

Worm's Eye View

Rural Industries

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This title is deliberately chosen to suggest a fresh look at a current problem. The writer was originally qualified as an engineer (mechanical and hydraulic), and has been working at rural development, through what are now known, as Extension methods, since 1913. His speciality lies in the processes of communication with village people.

Hence the angle from which the new look is suggested has a bias away from the views of the scholarly economists who have debated these issues for almost two years in the columns of the "Economic Weekly" . and the even more distinguished politicians whose debuts have been in the legislatures and their committers. In fact, the new look seems to the writer to be required from the worm's eye view.

THERE is one unanswerable case for developing industries in the villages of India, provided industries be regarded not merely as organised manufacturing activities. In every industrialised country, the service industries have been found increasingly essential to the development of all forms of production. This aspect seems to have escaped attention in India except, by the village people, who are pretty clear about it. One of the first questions a farmer asks when offered a modern mouldboard plough of steel, to replace his wooden digger plough is "flow will I keep this new plough sharp?" This question is in essence the same as the mechanized Canadian fanner's demand that field-services be available from the distributors of a new reaper and binder.

What the Villagers Want

Experience of villages where the National Extension Service or other agencies of development are at work shows that, village people are mentally ready for industry. Wide experience of any villages in India shows that a majority of people are insufficiently employed at some periods of the year. The Agricultural labour Enquiry estimates the All India average of working days on the land at 218. There is no estimate for unemployment among the "non-agricultural classes" who make up 18½ per cent of the rural population, according to the 1951 Census. Many factors, of which the principal one is probably the enormously increased, channels of communication between villages and towns in India, have created a situation in which village people seem to have got it into their heads that industry is what makes townfolk keep on top of them. This is a dangerous situation in a democracy, especially when the farming majority in the villages are becoming aware that the townfolk depend on them for food.

The debate on rural industrialisa-

tion has raged largely on economic grounds. But whether or not the economics of the process of industrialising village life are sound is matter beyond the framework of village people's thinking. Their concern for improvement in their lives and work does not fall into our convenient categories, derived from Western analytical science. We may assign the demand from 300-odd millions of people to any scientific category we choose. The facts remain that village people do not want only more consumables or more money; nor do we know, in a scientific sense, that this is their dominant need, without satisfying which no other need can create a clear aim for development. We assume this, because all our education has been shot through with Marxism.

Conversation with village people whom one has come to know intimately shown that their demand for improvement is driven by many motives. Their view of a better organised and self-developing life is certainly not clear, but two elements of that life form a very definite demand. Village people want to feel that they are good at their work, and that their homes and families also conform to a good, approved pattern. For these qualities, among others, they want more respect from non-villagers, and this desire is perhaps even stronger than their need for a sounder economy.

The Demand for Education

Before the present drive for improvement by Extension began, village people's desire that their children should have the means of escaping from the village was very strong, and was probably the principal motive behind the demand for education. Today this demand is equally strong, but it seems to be more, driven by villagers' determination that their children shall be on terms of equal respect with townfolk. Both motives act to produce a ready response from all village people to the suggestion that they should build

schools.

There is an equally warm Verbal response whenever it is suggested to introduce any form of industry into a village; but here the people feel that there is practically nothing they can do about such a desirable innovation. Co-operatives are always disliked where they have been tried and failed; this is nearly always because the village members were not taught the principles of co-operation, nor how to run a society.

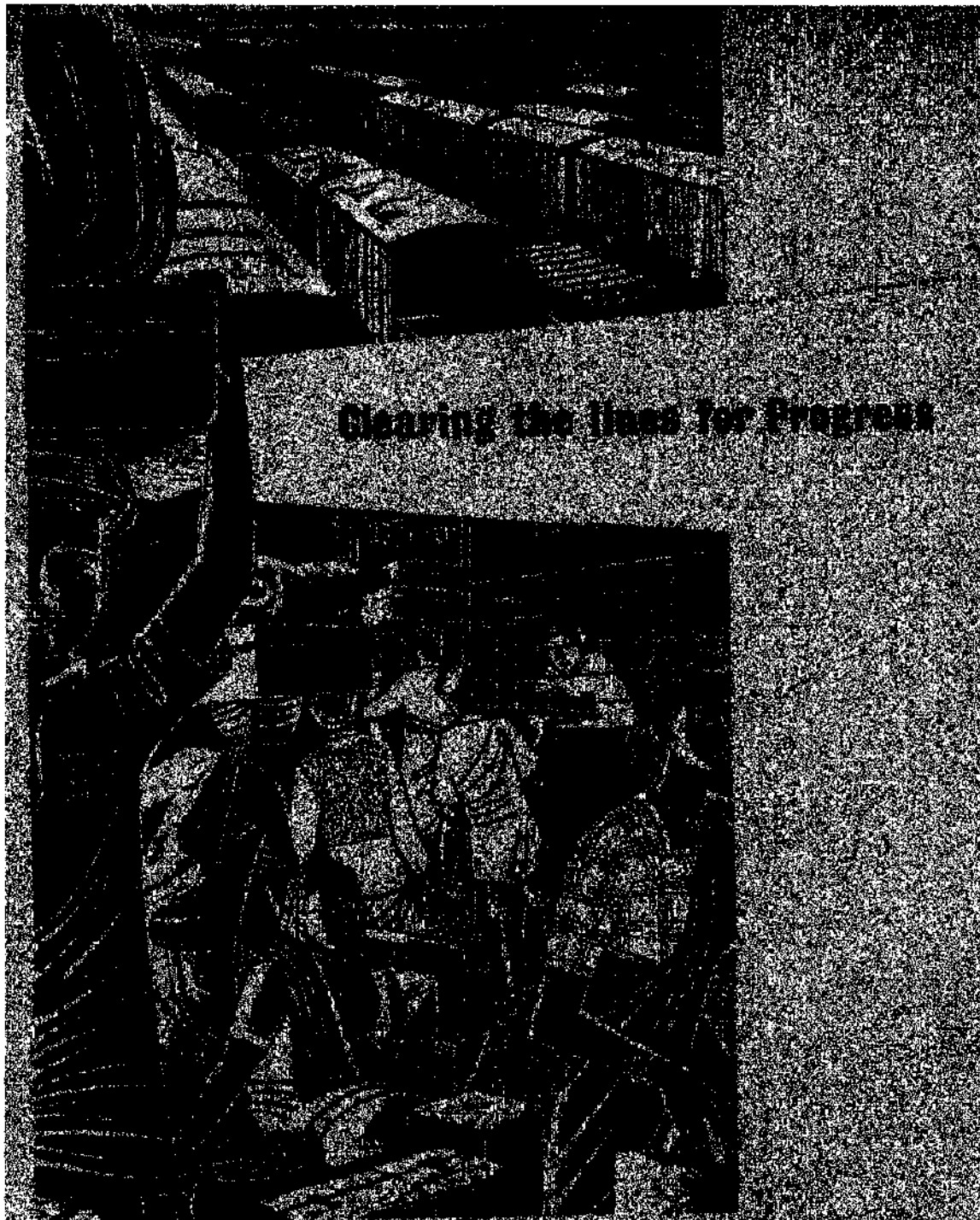
If planning for India's development is really to be done with village people (among the rest of the electorate), as it is claimed to be, then the demands of these people for industry have to be assessed. There is no evidence, for example, that the experimental introduction of 10,000 Ambar Charkas, through 200 Centres, has been planned after ascertaining a definite demand from village people.

By contrast, the pilot-development procedure of the National Small Industries Corporation seems to be much more realistic. Here, with more complex types of industrialisation in view, experiment with village people is sought, so that they are not the guinea-pigs in the laboratory, but the laboratory assistants.

Must India Repeat Other Countries' Mistakes?

It would appear that unemployment in rural India must increase, as a result of any conceivable development policy. The Bhoodan movement has an immense value in recreating an attitude toward- land and perhaps other social property in India in which such possessions are regarded, as a common trust. But the practical aspects of Bhoodan seem to this writer to offer only a wider sharing of poverty. This is not what village people want, spiritually, socially or economically, although they mercifully do not form these categories as we do.

Consolidation of land-holdings, which is today revitalising farming



Clearing the lines for Progress

More wheels may turn and more machines may manufacture... but this extra activity is meaningless without more transport to move passengers, raw materials and finished products. That's why of every rupee set aside for the Second Five Year Plan—an industrial plan, above all—no less than 3 annas will be spent on developing India's railways.

The Plan's allotment of Rs. 900 crores, will be used for rehabilitation of railway track and equipment, as well as to build 1,842 miles of new track, to buy 2,258

locomotives, 11,364 passenger coaches and 107,247 wagons, and to improve passenger amenities and working conditions for railway staff.

Burmah-Shell supply a lot of oil to Indian railways. And the railways move a lot of oil for Burmah-Shell. In fact, in one year, they carry not far short of 600 million gallons of oil to cities, towns and villages in every corner of the country. Railways and the oil industry do a vital job for each other—and they're doing it round the clock, year in, year out.

BURMAH-SHELL... IN INDIA'S LIFE AND PART OF IT

in the Punjab, is a more practical solution towards a shared prosperity of farmers; but any better organisation of land-use, like all Improved practices in agriculture, must result in reducing the numbers of persons needed to work on the land. As farm-produce and skills increase, the volume of labour decreases, even without powered cultivation. This experience of every other country where agriculture has been made more productive must be repeated in India; it cannot be avoided. But, there is no need to repeat all the other experiences of countries which have industrialised themselves. In particular, there seems no need to reduce the rural populations.

There is every good reason to maintain the predominance of agriculture in India. These reasons do not only spring from economic considerations; politics, and more emotional values connected with the fundamentals of culture-patterns in India, all contribute to the logic of such planning. Village people feel the supreme importance of agriculture more strongly than anyone; and they are over 80 per cent of the electorate in other words, of those who are theoretically the planners. When analysed, this village feeling (by no means confined to farmers) rests not only on the knowledge that farming is the source of their economic living. Here, again, the conviction that their skill in land-use is the true foundation of their human dignity comes up strongly with village people. If this supposed heritage of knowledge and skill be assailed, what has the villager left on which to base his claim to be treated with equal respect?

Yet the agricultural Extension field-worker of the NFS must undermine the farmer's necessary pride. In order to get better crop-yields, the farmer has to be shown that he is an ignorant and clumsy fellow in his present misuse of the lands. Even on this vital issue, he has to face the fact that the townsman knows better than he does. It is too much to expect every one of over 12,000 grain sevaks to be a diplomat. Consequently the basic and necessary pride of every villager in Extension areas now depends on the progressive farmers; they must show that, with the improved practices, they are far more skilful than any townsman could be at raising more and better quality produce. The progressive farmers will succeed; but there are

many stupid and conservative farmers who will not.

Non-Economic Factors

Here is another network of non-economic factors which suggests that better organised industry is a necessity in rural India. There seems to be no good reason why India should not work out a pattern of development which is not completely based on economics. If this be done, we shall have a matrix for growth which is radically different from industrialisation as experienced in Western countries, in Russia, and even in Japan.

The drift from villages to cities does not seem to have been at all decisive in India as it has been elsewhere. Large concentrations of industrial labour have nowhere brought their members more satisfaction in their work; indeed they have destroyed the personal pleasures of craftsmanship. Perhaps automation may restore personal satisfaction in a comparable skill, based on mental acuity, instead of manual dexterity; but this is generations away from us in India. Nowhere else in the world, though, has the pattern of migrant labour in urban industry been so persistent as in India. No other country seems to have experienced this unwillingness of the worker from the country to settle in the factory surroundings. Much of the reason for this lies in complete past failure to promote a tolerable social life for industrial labour in India. Yet the unbalanced political force which this small section of the population can now exert, may now raise more permanent settlement around factories by people from the villages, as has happened in every other country,

A well-balanced plan would establish better social and home conditions equally for farmers and all other village people, while improving conditions for the industrial labour already settled in the cities. This, of course, is the effort already being made; but probably it would be politically safer to meet the demand for industrialization in the villages, and thus to capitalize a certain bias away from city-life which probably still exists in India.

Promotion of Rural Industries

In the last two years, since the Ford Foundation Committee's Report, the administrative jungle of official agencies concerned with the development of rural industries has become a little less tangled. First comes the All-India Khadi and

Village Industries Board, now part of the Union Ministry of Production. Of the other All India Boards, Handicrafts is linked logically, but confusingly, with the Indian Co-operative Union, which is not quite an official body; Handlooms is part of the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which also sponsors the National Small Industries Corporation. The National Extension Service also takes a hand both in the Union Ministry of Community Development and through the State's organisations under Development Commissioners. The Central Social Welfare Board has a particular interest in developing industries for village ladies. Each State probably has its appropriate Department to Cultivate rural industry, for example the Planning Research and Action Institute of Uttar Pradesh. It would serve no purpose to list all of these.

In the past, private enterprise has done a good deal of this promotion. The Tata Iron and Steel Company's town of Jamshedpur is an example of one form of development. The Ogale Glassworks near Karad in Bombay State represents a different form, where the labour is lodged in its surrounding villages. Religious bodies, particularly the Christian missions in rural India have done much to develop handicraft types of industry, mostly on a part-time basis.

From this brief review of the agencies of promotion, it will be seen that the Karve Committee's report on Village and Small Scale Industries had sound reason to suggest a separate Union Ministry to handle the whole situation. But, as can be seen from the rest of this article, this Committee left untouched whole sectors of the development of rural industry which presumably would have to be covered by any such Union Ministry,

First Principles of Rural Industrialization

It is suggested that some administrative overlap and a great deal of effort by fieldworkers in this development might be economized by a fresh look at the objectives and the means of achieving them which are available or cultivable in a reasonably near future.

A number of assumptions are made by the writer in constructing this outline of the points at which development is required in the rural

areas. Basic to all of these is his personal impression that, village people are ready for industrial development, in all its senses: that they have the necessary intelligence and manual dexterity which can quickly absorb and retain the new knowledge and skills required, without waiting for literacy, and that they desire to improve their lives by working to do so. The other assumptions are as follows:

(i) that village people would, on the whole, prefer to remain in their villages, with their families, rather than shift to a town, provided the same opportunities of better work and the rewards of better living, including equal respect, were equally available in the villages.

(ii) that there is an increasing number of village people who need either part-time or full-time work in addition to farming, and its ancillary (or service) Industries.

(iii) that there is already much crude plant and equipment in villages, some of which could easily be adapted for more efficient industrial processes, through applied research in collaboration with the villagers who now use such tools, by Extension personnel having some engineering training.

(iv) that there will be a continuing effort made by the NES to educate village people thoroughly in the methods of forming and running multi-purpose co-operative societies. It is this form of group private enterprise which is referred to in the rest of this article. But co-operatives may take a generation or so to establish, in their true, viable form, in which all the members control the operations. Consequently it may be necessary, in order to assure the growth and continuity of private enterprise, for the NES to build up contractors from within the villages. Contractors would ultimately be absorbed by co-operatives. The importance of private enterprise in groups arises from the need to cut the umbilical cord of patronage, which ties most village people to officials or other non-villagers with financial power.

(v) that work for money-payment, sometimes on individual contract, will steadily replace the socially static jajmani system in the villages.

With these assumptions, it is possible to look at the needs of village people for industry, as they might be seen by an informed villager. The

range of points to be covered will therefore deal first with those (mainly service) industries which will be increasingly essential as farming improves. It will work upwards in the scale of industrial complexity towards those industries which may with equal economic advantage to be concerned be placed either in a rural or an urban area,

Industries Ancillary to Farming

No Indian farming at all can go on without Blacksmiths, Carpenters, Wheelwrights and Cart-builders. No improved farming is possible without improved home life, which will also require improved Masons and Potters resident in the villages. In all these crafts more skills and a better range of tools are needed, so that the craftsman can give more complex service and take less time over it. If this development will not increase his income sufficiently, the artisan must then form a co-operative with others of the same trade, sometimes in different villages. Together, the co-operative members can then more easily learn some manufacturing skills and thus sell either their services or their products over a wider, but still rural area.

Mechanics for cycles, motor-transport, diesel or electric pumping sets and perhaps other farm machinery are the next industrial servicemen to be trained as essential to improved farming. The mason will have to learn to work with concrete and perhaps steel reinforcement. The contractor for public works of civil engineering must be replaced by the co-operative of artisans. Perhaps the need for the local tailor and cobbler will vanish, as money and factory-made articles become available in village-shops (which should be consumer co-operatives); but, in the meantime, the existing tools and skids are capable of better and more satisfactory production and marketing, through professional co-operatives.

Animal Husbandry might well become more widely specialised, like Dairy Farming. Every farmer needs servicemen to eastvate bulls; breeding and veterinary treatment can also be treated as new rural industries. Similarly, in other countries rural people have specialised in collecting and storing improved, seed, in preparing mixtures of fodder for all livestock, and of fertilisers. All these are essentially locals if not exactly village-by-village industries,

and could well be developed as co-operatives with whole-time workers.

Supplementary Farming Industries

To fill the average 147 days when there is no work on the land, farming families must find some part-time gainful occupation. Surplus land-workers, as farming improves, will need, other whole-time work for pay. Among the trades indicated above, there will not be room for many of either group, even if caste permits. There is therefore reason to locate in the villages some industries which do not contribute to farming. Because it tends to be based on land produce, the All India Khadi and Village Industries' Board's list (Planning for Full Employment 1954) makes a useful corrective to the 1951 Census analysis. Considerations of availability of raw materials seem to be fundamental, as also the distances between markets and producers, especially for bulky, fragile or heavy raw materials or products.

Villagers as consumers seem to have no preference for goods produced in the villages. On the contrary, where distribution is adequate, and the retail price is down to the same level for a factory product which looks superficially as good as the hand-produced article from the village, the choice is always for the factory article. Village self-sufficiency is not the creed of village-people today, if indeed it ever was. Retail shopkeeping is however at the lowest level to-day that the writer has seen in 32 years of experience, beginning with cloth and yarn distribution. It would be a real service to village people to assist them in building consumer co-operatives, to replace the retail shops; it, would seem logical to villagers to make the present shopkeepers key-figures in such co-operatives.

No further development of village industries is acceptable on the basis that if the product is not very good, but is cheap, it will be good enough for villagers to consume. This is a wholly unjustified extension of the dogma of village self-sufficiency, and can only hamper the legitimate and growing pride of village people in self-development.

(To be Continued)

