perceptions and perspectives~~ of members of a family (whose members have built up land assets over generations) and those of other members of the community (whose perceptions and perspectives are often limited to a given point of time) and the state that leads to conflict in society.

A society which believes in peaceful social transformation has to evolve mechanisms by which emotional disturbances generated in the process of transformation at a time are not so intense as to create revolt. In this context loopholes in land reforms served a useful purpose since they provided an opportunity to families to make adjustments to the changing circumstances, thus minimizing the pain and the possibility of a resistance to change. This phase is more or less over, and society is ready for further changes.

As already mentioned, increase in population, continuous breaking up of joint families, and the law of inheritance resulted in greater fragmentation and reduction in the size of holdings. Due to the lack of economic opportunities outside agriculture, farmers clung to their small holdings as long as possible. However, with the low productivity of land due to the use of traditional technology it was often not possible for the farmers to fulfil their family obligations such as expenses on marriage. Sickness and marriages forced many farmers to sell their holdings, often piece by piece, to other farmers or money lenders. Since this process continued for long, the number of landless labour continued to increase.

Conflict in joint families created many problems. Litigations increased resulting in a greater pressure on the judiciary machinery. A greater struggle for survival led to more conflicts, greater tensions, factionalism, and general social tension. Uncertainties about the share in the property and litigation in the courts affected the family members' desire and capacity to invest in agriculture. Agriculture suffered, which in turn further affected the economic condition of the family. One can argue that the root of social tension could be the disharmony and dissatisfaction at the primary unit level of the society, namely, the joint family, whose prosperity has been traditionally linked with land.

In short, the law of inheritance, the joint family system, and traditional technology which worked in harmony in the past could not cope with the slowly increasing pressure of the changing environment whose basic components are increasing population, scarce land resources, and limited opportunities outside agriculture.

### III. Environment-II : Micro-Level Realities

This section examines the following aspects of contemporary, micro-level realities:

1. Spatial distribution of settlements and its implications on agricultural development.
2. Pattern of land ownership.
3. Social structure, social processes, and patterns of social behaviour.

#### Spatial Distribution of Settlements

By and large, rural settlements have never been a product of planned efforts. Only in recent years have planned, deliberate efforts been made to organize rural settlements in some order in the East European countries, Russia, and China. Historically, in India, the locale of rural settlements has been governed by topography and the geography of the land. The entire growth of these settlements has been completely unplanned, uncontrolled, and organic. The implications of this unplanned, uncontrolled, organic growth of rural settlements are many.

Firstly, there are tremendous variations in the spatial distribution of the population. We have villages with a few households to villages with thousands of households. Similarly, per capita availability of land and other natural resources varies from village to village. Due to these reasons, often a village settlement is not an appropriate unit even for administrative purposes.

Secondly, over a period of time, with the growth of the population in each settlement the original relationship between the land resources and the population has undergone drastic changes. Today, practically each settlement is burdened with a large number of unemployed and partially employed persons. Man without land is a common feature of these settlements.

Thirdly, it is practically impossible to provide all services and all facilities to each of these settlements. The organizational and managerial problems and cost involved in achieving these are stupendous. Even after more than a hundred years of district administration, a large number of villages are today considered remote and inaccessible by the government functionaries.

### Changing Pattern of Land Ownership

Agrarian reforms after independence have materially affected the pattern of land ownership in India. In 1964, Kutovsky pointed out that the feudal elements in agriculture had shrunk considerably and that the chief type of landlord in the Indian village was no longer the feudal type zamindar, or absentee jaqindar<sup>28</sup>. In the last 10 years the removal of the feudal elements from the agricultural scene has been more or less completed. In the transition period most of the land owned by the feudal elements was transferred to their kith and kin each having land within the prescribed ceiling. In the early period of change, most of these kith and kin were only the de jure owners of land, while the de facto control was exercised by the original owner. However, this stage could not last long. The original owner's interest in the land did not remain. He and his family received the "message" and knew that the process was irreversible. By dividing and distributing the land he was only buying time to adjust himself and his children to the changing environment. Critics of the slow process of land reforms and of the loopholes in land laws often do not realize that these serve a definite purpose, and are needed for peaceful transformations and changes in the social stratification in society. All changes of this type are painful to those whose interests and social status is hurt. Resistance to change is minimized if opportunities for adjustment are provided. Loopholes in land laws gave the necessary time for adjustment to the feudal elements. It was a pragmatic approach. It also helped society to keep its social conscience clear. India was able to remove the feudal element without much tension and any bloodshed.

The pattern of landownership changed considerably after the feudal elements transferred land to their kith and kin. In connection with such land, two dominant processes were observed. These were:

- 1 The relatives who already had other occupation and means of livelihood were not interested in the land per se. They considered their share of land as a piece of property which due to their lack of interest and poor management did not give attractive returns. Most of them sold their share of land generally after the demise of the original owner.
- 2 Those relatives who had no other skills and occupation became owner cultivators. Along with their land they also looked after the share of other members who did not sell their share of land purely for non-economic reasons like emotional attachment to land and for maintaining social relations with other members. Such support from other members was essential to the new owner-cultivator for otherwise it would not be possible for him to keep in the family, and maintain, large capital assets like a large house, godowns, machinery and equipments, and cattle built up by the original owner. Today,

in most villages, we find such owner-cultivators who management their own shares as well the share of other members of the original family. (For convenience, these cultivator families are henceforth called "residual feudal families.")

The total land managed by such a cultivator is large, and as such he is often treated as a rich land owner. However, to consider him rich would be misleading because in reality the land he manages is owned by many others. These farmers generally do not take much interest in local affairs nor do they participate in local institutions. Partly due to their status and partly because they are well off they do not even take loans from co-operative and other institutions. Initially due to over enthusiasm or ignorance, some of them made heavy investments in agriculture, which did not give much financial returns. Now they have become rather cautious about any further investment in agriculture. Their background, their better economic conditions, and their urban contacts enables these residual feudal families to give better education to their children. Due to the better opportunities and the higher standard of living available in urban areas and also due to pressure from other share holders of land, many of them are likely to sell the land and migrate to urban areas in the near future. Thus, within a generation, the last remnant of feudal families and their control on land will vanish from villages.

The second and the most crucial category of farming families in villages today is formed by those who were comparatively better off when jagirdari and zamindari were abolished. These families who are hard working, intelligent owner-cultivators, have a real stake in agriculture. Most of the land sold by the feudal landlords and by their relatives to whom the land was transferred was purchased by these comparatively better off farming families. This purchase of land by middle and upper middle cultivators in the last decade or so is likely to be reflected in any statistics on land distribution where one can expect a bulge in the middle and upper middle categories. By and large, these families belong to the dominant caste of the region. Most of these families are joint families. In these joint families the component members and their families live together. The land is already divided among members to satisfy the Land Ceiling Act and the land is managed by the head of the family in consultation with other adult members. Thus, a joint family with a somewhat different ethos is emerging on the rural scene; in this joint family the share of each member is already clearly demarcated, yet the members live and work together. The control of the entire enterprise is in one hand, yet the traditional authority of the head is being slowly replaced by a greater degree of consultation among adult members.

Slow, defective land reforms gave time to feudal elements to make adjustments to change. These also helped the already better-off farmers, mostly belonging to dominant castes, to increase their holdings and build up their assets. Thus, while in other socialist countries like the East European countries and China the ownership pattern shifted from the feudal elements to co-operative farming and state farming, in India, it shifted from feudal elements to cultivator-owner joint families which have deep roots in the villages. If there is no state intervention two processes are likely to affect the socio-economic condition of these joint families. A joint family which owns the maximum permissible acreage will not be able to acquire more land until there are new additions to the family. It will be able to increase its landholdings by purchasing land from other farming families who would in turn become medium or small holders, or even landless. In case no land is available for purchase in the village, the joint family would break and the land would be divided and fragmented. The latter is a greater possibility; the existing owner-cultivator joint families would break within a generation thus increasing the number of landholders having land less than that allowed by the Land Ceiling Act. Due to the increase in population and fewer opportunities outside agriculture, there would be pressures even to bring down the land ceiling.

As mentioned earlier, strong resistance to further land reforms is not likely to come from the residual feudal families but from the second category of owner-cultivator joint families belonging to dominant castes. This is not peculiar to India. There is evidence that East European countries, China, and Viet Nam faced a similar problem. Contrary to common belief, these countries have not physically liquidated this class of the farming population; they have shown great patience and tolerance towards them. For example, in Hungary and other East European countries families from this class were slowly brought under co-operative farming where their traditional status and position underwent slow transformation. The tolerance shown towards upper middle peasant by the pragmatic Chinese leadership can be understood from the following quotation from Mao Tse Tung:

The leading bodies in co-operatives must establish the dominant position of the poor peasants and the new lower middle peasants in these bodies, with the old lower middle peasants and the upper middle peasants whether old or new - as the supplementary force. Only thus can unity between the poor and middle peasants be attained, the cooperatives be consolidated, production be expanded and the socialist transformation of the entire country-side by correctly accomplished in accordance with the party's policy.<sup>29</sup>

In general, the residual feudal families and the dominant farming families covering about 40 per cent of the population control nearly 70 to 80 per cent of the land in villages. The remaining 60 per cent of the population survives on the remaining 20 to 30 per cent of the land. Some of them are medium sized and small landholders while most are landless. The average family size of dominant farming families is larger than that of the other three categories. Most of the farming families of the first two categories belong to the high castes and/or dominant castes of the region. However, in villages where low castes are numerically dominant, three or four joint families of the low caste control a major share of land.

Most of the small farms are less efficient, on the whole, than the large farms with regard to the use of production factors. Vyas observes that the input-output ratios and their returns on investment are unfavourable as compared with those obtaining on large farms. According to him:

The extremely limited land base of the small farms is probably the principal reason for the lower productivity of their fixed factors, i.e., family labour and their own draught animals, but their greatest handicap seems to be the lack of ready cash and the limited access to institutional credit.<sup>30</sup>

Generally, agricultural labour (whom I prefer to call unemployed persons) in a village can be categorized into: a) those who do not own any land, b) those who do own some land, but also work as agricultural labour on other farmers' farms, and c) those who belong to households owning some land, but work exclusively on other farmers' farms. The third category covers close relatives such as the brothers and sons of a cultivator, for whom there is not sufficient work on the family farm. Generally, about 40 per cent of the rural households are agricultural labour. Most of them belong to low castes and scheduled castes and tribes.

#### Social Structure, Processes, and Behaviour

An Indian village generally has a small, composite population consisting of a number of groups belonging to different castes, and in some cases, to different tribes as well as different religions. It is well-known that a village settlement is highly stratified with extreme differences in status among groups due to the existence of the institution of caste. The manifestation of the caste system is very clear. It determines the socio-religious, political and economic sub-systems in the settlement.

Certain relevant observations from numerous studies on the Indian village community are mentioned below:

- 1 A villager's nearest neighbours tend to be agnates or

affinal kin. The larger circle of neighbours mostly consist of fellow caste men. Most of the intercourse of an individual is confined to kin groups. Intergroup intercourse is regulated by the caste code.<sup>31</sup>

- 2 Caste and kinship still form the core of the village organization. They split the village into separate communities which have close affiliations across village lines. A community in the sense of a cohesive and united village community hardly exists.<sup>32</sup>
- 3 By and large, there is a correspondence between the economic strata and the social strata.
- 4 Boundaries of kin and caste are transcended in types of interdependence entailed by economic relationships.
- 5 Economic interdependence does not seem to imply social interaction like hospitality on a footing of equality.
- 6 Social distance is far wider than physical distance between the different classes of people who constitute the population of local communities. Social strata are so rigid that even most local gossip does not cross class boundaries. Even discussion between leaders of different class groups in the community is governed by custom, sometimes even by regulations....Participation in total community action is directed and regulated by traditionally established divisions of labour between the highly stratified sub-groups which constitute the village social organizations. Anything approaching reciprocal communication between persons is within not between groups.<sup>33</sup>
- 7 Sociometric studies indicate that in a community there are a large number of isolates or non-communicators and a small number of influentials or key communicators. Interpersonal communication is generally confined to sociometric sub-groups or cliques, although communication outside one's clique is not totally absent.<sup>34</sup>
- 8 Homophilic interaction patterns of a village cause new ideas to spread horizontally within the village to others of high status and the innovation trickles down very slowly and indirectly to peasants from a lower status.<sup>35</sup>

- 9 Village factions are primarily kinship groupings which carry on important social, economic, and ceremonial functions in addition to their factional struggles against one another.<sup>36</sup> The factions balance the power distribution in the community with the result that there is no total domination of any caste or individual over other castes or individuals.<sup>37</sup>
- 10 Under the jaimani system, each caste group within a village is expected to give certain standardized services to the families of other castes. A major function of the jaimani system is to assure a stable labour supply for the dominant agricultural caste in a particular region by limiting the mobility of the lower castes, especially those who assist in agricultural work.<sup>38</sup>
- 11 The leadership structure is such that those who are traditional wielders of power tend to retain it by traditional and non-traditional means, by exercising direct or indirect control over economic, political, and socio-cultural institutions, and by their political linkages at higher levels.
- 12 Leadership functions in micro-politics have crystallized into three distinct types of roles - the arbitrator - mediator role, the patron role, and the broker role.<sup>39</sup>
- 13 Village level functionaries, elected leaders, and village influentials, often work hand in hand as "gate keepers". They decide what information, when, and in what form, should reach the ignorant, poor section of the people. They also decide who should be benefitted and who should not be benefitted.
- 14 Socio-cultural norms are such that no individual, howsoever economically and socially powerful he might be, can affect a significant change in the lives of other members of the community. No deliberate effort is made by any leader to change the behaviour of other persons. In fact, there is no motivation for a leader to make such an effort since there is no reward for such efforts. The total community or the small groups within the community generally do not have common development oriented goals before them. Thus, the community has no shared direction towards which it can move. Since economic or development oriented goals for the community as a whole do not exist, there is nothing towards which an individual can lead the group. In this sense, there is nothing like a leadership role that someone can be expected to perform.<sup>40</sup>



- 15 Social norms are such that leaders are not expected to go around the village informing people about the latest technology or programmes. In a sense, interpersonal communication between leaders and followers is only unidirectional. Unless people ask, leaders do not transfer knowledge. Even if leaders do not communicate the latest knowledge to their followers, their leadership position is not affected.
- 16 Improvement of the self and not necessarily of the community is the main consideration of the people in position of power, and this is accepted by the others. Adoption of new technology is an individual exercise and not a group activity. No leader considers it his responsibility to make the community aware of the package of new practices and to influence it to adopt this package. Such responsibility will involve ~~providing services~~ and facilities to members of the community. Few can provide these, and those in the village who are in a position to do so, will not do so due to the existence of factions. This explains why no individual in the community can think of common goals and exercise interpersonal influence towards the attainment of such goals.
- 17 One of the distinct morphological features of these settlements is the castewise segregation and physical distances maintained within even a small settlement.<sup>41</sup> Even in a nucleated village where dwellings are closely clustered, there are sub-clusters of each caste. Generally, each sub-cluster is separated from the adjoining one by lanes and open spaces. The dwellings of low castes and untouchables are generally situated away from the settlement or on its boundaries. Spatial isolation is often absolute in the sense that persons especially of the higher caste do not enter the locality of low castes and untouchables. In his study of a South Indian village, Beteille observes that most of the Brahmin residents had never seen the inside of the Cheri, i.e., the residential area inhabited by the Adi-Dravidas, although they had lived in the village all their life and the Cheri was at a distance of only about a hundred yards from their street.<sup>42</sup>
- 18 Inter-caste marriages are not looked upon with favour. Marriage implies intimate, social, physical, and sexual contacts. Such contacts are not considered polluting in marriages within the caste. Similarly, people prefer to eat with members of their caste and to be members of a hukka group composed of people from their own caste. These activities also involve physical proximity between members, though not to the same degree as called for by marriage. Other activities which involve members of other castes, but which call for very little physical proximity are more acceptable. Hence, people do not mind people from other castes visiting their house if they stay outside the houses or living as neighbours, nor do they mind employing them as labour.

The broad generalizations given above raise some very crucial questions. Can a village settlement operate as a community for economic development? Can it exercise any sanctions against those who do not join community action? What would be the nature of such sanctions? From where can the people living in a village derive power to exercise such sanctions? If the state does not intervene, can the people living in a settlement generate powerful social authority by themselves and exercise control over the behaviour of the people for common benefit? These issues are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Theoretically, in any settlement, the social authority has two types of maintenance tasks, one which primarily governs the economic role relationships, and the other which primarily governs the role relationships pertaining to socio-cultural affairs. There is some evidence that in Indian village settlements when the economic security or interest of the entire settlement is threatened by a group, the action of social authority is swift, united, and sharp. On the other hand, if deviations from norms pertaining to economic role relations affect only an individual's interests, the action of social authority is somewhat slow, non-conclusive, and even ineffective. Thus, when economic interests of two individuals clash the social authority or social conscience is neutral; it neither favours or disfavors any party. It leaves the individuals to themselves to defend their economic interests. In other words, an individual may exploit others without evoking sanctions from the social authority and without affecting his social status. One may say that the economic behaviour of a person in a village is not subject to sanctions by other persons in the settlement. For economic relations the village ceases to be a community having common interests and shared norms. It is only for non-economic relations that the village is likely to behave like a community. This explains why no individual in the village can think of common economic goals and exercises interpersonal influence towards the attainment of such goals. This complete delinking of economic behaviour from non-economic behaviour creates a major obstacle for community action for economic development.

It must be emphasized here that even for non-economic relationships the social authority exercises only limited control on the individual. This is mainly due to two reasons. These are:

1. In a close system physical proximity and generation links leave very little privacy for an individual. As many things have to be socially shared there are likely to be few secrets among members of a settlement. Such a situation is bound to create tremendous psychological pressure on an individual since it constantly encroaches on his identity. As a reaction to such a social pressure he is likely to strive for a (and over the generations will have a built-in) hard core of certain traits which is not exposed to others, is not accessible to others, and which is not socially shareable. This hard core of certain traits, which becomes an integral part of the value system, is respected by the social authority, and gives an identity to the individual.

- This individual identity leads to individual interests which often come in way of organized, community actions.
2. A village is not an isolated entity. Two distinct patterns of social interaction are available in a village to individual members of the settlement....one which is within the physical and social boundaries of the village, and the other which is beyond the village. There are two distinct social circles, one the friendship circle within the village, which is primarily caste based, and the other the kin-based social circle which covers affinal and consanguinal relatives scattered over a large number of villages. Generally, the kin-based social circle is larger than the friendship circle within the village boundaries. In a village, the caste structure does not allow the exercise of any choice to individual members of the settlement. That is why the friendship circle in a village settlement is based on caste which exercises regulatory and maintenance functions mainly through rituals. Thus, in a village settlement there is no voluntary organization which can function without the age old traditional rituals practised by each caste. The kin-based organization provides a channel to dissipate the possible tension generated by the social authority working within the boundaries of the village, and shields an individual from such authority. Thus, the village settlement does not create a rigid social boundary for an individual. In other words, physical and social boundaries are not co-terminous. Over a period of time, the social authority "learns by experience" that it cannot exercise lasting sanctions, and the system thus develops norms whereby extreme controls cannot be exercised over the individual. In this sense, the identity of an individual remains absolute, and to that extent the village does not have a community in a social sense.

To sum up, this analysis indicates that conceptually it is inappropriate to apply the concept of community to a village, especially for the purpose of economic development. Only in a most superficial sense is the village a community. The economic behaviour of a person in the Indian village is not subject to sanctions by others. As such for economic relationships the village ceases to be a community having common interests and shared norms. Furthermore, the kin-based organization stretching far beyond the village provides a shelter for the individual from the social authority within the village. As such, even for the modernization of other social behaviour, the village does not provide a social boundary within which social pressures for change can be exercised on an individual. As observed earlier, due to tremendous variations in population and the haphazard location of settlements, a village is not a convenient physical unit even for administrative purposes. Considering these, it is clear that the village cannot be an effective unit for agricultural development and for socio-economic and political modernization of the Indian society. An interest oriented, politico-economic organization, cutting across village and caste boundaries will alone be effective organization for modernizing agriculture.

has made impressive progress in the industrial sector because it has built large organizations for exploiting natural resources. Similar large production organizations have not been built in the agricultural sector.

It has to be realized that if agriculture is a business or a profession, the owner-manager of a piece of land, as in all other professions, has a responsibility to society as a whole. He should enjoy the freedom derived by him as an independent owner to the extent he does not abuse it either knowingly or due to ignorance. In the changing circumstances, the concept that agriculture is an individual oriented activity and that only the individual owner can take correct, timely decisions, and hence, do as he pleases, is no more tenable. To accept it purely due to traditional, conservative, value orientations, and due to vague ideas about the real nature of agricultural technology and practices and about the decisions required in agricultural production at the farm level would be dangerous and detrimental to agricultural development in the long run. A concept appropriate in a given demographic-socio-technological-resource environment needs to be redefined and modified when the environment is no more the same.

It has long been recognized by Indian planners that "The basic condition for increase in agricultural production is increase in the unit of management of land." Agricultural technologists further support this important and unexceptional proposition when they suggest "co-operative and community action" for agricultural development. Alternative that are available to increase the unit of management of land are: a) removal of all restrictions on the ownership of land by private cultivators which would result in large piece of privately owned land as in USA, b) nationalization of land and formation of large units as state farms, c) corporate farming under collective ownership, and d) joint co-operative farming under as in socialist countries. The first alternative is not feasible in India. A mix of the remaining three alternatives can alone provide a large unit of management of land under Indian conditions.

The existing social organization and structure of Indian villages can neither fulfil the demand of new technology nor help in the removal of the age-old socio-economic inequalities. Micro-level realities, in terms of patterns of social and economic behaviour of the people, clearly indicate that in a village there is little scope for co-operative community action. It is futile to talk about co-operative village management. This is because of a) highly skewed land distribution (with a large number of small farmers and landless families) which is detrimental to the development of common economic interests, and b) acute social stratification based on caste (with members of each caste maintaining a social distance from those of other castes) which is detrimental to the development of voluntary groups. Under such circumstances, interest oriented, politico-economic organizations cutting across village and caste boundaries will alone be effective in modernizing agriculture.

It is inherent in the nature of a goal and interest oriented organization to generate within itself pressures for reducing differences among members. Such an organization would help in the removal of the age-old social inequalities. In the agricultural sector such organizations would be state farms, joint co-operative farms, and collective farms. As Nehru observed long back, "But there is no escape from some form of co-operative cultivation, if we are to make agriculture progressive."<sup>43</sup>

Efforts to reorganize individual production units in the co-operative framework need to be planned carefully keeping in mind once again the micro-level realities. The reorganization has to be done with great patience and in stages since a co-operative production enterprise requires great social and emotional adjustment. The transformation process has to be such that it gives sufficient time to the various categories of cultivators for social, emotional, and economic adjustment, as was done during the abolition of feudal landlords. For this, India has to evolve its own methods and approaches because of the presence of two unique institutions in India society, viz., the joint family and the caste system. Any action which ignores the powerful forces generated by these two institutions is bound to meet with great resistance. Even in socialist countries actions on this front were introduced with great patience and in stages.

As mentioned earlier, in Indian villages there are two categories of rich farming families. One category consists of those families which became owner-cultivators after the abolition of feudal landlords. At that time, pieces of land were transferred to close relatives and members of the original joint family, each having land below the land ceiling. Such pieces of land while owned by many are managed by one or two closely related families on behalf of the rest of the owners. In a way, this is a co-operative venture, with two marked characteristics, viz., the owners are close relatives and the number of absentee landlords is large. The entire land is treated as one farm and managed generally by a single family. However, any major decision pertaining to investment is taken by the managing family in consultation with other owners. By and large, many of these residual feudal families have no major interest in agriculture. It is merely a passing phase for many. Within a generation, this category of rich farming families would sell the land and vanish from the scene due to law of inheritance, better investment and occupational opportunities outside agriculture, dissatisfaction with the returns on capital invested, differences regarding the share of each owner, conflict among relatives, and so on.

The second and the more crucial category of farmers consists of those farming families which were comparatively better off at the time of abolition of jagirdari, zamindari, and malqazari. These families purchased land sold by the feudal landlords and their relatives. Today, most of them are large, joint families. These families have a real

stake in agriculture. Generally, they are the best cultivators in village. They dominate the village scene, control local institutions, and wield great power. They are always on the look out for more land. By and large, small farmers are very cautious while dealing with them. They generally belong to the dominant agricultural caste of the region. While they are progressive in agriculture, they can be extremely traditional in the socio-cultural sphere and are often hostile towards the low castes. Few small farmers, even of the same caste, would like to join these families in any co-operative venture. This category of farmers would form co-operative farming societies consisting of their own family members, mainly to get the advantage of any incentives provided by the government.

It is clear from the above that the first major efforts for developing co-operative farms have to be concentrated on the small and marginal farmers and the landless labourers belonging mainly to the low castes. Here again, in most cases, a village cannot be the unit of operation for building a viable co-operative farm. It would be necessary to consolidate the land belonging to small holders scattered in a number of villages. For building a consolidated farm with continuous boundaries government help would be needed in acquiring suitable pieces of land to fill the gaps. As far as possible members of such co-operative farms should belong to a single caste or to those castes which maintain a low degree of social distance among themselves. Over a period of time such co-operative farms should build their own settlements.

To start with, such co-operative farms would be generally small in size due to the small landholdings of the members. It would be necessary to progressively increase the land base of such co-operatives. This could be achieved in the following ways:

1. All land reclaimed in future and all surplus land available in the village as well as bhoddan land should be transferred to these co-operatives as the share of landless families. Care has to be taken that such land do not go to co-operative farms of second category of farmers.
2. In case such surplus or reclaimed land is not conveniently located it should either be exchanged for suitable land, or sold to private owners and from the sale money suitable land should be purchased or acquired for the co-operatives.

3. Co-operatives of small farmers and landless labourers should have the first option to buy any piece of land offered for sale by any private cultivator. There should not be any bilateral transaction of land, except perhaps among close relatives such as brothers, sons, uncles, and nephews. In the absence of a co-operative society the land should be purchased by the government and given on lease to landless or small holders. After sufficient land is thus acquired, a co-operative should be formed. Control on the bilateral transaction of land would indirectly limit the size of land controlled by the second category of farmers, i.e., the large landholders.

In this form of co-operatives, ownership of all resources such as land, draught animals, and implements could be private. The co-operative would be managed by an elected committee with the help of a trained farm manager provided by the government. All members would be paid rent by the co-operative for the land given to the co-operative for use. In fact, an attractive rent system would encourage many farmers of the first category and absentee landlords, who are not able to manage their land efficiently, to join the co-operative. The members would also get rent for the draught animals and implements given to the co-operative for use. The rent rates should be progressively reduced. In addition to rent, the members would get wages according to the labour days of work they put-in. Each member should also be entitled to a small piece of land the size depending on his family size for his family's private use such as for growing vegetables and fruits as well as for poultry, piggery, and so on.

The advantage of such co-operative farms would be multi-fold:

1. Due to the large size of the farm, there would be a more efficient utilization of resources available with the small holders.
2. The burden on extension, credit, and other input supply agencies would be considerably reduced, since these agencies would be required to contact fewer production units.
3. Due to the consolidation of land there would be little wastage of land. Also, better land and water management techniques, pest control methods, etc., would be adopted.
4. Small farmers would be saved from the clutches of rich farmers.

5. Over a period of time working together in an economic organization is likely to help in the reduction of the social distance maintained by various caste groups, especially those belonging to lower castes.

The main problems in building such co-operatives are given below:

1. It will be difficult to convince small holders belonging to different castes to form a co-operative.
2. Well trained, efficient farm managers will have to be found
3. The process of change will be slow since even if all the small holders join such co-operatives, not more than 20 to 30 per cent of the total cultivated land can be brought under co-operative farming.

The first would be the most difficult problem; the farmers will need a great deal of persuasion. The second problem can be overcome by proper selection and training and by building up a cadre of co-operative farm managers. As regards the third observation, the process of change would be slow to start with. However, with the breaking of joint families and with suitable controls on the bilateral transaction of land more and more land will come under co-operative farming.

In India, in 1973, there were 4,844 joint farming societies and 4,610 collective farming societies. Of the 9,454 societies in total, 1,976 were making profit, 2,487 were making a loss, and 4,991 were making neither profit nor loss. The members of these societies numbered 2,54,980, of which 86,159 were landholders, 1,40,219 were agricultural labourers, and 30,602 belonged to other groups. These societies commanded 5,07,513 hectares of land of which 3,55,345 hectares were under cultivation.<sup>44</sup> The growth of co-operative farming is slow. The last 15 years of experience show that the voluntary approach has not been very effective due to the lack of concerted efforts to remove the rural population's fear, born out of ignorance about co-operative farming. Simultaneous orientation and state intervention is necessary for building of the co-operative farming sector. For this, the following package of actions is essential:

1. Orientation of political leaders, key persons at the village level, administrators, and the farming population, so that they can appreciate the need for co-operative farming, and so that their fear born out of ignorance can be overcome.



2. Orientation of the private sector, especially the input supply agencies, so as to convince them of the usefulness of large units of management of land in the co-operative form, so that they come forward to help small farmers build such farms. A similar orientation should be given to voluntary agencies.
3. Preparation of land settlement maps on a crash basis for the demarcation and consolidation of land belonging to small and marginal farmers, government land, bhoodan land, any other surplus land, and land to be reclaimed. This would lead to the demarcation of land for co-operative farms with the identification of gaps.
4. Setting blockwise and yearwise targets for forming co-operative farms.
5. Placing restrictions on the bilateral transaction of land, except among close relatives and making financial arrangements for the purchase of land by the co-operatives or the state on behalf of small farmers and landless labourers.
6. Progressive concentration of funds and services earmarked for rural development and social welfare activities primarily on co-operative farms. Progressive reduction of the power and functions of the existing gram panchayats and the transfer of these to co-operative farms. In short, a progressive shift of focus from the traditional village as a unit of development and administration to a co-operative farm.
7. Progressive concentration of activities of multi-purpose and other service co-operatives on co-operative farms so that eventually the lowest tier of service co-operatives and other institutions would be co-terminus with the co-operative farm.

India has invested many precious years in experimenting with the community development approach and the area approach covering such programmes as IADP, ICDP, DPAP, Command Area, and so on. Both these approaches have had limited success. These and similar approaches sponsored and supported by Western countries have kept many good brains of this country so busy that they have little time and energy to devote to recognise and work out the solution of the fundamental problems in agricultural sector. The primary task before the country is to bring the large mass of the rural population under economic, interest-oriented organizations so that there is optimum human resource development and utilization. Increase in the unit of management of land in the form of co-operative or collective farming could serve this purpose. Unless the country takes steps in this direction in right earnest it will become

increasing difficult to achieve the twin objectives of agricultural development, viz., high productivity and removal of social inequality.

### Footnotes and References

- <sup>1</sup>The importance of food and of satisfying hunger is very beautifully expressed in the Taittiriya Upanishad where the teacher asks the pupil to pledge himself. He says:

Thou shalt not spurn food:

That is the First Pledge.

For, life is food, and the body the eater thereof,  
In life alone rests the body, and the body in life,  
And, food, therefore, in food.

Thou shalt not forswear food:

That is the Second Pledge.

Thou shalt grow food in plenty:

That is the Third Pledge.

For, the Earth is food,

And Akash enveloping it, is the eater thereof.

Thou shalt not turn away the hungry from your home:

That is the Fourth Pledge.

Food, therefore, shall thou grow,  
By all and every means.

(As referred to by K.M. Munshi, "Transforming Life," Our Greatest Need and Other Addresses (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1953), pp. 225-6.

- <sup>2</sup>If the primary purpose of agriculture is to satisfy hunger, it follows that the collection and production of other products which do not directly or indirectly satisfy hunger are of secondary importance. In such cases it is merely the extension of methods of agriculture for the satisfaction of some other human needs.

- <sup>3</sup>Mrydal does not regard the twin goals of economic growth and economic equality as conflicting. He argues why greater equality in underdeveloped countries is almost a condition for more rapid growth. He pleads:

1. The usual argument that inequality of income is a condition for saving has much less bearing on conditions in underdeveloped countries, where landlords and other rich people are known to squander their incomes for conspicuous consumption and conspicuous investment.
2. Since large masses of people in underdeveloped countries suffer from under-nutrition, malnutrition, and other serious defects, in their level of living...measures to raise income levels for the masses of people would raise productivity.

3. Social inequality is tied to economic inequality in a mutual relationship.
4. Behind the quest for greater equality is the recognition of the fact that it has an independent value in terms of social justice.

See, Gunnar Myrdal, The Challenge of World Poverty (London: The Penguin Press, 1970), p.68.

- <sup>4</sup> Total foodgrain production was 55 million tonnes in 1951 and 108 million tonnes in 1971.
- <sup>5</sup> V.M. Dandekar and N. Rath, Poverty in India (Poona: Indian School of Political Economy, 1971). See also, B.S. Minhas, "Rural Poverty, Land Redistribution and Development Strategy: Facts and Policy" (Indian Economic Review, April 1970), Vol. V, pp. 97-128.
- <sup>6</sup> V.R. Gaikwad, "Development of Weaker Sections: State Policy and the Need for New Structures and Strategies," Seminar on Rural Development for Weaker Sections (Bombay: Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, 1974), pp. 179-187.
- <sup>7</sup> B.S. Minhas, "Rural Development for Weaker Sections: Experience and Lessons," Seminar on Rural Development for Weaker Sections (Bombay: Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, 1974). p.4.
- <sup>8</sup> Jacoby observes:  

The discomfort of thinking about social issues, combined with the simple attraction of new ways of production, have together induced many economists, and still more politicians, to slide into whole-hearted support for the new technological approach. At times, it seems as if technological fantasies monopolize current economic thinking.

See, E.H. Jacoby, Man and Land: The Fundamental Issues in Development (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1971), p.13.
- <sup>9</sup> M.S. Swaminathan, "A Bumper Harvest," The Illustrated Weekly of India, XCVI, 36 (September 7, 1975), pp. 6-13.
- <sup>10</sup> M.S. Swaminathan, "Forward" in P.V. Shenoy, Agricultural Development in India: A New Strategy in Management (Bombay: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1975), p.IX. Swaminathan also observes:

Horizontal expansion in agriculture needs more investment, while vertical growth primarily needs attention to many small and simple details and cooperative endeavour. (p. x)

- <sup>11</sup> P.V. Shenoy, op. cit., p.3.
- <sup>12</sup> M.S. Swaminathan, "A Bumper Harvest," op. cit., p.13. See also, M.S. Swaminathan, Our Agricultural Future (New Delhi: All India Radio, 1973).
- <sup>13</sup> The Congress President, Mr. D.K. Barooah recently observed:  
 Unless agrarian relations were restructured and rural life reorganized and raised to a higher economic and social level, socialism would remain an urban phenomenon for the vast masses of Indian people.  
 See, The Times of India (September 13, 1975).
- <sup>14</sup> For example, E.H. Jacoby, op. cit.; Grigory Kutovsky, Agrarian Reforms in India (Bombay: People's Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1954), p. 171; R.E. Frykenbery (ed.) Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); E.L. Jones and S.L. Wolf, Agrarian Change and Economic Development: The Historical Problem (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1969); and T.S. Epstein "The Dimensions of Rural Development," T.S. Epstein and D.H. Panny, (ed.), Opportunity and Response: Case Studies in Economic Development (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1972), pp. 241-251.
- <sup>15</sup> I am aware that this is a very simplistic and broad generalization about the extremely complex caste system whose origin is obscure in antiquity. In fact, anything one says about caste can be contradicted. I am, however, drawing heavily from Hutton who in his book Caste in India: Its Nature, Functions and Origin refers to many theories on the subject developed by other scholars. From these, theories it seems that agriculture was an occupation practised even in the pre-Manu period. According to the laws of Manu the work of cultivating was given to the Vaishya Caste (p.149). Hutton refers to the occupational theory of caste advocated by Nesfield who regards occupation as the exclusive basis of caste distinction (p.170). Nesfield's view was supported by Dahlmann according to whom "caste sprang not from the four Varna but from the infinite number of corporations and of groups of relatives into which these four varna were divided. Agriculture was originally the prime factor in the economic life of India, a rival developed in the form of trade and industry, and the principle of division of labour became so important that it became regarded as the duty of the ruler to base his economic policy on the division of labour and distinction of occupations" (p.171). Blunt follows Dahlmann and also accepts Risley's theory that the origin of caste must be sought in the peculiar circumstances of a complex system of society, "a society of classes with a cross-division of guilds" (pp.171-2). Hutton also refers to Gilbert who points out that early Tamil literature refers to different people as inhabiting the

different geographical divisions of the coast, the cultivated lowlands, the pastoral, mountain, and desert areas. He suggests that this ecological differentiation of early groups offers a possible basis for caste differentiation (p.179). See, J.H. Hutton, Caste in India: Its Nature, Function, and Origin (4th edn.; Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1953), Part III, Ch. X & XI.

<sup>16</sup> A. Beteille, Studies in Agrarian Social Structure (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974), p.63.

<sup>17</sup> Wrigley observes:

When any net set of social customs becomes established, it develops a momentum of its own, and may no longer change in changing circumstances. If for many generations young men have married in early manhood this custom may survive into a period when holdings are much harder to acquire. Then either the land holdings will become fragmented, or the landless paupers in the society will multiply.

See, Wrigley, E.A., Population and History (New York: World University Library: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), p. 48.

<sup>18</sup> Spencer observes:

A social organism is like an individual organism in these essential traits; that it grows; that while growing it becomes more complex; that while becoming more complex, its parts require increasing mutual interdependence; that its life is immense in length computed with the lives of its component units ... that in both cases there is increasing integration accompanied by increasing heterogeneity.

See, Herbert Spencer, Autobiography (New York: 1904), Vol. II, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Accurate population figures for the past centuries are not available. Figures that are available are:

	<u>1750</u>	<u>1800</u>	<u>1850</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1950</u>	<u>2000</u>
Population of India and Pakistan	190	195	233	285	434	1269

(in millions).

Source: Durand, Proc. Am. Phil. Soc., (1967), 173, Table 1, as quoted in E.A. Wrigley, Population and History, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>20</sup> In the last four hundred years or so while the Indian population multiplied and, by and large, remained within the boundaries of the sub-continent, the white races of Europe also multiplied but migrated and occupied huge land masses like North and South America, Australia, and parts of Africa. It is interesting to note that between 1750 and 1950 while the Asian population increased from 498 million to 1381 million, i.e., 2.8 times, the total population of the European white races increased from 145 millions to about 735 millions, i.e. five times (the total population of Europe, excluding Russia, North America, South and Central Australia and New Zealand). Ibid; p. 205.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the Kakatiya rulers in the early part of the 13th century for the first time introduced the tank irrigation system on a large scale in an organized manner. There is historical evidence that artificial water channels were used for irrigation in the times of the Rig Veda.

See, Agriculture in Ancient India (New Delhi: Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 1964), p.13.

<sup>22</sup> In his study Agricultural Trends in India, 1891-1947, Blyn observes, "Acreage expansion was the predominant means of obtaining increased output." Its relative importance is indicated by the almost identical (ten-reference decade average) rates of increase of the all crop output (0.37 per cent) and of the all crop acreage (0.40 per cent per year); he however, observed that the expansion rate was slowing down and a turning point in the rate of expansion may be perceived about midway in the 1911-21 decade. Blyn's following analysis is very pertinent:

These findings - widening of cropland area rather than heightening of acre productivity, and slow down in acreage expansion despite accelerated growth in population - conform to what might be expected in a long-settled tradition-dominated country. Raising the level of yield per acre generally involves use of improved technology, though an increase in the proportion of labour to land may also have its effect. Expansion of acreage is often less dependent on change in technology and consequently appears as the more likely means of increased output. Much of the acreage expansion, however, was in dry Western India where construction of large dams made possible by modern technology (and much capital), opened up vast areas to cultivation. The slow down in acreage expansion may be attributed partly to the increasingly inferior quality of the remaining source of additional land and partly to the low geographical mobility of labour which blocked a more intensive seeking-out of the better land among those which were still not cultivated.

See, George Blyn, Agricultural Trends in India, 1891-1947: Output, Availability and Productivity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), pp. 127-8.

23 A recent survey conducted by the National Nutrition Laboratories revealed that about 70 per cent of the Indian population is non-vegetarian. (As reported by Laxmi Narayan in "Where are Those Wonder Foods?" The Economic Times, XII, 183, Sept. 3, 1972), p. 6.

24 For example, coal was discovered in South India about hundred years back when some pilgrims bound for Bhadrachalam halted near Yellaundi. It is said that when they started cooking on an oven improvised from black stones found in the river bed, the stones began burning. Subsequently, prospecting was undertaken in the area and mining began in 1889 which led to the development of the Singareni collieries. (As reported in The Times of India, August 29, 1975, p.6). It is worth noting that India's rural population continues to depend heavily on wood and cowdung for fuel. Extensive use of coal as an alternate fuel has been ignored so far. Most of the coal is utilized for railways, power generation in the organized sector, and for industries. Effect of extensive utilization of coal on the preservation of forests, utilization of cowdung and other organic matter needs to be worked out. Erik Eckholm reports the firewood shortage in developing countries. According to him:

Nine-tenths of the people in most poor countries today depend on fire wood as their chief source of fuel...Fire wood scarcity, then is intimately linked to the food problem facing many countries in two ways - Deforestation and the diversion of manures to use as fuel, are sabotaging the land's ability to produce food.

(As reported in "Fuel Crisis Hits Poorest Too," The Times of India, September 20, 1975).

25 Agriculture in Ancient India, op. cit., p. 35.

26 Wrigley analyses the possible results of successive improvements in material technology in an agricultural society. He says:

It may be that outside Europe, say in India, agricultural societies followed a different path because technological advances in the more recent centuries were less frequent and less important. It may well be also that a distinction should be drawn between what may be called intensive and extensive change in material technology. If a new technique increases the amount of cultivable land at the disposal of the community but without adding to the productive powers of individuals working on the land (extensive change) the effect on the living standards attainable at an optimum level of production will be less than if the change permits one man to produce more from the same area of land (Intensive change).

See, E.A. Wrigley, op. cit., p. 52.

- 27 Every human society has given a higher status and rank to those whose work involve a greater use of mental energies. In fact, it is the work that has status and rank. The status and rank is decided to a great extent, among other things (such as how satisfying a particular work is to human senses and how essential it is for the survival of the group), by the mental-manual ratio of human energy involved in doing that work. Those who do particular work get the status and rank attached to that work. Conflicts in organizations could arise due to differences in the status and rank of the work and the reward that work should get, and the status, rank, and reward given to a person doing that work. The fundamental difference between the capitalist system and the communist system is in linking the status, rank, and reward for work with the status, rank, and reward given to an individual doing that work. The communist ideology not only suggests a delinking of an individual's status and rank from the status and rank of the work, but also suggests a reward system which is independent of the status and rank of the work. This concept is discussed in my forthcoming paper "Work, Organization, and Technology."
- 28 Grigery Kotovsky, op. cit. p. 164
- 29 Mao Tse-Tung, "How Control of the Wutang Co-operative Shifted from the Middle to the Poor Peasants," (1955), The Socialist Unsurge in China's Country-side, (ed.) Vol. II, as quoted in Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung, (Peking: 1967), p. 30.
- 30 V.S.Vyas, "Economic Efficiency of Small Farms of Central Gujarat," Report of the Seminar on the Problems of Small Farmers, Seminar Series No. 7 (Bombay: Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, 1968).
- 31 For generalizations 1, 3, 4, and 5 see, I. Karve and Y.B. Damle, Group Relations in Village Community (Poona: Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, 1963), pp. 71-75.
- 32 U. Lewis, Village Life in Northern India (1st vintage edn., New York: Random House, 1955), p. 148.
- 33 C.C. Taylor, et. al., India's Roots of Democracy (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1965), p.527.
- 34 U. Pareek and Y.P. Singh, "Sociometry and Communication Network in an Indian Village," International Journal of Psychology, III, 3, (1958), pp. 157-165. Also see, L.K. Sen, Opinion Leadership in India: A Study of Inter-Personal Communication in Eight Villages (Hyderabad: National Institute of Community Development, 1969).
- 35 E.M. Rogers, in association with L. Svening, Modernization Among Peasants: The Impact of Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1969), p.235.
- 36 U. Lewis, op. cit. p. 147.



- <sup>37</sup> V.R. Gaikwad; et. al., Opinion Leaders and Communication in Indian Villages (Ahmedabad: Indian Institute of Management, 1972), p. 142.
- <sup>38</sup> O. Lewis, op. cit., pp. 56-57.
- <sup>39</sup> Leela Dube, "Leadership in Community Development and Decentralized Democracy," paper submitted for the International Development Seminar on Community Development and Local Government, East West Centre, 1955, p.12.
- <sup>40</sup> V.R. Gaikwad, et. al., Rural Social Structure and Communication in an Indian Village (Ahmedabad: Indian Institute of Management, 1973), pp. 112-115. Generalizations 15 and 16 are also based on this study.
- <sup>41</sup> G.S. Gosal, "Geography of Rural Settlements: A Trend Report", A Survey of Research in Geography (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1972), p. 190.
- <sup>42</sup> A. Beteille, Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjavur Village (Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1966), p.35.
- <sup>43</sup> Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as quoted by D.R. Gadgil, "Organization of Agricultural Production," A.R. Desai (ed.), Rural Sociology in India (Bombay, Popular Prakasham, 1969), p. 707.
- <sup>44</sup> Reserve Bank of India, Statistical Statements Relating to The Co-operative Movement in India, 1972-3, Part II, Non-Credit Societies, (Bombay: Reserve Bank of India, Agricultural Credit Department, 1975), pp. 136-143.