

RETHINKING DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY

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This paper highlights some of the new thinking that is emerging among scholars in the South in their search for relevant new paradigms of human development and participatory democracy. This thinking has evolved over the past 15 years or so as a result of experiential learning. It has gained legitimacy as the older, Eurocentric paradigms that were at the core of post-independent practice in most of the countries of the South failed to result there in forms of development or democracy that were sustainable. The disarray in the working of these conventional models in both the industrialized Western capitalist societies and the socialist East has given further legitimacy to the new thinking in the South.

ELEMENTS OF EMERGING PARADIGM SHIFT

Poverty eradication as understood in SAARC Secretariat (1992) is as follows :

Poverty eradication is a goal. In the ten year term, it means eradication of the worst forms of poverty, leaving only residual numbers of poor to be carried by welfare and safety nets, until they also could be brought into the mainstream of development.

Pro-Poor Planning with Social Mobilization, where the poor are the subjects and not merely the objects of the process, is the methodology. This methodology is complementary to the Open Economy and a modified Structural Adjustment Policy for achieving the goal of poverty eradication. The two legs of this overall development strategy — Open Economy and Poverty Eradication through Social Mobilization — would need to be harmonised, as they evolved over the different time horizons.

Selected elements in this recent thinking can be found at the periphery of Marxist thinking in the writings of Rosa Luxemburg,

Gramsci and a few others, and in the evolution of the welfare state inspired by liberal philosophies and Fabian socialism in the capitalist west. Others are implicit in Gandhian philosophy and in the cultural milieu of most of the South. However, two of the basic values — human development and participatory democracy in their widest connotations — which are at the core of the new things, were not at the centre of the Western - imitative models of development and democracy that were translated into nearly half a century of Southern efforts to establish viable nation states. Neither were they part of the mainstream development economics that dominated development thinking and practice.

The two dominant frameworks of thinking and action — both borrowed — were Marxism (mainly Leninism) and neo-classicism. Their failure to set in motion processes of social change in the South that ensured material well-being to large numbers and were both participatory and humane, is producing a grassroots response in the form of people's movements and experiments. The variety and richness of

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the cultural and socio-political context in which these movements are emerging, particularly at the micro level, will have to be considered for rudimentary generalizations and some broad guidelines for continuing search for relevant new paradigms of development and democracy.

The positive elements analysed here stem mainly from the release of the creative energies of the people at the micro level, as they struggle to survive and respond to the multifaceted crises in their lives. The central concern here is to clarify how the praxis, that is the action-reflection-action process inherent in these people's movements and experiments, can be refocussed. This continuous process is itself an instrument for reinforcing the positive changes underway. The proposition stated here is that, as the poor and vulnerable groups in the South deepen their understanding of their reality, they also, through greater consciousness-raising and awareness, action and organization, can bring about changes both in their lives and in society that will lead to human development and participatory democracy. They can at the same time contribute to economic growth. The deepening of their understanding can begin with collective protest against some form of social injustice or with a positive development action undertaken by a group.

To deepen our understanding of the above processes on the ground, and to see where they may lead, two fundamental issues have to be clarified. First, a clearer vision and perspective on social change whose values are explicitly stated, is an essential prerequisite. Southern cultures abound with visions of a good society. Second, a different intellectual framework, emanating from within the Southern cultures and knowledge systems, must be used in analysing the complex realities of, and

transitional pathways to, social change. The values to be used emanate from philosophical underpinnings that are holistic and not characterized by narrow and rigid ideologies. The associated methodology of analysis needs to be interdisciplinary. This in turn requires questioning of the narrow intellectual framework, the single-discipline analysis, *a priori* theorising and methodology of Western so-called scientific enquiry, which have for the most part informed attempts to analyse social change. A corollary is that we need to take stock of both the wide range of analytical tools and the knowledge systems that are now available in the South.

In other words, to understand in depth the new people's movements, which are manifestations of a new pluralistic paradigm of development and democracy, a re-evaluation of some of the fundamental values in our own cultures and of the intellectual tools and resources at our disposal must be made. The biases and inadequacies for understanding complex interrelated social phenomena by means of conventional intellectual processes, must be questioned and criticized. To assist in this task, there is now a sufficient body of new critical literature on the structure of social action and the relationship between theory and practice. The essence of this literature will not be repeated here. It is taken as axiomatic that intellectual frameworks borrowed from other historical, cultural and political environments can no longer be effective in understanding the complex realities of other, fundamentally different cultures and contexts, or in giving direction to social changes underway in them. The additional question is how to use the total knowledge systems that are available in the South to facilitate this understanding. Here, both the holistic and cognitive approaches to the generation of knowledge, as well as the much wider

range of technological choices that can result, are critically important instruments.

Another aspect in the search for new paradigms is to identify the fundamental nature of the process of social change itself. Is it one that results from a sharpening of contradictions leading to a 'big bang' type of revolution, which then automatically ushers in a good society? Or is it one that more commonly proceeds through marginal reforms and incremental changes? Both processes can be observed in reality, as can their varying consequences. But other intermediate processes and transitional pathways to social change may also exist, as the new movements operate in the various political spaces available in their given historical contexts. These latter transitions themselves may be considered revolutionary in that they involve in-depth structural changes in limited situations and within available political spaces. Through raising mass consciousness, building countervailing power and initiating equal access to resources for the poor, for instance, the old dominate structures could be modified and changed. The process then is, can the structural changes within limited political spaces be multiplied in a comprehensive and systematic way, with political commitment and support from new coalitions within the structures and with the participation of the poor and other vulnerable groups, under the variety of socio-political circumstances?

One last point that needs to be made there is that in looking at the specificity of the new people's movements and experiments in the South for culturally relevant and sustainable social change, the need for linkages between them across the globe should not be ignored. Such links would enrich the pluralism that is implicit on the ground in people's movements both in the

South and in the North. They could also help to build countervailing power at the global level.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The people's movements in the South not only express dissent, they also are providing some basis for a developmental and democratic alternative to the system as it now works. There is a qualitative difference between the new people's struggle and earlier liberation movements against colonialism, the peasant movements for land reform, and trade union movements. The point of departure is the discrediting of the conventional paradigm of national liberation, socialism and economic development itself. Conventional notions of capitalism, socialism and the sovereign nation state also have changed with the emergence of multinational corporations and various new philosophical 'mixes'. Without delinking from some of the conventional paradigms, the doctrines associated with them and purely legalistic formations, it is impossible to understand and learn from the emerging reality on the ground.

A fundamental departure from the conventional paradigms is also justifiable because of their failure both to initiate action leading to new accumulation processes and viable economic growth, and to establish appropriate new democratic state structures. They also failed to provide sustainable social formation in wider human and ecological terms. People were treated in the praxis of the old paradigms as objects of history rather than as its subjects. They were non-participant observers and fell victim to hierarchical, centralized bureaucratic processes in both the development and the political processes. In addition, they were, and are, frequently victims of repressive militarized state

structures and what amounts to state terrorism.

The whole process negated the diversity, humaneness and freedom that were fundamental to Southern cultures. It attempted to impose a monolithicness and homogenization that were alien and alienating. The tensions that were created resulted in mindless violence and anarchy rather than in positive social change. The centralization achieved through repression created increased violence and militarization of state structures. The processes of poverty creation, youth alienation and environmental degradation reproduced themselves. The human and material resource base available to reverse past processes itself began to be eroded. The state could no longer function as mediator and consensus maker.

GROWTH, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND EQUITY : NO TRADE-OFFS

As this multifaceted crisis deepened, the accumulation process set in motion either by means of private capitalism or of state capitalism, a process that was basic to the old concept of economic development, turned out to be insufficient, and the pressures mounted for an alternative accumulation process. It was not a matter of growth first and equity afterwards, but, equally, redistributive justice and 'trickle-down' were simply not the issues.

Most Southern countries were predominantly rural, peasant societies, with traditional knowledge systems and non-predatory relations with nature. And yet, nearly four decades ago, when Southern countries began to emerge as politically independent nations from centuries of colonial rule, they adopted a development model that was indifferent if not inimical to the large numbers who live in rural areas.

Support for this model, which essentially permitted the continuation of existing international economic relationships, came from two external sources: the industrialized countries of the West and the industrialized, centrally planned countries of the Eastern bloc.

The framework that has influenced this development process in the past half-century assumed that there were 'developed' countries and 'developing' countries and that if the experience of the former, along with some capital and technology, was transferred to the latter the gap would be narrowed. The objectives and processes were viewed in economic terms and great reliance was placed on economic factors and centralized decision-making to achieve results. This framework assumed that rapid economic growth could take place if there was central planning and control of the economy (by the state or the private sector) as a 'top-down' process, with emphasis on industrialization, modernization and urbanization. Capital, the factor in short supply in the so-called developing countries, was seen as the main input into the process. Internal capital accumulation, it was assumed, would be assisted by free and massive inflows of foreign capital and technology. The cumulative benefits of growth in the modern sector were expected eventually either to 'trickle down' automatically or at best to be handed down in an administrative fashion or 'delivered'. Material accumulation either in public or private forms was expected to solve other human problems.

The widening gap between the industrialized and Southern countries, the results of the so-called green revolution which helped the rich get richer and made the poor poorer within Southern countries, the massive transfer of resources from poor to rich, illustrated both the dangers and the

irrelevance of this framework to the majority of people in the South. They confirmed the limitations of the narrow, techno-economic model of development, even in its own terms.

Apart from the model's narrow orientation and its lack of relevance to Southern countries, the realities of the quantity and quality of foreign aid, of transfers of technology, and the weak internal mobilization efforts ensured that the prevailing assumptions regarding the possibilities for rapid growth were of little operational value. There is sufficient evidence even from studies carried out by the United Nations, World Bank and other institutions operating within the system to confirm that, by any standards, neither the quantity of aid nor its quality nor the kinds of technology transferred were sufficient or appropriate to transform these societies, let alone to lift them out of the poverty trap into modernization and industrialization. Even as there is general apathy towards aid and capital flows to the South in most industrialized countries today, there is also a growing body of opinion which supports the view that the earlier methods of aid-giving and technology transfer are things of past. They have created impoverished rural areas in the South and increased the dependence of Southern countries within an inequitable global order. This is not an argument against aid or international development cooperation as such, but a critique of the manner in which things have worked.

Furthermore, the transnational corporations that control the stock of modern technology, and are still the main instruments for its transfer, extract high prices for their know-how and equipment. The highly capital-intensive and import-substituting technology that continues to be implanted into the South with little social control or social

conscience bears insufficient relation either to real factor endowment, particularly of labour, or to the existing knowledge system, or to the wide range of technological choices available to the South. The entire process has been wasteful and the contradictions too sharp and numerous for any orderly form of management of the process as a whole for the real benefit of poor countries. Under these circumstances, for the South to keep asking for more of the same kind of aid is an irrational option. In terms of the old paradigm, a massive inflow of resources from external sources and reversal of the inflow of resources from the South would be required. Neither precondition has materialized.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s some token attempts were made to modify the narrow techno-economic notions of development and to effect some reforms. The reformists argued that a modified framework of economic development would still be made to work 'effectively' if (a) redistribution or social justice were built into the objectives; (b) elements of popular participation (namely some consultation with the people or manipulation with the people) in an essentially top-down planning process were allowed; and (c) a continuous process of transfer of a proportion of the income and technology from industrialized to Southern countries could be ensured, particularly through the UN system and its specialized agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the regional banks. More recently, a 'human face' has been added to the reformist option.

But the reformist position continues to be based on conventional development thinking and practice. Even with greater social justice and safety nets built into it and with greater human capital information, the development process is still considered

mainly as an economic exercise, subject to allocation of scarce resources by governments and big private sector corporations. Furthermore, a conflict-free social framework for change is assumed. The vision of 'one world' continues to pervade the international rhetoric, along with the assumption that these changes—brought about under existing conditions and within unchanged structures—will result in an orderly and continuous transfer of resources from industrialized countries to the South. Underlying all this are further assumptions: that the problem of development is mainly in the poor countries, and that a consistent set of policy packages based on technocratic considerations can be evolved and carried out from the top, both internationally and within individual countries. The basic assumption continues to be that the modernization/industrialization process, with some consultation with the people and the goodwill and assistance of 'developed' countries and the international community, will bring about positive social change. The poor are still considered to be the objects and the targets of the process and are at best to be provided with a safety net, while adjusting to an inequitable global system and a national system devoid of vision or capacity.

What, then, is the alternative development pathway for the South? As mentioned earlier, a sustainable development strategy for the present needs to search for alternative driving forces for a self-sustaining accumulation. It also seems necessary for Southern countries to adopt a development strategy that combines human development, growth, equity and technological change with a wiser and more creative use of local resources and knowledge. In such a strategy, the people, locally available resources and local knowledge systems become critical instruments. Imported capital and technology, the factors in short supply,

can be supplementary. The new strategy, moreover, does not have to be reflected in a single, replicable model; each country has its own socio-cultural specificity and will have to chart its own social transition. In this transition all countries, however, will need to pursue internally a basically two-pronged strategy that will permit them to maintain the gains from past attempts at modernization and industrialization—with appropriate damage limitation—and to make a direct attack on poverty in all its manifestations, an attack in which the poor themselves are the subjects and not the objects of the process.

Initially, the two prongs of the strategy may have some contradictions, but over time they can be harmonized. Regional cooperation can reinforce national efforts. This kind of regional cooperation will also permit Southern countries to adjust to the global system on more favourable terms.

Recent studies by the South Asian scholars confirm that human development, growth and equity need not be trade-offs in the South Asian socio-cultural setting. Studies by international commissions of enquiry such as the South Commission have endorsed the concepts of people-centred development, wise resource use and building technological capability in a step-by-step manner by widening the availability of technological choices. The 1990 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report on the concept of human development demonstrates that it is possible to achieve a high level of human development and quality of life even at initially low levels of income. The World Bank in its 1990 report on poverty alleviation and its contribution to development also drew attention to several successful micro-level people's movements and experiments in the South that, from small beginnings, have grown larger, increasing the savings, incomes and assets

of the poor. In these experiments poor people's creativity, local resources and local knowledge were critical elements. The UN Conference on Environment and Development and its forerunner, the Brundtland Commission, have increased awareness of the need for a wiser and more equitable use of natural resources. No longer can 20 per cent of world's people use 80 per cent of the world's resources and also erode the resource base needed to sustain future generations.

COUNTERVAILING POWER : A CRITICAL TRANSITIONAL ELEMENT

Another point of departure in rethinking past paradigms of development and democracy relates to the question of participatory democracy. In this regard, devolution of power and empowerment of the poor and vulnerable groups, as opposed to representative democracy and highly centralized elite power, requires clarification. There is little need to criticize the dangers of centralized power, repressive state structures and absolute power that corrupts. What needs to be elaborated is the concept of participatory democracy and the building of countervailing power, initially within the political spaces that are already available.

Conventional thinking on both development and democracy was based on a harmony model. This needs to be demystified. The assumption of harmonious communities in a conflict-free social framework for change has no basis in reality, whether at local, national or global levels.

At the local level, for instance, rural communities in the South in today's historical conditions are not homogenous entities. Sometimes, where land reform has occurred or in a tribal society in which land is communally owned and traditional social values continue to exist, the situation may

be comparatively harmonious. But even there, the degree of harmony will have been reduced by colonial penetration and other forms of external intervention. These interventions themselves have generated further local, national and global contradictions. They have also contributed to the erosion of traditional communal bonds and values and disrupted the traditional system that assured a more equitable access to resources by the poor and vulnerable groups.

In most Southern villages, deep-seated contradictions exist between different groups with conflict of interests. There are sharp relationships of dominance and dependence. These relationships give power to the dominant (the landlord, the trader, the moneylender, the bureaucrat, etc.), bringing about a crisis of immediate survival for the poor. Serious divisions exist among the poor themselves based on caste, religion, gender, age, etc. These divisions, the people's resultant reluctance to take economic, social and political initiatives collectively to improve their lives, and their inability to change their lives individually, further compound their difficulties. These factors also prevent them from benefiting from technocratically evolved development packages. The same conflict syndrome, between those who have power and those who do not, can be identified in the actual working of the national/global systems. Therefore, the rhetoric of harmony and interdependence at all levels cannot be a point of departure from which to rethink the question of transition to participatory democracy and devolved power. Sometimes class differentiations are blurred by caste or clan loyalties. This makes analysis in conventional social categories irrelevant.

Any meaningful approach to social change that will not benefit the rich at the expense of the poor, or the powerful at the expense

of the powerless, must be both political and social. It should not be a purely technocratic, fragmented sectoral or economic project approach. The political space for a political-social approach exists already in some countries, while in others it needs to be created.

Participation is of central concern in any discussion of development in wider human terms, and vice versa. Here it must be emphasized that participatory development and democracy are identical concepts. It is sheer pretension to think that the multifaceted crisis of Southern countries can easily be overcome or that the reshaping and development of these societies in a more balanced and sustainable way can be undertaken without the participation of the people, particularly the large numbers who are poor and vulnerable.

If participation means democracy, representative democracy as now practised is a singularly limited form. People participate in elections. But such formal participation is a mere token, unless power is shared, particularly at the local level. Participation also means trusting the people and commitment to a more egalitarian society, that would ensure equal access to resources, not only to land but also to education, food and health. Where formal power is in the hands of a few and power is not shared but grossly misused, participation in the first instance results in building countervailing forms of power, leading ultimately to a healthier democracy.

Furthermore, if development results from releasing the creative energies of the people, particularly the poor and the vulnerable, then they must be the final arbiters of their lives. Participation and self-reliance are thus inter-related. This form of development goes beyond merely meeting the material needs of the people and

beyond considerations of equity. To participate people need to form their own organizations. The poor needs, through their own organizations, to counter the socio-economic reality around them and the forces that keep them in poverty. Such participation then opens up possibilities for people to bring about changes in their conditions through their own reflections and collective actions. This constitutes a learning process, a process of further consciousness-raising and self-transformation. In this sense participation is also a basic human need.

The extent of participation will depend initially on the political space that is available for the participatory processes to start, particularly at the local level, and on the opportunities for an intervention in the existing socio-economic system by those who have a higher consciousness and commitment. In many Southern countries there is a great potential energy and will to change. This energy needs to be harnessed, and agents for change can be found in many areas to initiate the process of mobilization. There is strong support to people's causes from such groups as the radical church, various professions, students, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and even members of the bureaucracy and the judiciary. New coalitions between these groups and the poor and vulnerable are necessary.

The very nature of participatory, self-reliant development activities is such that they will eventually attract the attention of the power structure, still working within the confines of the failed paradigm. Some of these new participatory activities will then be co-opted by the system, others exterminated. While some are repressed, many still survive. Those which survive, existing in isolation, do not add up to much in terms of social transformation. But if they are properly

linked and multiply themselves through the processes of mobilization, conscientization and organization, they can become a countervailing power in the social context and help to widen the political space for change even further. Countervailing power is necessary to retain the vitality of the people. It is a living, collective consciousness of the people and a vigilance of the people against the abuse of formal power. It is the capability to resist such abuse and to assert the people's will whenever formal power deviates at the macro, as well as the micro level. It is critical for ensuring accountability by those who wield power.

They must be held accountable for its proper use to the people, and not merely for its abuse. Thus, building of countervailing power at all levels becomes a necessary component in a participatory democratic process, and constitutes a critical point of departure for rethinking development and democracy.

Reference

SAARC Secretariat (1992), *Meeting the Challenge*, Report of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, Kathmandu, Nepal.