

The Rockefeller Foundation & Economic Development in India, 1950-1975

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In August 2001, I engaged in research on the work of the Rockefeller Foundation in India. This research is part of a project that seeks to explore the programs and influence of the Rockefeller Foundation and Ford Foundation in India from about 1950 to 1975. My focus was on the RF commitment to economic development in India from 1951, when the first RF mission began to explore a role for the foundation, through to the gradual termination of programs in the mid-1970s. The materials proved to be rich. They detail the process by which the foundation moved into India, the interaction of the RF with other agencies (Government of India especially the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, U.S. government especially the Technical Cooperation Mission and later the Agency for International Development, and the Ford Foundation) and the relations between the New Delhi Office (headed for many years by Ralph Cummings) and the headquarters in New York. Most significantly, the records tell the story of the RF's role in fostering agricultural education, notably through Cumming's leadership of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), and in developing the high-yield varieties of grains that became part of the Green Revolution. In sum, I gained valuable insight into the politics and impact of RF work during the heyday of American involvement in India's development.

Three aspects of the documents proved especially illuminating. First, they detail the methodical process by which the foundation made its commitment to Indian development. At a time when there was often a tendency to rush into schemes of development in India and elsewhere, the RF officials were notably cautious and determined to identify the proper "niche" for its work. Between 1951 and 1956, the foundation sent five missions to India before agreements were finally

reached with Indian officials. Notable in this process were the RF evaluations of other American private and official programs, the RF's insistence that its efforts reflect Indian interests (as opposed to the Technical Cooperation Mission's tendency to define those interests), and the RF's definition of what it expected from Indian officials. Throughout this period of negotiation, the RF played from the "strength" of the high regard for the foundation's years of work in Indian public health and medicine; the foundation also benefited from the Indian scientific community's respect for the Mexican Agricultural Program and its interest in extending such research to India. During the extended negotiation with Indian and American agencies, foundation officials broadened their concept of the RF role. From the beginning, they envisioned a program of developing improved varieties of grain, but at first this was limited to corn breeding. As a result of greater interaction with Indian agricultural leaders, RF officials recognized the importance of other grains, especially rice, and that broader mission became part of the 1956 agreement.

Second, the documents also underscore very fully the RF role in the development of higher education in agriculture. Its well-known contributions to the Indian Agricultural Research Institute are detailed and are set within the context of RF relations with various Government of India and state government agencies. Also emerging from the documents is a much fuller picture than one can gain from secondary sources of the role of the foundation, largely through the enterprise of Cummings, in agricultural education and research throughout the country. The so-called Cummings Commission brought fundamental reform and the foundation's cooperation with the program of the Technical Cooperation Administration and American land-grant universities was important in introducing American practices at the state level.

Third, the archives provide much information on the origins of the Green Revolution in India. The expansion of the RF's mission in this area between 1951-56, as noted above, was

fundamental to the research on high-yield crop varieties that brought significant increases in production. The files on the collaborative work of RF and Indian scientists are voluminous and add much to the story of the Green Revolution; the vast literature on the subject focuses mostly on its economic, political, and social impact.