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# DEVELOPMENT AND AUTHORITARIANISM: AN EPITAPH ON SOCIAL ENGINEERING

I shall begin with an example from my own discipline, psychology. When the intelligence tests were developed in the 1910's, there was much discussion of their reliability and validity, including some spirited discussion of how, why and how far the tests measured human intelligence. It was reasonably clear to everybody that the tests were one way of measuring human intelligence and that the tests not only yielded approximate measures but also simplified a complex quality like intelligence. Gradually over the decades, there was a subtle change in the professional and lay attitudes towards the tests and the construct called human intelligence. Most textbooks began to reverse the relationship between IQ and intelligence. Intelligence tests were no longer an imperfect means of measuring the measurable aspects of intelligence; intelligence definitionally became what the intelligence tests measured.

Such beauties of operationalism and instrumentation are not unique to psychology. One can give examples from other areas of life, too. At one time it was closer to our consciousness that the thermometer was a way of measuring fever; now fever is defined strictly by thermometer readings, despite individual differences in 'normal' body temperature. One is tempted to hazard the guess that there is something in human nature which tempts us seek cognitive security by concretising not-easily-definable processes and qualities.

Something similar has happened with the concept of development. Development in its presently dominant sense was once a means of social transformation, a particular form of directed social change. Today development defines social change. So much so that if you are against development, most people presume that you are against all social change.

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This paper originated as a note written for the SID world conference on World Development: Risks and Opportunities, Rome, July 1985. An extract from an earlier draft was published in The Illustrated Weekly of India, October 16, 1983. The present version has been written for the Journal für Entwicklungspolitik.

Such imperialism of categories has many consequences, three of which are of particular relevance to those of us concerned with development as a political process in the third world. First, it allows a certain autonomy and primacy to the construct called development over the real-life processes which go with development; second, it produces a new elite, the chosen few who have expertise in the domain covered by the category and in cognate areas (modern technology, for instance); and third, it allows for a linearisation of experience and narrowing of options, which then prompt people to even state their dissent from the ideology of development in the language of development itself.

With these considerations in mind I shall now discuss one aspect of our experience with development in our part of the world, namely, the problem which development as a social process poses for a democratic order. In the process I shall hint at an internal, as against external, critique of development. (An internal critique evaluates the philosophical assumptions and the usefulness of the very concept of development; an external critique evaluates the misuse or sectoral use of development but exempts the idea of development from any fundamental criticism.)

It is one of the most painful features of our times that success in development has in most cases led to the emergence of authoritarian politics in third world societies. One by one the societies which have succeeded in development - or have shown signs of doing so - have fallen prey to the very success they have tried so hard to attain, in total defiance of existing theories of democracy and development. This correlation between development and authoritarianism can be said to be growing even in open societies like India and Sri Lanka after they have opted for more conventional forms of development in the last decade.

Is this correlation an accident or a result of the misbehaviour of the rulers of these societies? Or is there something fundamentally wrong with the idea of development itself?

We were told in the past that authoritarianism was due to underdevelopment. Development, we were told, guaranteed democratic freedom, at least in the long run. Those who believed in socioeconomic prerequisites of political democracy - from Talcott Parsons to David Easton and from Edward Shils to Karl Deutsch (1) - and those who believed in state-controlled economic growth as the sure road to their utopia - from Lenin to our very own Jawaharlal Nehru - to both groups oriental despotism was the primary model of authoritarianism. Both groups expected economic growth to lead

the Asian and African societies towards freedom, not away from it. So at least what they said. In the sixties some low-brow scholars like Everett Hagen even went so far as to posit a perfectly inverse relationship between the antidemocratic personality and the entrepreneurial man (2). So did in the Indian context smaller fries like K. W. Kapp and Subhayu Dasgupta (3). Even David C. McClelland and company, breathlessly trying to induce economic growth through higher achievement motive, incidentally produced the insight that the rise in achievement motive in a society prior to economic take-off sometimes led to lower levels of power and affiliation motives, and thus to lesser chances of imperialism and authoritarianism (4).

We are now told that most of these scholars never enjoyed much respectability in the citadels of development economics. We should, however, for that very reason consider them to be important figures in development literature. Because while the economics of these worthies was considered bad, very few attacked their political philosophy, even in passing. At worst, they were seen as misguided academic entrepreneurs or novices making enormous fuss about a minor issue - namely the non-economic factors in development. I am tempted to guess that in so far as they summated the stereotypes, folklores and prejudices centering around development, they underscored the expectation of their generation that development will lead to the enlargement of the area of human freedom. Their works played in development literature the role popular culture plays in some other areas of life.

Be that as it may, the experiences of police states such as South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Brazil, Shah's Iran and Ayub Khan's Pakistan have played havoc with this way of thinking in recent times. (The best success story in development in the socialist block in recent years, East Germany, is also one of the most successful police states in the block.) All these states turned more, not less repressive in the wake of their economic success. It is not accidental that in the third world, grassroot movements in general and civil rights movements in particular have increasingly become hostile to the very idea of development. And some of the movements do not even care whether one means by 'development' conventional development or the new alternative forms of development (5).

We have been told by a second group of scholars that authoritarianism can sometimes be a means of development. The scholars do not word their thesis in exactly these words but they cite the examples of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Stalinist Russia, pre-war Japan, the military dictatorships of

Latin America, and Maoist China in support of their thesis. In these societies high-pitched mobilisational politics within a closed policy have been used 1) to enforce consumption-restraints and collective sacrifices, and 2) to justify enhanced spending on the military and the police in the name of development. James Gregor's work exemplifies one subset of the genre rather neatly (6). Cynical and blatantly conservative though the thesis may sound, it has tallied with the experience of a large number of people who have been the victims of development and seen their rulers choose development over freedom whenever the chips are down. These victims have had too intimate an encounter with the cognitive conservatism which insists that development is the only pathway to human happiness, that for the sake of development every sacrifice is justified, and that without development a society is doomed to live with large pockets of poverty and famines for ever.

Most relevant to societies like India is, however, the inarticulate thesis - inarticulate because it is implicit in the actions of a large number of groups working all over the world in areas such as ecology, cultural survival and civil rights - that development itself releases authoritarian tendencies after it crosses a certain threshold. And this even in societies which honestly try to develop and expand democratic participation at the same time. The thesis admits that development itself has always included authoritarian elements, even in the democratic West. The elements were held in check in the western societies by the possession of colonies (to which they exported millions of their people marginalised by industrial growth and from which the colonisers obtained raw materials for economic development at cheap rates); by restricted franchise (which filtered off from the public realm much of the protest by the victims of development); by suppressing the voice of the ethnic groups which pay the price of development in ecological devastation and uprooting (as in the case of American and Brazilian Indians); or by exporting authoritarianism to crypto-colonies (as the United States has been doing in South America for many decades). Once these advantages are lost, authoritarianism may reveal itself as the other side of development even in the developed societies.

Such a point of view recognises three facets of development which nurture authoritarianism in the third world societies.

First, as democratic participation increases in a developing society, it brings towards the centre of the polity groups previously marginalised. These new groups threaten the power of those who control the society and

monopolise the benefits of development. Particularly so because development has come to mean in practice the taking over - by the state, by the organised sector or by the market - of the commons to which traditionally the weakest of the society used to have access. These commons are then used to produce marketable goods which can never reach the original beneficiaries of the commons.

For instance, a tribe living in a forest may have 'free access' to fuel-wood but once the forest is cut down to put up a dam and a hydel plant, the tribe may have no access to the new energy but could, in the process suffer from uprooting, loss of livelihood, and deculturation. Yet, the very experience of displacement and dispossession may politicise the tribe and make them a threat to the state. Authoritarianism becomes an easy means of containing these new participants in political and controlling their demands. The containment - A.F.K. Organski calls it the repression of the newly mobilised sectors and identifies it as the very heart of fascism - is legitimised by the manifest normlessness and crudity of the politics of the new entrants (7). The middle classes are always appalled by the unseemly style of the lower classes in politics. Authoritarianism in developing societies often takes advantage of this culture shock to contain political participation (8). And the slogan of development in such societies legitimises this containment.

I may mention in passing that this process parallels the explanation of authoritarianism offered by some scholars in India, too. The Emergency in India (1975-77) fitted the analysis in a copybook fashion. The coercion the Emergency produced came packaged in the rhetoric of development and though occasionally the rhetoric of 'putting democracy back on the rails' was also used, it was the emphasis on development which sought to justify the police-state methods used in areas such as family planning, control of media, and slum clearance. Similarly packaged argument have come at different times from the Marcos regime in Philippines, from Thailand, Pakistan and South Korea.

Second, development means sacrificing something of the present for the sake of the future. As development becomes a reason of the state, those who control the state feel justified in imposing these sacrifices on a selective basis and under 'expert' guidance. Authoritarianism becomes their technique of extracting sacrifices either from target groups identified by the state (in which case the sacrificial sectors on closer examination turn out to be the political dissenters or their support bases) or from those less

able to resist making such sacrifices (in which case generally the ideology of 'trickle-down effect' or that of 'market forces' is invoked) (9).

The concept of trickle-down effect has had a particularly long tenure in many third world societies. In third world societies which have taken the capitalist path to development, the concept often serves the same function as the suspension of democratic rights do in many socialist regimes. In both cases the aim is to extract economic surplus from the population, either through the science of development, which justifies the open inequality and injustice as short-term experiences, or through scientific history which represses the protests against the hidden inequalities and injustices in the name of future freedom. In India, which according to Raj Krishna has had 'a Hindu rate of growth' of roughly 3.5 per cent per annum over the last three decades, there is evidence that poverty has not diminished an iota till mid-70's, the poverty ratio for the country being stable at 56.6 per cent after more than two decades of planning (10). Further comment is unnecessary.

Third, though development in its present sense is being used for only forty years - President Harry Truman was the first to use the term in its present sense - it is a term which is retrospectively applied to the 300-years-long process through which the developed societies have passed to reach their present state. Development in non-western societies is supposed to be a shorter route to that state. Thus, the concept of development has as its underside the memories of the authoritarian violence and the exploitation which went with the early phases of development in the West, and the concept includes the message that the underdeveloped world should make similar blood sacrifices to develop.

The images of the non-unionised workers coming back from work after sixteen hours to rape their own daughters, children below ten working full day in the mills or in high-risk occupations like chimney sweeping, the women labourers populating the gin alleys - the survive in the western unconscious as an abyss into which the West may again slip if it gives up the ambition of scaling newer and newer heights of prosperity or if it loses the will to protect its interests with the help of the coercive power it has. The West's anxieties centering around development are then projected into the worldview of development and global politics of development. That is why the developed democratic societies are often the first to endorse a military despot in the third world, particularly if the latter is smart enough to mouth the idiom of development. That is why the Shah of Iran looked

like an overly strict schoolmaster to his western admirers, whereas Idi Amin looked like a stone-age monster. The former was seen as a practising developmentalist, even if misguided; the latter was seen as an unalloyed Oriental despot.

Development today is being built on the tears and sacrifices of millions. The developing world is proving to be another set of societies in which the language of development is dominated by 'calculations of pain' (how the violence done to some can benefit the others; or how much tolerance of exploitation or state coercion now will do good to everyone in the future). Few are willing to take up the challenge today to identify more humane forms of social intervention which will have a built-in component of democratic rights, especially for those battling for survival at the bottom or the peripheries of a society. Few are willing to admit that development is neither the last word in social change nor a universal panacea. Even fewer are willing to admit that we are not obligated to formulate our dissent from the ideology of development in the language of alternative development.

It is not possible for me to reel out - the incapacity is mine - alternative, more human concepts of social intervention which show the promise of supplanting the idea of development, in response to the challenges of our times. In the fifties and sixties the idea of social change seemed good enough to many scholars, the idea of growth seemed adequate to some others. Both now have a touch of *ennui* about them. Despite being broader concepts, I doubt if they can be resurrected or reinvested with the kind of magic which the concept of development had in its heydays. The concept of growth in any case, like the concept of development, invites societies to walk on the inclined plane of history - to borrow an expression from social philosopher A. K. Saran. It is unlikely to be any less oppressive.

If we, however, assume that we shall have to generate new concepts to describe transformative politics or the goals of social change in our times, it will be a reasonably fair guess as to what kind of criteria the new concepts will have to meet. (Actually it will be an unfair guess because if the rationality which has produced the idea of development remains intact and if only the concept of development goes out of academic fashion, that rationality is likely to produce, rather faithfully, a new concept which would be analogous to the existing concept of development.) Let me, however, define my task more narrowly and list some criteria for evaluating the concepts of intervention which may come up for our consideration in the



future. The list is tentative and it is strictly meant for those who believe that the voice of, in addition to the data on, the victims must be represented in the public discourse. I have therefore no illusion that it will satisfy either the development experts or the more conspicuous alternative development movements.

One, future concepts of social transformation will have to show some regard for the survival needs of minority populations and peripheries which, till now, even the highly developed societies have found easy to ignore. (Some of the world's richest nations have citizens living in poverty when minor adjustments in their defence budgets can take care of the needs of these citizens more than adequately.) The need for survival including cultural survival, and the need to protect life-support systems which go with such survival must have priority over social 'creativity', as such creativity is defined in the urban-industrial world.

Two, democratic rights must have precedence over the claims of knowledge in all sectors of social life. That is, no technology and no expertise is definitionally exempt from politics or from social scrutiny; nor can any techno-economic process such as development even claim that, in the short run, it can substitute for democratic processes. This also means that the peripheries of the society - the political and ethnic minorities, the socio-economically dispossessed - have the right to veto developmental interventions, even when the interventions are designed to benefit the peripheries according to the best available knowledge of development. To put in another way, all normative theories of social intervention will have to locate themselves squarely within a theory of participatory democracy.

Three, theories of social and political transformation must provide interpretive frames within which the theories can share responsibility for what is done in their name. The concepts which will supplant the concept of development in the future will hopefully not permit their partisans to shed every responsibility for man-made suffering inflicted in the name of the concepts with the help of the ploys popularised by the development community in the case of development - that is, by claiming that the suffering inflicted by the theory is an accidental byproduct of mismanaged or misapplied theory, or by saying that the administrators and politicians misunderstand the theory (11).

Four, the next generation of theories of social change must be more explicitly political. One problem with developmentalism is that it recognises politics in the context of development theory, not in its content or text. In

third world societies, this usually means accusations by development experts or technocrats that corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and, above all, powerful vested interests or political formations subvert beautifully egalitarian but essentially apolitical development models. And yet, despite making this accusation, the experts themselves are unwilling to give the victims of development any voice in their theories as a check against such subversion. The theories see such victims as passive victims - or in other contexts as passive beneficiaries, irrational resisters or docile spectators - of development. In case the victims protest against such hidden disenfranchisement, they are told that they have a voice in the larger politics of the society which has chosen the particular model of development. I suspect that in the coming decades, no theory of social intervention is going to be respected unless it lays its political cards on the table and, as a part of the exercise, develops 1) a built-in concept of the state as it would or would not get involved in the application of the theory and 2) a theory which will make the resistance by the potential victims of the theory visible and/or audible to a widening cross-section of the society.

Five, a theory of interventions for our times must include a critique of, firstly, the modern concept of the nation-state, especially of the nation-state as the ultimate arbiter of the fate of a culture and as a justification of unequal suffering and unequal responsibility and, secondly, modern science and technology both as the last word on human self-awareness and as an organised knowledge industry. As I have discussed these issues in some detail at various places, I shall leave them at that (12).

Six, all future concepts of social intervention must accommodate the Post-Gandhian principle that the interests and passions of the votaries of the concepts must be fully acknowledged in the theory as a political input. Each theoretical statement must be checked for the way it hides the presence of its protagonists in its philosophical assumptions, methods and goals. That is, no interpretation of the larger forces of history is acceptable unless it is informed with an awareness of the smaller forces of history - the individual and collective self-interests which influence the regular production and supply of theories of liberation. (In societies like India a veil of silence hides the way the process of development has benefitted not merely the rich but also the tertiary sector and how the economists and other development experts have benefitted from centralised development and bureaucratic socialism. Evidently the victims of

development will have to wait for the next generation of philosophers and sociologists of knowledge for an adequate understanding of the way social engineers such as economists, management analysts and mega-technologists have extracted economic and noneconomic surplus from the society.)

Finally, all serious theories of intervention may have to meet the odd 'psychological' criterion of built-in self-destructiveness. For too long we have been burdened by theories which then survive the predicaments and continue to shape our approach to new problems which have nothing to do with the old. This criterion seeks to fight such senile ideologies of transformation which survive by taking advantage of our cognitive conservatism. It tries to give respectability to theories which self-destruct as guides to action after serving their purpose in 'history'. Of course, they may or may not survive in popular philosophy or in the minds of men as categories of thinking or as parts of a society's experience with the rise and demise of theories of social transformation.

I suspect that without such a built-in element of self-destructiveness, in these days of over-communication we are doomed to live out our theories of life without reference to our lives.

#### Notes

- (1) See a brief critical assessment of the political development literature and the 'pre-requisites' approach in Satish Arora, 'Preempted Future? Notes on Theories of Political Development', in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *State and Nation Building* (New Delhi: Allied, 1976), pp. 23-66.
- (2) Everett Hagen, *On the Theory of Social Change* (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey, 1962).
- (3) K. W. Kapp, *Hindu Culture, Economic Development and Economic Planning* (New York: Asia, 1963); Subhayu Dasgupta, *Hindu Ethos and the Challenge of Change* (Calcutta: Minerva, 1972).
- (4) D. C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1961).
- (5) For instance, Special Issue on Survival, *Lokayan Bulletin*, October 1985, 3 (4-5); Claude Alvares, *Science, Development and Violence* (Delhi: Committee for Cultural Chokes and Global Futures, 1986) mimeo.; and 'Deadly Development', *Development Forum*, 9 (7), October 1983; Madhya-Pradesh Lokayan and Lokhit Samiti, *Vikas ki Kimat* (Ahmedabad: Setu, 1985); Suresh Sharma, 'Development and Diminishing Livelihood' (New Delhi: CSDS, 1985), mimeo.
- (6) A. James Gregor, *The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1974); also *The Ideology of Fascism* (New York: Free Press, 1969).
- (7) A. F. K. Organski, *The Stages of Political Development* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965).
- (8) See my 'Adorno in India: Revisiting the Psychology of Fascism', in *At the Edge of Psychology* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 99-100.

- (9) See for example Ashis Nandy, 'Introduction: Science as a Reason of State', and Shiv Visvanathan, 'The Annals of a Laboratory State', in Ashis Nandy (ed.), *Science, Hegemony and Violence* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- (10) Raj Krishna, 'Stagnant Parameters', *Seminar*, January 1984, (293), pp. 62-66.
- (11) By development community I mean something akin to what some political analysts call the foreign policy community. It includes the development decision-makers, development managers; the media-persons covering developments, and teachers and experts on development, and scientists and technologists whose work is concerned with or defined as developmentally relevant. This is the sector in which the ideas and contents of development are sold, bought, legitimised or delegitimised.
- (12) Ashis Nandy, 'Introduction: Science as a Reason of State'; and 'Culture, State and the Rediscovery of Indian Politics', *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 18, 1985 19(49), pp. 2078-2083.

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