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*Pacific Affairs*, Volume 44, Issue 3 (Autumn, 1971), 353-367.

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# The Green Revolution and “Economic Man”: Some Lessons for Community Development in South Asia?

Harry W. Blair

ONE OF THE GREAT controversies in the literature of development has revolved around the issue of rationality in the peasant farmer. Is he basically an “economic man,” or is there substantial truth to the image of non-Western man as non-materialistic and other-worldly? It would appear that the “Green Revolution” in much of the underdeveloped world today has resolved this debate, at least in large measure, in favor of “economic man.” At the same time a similar though rather ill-defined argument has been going on about political development at the peasant level. The central issue here is whether or not this peasant is a political analogue of “economic man.” The failure to resolve this question has been a major reason for the unfortunate record that community development has produced thus far.

The present article will focus on this similarity between economic and political development at the village level in South Asia, where the available research on these issues is far greater than for other developing areas. South Asia is also the area where one of the most promising experiments in community development has been attempted—the Comilla project in East Pakistan. This experiment, it will be contended, was promising (at least until the 1971 civil strife) largely because it showed a way to apply the lessons of the Green Revolution to low-level political development and to combine both the economic and the political spheres in a singularly effective manner.\*

What was for many years the accepted view of Indians as a spiritual, other-worldly, and in general non-materialistically oriented people has its intellectual foundation in the works of Max Weber.<sup>1</sup> Weber’s thesis was that (subject to some qualifications) Hinduism inhibited the development of a South Asian counterpart of the “Protestant Ethic” that served as the main-spring of the Industrial Revolution in the West. Even today, some scholars hold to one version or another of the Weberian thesis.<sup>2</sup> Like many of Weber’s

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\* The author would like to thank Dr. Lowell S. Hardin of the Ford Foundation, Dr. Jerome T. French of the Agency for International Development and Dr. Douglas M. Ensminger of the University of Missouri for their very helpful criticism of this article.

<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*. Trans. and ed. by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, K. William Kapp, *Hindu Culture, Economic Development and Economic*

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ideas, however, this one has come under serious criticism in the last twenty years. The main challenger has been Milton Singer, who finds considerable evidence for a materialistic ethic of striving and saving in the Hindu tradition.<sup>3</sup>

In a region where 80 per cent and more of the people are rural, and over 70 per cent of the labor force is engaged in agriculture, this debate must necessarily focus in large measure on the primary sector of the economy. The question, then, becomes directed toward the peasant: is he essentially an other-worldly spiritualist, or is he a profit-maximizing "economic man"?

The most eloquent pleader for the former view has undoubtedly been Kusum Nair, who, not content with uncovering evidence showing farmers to be motivated by mainly non-materialistic goals in India, has done comparative research in Japan and the United States with similar findings. Arguing most vigorously for the opposite view has been Theodore Schultz, who holds that the peasant is indeed a rational profit-maximizer and an "economic man." In his view, traditional agriculture has been organized along extremely rational lines at its given level of technology, and the farmer has welcomed any real chance to increase production and profits.<sup>4</sup>

Partial evidence for one side or the other could be adduced from such spheres as the Indian bovine population,<sup>5</sup> but the question remained essentially unanswered until the last several years, during which the subcontinent underwent what has become widely known as the Green Revolution. By the middle of the 1960's new varieties of wheat and rice were developed, largely under the auspices of the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, that would dramatically increase yields. The most successful of the new high yielding

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*Planning in India* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963); also Guy Hunter, *Modernizing Peasant Societies: A Comparative Study in Asia and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), esp. pp. 36, 55. Gunnar Myrdal is ambiguous on this point in *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (New York: Pantheon, 1968), at one point criticizing stereotypes of other-worldliness (pp. 95-98), while at others seeing religion as an obscurantist force, inimical to development (pp. 89-93, 103-112, 2117 and *passim*).

<sup>3</sup> Milton Singer, "Cultural Values in India's Economic Development," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCCV (May 1956), pp. 81-91. See also Singer *et al.*, "India's Cultural values and Economic Development: A Discussion," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, VII, No. 1 (October 1969), pp. 1-12; his "Religion and Social Change in India: The Max Weber Thesis, Phase Three," *ibid.*, XIV, No. 4 (July 1966), pp. 497-505; and "The Modernization of Religious Beliefs," in Myron Weiner, ed., *Modernization: The Dynamics of Growth* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), pp. 55-67.

<sup>4</sup> Kusum Nair, *Blossoms in the Dust: The Human Factor in Indian Development* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), and *The Lonely Furrow: Farming in the United States, Japan and India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969); also Theodore W. Schultz, *Transforming Traditional Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> See as a Schultsian argument, Marvin Harris, "The Cultural Ecology of India's Sacred Cattle," and comments thereto, *Current Anthropology*, VII, No. 1 (February 1966), pp. 51-66. On the other hand, see V. M. Dandekar, "India's Sacred Cattle and Cultural Ecology," *Economic and Political Weekly*, IV, No. 39 (September 27, 1969), pp. 1559-1566; also a section of Myrdal's book entitled "The Hindu Taboo on Cow Slaughter and Similar Valuation of a Specific Type," *op. cit.*, pp. 89-93.

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varieties (HYV) are the dwarf wheats developed in Mexico and the rice strains evolved in the Philippines and Taiwan. The differences between the HYV and the traditional varieties are many, but most important is the contrasting response to fertilizer. If too much fertilizer were applied to the older crops, the plants would grow so large that they would fall over (lodge) on their weak stems and rot. The newer dwarf varieties have stronger and shorter stems, and will not lodge from similar amounts of fertilizer but instead grow bigger and produce more yield. Thus for the HYV, the costs are greater, in the form of fertilizers, accompanying irrigation, greater care against pests and blights (the new crops are susceptible to insects and diseases that did not affect the older ones), and the increased labor involved in all of these things, but the returns are even greater. In other words, the HYV promised a very high marginal rate of return for the rational farmer.<sup>6</sup>

The governments of both India and Pakistan (after some experimentation) decided to import HYV seeds in substantial quantities and to distribute them to farmers on a large scale. The response was almost immediate. Mexican wheats, which were planted on only 7,400 acres in India in 1966, climbed to over 15,000,000 acres in the 1970 crop season. In Pakistan the increase during the same period was from 12,000 to 7,000,000 acres.<sup>7</sup>

For rice the progress has been substantial, but not as dramatic. Susceptibility to blights such as rice blast and insect pests like the gall midge have held down the rate of introduction somewhat, and there is some indication that the failure thus far to develop a strain equal or nearly equal in quality to taste is involved in the slower acceptance rate.<sup>8</sup> Still, the Indian acreage under Taiwanese and Philippine rice climbed from 150 acres in 1965 to almost 11,000,000 in 1970.<sup>9</sup> Overall, the Green Revolution seemed to be firmly entrenched by the end of the 1960's.

In short, the peasants of South Asia do appear to be rational profit-seekers who will respond to new opportunities. Or at least some of them will. The question of just what proportion of farmers are and will be participating in the Green Revolution is one of the several "second generation" problems already beginning to demand attention. Obviously, many farmers are growing the HYV crops, and more are sure to follow, but there seems to be emerging a pattern of class bias in this participation. While there is evidence that small farmers are just as eager as the bigger ones to join the Green

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<sup>6</sup> The best single account of the Green revolution is probably Lester R. Brown, *Seeds of Change: The Green Revolution and Development in the 1970's* (New York: Praeger, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> Dana G. Dalrymple, *Imports and Plantings of High-Yielding Varieties of Wheat and Rice in the Less Developed Nations* (Washington: Foreign Economic Development Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1971), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> W. David Hopper and Wayne H. Freeman, "From Unsteady Infancy to Vigorous Adolescence: Rice Development," *Economic and Political Weekly*, IV, No. 13 (March 29, 1969), Agriculture Supplement, pp. 17-21; also Robert H. Herdt, "Profitability of High-yielding Wheat and Rice," *ibid.*, IV, No. 52 (December 27, 1969), Agriculture Supplement, pp. 197-200.

<sup>9</sup> Dalrymple, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

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Revolution and that the new technology is just as effective on small plots as on large ones,<sup>10</sup> economies of scale in constructing irrigation facilities, access to credit, inability to withstand the effects of market vagaries and other such considerations tend to favor the larger operators.<sup>11</sup> Peasant farmers may all be "economic men," but not all of them may get the chance to prove it, at least in the near future.

There are two other (and in some areas larger) groups involved that will be even more affected than the small landowners: the tenants and sharecroppers, and the landless agricultural laborers. While the upper classes become richer and the lower landowning communities at least remain at more or less the same level, the tenants are likely to be dispossessed by profit-maximizing landowners seeking economies of HYV scale;<sup>12</sup> the erstwhile tenants and sharecroppers will become additions to the landless class, whose labor is in somewhat greater demand now at the beginning of the Green Revolution, but will likely become redundant as the bigger farmers begin to mechanize. Isolated instances of violence have been reported between these people at the bottom and the landowning entrepreneurs who are benefiting from the HYV,<sup>13</sup> and there will probably be more as the disparity between the two classes increases.

Even if the Green Revolution does become a privilege of the rural elite, the issue of the peasant as "economic man" seems resolved. Those who can do so are taking almost immediate advantage of a workable new technology to maximize agricultural profit.

The economic controversy has long had an analogue, though generally an unrecognized one, in the political sphere. Just as nation-builders and foreign well-wishers worried about how to inculcate a non-Western version of the Protestant Ethic in the nonmaterialistic and other-worldly peasant, so they likewise pondered over how the politically apathetic villager might be induced to cast away his traditional dependence on an authoritarian governmental

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<sup>10</sup> Ralph W. Cummings, Jr. and S. K. Ray, "1968-69 Foodgrain Production: Relative Contribution of Weather and Technology," *Economic and Political Weekly*, IV, No. 39 (September 27, 1969), Agriculture Supplement, pp. 163-174 (at 169-171).

<sup>11</sup> See Wolf Ladejinsky, "Green Revolution in Bihar: The Kosi Area, a Field Trip," *Economic and Political Weekly*, IV, No. 39 (September 27, 1969), Agriculture Supplement, pp. 147-162; also Cummings and Ray, "1968-69 Foodgrains Production," *op. cit.*, p. 170; and C. H. Shah, "Waltair: Fall-out of Green Revolution," *Economic and Political Weekly*, V, No. 2 (January 10, 1970), pp. 42-44.

<sup>12</sup> There are some indications that this is already occurring. See John W. Mellor, "Report on Technological Advance in Indian Agriculture as It Relates to the Distribution of Income" (mimeographed), report prepared for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (December 1969); also Ladejinsky, "Green Revolution in Bihar," *loc. cit.*; Pranab Bardham, "Green Revolution and Agricultural Labourers," *Economic and Political Weekly*, V (Special number, July 1970), pp. 1239-1246.

<sup>13</sup> An incident involving the burning alive of some forty persons in the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras State) has drawn much attention. See *New York Times*, January 15, 1969; André Beteille, "Agrarian Unrest in Tanjore: High Degree of Political Organization," *Times of India* (Bombay edition), September 20, 1969.

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structure and practice the virtues of local self-government. As "economic man" was the innovative profit-maximizer, so "political man" would be the vital, interested, participating villager who would successfully manage his own public affairs at the village level by using the machinery of local self-government—a political maximizer.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of Indian independence, it was thought so essential to institute such structures that an article to that effect was inserted in the Indian Constitution: "Art. 40. The state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of local self-government."<sup>15</sup> There were several motives for this emphasis.<sup>16</sup> First, involvement in the practice of democracy at village level would educate the citizens in the exercise of democratic government at all levels in a country which had enjoyed little democracy under the British. Second, this involvement would also help integrate the citizenry into the new nation as enthusiastic and effective supports.

A third motive concerned the administration of the new country. To change from the conservative "law, order and revenue-collecting" colonial bureaucracy to an administration that would develop and transform the countryside was going to be a Herculean task and one that would be lightened by being passed on in part to the beneficiaries through local self-government. Closely tied in with this was a fourth factor—the whole notion of economic development itself. Any real economic growth would have to involve the villages where over 80 percent of the population lived, and what better way to proceed than to harness the people themselves to the task? Lastly there was the Gandhian ideal of a nation of self-sufficient village republics—a notion with which many disagreed, but toward which most of the founding fathers of the Indian Union felt an obligation to make some concrete gesture.

Central to all this thinking was the idea that, if it were to work, a radical

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<sup>14</sup> The idea of man as a political maximizer is an old one, forming for instance the basic concept upon which the *Leviathan* of Thomas Hobbes is developed. More recently, a "political man" model has been derived from economic theory by Anthony Downs in *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), especially pp. 4-11; see also James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962).

<sup>15</sup> Constitution of India, article 40. This article was one of the "Directive Principles" set forth as (non-justiciable) goals of national development. Local self-government did not, of course, begin only with independence in 1947; for a brief history, see Hugh Tinker, "The Village in the Framework of Development," in Ralph Braibanti and Joseph J. Spengler, eds. *Administration and Economic Development in India* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1963), pp. 94-133.

<sup>16</sup> Granville Austin gives an excellent summary of the thinking on these matters in *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 26-49; see also Reinhard Bendix, *Nation Building and Citizenship: Studies of Our Changing Social Order* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 256-355.

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metamorphosis must take place in the minds of the villagers. The man who had been the hapless victim of an authoritarian chain of command that stretched from Whitehall down through Viceroy, District Collector and petty functionaries like the *tehsildar*, *kanungo* and *patwari* to the village, must now take charge of his own political destiny and get himself and his fellows busy at the work of national development from the bottom up.

The result of all these urges was the Community Development program, launched (on Gandhi's birthday, significantly) in 1952. The first Minister for Community Development described the program's purpose in these words:

India slumbers in her villages—550,000 of them. . . . Sixty million families living in the countryside have to be aroused. They have to be awakened to their obligations to the 'welfare state' we are pledged to build. They have to acquire new knowledge, new ways of working and a will to a fuller and richer life.<sup>17</sup>

The Community Development program was essentially an elaborate extension operation in which a Village Level Worker (VLW) would serve the needs of several villages as a multi-purpose extension agent, backed up by a team of specialists in public health, education, irrigation and civil engineering, animal husbandry and agriculture. These specialists were organized on the basis of blocks, areas comprising 60,000 to 100,000 persons.<sup>18</sup> The program was incredibly ambitious; within a few years the entire country was to be divided up into some 5,000 development blocks, each with a Block Development Officer (BDO) in overall charge, specialist teams, and VLW's.

Community Development, though rapidly expanded over most of the country, did not prove to be the immediate success that its initiators had hoped. At length it was decided that the root of the trouble (in addition to inadequate financing and insufficient and untrained personnel) was political. The program had become chiefly an administrative one, concerned with fulfilling administrative targets (schools built, canals constructed, etc.) but not connected in any real way with the people who were supposedly being mobilized for and participating in development.<sup>19</sup>

The solution would be to bring the Community Development administrators under popular control, which would be done with a series of elective

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<sup>17</sup> S. K. Dey, "Towards a New Destiny," in Government of India, Ministry of Development and Cooperation, *Kurukshetra: A Symposium*, rev. ed. (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1961), pp. 9-14. A very good synopsis and analysis of the Community Development rhetoric is found in Bendix, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-338.

<sup>18</sup> The genesis of the program and the pilot project that led up to it are explained in detail by Albert Mayer in *Pilot Project, India: The Story of Rural Development at Etawah, Uttar Pradesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

<sup>19</sup> See Government of India, Planning Commission, Committee on Plan Projects, *Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1957), known popularly after its chairman, Balvantray Mehta, as the Mehta Report; also Francine R. Frankel, "Ideology and Politics in Economic Planning: The Problem of Indian Agricultural Development Strategy," *World Politics*, XIX, No. 4 (July 1967), pp. 621-645; and Tinker, *loc. cit.*

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bodies beginning at village level with a popularly elected village council (*gram panchayat*). The heads of all the *gram panchayats* in a block would make up a *panchayat samiti*, which would direct and supervise the block administration from BDO on down. In turn the heads of the *samitis* would compose a district-level body (*zila parishad*) that would be largely a coordinating unit. Altogether, the scheme was known as Panchayati Raj (rule by *panchayats*).<sup>20</sup>

Panchayati Raj would, it was hoped, do what Community Development had failed to do—involve the people in their own development. As Balvantray Mehta, the man probably most responsible for the new approach, put it, "the whole conception behind Panchayati Raj" is derived from the Gandhian notion that "people in the villages should be asked to undertake the responsibility of governing themselves."<sup>21</sup> After all, parliamentary democracy had worked successfully at the state and national levels during the first decade of independence; why should it not work at the village level as well?<sup>22</sup>

Like the Community Development movement, Panchayati Raj has been far from an unqualified success. Case-studies available show a rather small contribution to development stemming from Panchayati Raj.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps worse, it has been operating to some extent like the Green Revolution: when it succeeds at all, the dominant upper classes in the villages appear to be getting most of the value from it. In the words of one Indian scholar:

. . . benefits are not being equitably distributed and there is a lot of misuse of funds. It is common knowledge that sections who belong to the higher strata of rural society have captured power and they are trying to monopolize the benefits . . . *panchayat samitis* get divided between dominating and minority groups and there comes about the phenomenon of *political haves* becoming also the *economic haves* and *political have nots* also becoming the *economic have nots*.<sup>24</sup>

This skimming-off of benefits by the dominant classes has not been as dramatic as in the case of the Green Revolution, for the local rewards of self-government have not multiplied at so rapid a rate, nor has the total gain by

<sup>20</sup> For a brief description of Panchayati Raj, see Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-213.

<sup>21</sup> Balvantray Mehta (see note 19), "Some Recent Trends in Panchayati Raj in India," *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, VIII, No. 4 (October-December 1962), pp. 456-459 (at 458).

<sup>22</sup> See A. T. R. Rahman, "Rural Institutions in India and Pakistan," *Asian Survey*, VIII, No. 9 (September 1968), pp. 792-805.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, T. N. Chaturvedi, "Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan," *Economic and Political Weekly*, IV, No. 25 (June 21, 1969), pp. 999-1002 (Rajasthan is widely considered to be the most successful Indian state in implementing the Panchayati Raj system). The Planning Commission itself took a rather sober view of the achievements of Panchayati Raj in its *Fourth Five Year Plan, 1969-74: Draft* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1968), pp. 168-170.

<sup>24</sup> Iqbal Narain, "Developmental Administration under Panchayati Raj: The Rajasthan Experience," *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, XIV, No. 1 (January-March 1968), pp. 56-74 (at 71-72). On the point of elites getting most of the gain from Community Development and Panchayati Raj, the evidence is voluminous. See *inter alia* George Rosen, *Democracy and Economic Change in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 92-101; Myrdal, *op. cit.*, pp. 887-891 and 1339-1346; Bendix, *op. cit.*, pp. 338-356.



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the society as a whole been as great. Besides, political dominance in the village has traditionally been the prerogative of the entrenched, landowning (usually upper) castes, anyway, and their taking over of the Panchayati Raj structure represents not change but rather continuity of the old distribution of power. And it is *change* in the relative distribution of a societal value like political power or wealth that is likely to cause unrest, not so much a continuation of the *status quo*, however inequitable that might be.<sup>25</sup>

That this outcome should ensue in local self-government should occasion no surprise. The vast amount of work done in social anthropology in India over the last twenty years has furnished ample evidence that the common pattern of social life in the Indian village is one of dominance of economic and political life by a single caste, generally one fairly high in the ritual hierarchy. Usually through control of land, sometimes with the additional help of numbers, one caste commonly manages to exercise a position of overbearing dominance in village affairs.<sup>26</sup> The studies available are too few to permit any generalizations as to the proportion of population typically made up by a dominant caste, but such data as we do have indicate that in a substantial percentage of villages numbers are not as important as other resources, primarily land ownership.<sup>27</sup>

Panchayati Raj presents the non-dominant (and generally lower) castes with the opportunity to gain control politically, simply by voting *en bloc* against the dominant caste in panchayat elections. With political control and some intelligence it would be possible at least to lighten, if not remove, the economic suzerainty exercised by the dominant group. Yet this has not happened, and the reason is principally that the dominant castes have met the threat to their position by taking over the panchayat system—an easy enough exercise for those who were in control already.

This conclusion accords with similar evidence gathered elsewhere. Political participation seems commonly skewed in favor of the upper classes elsewhere in the world, and serious political activity (as distinct from ordinary participation such as voting) appears virtually everywhere to be disproportion-

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<sup>25</sup> This well-attested proposition in social science dates at least from de Tocqueville; see Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 175-178. A good survey and analysis of recent research on the subject is found in Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University, 1968), pp. 49-59.

<sup>26</sup> The theory of "dominant caste" is mainly the contribution of the Indian social anthropologist, M. N. Srinivas; see his essay, "Social System of a Mysore Village," in McKim Marriott, ed., *Village India: Studies in the Little Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 1-35; and his "The Dominant Caste in Rampura," *American Anthropologist* LXI, No. 1 (February 1959), 1-16.

<sup>27</sup> See Ralph W. Nicholas' comparative analysis of Indian village studies, "Structures of Politics in the Villages of Southern Asia," in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds., *Structures and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), pp. 243-284; also see Harry W. Blair, "Caste, Politics and Democracy in Bihar State, India: The Elections of 1967" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, Durham, N. C., 1969), pp. 104-109 and 271ff.

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ately engaged in by elites. There is no reason *a priori* to believe that South Asia should be greatly different.

The South Asian peasant is, it seems clear, an economic profit maximizer, or would be if he had the chance. He might well be a political maximizer also, if he had the chance. As it is, however, the man at the bottom often does not have this opportunity, for village economic elites use their relatively considerable societal resources to dominate the organs of local self-government.<sup>28</sup> For many, the political arena is closed.

The problem, then, if South Asia's villages are to achieve some meaningful degree of pluralist democracy in which all groups have at least some voice, comes down to this: how to mobilize lower caste groups into effective channels of political activity. To do so would not *per se* solve the cumulative problems of inequality, but it would give these lower groups a resource to use at the level of local self-government that would be of great value. It is in this connection that the Comilla experiment proves instructive.

The Pakistan Academy for Rural Development at Comilla, East Pakistan, has been widely considered as an outstanding example of a successful community development program. Under the leadership of its director, Akhter Hameed Khan, the Academy has had an especially impressive record of achievement in its major activity of establishing cooperative development projects. Its program<sup>29</sup> revolves primarily around three spheres of activity:

<sup>28</sup> At levels higher than the constituency, there is some positive evidence for Eldersveld's "stratarchy" model of an open political system; see Samuel J. Eldersveld, *Political Parties: A Behavioral Analysis* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964). Ramashray Roy has shown how leaders of successive caste groups have been able to enter the political arena in Bihar state; see his "Intra-Party Conflict in the Bihar Congress," *Asian Survey*, VI, No. 12 (December 1966), pp. 706-715; and "Factionalism and 'Stratarchy': The Experience of the Congress Party," *ibid.*, VII, No. 12 (December 1967), pp. 897-908. The mobilization of caste-groups as political organizations has enabled new social groups to enter the political arena, some of them with dramatic effect; see Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 36-87. The efficacy of such tactics for lower-caste groups having neither large numbers nor dense geographical concentrations is very doubtful, however. See Blair, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-293, 319-322 and 354-355. At village level the evidence tends more toward the "iron law of oligarchy" model; see Robert Michels, *Political Parties* (New York: Collier Books, 1962; orig. Basel, 1915), esp. part VI.

<sup>29</sup> The following description of the Academy's work is drawn from several sources, mainly Akhter Hameed Khan, *Rural Development in East Pakistan: Speeches of Akhter Hameed Khan*, and *Community and Agricultural Developmental in Pakistan* (both published by the Asian Studies Center at Michigan State University as Occasional Papers, 1965 and 1969, respectively); also Arthur F. Raper and assistants, *Rural Development in Action: The Comprehensive Experiment at Comilla, East Pakistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970). It is, of course, impossible as of this writing (late June 1971) to assess the effects of the civil war in East Pakistan on the Comilla project. If press reports emanating from East Bengal are correct, though, the program has in all probability suffered a severe setback, if not a complete disintegration. In fact, its very success in creating a sense of purpose and efficacy in the peasantry may have been an excuse for repression by a West Pakistani army anxious to eliminate possible roots of future guerilla activity. Whatever may have happened, the Comilla experiment has shown that it is possible in an underdeveloped rural setting to establish a workable program of community development.

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agricultural credit, the provision of training and supplies, and research. The loci of these activities are the cooperative at the village level and the Academy itself at Comilla.

In East Pakistan, as in most peasant societies, the quintessential problem of the agriculturist is credit. His major need for money is at the beginning of the growing season to buy seed and fertilizers, to provide for draught animals for plowing, and so on. This need explains the ubiquitous role of the moneylender, for the small-scale peasant's creditworthiness at commercial banks or even governmental lending institutions is invariably nil. The establishment of creditworthiness was the beginning point of the Comilla approach. The Academy agreed to provide substantial credit, if a group of peasants formed a cooperative in which each put up some money. The insistence on regular contributions from each member, irrespective of personal poverty, was absolute, and served to give every participant a continuing stake in the success of the venture.

The cooperative then elected one of its members to attend weekly training sessions at the Comilla Academy. The attending member was then expected to recount what he learned at a subsequent weekly meeting of the cooperative, at which time individual monetary contributions were made and the account-books were inspected by the membership (the books were frequently audited from above as well, to insure scrupulous honesty). The agent of innovation was thus an inhabitant of the village who went out for instruction and returned to impart it to his compeers; the Village Level Worker from outside was thereby eliminated.

The VLW was widely recognized as the key man in both the Community Development and Panchayati Raj programs. Overall progress depended on what happened at the village level, and this in turn depended largely on the ability of the VLW. The lack of success exhibited by both programs has been blamed in no small measure on the VLW's inability to transmit innovation to his charges.<sup>30</sup> In the Comilla program, the attempt to get educated outsiders into village development was seen from the outset as futile:

. . . it is like trying to send a river upstream. The tendency in the villages is—and it seems to be an irreversible trend—that the best people leave the villages. Nothing can stop them; they keep on leaving.

In the village, anybody who has the slightest intelligence, education, or resources has one aim: to educate his boy so that he may get out of the village. That is the chief aim of his life. And if the boy cannot get out of the village after having acquired some

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<sup>30</sup> Iqbal Narain, "Developmental Administration Under Panchayati Raj," *op. cit.*, p. 70. See also Carl C. Taylor *et al.*, *India's Roots of Democracy: A Sociological Analysis of Rural India's Experience in Planned Development Since Independence* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1965), pp. 220-222, 238-242, 627-631.

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education, it is considered a calamity, a curse laid by God Himself or by the devil to defeat the main purpose of all his endeavors.<sup>31</sup>

Instead of bringing in an outside man, the Comilla equivalent of the VLW was recruited from within the village, where there was a much greater chance that he would remain. He also served as the disseminator of new resources, for along with bringing new technologies of agriculture, he also brought the new seeds, fertilizers and demonstration equipment with which to put the new knowledge to work.

The Academy program was not restricted to agriculturists. In fact, some 225, or about 11 per cent, of the cooperative societies that had been formed through 1968 were distinctly non-agricultural. These groups represented such diverse occupations as rickshaw-pullers, small traders and merchants, carpenters and butchers.<sup>32</sup> The rickshaw-puller groups were especially interesting, as their membership was drawn from the lowest (i.e., landless) strata of the society.<sup>33</sup> The membership of the agricultural cooperatives, it might be noted, was made up exclusively of cultivators, for the landless, though they often work in agriculture as laborers, were ineligible to join.

A third principle was research. From the beginning numerous studies and re-studies of the program in all its aspects were made by social scientists from the Academy and outside. There was also a constant willingness to innovate and change direction as a result of this research.<sup>34</sup>

Despite importunities from the Pakistan government to expand the program as rapidly as possible, the Academy successfully insisted on enlarging it only very cautiously. By 1968, it had spread into only ten thanas beyond the original one, out of a total 411 thanas in East Pakistan. By comparison, the community Development operation in India grew from Mayer's first pilot project in 1950 to 15 blocks in 1952 and 2,361 blocks by 1958.<sup>35</sup>

As for the impact of the Comilla project, one study has shown that, while villagers who came into contact with the program did not have significantly greater aspirations to own things or to seek higher educational or occupational attainments for their sons than villagers isolated from the project, they did

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<sup>31</sup> A. H. Khan, *Rural Development*, p. 16. Khan gives some further devastating criticism of the VLW approach (which was tried in Pakistan as well as in India in the 1950's) in *ibid.*, pp. 40-43; also in *Community and Agricultural Development*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>32</sup> Statistics from Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, *Ninth Annual Report: 1967-1968*, ed. by Badaruddin Ahmed (Comilla: Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, 1968), pp. 48, 51 and 91.

<sup>33</sup> For an analysis of the nonagricultural cooperatives, see Harvey M. Choldin, "Urban Cooperatives at Comilla, Pakistan: A Case of Study of Local-Level Development," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, XVI, No. 2 (January 1968), pp. 189-218.

<sup>34</sup> See Harvey M. Choldin, "The Development Project as Natural Experiment: The Comilla, Pakistan, Projects," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, XVII, No. 4 (July 1969), pp. 483-500.

<sup>35</sup> Indian figures are from Tinker, *op. cit.*, p. 109. In the early 1960's, the Indian block averaged perhaps 85,000 inhabitants, while the thanas of East Pakistan were somewhat larger, averaging around 125,000 people.

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have an increased (and statistically significant) sense of their own economic efficacy.<sup>36</sup> This finding accords well with the previously mentioned notion that economic ambition and desire for improvement are fairly evenly distributed, whereas this is not true of the ability to realize these desires. By introducing innovation in practicable ways, the Comilla project changed the peasant's sense of possessing this ability. As the Academy director put it:

It seems to me that in East Pakistan the farmers are very active and responsive to new ideas and innovation, and the problem before us is not the stupidity, the conservatism, the dullness, or the traditionalism of the farmer. To me the real problem seems to be one of designing good policies and institutions, of providing facilities, like credit, through these sound institutions, and of providing good leadership from the government and the local councils. And as soon as they can be done, East Pakistan will move with surprising speed.<sup>37</sup>

While designed to aid economic growth, the cooperatives have had a very strong political potential as well. Big farmers generally were hostile to them and refused to join, and so the agricultural cooperatives became the preserve of the middle-status, small-scale farmers.<sup>38</sup> The landless, while ineligible to join the agricultural units, showed an excellent capacity for being mobilized effectively by such projects as the rickshaw-puller cooperatives.<sup>39</sup> In providing their members an increased sense of societal efficacy and experience at working together in groups, both types of cooperative furnished resources that could be transferred into the political arena, where these middle and lower status elements could employ them in competing politically with traditionally dominant groups in the village.

In addition to the cooperatives with their political implications, there was a project that worked explicitly with the political structure. At about the same time as the Panchayati Raj program replaced Community Development in India, the Basic Democracies system superseded Pakistan's equivalent of Community Development (a scheme called the Village Agricultural and Industrial Development Programme). Basic Democracies consisted of popularly elected Union Councils at the village level, whose leaders would comprise Thana Councils at the next higher level, and so on up to the provincial level. Government officials were represented at each level.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Howard Schuman, *Economic Development in Individual Change: A Socio-Psychological Experiment in Pakistan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, Center for International Affairs, Occasional Paper No. 15, 1967), especially pp. 24-26, 38-39 and 46-47.

<sup>37</sup> A. H. Khan, *Community and Agricultural Development*, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> See Choldin, "Urban Cooperatives," p. 196; Raper, *op. cit.*, p. 50; also A. H. Khan, *Rural Development*, pp. 13-14 and 22.

<sup>39</sup> The potential of such groups is somewhat limited, for a rural area can absorb only a limited number of rickshaws. Most of the landless strata have in fact very little in the way of alternative non-agricultural employment. Nevertheless, the success of those groups that have been formed show that the people at the bottom can be organized quite successfully.

<sup>40</sup> For a brief description of the Basic Democracies set-up, see Khalid bin Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), pp. 247-260; also Rahman, *loc. cit.*

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In Comilla Thana the Academy personnel devoted considerable energy to getting the Union Council leaders and the administrative officials to work together on the Thana Council. Fortunately, outside resources were made available in the form of foodstuffs (supplied under United States Public Law 480) which were utilized along with government grants to finance large-scale public works projects. This resource functioned as an incentive to both the elected and governmental groups, just as the provision of credit did for the cooperatives. The two sides worked together, and set up a highly successful series of projects to build up infra-structural facilities (roads, flood embankments, irrigation canals and the like) all of which had the added virtue of providing employment to the landless laboring class during the agricultural slack season. On the basis of this success, the Comilla Thana Council proceeded to undertake activities in seed and fertilizer distribution, animal husbandry, fisheries and public health.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps because of over rapid expansion, the rural works program was not as successful as the cooperative experiments.<sup>42</sup> Nor was the half-administrative Thana Council through which it worked democratic in the same sense as the Panchayati Raj scheme, in which elected officials dominated.<sup>43</sup> Still, it showed that, where resources are made available, popularly elected bodies can function effectively together with administrators.

The real question about Comilla is whether it can be replicated elsewhere, and on this there are two grounds for skepticism. First, there is the matter of Akhter Hameed Khan himself, a highly talented leader with a richly varied background that includes service in the Indian Civil Service, from which he resigned to become a locksmith's apprentice, in order to learn how the working man lives. He studied Islam intensively, edited newspapers and served as teacher and administrator in both secondary schools and colleges.<sup>44</sup> There can be no doubt that the success of the Comilla experiment has been in large measure due to his leadership. Characteristically, he has often denied his indispensability, and if the factors outlined previously are the crucial ones in the program's success, it should be able to survive and prosper without him, but only time will tell.<sup>45</sup>

Doubts as to the replicability of the Comilla experiment also arise from a consideration of the socio-economic characteristics of the area in which it has succeeded. For one thing, land distribution there is less inequitable than

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<sup>41</sup> An account of the rural works program and its connection with Basic Democracies is given in Raper, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-134.

<sup>42</sup> After the first year of operation in Comilla Thana, it was extended to cover all of East Pakistan where, compared to earlier programs, it was highly efficacious. See *ibid.*, *loc. cit.*: also A. H. Khan, *Community and Agricultural Development*, pp. 19-20; and Myrdal, *op. cit.*, pp. 1364-1366.

<sup>43</sup> Rahman, *loc. cit.*

<sup>44</sup> A brief account of his career is given in Raper, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-293, also *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> A. H. Khan, *Rural Development*, pp. 27-28. See also Raper, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-262.

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in many underdeveloped areas. For Comilla District, the average farm size is only 1.8 acres, and in East Pakistan as a whole, it is only 3.7 acres.<sup>46</sup> Thus there are large numbers of uncreditworthy and economically marginal peasants available for recruitment into the project. It should be noted, however, that land distribution in parts of India compare quite closely with these figures; in Bihar State, which has been a noticeable non-achiever in community development thus far, land distribution resembles very nearly that of East Pakistan, and some of Bihar's districts closely resemble the pattern in Comilla.<sup>47</sup> The distribution of land, then, would not appear to be a crucial element.

Social structure is more difficult to isolate as a factor, but may also be cause for concern. In overwhelmingly Muslim East Pakistan, the society is quite egalitarian when compared with the ascriptively based caste-structure of rural India.<sup>48</sup> The implication here is that it may be more difficult to get Indian peasants of high and low caste working together than the farmers of Comilla. On the other hand, to the extent that upper-caste farmers in India are larger-scale operators, they might be hostile to such a project, just as the big farmers have been in Comilla. This reaction might generate similar results in making the project more open to smaller scale, lower-caste farmers, who have been left awash by the Green Revolution. This would be especially true if laws protecting tenancy rights were enforced, for then the lower-caste tenants on small holdings could join the new technology without fear of displacement by their high-caste landlords. For the present, though, the question is unanswered, because the Comilla approach remains to be tried in India.

What is common to both the Green Revolution and the activities of the Academy at Comilla is the introduction in practicable terms of a new pattern of behavior characterized by high marginal returns. The new agricultural technology of the Green Revolution requires more inputs, but offers greatly expanded outputs. Similarly, the new social, economic and political technology of the Academy require significantly greater costs, in the form of organizing efforts, meeting attendance, individual monetary contributions, political endeavor in getting elected to Union Councils, inter-village cooperation in road-building and canal-digging, and so on; but the benefits are likewise even greater.

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<sup>46</sup> Raper, *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 9 and 15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302. Government of India, *Census of India 1961*, Vol. IV, *Bihar*, Part III(i), *Household Economic Tables*, by S. D. Prasad (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1965), pp. 21-65. The average landholding in Bihar appears to be slightly over 2.5 acres (no exact averages are available, only categories). For two of Bihar's districts, almost 40 per cent of holdings are less than an acre, and almost 65 per cent are less than 2.5 acres. It should be noted that the Bihar data include holdings held in tenancy or share, as well as land held outright (p. 19). The inclusion may not be very important, however, in view of the general tendency on the part of landowners not to admit the existence of tenants or sharecroppers (in order to prevent the latter from exercising any legal rights to their position).

<sup>48</sup> Or West Pakistan, for that matter. See Sayeed, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

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The key is in the credibility of the cost-benefit ratio. If the farmer believes that the new agricultural technology will work and that he can market the increased crop, or if he believes that the Comilla Academy will provide the credit for the cooperatives or the funds for public works projects, he will invest the necessary effort. But if local self-government is inefficiently and often corruptly managed, and if traditionally dominant upper-castes are able to transfer their power to, and take over, Panchayati Raj, then the peasant will not make this investment, simply because the return is too low or non-existent. In short, the Indian villager from the non-dominant strata has no incentive to work within the present Panchayati Raj system, and he does not. To apply the Comilla approach in rural India would be expensive, in terms of re-directing the bureaucracy as well as money, but it may be the only way to avoid large-scale unrest and violence left behind by the Green Revolution.

*Bucknell University, Lewisburgh, Pa., June 1971*