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The concept and the practice of Social Development in the Late-modern age

Theory, is a tool of unveiling the relationship between facts, a conceptual scheme by which we define, classify and systematise the meaning of relevant facts, concepts, practices or phenomena. The objective of social theory is to reveal the scientific truth about the human society. All social-science theorising, is a reconstruction to explain the various facets of human existence. Impressed with spectacular success of natural sciences in the nineteenth century, August Comte, French philosopher and father of sociology, founded a movement called *positivism.* It was not merely an appeal to sciences, but almost its canonisation. What sciences could unveil about nature and physical world, social sciences could do for the human and social world.

Nineteenth century Europe, was enthralled with the idea of *progress*, as the new *faith* of modern age; based on boundless expansion of science and technology, exploitation of natural resources and control of man over nature and non-human world. However, change has been perennial nature of human civilisation. “Nothing is permanent, but change’’ (Heraclitus, fifth century B. C). What has characterised change so drastically and dramatically in the Age of Enlightenment, is the overarching reach and *universalising* nature of change, transforming the entire fabric of civilisations across the globe.

John Maynard Keynes, observed half a century ago, ‘’ From the earliest times of which we have record, down to the beginning of the eighteenth century, there was no great change...ups and down certainly...but no progressive violent change’’ (cited in Galbraith 1987:282). Intensity and proportion of change,

caused by spectacular innovations of sciences, transformed the agrarian and feudal social structure of European societies during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Industrialisation and urbanisation led to rationalisation, secularisation and ultimately the *modernisation* of these societies.

However, modernisation and progress had tremendous human and social consequences. Industrialisation and urbanisation caused chaos and disorder in personal and social life of people. Social development, emerged as the key idea of managing social changes and problems of chaos and disorder. Thus, history of social development has been rooted in the social problems of industrial revolution in Europe. Social development, was envisaged to create order out of chaos, conflicts, and disorder of industrial society, by mitigating social consequences of economic changes. Ever since then, social development has carried the connotation of interventionism and management. “Social development is fully committed to the principle of interventionism” (Midgley 1995 : 84). I will discuss the subject-matter of question, by situating the same in this background.

2. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AS PLANNED OR DIRECTED SOCIAL CHANGE:

As stated earlier social development emerged as the idea of managing rapid social changes occurring in the industrialising societies. Examples of sciences in establishing man’s control over nature, inspired social scientists to explore ‘laws of society’, to exercise better control over direction of social change and social conditions of human existence. Darwin’s theory of biological evolution provided the unilinear teleological ideology and Newtonian science provided the idea of stability, force, system and order to social sciences.

Among the prominent theories of social change, which have bearing on social development , are the ones propounded by Karl Marx, August Comte, Herbert Spencer and Leonard Hobhouse. Hobhouse, in his book ‘Social Development’,

expressed the idea that application of rational control can bring about social development by planning or directing the processes of social change. Social Development, carries this meaning till date, " social development...is a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development" (Midgley 1995:25).

The 'elusive' nature of 'concept' as well as 'practice' of social development emerges from the last part of the definition, quoted above, that is ,in *conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development.* The classical European social-science tradition of theories of social change, such as Marxism or Structural-functionalism saw social and economic change as integral part of changes affecting human and social world. However, dichotomisation and separation of economic sphere of life from over all historical, political, socio-cultural life, has been the characteristic of post-war development discourse.

" By using for the first time in such context, the word 'under-development', Truman changed the meaning of development....a new perception of one's own self, and of the other was suddenly created. Two hundred years of social construction of historical, political meaning of the term 'development' was transmogrified" (Esteva 1992:7). Thus development came to be understood as the opposite of 'underdevelopment'. Underdevelopment carried the meaning of lacking the basic tools of science, technology, rationality, state, and market; the key metaphors of modernity.

A number of historical and Geo-political factors, shaped the development discourse during the post-war period. By the end of Second World War, centre of world power, moved from Western Europe, to America and Soviet Union. Post-war period was marked by economic recovery of Europe and decolonisation of countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Emergence of Non-aligned Movement (NAM) at Bandung Conference, 1955 and Cold War between USA

and USSR, combined with nationalism and developmentalism in Third World, shaped the contours of development discourse.

Arthur Lewis' theory of economic growth(1955), complemented by Rostow's Theory of Stages of Economic Growth (1960) reduced multi-faceted human endeavour of development, to unidimensional focus on 'economic growth'. During 1950s and 1960s 'modernisation' became the key to the process of 'catching up', by which Third World countries could develop. Development paradigm of modernisation theory, envisaged the replication of European experience of industrialisation of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the primarily agrarian and semi-feudal conditions of Third World countries. Thus, development a fundamentally multi-dimensional form of social, economic, political and cultural change was reduced to *'economisation'* of Third World societies. Leys (1996:7), captures the phenomenon in these words, " Goal of development was growth, the agent of development was state and means of development were macro-economic policy instruments".

Keynesian economic theory of intelligent state intervention in 'reformed capitalism' found favours with planned economy efforts of developing countries. However, during the entire process of 'catching up' paradigm of development during first two Decades, social development was more or less ignored from the development theory and practice. *"UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development), constituted in 1963, acknowledged later that social development was seen partly as a precondition for economic growth and partly as a moral justification for it and sacrifices it implied"* (Esteva 1992:13).

By early 1970s, failure of top-down 'catching up' modernisation paradigm of development caused disillusionment, dissent and criticism of the very project of development. Algiers' conference of countries of Non-aligned Movement (NAM), gave the call for NIEO(New International Economic Order) in 1973, demanding more equitable share of world trade and reduction of growing

polarisation of poverty. Ester Boserup's path breaking book (1970) 'Women's role in Economic Development' documented the 'invisibility' of women in development theory and practice and launched the movement for inclusion of Women in Development. 'In Limits to Growth', (1972) a book by Club of Rome, a group of European engineers, scientists, managers and multinationals, raised the issue of degrading environment due to unbridled industrialisation of globe and limit of 'finite' resources of Earth. John Rawls (1971), in his book 'A Theory of Justice', called for the maximisation of social-welfare of the least well-off person of the society.

The cumulative effect of these 'social' concerns, necessitated reorientation of priorities of development. Thus, Second UN Decade for development 1970-1980 focused on 'growth with redistribution' and Basic Needs Approach advocated by ILO (International Labour Organisation). The strategy, was to redress the social problems of poverty, inequality, and injustice caused due to 'distorted development' of previous decades. It was also realised that people were left out of the processes of development. Thus, ideas of 'participation' and role of civil society attracted the attention of actors involved in development. However, despite the awareness of 'social' consequences of 'economistic' development, 1980s aggravated the same as a result of 'Debt-trap' in which most of Third World countries, particularly those of Sub-Saharan Africa found themselves due to Structural Adjustment Programmes. Chambers (1997:16), has captured the consequences of entire journey of 'economistic' development in these words "First to expect weak states to do so much through central planning and direct government action, then to drive them deep into debt with enormous loans, and when they are in no position to argue, to thrust on them policies of structural adjustment made life worst for the poorest".

3. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-IMPASSE ERA OF DEVELOPMENT:

"Two hundred years ago the income ratio between world's rich and poor countries was 1.5:1 ; in 1960, it was 20:1 ; in 1980, it went upto 46:1 and in 1989, the ratio became 60:1" (World Bank, 1991 cited in Schuurman 1993:10). These facts expose the emptiness of promises of 'catching up' by following 'myth' of modernity during first two decades of development and 'magic' of market during the next two decades. Success of a theory lies in observation, analysis, classification, systematisation and prediction of facts. Facts and theory stimulate each other. Facts of development, as illustrated above, proved the shortcomings of 'official' theories of Modernisation as well as neo-liberalism. However, the critical theories of dependency, and under development also proved inadequate, by assigning all causes of underdevelopment to colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of countries of Periphery by those of Centre. Global developments, like collapse of State-driven socialism of Soviet-model and successful examples of East Asian countries proved the deficiency of dependency theories as well.

1980s were described as the 'lost' decade of development and 'impasse' (Booth 1985) in development theories. 1990s started with call for abandonment of the whole project of development itself, with debate about 'post-development' era. Both the theories, based on structural-functionalism, as well as Marxism were criticised for being 'economistic', 'teleological', 'evolutionary', and 'eurocentric'. Therefore, the search for incorporating 'social' , 'diversity', 'culture', and 'human agency', marked the reorientation of 'post-impasse' development discourse. Post-modernist critique of 'end of grand Enlightenment meta-narrartives', provided powerful critique of the very basic postulates of grand theories of development. Although not in agreement with post-modernist 'celebration of difference', the criticisms of ' Enlightenment meta-narratives' were duly reflected in emerging concepts and theories of Social Development. Views

of important Social-theorists on different aspects of social development, are analysed in following paragraphs.

Theory of Structuration and Life-politics:

Following on his theory of Structuration, which was a critique of structural-functionalism as well as historical materialism, Anthony Giddens (1996), has propounded the concept of Life-politics. Giddens sketches the contemporary life of modern man as the one in which the ideas, narratives, institutions, body, tradition, knowledge, self, nature, in a sense the life as a whole loses the '*given*' notions we are used to. In globalised world of 'reflexive modernity', social changes brought about by the processes of globalisation, detraditionalisation, social reflexivity, and manufactured uncertainties, make social , political as well as human relationships undergo fundamental transformation. This has altered the very meaning and contour of Self and the surrounding world. In such a 'runaway world', Giddens highlights the importance of reflexivity, the role of human agency in transforming the Self and in the process the world around. "Every one in some sense must reflect upon the conditions of his or her life, as a means of living a life at all...rather than a politics of life chances life-politics is a politics of Life decisions" (Giddens 1996:372). He elaborates his arguments about Life-politics by discussing moral and ethical issues involved in decision making in life-problems created by modernity; like genetic engineering, nuclear armaments, global warming , changing gender relations, divorce, remarriage etc. Giddens, finds the framework of current emancipatory politics, radical as well as liberal, deficient in handling these life-problems caused by modernity. Giddens' concepts, thus, provide a powerful tool to social actors, to mitigate the alienating effects of high modernity, by achieving self-actualisation and 'making a difference' in social and institutional frameworks of their existence.

Post-Marxism and Post-colonialism:

Corbridge (1994) agrees with Giddens in characterising the social changes taking place in late-modern age, we are living in today. 'Time-Space compression' (Harvey's term), or 'time-space distantiation' (Giddens' term) , capture the essence of globalisation of different facets of contemporary life, such as trade and finance, culture, satellite communications etc. Under such circumstance of contemporary existence, everyday life of modern man living in any part of the world is being shaped , more and more, by dialectical inter-play of global and local forces. Corbridge therefore, finds works of Marx, and Weber, relevant in understanding the consequences of modernity. While accepting the need for role of human agency and importance of diversity, he does not agree with ahistorical, depoliticised approach of post-modernism. Therefore, Corbridge proposes post-Marxism, as the right perspective for theorising social development, he says that "post-Marxism is suited to investigation of the contradictory logic of modernisation and globalisation" (Corbridge 1994:92).

Actor-oriented Approach:

Norman Long (1994) argues that development theories of modernisation as well as neo-marxism, are both deterministic and explain social change as a result of exogenous factors, market or state respectively. Accepting the importance of external sources of social change, he articulates the crucial role of human agency, in 'making a difference', the role played by human consciousness and action. Actor-oriented approach, thus explains the difference made by individuals, in similar structural circumstances. For example, role played by Lenin, Gandhi, or Mandela in recent history validates the actor-oriented paradigm. Schuurman (1993:31) says, "Only Norman Long's actor-oriented approach conveys the impression that not just diversity but also inequality is manifest. In addition theoretical framework of Long's approach takes into account the criticisms of Booth and Post-modernism"

4. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS:

Now let us see the real-life experiences of what has been happening to stated objectives and processes of social development : goals of elimination of poverty; greater equity; increasing employment; and enhancing social integration through the social processes of Livelihood; Resources; Knowledge and Rights. Examples, encompassing institutional frameworks of State, Market, Civil Society and Household, are examined in the following paragraphs, to elucidate different dimensions of concepts and practice of social development.

Impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes on Livelihood of Women in Ghana:

K, Manuh (1997) has reported the micro-level analysis of Economic Recovery Programme/Structural Adjustment Programme (ERP/SAP) on livelihood of women, particularly its impact on their productive employment in Ghana. ERP/SAP, which was introduced in Ghana in 1984, focused on reduction of government expenditure in social services, and reduction of role of state in overall economic activities by stressing export-led growth, removing trade barriers. It led to decrease in share of employment in manufacturing sector, to half of its level in 1970. Further, retrenchment in civil and public services resulted in loss of appreciable number of jobs in education and health sectors, which adversely affected sizeable number of women employees. Before introduction of ERP/SAP benefits, like certain period of maternity leave and free health care were available to women employees. Under SAP, women lost jobs in informal sector as well, like those employed as casual workers on cocoa, coffee, and other cash-crop plantations, which were adversely affected during structural adjustment programmes. Manuh (1997) concludes that, “ ERP/SAP not only

reduced women's chances of employment and their ability to retain jobs but also raised the price of social services, threatening the work force of women and their livelihoods".

Social and Participatory Development; Empowerment from Below in Gal Oya, Sri Lanka:

Norman Uphoff (1996) illustrates success of social and participatory development, based on collective efforts of farmers in bringing about empowerment from below. Work on improving water use efficiency of irrigation system in Gal Oya, Sri Lanka started in 1980, as a joint project of Agrarian Research and Training Institute (ARTI) in Colombo and Rural Development Committee at Cornel University on request of Sri Lankan government and USAID. Collective energy of farmers was gradually released in form of group mobilisation and they started working towards social objective of transforming their real-life problems. Young organisers played the role of catalysts and 'change agents'. Farmers' co-operative organisation, undertook purchase and sale of seeds and fertilisers; maintained better co-ordination with Irrigation and Agricultural Departments; and kept water efficiency, twice as high as before the start of the project. Uphoff was startled with success of empowerment of farmers of Gal Oya, brought about by release of their collective productive energy, by role of human agency and social mobilisation. He felt educated himself, so as to question the mechanistic and reductionist methodology of development theories. Uphoff (1996 :XI) states, "organisations have given farmers means to identify their needs and develop remedies through joint action....essence of participatory development, whereby people produce their own empowerment rather than receive it from someone else".

Role of Human and Social Capital and State intervention in Social and Economic Development:

R, Putnam (1993) has emphasised the role of human and social capital in development. Investments in health, education, housing, strengthening social organisation, collectivity, networks, participation and social integration are the key components of human and social capital. Success of social and economic development in Japan and East Asian countries, illustrates the role of human and social capital. In Japanese system, State, private market economy and Civil Society work in harmony. State has invested heavily in human capital, in producing competent engineering , managerial and labour force. Galbraith (1987:293), says, “In Japan the State is indeed , as Karl Marx held, the executive committee of capitalist class; this is normal and natural”.

Neo-liberal theorists have been claiming ‘East Asian Miracle’, due to implementation of prescriptions of ‘free market economy’ with minimalist state. But Wade (1990) in case of Taiwan , Chang(1991) in case of South Korea and Smith (1994), again in case of South Korea have established substantial role of ‘State’ investment in human and social capital, which has led to social and economic development in these countries. South Korea , for example, was a Japanese colony till 1945 and was nowhere near Rostow’s prescriptions of ‘take off’ in 1960. But due to radical land reforms, investments in education, reducing fertility rate by family planning, increasing agricultural productivity, promoting indigenous industry, and effective tax system, State could achieve success in social as well as economic development. “South Korea poses a strong challenge to neo-classical counter-revolution models....nation-state was highly interventionist at home and in international trade “ (Smith 1994:124).

5. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT LACKS A CLEAR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

In view of the discussion and analysis, in the paper, it is evident that social development, from the times of Hobhouse (who coined the term), till now has been conceptualised and practised, without a clear theoretical framework, which has caused it to be 'elusive'. Midgley (1995:8), rightly summarises the debate by stating that,

> "Social development perspective is not widely known in the industrial countries today. Nor is it generally accepted in academic circles. In addition, the field is still theoretically underdeveloped and there is much confusion about what social development entails in programmatic terms. Even the term is poorly defined".

However, the 'elusive' nature of concepts, theory and practice of social development speaks volumes about role of 'economy' vis a vis 'society'. Starting with industrial revolution in Europe, Economy has been gradually, '*disembedded*' (to use Polanyi's term) from social, historical, cultural and political contexts. The process, reached its peak in the post-war period, which witnessed 'end of the regulated system of national economies, formalised by Bretton Woods' (Leys 1996:vi).

Economisation of society, has reduced 'social' human being into *Homo economicus*-the atomised, profit maximising, consumer, individual. Further, State, Market and Science, as key Enlightenment metanarratives, have common 'universalising' characteristics, disembedded from specific socio-cultural and historical contexts. Accordingly, State, Market and Science, working in tandem in their 'universalising' global march, have been making and unmaking the West and the Rest, since industrial revolution. Post-war development theory and practice is rooted in this overall 'modernist' narrative. Accordingly, theories of

modernisation as well as neo-Marxism have been reflecting these universalising, deterministic, structural and economistic characteristics.

Friedman (1993:9), captures the phenomena in these words, " It is the very nature of technical and economic growth that excludes large numbers of people --- in some countries -- a substantial majority -- from its potential benefits". The problematic of social development, in '*harmonising*' and *'integrating'* economic development can be clearly understood in terms of Friedman's analysis. However, failure of 'trickle-down' development dogmas, reflected in growing polarisation of poverty and concerns about sustainable development, gender relations, social exclusion, participation and empowerment , during 1980s and 1990s , have opened up the space for the role of 'culture', 'diversity', 'specificity' and 'human agency' in social development.

Human and social consequences of 'distorted' economistic development, have therefore, been motivating social theorists in conceptualising new ways of sorting out 'structure-agency', 'macro-micro', 'theory-practice' dichotomy. " What specifies best the advances that have been made in recent development sociology is the discovery of new problematic or explanandum, *diversity*" (Booth 1994:16). World Summit on Social Development 1995 has brought the focus back on social development. Social changes taking place in the context of globalisation, have drawn the attention of social theorists on articulating clear framework for social development. Further, Nation-state, the conceptual apparatus of socio-political management of capitalism, itself has undergone fundamental changes under the impact of 'irresistible' and 'invincible' global market forces. Liberalisation, privatisation and transnationalisation of trade and finance have altered the sovereignty of nation-state. Neo-liberal mistrust of society and its thrust on role of market, on not 'just setting the prices right', rather as an alternative to state, as regulator of society has accentuated the problems of large number of populations, both in North as well as South, who are 'excluded' from the workings of market economy. Edwards (1994:295), rightly

says “...social development research is going to be much more vigorous in finding credible theories to act as counterweight to neo-liberal paradigm’.

6. CONCLUSION:

In view of discussion and analysis in the article, it is evident that ‘elusive’ nature of concepts, practice and theory of social development, is situated in over all social, political and historical contexts. Since the inception of sociology, the problematic of formulating ‘laws of society’, akin to ‘laws of sciences’, has been engaging the attention of social theorists. The failure, stems from the fact that man, the material of social scientists’ study, is unlike the materials of natural scientists. Men are not automata and they are not programmed to act in a particular way. Therefore, a large part of epistemological uncertainty, will remain as it is inherent in the very nature of social sciences. Further, theories like structural functionalism and Marxism, become ‘deterministic’ and tend to ignore the role and importance of ‘diversity’ and ‘human agency’. Current debate, in social development approach, therefore, takes cognisance of ‘structure-agency’ dialectic and social changes, taking place in late-modern age, we are living in today. Giddens’ Structuration theory, coupled with concept of Life-politics; Corbridge’s formulation of post-Marxism; Long’s Actor-oriented paradigm and Putnam’s concept of social capital; may provide a clear theoretical framework for social development by resolving the ‘structure-agency’ dialectic.

Key role, in formulation of a theory is played by facts. Facts change the focus and orientation of theories. Formulation of theory, involves summarising the facts, generated by practice, into empirical generalisations and offering a clear conceptual framework by which relevant practices are systematised and interrelated. Thus, theory is like giving a name and distinct identity to a ‘concept’ or ‘practice’ so that they are not ‘elusive’. However, here lies the paradox of emergence of another ‘specialism’. Theory of social development, therefore, has to take into account the experiences during Twentieth century, of devastating

human and social consequences of 'deterministic' applications of 'state-socialism' and 'market-capitalism'. The rise of 'centrifugal' forces of diversity, culture, gender, indigenous knowledge system, social movements, sustainable development, participation and empowerment, also have to be duly incorporated. Another major challenge, lies in 're-embedding' economy back in socio-cultural contexts. Alcantara (1996:211) summarises the current debate about social development perspective succinctly, "*The 1990s have all the symptoms of a 'turning point' in world history --a moment-- when many of the structural 'givens' of social development themselves have become problematic and world society undergoes profound reorganisation"*

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