CHAPTER 8
FROM DISCOURSE TO INSTITUTIONS - II: IRMA

This chapter outlines the institutional history of the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA). Based primarily on the published literature, such as annual reports, souvenirs brought out on various occasions, and related brochures and booklets, it attempts to delineate the general orientation of IRMA as an institute in the broader field of rural development. Although the Institute is relatively young, it has already carved out a niche in the area of rural management and development. As an Institute, which is almost financially independent of the government grants, it holds an additional attraction. Not only is it self-dependent, it has also over the years, generated a surplus in its corpus fund.

Moreover, as an Institute which has functioned at the nerve centre of a well-known co-operative movement, namely, Anand in the Kheda District of Gujarat, its structure and functioning in the context of rural development is bound to yield significant insights for the students of rural development institutions. Its relationship with the state, given its vigorous independence and well-guarded autonomy, is pregnant with alternative conceptualisations of a rural development institution. In particular, its particular thrust on the professionalisation of the management of rural development institutions and organisations, as well as the rural development programmes that they manage, has imparted it a unique personality as a key player in the field of rural development. It will be interesting and instructive to find out how an institute, which has flourished under the active patronage and sponsorship of a particular kind of co-operative organisation, relates to the state-led rural development policies and programmes.
IRMA: The Emergence, Growth and Development

The establishment of IRMA is linked to the humanpower demands of the Operation Flood II (OF II), a project undertaken by the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), Anand to replicate the Anand model of dairy co-operatives throughout the length and breadth of the country. In order to meet the requirements of the managerial humanpower and the consultancy needs of the OF II, a new centre for management, research and consultancy was proposed to be established. Earlier, the then Chairman of the NDDB, Dr. Verghese Kurien, had approached the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA) to help train managers for the rural producers co-operatives. In the course of the discussion with the then Director of IIMA it was revealed that the IIMA was ill-equipped to cater to the needs of the NDDB, owing to the former's pronounced thrust on the urban-corporate sector and their business needs.

Once the proposed tie up with the IIMA failed to materialise, the NDDB established a cell in December 1978 to help initiate work on the proposed centre. Subsequently, the concept of the proposed institute was somewhat broadened. It was envisaged as an institution which would conduct training, research, and consultancy activities primarily related to Anand pattern of organising producers, but not confined to dairy projects. By that time, the Anand model of co-operative organisation had been extended to other commodities, such as oilseeds. It was, therefore, proposed that the centre would be called the Institute of Rural Management and registered as a separate organisation, though functioning closely with the NDDB and the Indian Dairy Corporation (IDC). The steering committee
for OF II authorised the registration of the Institute in its third meeting. The Institute was subsequently registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and the Bombay Public Trust Act, 1950, on 14 December 1979, with the Charity Commissioner of Gujarat.

A Board of Governors with eleven members was constituted to help shape the nascent Institute. The IRMA's Board of Governors consists of the Chairman of NDDB, the representatives of the NDDB, three elected representatives of the IRMA society, representatives of central and state governments, outstanding academics and two of the Institute's senior faculty members. Since the Institute was coming up under the patronage of the NDDB, the then NDDB Chairman, Dr. Verghese Kurien, was also made the Chairman of the IRMA Board of Governors. What is noteworthy in the constitution of the Board of Governors is the presence of only one bureaucrat, the secretary, Department of Agriculture, Forests and Co-operative to the Government of Gujarat.\(^5\) The IRMA Director was the ex-officio member-secretary of the Board. The Board had members like Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, then member of the Planning Commission and the leading agricultural scientist credited with ushering in the Green Revolution in India.

In financial terms, the money earmarked for the humanpower development under the OF II became the seed money for the Institute. More importantly, excepting the seed money, the Government of India had no financial stakes in the Institute. Out of the total proposed capital outlay of Rs. 4.67 crores, Rs. 5 lakhs came from OF II funds, 20 lakhs from the Ford Foundation, and the rest from the Swiss Development Corporation. The Government of Gujarat, however, provided
24 hectares (60 acres) of land adjacent to the main NDDB campus for the development of the Institute. The site used to be a tobacco research farm of the Gujarat Agriculture University, Anand Campus. Till the IRMA campus came up on its permanent location in 1983, the Institute functioned from the Diagnostic Lab Complex of the NDDB. The Farmers Hostels of the NDDB used to function as the hostels of the IRMA. In other words, the NDDB had not only overseen the growth and development of the Institute in financial terms, but also had lent its physical infrastructure for the proper functioning of the Institute. It is hard to discuss the genesis and growth of IRMA but with reference to the NDDB. The NDDB had lent its staff quarters as well for the purposes of accommodation of the faculty members and the girl students. Moreover, the entire construction work of the IRMA campus was undertaken under the supervision of the engineering staff of NDDB.

Though the Institute was formally established on 14 December 1979, the recruitment of staff had already begun in March 1979. A break-up of the first 13 staff (that is, faculty members) tells us that four of them came from the IIMA, four from different universities abroad and the remaining five from other Indian universities. Dr. K. R. S. Murthy was the first Director of IRMA. In July 1980, the Institute started teaching the first batch of one-year post-graduate diploma course in rural management (PRM). The students had been selected on the basis of an all India entrance test followed by personal interviews.

Two things need to be noted in the context of the development of IRMA in its first few years. There was a deep imprint of the IIMA in the conceptualisation of its teaching programme and general orientation, as if the IIMA was the implicit
model for IRMA. The organisation of the reading material and the pedagogical techniques were like any other business management school. The literature on IRMA explains it as a consequence of the paucity of time available to the faculty members, as they had to put in place all the co-ordinates of a new teaching programme, with the added burden of a national level entrance test and interviews, in a short span of time. Technically, in almost six months time, the Institute set out on its teaching programme.

Secondly, given the grandeur of a national level entrance test for admissions, the Institute succeeded in attracting good quality students to the PRM. Most of the students came from metropolitan-urban background and were graduates/postgraduates of prestigious institutes. This distinctive social character of the student body emerged even when there was a deliberate bias in the selection process towards those who had a rural background or had some work experience in the rural sector.

In short, the IRMA was established to generate specialised managerial humanpower for the success of producers' co-operatives. In this sense, it merely reiterated the conviction of NDDB that that all-round and sustainable rural development requires not only the growth and sustenance of member-controlled democratically-organised co-operatives but also the professional management of such co-operatives. It also took into account the fact that the supply of management graduates in India was highly inadequate, both in terms of numbers and in carrying out the managerial tasks in the rural producers organisations:

IRMA is born out of the conviction that a powerful and effective way of achieving all-round and sustained rural development is by creating organisations
owned by the rural people and managed by them with the help of their own professional managers committed to the betterment of rural people (IRMA 1983-84: 6). 7

Seen thus, we can assert that until the IRMA was established, there was no special attention paid to the management training and research support required by the rural producers organisations (co-operatives). Existing institutes of management focused their activities entirely on the needs and the context of the urban-corporate sector. Consequently, very few of their graduates were available to these 'undermanaged' rural organisations. Even those who were available had value systems and aspirations which were not in consonance with the ethos and culture of these rural producers' organisations. The IRMA was established primarily 'to fill this void by providing these undermanaged rural organisations with the managerial training and research support that they required and, in general, by facilitating increasing professionalisation of their management' (Ibid.).

The heightened awareness of its distinctive niche in the field of management education and the mandate provided to it by the NDDB got translated into a set of objectives. The first Annual Report of IRMA (1979-1980) articulated the objectives as follows:

1. To impart education and training to young men and women for managing income-generating and development activities for and on behalf of the rural producers.

2. To offer short training courses for policy-makers, directors, general managers, and those in-charge of specific managerial functions in rural enterprises and projects.
3. To conduct research on operating problems in order to help improve the management of rural enterprises and projects.

4. To undertake basic research into the processes of rural management to augment the existing body of knowledge.

5. To provide consultancy services to rural enterprises and projects in order to improve their operational efficiency and effectiveness.

At the time of its inception, the IRMA had many advantages to begin with. For example, despite being the largest agricultural co-operative movement in the world, Indian co-operative effort was often faulted on two counts: (1) the lack of member-control of the co-operatives caused by the hegemony of the state in everything co-operative, and (2) an inadequate base of managerial capability, something about which an institution like the IRMA could do a great deal. In fact, to provide a constant supply of the managerial expertise to the co-operative sector was its raison d’être. Moreover, the IRMA was close, physically and psychologically, to a segment of this movement which had already made a name for itself. Thus, the IRMA had a ready access to a live laboratory in the Anand-pattern of co-operatives which viewed it to be their collaborator, and therefore, showed willingness to provide its faculty and students unlimited access to their resources and experience.

Given this context, the IRMA was expected to promote, nurture and sustain the belief that, given a sufficiently supportive policy environment, in many ways member-controlled co-operatives may have superior and more enduring qualities as vehicles of large-scale socio-economic change than either voluntary organisations
or bureaucratic organisations/programmes. In a way, this was essentially the NDDB ideology, which had proved its worth earlier in the case of AMUL. Logically, for the initial few years, the IRMA needed to direct the bulk of its creative energies to the task of management capacity-building in member-controlled rural organisations through co-ordinated effort in its educational, training and research programmes. It was thought that the establishment of IRMA would not only reinforce the primacy of the member-controlled co-operatives but also facilitate the transition to member-controlled co-operatives by virtue of its intellectual leadership. Thus, the IRMA came to be birth-marked as an ally primarily of the member-controlled co-operatives and, by implication, of local self-government institutions, self-help groups and other such local organisations which derived their authority from the members whom they existed to serve.

In the first few years, therefore, the IRMA's research, training and placement were geared entirely towards the NDDB programmes. The main consideration was to rapidly develop institutional capability for research and training by concentrating on two sectors - dairying and oilseeds. Over time, however, the initial impulse generated by the IRMA's association with the NDDB programmes has resulted in the gradual broadening of concerns so as to include the rural sector as such and focus on integrative rural management.

Once the scope of IRMA was broadened, increasing demands began to be made upon the Institute by a wide variety of rural development organisations, ranging from voluntary agencies to government and public sector agencies. So, with the passing of time, an unorthodox spirit became part of the IRMA. It moved
beyond the formal organisations of rural people and included voluntary as well as other formal development organisations in its constituency. This inclusion and incorporation of a variety of rural development agencies and organisations took place at two levels.

First, all those organisations which, according to the IRMA, ‘have a long and proven track record of successful development work and have demonstrable capacity to effectively use highly qualified professional rural managers’, become labelled as designated organisations. In effective terms, it means that they are welcome to go to the IRMA for campus recruitment, and the placement of the IRMA graduates in such organisations is encouraged (IRMA 1983-84: 7).

At another level, certain organisations become part of the IRMA Society as per Rule 2.4 of its Memorandum of Understanding. The membership of the Society is open to farmers’ co-operatives and institutions directly involved in rural development. Any such organisation or institution can become the member of the Society by donating Rs. 1 lakh to the IRMA trust. So far twenty-one institutions and organisations have become the members of the Society. They include mainly dairy and oilseeds producers co-operatives, and non-governmental, voluntary and other development organisations.

**Study and Research at IRMA**

The training programmes of IRMA can be broadly placed under three categories:

1. Two-year post-graduate programme in rural management, to train primarily fresh graduates from the universities.
2. One year post-graduate programme in rural development management, to train in-service candidates from the rural development organizations.

3. Short duration management development programmes for the in-service candidates from various rural development organizations.

As mentioned earlier, the commencement of the Programme in Rural Management (PRM) was the first major step towards achieving the Institute's objectives. The PRM has been open to all graduates, irrespective of their background discipline. Its aim is the preparation of young men and women, chosen on the basis of an all-India competitive examination and subsequent interviewing, for careers involving management responsibilities in farmers' organisations. The content of the programme is, therefore, specifically geared to equip students with skills and abilities that are necessary for the efficient management of rural enterprises and allied organisations, particularly of the co-operative sector. The programme also explicitly recognises that rural development is not a mere barefoot exercise shrouded in sentimentality but one involving the adoption of a professional approach, that is also imbued with idealism and commitment, to the problems of rural sector. It is most definitely not value-neutral. Any programme of this nature, is therefore, not only intrinsically difficult but has the added handicap of not having any precedents to fall back upon (IRMA 1983-84: 4).

Thus, at the core of the activities of IRMA is the PRM. It is also the first teaching/training programme of IRMA. The main objective of the PRM was to train young talent for their future role as managers for the co-operative and other development organisations working for the rural sector. A sense of idealism permeated the launch of PRM. It was expected that the IRMA graduates would help the rural people 'to develop new institutional forms, by making the benefits of
modern science and technology available to them in harmony with the development of a vigorous, modern rural culture that is more stable and humane than the industrial urban cultures served by most managers today’ (Halse 1980: 27).

Over the years, the PRM has turned out to be the flagship programme of the Institute. This programme draws on the disciplines such as mathematics and statistics, computer science and operations research, economics, psychology, sociology and other social sciences, and seeks a system’s approach to co-operative management, development administration, and integrative rural management. In the reckoning of IRMA, the PRM is an endeavour towards developing a new discipline of ‘rural management’ as against the general management. Halse, who had been closely associated with the conception of IRMA, visualised the rural management as a distinctive field. According to him,

in addition to the behavioural and economic sciences, the study of rural management must draw more heavily than ‘business management’ on the physical and technical sciences which deal with food and agricultural systems. Its study must also view the tasks of rural managers through the eyes of the rural society which they serve and its practice requires sensitivity to the priorities and the needs of that society, dominated as it is by the culture of poverty (Ibid.)

In 1991, the IRMA launched a One-Year Programme in rural management (OYP) for the in-service professionals working in different co-operatives. The OYP broadly followed the curriculum already in place for the PRM but with reduced field work and organisation traineeship components. However, the OYP was discontinued in 1996, owing to the problems of finding financial sponsors for the candidates. In 1997, the two programmes - the PRM and the OYP - were merged with some innovative features. As per the new Programme, a candidate
could opt for the first year only and after successful completion gets awarded a Certificate in Rural Management. If the candidate undergoes the full duration of the Programme, s/he gets a Diploma in Rural Management. The Programme has the flexibility under which a Certificate holder can return to the Programme within three years of her/his getting the Certificate and go for the Diploma. Since that time, the arrangement has continued.

Apart from these long-duration training programmes, the IRMA also conducts short-duration ‘management development programmes’ (MDPs) for middle and senior level professionals from both co-operatives and other development organisations. These programmes have been in place since 1981. Most of the MDPs are of one-week duration. However, there are instances of such programmes having been organised for one-month and three-month durations. As of now, the MDPs have stabilised as programmes of one-week duration. These programmes are also conducted as tailor-made training programmes to suit the specific requirements of client organisations. At present, there are separate management appreciation programmes for voluntary agencies (see IRMA 1999: 14).

However, a close scrutiny of the IRMA annual reports reveals that in the first decade, there was disproportionate attention on the PRM,\textsuperscript{8} which is as old as the Institute itself, and, as a consequence, mid-career training of the rural managers and even research took the back seat. Running of short-term courses for the IAS probationers and conducting workshops on behalf of various ministries and departments are some of the other activities that the IRMA has been engaged in.
The IRMA’s research programmes have two discernible streams: one leads to the mainstream management research, while the other leads to research on wider issues of socio-economic uplift of the rural people. In the case of the former, the focus is on understanding operational problems faced by rural organisations in order to help evolve feasible solutions. Much of such research is in the form of case studies and consultancy projects. The latter stream of research concerns specifically with the problems of the rural poor and the analysis of various interventions to bring about their uplift. This research is more general in orientation and draws upon various social science disciplines.

A careful look at the research output of IRMA reveals the gradual widening of the scope of its research concerns. Of late, the research conducted at the IRMA covers the totality of rural development and management. Earlier, the thrust was more on problem-solving, action-oriented inter-disciplinary research. The projects covered as wide and diverse areas as dairying, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables, tobacco, biogas, co-operative banking, integrated rural development programmes, milch cattle insurance, common property resources of land, water and forests, water markets, public health system, public distribution system. Besides taking up research projects for its client organisations in the co-operative sector, the IRMA also took up research and consultancy project for the Department of Rural Development of Government of India as well as the State governments of Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. The Ford Foundation and other international foundations have also been assigning research projects to the IRMA from 1985-86 onwards.
Strong field base, heavy policy/action orientation and the multidisciplinary nature have been the key strengths of IRMA's research. However, it does not mean that all is well with the IRMA's research output. It has been said that most of the researches done so far have remained singularly weak owing to its excessive micro-orientation and the corresponding absence of a larger world-view. It also continued to be dogged by the problem of relatively low 'strike rate', in the sense that the proportion of initiated efforts which resulted in finished research in published form remained unsatisfactory. These deficiencies have been explained in terms of the excessive teaching loads of the IRMA faculty. Inadequate planning and insufficient efforts invested on data and first drafts have also been seen variously as responsible for the poor quality of research (see IRMA 1989-90: 23).

As its Annual Report for the year 1985-86 claims, in the short span of less than a decade, the IRMA has emerged as an institute of excellence in research and training in the field of rural development and management. While it continued to broaden its concern for other areas of rural activities, the major thrust was on organisational and managerial aspects of technical changes in the rural sector. To be sure, as of now, the IRMA is recognised as one of the leading institutes in the field of management of rural change. While the Institute continued to develop its form and content from the stated and perceived needs of its main constituency - the Anand-pattern producers’ co-operatives, it had subsequently broadened its concerns to include other aspects of rural activity. This expansion in scope has been in tune with its stated mission - to provide managerial resources to help the rural sector to professionalise its operations. In its own reckoning, it has been
possible for the IRMA to cultivate a variety of interests and, at the same time, consolidate its strengths in the core field of rural management.

**IRMA: The Quest for Perfection**

Introspection and internal debate has been a marked feature of the IRMA. True to the mood of self-introspection, the IRMA invited PRADAN, a highly professional NGO, in 1990, to carry out a detailed study of the post-graduate programmes and the overall experience of the first eight batches of students (see PRADAN 1990). Subsequently, two independent consultants were commissioned in the mid 1990s to undertake stocktaking of the Institute. This independent assessment is contained in what is generally referred to as 'Pareek-Forster Report on IRMA' which has identified the ambiguity about the IRMA’s strategic posture as a central problem facing it at the end of its tenth year. Internal debate among the faculty members concerning a more categorical mission concept for the Institute and a greater clarity and consensus on central purpose have very often found their articulation in its annual reports. The IRMA has been concerned with its overall image rather than with the impact of individual programmes or of the faculty’s work. The quest for an overall vision, comprehensive enough to inform the various activities of IRMA, has been an ongoing one.

The IRMA has been aware that in India’s vast rural sector, with its labyrinth of diversified institutional structures, its modest professional staff (between 20-25) and its relatively small output of graduates (1,205 till 2002) can hardly bring about revolutionary changes. Also, it has expended its time and energy on a highly disparate set of issues, thus catering to an equally disparate set
of client systems. As a result, while individual pockets of excellence and impacts have appeared and disappeared, opportunities for making major institutional impacts through concerted, synergistic action could not be tapped vigorously.

After a lot of soul-searching, there seems to have emerged an approximate consensus, after more than a decade of its establishment, on two points concerning the Institute: (1) As a management institute it must concern itself primarily, though by no means exclusively, with bringing about change through enhancing the effectiveness of organisations (of rural producers). (2) Taking into account its historicity and its intellectual roots in democratic member-controlled co-operative organisations, it should earnestly attempt to be the intellectual leader for the democratic rural co-operative movement.

Although these appeared obvious in retrospect, the intellectual evolution of IRMA did not reflect the primacy of these concerns till the early 1990s. Much research at the IRMA had tended to focus on socio-economic and policy perspectives, in contradistinction to organisational and managerial perspectives. To its dismay, and much against its own self-image, much of the research had aimed at some hypothetical planer/decision-maker operating at the macro level. Conversely, too little of the IRMA’s research addressed the day to day concerns of the decision makers and field managers working with rural organisations. This has meant, among other things, that the bulk of research has had weak linkages with teaching and training programmes for ground-level managers. Finally, it has not been able to tap valuable opportunities for action collaboration and functional engagement
with client organisations which had depended on the IRMA for support in building their management capacities (see IRMA 1990-91: 7).

In this context, the IRMA deliberately positioned itself in relation to the generation of applied knowledge in those grey areas which were important to rural organisations but had not received much attention in standard management and social science research. New research issues became institutionally important and relevant, as the old issues took the back seat. One also finds a conscious tilt towards research support for advocacy on issues relating to reforms of the co-operative law and modifying the role of government in co-operatives. The advocacy role by way of research was considered important in moulding public opinion and informing public policy debate. By implication, it meant that research on government development programmes would take a low priority except where their design and implementation explicitly incorporated member-controlled ground-level organisations.

While some policy research on issues, such as the natural resources management, canal irrigation, social forestry, etc. continued, the Institute's focus gradually shifted to organisational innovations and or user-oriented management systems. Concurrently, even in sectoral policy research, faculty members were encouraged to pay greater attention to the viewpoints and priorities of organisational decision makers rather than national planners and policy makers, or of academics and researchers. Finally, mechanisms were devised to translate the output of this knowledge building effort into changes in curricula and design of training strategies. The aim was to not only to generate such knowledge that could
be of practical value to the organisations working in the rural sector but also to expose its students and trainees to the frontier areas of knowledge derived from the principles of modern management.

Thus, at the IRMA the research, in the early 1990s, came to acquire a distinctive focus on context-specific applications. At the same time, it also undertook the task of generating a great deal of new knowledge in its core area of management of rural co-operatives. The assumption was that the then existing social science literature had failed to generate quality literature on rural co-operatives. Without denying the importance and relevance of social science literature, it felt that the Institute itself, given its mandate, had so far not been able to become a major player in the field of management of rural co-operatives. It came to realise its own inadequacy of efforts in building its corpus of applied knowledge about the problems and issues critical to co-operatives (see IRMA 1991-92: 3). This was so even when it had been close to the co-operatives, nay, it had grown under their patronage.

This redirection of research focus from socio-economic to organisational and managerial issues found expression in the organisation of two comprehensive seminars on the co-operatives: the one on ‘the management of rural co-operatives’, in December 1992, and the other on ‘rediscovering co-operation’, in November 1996. These seminars were the outcome of long and careful planning and also involved researchers from other research institutes and universities, and the entire proceedings were published. The thrust was on understanding co-operatives, their organisational context, and management and policy environment. It also gelled
well with the IRMA’s new-found belief that good research could be a powerful input into decision making and policy formulation. The launch of the Doctoral Fellow Programme in Rural Management in June 2002 can be seen as the latest manifestation of the IRMA’s attempt to consolidate the area of rural management as a discipline.

Applying the principles and techniques of modern management to improving the management of rural institutions and organisations, rural development projects and rural enterprises has been the stated mission of IRMA since its inception. It has always believed in promoting sustainable and equitable rural development through efficient and effective professional management and public policy support. It has always been committed to integrating development and management concerns in its teaching, training, research and consultancy activities. In fact, this has been the unique strength of IRMA in relation to other management and rural development institutes.11 Whereas the management institutes are almost exclusively concerned with business management, the rural development institutions focus exclusively on development. As against these, the IRMA has dovetailed business management and rural development in both theory and practice (see IRMA 1994-95: 5).

All the same, it has tried to retain its original pro poor rural stance, as there are very few other academic institutions in the country which seek to apply principles, policies and practices of professional business management to promote sustainable and equitable rural development. As one of its Annual Reports (IRMA 2001-2002: 1) puts it,
IRMA has a unique and noble mission of promoting sustainable and equitable socio-economic development of rural people through professional management of their organisations. The fulfilment of this mission requires a different breed of managers, who have faith in rural people and their capacity to improve and who are committed to serve them, especially the poor, who have perseverance and patience, who are innovative, and who cherish the values and ethos congenial to rural development. IRMA has evolved over time a unique curriculum, has set up state of the art facilities, and has created a congenial environment to produce such a breed of rural managers.

Thus, a cursory comparison of the institutional profiles of the NIRD and the IRMA reveals interesting insights. While the NIRD has accorded privileged reception to social sciences, as evidenced in the background of their personnel, the IRMA has largely drawn on agricultural and management sciences. This difference in focus is understandable as the NIRD was established at a time when social sciences were on the upswing and considered to be of great consequence to planning and policy formulation. As an institute catering to the bureaucratic functionaries of different levels, the NIRD positioned social scientists as authentic guides and reliable field experts on development issues. That is to say, since the very beginning the NIRD has attempted to create a distinctive self-image in relation to a bureaucracy that was thought to be largely oblivious of the grassroots realities given its systemic constraints. To what extent it has succeeded in this remains a moot issue. Also, the NIRD has consistently tried to distinguish itself from universities, and other ‘ivory towers’ of theoretical research. Being a centre of applied academic/policy research has been its unique selling point.

The IRMA’s emergence has been inseparable from the overall co-operative context embodied in the institutional matrix of the NDDB. Though operating largely outside the state influence, it has been highly critical of the bureaucracy as a system. This is not surprising given the ideological context in which it emerged where the state was thought to be the destroyer of the co-operative initiatives. Like
the NIRD, the IRMA also prides on its being a centre of applied policy research. Moreover, compared to the NIRD, its institutional scope is well demarcated: the main focus is on problem-solving type of research for the organisations working in the rural areas. This explains why the IRMA has been more receptive to agricultural scientists, marketing strategists and management 'gurus' than social scientists.

However, as we will see in Chapters 9 and 10, what is significant for us is the absence of any distinctive institutional discourse on the idea of the village at both these Institutes. Whereas the NIRD has been purveying the state’s representation of the village with great fervour, the IRMA has defined 'rural' in oppositional terms in relation to the urban-corporate sector. The large contingent of social scientists at the NIRD has so far not been able to generate a discourse of village that critically scrutinises the statist construction. True, this is not because of the inadequacy of social sciences but because of the NIRD's lack of effective autonomy vis-à-vis the state. Although the IRMA has been outside the influence of state to a great extent, the representations of the village prevalent there have not been untouched by the statist construction. This is particularly evidenced in its teaching programme, and also, the consultancy research that it undertakes.

In the following chapters (Chapters 9 and 10), we shall move within the institutional structures of NIRD and IRMA to enter the professional world of scholar-practitioners working there. In this Chapter, and in the preceding one on the NIRD (Chapter 7), our main aim has been to set the context of our discussions at the level of institutions, namely, the NIRD and the IRMA. After having moved
from the level of discourse to that of institutions, the next logical step is to shift our attention to the level of scholar-practitioners. We shall present our discussion of the scholar-practitioners of rural development while considering the primary data collected through focussed interviews with them.

Notes

1 OF II, the national dairy development project, with an estimated total investment of nearly Rs. 4850 million over a period of seven years, aimed at helping some 10 million rural milk-producing families to set up co-operatives in 150 districts throughout India. It was estimated that the OF II would require 400 new entrants in the managerial cadre each year. Similarly, the national oilseeds project (also under the umbrella of the NDDB), with an estimated total investment of Rs. 2000 million, was to help form oilseeds growers' co-operatives in the States of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. It was estimated that the oilseeds project would require 200 new entrants at least till mid 1980s.

2 He was also a member of the then Board of Governors of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

3 Most of the IRMA publications (see IRMA 1995, 1999) highlight the fact that the Institute was not named as the ‘Institute of Co-operative Management’ even though catering to the manpower requirements of the co-operative sector was the prime inspiration for the setting up of the Institute. In retrospect, they interpret this fact as a testimony to the far-sightedness of the NDDB, in particular Dr. Kurien, who did not want to restrict the scope of the new Institute by tying it up closely and exclusively with the co-operative sector. With the benefit of hindsight, they argue that this foresight facilitated the shaping of the IRMA as a distinctive institute in the field of rural management rather than in the restricted field of co-operative management.

4 The IDC was the funding body for the OF II.

5 However, one Secretary from the Ministry of Rural Development subsequently came to be a member of the Board of Governors.

6 The sociologist Leela Dube was a faculty member at the Institute for almost three years right from its inception. Two other sociologists, namely, S. C. Dube and B. S. Baviskar, have also been associated with the Institute. While the former mainly delivered occasional talks and lectures, the latter has in addition taught a full-fledged course on co-operatives.

7 In the references cited in the text of this Chapter where IRMA is followed by the hyphenated calendar year, the reference is to the Annual Report of IRMA.

8 The significance of the PRM for the IRMA can also be gauged from the fact that its annual convocations have so far attracted as chief guests three prime ministers — the late Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1982, the late Shri Rajiv Gandhi in 1986, and Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee in 2000. Similarly, two Presidents — the late Shri Giani Zail Singh, in 1983, and Shri R. Venkataraman, in 1988, have graced its convocation,
not to mention of many other dignitaries who have been coming to the IRMA as chief guests at the annual convocations.

PRADAN study was mainly concerned with evaluating the IRMA graduates on two counts: rural orientation and managerial effectiveness. The study found that the average graduate quite high on managerial effectiveness but low on rural orientation. It found relatively small proportion of IRMA graduates engaged in jobs which required active and continuing contact with rural communities. It concludes that the PRM has produced good conventional managers and supplied them to rural organisations; but it has not produced sizeable number of rural managers. Thus, it pointed towards a significant mismatch between the mission of professionalisation of rural organisations (as claimed by the IRMA) and the actual pattern of placement of graduates (see IRMA 1989-1990: 36; see also Shylendra 2003).

Both the reports, the PRADAN and the Pareek-Forster, are available with the Office of the Director of IRMA, whose special permission is required to go through them. They are not available in the IRMA library. Since they are not in the public domain, I could not access them. However, a copy of the PRADAN report is available with its office in New Delhi.

On the basis of its infrastructure, intellectual capital, financial status and governance, the IRMA has been ranked the fifth best management institute, after the four Indian Institutes of Managements, in a survey conducted by Business Today Cosmode. The survey lauded the IRMA for steering clear of the MBA frenzy and remaining committed to professionalisation of rural institutions (IRMA 2000-2001: 54).