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Vol XV
No. 4

ISSN 0019-5014

OCTOBER-
DECEMBER
1960

INDIAN JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS



INDIAN SOCIETY OF
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS,
BOMBAY

BOOK REVIEWS

Caste and the Economic Frontier—A Village in Highland of Orissa, F. G. Bailey, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1957. Pp. xvi + 292. 35 s.

This is not just a book on caste, as its title may indicate. The amplification of the title immediately removes the misconception. It is a time and space study of a social phenomenon. Castes' boundaries extend over time and are not spatially circumscribed. A village is essentially a territorial expression. The book explicates in a systematic way the impact of exogenous factors on a village community, that was not entirely 'sociologically' self-sufficient. The nebulous nature of the idea of self-sufficiency is brought out by Dr. Bailey in that he writes: "Bisipara, then, was self-contained in the sense that all the goods and services it required could be supplied from the locality by barter...." Further the author points out: "It is obvious that in the field of kinship the village was not a 'little republic' The same, to a lesser extent is true of the village as ritual unit, and minimally as a political unit". (*ibid*, p. 230). In this respect, village exogamy (wherever prevalent) in relation to caste, and village self-sufficiency in the context of subsistence, have had opposite effects: one drew an individual out of the village and another kept him in the village.

The book under review is therefore a very significant contribution to already existing commentaries on caste. But it does not add to the pile. It is unique in that it is an analysis of processes of change in a village set on a particular ecological and social *gestalt*. During the last fifteen years, caste at the village level has been studied by many foreign and Indian scholars. Such studies have either confirmed the generalizations of earlier scholars or have modified their conclusions in the light of the field data. Dr. Bailey unravels the functional relations among a caste, a village and the economy and sheds light on their inter-dependence.

The book is divided into three parts — of which the second part is the most crucial. Dr. Srinivas's forward is an apt introduction to the book. Two appendices and glossary added by the selective references are instructive and sure to provide guidance to the research scholars. The only drawback of the book, if it can be called a drawback at all, is, it is rather too much crowded with details and the reader may have to make special efforts to keep track of the main theme. However, to a social scientist such details have significance and value.

As it would be impossible to do justice to all the points mentioned in the book, a few rather pertinent facts are discussed in this review. The village is called Bisipara and is situated in the remote hills of western Orissa. It is located in the centre of Kondmals, which is a sub-division of Phulbani District in western Orissa. The river Mahanadi is on the north. The Kondmals, according to Dr. Bailey, has characteristics of a 'settlers' frontier'. Its original inhabitants have been the Konds (Adivasis).¹ The Oriyas have immigrated from the plains and display in their behaviour pattern the psychology of settlers. Bisipara is a 'settlers' frontier' in that the inhabitants of the village are the Oriya immigrants. They trace their history three hundred years back. They have occupied the best

1. In this review, Dr. Bailey's spelling of vernacular terms and place names has been kept unaltered.

land, while the Konds are either driven away or assigned a very subsidiary role in the village economy (e.g., Kond potters).

Dr. Bailey's most valuable contribution is the definition and delineation of 'frontier' which as a concept explicates interaction patterns among different caste-groups² in the village and outside the village.

The Oriyas in the Bisipara are stratified into caste-groups. Before 1855 the warrior caste-group owned all the land and therefore had a dominant position. Ritually, the Brahmin caste-group was at the top of the caste hierarchy. But it was the warrior caste-group that had the dominant position, because of its numbers, its major share in cultivable land and its wealth. Other caste-groups had ritual and economic relationship with the warrior caste-group and that was the way they maintained themselves.

The turning point in the history of Bisipara came after 1855. The population of the surrounding region was increasing. People were in search of new lands. Bisipara was already settled. All the land was cultivated. *Land was scarce*. There was no possibility of accommodating new settlers. The new economy came through the 'traders' frontier' and through extension of the 'economic frontier'. In this upheavals the Ganjam distillers (who arrived after 1855) and the Boad distillers (who were already there) played a very significant role, because of their caste privilege as distillers. They entered the liquor trade after the British prohibited the Konds from running the home-still. They made money upto 1910, while the warrior caste-group felt the pressure of the new economy. The village 'power structure' was slowly modified. After 1910 the Ganjam distillers took wholly to trade, which they were doing before partly. It is they who extended the 'traders' frontier'.

Dr. Bailey's analysis is at its best in Chapter IV on 'Why does Land come into the Market?' The economy of Bisipara revolves round rice production, internal rice trade and export of turmeric. In this connection, the Kond-Oriya complex becomes obvious. The former produces both rice and turmeric — rice for their subsistence and turmeric for exports. Best rice lands are taken over by the Oriyas. The Oriyas find turmeric hard to cultivate and prefer to trade in it. The trading season coincides with the slack season in agriculture. With the extension of the 'traders' frontier', trade became attractive. Added to this, there was already scarcity of land and the ever present threat of rising population. Agriculture therefore did not offer any further room for expansion.

Upto that time the warrior caste-group lived in joint families. Now the new economy offered rewards to the individual with a little capital and initiative. The British created a way out. They *legalized* individual rights in land. The land came into the market *openly*. Some had to sell land under the pressure of 'contingent' expenditure. But they waited for the opportunity to buy it again. This they did when they accumulated enough money which they earned in their respective occupations. Once land came into the market, there was a likelihood of its changing hands often. The opportunities for trade made every individual a trader in Bisipara. This helped agriculturists to cover their 'contingent' expenditure

2. Caste in this review will be referred to as explained by Dr. Bailey in his prefatory note.

through income from trade. All did not succeed equally; those who failed, sold land and took to trade. Some of them could buy land again when adequate resources were at their disposal. It was the ever recurring contingent expenditure — for deaths and marriage are inescapable — that engendered this repeated cycle of selling and buying. A man could postpone the evil-day by pawning or selling ornaments or by borrowing from his uterine or affinal kin.

The cause of all that goes on in Bisipara can be ascribed to the configuration of circumstances described above. Once land came into the market, the traditional relations lost their contextual meaning. Village services were disorganised. New landlords (Boad distillers and Ganjam distillers) found it profitable to employ free labour. Land changed hands and thus new interaction patterns came into being. The village wore a new appearance.

The practice of rice ritual continues. Village council meets. But there is a difference. Now the 'administrative frontier' counts. Officers, clerks, peons, have their roles and new status. The Headman (warrior caste) makes his presence felt. The Boad outcastes and adivasis are protected by administration. To that extent the village unity is jeopardized. They are accorded preferential treatment in Government services, so they do not pay attention to the decisions of the Village Council. The Ganjam distillers do not wilfully disobey the rulings of the Village Council. The Village Council shrewdly avoids making reference to their behaviour. They want to remain outside the pale of the Village Council but at the same time they do not want to disturb the equilibrium of the village life.

The Boad distillers stand as a class apart. They want to be the part and parcel of village life. They aspire for the status of the warrior caste-group. They own land. They have 'sanskritized' their way of life. They have respectable position. This is the result of their wealth, their ownership of land and their taking to 'sanskritized' customs. As Dr. Bailey remarks: "The point which distinguishes the Boad distillers from the other two . . . is that they have achieved their new status, within the existing ritual and political frame-work of the village. Positions within the structure were altered. The structure itself was left intact". (*ibid*, p. 198).

The last chapter sharply poses the problem arising from the changes of 'power structure'. There is a feeling of discomfiture around. Now there are two authorities — one the village council and the other emanating from the state. The former is losing its hold, while the latter is spreading itself through its network of welfare activities and administrative measures. Here 'we' and 'they' attitudes persist. There is very little disturbances of normal channels in the case of welfare activities, as the administration, as far as possible, utilises the existing village institutions. As to law and order or the payment of tax, the Headman represents the administration, but he is of the village. The administration remains an outside authority and the Headman a sort of 'communicant'. People understand his position.

The village is changing, but it is not disintegrating. The strains and stresses which are observable are the outcome as Dr. Bailey says, of "the magnitude of the economic change or of certain irreducible features in a caste system." (*ibid*,

p. 271). Caste discourages individual mobility. But as the example of the Boad distillers indicates, it does not object to group mobility. When accommodation is not possible as in the case of the Boad outcastes, there is no question of caste giving in. The onus of adjustment now is thrown on the administration. In Bisipara the circumstances were such that all the forces directed their attention on the consolidation of the available resources of the village. All were of the village — even the Ganjam distillers did not exploit the people as the traders usually do when they belong somewhere else. No doubt, their caste role gave advantages to the Ganjam distillers. Even the individual who flourished in hide-trade had immediate caste advantage. It is true that without the advantage of their differential ability they would not have succeeded. But this success in various occupations has nothing to do with the position derived from the ownership of land. The warrior caste-group owned land, but had limited avenues of employment open to them because of caste restrictions. The members of the warrior caste-group had status and power, but they could not take to liquor trade, where the money could easily be made. They withdrew from the field and took shelter under their caste status. In spite of all these stresses and strains, the breakdown was averted as there was no spatial mobility. Dr. Bailey rightly concludes, "The battle is in the field of social mobility." (*ibid*, p. 272).

The Boad outcastes are in a strange predicament. They are untouchables. Whatever wealth and power they have, are due to the discriminating legislation in their favour. Their main ambition is to be absorbed in the caste structure as a group, but everywhere they meet with resistance. The Kond potters, the Ganjam distillers and the Boad distillers, have, each in their own way, adapted themselves to the new conditions. The village council makes room for all the three caste-groups.

This is how the book analyses the currents and cross-currents of Indian social life. It presents a picture on a micro-scale of what is exactly happening on the macro-level. It is perfect by itself inasmuch as it has succeeded in describing the nature of caste society — with its accent on group mobility, its institutionalisation of deviant behaviour, through the formation of 'sub-castes', and the difficulties encountered on this front by those who cannot easily rescind the kinship ties of their poor relatives. Bisipara is a miniature. The scale may be small or large, the pattern of interactions is nevertheless the same. Cities and towns have their caste-groups. There are rivalries on the economic and political front, each caste wanting to be superior to the other. The goal is to be more than the other caste, not its equal. Economic betterment and political power may ease the tensions or dissipate it in different directions. Administration may hide its formidable manifestations, but caste is intractable. Whether it is a question of land reforms or community project, whether it is a question of co-operative farming or co-operative credit, caste cannot be wished away. It is the group to which one belongs, and, at the first chance, one likes to help.

The book, therefore, is a candid statement of caste-village dynamics. Dr. Srinivas in his preface to the book aptly suggests: "Dr. Bailey has written an important and stimulating book which ought to be read by anthropologists, economists, welfare workers and administrators."

(MRS.) HEMALATA ACHARYA

Rural Planning of One County—Worcester County, Massachusetts, John Donald Black and George William Westcott, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1959. Pp. xv+419. \$9.00.

The book is a report of an ambitious undertaking to evolve an all embracing plan for future land use of a county, an administrative unit which is bigger than a taluq but smaller than a district. The project was planned with thoroughness, for which all the works of late John D. Black have come to be known. The idea of the project was conceived in 1936-37. It was in operation for twenty years, excepting for a brief interruption during war years. In this book all the phases of this project, planning, the collection of background materials, assessing the alternative plans, taking the necessary decisions and executing them and the evaluation of the results are fully reported.

The county selected for this experiment is not a representative agricultural county of the United States. It is more typically an urban area. The contribution of agriculture in the total employment as well as the income of the area is only marginal. Agriculture itself is mostly dairy-farming rather than crop farming. Yet the problems of the people in agriculture are by no means easier even in such an area. On the contrary some aspects of adjustment which are necessary to smoothen the transition from a rural-agricultural to an urban-industrial society are quite baffling.

The land use planning, in this project, was geared to the welfare of the people of the area. It was done in two ways. In the first place it was emphasised that, people rather than land was to be served by such planning. Secondly, the farm operator and his family were considered major elements in land use adjustments.

The methodology of the project was mostly evolved in the Seminar on Land Use Planning and Conservation of Harvard's Graduate School of Public Administration. Two basic procedures involved in planning were *area-mapping* and *operating unit planning*. The area mapping procedure gives the most detailed account of the geology, physiography, soil and land types, vegetation and crop-adaptability of the land in question, the markets of the goods produced, etc. At this stage, planning needed close co-operation of physical scientists. At the next stage of operating unit planning, the role of social scientists becomes more important. The operating unit planning in this project was done by the method of farm budgeting.

With the help of these procedures planners were able to formulate rational plans for the farms, sub-areas and the county and to fulfil their immediate objective of helping the people of Worcester. The periodic surveys of the area could prove that the project was of material aid to the people of the county. By adopting the most methodical and comprehensive approach the project was also able to fulfil a broader aim of setting down the principles of county planning.

To us in India this report is valuable from two points of view : from the point of the methodology of land use planning and from the point of the broader issues of economic growth to which also this study alludes.

With the current movement of devolution of power to the lower units of administration, the function of planning will also be considerably decentralised. If we have to conserve our resources to the maximum we will also have to evolve land use planning for homogeneous areas, say, within a district. The emphasis which is put on area mapping in this book should not be missed by the planners in this country. Several portions of the book, specially, chapters on Community Planning and Rural Planning can be read with profit by the people in charge of the extension, though they may not be connected with the land use planning as such. A careful perusal of this book suggests the difficulties of operating unit planning. In view of the difficulties and handicaps in framing the farm budgets, this reviewer is of the opinion that a large scale farm management movement will be too ambitious programme in this country at this stage. Our people are scarcely ready for it. It is better to stop detailed planning at the Taluq or at the most at the Village level, where the tool of area mapping should be fully utilised, and to dilute the efforts as one reaches down to the farm.

This book has another merit. Because of the long period over which the area was kept under observation, in all, more than twenty years, it suggests clearly the impact of rapid industrial growth on the rural population (Chapters 15 and 16). The consolidation of holdings, the conversion of the marginal farmer to the part-time farmer (*viz.*, either the head of family takes up outside farm employment for a short duration or some other members of the family do), the changes in the type of farming from crop cultivation to dairy farming to dairy-cum-orchard (or poultry) farming to orchard (or poultry) farming, the extension of the markets for a wide variety of goods and innumerable problems to which it gives rise, are few of the developments which this project has brought in relief. In not too distant a future some of these issues will become, if they have not become already, relevant issues in this country also. For us therefore the value of this study is doubly enhanced.

V. S. VYAS

A Review of Co-operative Movement in Marathwada : 1950-55, N. P. Ranbhise, Bombay State Co-operative Union, Bombay, 1959. Pp. 68. Rs. 1.50.

The brochure gives the details of the growth of the co-operative movement in the Marathwada region during the period of five years, 1950-55. The author has also added a post-script for the period 1955-58. The movement in the region developed under the extraordinary control of the Department staff. The Manager of the Central Co-operative Bank, Co-operative Inspector, Supervisors, etc., were all Government employees and even the accounts of the primary co-operatives were maintained by the supervisors. During the period 1950-55, though there were a few non-credit co-operatives, the credit structure dominated the movement. These included a large number of grain banks which were practically dormant. Loans were advanced against the landed security and the extent of loans were determined by the land revenue paid by the land owner. Obviously, under this system, tenant cultivators were not brought within the co-operative fold. In the recovery of dues, though the office-bearers were given encouragement by paying them an allowance of $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent to 2 per cent of the recovered amount, no concerted efforts were made to recover the dues and the overdues

mounted up. In this respect, the position of the central banks and Rural Banks was no less similar. During the period of controls a few marketing societies were organised. However, with the relaxation of controls, the activities of these societies almost came to a standstill and no efforts were made to revive them. With the merger of the region in the Maharashtra State efforts are being made to re-organise the co-operative movement so as to bring in line with the status of the movement in other parts of the State. For the strengthening of the credit structure and the diversification of the movement, the author makes a number of useful suggestions.

Now that the Marathwada region forms a part of the Maharashtra State, the brochure would be valuable to co-operators interested in an account of the movement in that region. There was no published work in this respect and the author's attempt to fill this gap needs to be congratulated. A few obvious mistakes that have crept in the brochure such as incomplete sentences, lack of proper heading to the tables—in one place the entire table is missing—could have been avoided.

P. R. BAICHWAL

Co-operative Credit Movement in Sinor Mahal (A Study in Problems of Overlapping Co-operative Structure), B. G. Shah, Baroda Central Co-operative Bank Ltd., Baroda, 1960. Pp. 39+xxxiv.

This study is among the few attempts at successfully planning a purposive research in some problem situation. It has, therefore, immense practical importance for the co-operative movement not only of Sinor Mahal but also of the entire cotton growing region of Gujarat. The whole region suffered from the same malady in varying degrees and the prescription administered is also the same.

In the course of last ten to fifteen years, a new pattern of 'cotton co-operatives' with marked business bias, evolved in the region. Like other successful business units, more successful of them pursued an aggressive policy of expansion, of both their areas of operation as well as functions. In absence of any policy of co-ordination, competition resulted in overlapping of jurisdictions of each other and taking over by them multiple functions connected with cotton trade. They advanced finance for seasonal operations, undertook to gin and press cotton of their members and market it on their behalf, provided marketing finance against pledge of cotton and supplied consumption and production requisites. This extra-ordinary concentration of functions considerably weakened the utility of primary multipurpose societies and almost threatened their extinction and altogether dispensed with the use of marketing societies. This new competition oriented pattern 'significantly contributed to the extension of co-operative credit and marketing'. For instance, consistently for a period of five years, 1954-55 to 1958-59, these societies processed and sold on an average 70 per cent of the cotton crop of the mahal and provided increasing amount of crop finance, the average per member being Rs. 502 in 1958-59 as against Rs. 305 in 1955-56. This is certainly a record achievement that will make co-operative movement anywhere in India envious. But competition that led to such phenomenal growth is also responsible for creating a cut-throat, aggressive internal rivalry 'to the total

disregard of co-operative principles and even financial prudence.' It would suffice merely to mention a few of the evils which are described by the author at length, like indulgence in competitive increase in the scale of crop finance per acre (particularly of cotton which alone claims 66 per cent of the total gross cropped area), the borrowing of excessive finance by several members through multiple membership of several societies simultaneously resulting in *benami* transactions, excessive unutilised surplus capacity of processing societies (49.18 per cent on an average even on the basis of one shift) and weak financial and income structure of these societies. The Co-operative Department in its anxiety to arrest further deterioration issued a directive demarcating functions and jurisdictions of cotton sale and multipurpose societies with effect from April 1959. The implementation of the policy gave rise to many difficult problems of readjustments, particularly for cotton co-operatives. Their profit-making functions like the crop loan business and supplies of consumption and production requisites are taken away and only the loss-making function of ginning and pressing of members' cotton is left with them. What is still worse is the uncertainty created in the procurement of necessary ginning load as a result of the limitation of their area of operation and severance of the direct nexus with their individual feeder members. At the time when the movement was confronted with a serious situation the author was called upon to help in devising ways and means of securing a smooth transition to a new frame-work. This task is indeed difficult. The author analyses the problem with unusual degree of clarity and understanding but without any fault of his does not succeed in devising effective ways and means. It is difficult to foresee how far his advice regarding upward revision of processing charges, requesting the Government to subscribe to their share-capital and State Finance Corporation to advance long-term loan for improving their liquidity and the like may help them in overcoming their difficulties which are very basic.

The whole discussion highlights two fundamental issues which co-operatives may face in their advanced stage of growth, viz., (1) the role of competition in co-operative movement and (2) the policy of the Government with regard to it. The gross indifference on the part of those who are in charge of supervision, control and guidance in allowing the situation to develop into destructive competition and then a sudden decision to impose a new structure which almost mechanically demarcated jurisdictions and functions, to say the least betray lack of foresight and incompetence to understand situations and take actions in time. Their action is as much amazing as their inaction and unfortunately both of them are prejudicial to the growth of co-operative movement. In spite of the multipurpose village societies that existed in the *mahal* the phenomenal growth in the face of competition by the private trade must have many things to commend. The evils of competition could have been controlled effectively without sacrificing the old pattern. What was necessary was rationalisation and not renunciation of the old structure. The policy was guided not by practical but ideological considerations. The misplaced trust in the assumption that co-operative spirit exists only in comparatively small societies is responsible for such extra-ordinary action. By now we have enough evidence to show that co-operative spirit is in no small measure a function of economic efficiency. The successful working of co-operative movement in the western countries recognising the importance of this fact, have devised other means to secure co-operative spirit in the best possible manner. Even granting that as a matter of policy we cannot encourage

units to grow larger, there was no rationale behind breaking down units which have grown under particular circumstances.

The problem of competition in co-operative movement is very fundamental and deserves comprehensive treatment. It should be remembered that overlapping of functions and operational areas is only one manifestation of that situation. Should a co-operative confine itself to only prescribed functions irrespective of local conditions? Should it not, like other growing business concerns, extend its area of operation? Would it not be healthy for co-operation to compete with each other under some well laid-down rules of game? Is there any justification except that of ideological, for prescribing artificially functions and jurisdictions for various co-operatives in the same uniform manner all over the country? Though the author was entrusted with a clearly defined task, *viz.*, devising ways and means of securing a smooth transition to new framework, he would have done a great service if he had raised these problems and examined their implications. He ought to have questioned the official assumption that a new structure is a pre-condition for smooth and healthy development of co-operative movement.

Some of the operational defects pointed out by the author are very serious and may impair the movement if not rectified in time. The disbursement of crop finance without any regard to cost of cultivation or farm practices hardly serves any productive purpose. It is anybody's guess as to how much credit is actually utilised for meeting expenses incurred on current farm operations and on introduction of better techniques and organisation. The mere expansion of credit on the basis of repayment capacity may be a sound banking principle but not a sound economic principle. In the situation of serious scarcity of funds at the disposal of co-operative movement, we should not encourage any wasteful application of credit. It is unwise to allow the credit policy to be influenced only by one crop or a few commercial crops to the total disregard of the needs of food crops. The pursuit of such a policy in the *mahal* is rightly considered one of the factors responsible for causing shift in favour of cotton over the period of study. Credit should not be concentrated only in commercial crops but be disbursed according to the requirements of all crops. Failure to recognise this may cause serious imbalance in the cropping pattern over a period of time. If the capacity of food crops to absorb credit is limited, despite their needs, a closer analysis of this situation should be made. By merely neglecting credit needs of food crops we do not solve the problem but only aggravate it. No one will have any hesitation in agreeing with the author that the use of short-term funds for the block capital affects adversely the liquidity position of the processing societies and that the run on deposits and share capital may pose a serious financial crisis for them. There are many other suggestions like improving marketing efficiency at the union or apex level, exploring possibilities of common purchase of stores or co-operative manufacture of various items of stores which do not require great skill and evolving standards for judging operational efficiency of co-operative units, which if properly implemented, may go a long way in improving the working of these societies.

One would expect the author to elaborate how exactly this new pattern will 'necessarily result into higher profit and healthier growth' of multipurpose societies, how the decline in advances in 1959-60 can be just dismissed as reduction in excess borrowing and why should 'large-sized' societies should be blamed for

comparatively higher overdues when the author himself admits that most of these societies are newly formed and hardly any link between credit and marketing exists in these societies. The question of excess capacity is no doubt very serious but again here one would have expected the author to measure the surplus capacity not absolutely but comparatively. The comparison could have been instituted with a representative unit either in a co-operative sector or in a private sector.

It will be unfair to the author to close the review without paying him handsome compliments for doing this difficult task so well. Everyone will share with him the anxiety that the co-operative movement in that area is passing through one of the most difficult phases of its existence and that its future course will be greatly influenced by the manner in which the recognised structure adjusts to changed circumstances.

A. C. SHAH