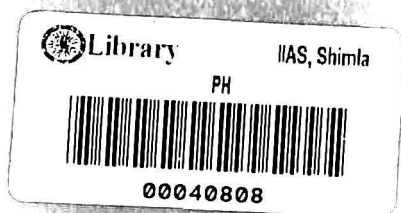
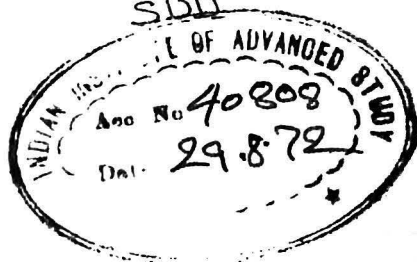


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IMPEDIMENTS TO 'DEVELOPMENT FROM BELOW'

IN INDIA'S ECONOMIC HISTORY

DIETMAR ROTHERMUND

Introduction: Thresholds and Constraints

Economic development frequently comes up against thresholds which impede the smooth curve of economic growth. These thresholds are constituted by various constraints which coincide so as to create a more or less insurmountable obstacle. The constraints may be physical, technological or institutional ones. Their combination will have a cumulative effect and in many cases it will be difficult to recognize the dominant constraint. Thus thresholds created by a lack of resources or physical and technological handicaps may be wrongly interpreted as originating from social and cultural constraints or vice versa. 'Crossing a threshold' means overcoming the constraints constituting it. This may be achieved either by adjusting economic activities below the threshold so that the cumulative effect of the respective constraints is reduced or eliminated or by reaching across the threshold from beyond its confines. The first approach can be termed 'Development from Below' the second one means 'Development from Above'. Usually economic development will be fostered by a combination of both approaches. In fact, development planning would ideally aim at an adjustment of economic activities below the given threshold so as to fit in with remedial measures above the threshold—thus building the bridge from both sides. But the identification of impediments to 'Develop-

- * Some of the conditions for development from below which have been considered in this paper were first outlined by Ludwig Y. Oppenheimer in two articles in the journal *Offene Welt*: 'Grundbedingungen für den Beginn wirtschaftlicher Entwicklung', *Offene Welt* (1963), p. 262ff., and 'Dynamik von unten—ein kritischer Aspekt der Entwicklungshilfe', *Offene Welt* (1963), p. 553ff. The author wishes to thank Robert Crane, Michael Lipton and Hans-Christoph Rieger for detailed comments on an earlier draft of this paper which have greatly helped him in revising it.

ment from Below' should precede any attempt at development planning.

In many countries agriculture is the most crucial element of economic 'Development from Below' because it must provide the base for all further development. Agricultural operations are subject to many physical, technological and institutional constraints which may arrest the agriculturist at the level of mere survival. If he reaches the aim of comfortable self-sufficiency he may nevertheless not want to participate in wider economic activities by parting with a major share of his crop unless he is forced to do so or is sure of the benefit which he will derive from this participation. The money economy may encompass only a limited number of people and the distribution of income may be so uneven that most people do not have a chance of crossing the threshold of paralysing poverty. Technological innovations which could transform many activities may require an investment which is beyond the means of those who could use the new tools. Investment and technological know-how will have a tendency to combine and establish an enclave economy, thus defying social control and integration. The political development will reflect rather than transform these economic trends and it is, therefore, the very opposite of developmental politics which would imply a conscious reduction of constraints so as to facilitate the crossing of the thresholds. The attitude towards developmental politics is deeply related to the social order and the value system. The more obvious phenomena, such as caste, may be less important in this context than the underlying assumptions of human inequality and the insignificance of human endeavour. 'Development from Below' means human mobilization which will inevitably give rise to social conflict as people cross thresholds and compete for resources.

The problems confronting 'Development from Below' have been outlined very briefly in this introduction in order to indicate the relations between various constraints. In the following pages these problems will be discussed in detail.

1. Survival Agriculture, the Land System, and the Appropriation of Surplus

Economists usually refer to agricultural activities which are not integrated in the money economy as 'subsistence agriculture'.

Actually in many countries the majority of small cultivators are eking out a living at a sub-subsistence level. Their operations are determined by the severe constraints of survival agriculture. The survival agriculturist's main concern is to avoid risks.¹ He cannot think in terms of profit." He may make use of his family labour much beyond the so-called 'marginal productivity of labour'. The land he cultivates would usually yield more if it were in the hands of a richer peasant who could afford to grow the most profitable crops. The survival agriculturist, however, must think in terms of an adverse combination of the constraints under which he operates. He depends on rainfall, on draught animals, on the members of his family, on credit and on the land system. He may wish to sink a well, but he may not get the credit for it. He may want to expand or contract cultivation according to the availability of family labour but the land system will not permit this. Thus he is kept in his place by the cumulative effect of constraints and cannot cross the threshold towards comfortable self-sufficiency. At least about one acre of rice land per adult member of the family in the rice economy of Eastern India or two acres in the millet economy of the Western Deccan and Rajasthan are required for 'subsistence', all those who have less than that must work for others in addition to working on their own land. Overpopulation has greatly depressed Indian agriculture. Recent field research in Orissa has shown that only 14 per cent of the peasant families could rely on rice supply from their own land throughout the year,² all others would have to be termed survival agriculturists. But those who are just below the threshold of all year round self-sufficiency may be able to cross it if some of the constraints under which they operate were slightly reduced.

In addition to the physical constraints of rainfall and the quality of the soil Indian agriculture has been most seriously affected by the rigidity of the land system. Various factors in India's economic history have combined to 'lock up' the land.³ Originally land was

1. Michael Lipton, 'Urban bias and agricultural planning', in Paul Streeten and Michael Lipton, (eds.), *The Crisis of Indian Planning*, London, 1968.
2. K. H. Junghans, 'Wirtschaftliche Struktur- und Funktionsanalyse der Landwirtschaftlichen Betriebe', *Yearbook of the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University* (1967/68), Wiesbaden, 1968, p. 144ff.
3. The term 'lock up' (Bodensperre) has been taken from the work of Franz Oppen-

not a commodity which could be bought or sold in India. It belonged to him who first cleared it. It was inherited and also subdivided, there were practices of a limited transfer in terms of a kind of usufructuary mortgage, but in general there was always enough land at the disposal of the village community for further settlement. Feudal landgrants either conferred a right for establishing a new settlement or gave a share of the charges on settled land, though they never established property rights in the modern sense of the term. Feudal revenue assignees may have used harsh methods in order to collect their revenue, but they had to take care not to drive away the peasants as they would then lose their revenue.⁴ For the most part the villages paid their revenue assessment jointly. The village community controlled the surrounding waste land and frequently rented it to outsiders, who may have been either migrant latecomers joining an existing village in search of land and protection, or peasants from neighbouring villages who looked for some additional land which they could cultivate as long as they had the means to do so. Cultivation usually depended on the family labour and as the family expanded or contracted the peasant would want to expand or contract cultivation. The universal system of 'insider' and 'outsider' peasants enabled the village community to make use of the available land with some degree of flexibility while nevertheless paying its revenue regularly.⁵

There were, of course, also villages in which most of the agricultural work was done by hired or bonded labourers, particularly if the landholders themselves would not touch the plough because of caste rules.⁶ However genuine landlords did not exist; they were

heimer, *Theorie der reinen und politischen Okonomie, Zweiter Halbband: Die Gesellschaftswirtschaft*, Jena, 1924, p. 395ff., 406, 757ff.

4. Irfan Habib, 'Evidence for Sixteenth Century agrarian conditions in the Guru Granth Sahib'. *Indian Economic and Social History Review (IESHR)* (1964), p. 64ff.
5. For the dichotomy khudkasht—pahikasht, mirasdar—upri etc. see Dietmar Rothermund, 'Die historische Analyse des Bodenrechts als eine Grundlage für das Verständnis gegenwärtiger Agrarstrukturprobleme, dargestellt am Beispiel Indiens', *Yearbook of the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University* (1966), Wiesbaden, 1967, p. 149ff.
6. Benedicte Hjejle, 'Slavery and agricultural bondage in South India in the nineteenth century', *The Scandinavian Economic History Review* (1967), p. 83.

created only by the British when they took over the indigenous revenue system and added to it their own concept of landed property. They redefined Indian agrarian relations in terms of the relation between landlord and tenant and converted former revenue assignees into landlords. Frequently older customs of tribes and village communities had been superseded by feudalization, e.g. the headman becoming a feudal retainer with a service tenure, such relations were interpreted under British rule as contracts concerning private real estate.

The Moghul predecessors of the British had applied the uniform term "zamindar" to all kinds of feudal or tribal leaders in order to simplify their administrative procedure. The British completed this task by making the zamindar a landlord whose property could be sold if he failed to pay the revenue. Their harsh assessment forced many landholders to borrow money and to mortgage their land, and British law encouraged landtransfers and the foreclosure of mortgages. Land became a favourite object of litigation. Due to the peculiar British practice of conveyancing and the lack of a system of public transfer based on a cadastral record of rights, land titles were secure only for those who had a long purse and could afford the better lawyer. British officers had spent much time and effort on the preparation of revenue records, but these were useful only for the collection of rent and revenue, and in many provinces the revenue authorities openly stated that they were not interested in the constant variations of ownership but only in the identification of the piece of land for which revenue had to be assessed.⁷

Increasing population pressure made land a more and more valuable commodity. The village community lost all control over the land even in those areas where the village remained the unit of revenue assessment. Agrarian relations corresponded more and more to the landlord and tenant pattern which the British rulers had set for India. When the administrators got alarmed because of a growing indebtedness and land transfers or because of strained relations between landlords and tenants they tried to prohibit land

7. Dietmar Rothermund, 'Die historische Analyse des Bodenrechts...' loc. cit. p. 158f.; also C.K. Meek, *Land Law and Custom in the Colonies* (second ed.), London, 1968, p. 272ff.

alienation and enacted legislation to protect tenants against eviction and an undue enhancement of rent. But they made no attempts at a land reform.⁸ The system which emerged from this combination of imposed landlordism, remedial legislation and inadequate protection of small holders and subtenants was perfectly suited to an exploitation of man rather than an improvement of the productivity of the soil. Those who bought control over land simply in order to squeeze some rent out of those who had to eke out a living on this land were encouraged and protected by this system.

Rents varied greatly, they did not necessarily correspond to market rates. Several stages of transition from charges in kind to a cash rent could be observed in India in the course of the nineteenth century. A report on Oudh in Northern India gives an interesting account of these different stages: The first stage is the traditional sharing of produce according to some fixed proportion. This may be done by a division of the produce after the harvest or in terms of an estimate of the standing crop. In this case there will be no increase of the rent as the profit of the landlord rises with the rising prices. Under the impact of the money economy and the cultivation of cash crops (sugar cane, tobacco, poppy) both landlord and tenant are eager to settle for a cash rent. The second stage is marked by an application of these cash rates to the respective land whether a cash crop is grown on it or not. At the same time the conventional share of the grain produce is commuted into conditional cash rents which are revised whenever the land has to remain fallow or does not yield a crop. The third stage consists of an agreement on an overall money rent for the entire holding of the tenant fixed for one year with an understanding that either the landlord or the tenant may ask for a return to the old produce share. But finally the fourth stage of an absolute money rent is reached and it is only at that stage that arguments about the enhancement of rent will appear.⁹ Exactly the same pattern was observed in Japan.¹⁰ And just like in Japan this

8. Dietmar Rothermund, 'The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 and its influence on legislation in other provinces', *Bengal Past and Present* (1967), p. 90ff.

9. Govt. of the North Western Provinces and Oudh, *The Condition of the Tenantry in Oudh*, Vol. II, Allahabad, 1883 (Major Erskine's Report), p. 258.

10. Thomas C. Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan*, New York, 1966, p. 157ff.

meant substantially that tenants were assuming more and more of the risks of agriculture while the landlords became absentee rent receivers.

In India this process did not mean that agriculture advanced to a higher level of productivity. In fact, alarming features of the destruction of the productive capacity of the soil were noticed even at that time. The same report on Oudh which contains the outline of the development of cash rents also gives a dismal account of the vicious circle of population pressure and over-cropping. Due to the increase of population not much land remains fallow, therefore there is less pasture and accordingly less cattle and less manure. The forest has been cut and there is no firewood and cow-dung is used for fuel, thus the available manure is further diminished. The reduction of the pasture also implies that fewer bullocks are available for ploughing and therefore this work is done inefficiently. There is also a great demand for water but irrigation has not been adequately expanded. The peasants have resorted to double cropping. Increasing rents force them to grow the most remunerative crop and they are unable to follow a pattern of crop rotation which would restore the productive capacity of the soil.¹¹

Side by side with cash rents share-cropping continued as an important element in agrarian relations. Actually the more oppressive features of share-cropping developed only after the spread of cash rents. As long as the landlord received the rent in kind, everybody 'shared the crop,' but when the tenant paid his rent in cash and got the land cultivated by sharecroppers the position was changed considerably. Sharecropping became a device for paying low wages for agricultural labour and at the same time letting the labourers share the risk of cultivation.

In the Southern part of India where the British had made the revenue settlement with individual peasants (ryotwari settlement) rather than with superior holders or former revenue assignees sharecropping was less frequent and there were more agricultural labourers. But this proletarianization was not a symptom of land consolidation and increasing efficiency in agricultural production. It simply indicated that the land had been 'locked up' and that

11. Govt. of the North Western Provinces and Oudh, op. cit., Vol. I

those who were excluded from a share in the land had to work for those who had retained a share.¹² Originally the ryotwari settlement had been designed so as to give flexibility to the land system. The peasant could expand or contract cultivation according to his needs and he was supposed to pay revenue only for the land which he actually cultivated. But with population pressure this element of flexibility had soon disappeared and nobody thought of surrendering any land. The rigid elements of the system proved to be more durable than the flexible ones.

The land reform in independent India did not break the 'lock' although the political leaders indulged in a great deal of brave talk about 'land to the tiller.' Only the biggest rent-receivers were deprived of their privileges, but they could keep their so called 'home farms' which were often quite substantial. Thus they have lost their quasi-feudal status and have joined the ranks of the agrarian bourgeoisie where they are in the good company of the more substantial of their former tenants. The right of resumption which was granted to landlords so that they could recover a part of their land from their tenants for 'personal cultivation' created much ill will. Subletting of land has been prohibited in most parts of the country but sharecropping continues nevertheless. Flexibility has not been restored, on the contrary, the legislative provisions against subletting have proved to be an obstruction for the dwarf-holder who would lease out all his land while looking for work elsewhere, whereas the more substantial peasant can make use of the lenient interpretation of 'personal cultivation',¹³ and get his land tilled by others.

The self-sufficient peasant who lives beyond the threshold of survival agriculture has always been the dominant force in the

12. Surendra Patel, *Essays on Economic Transition*, Bombay, 1965, p. 3ff.; there is a controversy among students of Indian economic history with regard to the rise of a landless class of agricultural labourers (see Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India—Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1968, as well as Morris D. Morris' review of Mrs. Kumar's book, IESHR (1966), p. 185ff., but while it is certainly true that landless labourers existed at earlier stages of Indian history (see also Irfan Habib, 'Evidence . . .' loc. cit. p. 65) their number must have increased in the 19th and 20th century due to the changes in agrarian relations.
13. Daniel Thorner, *The Agrarian Prospect in India*, Delhi, 1956.

Indian countryside. There is, of course, a considerable degree of elasticity in the concept of self-sufficiency. The survival agriculturist may think that he has achieved it when he and his family have one square meal a day, the more substantial peasant may like to have two. He may also want to increase his leisure by getting his work done by others whom he can afford to feed. For all these reasons he may not wish to part with much of the agricultural surplus which he could otherwise contribute to other sectors of the economy. The surplus can, of course, be appropriated by taxation, or facilities for the deposit of savings may be offered and consumer goods may be produced and marketed in the countryside. The crucial constraints which have impeded the full participation of India's self-sufficient peasants in the money economy have usually been related to communication, transport, education, the supply of goods other than food, marketing and banking. The appropriation of agricultural surplus has always been the central problem of administration in India. There was, of course, the possibility to decentralize administration and to make the officers of the state live off the land, but the more ambitious political systems wanted to support a large central establishment and this could only be done by means of monetization.

2. Income Distribution and the Money Economy

Traces of a money economy can be recognized in Indian history for many centuries. But monetization seems to have varied a great deal. Numismatic evidence shows that the currency contracted and expanded, probably indicating changes in the pattern of trade and the modes of revenue collection. During the sixteenth and the seventeenth century India enjoyed a certain amount of economic prosperity. The coastal areas were actively involved in maritime trade. The great Northern plains, the centre of the Moghul empire, were dotted with towns and cities which could have rivaled their counterparts in Europe. Perhaps a higher proportion of the population lived in towns by the end of the seventeenth century as compared to the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁴

14. Satish Chandra, 'Some aspects of the growth of a money economy in India during the seventeenth century' in IESHR (1966), p. 323.

The cash revenue demand of the Moghuls forced the peasantry to participate in the money economy. The merchant who combined graindealing and moneylending emerged as an important figure in India's economic life.¹⁵ However, the money economy remained a marginal aspect of economic life. Many transactions (payment of wages and charges on the land) still consisted of payments in kind rather than in cash. A few big merchants might have been worth millions of Rupees and were able to issue or honour bills of exchange up to the amount of the annual revenue of a province.¹⁶ But the per capita income of the majority of the people was not sufficient for a gainful participation in the money economy. The growth points of manufacturing industries were few and far between. There was some production of cash crops but no substantial sector of commercial agriculture did emerge at that time. The land revenue policy of the Moghuls did not act as an incentive for commercial agriculture as it was based on purely fiscal considerations, i.e. the charges varied according to investment and yield.¹⁷ However, the government did provide agricultural credit (taccavi) with a view to enhance the revenue paying capacity of the landholders.¹⁸ Beyond this there was little investment in agricultural production. The superior landholders, usually revenue assignees, were not really landlords but had a share in the charges on the land as a compensation for services or in order to maintain themselves and their retainers.¹⁹ As they were not real landlords they could hardly be expected to be 'improving landlords.'

The 'incomes policy' of the government of that time was restricted to a gradation of the emoluments of the higher military and administrative officers, and the revenue policy was framed according-

15. Satish Chandra, 'Some aspects. . .' loc. cit., p. 327.
16. Ibid., p. 328.
17. N.A. Siddiqi, 'Land revenue demand under the Mughals', IESHR (1965), p. 373ff.
18. Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, London, 1963, pp. 253-255. Unfortunately very little is known about the details of taccavi administration. Actually taccavi loans are granted even at present by the various state governments in India but as the amounts granted are computed according to a certain rate per acre which has not been revised for a long time the system is now hopelessly out of date and is not of much use to Indian agriculturists, recently land development banks have been entrusted with taccavi administration.
19. Irfan Habib, 'The social distribution of landed property in pre-British India', *Third International Economic History Congress*, Munich, 1965.

ly. 'Development from Below' was only possible to the extent that the collection of revenue remained imperfect and that certain substantial peasants and village officials managed to keep some of the surplus for themselves. Such people tended to become petty 'feudal' chiefs and a decline of the power of the state meant additional power for them. In this way a wider distribution of income may have been caused by a contraction of the power of the state, but at the same time such a decline was usually accompanied by a decrease in monetization and adverse changes in the pattern of trade. In a somewhat exaggerated way one may express the Indian dilemma thus: either there was a highly inequitable distribution of incomes and an expansion of the money economy or a parochial pattern of the appropriation of surplus accompanied by a contraction of the money economy.

British colonial rule did not help to solve this dilemma but it rather aggravated the problem. The British copied the revenue system of the Moghuls but "improved" upon it by raising the rates of revenue and making its collection far more efficient and inelastic. By insisting on cash payment of the revenue they greatly fostered monetization. In the nineteenth century they enhanced the revenue even more because they felt that Ricardo's rent theory justified a total appropriation of the 'unearned increment'.²⁰ In many areas they wiped out the slightest potential for development from below by their stiff revenue assessments. But they also did not use the revenue for fostering development from above. Nor did they grant any significant amount of taccavi-credit to agriculturists. Applicants for such credit were faced with numerous bureaucratic obstacles. The villagers had to turn to the indigenous moneylenders whose business greatly increased under British rule. These moneylenders and the new class of rentreceivers created by the British formed an influential stratum of Indian society. They oppressed the agriculturists without being able to contribute themselves to development from below. They neither used the capital which came into their hands for making improvements in agriculture nor did they invest their money in industry.

20. Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford, 1959, p. 81, see also Ravinder Kumar, 'The rise of the rich peasants in western India', in D. A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, London, 1968, p. 25ff.

In Japan where a similar agrarian bourgeoisie had emerged there was an improvement of the methods of agricultural production as well as a considerable investment in industry by the end of the nineteenth century.²¹ But in India this did not happen. The foreign rulers did not permit any industrialization, and there were no industrial banks which could attract deposits and channel capital into long term investment in industry.²² Due to the depreciation of the Indian silver currency in the last quarter of the nineteenth century there was a wide gulf between silver and gold capitalism.²³ The indigenous silver capitalist was 'rusticated' and capital for investment in Indian railways etc. was found in the London money market.²⁴ The 'rusticated' indigenous capital was either hoarded or used for buying control over land without any intention in improving it. Credit was geared to the production of cash crops for the world market rather than of food crops for internal consumption.

Even at a time when recurrent famines caused a constant rise in the price of foodgrain the Indian peasants extended the cultivation of cash crops for the export market although they did not make a greater profit on those crops.²⁵ The productive capacity of India's agriculture was pre-empted by the credit network geared to the export market. Advances and other means by which the creditors controlled the debtors made it impossible for most peasants to decide on their own what they should grow. This passive and partial exposure to the forces of the world market left its mark on India's economy. The agricultural surplus was flushed out of the country and nothing was left for development from below. Income distribution fell into a pattern which stifled economic development. A small percentage of

21. Thomas C. Smith, op. cit., p. 157ff.

22. G. Findlay Shirras, *Indian Finance and Banking*, London, 1919, p. 392ff.

23. Dietmar Rothermund, 'The Indian silver currency 1876-1893: A problem in Asian economic history', Paper No. 37, *International Conference on Asian History*, Kuala Lumpur, 1968.

24. The term 'rusticated' is derived from M. G. Ranade's reference to the 'rustication' of Indian society; cf. V. S. Minocha, 'Ranade on the agrarian problem', IESHR (1965), p. 359; for the investment of British capital in specific sectors of the Indian economy cf. Arun Bose, 'Foreign capital' in V. B. Singh, (ed.), *Economic History of India, 1857-1956*, Bombay, 1965, p. 492ff.

25. G. V. Joshi, *Writing and Speeches*, Poona, 1912, p. 606ff.

the rural population managed to derive benefits from the prevailing system by operating the local credit network, participating in grain dealing and in the marketing of cash crops, but the mass of the peasantry was relegated to the ranks of the survival agriculturists.

The negative development of the nineteenth century was not redeemed by any spectacular event in the twentieth century. Two World Wars were a boon to India's economic development but they did not affect the agricultural base of the economy as much as its industrial sector, whereas the depression between the wars hit the Indian agriculturists badly. Independent India inherited a vast impoverished peasantry. The income distribution in rural India reflects this state of affairs. A rural household survey conducted in 1962²⁶ revealed that 60 per cent of the rural households were not only unable to accumulate net savings but were in fact 'dissaving'. The higher echelon of those 60 per cent reached an annual income of about Rs. 1000, their households had five members and two of them were earners, the house and implements they owned were worth about Rs. 600. The survey quoted here does not contain information about land holding but it would appear that these 60 per cent own less than 25 per cent of the land available for cultivation and they could be defined as survival agriculturists. If one looks more closely at these 60 per cent one finds that the lower 30 per cent are in the income class from Rs. 360 to 720 per year, their families have less than five members and less than two earners, their houses and implements are worth about Rs. 350 per family, and their 'dissaving' goes on at a much higher rate. These households have not only no potential for development from below but they actually depress the economy and probably destroy the productivity of the soil.

A look at the upper 40 per cent of rural households shows that about 20 per cent would belong to the category of comfortably self-sufficient peasants. These households have an average annual income of about Rs. 1500. Their houses and implements are worth about Rs. 1000, they can save a small amount. There are about six family members and more than two earners in every household. The households

26. National Council of Applied Economic Research, *All-India Rural Household Survey*, Vol. II, 1965, pp. 55, 77, 97.

in this category hold probably as much land as the lower 60 per cent together. Only the upper 20 per cent of rural households contain the rich peasants of income groups between Rs. 1800 to Rs. 7200 and above per year. They probably own about half of all cultivable land. The value of their houses and implements approximates that of one annual income, they can save substantial amounts, and there are usually more than two earners in the family. The size of their households indicates that they can afford to support a greater number of family members (about 3 in addition to every earner).

The steep pyramid of income distribution and wealth can be more clearly delineated only if some attention is paid to the top 2 per cent of rural households. These households account for about 25 per cent of all wealth in terms of houses and implements, they probably own around 15 to 20 per cent of all available land and they have an average net income of about Rs. 10,000 per year (1962).

Several studies have shown that in India it is not necessarily the big wealthy farmer who makes the best use of his land but rather the middle peasant who owns less than 25 acres. On the other hand the survival agriculturist also does not make the best use of his land for reasons which have been mentioned earlier. Consequently attempts will have to be made to reduce the holdings of the bigger and enlarge the holdings of the smaller peasants so as to add to the number of middle peasants. At the same time great efforts will have to be made to find alternative employment for a good part of the bottom 30 per cent of poor peasants.

In recent years much has been made of India's 'green revolution'. After the absurd experience of the import of foodgrain into one of the world's greatest agricultural countries the prospect of national self-sufficiency seemed to be almost a miracle and it has been greeted with enthusiasm. But this enthusiasm may be shortlived. Of course, national self-sufficiency may have come to stay, but the income disparities will be accentuated by the 'green revolution', as only the richer peasants can participate in it while the position of the survival agriculturists may deteriorate not only in relative but even in absolute terms. The introduction of high yielding varieties is a technological innovation which increases risks and demands more resources and thus widens the gap between the poor and the rich.

3. *Technological Innovation and Social Dependence.*

The resistance to technological innovations has often been explained in terms of cultural constraints. The tradition-bound Indian peasant or artisan is supposed to be unwilling to adopt new methods and even the demonstration effect of a successful implementation of such methods is lost on him. However, the critics usually fail to recognize the threshold which limits the activities of the peasant or artisan.

Those who work at the lower level and are unable to cross the threshold are by no means unaware of the 'demonstration effect' of activities at the higher level, but they know their limits. In fact, they are often afraid of being dominated by those who are beyond the threshold because they realize that any failure in their limited operations may drive them into complete dependence on someone who commands more resources. The many forms of bonded labour and serfdom for which Indian economic history provides a great variety of examples can be explained in these terms.²⁷ This pattern of dependence mostly crystallized into hereditary relations sanctioned by social and cultural norms of mutual obligations. However, all those who could lead an independent life by carefully minimizing their risks usually tried hard to retain their independence.

The resistance to technological change which has often exasperated observers of India's economic scene is deeply related to this quest for independence. A study of the problem why Indian silk winders rejected the use of new machinery in the nineteenth century, or why cotton growers stuck to their old methods of separating the cotton from the seed rather than adopting the cotton gin, or why Indian iron smelters would not give up their primitive traditional methods reveals that in each case the capital required for the new implements was beyond the reach of the people concerned and the innovation would have demanded a different organization of the whole working process so as to upset the existing pattern of the division of labour.²⁸ In other words, the people concerned would have had to subject them-

27. Surendra Patel, *op. cit.*, p. 3ff., Dharma Kumar, *op. cit.*, and Benedicte Hjeje, 'Slavery and agricultural bondage', *loc. cit.*, p. 71ff.

28. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, 'Cultural and social constraints on technological innovation', IESHR (1966), p. 240ff., and Hitesranjan Sanyal, 'The indigenous iron industry of Birbhum', IESHR (1968), p. 101 ff.

selves to the direction of an entrepreneur who would control the new means of production. Of course, in the long run the entrepreneur was bound to win anyhow and the small independent operators were crowded out, but they tried their best to carry on by minimizing their risks as long as they could do so. This meant that the prospect for development from below was very dim, indeed, in such cases. It frequently happened that entirely different people took over where others had failed to cross the threshold. Those who possessed traditional skills which should have qualified them for certain occupations were often the least likely candidates for new jobs whereas others whom social and cultural constraints would have prevented from acquiring such skills in the traditional way moved into the field once technological change had provided a different setting.²⁹

Limited resources and the quest for independence are not only an impediment to the crossing of the threshold by means of technological or organizational change, they prevent also development within the traditional pattern of agriculture. For example, a dwarf-holder in a rice producing area who does not get enough rice from his fields so as to feed himself and his family from this supply must work for others in order to supplement his income and is, therefore, unable to use the essential period between harvesting and sowing for improving his own rice terrace so as to get a higher yield. He may also not have enough draught animals for the frequent ploughing required for intensive rice cultivation.³⁰ His agricultural operations which he performs on his own account may therefore be less efficient than those to which he contributes when working for somebody else, but if he can help it he will not give up his own holding and enter permanently into the services of a bigger landowner.

4. *The Triple Economy and Economic Integration*

The impediments to 'Development from Below' do not only beset the agricultural sector and may prevent the adoption of even the simplest technological innovations, they also appear at the higher

29. Morris D. Morris, 'Values as an obstacle to economic growth in South Asia: An historical survey', *The Journal of Economic History* (1967), p. 588ff. here especially p. 604f.

30. K. H. Junghans, 'Wirtschaftliche Struktur und Funktionsanalyse . . .' loc. cit., p. 149.

threshold which separates the activities of trading, moneylending and profitable agriculture from the more intricate business of industrial investment and entrepreneurship. India has an old tradition of moneylending and trading, and Indian economic history provides examples of great organizational skill in this field.³¹ But the higher realm of industrial organization and finance remained inaccessible to the Indians at that time when they should have ventured into this field.

India was under British colonial rule when it should have made this transition. This was unfortunate for two reasons. First of all, the British did not want to industrialize India and secondly, the British precedent was unsuitable for India. The German, the Russian or the Japanese pattern of industrial finance and organization would have been a better example for India. The British models of joint stock companies and limited companies and the way in which capital was channeled from moneylending and trading into industrial finance via the money market were quite inimitable, whereas state initiative and industrial banking as practised in those countries which were later beneficiaries of the industrial revolution would have been more appropriate examples for India.³² The British-Indian Government, however, was either obstructing any development or it handled matters in a singularly inept fashion even when it was under orders from London to do something.³³ The British system of banking which was introduced into India was also quite useless for developmental purposes as it was geared to the needs of trade and provided neither rural nor industrial credit.³⁴ In the absence of a proper money market and faced with an unsympathetic government and an unsuitable banking system Indian capital could not cross the threshold into the realm of productive investment and remained confined to the lower regions of moneylending and trade.

31. S. Arasaratnam, 'Indian merchants and their trading methods', IESHR (1966), p. 85ff.
32. G. Findlay Shirras, op. cit., p. 394, for the stages of industrial finance see Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, Mass., 1962.
33. Peter Harnetty, 'India and British commercial enterprise: The case of the Manchester Cotton Company, 1860-64', IESHR (1966), p. 396ff.
34. G. Findlay Shirras, op. cit., p. 336ff., also S. G. Panandikar, 'Banking' in V. B. Singh, (ed.), op. cit., p. 414ff.

It was only after independence that state initiative could break this barrier, but rural and industrial credit still remained underdeveloped and, therefore, India experienced a fragmented 'Development from Above' rather than an integrated 'Development from Below'. This 'Development from Above' was encouraged by theories of unbalanced growth which stressed the importance of a strategic breakthrough in the leading industrial sector as this would have a spread effect throughout the economy. However, the spread effect was slow and not necessarily of the same dimensions as the amount of capital invested in basic industries. The modern industrial sector, therefore, tended to become an enclave economy with its own standards of life and style. In terms of productivity this urban-industrial sector forged ahead, it encompasses only about 20 per cent of the population but contributed about half of the national product whereas the other half was produced by the remaining 80 per cent in the countryside. As has been pointed out earlier 60 per cent of this rural population continue to live at the threshold of survival agriculture. This is about half of the total population, and it is a matter of speculation how much this unfortunate half has contributed to the national product—perhaps not more than 10 per cent as this part of the population holds only about 25 per cent of the land. In summary it may be stated that 20 per cent of the population produce 50 per cent, 30 per cent about 40 per cent and 50 per cent about 10 per cent of the national product.³⁵

35. The most recent information on the national product is contained in the *Estimates of National Product (Revised Series)*, Central Statistical Organisation, Government of India, New Delhi, 1969. This information shows that agriculture actually declined in terms of its share in the net domestic product in this period. It stood at 51 per cent in 1960/61, went down to 42 per cent due to bad harvests in 1966/67 and recovered only slightly in the following year (45 per cent). Of the other sectors mining and manufacturing maintained a share of 20 to 22 per cent, trade and transport 14 to 15 per cent and banking, real estate, administration and other services 15 to 17 per cent. According to the *Census of India of 1961* (Paper No. 1 of 1962, Final Population Totals) the population consisted of 439,2 Mill. people of whom 78,8 Mill. (18 per cent) lived in urban areas. 100 Mill. were recorded as cultivators and 31,5 Mill. as agricultural workers. The 131,5 Mill. engaged in agriculture thus represented 70 per cent of the total work force of 189 Mill.

Accordingly India witnessed the rise of a triple economy divided by two major thresholds: the industrial sector dominated by the state and a few big capitalists, the richer rural sector dominated by substantial peasants, traders and moneylenders, and the survival sector. The industrial sector was unable to offer enough employment as to assimilate the two other sectors. The thresholds were, therefore, maintained over a considerable period of time. Due to their economic persistence these thresholds have also been socially and culturally reinforced. The illiterate survival agriculturist and landless labourer, the rich peasant, moneylender or trader literate in his regional language, and the Westernized executive or civil servant set the tone at their respective levels.

The impediments to 'Development from Below' and the limitations of the spread effect of 'Development from Above' have also caused regional disparities. Urban centres created at the periphery of India by the seaborne trade of the colonial power attracted industries and enhanced the characteristic features of the enclave economy.³⁶ The concentration of mineral resources in the North-East led to the establishment of basic industries almost exclusively in that area. Overpopulation in the fertile Eastern deltas and the scarcity of rainfall in the Western Deccan and Rajasthan have marked out special problem areas in agriculture. Alternative employment is not necessarily available where the survival agriculturist would need it most. Steel mills are first of all established for the efficient production of steel, they will have an impact on their rural hinterland³⁷ but this impact is, of course, not commensurate with the amount of capital invested in the mill, nor is the location of the mill planned so as to make the most of its impact on the hinterland. The triple economy and regional disparities thus reinforce each other.

The ideal pattern would be one of decentralized regional industrialization financed by the richer peasants and moneylenders and giving employment to the survival agriculturists. But this is more than one can hope for under the prevailing circumstances. The profits of usury,

36. D. R. Gadgil, *Planning and Economic Policy in India*, Poona, 1961, p. 181.

37. K. H. Junghans, 'Das landwirtschaftliche Hinterland Rourkela's', *Indo-Asia* (1968), p. 42.

of hoarding and now of the 'green revolution' are much greater than those of investment in small scale industries.

Community Development was a major attempt at fostering 'Development from Below' and stimulating regional integration, but it has not fulfilled the high hopes of those who started it in India.³⁸ In the beginning the administrative structure of this new venture was very frail and not sufficiently integrated in the normal civil service network, and it suffered from the inherent difficulties of being established from above to initiate development from below. Later on the Block Development Officer with his small staff of agricultural advisers became a regular part of the administration, but in this way community development lost much of its spontaneity and flexibility. It was extended in a routine fashion to all corners of India, adequately trained staff was not available and communication with the peasantry became a problem. The peasants were after all very well aware of their own problems and the Development Officers could not change the basic constraints under which they were operating.

Bhoodan and Gramdan, a voluntary movement sponsored by Gandhian social workers aimed at reducing these constraints by transferring land from the rich to the poor peasants and by restoring some power to the village community, but this movement lacked the executives who could turn declarations of intent into social action.³⁹

District planning and the allocation of funds and responsibilities to elected bodies at the district level has been one of the most encouraging innovations of recent years. The district was chosen as the most suitable unit of regional development in Maharashtra and the District

38. K. H. Junghans, 'Die Wechselbeziehungen zwischen agrarsozialer Eigendynamik und agrarpolitischer Aktion im indischen Dorf', *Yearbook of the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University* (1966), Wiesbaden, 1967, p. 167ff.; also Detlef Kantowsky, 'Community Development and Panchayati Raj—leadership in a Community Development Block in Eastern Uttar Pradesh', *Inter Discipline* (1967), p. 43ff.
39. Sugata Dasgupta, *A Great Society of Small Communities—The Story of India's Land Gift Movement*, Benares, 1968, p. 38f.; Sachidanand, *Sarvodaya in a Communist State—A Socio-Economic Survey of Gramdan Movement in Kerala*, Bombay, 1961, p. 94ff.; A. W. Sahasrabudhe, *Report on Koraput Gramdans*, Wardha, 1960, p. 19.

Board (Zilla Parishad) has been given ample powers.⁴⁰ But other states have made different arrangements for local self-government and the success of all these measures has yet to be tested. 'Planning from Below' remains a problem.⁴¹

An intensive agricultural development programme, popularly called 'Package Programme,' was introduced so as to find out what could be done in a district if all bottlenecks of credit and supply of inputs could be removed. In each state one district was selected which had already attained high targets in agricultural production in order to test to what extent a new standard of performance could be established with intensive aid. In selecting the districts in terms of the targets achieved the potential of the district for further growth was taken for granted and no special effort was made to find out why the district had attained high targets and whether some constraints may not prevent additional growth. In many of these districts tenurial conditions were so bad that they proved to be an impediment to further development.⁴² None of these districts produced any spectacular new experiment in agrarian relations and the increase in productivity which has been registered in most of them has been overshadowed in the meantime by the 'green revolution' which has shown that with sufficient resources and under suitable conditions no intensive programme is required in order to make peasants step up their production. However, the problem of economic integration still remains to be solved.

5. *Political Development versus Developmental Politics*

Economic integration and political development are interrelated. Political parties reflect the interaction of economic interests and political decisions make an impact on economic affairs. As long as a

40. Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis Act, 1961 (Maha. Act 5 of 1962) in: *AIR* 1962, p. 266. Amendment (Maha. Ord. 3 of 1962) in: *AIR* 1962, p. 302.
41. H. C. Rieger, 'Bureaucracy and the implementation of economic plans in India', *The Indian Journal of Public Administration* (1967), p. 32ff., and H. C. Rieger, 'Indiens Erfahrung mit der Planung von unten', *Yearbook of the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University* (1967/68), Wiesbaden, 1968, p. 30ff.
42. Wolf Ladejinsky, *A Study of Tenurial Conditions in Package Districts*, Government of India Planning Commission, New Delhi, 1965.

country is not free to rule itself this interrelation may be rather tenuous. A freedom movement would reflect economic interests only to a certain extent, and as the movement does not control the government its political decisions will have no influence on the course of affairs. Colonial governments on the other hand keep aloof from the interests of the countries they govern and are guided by political decisions which are made elsewhere. In India under British rule parliamentary democracy was introduced with a very limited franchise. The national freedom movement was moulded by the political structure which it wanted to capture. The social policy of the Indian National Congress was, therefore, not too far ahead of the interests of the limited electorate which it wanted to impress. Organizationally the Congress did not reach below the district level which was the basic unit of British administration. Gandhi's 'constructive programme' of village uplift did not become a decisive element of political structure.

After a peaceful transfer of power the Congress merged with the administrative 'steel frame' left by the British. The maintenance of power was more important than the quest for extending the social basis of power. The heritage of the freedom movement provided sufficient social legitimacy for the ruling party and an awareness of the prevalent social constraints of political power discouraged any attempts at radical reform.⁴³ Adult franchise was bound to make a difference in the long run, but it did not necessarily sweep away the old constraints at once. A widening of the circle of political participation did not immediately imply a radical trend but first of all brought into the limelight the parochial conservative forces. In trying to reach the villages the ruling party established a partnership with the upper strata of rural society who would welcome an increase of their power due to 'Development from Above' without contributing to 'Development from Below'.⁴⁴ In other words, the benefits of the political and legal system stop just above the first threshold.

The legal system inherited from the British has also been of doubtful value for 'Development from Below'. Its strong bias in favour of the

43. Dietmar Rothermund, *Die Politische Willensbildung in Indien 1900-1960*, Wiesbaden, 1965.

44. Reinhard Bendix, 'Public authority in a developing political community: The case of India', *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* (1963), p. 39ff.

creditor and against the debtor, its expensive procedure and its dependence on the technicalities of English Common Law have protected the interests of the rich and the strong. This system has, of course, assured the security of property and the availability of credit, but these benefits have not reached the small man, on the contrary, the system has been used so as to intensify his exploitation. In an advanced money economy which depends on trade and investment the easy recovery of credit is the mainstay of economic transactions, in an agrarian economy with a high percentage of survival agriculturists the legal provisions facilitating the recovery of credit were used by the strong in order to intimidate and enslave the weak. Cheaper local forms of dispensing justice could not prevail against the jurisdiction of the courts. Post-independence reforms which introduced village courts (*nyaya panchayats*) have not been successful because these courts did not have enough powers, and everybody who could afford it or who had lost his case in the village court would run to the old, established court in the district town.⁴⁵

All these trends which characterize political development in India militate against developmental politics which would have to aim at the implementation of a radical land reform, the maintenance of a precise record of rights, the acceptance of cheap, local courts, the social control of rural credit, the decentralized industrialization of backward areas financed by direct taxation of rich peasants and traders, the reduction of the risks of the survival agriculturists and the general availability of improved inputs such as fertilizers, seeds etc.⁴⁶

6. *The Social Order and the Value System*

The impediments to 'Development from Below' which have been described so far are much more relevant to the Indian problem

45. Detlef Kantowsky, 'Indische Laiengerichte—Die Nyaya Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh', *Verfassung und Recht in Ubersee* (1968), p. 140ff.
46. A general indication of the awareness of the Government of India of these problems is given by a recent letter of the Prime Minister to the Chief Ministers on agricultural development, but this letter reiterates points which have been made earlier such as the fact that 'the absorption of improved farm practices is largely determined by the nature of tenures of the cultivators' etc. (Text printed in *Times of India*, August 27, 1969).

than the rigidity of the social order associated with the caste system which is generally held responsible for India's economic ills. It is true that particularly in rural India the pattern of social dominance is frequently articulated in terms of caste and that in some areas permanent ties of dependence have been sanctioned by the caste system which inflicted social disabilities on certain groups making it impossible for them to hold land or to escape from servitude. But even in such cases the notion of caste expressed the relationship of dominance and dependence without necessarily being the cause of it. Most students of India's social history have been deceived by the categorical statements of Brahminical texts which for reasons of more or less enlightened self-interest contained a persuasive description of cause and effect as far as the caste system was concerned. In fact, the caste system provides a very loose system of classification of various groups in Indian society and even the distinction between caste and tribe is a problem which puzzles the anthropologist.⁴⁷ In the face of economic or political challenges the caste system has proved to be very flexible. Many people have worked in professions which were a far cry from their 'traditional' occupations without 'losing caste'.⁴⁸ Local leaders may use caste in their quest for power but they do not necessarily favour members of their own caste if this would be to their disadvantage in a wider context.⁴⁹ If caste restrictions acted as impediments to development as far as one caste group was concerned there would be other groups which could step in. The caste system discouraged 'Development from Below' only to the extent that it served as a justification for the solidarity of dominant groups in oppressing others and preventing individual deviations from the group norm. But such justifications have been found in other social systems as well. Only the fact that caste solidarity is based on endogamy distinguishes it from other forms of group solidarity. The other characteristic feature of the caste system, the notion of a hierarchical order of castes, is more of an ideal construction which

47. F. G. Bailey, 'Tribe and caste in India', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (1961) p. 7ff.

48. Morris D. Morris, 'Values . . .', loc. cit., p. 605f.

49. Adrian C. Mayer, 'Some political implications of community development in India', *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie* (1963), p. 86ff.

becomes tangible only in the case of untouchability. And untouchability can, indeed, be singled out as the one great obstacle to 'Development from Below' as far as India's social order is concerned.

In the sphere of values much has been made of India's otherworldly preoccupations which are supposed to preclude any interest in economic development. Here again the value of a small spiritual elite have been wrongly taken for the values of the whole people. There is, in fact, much cant in the assertion of these values, or to put it differently, many people who actually live by other values and who know that they cannot realize the values of renunciation and spirituality in their own life compensate for this by showing their devotion and deference to those who profess to adhere to these values. But this assertion of spiritual values has not proved to be an obstacle to a vigorous pursuit of worldly advantages.⁵⁰ The only impediment to 'Development from Below' as far as the Indian value system is concerned is the absence of a genuine interest in social justice and a fair chance for all. Indian experience seems to teach that at least in this world such justice does not exist and there simply is no fair chance for all. This may, in fact, be a realistic appraisal of this world. However, those who think that a belief in liberty and equality is essential for 'Development from Below' would nevertheless deplore this attitude. Many Indians have raised their voice against it and have tried to assert the new values of social justice, but they will still have to convince the majority of the people whose experience has taught them a different lesson.

7. Mobilisation, Conflict, and Education

It has been said by some observers of the Indian scene that the 'revolution of rising expectations' has not affected the majority of the people because of their 'limited aspirations'. After a survey of the constraints under which most Indians have to live it may be stated that these aspirations are not limited but latent because expectations cannot rise as long as these constraints exist. However, if people manage to cross thresholds in greater numbers their expectations and aspirations will increase and conflict will arise as they compete for scarce resources. The natural fatalism of the survival agriculturist

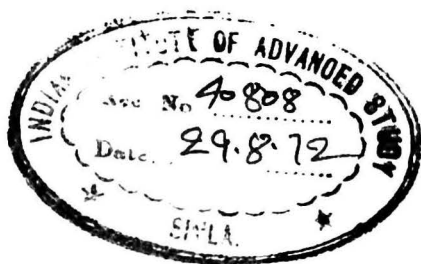
50. Morris D. Morris, 'Values . . .', loc. cit., p. 595ff.

and the complacency of the self-sufficient peasant are foundations of social and political stability. The great variety of patterns of physical and social dependence in agriculture makes an effective combination of interests (leave alone 'classes') almost impossible. But once constraints are removed there will be conflict. Those who are serious about economic development must face the fact that they are asking for trouble. Human mobilisation is challenging and dangerous.

Conflict cannot be avoided but it can be articulated so that it will contribute to its own solution and does not end in chaos. In this context education is of crucial significance, because it provides information about the alternatives of further action. People become aware of the manipulation of scarce resources and want to participate in it. This implies a familiarity with the social and political system, an access to those who wield power and authority and the knowledge of the rules and regulations which govern their decisions. Education will have to provide the skill for the articulation of demands as well as the insight that not all demands can be met simultaneously. It is the key to rational mobilisation but its quality may be doubtful in a triple economy burdened with a colonial heritage which has produced an enclave economy as well as an enclave education.

The inadequacy of education is a serious impediment to development from below. A stereotyped pattern of instruction, copied from outmoded foreign precedent, and administered in a routine fashion without regard to the changing needs of the society does not contribute to a better understanding of one's own problems and how to deal with them. The anxiety to qualify oneself according to this system of education in order not to drop out of the race for jobs has a paralysing effect on the mind. The non-conformist may be disqualified and may end up in poverty, which is a haunting presence and not just a matter of relative deprivation. The survival educationist must avoid risks, he cannot think in terms of the real benefits of education. Here is another threshold which is as difficult to overcome as the more obvious ones. But in this case the dominant constraint may be a lack of imagination. New ideas are needed in order to satisfy the rising demand for education not only in terms of quantity but also as far as the quality of education is concerned. Recent field research has shown that even India's survival agriculturists want education for their children and put a higher premium on it than on additional land or

other physical resources.⁵¹ Gandhi's advocacy of 'basic education' was in tune with this demand, but his programme could not be implemented because it did not fit in with the prevailing institutional pattern of education. India still awaits an educational reform which would set free the forces of 'Development from Below'.



51. K. H. Junghans, 'Einfluss der Industrialisierung auf die geographische und geistige Mobilität traditioneller Agrargesellschaften in Südasien', *Geographische Rundschau* (1968), p. 429.

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