INTRODUCTION
After Independence, India adhered to the socialistic path of development planning. It aimed at growth with (social and spatial) justice. But in practice it worked for economic growth in sectoral planning framework. The model failed as a redistributive device in the absence of institutional changes required to support the 'trickle down' effect of economic growth. Persistent regional disparity in development was one of the negative fallouts, notwithstanding the balanced regional development as an avowed goal of planning.

The realisation for redressal of disparity in development came, though late, only after two decades of planning when Green Revolution, a strategy for agricultural development, contributed to widening of the disparity rather than mitigating it. The Revolution remained confined to some select areas, with already developed system of irrigation, in the beginning. The disparities seem invidious, hence, palliative measures were not sufficient. Therefore, two bold measures were taken in the Fourth Plan (1969-74):
(a) the change in the central plan resource transfer formula in favour of backward states, and
(b) initiation of a number of backward area development programmes.

Since then backward area development programmes, with certain modifications over the period, are continuing in all plans, with some positive gains.

However, in recent years, there is a change in the thrust of our economic policy. The New Economic Policy, initiated in August 1991, is more oriented towards achieving economic growth by globalising, privatising and deregulating the Indian economy. We are now amidst the process of transforming our economy from the 'planned' to 'market'. Once again, this has pushed the question of regional disparity to the centre stage. It is in this context that a special need for the 'Geographic Appraisal of Backward Area Development Programmes' has been felt.

Given its nature, the theme of backward area development programmes was expected to receive great response from the geographic community. As it will become evidently clear from the survey of literature elsewhere, geographers failed to reap the rich harvest. Finding the research gap, the present dissertation accepted this challenge.

The term 'Backward Area' is commonly used, but conceived and perceived differently. Ask any one anywhere to name backward areas in his/her country and the answer is generally spontaneous. The existence of backward areas is universal though contextual in relative sense. Their development is desired but is deemed as a difficult task.
In this context, the present research work raises two basic questions:

1. Which are the areas officially identified as backward in India?
2. When and why did the Government of India initiated programmes for development of backward areas?

Both the questions raise further related issues. The first one, in turn, raises the following questions: Is India having development programmes for specific or different types of backward areas? How are such areas identified? What is the areal coverage in each case? Are they dispersed or contiguous?

Related questions to the second one are:

How many backward area development programmes are there in India? When and why was a particular type of programme started? Which financial and organisational arrangements were made for the purpose? What has been the impact of such programmes on the development process of the respective areas?

As such this work has a threefold objective:

1. to trace the concern of our planners in respect of spatial aspects in development efforts in general, and of backward areas in particular,
2. to provide a detailed account of the criteria of identification, areal coverage, financial and organisational structure of individual programmes, both in the context of time and space, and
3. to assess the impact of these programmes.

The findings of the work will be of paramount importance in at least three ways. First, it will unfold the Indian experience in developing backward areas. Secondly, it will provide useful material for future planning to ensure the economic efficiency, social effectiveness, and development efficacy of the new arrangements. Finally, it will indicate the feasibility of replicating the Indian model in other developing countries.