Community Development Projects—

A Sociological Analysis

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The present paper attempts to make a sociological analysis of the Community Development Projects which have been sponsored by the Government of the Indian Union to assist the reconstruction of the agrarian economy and the rural society.

The Planning Commission in their first Five Year Plan have described the Community Development Projects 'as the method through which Five Year Plan seeks to initiate a process of transformation of the social and economic life of the villages'. ¹ It is, according to an U. N. O. report, 'designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and, if possible, on the initiative of the Community, but if this initiative is not forthcoming, by the same use of techniques for arousing it and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response'. ² The Community Development Projects are of vital importance, according to Pandit Nehru, 'not so much for the material achievements that they would bring about, but much more so, because they seem to build up the community and the individual and to make the latter the builder of his own village centres and of India in the larger sense. '³

The word 'Community Development' itself is a novel nomenclature in India. As the Report of the Team for the Study of the Community Projects and National Extension Service (popularly known as the Balwantrai Committee Report) states, 'We have so far used such terms as rural development, constructive work, adult education and rural uplift to denote certain of its aspects. The word "Community" has, for the past many decades, denoted religious or caste groups or, in some instance, economic groups not necessarily living in one locality; but with the inauguration of the community development programme in this country, it is intended to apply it to the concept of the village community as a whole, cutting across caste, religious and economic differences. It is a programme which emphasises that the interest in the development of the locality is necessarily and unavoidably common to all the people living there'. 4 It is sociologically significant to note that to renovate the agrarian economy and the rural society through the active participation of millions of villagers, the sponsors of this movement could not find an appropriate term in any of the State languages of India to symbolize

this vast process. We will examine the postulates underlying this new connotation of the term "Community" subsequently.

The Community Development Projects emerged as a result of inspiration from the following earlier experiments:

(i) Intensive rural development activities carried out at Sevagram and the Sarvodaya centres in the Bombay State; (ii) The Firca Development Schemes in Madras; (iii) Experiments to build up community centres for Refugees at Nilokheri and other places; (iv) And more particularly from the Pilot Projects at Etavah and Gorakh-pur in the U. P. under the inspiration of Albert Mayers.

The idea also arose out of a realization that various efforts made by the Government departments such as Agriculture, Animal husbandry, Cooperation, Health, Education and others, which were carried on separately, should be coordinated to make them more effective. Further, according to the sponsors of the movement, this programme was launched with a view to changing the very philosophical basis of rural reconstruction. Most of the other institutions approached the village and rural reconstruction work in a philanthropic spirit. The Community Development Movement 'wants to create a psychological change in the villagers.... It aims at inculcating in the villagers new desires, new incentives, new techniques, and a new confidence so that this vast reservoir of human resources may be used for the growing economic development of the country'. ⁵

The Community Development Programme was inaugurated on October 2, 1952. Fifty five Community Projects were launched. Each Project Area comprised about 300 villages, covering an area of 450 to 500 sq. miles, i. e., about 1, 50, 000 acres with a population of about 2, 00, 000 persons. A project area was divided into three Development Blocks of hundred villages, each with a population of about 65, 000 persons. Each Block was divided into about twenty groups, each containing five villages. Each group of villages was being served by a Gram-Sevak (the village level worker). Of the five villages, one generally became the headquarter of the Gram-Sevak.

The programme launched in 1952 was extended to wider areas at the end of the First Five Year Plan. 603 National Extension Service Blocks, and 553 Community Development Blocks covering 1, 57, 000 villages and a population of 88. 8 million persons were created. Nearly one out of every three villages in India was brought within the orbit of this Programme,

The Second Five Year Plan proposed to bring every village in India under this scheme, 40 per cent of the area being brought under a more intensive development scheme. In all, 3,800 additional Extension Service Blocks will be set up, 1,120 of these being converted into Community Project Blocks. The ambitious scheme has, however, been subsequently modified!

The Community Development Programme is broadly divided into three phases, viz., the National Extension phase, the Intensive Community Development Project phase and the Post-Intensive Development phase. Of course, it is not laid down that everywhere the first two phases must follow each other, the National Extension phase in some areas having been skipped over to usher in the Intensive Community Development Project phase. Usually, the period of the first and the second phase is to last for three years each.

In the first phase, the areas selected are subjected to the method of providing services on the ordinary rural development pattern with a lesser Governmental expenditure. In the intensive phase, the blocks selected are subjected to a more composite and more intensive development schemes with larger Governmental expenditure. In the post-Intensive phase, it is presumed that the basis for self-perpetuation of the process initiated during the earlier phases has been created and the need for special Government expenses reduced. Slowly the areas are left in the charge of the Departments for the development.

In 1952-53 series of community projects, the provision per block was Rs. 22 lakhs for a period of three years. This was reduced to Rs. 15 lakhs for the 1953-54 series. The present provision for the N. E. S. stage of three years is Rs. 4 lakhs and for the Community Development stage is Rs. 8 lakhs, making up a total of Rs. 12 lakhs for six years. In other words, the annual expenditure per Block was reduced first from Rs. 7.3 lakhs to Rs. 5 lakhs and now to Rs. 2 lakhs.

An imposing list of activities has been prepared by the sponsors of the Community Development Projects. They include various items connected with the following eight categories of undertakings:

(1) Agriculture and related matters; (2) Communications; (3) Education; (4) Health; (5) Training; (6) Social Welfare; (7) Supplementary Employment; and (8) Housing.

The fourth Evaluation Report of 1957 adopted different criteria for classifying activities undertaken by the Community Development

Projects. They divided the programmes of activities into the following major categories: (1) Constructional programmes; (2) Irrigation programmes; (3) Agricultural programmes; and (4) Institutional and other programmes. ⁶ The detailed list of the various activities undertaken under each of these programme is as under:

Constructional Programmes: 'Kutcha' roads, 'Pucca' roads, culverts, drains, pavement of streets, school buildings, community centre buildings, dispensary buildings, houses for the Harijans and drinking water sources.

Irrigation Programmes: Wells, pumping sets, tube wells and tanks.

Agricultural Programmes: Reclamation, soil conservation, consolidation of holdings, improved seeds, manure and fertilizer, pesticides, improved methods of cultivation and improved implements.

Institutional and other programmes: Youth Clubs, Women's Organisations, Community Centres, 'Vikas Mandals', cooperative societies, distribution stores, maternity centres, dispensaries, veterinary dispensaries, key village centres, panchayats, adult literacy centres, primary schools, 'dai' training centres, cottage industries, production cum training centres, demonstration plots, soakage pits, smokeless 'chulha'.

An elaborate organization has been created to implement Community Development Projects; it is known as the Community Project Administration. Originally functioning under the Planning Commission, it is now under the charge of the newly created Ministry of Community Development.

The entire administration is composed of four major types—the Central administration, the State administration, the district organization and the Project administration. The power and the control flow from top to bottom, making it a hierarchic bureaucratic organization. At every level there is an Executive Officer, functioning with the aid of a Development Committee and helped by an Advisory Board. At the Centre, there is an Administrator, at the State level there is a Development Commissioner, at the district level there is a District Development Officer of Collector's grade and at the Project level a Project Level Officer equipped with a staff of some 125 supervisors and Village level workers.

Prof. S. C. Dube finds six significant characteristics of this administrative organization.

"First, in recognition of the necessity of unified and coordinated direction of development activities, final responsibility on all the four different levels has been vested in one individual and not in a multiplicity of specialists. Provision, however, has been made for technical consultation and guidance of experts on all the levels.

"Second, in recognition of the necessity of associating nonofficials with programme planning, and to a certain extent with programme execution, provision has been made for consultative and supervisory committees to be associated with appropriate officers on all levels.

"Third, in order to cut down red tape and maintain an efficient supply link from the central and state headquarters to the individual projects, sufficiently important officers have been appointed at different levels and direct channels of communication from the highest (Centre) to the lowest (Project) levels have been established. The principle of a teamwork at different levels has also been emphasised.

"Fourth, in view of the very special nature of the work to be undertaken, provisions have been made to organize orientation and training courses for officers on the two lower levels, and for frequent exchanges of views and consultation between officers on the two upper levels.

"Fifth, in order to secure popular participation on the widest possible basis, it was decided to utilize all existing local agencies in the implementation of the development programme. Where such agencies did not exist or were not adequately developed it was decided to create them.

"Sixth, in recognition of the two important principles of modern public administration, namely of research and progress, an independent Programme Evaluation Organization has been set up to evaluate the existing organization and methods of Community Development. The findings of this body are expected to lead to a desirable modification of and changes in the organizational set-up and methods of approach."

We will now survey the achievements of this programme. It is extremely difficult to give a total quantitative assessment of these achievements for a number of reasons. First, to the best of present writers' knowledge, such overall data have not been compiled. Second, it is not very easy to separate the achievements of the Community Development Projects from those brought about by other agencies. Some observers have pointed out that a number of activities attributed to the Community Development Project movement

should, in fact, be credited to other agencies. We shall, however, accept for the purposes of evaluation, the achievement data in regard to constructional, irrigational, agricultural, institutional and other activities as collected by the Fourth Report of the Programme Evaluation organization. ⁸ It is a data carefully collected from seventeen Project units from different states studied by the Project Evaluation Organization.

The impact of the Community Development Projects has been subjected to analysis and evaluation by a number of scholars and organizations. Prof. Wilson, Prof. Carl Taylor, Prof. Oscar Lewis, Prof. Opler and his team, Prof. Dube, Prof. Mandlebaum and many others have attempted to assess the nature of the impact of the Community Development Projects on the life of the rural people. The Programme Evaluation Organization has also been doing assessment continuously and their Reports are valuable documents. The Bench Mark Surveys also provide insight into the workings of the Community Projects. The popularly known Balwantrai Committee report on the subject is one of the latest authoritative evaluation. Prof. Dube's *India's Changing Villages* is the latest comprehensive and systematic analysis of Community Projects, although based on a very intensive examination of only two different types of villages in U. P. It will be very difficult indeed to adequately indicate here the main findings of these studies and Reports separately. However, a certain general pattern of evaluation emerges which deserves our careful attention.

It should be noted at the very outset that all the scholars and organisations who have evaluated the Community Development Projects, fundamentally accept the major postulates of the economic policy of the Government of India and of the Five Year Plans. Further, all these evaluators have assumed that the Community Development Movement is both desirable and appropriate as a technique of reconstructing the agrarian economy and society of India. Not one of them has even raised a single query or attempted to critically examine the major postulates of the Movement. It is, therefore, necessary to make explicit the major assumptions taken for granted by others. As Prof. Carl Taylor remarks: "The whole concept and Plan of Community Development-Extension programme is that local self-help Village groups will mobilize their natural and human resources for local improvements of all kinds and all technical agencies of Government will aid them in this undertaking. "9 It implies, according to him (i) initiative of people in both formulating and executing

the programmes, (ii) therefore the schemes of generating and organizing a large number of voluntary associations almost of primary group nature and also a wide variety of local institutions, (iii) reliance upon group work techniques; (iv) active participation of people in all the stages of implementation, resulting in local leadership, (v) governmental administrative machinery which acts as an assisting body. The personnel of the administrative machinery, at all levels, should not merely be equipped with administrative and other technical skills but must be fairly well-versed in social skills of evoking voluntary association and community participation

The philosophy underlying this Movement, in the context of the Indian agrarian society, therefore, implicitly accepts the following major sociological assumptions: (i) the individuals, sections, groups and strata forming the Village Community have a large number of common interests, sufficiently strong to bind them together; (ii) the interests of the various groups and classes within the village are both sufficiently like and common to create general enthusiasm as well as a feeling of development for all; (iii) the interests of the different sections of the community are not irreconcilably conflicting; (iv) the state is a super-class, impartial, non-partisan association and that the major policies of the Government are of such a nature that they do not further sharpen the inequalities between the existing social groups; (v) peoples' initiative and enthusiasm and active participation are possible in the extant village communities because they have common interests

None of the scholars or the committees have critically inquired as to whether these assumptions about both the Village Communities in India and the Indian State and its governmental policies are valid or not.

However, we will review at present only the major findings of these scholars and committees regarding the operation of Community Development Projects and their impact upon the life of the rural people.

Prof. Taylor and most of the scholars feel that the Government machinery, though staffed by intelligent, hard-working and conscientious persons, has not still assimilated the true spirit underlying the entire programme. The Community Development Extension Programme is operated more as an executive assignment. According to Prof. Taylor, the administration of the programme is predominantly based on aid from and reliance on the Government. The initiative of the people is still lacking. The Government machinery relies more on propaganda and spectacular results rather than on group work

and voluntary creative participation. According to Prof. Taylor, a certain amount of active governmental participation was inevitable in a country like India during the earlier phases of the movement. But if that earlier phase was not crossed over and if the movement did not elicit active participation and initiative from the people, the very basis of the Community Development Programme would crumble. The danger has been slowly raising its head.

Prof. S. C. Dube also comes to the same conclusion. "Planning so far appears to be from the top down.... It is necessary to examine the implications and results of the present trends in planning. Because of the unique curbs on Project autonomy its officials hesitated to demonstrate much initiative. What was worse they tended on the official level to accept orders from above, i. e., from the state headquarters, without question or comment, and this despite pronounced private reservations. As an outcome of this trend the officials were oriented less towards the village people, and more towards the pleasing of their official superiors. "¹⁰ And further, "A large number of Project-sponsored activities are directed along the lines of traditional government 'drives' rather than according to the proved principles of extension work. Visible accomplishments under such pressure and stimulation and completion of physical targets are greatly valued, and too little attention is given to the question of finding out if the movement is really acquiring roots in the village society. "11 According to Prof. Dube, government servants function as bureaucrats and have not become agents of change with an active social-service mentality.

The Balwantrai Committee Report is critical of the structural foundation of the Community Administration. According to the Report,

"admittedly, one of the least successful aspects of the CD. & N. E. S. work is its attempt to evoke popular initiative. We have found that few of the local bodies at a level higher than the village panchayat have shown any enthusiasm or interest in this work; and even the panchayats have not come into the fields to any appreciable extent. An attempt has been made to harness local initiative through the formation of ad hoc bodies mostly with the nominated personnel and invariably advisory in character. These bodies have so far given no indication of durable strength nor the leadership necessary to provide the motive force for continuing the improvement of economic and social condition in rural areas. So long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will supply the 'local interest,

supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality, 'invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development.

The report suggests that the elected Village Panchayat at village level and an elected Panchayat Samiti at the bloc level act as agencies to execute the Community Development Programme and the present Bloc level and Village level bureaucratic machinery be wound up.

In short, the major criticism offered by scholars and Evaluating Committees boils down to the following major points: (i) its bureaucratic nature; (ii) absence of elective principle at any level in the machinery; (iii) decisions taken at the top and communicated below, almost like executive fiats; (iv) considerable confusion in the overall administration of the country, expressed in the relationship between the Project Administration and other Government departments; (v) considerable confusion and conflict with regard to powers and duties, and relative position and seniority within the staff of different departments as a result of their being interlocked with the Project Administration; (vi) duplication of work for a section of the administrative personnel and resultant overworking and the problem of divided loyalty towards functions; (vii) absence of social service mentality; and (viii) lack of social work skills among the staff.

In regard to the actual achievement of the Projects, within the cluster of villages operated by a Gram-sevak, his headquarter-village receives more benefits. Further, it has been found that bigger villages get greater benefits. Similarly, commercial belts receive more facilities than the non-commercial agrarian belts. As the Evaluation Report points out,

"There is wide disparity in the distribution of the achievement and therefore of the benefits of the community project programmes. This disparity exists as between different blocks in the project areas. Within the blocks it exists as between the H. Q. villages of Gram Sevaks, the villages easily accessible to them, and the villages not so easily accessible. Within the villages, it exists as between cultivators and non-cultivators; and within the cultivating classes, it exists as between cultivators of bigger holdings and larger financial resources and those of smaller holdings and lesser financial resources. This is a matter of serious concern not only in terms of regional and social justice but also in terms of the

political consequences that may ensue in the context of the increasing awakening among the people. "¹³

Though this disparity of benefits is recognised, none of the scholars or evaluation organizations has made a systematic analysis of its consequences; its ecological repercussions are not even seen by them. The Indian rural society is undergoing transformation under the impact of numerous forces today. Government's programmes of industrialization, electrification, land reforms, major irrigation works, export and import plans, taxation, commercialization and monetization of various sectors of economic life, and unification of the country through development of means of communication, are producing important changes in the agrarian areas also. The impact of urbanization and industrialization upon the pattern of rural life are being studied by a number of scholars. Unfortunately, however, none of the evaluators has analysed the impact of the Community Development Project upon the rural life from this wider perspective. Nor have these evaluators indicated the significance of this uneven growth of various regions, blocks, and villages.

The advantages of the improvement, as pointed out by the Community Evaluation Reports, are taken by larger cultivators. As Prof. Dube points out,

"Although the ideal of the Community Development Project was to work for the many-sided development of the entire community, from the foregoing account of its work... it is clear that its significant and best organized activities were confined to the field of agricultural extension and consequently the group of agriculturist benefited the most from them. A closer analysis of the agricultural extension work itself reveals that nearly 70 per cent, of its benefits went to the elite group and to the more affluent and influential agriculturists. The gains to poorer agriculturists were considerably smaller.... For the economic development of this group, as well as for that of the artisans and agricultural labourers, no programmes were initiated by the Project." 14

Similar observations are made by all the Project Evaluation Reports as well as by scholars like Mandelbaum. This impact of the Community Development Project is fraught with serious consequences. It sharpens the gulf between the rich and the poor cultivators. It makes artisans and agricultural labourers relatively more handicapped than the cultivators and therefore generates greater inequality and wider chasm between the affluent farmers, the agrarian capitalist

class on one hand and the poorer strata composed of poor peasantsartisans and agricultural labourers on the other. It implies that in the context of the economy which produces for market and profit, the poor farmers and other strata are made weaker in their competitive strength against the richer strata.

The organizations for rural change are dominated by the upper sections of the rural population. As pointed out by the Programme Evaluation Report, "When one considers the pattern of membership in village organizations, be they cooperative societies, *Vikas Mandals*, Gram Panchayats or Nyaya Panchayats, one clearly finds that the membership is confined to the large cultivators and that the smaller cultivators as well as landless agricultural labourers, have practically no stake in the organizations of the village. "¹⁵ As Prof. Dube has pointed out,

"The Community Development Project sought the cooperation of the existing village institutions such as the village panchayat and the adalati panchayat schools and cooperative societies. Persons holding offices in these bodies or otherwise prominent in the activities were regarded as 'Village Leaders', and the development officials made a special effort to work closely with them. Some others who had contacts with politicians and officials were also included in this category and were consulted in matters connected with the project.... Thus a group of village people having contacts with the world of officials and politicians largely came to be viewed as the local agents of change.... The first mistake was in assuming that these people were the leaders.... Because of their association with the official and the urban ways of life these leaders as a group had come to possess a special status within the community, but the average villager did not trust them without reservations. Some of the common stereotypes regarding government officials applied in a modified form to these village officials who were recognised as having a semi-government status.... Among others included in the category of 'traditional leaders' were the important and influential people in the village. Naturally most of them were from the dominant land-owning group. In identifying power and status with leadership, an important and emerging aspect of group dynamics was ignored. The undue ampless in of group dynamics was ignored.... The undue emphasis in working with 'traditional leaders' was construed by villagers as an effort on the part of the Government to maintain a status quo in the internal power relations within the village communities and indirectly as a step to support the domination of the landowning groups. "16

The same conclusion is drawn by almost all the evaluators. This reliance on the upper stratum of the village population by the Government has sociological significance which cannot be underestimated. Nay, it has serious social implication in terms of the dynamics of rural society. It implies not merely a hold over the economic resources in that area by a small tipper class, but also a hold over the political, social and cultural life of the community. It further means that in agrarian area, as a result of the functioning of the community development programmes, a stratum becomes strengthened economically and politically, and utilizes various institutions for its own end. It also means that in agrarian area, the Community Development Projects are creating an institutional and associational matrix wherein the Government buttresses the economically dominant classes, and in their turn, the economically dominant classes strengthen the power of the present rulers of the State. This development has dangerous significance for the all-round development of the rural society and also for the unprivileged strata of the agrarian area which constitute the bulk of the rural people. It is very unfortunate that the implication of this developmental tendency in terms of class polarization in agrarian area, and the role of the state as an agency of the upper stratum is not fully appreciated.

Almost all the Evaluators have recognised that the contributions to be made by the village people are felt very burdensome by the lower sections of the people. *Shramdan* is the technique by which masses were asked to make contribution to the Community Development. Prof. Dube's observations on *Shramdan* as a voluntary movement of village self-help deserves attention:

"From a close observation and analysis of four Shramadan drives... certain points emerge that explain differences in reactions to Shramadan. The village elite, as well as the upper status groups have, on the whole, welcomed the shramdan drives, and through them the construction and repairs of roads. They gained from it in two ways. First, the repaired and newly built roads facilitated the transport of their sugarcane and grain. Secondly, in these drives they could assert their position of leadership and prestige in the village... as is explained at some length in Chapter VI, because of their status they assumed supervisory roles in this work, and left the hardest and less desirable part of the job to be done by the people of the lower status and lower income groups. Even their token participation won the praise and acclaim of the officials and outside political leaders. The poor-

er groups, on the other hand, had no practical and visible gain from these projects. Few among them owned bullock carts, and most of them did not have large quantities of sugarcane or wheat to be transported to the urban markets. Their work did not win much praise from outsiders. All that they got often was a formal acknowledgement from the lower officials and some village leaders. They not only had to work hard, but they also lost the wages for the day, which they otherwise might have earned. This explains why many of them viewed this thing as a revival of beggar, a practice under which influential landowners and government officials compelled the poorer people to work without wages or at nominal wages and which is now prohibited by law."

New associations have been launched or some of the old associations performing those functions have been claimed to be revitalized. Youth clubs, women's organizations, community centres, schools, libraries, adult education classes and social education centres form the predominant type of institutions. These organisations have emerged only in a very few areas. Excepting some institutions like Bhajan Mandalis or Akhadas at some places, very few institutions have taken roots in the villages. A large number of these institutions are operating more as paper organisations. Almost all the evaluators have indicated the failure of this section of the Community Development Programme.

Almost all critics including Taylor, Wilson, the Balwantrai Committee, Dube and V. K. R. V. Rao indicate these trends. They criticise one aspect of the programme or the other. They suggest some symptomatic remedies to cure the ills. Prof. Taylor wants thousands of trained officers, equipped with social skills to make this programme a success. The Balwantrai Committee makes certain proposals for making Village Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis as instruments for operating the Community Development Programmes. It also wants to abolish two-phased division in the form of N. E. S. and CD. with unequal financial allocations and creation of six year unit with larger financial allocation. Further, it wants the CD. Programme to concentrate more on select items like increase in production rather than cultural improvements. According to them, there is nothing wrong with the major premise of the Community Development Projects, nor is there any fundamental fallacy in the postulates of the Five Year Plans. According to these evaluators, the failure of the CD. Projects in essence is due to one or more of the following factors: ignorance, lack of will on the part of the personnel, faulty organizational principles, fatalism of the vast bulk of the people, lack of technical and social skills, or wrong choice in selection of items. According to Prof. Dube, the main obstacles are: "(i) the general apathy of a considerable part of the village population, (ii) suspicion and distrust of officials and outsiders; (iii) failure on the part of the Project to evolve effective and adequate media of communications; (iv) tradition and cultural factors. "18

Are these costly projects, which do not fulfil their proclaimed major objectives, worth continuing? Are they not becoming agencies which do not merely defeat the very purpose for which they are ostensibly launched, but are actually playing the harmful role of strengthening the richer strata in the agrarian society?

Inspite of the fact that considerable factual material has been collected which indicates the class structure of the agrarian society, and which also points out how the agrarian proletariat, a large number of uneconomic holders, and an enormous group of ruined artisans constitute the bulk of the rural community, none of these evaluators confronts the question, viz., how can a programme which essentially supports the upper strata of the rural population and which primarily benefits this minority in strengthening it institutionally, be called a Community Development Programme? The very name, to say the least, is deceptive.

Sociologically, the Community Development Programme is not merely proving futile in its acclaimed goals, but is becoming harmful.

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