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Dry Grain Farming Families

Hausaland (Nigeria) and Karnataka (India)
compared

POLLY HILL

Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge

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Preface

This book was written accidentally. Prevented by immigration restrictions from working in Nigeria for longer than three months, in 1977 I decided on the spur of the moment to seek my fortune in south India instead, despite my entire unfamiliarity with that continent. The idea of comparative inter-continental work had not occurred to me until I had spent some time in the Karnataka (south Indian) villages, when I realised, to my surprise, that I was in a rather familiar environment in terms of the kind of enquiry on rural economic inequality and individual poverty which I was again resolved to undertake.

As this book attempts a radical assault on prevailing orthodoxy, I doubt if it could have been written by an ordinary member of a university department, such as I had once been myself, for in close academic communities only those of high status are acceptable non-conformists – which is not to deny that one department may include two violently opposed schools of thought.

A cardinal intellectual error of our times seems to amount to a belief in a ‘standard condition’ of under-development in tropical food-farming societies, for how otherwise can one account for the belief that so much prevailing orthodoxy on matters such as economic inequality and the causes of severe poverty has universal validity, despite the flimsiness of the empirical basis? My contrary contention is that there is so much variability within the rural tropical world that hardly any doctrines below the highest level of generality have universal application, and that it is only by emphasising the significance of heterogeneity that we can hope to make proper intellectual progress. That being so, our first task, whether as economic anthropologists or as (those rare birds) field economists, must be that of identifying and analysing, *by means of fieldwork*, the more important (in terms of the sizes of the populations involved) of the various agrarian systems which exist in the tropical world. It seems to me that the number of important systems may be quite manageably small – say ten or twenty rather than a thousand; and that one of them might

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Preface

prove to be the particular dry grain mode which is the subject of this book.

I hope that I have provided sufficient background information for the book to be comprehensible to students with no prior knowledge of West Africa or south India, thus enabling the formulation of this hypothetical dry grain mode to be assessable within a world context. The book has many other purposes. It is, for example, a practical demonstration of the advantages of setting the socio-economic problems of rural India within a wider world. Indian studies are presently such a specialised field that I found that it was positively advantageous to enter the villages with all the beliefs and prejudices that I had acquired as a long-term West Africanist – my approach being necessarily different from that of a trained Indianist.

Most third world people being country dwellers, I find it appropriate to follow my own inclination of *looking at the world as a whole from within the countryside*. But I have, unfortunately, been unable to avoid a constant switching between the past and present tenses: sometimes I seem to be inside a village as I write, sometimes I merely remember being there. In this connection I have to stress that my comparison is based on conditions as I myself found them in the villages – that it would have been quite impracticable to have taken account of developments in rural Hausaland since 1968.

Since I have already produced two books on rural Hausaland, to which there are many cross-references, I here provide much more detail on the Indian than the Hausa villages. (Even so, limitations of space have forced me to omit much Indian material, archival and other, which is in my files.) In order to enhance the readability of the main text, which is mainly concerned with the inter-continental comparison, part of this detailed material has been relegated to appendices, some of which are primarily statistical.

I shall, of course, be criticised by those who note that my deeply pessimistic conclusions are little relieved by practical suggestions of palliatives. This is deliberate and does not imply a hard heart – indeed, like every other concerned amateur, I have some strong views on ‘what ought to be done’. Our present dire ignorance of tropical rural life can be alleviated only by fieldwork which, together with the associated archival work, background reading, analysis of field material and writing, is arduous indeed, leaving no time for other work. While as fieldworkers we do our utmost to provide policy makers with findings which are relevant to their needs, their task must be different from ours, and they should not expect us to step into their shoes. If they do, our ignorance (especially

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about the most impoverished regions which lack irrigation systems) will continue to be so profound that we shall lack all comprehension of how ignorant we are.

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Acknowledgments

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Prof. Joan Robinson, Dr Murray Last, Dr Keith Hart, Dr A. F. Robertson, Dr Francesca Bray, Dr Charles Ross, Dr C. A. Bayly and Dr Peter Skalnik read and criticised most or some of the draft chapters at various stages. I am most grateful to them all and must, of course, insist that they and the others named hold no responsibility for any of my conclusions. I must also thank Prof. Meyer Fortes, Dr Sunanda Sen, Dr J. R. Hood, Prof. Michael Lipton and my daughter Mrs Susannah Burn.

On arriving in Bangalore it was my great good fortune to recruit two university graduates, Mr A. V. Diwakar and Mr B. A. Gopal, as my full-time assistants. As it had always been my intention to work in several villages simultaneously, we each continued to live in Bangalore, proceeding daily in the direction of one or other village in an ancient car, which broke down repeatedly. As a statistician, who now works with the Population Centre, Indian Population Project, Bangalore, Mr Diwakar was responsible for compiling the household 'genealogies' and for collecting village statistics generally; his work was excellent, his experience invaluable. Mr Gopal, who acted as my interpreter and constant guide and friend, fortunately spoke each of the three necessary mother tongues (Telugu, Kannada and Tamil) – he was much appreciated by villagers of all castes, almost being regarded as one of themselves. The dreadful task of

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unravelling the village land revenue statistics fell jointly on Mr Gopal and myself; we suffered greatly from the working conditions then endured by two of the three Village Panchayat Secretaries with whom we worked. We are indeed grateful to these three officials for much help and advice and for their tolerance of our peculiar ways.

We made so many friends in the Anekal villages that I can thank only a few of them by name. We are especially grateful to those who allowed us to sit in their houses for days on end, almost as though we lived there, especially to Sri H. A. Mallareddy of Hullahalli, and his mother Smt Bayyamma, in whose glassed-in verandah we spent hundreds of hours talking to our special friends among the large Harijan population of that village. We also enjoyed much hospitality from the households of ex-patel Madappa of Mahantalingapura (with whom we enjoyed exploring the hinterland of his village), of ex-Shanbhog V. R. Subbrayappa of Vabasandra, of Sri Krishnareddy of Srirampura and of Sri R. Subbramaiah, retired schoolmaster of Bukkasagara. I am especially grateful to the several Harijan village servants (*thotis*) who were my particular friends, among them Thotis Chikkamuniswamy and Papanna of Hullahalli and Thoti Muniappa of Bukkasagara with whom we must have spent the equivalent of several weeks walking round the farmland and nearby villages. Nor can I resist thanking Contractor Mallareddy of Hullahalli and Priest Lokappa of Bukkasagara.

On the official level I am grateful to Smt Negarathnammani, then Tahsildar (head official) of Anekal Taluk; to the Special Deputy Commissioner of Bangalore District for granting permission for access to the village records; and to the Archivist of the Karnataka State Archives for permission to consult the records as well as to the staff for much fetching and carrying of bulky papers. I must also thank Prof. M. N. Srinivas and other members of the Institute for Social and Economic Change at Bangalore for welcoming me when I first arrived.

The work in India was undertaken during my tenure of the six-year Smuts Readership in Commonwealth Studies at Cambridge University. I am grateful to the Managers of the Smuts Fund for granting me additional funds in support of my Indian fieldwork. I must also acknowledge financial support from the Leverhulme Trust while I was writing the book. I doubt whether I should have sustained the ordeal of persisting with the book had the Cambridge University Press not offered me positive encouragement at all stages.

Finally, I must praise the unique academic atmosphere provided by my college Clare Hall, a truly international institution which never ceases to amaze me.

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Abbreviations and conventions

AKs and ADs	At appropriate points I refer to members of the Adikarnataka and Adidravida castes as AKs and ADs, but other caste names in the Anekal villages have not been abbreviated.
Book references	The title of any publication is given only for its first mention; thereafter reference should be made to the author's name in the book list.
Currency	In 1977–8 the rate of exchange between the rupee and the £ sterling fluctuated somewhat; I have taken it to be Rs 14 to the £.
Rounding	As the use of decimal points in my statistical tables would have given a spurious sense of accuracy, I have rounded all percentages to the nearest integer with the result that they do not always total 100.
Tables	Nil is indicated by –, . . . signifying inappropriate or irrelevant.
Vernacular words	I have endeavoured to reduce the number of vernacular words to a minimum. Although several languages were spoken in the Anekal villages, all vernacular words for those villages are Kannada – apart, of course, from all-India words connected with such matters as land revenue and tenure.