CHAPTER 6

THE DISCOURSE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development programmes are, as a rule, accompanied by a certain conceptualisation of the village. The state, while devising, promoting and administering programmes aimed at improving the conditions of life of the villagers, necessarily relies on a set of images of the village and the village life. Development policy makers discuss what villagers do, how they react to exogenous inputs, how they visualise their needs, and what they think of development, and so on. At times, they collect what they refer to as relevant sociocultural data in relation to development programmes. Their data and discussion provide them with images of the village and its developmental needs. However, very often these images of the village coalesce into a typical, generic village, turning all the villages into the village for the purpose of rural development. In other words, the village crystallises into a distinct social category in the context of the statist project of development, rural development in particular. This conceptual joining of the village and development, through the mediation of the state (and its multifarious agencies) is what we intend to look at in this chapter.

Thus, for us, the village is not merely an ontological category reflecting the morphology of a society where the vast majority of the people are villagers. Instead, development, rural development in particular, alters the meaning of the village in our social imagination. While talking of the village in the context of rural development, we no longer talk in terms of the actual villages where these programmes are going to be carried out or for which they are meant. Rather, we are guided by an implicit opposition between the village and the development: the
village is something which is characterised by the absence of development. The village is also portrayed in this thinking as a backward place by virtue of its being at a remote distance from development. This is precisely why it qualifies to be the recipient of the rural development programmes. This means that the images of the village have changed over time, especially with the acceleration of rural development programmes. The semantic association of the village with development leads to a definite alteration in the earlier ways of conceptualising what a village is. Village as a kind of place (underdeveloped/undeveloped) come to stand for a kind of people (backward).

Given our axial concern on the shifting relationship between the village and development, and the role of the state therein, we do not purport to present a comprehensive review of the literature on rural development. Nor do we intend to chronicle the different rural development programmes, and their achievements and failures. Since the empirical context of our research is the rural development institutions which have been concerned with devising, directing and managing rural development, rather than being concerned with the success, failure or impact of a particular programme, we attempt to seek an understanding of the discourse on rural development in terms of changing state-society relationship and its implications for particular type/s of construction of the village.

We will see in what ways the discourse on rural development constitutes a hegemonic version of the village in India. We will simultaneously try to explore our tentative argument that the developmental focus on the village helps Indian state in getting a renewed legitimacy as a crucial modernising agency. Only by
maintaining and sustaining a rural developmental discourse the Indian state can justify its popular sovereignty as a modernising tool amidst an underdeveloped society. As a consequence, this discourse also recreates the Indian village in a particular fashion by making it the principal site where tradition-modernity problematic unfolds itself.

In this chapter, we will also try to find out whether the image of the village current in the discourse on rural development converges with that of the dominant sociological and social anthropological writings. Or, can one find a marked dissonance between the two? In fact, we will try to problematise the village of the rural development programmes. However, our focus is not on how does the village process rural development programmes, but on how the village gets processed by the rural development programmes.

**Beginnings of Rural Development: Colonial Rule and After**

Historically speaking, the beginnings in the direction of what subsequently came to be known as ‘rural development’ were made during the British rule itself. The famines, food riots, and the high degrees of land alienation and rural indebtedness drew considerable attention of the colonial authorities and the latter felt the need to ameliorate the conditions prevailing in the villages. Securing better rights for tenants, protecting small tenants from money-lenders, irrigation works, formation of co-operative society etc. were part of the British legislative efforts. Also, the Public Works Department partly took care of the issues concerning infrastructure development, such as school buildings, hospitals, roads, post and telegraph in rural areas. However, development activities in the rural areas acquired an institutional
focus after the Royal Commission on Agriculture (RCA) published its report in 1928. Even so, barring a handful of welfare and relief activities supported by periodic grants, the British colonial state could not launch any major programme for rural development.

However, from the beginning of the twentieth century colonial policy makers showed increasing concern about agrarian stagnation and the general deterioration of life in the countryside. Various welfare services were introduced. Newly recruited experts on agricultural extension, credit facilities, health care etc. attempted to impart some substance to the self-image of the benevolent government. Under this programme known as village improvement, the village became a policy target. In fact, the first signs of community development can be found in Brayne's *The Remaking of Village India* (1929). As an organisation the Indian Village Service can be seen as a precursor to the post-colonial community development programme. Thus, the conjuncture of famines, calamity, endemic village distress and poverty demanded urgent attention from the British colonial state as a progressive agency of development.

On another plane, the newly found British orientation towards the uplift of the rural population has also been read as a strategy to prevent the mass of rural population from being mobilised by the independence movement. A certain degree of agrarian reform was thought necessary by the British rule to counter the expansion of the nationalist agenda. Ludden (1999: 11) traces the beginnings of a modern development discourse in the 1840s in the petitions by the critics of the East India Company. For example, Arthur Cotton argued against coercive taxation
and petitioned for increased government expenditure on irrigation. In 1869, Lord Mayo demanded the foundation of an imperial department of agriculture stating that:

For generations to come the progress of India ... must be directly dependent on her progress in agriculture ... There is perhaps no country in the world in which the State has so immediate and direct an interest in such questions ... Throughout the greater part of India, every measure for the improvement of the land enhances the value of the property of the State. The duties which in England are performed by a good landlord fall in India, in a great measure, upon the government. Speaking generally, the only Indian landlord who can command the requisite knowledge is the state (cited in Ibid. 1999: 11).

It is noteworthy that the enlightened public opinion had come to view the state as the only agency of development; it was believed that only massive state investment and relief, supported by enlightened generous public contributions, could reduce the suffering of the poor in India. Also, by 1900, it was firmly established in their minds that Indian villagers live perpetually at the edge of death and starvation. This perception of Indian village as being on the brink of catastrophe went a long way to make the village a ground for debate, research and political action. In the course of this long-waging debate, among other things, state institutions and urban intellectuals invented the modern science of development. The establishment of the Imperial Council for Agricultural Research and the recruitment of engineers, soil scientists, chemists, biologists and botanists on a large scale testify to the early shaping of a modern rural developmental agenda in British India.

In a large measure, this rudimentary agenda of rural development was conceived as a way to redress the nationalist grievances. Nationalists had argued that the British rule was squarely responsible for the ruination of non-agricultural occupations like crafts and cottage industries. They also blamed British trade
policies which favoured British-manufactured products over Indian ones. This had led to a process of de-industrialisation in India. The de-industrialisation thesis combined with the ‘drain’ theory created a public environment where nationalists could posit that the poverty in India was not a natural phenomenon but an outcome of British policies. In nationalist accounts, increase in famine deaths, ruined-agriculture on account of excessive taxing, de-industrialisation and attendant pressures on land, all such causes and manifestations of rural poverty were put at the doors of the disastrous British policies. Nationalists also criticised the British for the low level of public investment in agriculture. Their argument was that poverty had come to replace the earlier Indian prosperity under the weight of the exploitative colonial rule. For example, Radhakamal Mukherjee in his *The Foundation of Indian Economics* (1916) begins with a model of a traditional village economy disrupted by heavy tax demand, private property laws, voracious money lending, and capitalist commercialism, all imposed by the British. Naturally, forced land alienation, bonded labour, coerced revenue collections became colonial pathologies producing poverty and needed to be remedied by the agency of the state in the form of a new agenda of rural development. The conceptualisation of this agenda was, however, distinctly technocratic. It focused mainly on how to increase production through agricultural modernisation. That is why, it paid considerable attention to improving agricultural methods, the granting of credits, irrigation projects and other types of intervention. Such interventions at the village level, which were even otherwise quite moderate, took the existing distribution of resources, by and large, for granted.
Parallel to the efforts by the colonial government, there were several other experiments in rural development. If we take these experiments into account, then we can safely claim that rural development has had a fairly long history in India going back to several decades before Independence. Some of these early well-known experiments were Sriniketan, Martandam, Gurgaon, and Etawah. Such experiments were intended to mitigate rural poverty in a localised area through various means, and majority of them were initiated and carried out either by well-intentioned foreigners or by prominent Indians. As these experiments were sporadic, episodic and short-lived, and very often, guided by the ideas of charity and benevolence, they could be regarded only of cosmetic value. Moreover, they remained confined to the experimental areas and failed to bring about any considerable success in terms of either accomplishing their avowed objectives or having a demonstrable effect.

Then comes Gandhi’s rural reconstruction programmes which had a wider scope and which operated on a pan-Indian scale. Gandhi’s concern with hygiene, sanitation, education, roads, khadi, wells, etc. can be said to be guided by the overall idea of rural development. However, it was more a training to his team workers, and a creation of awareness of need for a mass movement among the villagers than a mere effort to improve literacy or sanitation or economic conditions (see Gaikwad 1986: 53-54).

Effectively speaking, rural development programmes got a new lease of life after the achievement of Independence. As the state took upon itself the mandate of playing a very decisive and significant role in reconstructing rural society, fresh,
and concerted efforts were made in the direction of rural development. A new
dependour was made to bring about an overall change in rural social life (Desai
1979: 2). For many observers, the introduction of various rural development
programmes 'has essentially been a dimension of political strategy to ensure
political stability ... it was, in essence, a strategy to gain time in the absence of any
viable alternative' (Gaikwad 1986: 10). Gaikwad argues that these low-cost special
rural development programmes were meant to keep hopes and aspirations of the
rural people as well as their faith in democratic institutions and the state alive. It
was believed that the increasing gains from industrialisation would progressively
satisfy the welfare needs of the rural people (Ibid.).

In this reading, rural development programmes are seen as an interim
arrangement till the general prosperity becomes more widespread. In a way, it also
attributes conscious motives to the state and projects some sort of conspiracy
theory by doubting the apparent intentions of the state.

Conceptualising Rural Development

Rural development emerged as a distinctive field of policy and practice in the
1970s when it became part of the 'new strategy' for development planning by the
World Bank and the UN agencies (see World Bank 1975; see also World Bank
1988, 1997). This strategy came to be formulated as a result of the general
disenchantment with previous approaches to development planning at national and
sectoral levels. It is defined by its concern with equity objectives of various kinds -
especially the reduction of inequalities in income and employment, and in access to
public goods and services, and the alleviation of poverty. It is this focus on
distributional issues which has marked out 'rural development' as a distinct field at
the global level, because an overwhelming majority of the poor in the developing
countries of Africa and Asia live in rural areas.

The term 'rural development' refers to a distinct approach to interventions
by the state in the economies of underdeveloped countries, and one which is at
once broader and more specific than 'agricultural development'. It is broader
because it entails much more than the development of agricultural production - for
it is in fact a distinct approach to the development of economy as a whole. It is
more specific in the sense that it focuses (in its rhetoric, and in principle)
particularly on poverty and inequality.

Although there is a substantial overlap between the field of conventional
agricultural economics and the concerns of 'rural development', the kind of studies
which are required to understand the factors affecting rural development are not
contained within the discipline of agricultural economics. Not only does 'rural
development' include attention to other aspects of rural economies as well as
agriculture, but also the analysis of distributional issues. In this sense, rural
development demands an interdisciplinary approach in which the broader social
and political factors interacting with economic processes are subjected to
examination. Conventional agricultural economics tends to focus upon the analysis
of the efficiency of the use of resources in production and marketing, and to treat
the social and political factors which are of central importance in the practical
activity of 'rural development' as ceteris paribus.
The expression ‘rural development’ may also be used, however, to refer to processes of change in rural societies, not all of which involve action by governments. In fact, the activities of the state are profoundly influenced by what happens in rural society, and that the state in turn, greatly affects processes of agrarian change. In this case the activity of ‘rural development’, a form of state intervention, must be considered simply as one of the forces concerned - although it is one which has become of increasing importance. In this view, rural development is seen as also a process and not merely as policy (see Harriss 1992: 15-34).

However, in the mainstream literature, rural development is seen more in policy terms than as a process. There is a long tradition of thought which conceptualises the state as existing outside of or above society (see, for example, Bailey 1957), and in the line of this tradition there are a good many writers who treat the activity of rural development as if it were conducted by the state in the interest of the society as a whole.9

In India, the RCA equated rural development with agricultural development. This equation was kept intact even after independence in certain quarters of the government. For example, the Planning Commission’s Task Force on Integrated Rural Development states, ‘After careful consideration, we have belatedly decided to take what might be considered a rather restricted view of the expression “rural development”. We have chosen to equate it with agricultural development in the widest sense so as to embrace, besides, crop husbandry, all the allied activities’ (quoted in Maheshwari 1985: 17).
Even now, rural development remains an omnibus term, both for national and international development agencies. The World Bank sees it as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people - the rural poor - such as small-scale farmers, tenants, landless labourers, etc. It further distinguishes between those who are poor in absolute terms (monthly income being less than $50) and those who are poor in relative terms (income being less than one third of the national average). For Katar Singh (1989: 18), ‘...it [rural development] consists overall development of rural areas with a view to improve the quality of life of rural people’ and further ‘rural areas are those which are not classified as urban areas. They are outside the jurisdiction of municipal corporations and committees and notified town area committees’.

According to L.C. Jain (Jain et al. 1985: 220), rural development refers to the ‘transformation of the outlook of the people, inculcation of the spirit of self-reliance, generation of habit of co-operative action through popular bodies and these three to lead to enlightenment, strength and hope’. Thus, one finds that political empowerment and decentralised governance are new variables in discussions on rural development (Kuhn 2000). Similarly, the participatory management of common property resources has, of late, been widely discussed under the rubric of rural development (see Thakur and Pattnaik 2002).

Without going into the various definitions of rural development, one can safely argue that over the past fifty years or so the content of this term has changed substantially. This change is intertwined with the changing image of village
community. Maheshwari (1985:16) refers to one such important transition in the conceptualisation:

The earlier definitions of rural development assumed the village to be a homogenous entity but this myth was exploded under the impact of the first set of programmes undertaken for rural development. The benefits of these schemes and programmes generally accrued to those with large land holdings, and the lot of those possessing meagre or no land did not improve and, in many cases, even worsened. The stratified character of rural society was disclosed in all its clarity and sharpness, necessitating a revision of originally prescribed contents.

The target group approach of the 1970s is located in this moment of conceptual transition from village as a homogenous community to village as a stratified community. This means that ‘rural’ instead of being defined in terms of something as neutral as rural area (see Katar Singh 1989), came to be defined in terms of asymmetrical social groups dotting the rural landscape. In substantial terms, rural development usually meant increasing production and raising productivity, removal of poverty, inequality and exploitation. All those activities (plans, programmes and policies) which were geared towards one or more of these aims constituted rural development provided these activities were undertaken in a rural area. Thus, an anti-poverty programme in a cluster of settlements administratively designated as a village will be a rural development programme. As Alexander (2000: 190) writes, ‘rural development implied increase in per capita income, and the achievement of various economic and social attributes of developed societies, such as increased use of capital, productive activities based on science and technology, expansion of infrastructural facilities, expansion of educational levels, reduction in mortality and fertility rates etc’.

In other words, while the term ‘rural development’ has a larger connotation, in its specific connotation now, it refers to programmes specifically addressed to
improve the socio-economic conditions of the disadvantaged sections of society, particularly those below the poverty line. Though the main focus of rural development is to reduce poverty, it is believed that it would also contribute to economic growth through increase in rural production, increase in productivity, and expansion of rural markets. These days, in addition to poverty alleviation programmes and agricultural development and extension programmes, women’s development has also been added under the rubric of rural development (Ibid.). Broadly speaking, the literature on rural development has included studies concerned with the causes of poverty and suggestions for its redress and the ones which describe various rural development programmes and evaluate their effectiveness. It also includes studies on rural organisations such as co-operatives, local government institutions and voluntary agencies, and rural industries and markets.  

Thus, in operational terms, rural development includes in its scope all those programmes which are concerned with bringing about social and economic change in the rural areas with a view to improving the quality of life of the rural poor. Most often, rural development programmes are broadly conceived as anti-poverty programmes.

In India, over the past half a century not only numerous programmes and schemes of rural development have been floated but also they have undergone changes in their emphases and orientation. Notwithstanding recurring shifts in the nature and orientation of rural development programmes, it is possible to cull out certain broad objectives (Rajagopal 1996: 2):
a. Increasing the productivity in agriculture and allied sectors.

b. Decentralised programme implementation system.

c. Extensive mobilisation of local resources.

d. Increasing the per capita income of vulnerable sections of rural population by providing effective occupation through rural development programmes covering the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors.

e. Providing skill upgradation and technology extension.

f. Developing adequate backward and forward linkages.

g. Generating gainful employment in secondary and tertiary sectors during the lean agricultural seasons.

In effect, the scope of the rural included a host of concerns such as tenancy reforms, employment generation, increased agricultural productivity, reduction of existing social and economic inequalities, education and adult literacy, irrigation, public health, housing, animal husbandry, transport and communication, participatory and decentralised decision-making institutions. So far as government orientation is concerned, there have been mainly three main approaches to rural development (Haque et al. 1977). In the first approach, technical and managerial innovations are introduced to that stratum which is considered to be most receptive. Thereafter, the government adopts a kind of night-watchman attitude. This is generally termed as the diffusionist approach, in contrast to the trickling
down or coffee percolator approach, as it is hoped that the effects of diffusion will be increasingly diverse and will not be restricted to the contents of the original input. Secondly, there is the grants-in-aid approach. In this approach, aid is given to those who seem to need it most with the expectation that deprived sections will move onto a path of independent and sustained development once the initial resources have been provided with. Lastly, the integrated approach views the community or the target group holistically and various material and non-material factors are taken into account so that development thrusts can be integrated. The intention is to make development less traumatic and more permanent in terms of its effects. Since integration of economic and non-economic factors is sought to be consolidated and popular participation is encouraged, it is hoped that development would be more evenly balanced over time.

Academically, this area (i.e. the area of ‘rural development’) provided fertile ground for social science disciplines for research. This chapter, however, does not attempt a critique of the way ‘rural’ has been approached in other disciplines like economics and public administration. Rather, its main focus is on the context which facilitated the interaction of sociology as a discipline with the policies and programmes of rural development. The new context impacted on the orientation of the discipline as well. The methodological and theoretical wherewithal of the discipline were put to new uses. In the process, the self-image of the discipline also changed. It projected itself more as a policy science than an arcane body of esoteric knowledge about Indian society and culture. Sociologists lost no time in articulating their claims as policy planners and experts, and infrequently they were obliged, too (see Dube 1958; ICSSR 1974, 1985, 2000).
This has been captured succinctly by Oommen (1985: 119) in his survey of ‘rural studies’:

The dominant concern of village studies in the mid-fifties was to understand the nature of the social structure and this understanding was invariably gained through ‘participant observation’. While the data generated and analytical insights gained through these studies enriched our knowledge of the rural social system, its relevance in the context of the ongoing process of planned development was often doubted, particularly by policy makers and social engineers. Two types of studies seem to be relevant for them: those which can generate basic information about the society and those which focus on the consequences of planned development. Viewed from the perspective the sociology of knowledge, Indian rural studies seem to have responded to the ‘need of the system’ as perceived by the policy makers.

The newly found orientation of social sciences to rural development has attracted much criticism as well. For Cloke and Little (1990: 35), the reluctance of many researchers to grasp the admitted complexities of state theory has been a major contribution to the persistence of traditional wisdom about rural development. They criticise the proliferation of recent studies which have adopted a kind of ‘blinkered rationality’ and which are now becoming increasingly untenable. For them, a definite pattern can be teased out in the growing body of literature on rural development (Ibid: 35):

Select a policy for analysis;
Find out what the policy makers’ objectives are for this policy (as stated for public consumption);
Compare these objectives with some form of empirical study of what happens on the ground;
Conclude that any difference between what should have occurred (according to published objectives) and what has occurred (according to positivist techniques of measurement) is ‘the problem’ with the policy;
Suggest another policy which may overcome or ameliorate ‘the problem’ (but which may equally fail the blinkered rationality test)
Although this approach has in some senses been successful in raising the level of available information on some aspects of rural change and planning, it is beset by some obvious inadequacies. First, it accepts policies which are written down for public consumption at face value. Second, it assumes that state policy objectives may be adopted as a realistic illustration of the underlying roles and functions of the state and its various agencies. Third, it minimizes, or even ignores, the social, economic, and political contexts of planning and policy making. Fourth, it offers an internal logic which suggests that policy problems are caused by faulty implementation techniques, and that technical solutions to these faults will lead to policies which will be more successful in responding to rural problems (*Ibid.*: 35-36).

It has been pointed out that in the literature on rural development one finds a widespread rejection of socio-political theories of the state. State as the pivot of policy analysis is taken for granted and any questioning of the state is considered too impractical, too political and too disruptive of the technical role of applied nature expected of the researchers. Also there is much conflation of categories owing to the lack of theorisation of the state. The conceptual distinction between the state and government is not maintained and respected. No wonder, researchers from a range of academic disciplines have, with some regularity, criticised the lack of theoretical development that has characterised the study of the rural economy and society.

One of the major hindrances to the adoption of the political economy approach in general and theoretical discourse on the state in particular is the fear
that studies of rural change will lose the political neutrality which is perceived to be offered by more orthodox ways of evaluating planning and policy making. Then, there is the aspatial nature of political economy. Consequently, rural researchers find some difficulty in attempting to reconcile their separate identity with the principles of the political economy approach. Linked to the dilemma surrounding the conceptualisation of rural space, another barrier to the use of the political economy perspective in rural research has been an over-reliance on the study of the substurctural themes. Community and anthropological approaches, together with an overemphasis on description, have helped to ensure a very narrow focus which has detracted from the identification of structural processes.

According to Cloke and Little (*ibid.*), our understanding of rural areas has suffered from an unwillingness to explore different theories and concepts, particularly those emanating from political economy. With some notable exceptions, applied research into rural society, and the planning and policies to which it has been subjected, has conformed to tried and tested empirical formula without due regard for the wider state/society setting of the phenomena being investigated.

Researchers of ‘rural studies’ have for some time been preoccupied with the need to justify their own existence. They have fought long and hard to differentiate rural characteristics, to define rurality, and generally to advance some form of rural separatism which provides them with a professional *raison d'être*. While it is only in extreme cases that this attitude has proposed ‘rural’ as a distinct theoretical
category, it has more generally obscured the importance of broad political, social and economic issues.

Buller and Wright (1990: 1-24) argue that often rural development has been associated with an *atheoretical* and applied approach to single issue problem solving. As a research focus it has long suffered from a narrow scale of analysis, a lack of sufficient generalisation and an overconcentration on the effects rather than the causes of social and economic change. In the United Kingdom, there is considerable debate as to the existence or otherwise of a specifically rural component in the broad development process, and also on the general status of the field of ‘rural studies’ (see Newby 1980; Cloke 1987, 1988, 1997; Hoggart 1990; Halfacree 1993; Murdoch and Pratt 1993; Pratt 1996; Liepins 2000; Phillips 2002). However, in India, there is a conspicuous silence on the status of ‘rural studies’ in general and ‘rural development studies’ in particular. Not surprisingly, ‘rural development’ is often viewed as the concern of government agencies. The continually expanding body of work on ‘rural development’ reinforces this impression.

Much of what passes as literature on ‘rural development’ grossly neglects processes of structural change and development. Whatever studies are conducted on such processes are considered academic, while the ones concerned with rural development policies and programmes are labelled applied and diagnostic. As a consequence, these two foci of ‘rural development studies’ go their separate ways and help maintain an irreconcilable distinction between the studies theorising structural change in rural localities and those documenting and assessing rural
agencies and policies. Thus, we find a lack of exchange of ideas and personnel between these disparate components of ‘rural development studies’. Studies of rural development focusing on rural change and those dealing with policies and programmes are not organically linked. This sectoral approach to the study of rural development should be borne in mind while examining the discourse on rural development.

Confusion also prevails owing to the necessary multidisciplinarity of the field of ‘rural development’. Although, in its role as an organising principle in evaluating rural change and in terms of its policy significance, rural development is a key concept in contemporary ‘rural studies’, the ubiquity and diffuseness of the term has deprived it of any specific meaning. As Best (1983: 27 cited in Buller and Wright 1990: 2-3) remarks, ‘it is a bold author who entitles his book “Rural Development”. What after all, is “rural development”? Is it a field of study and research? Is it a form of state intervention to promote the well being of rural people? Or is it something which is happening anyway no matter what the academics or the bureaucrats do? Similarly, it has been dubbed as a ‘debauched word’ owing to its ideological fickleness similar to those of words such as progress and revolution (Frank 1986: 127 cited in Buller and Wright 1990: 2-3). It has also been called a lazy thinker’s catch-all term (Welch 1984: 427 cited in Buller and Wright 1990: 3). This ambiguity of scope and meanings has largely been overcome by a strict adherence to the analysis of rural development as a policy rather than as a process (see Buller and Wright 1990: 1-24; see also Wright 1990: 41-63). We too are interested in rural development as a policy only.
In the Indian context, after more than fifty years, 'rural development' still remains largely an untheorised subject. Dhanagare (1985: 350) seems to be right in observing that a lot of preconceived notions and anecdotal anarchy prevail in the literature on rural development. Similarly, according to Mellor (preface to Mellor et al. 1992: v), rural development policies in India have been guided more by the pragmatic lessons from past errors and successes than by a 'formulating theory'. He asserts that policy-making in the context of rural development has seldom been a scientific process. It has failed to take adequate notice of the fact that policies grow out of their environment. He opines:

If there had been a solid body of relevant development theory, a point of leverage might have been found in the Planning Commission, in agencies of foreign aid, even in key individuals, Indian or foreign. With such paucity of knowledge, however, the points of leverage, of power and decision, became so diffused that the focus is towards programmes and their interaction rather than towards, individuals, groups, or agencies and their interaction. In this circumstance, the key to understanding the evolution of Indian rural development policy lies in recognition of the effect of deficiency in knowledge of rural development processes on the formation of policy (Ibid.).

Understandably, we do not have much literature on the ideas which are implicit in the conceptualisation of rural development and which underlie the practices of rural development. The very phrase rural development suggests that villages are in need of development towards some ideal that they have fallen short of attaining. What images of village have informed the work of rural development enthusiasts need to be explored.

**State-Village Relationship: The Post-Colonial Context**

After Independence, it was earnestly believed that the state had to play a central role in the development of the society in general, and that of the village in particular. Indian state self-consciously took upon itself the task of modernisation
and development of the society. This was natural in the sense that Independence was energised not only by visions of democracy but also by a desire to modernise and develop a society that for so long had been systematically impoverished under the colonial rule. In this sense, democracy and development were taken to be cardinal principles of the post-colonial enterprise of nation-building.

In the changed context, the adequate implementation of rural development assumed the incorporation and subordination of the village to the state, as, under the postcolonial regime, there was no longer any opposition between the state and the (village) community. Rather, around the patriotic image of the ‘village’ community countless administrative utopias were woven. The attainment of Independence led to the concerted developmental focus on the village. In fact, idealised villages of nationalist movement were attempted to be put into place by CDP after Independence. Inden (1990: 151-52) brings out the context succinctly:

The picture of the Indian village as an idyllic but static rural community has also given way to one of that same village as the very ‘epitome’ of the ‘grinding’ poverty and despair of the ‘third world.’ It is either ripe for ‘community development’ or a ‘green revolution’: or a hopeless victim of its own past and a relentless world system that has forever shattered its former self-sufficiency.

The developmental commitments of the state opened up the questions concerning the direction and management of social change. The spate of village studies carried out around that time brings out the nexus between the sociological studies of the village and the state agenda of planned social transformation as embodied in developmental policies and programmes. Thanks to the gigantic development efforts of the state, the village became the site where the transition from tradition to modernity had to take place. It was in the changing character of the village that the dilemmas of ‘old societies and new states’ (Geertz 1963) were
destined to progressively resolve themselves. Thus, the village became a locus for understanding the dynamics of traditional society and culture.

On another plane, various social groups aspiring for mobility invoked the protection of the state and used their rights as citizens to overcome the disabilities which the rest of the village imposed upon them. As early as 1957, in his ethnographic study of a village (Bisipara) in Orissa, Bailey (1957: 13) noticed that such social groups ‘are passing beyond the the political frontier of the village and seeking to establish themselves as citizens of the state.’ Corroborating Bailey’s observations, Srinivas (Foreword in Bailey 1957: vii) wrote: ‘It seems as though they [such social groups] are being gradually ejected from the village community of Bisipara into the political society of India. This situation is a familiar one in modern rural India, and if it proceeds unchecked, it is likely to alter the nature of Indian village community’.

Whereas in pre-colonial and colonial times the villages were not directly administered by the state, the post-colonial state has been taking an active interest in the welfare and development of the village. This has also led to a change in the conception of the role of the state. The state has come to be seen as a positive agency of welfare and social change rather than an evil necessity. The state, through a plethora of welfare policies and developmental programmes, aims to change the social structure of the village in its entirety. In Bailey’s words (1957: 3), ‘Until recent times the state was not concerned with the social and political organisation of the rural communities, nor did it interfere with methods of
exploiting the material world. The state was interested in revenue ... The function of the government were fiscal and pacificatory and seldom reforming'.

Thus, one sees the unfolding of a process which seems to have facilitated an ever-growing traffic (of ‘ideas and interests’) between the state and the village. To a great extent, the pace of this traffic has been an outcome of the conscious policies of development and change embarked upon by the state. It is not surprising that the villagers now see themselves more as citizens of the state than the members of the village. This is indicative of the centrality of the state in the processes of social change in contemporary India.

Even otherwise, historically speaking, the state has been powerful in relation to the individual village. Traditionally, the central axis of this vertical articulation has been the relation to land, with the state shaping property rights and revenue demands with the objectives of resource extraction as well as political accommodation and containment. Often, the basic unit for this relationship was not village at all, but smaller estates within the village, or much larger units comprising several peasant settlements at a time. In terms of local political and power structures as well, the village per se was not universally the key unit (see Chapters 2 and 3).

In the post-colonial era of state-led development, the nature and direction of resource flows have altered significantly. Parallelly, land reforms have in many states broken down the earlier units and vested rights in individual peasant households, with the village being the basic unit for economic administration. But, while the entry of the state as a development player might have shored up the
village as a unitary entity at an administrative level, other forces and processes have been leading to a progressive loss of the economic and social identity of the village (Breman et al. 1997: 5-6). With the introduction of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment as regards Panchayati Raj, the village is also shaping up as a new unit for political representation.

Village as Seen through Development Programmes

Curiously enough, the village continued to be seen as implicated in backwardness, superstition, resistance to change, reaction and orthodoxy. The dynamic interface between development processes and village life did not significantly alter the well-ingrained conceptualisations of the village:

The fundamental dichotomy, for example, is assumed to be between traditional, meaning ‘stable’, and modern, meaning ‘dynamic’ as in the discontinuity postulated by nineteenth century officials in India between subsistence or commercial agriculture or between country and town. How complete is the division between urban and rural when few economic or social activities are restricted to one area or the other, and when the same trading, credit and social or religious networks pervade both? (Robb 1983: 2-3).

The village remained and continues to remain at the receiving end of change-processes which have their origins outside in policies formulated at the higher levels, that is, the state. Its apparent near passivity made it amenable to incorporation, transformation and absorption by the statist agenda of development. The villagers were seen like dough in the hands of planners and the government.

In a subterranean way, and from the viewpoint of national ideology, the Gandhian model of the self-sufficient village economy based on social cohesion and mutual co-operation provided a valuable source of inspiration. For many, rural development programmes were seen as attempts to genuinely transform the myth
of the co-operative peasant village into a reality in the post-colonial era. However, ‘the appeal to a long-existent village community ethos was really little more than romantic rhetoric. Moreover, the activities undertaken in practice were not primarily or even mainly directed towards strengthening the solidarity and cohesion among local inhabitants, i.e. to give them a feeling that they actually formed a community’ (see Breman 1997: 36). Nonetheless, the idea, religiously adhered to by many generations of policy makers, that village constituted a homogeneous peasant class persisted. As Béteille (1980: 117) notes:

At the time of independence there was perhaps some hope that Indian villages, battered for two hundred years by the forces released by colonial domination could be reconstituted into peasant communities of a sort, Land reforms, co-operatives, community development were all thought of as a possible means to that end. These and other means have been tried in the three decades since independence, but there is little indication of village acquiring the kind of social homogeneity that is typical of the peasant village. The basic mistake lay probably in the assumption that the typical Indian village ever was a community of peasants.

Other observers of the Indian rural scene (see Desai 1979; Dhanagare 1984) find the basic postulates of rural development programmes to be questionable. They argue that the first major rural development offensive, the CDP, was conceived, founded and implemented through the state apparatus on the belief that Indian villages constituted ‘rural communities’. In doing so, Ferdinand Tonnies’ concept of *Gemeinschaft* and Charles H. Cooley’s notion of community as a primary ‘we-group’, which had already been smuggled into Indian sociology via British anthropology and American sociology, were superimposed on the realities of rural India (Dhanagare 1984: 179). The framers of the CDP presumed that Indian village communities had internal homogeneity and functioned as harmonic systems. Hence, in its very conception the CDP visualised the development of a village or a locality as ‘community as a whole’. Dhanagare further relates this to
the reigning paradigm of structural functionalism in Indian sociology. He finds this
‘assumed structural-functional unity of village community’ as an outcome of the
influence of structural-functionalism on dominant sections of professional social
scientists in India in the early 1950s (Ibid). The introduction of CDP was perceived
most enthusiastically by some social scientists who, by making it their prime research concern, promoted its cause.

The other major presupposition underlying the adoption of CDP was that
the Indian village society (viewed as a little community) lacked an internal
dynamics of its own. The assumption was that the rural society founded on
hierarchical caste structure had no built-in mechanism for change. Dhanagare
(Ibid.: 199) believes that this image of the Indian village was deduced from Karl
Marx’s notion of the Asiatic mode of production. Marx had characterised the
Indian rural society as stagnant, unchanging, vegetating and hence having no
‘history’ prior to the introduction of British colonialism. Therefore, Marx treated
imperialism as an unconscious tool of history since it had to perform the positive
function by ending the stagnation of rural society by exposing it to the forces of
modernisation. Hence, the exponents of CDP, both within and outside the
government, thought that exogenous forces could alone stimulate motivation for
change and create general awareness as well as developmental consciousness
among the Indian rural masses (Dhanagare 1984: 180-83).

Even the Balwantrai Mehta Committee report admits that ‘the idea that
village community in India represented a unity of interests, in common
developmental objectives, itself was a misconception’ (cited in Ibid.: 180). Thus,
for Dhanagare, the fundamental premises on which a developmental policy was formulated and implemented through the CDP were wrong in that they misrepresented the reality of the village as a homogeneous society. Also, by ignoring

the integrated but hierarchical and competitive nature of the village as a unit, development policies have tended to reduce access to economic opportunities for the poorest sections of village society ... and to reinforce - at least not to weaken the powers of those who have been politically dominant at the local level' (Neale 1990: 61).

Much like Dhanagare, Neale (Ibid.: 52) argues that the assumption that the village has a unity vis-à-vis the outside world was fallacious. Even though the village had a unity by virtue of being the focus of many social systems, it was not a unit in the sense that its members saw each other as rising and falling together economically. To function within the same system, to be mutually interdependent, does not mean to be non-competitive. His proposition is that there is not one village economic system of commercially related or commercially independent nuclear households, but several village systems connecting non-homogeneous units.

In a sense, *community* development itself was a novel nomenclature in India. The first Five-Year Plan document projects 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’ (cited in Desai 1979: 127). It is pertinent to note here what the Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report of the Team for the Study of the Community Projects and National Extension Service had to say:
We have so far used 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 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 locality is necessarily and unavoidably common to all the people living there’ (Ibid.: 128).

As part of his critique of the idea of the village which informed the CDP, Deasi (1979) finds it sociologically significant that its sponsors could not find an appropriate term in any of the Indian languages. Strangely enough, the programmes supposed to renovate the agrarian economy and rural society in India through the active participation of millions of its villagers had to be designated using the terminology supplied by American rural sociology. In fact, the philosophies underlying CDP as well as the initial resources were a gift to the Government of India by the United States of America. Dhanagare’s (see supra) critique of the sociological assumptions of rural development programmes has great resemblance with that of Desai, who has identified the following assumptions about the Indian agrarian society and rural development:

a. The individuals, sections, groups, and strata forming the village community have a large number of common interests. These interests are sufficiently strong to bind them together as a community.

b. The interests of various groups and classes within the village are sufficiently common and alike to create general enthusiasm as well as a feeling of development for all.

c. The interests of different sections of the community are not irreconcilably conflicting.
d. The state is a supra-class, and an impartial and non-partisan association, and that the major policies of the Government are of such a nature that they do not sharpen the inequalities existing between social groups.

e. People's initiative, enthusiasm and active participation are possible in the extant village communities because they have common interests (Desai 1979: 134-35).

Desai feels that none of the scholars or the committees have critically inquired as to whether these assumptions about both the village communities in India, and about the Indian state and its policies, are valid. That is why, the CDP continued to operate on the basis that the existing village will remain the basic unit of social life for the vast bulk of the people for times to come. He wonders whether the village unit, which was the foundation of the entire scheme, would remain a valid unit of agrarian society after the basis of present day agricultural production has been transformed. Since the isolation of village communities has been destroyed on account of the operation of various forces, it was a folly of the Indian state to make the village the policy target of rural development. However, Desai fails to note that making the village as the policy target could have other advantages and political uses. As Neale (1990: 155) states, 'the state which sets up a Programme Evaluation Organisation and a central institute for research into the problems of community development may, of course, only be going through appropriate motions; but it may sincerely be trying to find ways to integrate the parochial, hierarchical village into the developing, democratic nation'.
We should not read too much in the state’s undertaking of community development projects. In fact, the appeal to a long-existent village community ethos was really little more than romantic rhetoric. Moreover, the activities undertaken in practice were not primarily or even mainly directed towards strengthening the solidarity and cohesion among local inhabitants, that is, to give them a feeling that they actually formed a community (see Breman 1997: 36). The state was well aware that many of its programmes, though constructed on exaggerated notions of the village’s community, had foundered on the village’s fissiparous tendencies. The not-so-illustrious history of the co-operative movement, and of the Panchayati Raj, has brought home, time and again, the deep-rooted powers of the village elites who have been responsible for generating waves of disillusion among the rural development enthusiasts, especially the ones who were inspired by the community character of the village.

Historically, the changing images of the village community have informed the ideologies, packages and programmes of rural development. The changes in the global developmental fashions and rhetoric too, have impacted on the content and conduct of rural development programmes. CDP is long passé now. As Chambers (1993: 107) remarks, ‘the community development ethos and programmes of the 1950s, the stress on agricultural extension and the dissemination of innovations of the 1960s, look dated and wrong now, even naïve, with their stress on cultural obstacles to change, on community self-help construction and on early adopters and laggards’. In the 1970s, redistribution with growth was advocated through neo-Fabian extension of state organisations which led to the specially targeted programmes for the rural poor such as Small Farmers Development Agency.
(SFDA, 1971), Training Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM, 1979), and the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP, 1979). This was the time when the faith in the capabilities of the state to deliver goods was largely undiminished. The state could and should do more was the pervading sense informing rural development programmes as well.

If the 1970s was the decade of equity, the 1980s was the decade of efficiency. This is not to emphasise how much or how little either equity or efficiency was achieved, but to say that they were prominent in rhetoric and ideology insofar as development was concerned. Since the 1980s state organisations were to be slimmed in line with neoliberal prescriptions.

To this day, in rural development policy and its application, India adheres to neo-Fabian approaches. In India, the focus has mostly been on ‘redistribution with growth’, and this focus undergrids all the major polices and programmes of rural development. India is one of those rare countries which has persisted with massive administered programmes targeted to individuals or households. Also, one finds that the attempts to implement these administered programmes have subsequently been more sustained. Most of these programmes continue to operate on a vast scale all over the country.

In a way, rural development programmes in India have been ‘standardised, subsidised, packaged and targeted. Packages often do not fit and often miss their targets but the approaches and programmes are stable’ (Chambers 1993: 108). There are many reasons for the sustained momentum of rural development programmes in India. There are misleading evaluation surveys which often
highlight the positive effects that these programmes have had. Then, there is large
networked local politics of patronage which depends on such programmes to a
large extent. More importantly, India has the financial and administrative means to
persist with a rural development strategy where field bureaucracies play a major
part. This has mainly to do with the relative freedom that India has had from
foreign debt and aid dependence. No wonder, India has been able to resist donor
pressures to change its rural development policies (see Ibid.).

Thus, we find that, in its zeal to modernise the countryside, the state
launched a plethora of developmental policies and programmes. In this context, the
decisions of the policy makers and planners associated with the state can be seen as
the outcome of two considerations - their perception of the existing organisation of
the village and their view of what the world should be. It is a different matter
altogether whether their goals have been realised or to what extent Indian village
society has modified, subverted, and thwarted the aim of the policy makers and
planners. Very often,

The well made plans of the government do not go the way they are expected to,
because people are not pawns which can be moved about but have intelligence,
resources and aims of their own. They manage either to find loopholes in the
rules, or bypass them altogether, in order to achieve their own ends, and in the
process defeat the planners. It would be more fruitful and interesting to look at
them as providing examples of the responses of human beings with certain
resources, values and aims, to the policies and programmes of a powerful
government acting through its officials...It is a complex, interactional situation
and constitutes an ideal for research by social anthropologists (Srinivas 1996:
186).

A Sociology of Rural Development?

The place of sociologists in the policies and programmes of rural development has
exercised great many minds since long (see Copp 1972). In his rhetorically titled
Rural Development: Is It Sociology or Common Sense', Rorher (1976: 25-35) attempts to look for the rationale which led to sociologists' growing involvement with such concrete programmes of effective social action. For him, the sociologist was required to do more than just passively observe. As he puts it,

His [sociologist's] special capacity to convert theory into common sense knowledge was required because he had knowledge of social action which could be brought to bear on the observed instance. A sociologist's theoretical knowledge informed his analyses of the empirical instance and by reporting his observations he became implicated in social action. It was believed that the practitioners' grasp of social affairs could be improved and enlarged by the sociologist's special capacity to analyse action. It was in the latter capacity of translating theory into common sensical knowledge that the sociologist achieved equality with the practitioner in implementing social action (ibid.: 25).

Further,

The sociologist had the responsibility to provide analyses that were to be incorporated into the man-made environment. In this connection, feeding back of theoretical knowledge would result in changing social practices and policies. The sociologist became involved in social change through his having contributed to effective social action (ibid.: 26).

In a sense, the relationship between sociologists and other practitioners of social action has been a running thread in great many reflections on the nature of sociological knowledge. Way back in 1946 Carl Taylor (1947: 1-9), in his presidential address to the American Sociological Association under the title 'Sociology and Common Sense', underlined the reciprocity and mutuality of sociologists and practitioners.12 He posed sociologist as the man of theoretical knowledge and the practitioner as the man of common sense knowledge. For him, each needed the other to implement effective social action. Although both shared responsibility for programmes of social action, Taylor explicitly restricted the sociologist to the observer's role. His views have been echoed by many Indian sociologists as well who were highly sceptical about sociologist's close involvement with the state-sponsored programmes of social and cultural change.
For instance, Srinivas (1955: 5) cautioned his fellow sociologists against the tendency to go for sponsored studies urged by policy requirements:

The Government of India has an understandable tendency to stress the need for sociological research that is directly related to planning and development. And it is the duty of sociologists as citizens that they should take part in such research. But there is a grave risk that 'pure' or 'fundamental' research might be sacrificed altogether. We are not so rich in our human resources that we can afford to have our few sociologists all doing applied research.

The expressed desire of anthropologists and sociologists to distance themselves from the world of policy makers has also come from those who have been closely involved with action research. Thus, we have Dube (1969: 790) pointing to the dangers of marrying theory with practice in the following words:

Our role should be viewed essentially as one of the analysts, and not that of the therapist. The temptations to the students of village India to assume the mantle of an action engineer will be many, but it is doubtful if we are cut out for such a role by our orientation, training, and experience. What the enlightened administrator expects of us is not so much glib advice, but substantial additions to the existing knowledge of the village communities to enable him to formulate informed policies.

Notwithstanding these periodic articulations of scepticism, the study of *Village India* has been closely tied to the developmental aspirations of the Indian state, with a stress on planning and institutional reform (Niranjana 1991: 376). The primary focus on changing social situation in rural India was inevitably linked to the developmental policies and the practices of social engineering. Given such a close nexus between sociological analysis and policy formulation, it comes as a surprise to read the following statement in the latest ICSSR survey on 'rural development': ‘sociological studies of economic activities have yet to catch the interests of sociologists in India. Their turning interest to this area of work would be a useful contribution to societal development’ (Alexander 2000: 273).
Although the relative indifference of the sociologists to the problems of rural economic development remains a moot point, it is worthwhile to gauge the relative impact of sociological knowledge of the village community on the rural development policies, priorities and programmes. At a general level, we have to realise that the entry of trained sociologists, or social scientists, into the domain of policy research need not mean better policies or more informed ones. A lot more depends on the attitude and orientation of the state towards social scientific research. Breman (1997: 48) captures this essence when he writes:

The assumption that policy makers are seriously interested in the outcome of social-scientific research and are prepared to adjust their development programmes on the basis of those findings, has proved in practice to have little justification. The gradual shift in structural-functional studies during the 1970s and 1980s towards more system-critical anthropological and sociological research did not go unnoticed, but failed to find expression, in an agonising reappraisal by the powers-that-be of the course already set during the 1950s.

**Conclusion: The Paradox of Village and Development**

To be sure, development policies have made an enormous and decisive impact on the course of social transformation in the Indian village during the past half a century or so. The village landscape is dotted with agencies of the state, whose presence is justified in the name of rural development. Seen differently, the national project of rural development encourages the formation of a unified, monolithic rural India crying for policy inputs from the state. The *rural* of rural development, while transcending the differences of language, region, caste and ethnicity, marks off a common terrain to be developed under the benign guidance of development functionaries. What characterises *rural* is the common condition of underdevelopment at which development interventions are aimed. This
characterisation of a social territory in exclusive terms of underdevelopment has many other outcomes.

For example, even in popular common sense discourse, development becomes the idiom through which the relationship between the village and state is articulated. This leads to the incorporation of the village into the state and the associated conversion of villagers into citizens irrespective of the real outcome of the rural development programmes (see Weber 1979, Ferguson 1990, Zook 2000).

Along with this a temporal hierarchisation of the village takes place. Since villages are underdeveloped, they remain in the past or, at best, an inadequate present, while other places (non-villages) have already become part of the future by virtue of their being developed. In this sense, the category of the villager functions in the same way as the category of the native in anthropology (Cf. Fabian 1983). By being placed backward in time, the village typifies a particular social form and the villagers stand for a particular set of beliefs and values. Place and person fuse in the delineation of the essence of the village, as the village is made to stand for a kind of culture-territory in relation to development.

In other words, whereas rural development aims to make development an integral part of the village, it also creates a dichotomy between the village and development. Development is concentrated in other places, while villages are places of little or no development. In this perspective, the village emerges in counter-distinction to development even though it is the prime target of development. As a consequence, rural development, while intending to bring development to the village, conceptually segregates it as a social world distinct and
distant from development. For the practitioners of rural development, development is the solution and village is the problem. Seen in these terms, while villages are the objects of development and the villagers its recipients, the villages are also obstacles to national development. This conceptual opposition of the village and development, upon which much of rural development programmes is based, thus, leads to a paradox: rural development locates village on the periphery of development, yet, its ostensible aim is to make villages developed (see Pigg 1992).

This is not to say that the village does not contest and redefine the state: 'the state is not only present in the village but the village also penetrates into the state' (Breman 1997: 59). That is, the dynamics between the state and the village is not unidirectional. As recent scholarship on development (see Pigg 1992, 1996; Woost 1993; Escobar 1995; Tsing 1999; Moore 2000) has shown, it is not merely the supra-local sphere such as the state that acts on the village, but the village does appropriate the state in its own image. Moreover, the village does not seem as opaque and fixed to its inhabitants as it appears to the policy makers and planners manning the institutions of rural development. However, how the abstracted social map of the village as carried by rural development functionaries is reworked and appropriated by the villagers in the processes of the implementation of development programmes is not the focus of our discussion here. Suffice it to say that development apparatus is also a pervasive and effective generator of categories. It is an effective mechanism of classification and knowledge control.

A close look at the practices of rural development tells us that a kind of ersatz sociocultural knowledge encapsulated in the notion of the village
predominates in the institutional context. Notwithstanding the plethora of preliminary studies, pilot projects and in-house experts, there is always a privileging of a more convenient institutional *lingua franca* - the language of the village, an abstract village devoid and dissolved of all its diversities and particularities. True, this systematic reduction of the diverse into the generalisable helps render the village more knowable. To the extent the village becomes knowable it also assumes a concrete reality for the purposes of rural development. This generic village, thus produced, provides a comfortable framework for rural development agencies within which programmes can be planned and launched and implemented. What Cohn (1987: 162) said in the context of British administration rings equally true in the case of contemporary rural development discourse: ‘For the administrator the types and classifications of villages had the same kind of advantage that the official view of caste had: they reduced the need for specific knowledge. One could act in terms of categories’. The naturalisation of the village as a category in the British colonial discourse and the subsequent formulations of Indian nationalists further reinforce this tendency to think in terms of the village - the generic village (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4).

Seen thus, it will be interesting and instructive to ask: When policy makers talk of *rural development*, or the *village*, do they mean the same thing as that inhabitants mean or the sociologists and social anthropologists conceive of? How does the village come to be extracted upward from the local world of multiple hierarchies such as gender, caste, age, patronage, exchange, exclusion (the domain of conventional village studies undertaken mostly by sociologists and social anthropologists) to the periphery of development in relation to the national society
(the world of development practitioners including trained sociologists and social anthropologists)? Are not real villages translated into the language of generalities spoken in the world of rural development? Does not this translation of villages into the village entail a definite reification of the village? Does not this reification of the village as the locus of national underdevelopment lend itself to political uses and serve political interests? Does not the very act of rural development constitute a new meaning of the village? In the following chapters we shall examine some of these questions while presenting case studies of two rural development knowledge institutions, namely, the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad (NIRD) and the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA).

Notes

1 By 'rural development programmes' we refer to interventions guided, or more usually, implemented by the state (or by aid agencies though routed through the state agencies). In the Indian context, such interventions generally include policies and attempts made for alleviating the socio-economic conditions of the poor in the villages or developing backward areas (see NIRD 1999: 123).

2 There could be numerous ways of conceptualising the village apart from the census and other administrative definitions which privilege demographic, ecological and occupational factors. Studies of the ways in which socially mobile segments of the population relate to the villages they have already left, studies of the urban elite’s images of the villages they have perhaps never seen, and the studies of the rural and pastoral imagery in literature, film and other visual media have hardly been conducted in India. These studies would show other dimensions of the images of the village that are being discussed in this chapter.

3 Incidentally, most of these writings are concerned with devising the ways and means to promote rural development in the country, and thus focus mainly on issues relating to strategy, planning and implementation, and evaluation and monitoring. The issue of rural development has been discussed exhaustively by Madan (1983); Mehta (1984); Maheshwari (1985); Roy et al. (1985); Dantwala et al. (1986); Dubashi (1986); Jha (1988); Singh (1989); Tiwari (1994). For an exhaustive recent treatment of the theme see Alexander (2000), see also Sau and Das (2001).

4 For a critical assessment of rural development programmes in India, see NIRD (1999).
The Royal Commission on Agriculture was set up in 1926. Even before the Commission was set up, some efforts to improve Indian agriculture were undertaken. For example, John Augustus Voelcker was appointed by the Government in the late 1880s to survey the existing state of agricultural practices in India and to recommend suitable measures for the improvement in agricultural production, which led to the publication of his *Report on the Improvement of Indian Agriculture* (1893). Likewise, a report by F. A. Nicholson, namely, *Report Regarding the Possibility of Introducing Land and Agricultural Banks into the Madras Presidency* (Government of Madras, 1895) talks of establishing co-operatives to address the problems of rural indebtedness and poverty. Other instances can be cited from other provinces of British India. However, these efforts were not to coalesce into an overarching ideology of rural development as discernible in the postcolonial period (see Zook 2000: 65-85).

Wittfogel (1957) has argued that the prevalence of state-sponsored large-scale irrigation networks has been one of the factors behind ‘Oriental Despotism.’ In analysing the Asiatic mode of production even Karl Marx has taken note of irrigation bureaucracy in the context of India (see Thorner 1980). The point is that some sort of arrangements having a bearing on agriculture and general welfare of rural population have always existed in India irrespective of the nature of political regimes.

6 Also, historically Britain had no worthwhile experience of rural development in its own country which could be of use to India (see Baviskar *et al.* 1983).

For a history of rural development programmes in India, see Kavoori and Singh (1967); Government of India (1973); Mittal and Khan (1976); Desai and Chawdhary (1977).

For a general discussion on the theme of rural development see Lele (1975); Hunter *et al.* (1976); Mellor (1976); Long (1977); Hoggart and Buller (1987); Buller and Wright (1990); Mellor *et al.* 1992; Gsanger (1994); Barkin (1995); Stephen (1998); Ashley and Maxwell (2001); Ellis and Biggs (2001).


10 This approach is also known as clientele-based approach or the intended beneficiary oriented approach. Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers (MFAL) programme and Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), for example, fall under this category.

11 See NIRD (1999) and other suggestive titles.

12 For a different treatment of the same theme, see Beteille (1999).