

# **Progress: A Study on Development Discourses and Practices**

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## DECLARATION


This is to declare that the dissertation entitled “ **Progress: A Study on Development Discourses and Practices** ” has been submitted by me to the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**. This Dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree to any other University and is my original creation.

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## CERTIFICATE

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*Dedicated to my loving*

*MOM, Hail NGD (CHUNNU BHAI),*

*PAPA, PARTHA BAPURI & CHIKU PIE!*

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## CHAPTER: 1

### INTRODUCTION

*Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals*

*-Martin Luther King Jr.*

#### **Progress and Development: Embodiment of a Good Life**

To develop is to progress. And 'development is for a good life. That's a general understanding most people have. Like most people, I used to have the same understanding of development. But then there is this beautiful piece of work- a documentary on world water crisis (*Blue Gold: World Water Wars, 2008*) that I had watched last year. A moving film on environment issues pertaining to water management or rather mismanagement compels me to ask whether development is really a progress. Or for that matter, what is progress at all?

In fact, to think of it, the constant debates for and against the neo-liberal policies of the Government, the campaigns against FDI, the episodic clashes regarding dams, the sight of the unimaginable slums in cities, the plight of debt-ridden farmers, the ethnic clashes over identity and resources, the degrading inhuman living plus working conditions for innumerable people and not to forget the ever-increasing environmental problems have all perturbed my thinking at various points of time. It is in the light of such experiences that when I finally had to think about an area of research work for my dissertation writing, of all things on earth, one word 'development' struck my mind. All of the aforementioned problems concern themselves with this idea in some or the other form. Hence, I have decided to engage with the murky waters of this phenomenon called development, which just like water, seems to take different shape in



different moldings. But the arresting idea that seems to inform the 'development discourses and practices'<sup>1</sup> is some notion of 'progress'.

The word progress, Latin- '*Progedior*', '*Progressus*' betokens movement or change; meaning- 'to walk forth or to advance' (Woods 1907, pp. 779). Thus underlying the concept of progress is the idea of some or the other kind of advancement, a change in order of things with the new being apparently better and desirable. Does this not remind us of the *déjà vu* that evolutionary theories are about – change? Probably it does! But this is where we must caution as the two ideas- progress and change are not synonymous.

Progress as we understand it in contemporary times is quite an after math of Western modernity. There is an underlying hint of advancement as in a forward looking project concretized by governments and state authorities largely and unfortunately based on narrow and biased goals and objectives. The differentiating principles of developed 'we' against the under-developed 'others' are often inspired by ethnocentricity. Thus fulfills the purpose of justifying the universalizing claims of Western notion of progress.

In fact, the idea of 'progress' has entered, as Shanin (1997) noted, all spheres of contemporary societies so much so that it became the popular common sense, resistant to challenge. But *no other thought embodies this idea of progress better than the concept of development and its discourses and practices*. Development demands progress, Progress in turn definitely invites change but it must be noted that any and every change does not count as progress. Thus progress is an important element overriding the junction of development theory and practice across time and space. It is in this sense of exploring both the continuities as well as the discontinuities on the path of development as progress that I place my work.

The discourses and practices of development somehow always betoken a notion of progress and are seen as a qualifier of favorable change. Thus before moving into the realm of development as theory and practice, it is interesting to jot down a sense of development running across various

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<sup>1</sup> Discourse is a conglomeration of theories about how desirable change in society is best achieved in practice. Such theories draw on a variety of social science disciplines and approaches. Foucault viewed discourse as the 'delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories' (1972, pp. 199). Again, practices here refer to the planning aspect of development and strive to be solution-driven.

notions of social change, read progress put forward by different scholars at various points of time. There has always been a compelling notion of 'development' running through all kinds of understandings of human society. A linear concept of time tries to unfold the trajectory of development in relation to human society as per three fundamental aspects-

- Normative changes
- Forms of human organization/institutions/political institutions
- Forms of economic activities

The universalizing claims of Western notions of progress in a complex human world gave a new lease of life to the concept of progress such that there was no looking back. Post Industrial-Revolution and urbanization along with the spread of colonialism, an image of linear progress influenced by positive science grew. Growing rationality and bureaucratization marked the Western world. Political visions were accordingly met and it was not long before these concerns entered the zone of academics, leading to the growth of discipline like- sociology, anthropology and economics- in the form of modernization theories, strategies of development, growth and so on.

The concept of progress as forwarded by pillars of Western modernity increasingly mapped out the world on the lines of developed 'we', against underdeveloped 'others'. The latter were apparently categorized as needing help and guidance. What remains to be asked is how do we arrive at an understanding of who is the most progressive? Who decides on the symbols of progress?

While the focus was increasingly consolidated on forwarding the suitable indices of development with the proposed aim of bridging the differences, what was fundamentally being overlooked is the fact that the existing divisions have a significance and life of their own. There is no need as to why societies across the globe need to follow Western parameters of progress.

The impact of the idea of progress was three- fold: as a general orientation device, as a powerful tool of mobilization and as an ideology. Remarkably the most crucial instrument of the idea of progress has been the modern state with its legitimization as the representation of the nation and

its claims to bureaucratic rationality. 'Progress', 'development', 'growth' and so forth became the main ideological foundation for statehood, the governability of people. Ideas of limitless linear growth make us short-sighted, blinded to the diversities of the social world and also delay our understanding of environmental crisis (Shanin 1997, pp. 68-70).

Progress oriented 'state led development models advocated social engineering and planning, popularized them and indeed rendered them necessary in collaboration with principles of positive science and technology. These state led planning models ironically produce mechanisms of exclusion, depriving vast number of people freedom to choose. It is not surprising then that the major expressions of protests, across the globe have taken the form of deep-seated anti-statism or anti-government.

Other than these, there are many new forms of campaigns emerging in relation to mindless consumerism embedded in contemporary paradigm of the developed 'we'. The Hugh Fearnly Fish fight<sup>2</sup> is only one example amongst several such cases. Half of the fish caught in the North sea are thrown back dead. Similar is the case with other areas. Fish are apparently highly precious and at the same time exhaustible, like most of the resources. Hence we cannot afford to dissipate them casually into the sea. When a major chunk of population across the globe lives under the shadows of poverty, struggles for one meal a day; food wastage in any form is no less than a scandal. The so called developed 'we' however often indulges in this scandal at various levels. Wasting precious fish flesh needs to stop. Oceans and seas are under immense pressure as too many fish are being caught along with excessive waste being thrown in and too little is being done to protect marine wildlife and vital fish stocks. On the backdrop of such scenario, celebrity chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall drew attention on the UK's fishing industry in 2011. He collaborated with Marine Conservation Society that seeks marine wildlife protection, sustainable fisheries and clean seas and beaches.

While globalization facilitates consumerism for ignorant masses, societies become increasingly hollow. We have to be far-sighted and hold collective responsibilities with an aim to comprehend better and learn to live with an acknowledgment of our world's apparent limitations.

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<sup>2</sup> For details, please see [www.fishfight.net/](http://www.fishfight.net/)

Though total world income actually increased by an average of 2.5 percent annually, the number of people living in poverty increased by almost 100 million. Why has globalization—a force that has brought so much good- become so controversial, asks Stiglitz (2002, pp. 4-5). Does globalization typically signify spread of capitalism clothed in the idea of progress that so called under-developed ‘others’ should follow. What about the rampant adversities that these factors have brought to the lives of millions of people across the globe? There is an ever growing divide between the haves and the have-nots. In spite of all the promises held by state led development models, the fate of innumerable people continues to be jeopardized.

Since it was not possible to deal with all such issues in one study, hence, I chose to deal with one fundamental idea of human civilization, viz. ‘progress’ in its close association with the ‘development discourses and practices’ across time.

I have tried to show the normative changes in the context of broader philosophical and academic mooring in the realm of progress and development, most clearly visible in post-enlightenment ideas and proceeds thereon. As for the human organization part, I have focused on the political institution, stressing the popularity of democratic institutions in contemporary world. The third component is reflective of the transition from say agriculture based societies to manufacture based industries to consumerist and highly technological fervor in present times. Notably, what all of them do is present the manifestation of societies from simple/primitive to complex/modern, if we may say so. And it is this transition that is worshipped as progress.

However, this worshiping of progress must be interrogated. As Bury (1920) puts it,

*To the minds of most people the desirable outcome of human development would be a condition of society in which all the inhabitants of the planet would enjoy a perfectly happy existence... It cannot be proved that the unknown destination towards which man is advancing is desirable. The movement may be Progress, or it may be in an undesirable direction and therefore not Progress... The Progress of humanity belongs to the same order of ideas as Providence or personal immortality. It is true or it is false, and like them it cannot be proved either true or false. Belief in it is an act of faith.*

Indeed, the real test of progress in our times seems to be grounded not in mindless material advancements but in taking steps forward in the pursuit of justice-to present as well as future

generations. I say present because there are huge numbers of people who are dislocated in the name of development projects, there are people who have no or little access to basic amenities of life. Then I also mention future generation because of the severe environmental crisis that our world is getting into every day, courtesy state-industrialist nexus deepened by ignorance and carelessness in general public. Thus, there is a need to critically engage with the very idea of development as such.

### **Concerns, questions and objective of the study:**

The key areas of my dissertation work include the identification of an inherent idea of progress in context of development discourses and practices whether it is in the sphere of development dynamics in a democracy or the ironies of development with reference to state led development model, eventually conceptualizing development through symbolism. Progress as a critical symbol of development is the underlying theme in each of these explorations. It tries to capture the essence of progress rooted in development right from its historical churning to present-day neo-liberal thrust.

The attempt is – (a) To lay bare development discourses and practices (read plural as it is a heterogeneous category) essentially as an idea of progress in varying manifestations. (b) To highlight the contesting ideas and contradictions in theory to practice translation, illuminating progress and development in a democracy and reflecting upon loopholes in development mechanism. (c) And finally to highlight a vista of symbols and its criticality in understanding progress and development.

Besides, the present study shall also specifically look at the questions of (a) how do we perceive development (symbolically) as a continuous struggle for progress? And (b) what forms our understanding of whether a society is developed or not?

## **Methodology**

Given the nature of the theme, this study travels through the intellectual birth of development discourse right from its biological thrust to its transfer to the social world. The idea is to capture not just the continuities but also the gap in development studies. In the process, it has become a journey from structuralism to post-structuralism, moving on to post-modernist influence ultimately producing enormous heterogeneity in the sphere of development.

Development has several strands or schools of thought attached to it. It is a concept, a policy, a reality, a myth, a need, a luxury, a theory and a practice- all at the same time. It is the combination of macro sociological abstract categories and micro-sociological lived realities. Accordingly the present study resorts to the theoretical support of symbolism to deliver the essence of progress running through the veins of development.

More specifically, the present study hopes to be a reflection on development (its discourses and practices) as an embodiment of the idea of progress. It tries to achieve this objective based on a careful perusal of all the major theoretical realms projecting critical aspects of development. Thus it is primarily based on secondary sources by way of review of literature and secondary data from books, journals and newspaper. One preliminary case study has also been included as a critical example of the crisis of development in contemporary India. I have also included a documentary reading. The broader theoretical approach is based on symbolism cutting across both macro and micro sociological concerns associated with the theme of the study.

### **Organization of the dissertation:**

The dissertation in its totality comprises five sections, starting with first chapter which is an introduction to the work, it moves on to the main body of work- second, third and fourth chapter, each of it addressing different aspects of development discourse and practice associated with a notion of progress. The four chapters are followed by a brief fifth chapter which is a conclusion,

not necessarily a constricted conclusion to the theme but as a concluding remark to the work done until here, hoping to open a new vista of reference for further work on this area.

The second chapter entitled '*Progress, Development and Democracy*' tries to explore the different dimensions of progress and development discourse, ultimately linking it with the institution of democracy. As the title suggests, it engages with an understanding of development as (1) normative change vis-à-vis progress and (2) institutional change vis-à-vis democracy.

It begins with a brief history of progress as a concept, building upon its merging with development over the time. The normative changes are elucidated by critical reflection on the transfer of development from biological metaphor to the socio-cultural world. Then it goes on to explore various strands of development discourse(s) particularly stressing on modernist and then post-modernist approach. Finally coming to the point of forms of human organization in terms of political institution and its impact on progress and development, the remainder of the chapter focuses on the linkages between democracy and development. Apparently democracy is in great vogue in contemporary world.

The third chapter '*Development: Ironies and Discontents*' as the very title suggests shifts the focus to some of the prominent loopholes in development practice, bringing out the ironies of development in present world and in India in particular with reference to a case study, from Meghalaya, addressing the question of human rights. On a broader level, it addresses the crisis of development in neo-liberal political economy.

In 1950s, Lipset had highlighted the inter-connections between democracy and economic development. In spite of the criticisms forwarded against it, it gave fresh insights to Modernization theory, becoming a reference point for any work asserting the connections between polity and economic development (Diamond 1992). Development of course cannot be narrowed down to economy and Modernization theory itself is debatable, nonetheless, the very understanding of development as an emancipatory model for the poor and as a qualifier for equalizer, demands engagement and analysis of state sponsored development models. Given the fact that India is a democracy, it then becomes important to look into the inter-connections between democracy and development discourse in India.

Thus the chapter begins with development discourse in India, moving on to crisis of development in today's neo-liberal set-up. With the aid of the case study on what I call the 'Coal Minors' of Meghalaya, it is attempted to throw light upon the paradox of democracy in India.

Finally, the fourth chapter entitled '*The Cultural Cross Overs of Symbols and Development*' mirrors an understanding of development through symbolism, trying to make sense of the way development is perceived as an accumulation of symbols. This takes us to two sets of problem-first, who decides on these symbols that invoke differentiations between the developed 'we/us' against the under developed or developing 'them/others'? And second, even if we accept development as a real achievable phenomenon, it would still prompt certain symbols, so then what are the kind of symbols we would want development to associate it with?

What is the understanding of development in a society behest with consumerism in a neo-liberal modernizing state?

What implications do culture hold for development?

According to Tim Allen, 'the study of development ... necessitates the study of shared values of all kinds, and the examination of their multifaceted transformations' (Schech and J.Haggis 2000, p. xi). Thus it becomes important to study the relationship between culture and development. In its perception as a cultural construct, the concept of development can be rejected as a myth on the grounds that it is embedded on Western ideologies of modernization and imperialism, replaced by globalization or can be accepted as a reality on the grounds that it can be channelized towards an unbiased engagement of diverse cultures, providing a pool of alternatives to the dilemmas of development.



## CHAPTER: 2

### PROGRESS, DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Progress in general is an age-old concept that can be dated back to antiquity. Mankind has always tried to explore the notion of progress in the spirit of a positive qualifier of existentiality. It has both biological and social connotations. This chapter tries to explore the idea of progress as well as that of development, linkages between the two and their implications in the field of polity as in especially the interaction between development and democracy. The theme of my study revolves around the notion of societal progress, underlying the notion of development in terms of its discourses and practices, especially as an after- effect of modernity.

#### **Progress: History of an idea**

##### **(1) Progress as an age old concept:**

According to sociologist Robert Nisbet (1979) the idea of progress has continuously been one of the most important ideas in Western civilization for a long time.

He delineates five crucial premises of Idea of Progress-

1. value of the past,
2. nobility of Western civilization,
3. worth of economic/technological growth,
4. faith in reason and scientific/scholarly knowledge obtained through reason,
5. intrinsic importance and worth of life on earth.

The core theme underlying the idea of progress is the perpetual advancement of mankind and his/her society across time and space. So then what catches attention is

the idea of advancement. This may have different connotations in different contexts. At some point somewhere it could invoke a sense of spiritual advancement and in some other context it could mean material advancement. Thus once again it is about the symbols of advancement that the particular system of thought holds onto.

During earlier times, progress indicated the advances made in practical knowledge domain in the arts and sciences discourses. The intellectual thrust also included notions of progress in the line of spiritual and moral development. Post-enlightenment works suggest the entwinement of progress in modernity characterized by individual freedom, equality, justice and rationality. All of these, particularly the concept of equality<sup>3</sup> is crucial to any understanding of development. It is more complex than it first sounds. Again faith in democratic institutions, identification of higher consumption and hygiene with developed ness also characterize the trajectory of progress there on. Thus in a nutshell, only the sky is the limit to human desires and objectives that denote the fulfillment or outcome of mankind's progress.

Nisbet (1979) pictures a vivid account of the history of the idea of progress, stating that ironically most of the original work on progress including the famous 1920s work by J.B. Bury- '*The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*', speak of it as a relatively new concept in the dawn of human history, precipitated by growth of science and reason in Western world whereas the concept of progress is rooted in antiquity.

The impression that the idea of progress was deeply entrenched in modernity post-enlightenment is viewed by some scholars as biased. Its constant linking with so-called advanced societies and its de-linking with so-called primitive societies is not

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<sup>3</sup>*The Idea of Natural Inequality and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, 1983 (new, enlarged edition, Oxford University Press, 1987). *Antus!*

only thought-provoking but also outrageous.

Notably the idea of primitive civilizations being devoid of concepts of spiritual/material/moral progression has been challenged by some phenomenal works as that of Ludwig Edelstein's *The Idea of Progress in Antiquity*. Edelstein remarked that the ancients 'formulated most of the thoughts and sentiments that later generations down to the nineteenth century were accustomed to associate with the blessed or cursed word progress.'

Plato otherwise renowned for western political thought also wrote significantly on the idea of progress. In *The Statesman* Plato delineates a historical account of the progress of mankind from lowly origins to its present heights. In Book III of *The Laws* Plato presents an even more detailed picture of humanity's progress from a state of nature, step by step, stage by stage, to ever-higher levels of culture, economy, and polity.

Aristotle also formulated a linear progression of human history, one that began with mankind in the stage of kinship alone, progressed to villages and confederations, and ultimately achieved the political state. Aristotle's *Politics* makes clear his belief that reason and wisdom will lead to continuous progress with a corresponding growth in knowledge. The theme of improvement through individual effort and action that we find in his *Ethics* is clearly set, as Edelstein emphasizes, in a conception of morality that is not static but dynamic, one to be envisaged in a progress of development. (ibid)

Nisbet (1979) throws light upon the important contributions made by classical European thinkers on the theme of progress. Of them Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* written in the first century B.C. and Seneca's *Quaestiones Naturales* and *Epistulae Morales* deserve our special attention as both of these works, though highly dated present the sense of linear evolution evident in the conceptualization of progress over the ages. Lucretius stressed on social and cultural progress of mankind. Seneca's work is in the lines of Darwinian theory of evolution (as in case of Lucretius too),

with more than mere hints of natural selection. Again Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* is another classical text in human progress, not very different from what Rousseau wrote many centuries later on the state of nature and of man's social and cultural ascent from it. Seneca suggests that much remains to be done and that even after thousands of centuries, people will not be deprived of the chance of adding something new.

One of the earliest comprehensive statements on progress was forwarded by Turgot, in his - *A Philosophical Review of the Successive Advances of the Human Mind* (1750). Here he highlighted the holistic dimension of progress as in it invokes the whole of culture, manner, mores, institutions, legal codes, economy, and society and not just arts and sciences.

This is notably also seen in Rousseau's work. In *Social Contract*, Rousseau stresses on the formulation of general will, placing importance to overall societal welfare promoting just and equal conditions of living, in turn promoting progress in human society in a holistic way.

Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) position on progress brings us back to the conceptualization of progress as a drive from simple to complex. He argued that progress is neither automatic nor continuous and does not measure knowledge or wealth, but is a complex passage from barbarism through civilization toward enlightened culture and the abolition of war (Sklair 2005).

Similarly, Condorcet (1743–1794) suggests some nine epochs in the realization of progress, visualizing progress as a transition of society from ancient barbarism to state of renaissance towards a futuristic view in the end hoping of another epoch that would see culmination of full equality, liberty, justice, and freedom. The first epoch is characterized by kinship organizations, subsistence economy and nascent religious practices. The eight succeeding epochs take us through the origins of language, pastoralism, agriculture, villages, towns, commerce, and so on.

## **(2) Progress as a modern concept:**

Enlightenment inspired modernity lies at the heart of progress in context of development. The onslaught of enlightenment in 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> century Europe ushered in a period of tremendous intellectual development invoking normative changes in philosophical and scientific thought, spreading over across time and space.

Enlightenment is best understood as a combination of two orientations, one depicts it as “a set of interconnected ideas, values, principles and facts which provide both an image of the natural and social world, and a way of thinking about it” (Hamilton 1992, p. 21) and the other is the concept of enlightenment as a diverse movement, with a plurality of ideas (Porter 1990).

An inherent notion of progress (read more qualified life) was embedded in enlightenment rationale that sought to create a more just, better conditions of living based on rationality, thought to be a stepping stone towards advancement in human civilization from its earlier weightage on religion and superstitions. It is the same transition from tradition to modernity, heralding progress and development. It also advocated change in political set-up, gradually moving towards more liberal forms of government, eventually leading to democratic institutions across the globe. Modernity’s promise of progress is no less than an intriguing paradox though.

Just like the hard sciences would always try to come up with explanations of the natural laws governing the universe, philosophers tried to unearth the social laws beneath the functioning of society with the aid of reason and research so as to facilitate a better world for all.

Thus the legacy of demeaning traditional, indigenous values and institutions in favor of modern counterparts can be traced back to the days of enlightenment.

Why do we forget that what we regard as modern today may become outdated tomorrow but what surpasses the wrath of time is the core of civilizational thrust-

But change is inevitable

fundamental values that guide the terrain of progress and development! Once we lose sight of these values, we lose the essence of progress, subsequently losing out on development. Change is not necessary always, at least not in each and every sphere.

For instance, even today, ethnicity is assumed to be an inherent process in certain regions, obstructing the supposed progressive path of modernization but it is often missed that ethnic tensions/conflicts, political or social, have more to do with the arrival of state apparatus, the practice of bio-power, as Foucault would have put it and the project of nation-building and thereby, are generally ignited by the identification of some or the other kind of unequal treatment/ injustice or unequal access to resources, suppressed identities and so on.

Comte (Barnett 2012) was not comfortable with the ideas of Enlightenment, which, according to him, caused the unwanted French revolution. He propounded a "positivist philosophy" in the form of 'social physics' or 'sociology' to tackle with the destructive philosophy of Enlightenment. Comte believed that the process of natural evolution of society would propel development. He thereby came up with the evolutionary scheme of three stages through which he believed that the world and of course groups, individuals, science, societies and even minds go through. Both Saint Simon and Comte were influenced by the French counter-revolutionaries de Bonald and de Maistre, however the major difference lied in respect of the latter philosophers' emphasis on the need to return to the middle ages.

Modernization theory of development has been a key form of the Idea of progress as promoted by classical liberals in the 19th and 20th centuries, who called for the rapid modernization of the economy and society to remove the traditional hindrances to liberalization.

#### The Nineteenth Century's View of Progress

Auguste Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, published in successive volumes during the 1830s is probably the most systematic and dedicated of all works on progress in the century. The essence of human progress for Comte is intellectual. His famous

formulation of the evolution of mankind's mentality over the millennia through three successive stages: the theological, the metaphysical and the most recent one being the positive or scientific stage is a noteworthy reflection of linearity in the framework of evolutionary theories. Especially the third stage is indicative of the take-over by reason and science, wherein, increasing rationality is the order of the day- something that is held as a virtue in modern conceptualization of progress laden development. *is the key*

John Stuart Mill wrote an entire book on Comte's philosophy, which he admired greatly in the form it had taken in the *Positive Philosophy*. In his most famous essay, 'On Liberty', Mill distinguishes between "stationary" and "progressive" societies, and argues that the greatest possible freedom of the individual is the natural outcome of the laws of progress in society.

In Germany, G.W.F. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (published after Hegel's death in 1831) assumed much of the same influence that Comte's writing held in France. The most striking difference between human history and what is revealed in the study of sub-human species consists in "an impulse of perfectibility" that the human species alone possesses, as the consequence of its powers of reason and also of the cumulative character of its mental experience. For Hegel human history is the development of spirit in time and the essence of Hegelian spirit is 'freedom'. Thus the idea of freedom has travelled a long way since then in the trajectory of progress laden development. The famous English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) in *The Principles of Sociology* (1876) and *The Principles of Ethics* (1879) propounded a universal law of socio-political development. This was the same evolutionary line of thought that advocated progressive sense of development with the gradual spread of greater individualism and more freedom.

At a much later date, Amartya Sen also stressed on the conceptualization of progressive development through the lens of freedom (Sen 1999). This view stresses on the realization of freedom in multiple spheres as a signifier of progress.

For Spencer, as for so many others of the age, the words 'development,' 'evolution,'

and 'progress' were synonyms (so are they in Darwin's *Origin of the Species*). Spencer devoted his life to demonstration of the operation of laws of progress throughout nature and human society.

Where Hegel's conceptualization was more on ideational grounds, Karl Marx came up with a materialist interpretation of history whereby thesis and anti-thesis leads to synthesis. Thus the history of mankind is viewed more or less as a progression followed by changes in the economic order. *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels is in this sense a celebration of the idea of progress as it advocates a revolutionary journey towards a communist society – one that is viewed as the most desired form of human organization. One that is fundamentally believed to create a much more equal and just society.

We must not miss the other end of the spectrum holding a different genre of literature on progress. For instance Jacob Burckhardt, Friedrich Nietzsche, Oswald Spengler, W. R. Inge, and Austin Freeman in the early decades of the twentieth century- all of them sharing the commonality of being sceptical to progress. They did not support the idea of change in the natural and cultural landscape contrary to popular beliefs of associating them with progress (Nisbet 1979).

Nonetheless there was no looking behind for progress or progress only progressed thereon if we may say it so. Notwithstanding the relevance of 'progress' in the philosophies of liberalism, democracy, and equality, we must not forget that there is a dark side to this idea as well. Democracy may sound to be only fair and equitable enhancing progress and development however, enhancement of the political state in a democracy can be at times equally if not more dangerous than an authoritarian regime. The present day state led violence accompanied by increasing militarization is a befitting example. Mention must be made of AFSPA in North-Eastern state of Manipur which embodies the paradox of democracy in India's story of progress and state led development.



By the time we have reached the twenty-first century, ideas of progress if I may say so, demands spiritual and moral connotations. It is only foolhardy now to advocate mere materialistic perceptions of progress. But then this is the world of neo-liberal illusion where certain sections of people live in what Baudrillard calls hyper-reality.

### **Development: A multi-faceted concept**

Definitions in social sciences are contextual, largely determined by the ideological, epistemological and methodological orientation of their commentators. Many of these are evident from the labels associated with the multiple approaches to development discourses over the last several years. To name some of the prominent ones- we have -'economic development', 'modernization theory', 'state sponsored development' 'dependency approach', 'basic needs approach', 'top-down development', 'bottom-up development', 'another Development', 'autochthonous development', 'autarchic development', 'agropolitan development', 'empowerment', and, most recently, 'post-development', 'anti-development' and even 'post-modern development'. It is therefore evident that debate, dissension, contestation and negotiation have been ever-present, both on the ground level as in particular localities and among the numerous official and unofficial agencies engaged in development work (Simon 1999, pp.19).

Development is a concept which is contested both theoretically and politically, and is inherently both complex and ambiguous in its practice. In recent years it has been understood principally as a limited practice of development agencies for the progress of so called third world countries. The vision of the liberation of people which animated development practice in the 1950s and 1960s has thus been replaced by a vision of the liberalization of economies (Gore as cited in Sumner 2008).

*Post-modern approaches... see [poverty and development] as socially constructed and embedded within certain economic epistemes which value some assets over others. By revealing the situatedness of such interpretations of economy and poverty, post-modern approaches look*

*for alternative value systems so that the poor are not stigmatized and their spiritual and cultural 'assets' are recognized. (Hickey and Mohan as cited in Sumner 2008)*

If development means good change, questions arise about what is good and what sort of change matters. Any development agenda is then a value-laden enterprise. Since development is context driven, contingent on values and on alternative conceptions of the qualified life, it has never been a homogeneous enterprise.

It is of course necessary to look into the continuities in development lineage since its early biological usage to its transfer to the social world through the works of the likes of Malthus, Comte, J.H. Newman and others in the early decades of the nineteenth century. However it is equally important also to enquire the discontinuities and changes in the perception of development in the contemporary world.

Escobar (1995) for instance elucidates the interpretation of development as destruction, reproducing post-war Western economic and cultural imperialism. This is not to deny the culmination of modernization approaches and its most popular offshoot- neo liberalism that have together created a niche for themselves in contemporary world, firmly holding their footing on liberal democracy framework. Simultaneously off late there have been growing heterodoxies evident in the form of postmodern/post-colonial/post-development challenges.

### **Transfer of biological metaphor to social world**

The term development no doubt has gained impetus in the academic literature after the Second World War; however, it is not only interesting but also crucial to trace the lineage of this term right from its inception when it had begun to be used from a biological stand-point.

Just as evolutionary history tried to understand life on earth by uniting history and biology, social sciences 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards started nourishing the conception of evolutionary development to evaluate progress made or ought to be made by human

civilization. Thus we see constant attempts in social sciences to repeat in the realm of the social world what was being achieved by hard sciences, (especially post-enlightenment) in that of the physical world.

The idea of physical evolution, the conception that species change over time dates back to antiquity, in the ideas of the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Chinese as well as in medieval Islamic science. With the advent of biological taxonomy in the late 17th century, there were these two opposing concepts, one being- essentialism, i.e., the belief that every species has certain essential characteristics that do not change, a concept which had developed from medieval Aristotelian metaphysics; the other one being the new anti-Aristotelian approach to modern science. Enlightenment progressed and its impact spilled over from the physical sciences to natural history and from natural history to social sciences.

In the early 19th century, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck proposed first explicit theory of evolution. In 1858, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace came up with a new evolutionary theory. Darwin laid emphasis on the principles of common descent and a branching tree of life, indicating that two very different species could share a common ancestor. It was based on the idea of natural selection. The Tree of Life, put forward by Darwin according to Ernst Haeckel (*The Evolution of Man*, 1879) illustrates the 19th-century view that evolution was a progressive process leading towards man.

Drawing from biological analogy, evolutionism came a long way from Darwin's general theory of evolution to the social evolutionary theory formulated by Victorian social scientists that vouched for a progressive evolution of human societies that would lead to further civilization with greater moral values. This line of thinking is reflective of hints of colonialism and its justification, deeply embedded in Western thought. Just as evolutionary developmental biology explains the development of human body as a representation of temporal and spatial control of gene expression, so does evolutionary notion of progress try to explain the development of human society as a representation of temporal and spatial control of human society.

The transfer of the biological metaphor of development to the social sphere can be dated back to the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sociology has its roots in the attempt to understand change. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century enormous changes surfaced in the western European societies. Sociologists attempted to make sense of these changes. Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte seem to be the early theorists of development who propounded the idea of an evolutionary change and progressive change through the development of human intellect, particularly through its development in scientific thought. However Herbert Spencer equated this evolution to biological evolutionism, treating societies as organisms and arguing that it is a character of social bodies, as of living bodies that, while they increase in size they increase in structure as well. He stressed on development from within. Ferdinand Tonnies (1855-1936) gave the concept of *Gemeinschaft*, meaning community against the gradual development into *Gesellschaft* meaning association. Durkheim, taking a functional view of the society related the changes in the societies to the journey from Mechanical Solidarity to Organic Solidarity. He highlighted the transition of simple societies held together by mechanical solidarity to modern, complex societies based on organic solidarity, with a direct hint of increasing specialization just like differentiation in living organisms in their evolution from simplex to complex organisms. In contrast to Durkheim, Max Weber focused more on the individual than the society and an underlying hint of the paradox of development can be found in Weber's notion of modern world associated with the rise of capitalism advanced by the processes of increasing rationalization, bureaucratization and the so called disenchantment in an iron caged world. Karl Marx observed these changes in societies as a part of the conflicting interests of two antagonistic classes, thereby, paving way for a new social order. He related the contemporary social problems with the expansion of capitalist structure and foresaw an end to these problems with the advent of communism via socialism. A staunch opposition to the Marxist interpretation was given by the modernization theorists who made prophetic subscription to market economies as the future of the contemporary world.

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The theories of biological evolution thus influenced study of social change in a major way. Spencer can be best associated with the holistic view on evolution as the progressive development of the physical world, biological organisms, the human mind, and human culture and societies. Human societies were seen as developing towards a more progressive direction, thereby suggesting a sense of natural linearity in order of change. Comte too put forward a directional theory of society passing through different stages, evolving from a theological orientation to a metaphysical base and ultimately to a positivist society. It is also true that the influence of evolutionary theories can clearly be seen in European body of thought that at various junctures have resorted to such explanations to elucidate the evolved and higher nature of their civilization which they suggested can be transmitted to other regions of the world by industrialization. This automatically reflects the colonializing justifications of the Europeans, latter leading to neo-colonialist endeavors.

The socio-biological argument that on account of being essentially biological organisms, human beings ought to be studied in this vein is a deeply entrenched theme in Chomsky's work and he has been the foremost critic of the doctrine of the "blank slate" in the social sciences.

However the social situation changed invariably since the 18th century and new issues have emerged in the development discourse.

Following Sumner, we would argue that there are three discernible definitions of 'development'. The first is historical and long term and arguably relatively value free 'development' as a process of change. The second is policy related and evaluative or indicator led, is based on value judgments, and has short- to medium-term time horizons – development as the MDGs, for example. The third is post-modernist, drawing attention to the ethnocentric and ideologically loaded Western conceptions of 'development' and raising the possibilities of alternative conceptions (Sumner: 2008).

All three of the above conceptualizations of development reveal their own genre of specificities in regard to discourses and practices.

## **Approaches to Development: Discourses and Practices**

**Some of the popular approaches to development discourse are discussed below-**

### **(a) Market-oriented approach and Modernization theory:**

The first formulations of development theory can be found in the works of economists, strongly influenced by Keynesian economics and the war time and post war time practices of state intervention in the economy including the Marshall Plan. By the 1950s the limitations of development economics as a theory of development started getting exposed (Barnett: 2012). Modernization theory was a Western response, propagated especially by the U.S government to equip themselves with expertise needed to exercise their new role as superpower. This approach dominated development thinking in the 1950s and 1960s and is reflective of a long-standing Western concern with progress (Schech and J.Haggis 2000, pp.9).

It is in fact a path-breaking and complex process involving radical changes in the form of industrialization, urbanization, secularization, media expansion, increasing education, greater economic growth and so on in the so-called underdeveloped or developing societies. The market-centric approach is based on the assumption that the best possible economic consequences will result if individuals are free to make their own economic decisions. Vivid expression of this approach is arrested in the works of modernization theorists and that of neo-liberals. This is a process which may be triggered in many different ways but which is most likely to be initiated by changes in either technology or values.

W.W. Rostow (1960) attempted an alternative to Karl Marx's theory of modern history and curved out five stages of growth. Offering the metaphor of an aero plane from rest to take off and flying high, he predicted a chronological development course for each societies, traditional society, preconditions for takeoff, the take-off, drive to maturity and the age of high mass-consumption.

In contemporary times state sponsored development models are a reflection of extension of modernization approach.

**(b) Dependency Approach:**

During 1960s, a number of theorists started raising questions about the market oriented explanations of modernization theories. So much so that even the ILO called for 'redistribution with growth' in 1972. Drawing on Marxist ideas, scholars argued that underdevelopment is not due to the cultural and institutional faults of so called underdeveloped societies, but due to the exploitation of these countries by wealthier countries. Many dependency theorists like Andre Gunde Frank (1969) argued that global capitalism trapped the low-income countries into a downward spiral of exploitation and poverty zone. Cardoso and Faletto, Amin and Wallerstein (1979) have all made remarkable neo-Marxist contributions in subsequent years. Work on the dependency approach paved the way for a new strand of thought called **World-System theory**<sup>4</sup>, most closely identified with the work of Wallerstein and his colleagues, which (unlike the dependency theorists who hold individual countries being economically tied to one another) saw the world capitalist economic system as a single unity with three different zones — the core (the most advanced industrial countries), the periphery (the low-income and largely agricultural countries) and semi- periphery (the semi-industrialized, middle income countries). In contemporary times, we all know that the north is there in the south and there is a south in north as well.

**(c) Basic needs approach (Modernization with a human mask):**

The growing criticisms faced by top-down modernization theories and the failure of

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<sup>4</sup>For details, please see Immanuel Wallerstein's 1979 work on world system theory in *The Capitalist World-Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

mainstream development in democracies in so called third world made the international community adopt a basic needs strategy. The World Bank finally adopted the principle of meeting 'Basic Needs' (1976) and this was later followed by structural adjustment programmes. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defined basic needs as:

*The minimum requirements of a family for personal consumption: food, shelter, clothing: it implies access to essential services, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, transport, health and education; it implies that each person available for and willing to work should have an adequately remunerated job. It should further imply the satisfaction of needs of a more qualitative nature: a healthy, human and satisfying environment, and the popular participation in the making of decisions that affect the lives and livelihoods of the people, and individual freedom.(ILO: 1976 Source: Wikipedia)*

#### **(d) Development and gender:**

The basic needs approach brought women into forefront paying heed to their crucial roles in food production, family consumption and birth control. It opened the doors to the dynamics of gender relations in development, marking an important shift in development thinking inspired by wave of feminism.

*The Warren thesis* of development that emphasized the importance of imperialist forces of capitalism inspired progress was formulated in opposition to the Marxist and dependency theories.

Again, *Barrington Moore's Three routes to development* stood apart from both dependency approach and modernization theory. It spoke of a bourgeois democratic revolution, fascist revolution and peasant revolution as the three ways.

#### **(d) Alternative approaches :**



Some thinkers brought in a more humane conceptualization of development making it more people-centric. Hence new theories, explanations and models flooded in the later part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ecology based sustainable development model, development through the association of civil society, development through feminist model etc. are some of the eye-catchers.

The widespread usage of the prefix 'post' in most theoretical concepts has almost become a *déjà vu* albeit an important one that betokens differences, either in terms of periodization or conceptual and methodological approaches.

With the expansion of post-structuralism many scholars chose to think in terms of post-development while some even wrote the obituary to development, professing anti-development. On the whole, critiques of conventional development and the search for more meaningful, sustainable, bottom-up alternatives are not new.

There are various such examples -Renowned dependency authors, Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin advocated autarchy, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation (1975) advocated another development, a wide range of grass root movements, mostly advocating bottom-up development strategies as in John Friedmann's concept of agropolitan development. More recently, there was a certain kind of anti-development perspective propounded by Rosemary Galli. (1992)

The concept of '*another development*' is (i) need oriented (ii) self-reliant (iii) eco-friendly and (iv) empowering for the people who are otherwise acted upon. This approach stands in opposition to the likes of Green Revolution. A large literature demonstrates the ways in which Green Revolution technologies have brought in unseen miseries in the lives of the rural poor. For these reasons, the technological modernization of indigenous agriculture is seen as dicey. It is not to say that technology of modernization cannot contribute to "another" development. Generalized remedies must be implemented with utmost caution. An alternative for one region cannot be necessarily applied universally. Apart from the academic propositions of alternatives on paper, it is imperative to involve local inputs in the

scheme of things. It is crucial to unite understanding and action, or theory and practice, into a single process which puts people at the very center of both. This is the real task for development theories in the 1990s. This perspective in turn brings into light yet another important component of development, one that may not have gained limelight for quite some time now but would do well if revisited. And that is the idea of moral development. This often neglected terrain of development holds the potential to unleash true spirit of all other forms of development. It uplifts the moral character of human agency such that the wrath of structure can be dealt with for the poor unless people born on the brighter end of spectrum enjoy the spectacle of struggle for survival.

#### **Community development: something old/something new**

*Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritizing the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean ... geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organizing around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organizations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies... to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. (IACD, 2004)*

The word "community" is derived from the Old French *communities* which is derived from the Latin *communities* (*com*, "with/together" + *munus*, "gift"), a broad term for fellowship or organized society. Thus it refers to the idea of a cohesive close knit social entity, i.e. *Gemeinschaft* as marked out by Ferdinand Tonnies and it shares common values and belief systems. Residents of a village e.g. can be referred to be all

a part of unified community life.

Ironically, community development programmes are misused as stamps to give theoretical legitimacy to government policies but in practice they serve little purpose (Craig et al. 2011, pp. 14). The relationship between individual freedom/space and common welfare is one of the fundamental concerns of social and political theory and particularly for the success of community development programmes the flow of this relationship matters a lot. Moreover as highlighted by scholars it is a critical question as to whether the 'community' in community development projects referent of everybody who reside in a specific area, betokening a sense of belonging or paradoxically does it refer to all those who are excluded from being a part of the group. This raises another set of queries as in whether we can perceive a community as a homogeneous entity or is it actually a polarizing force such that communities can be socially constructed and rather manipulated by the policy makers or those in power for their own narrow interests.

It is evident that community development happens to be at crossroads between the state with its policies aiming to maintain status quo and the people living in a community, who may occasionally express themselves collectively through protests or dissents. It thus continues to render itself up against competing rationalities, eventually creating, re-creating or sustaining the collective space in which people in a group can assert or contest their location in the wider society is what marks a progressive community development practice (ibid, pp. 308).

For instance, a community development programme, striving to educate, encourage and empower the masses with self-help and the aid of local resources was formulated in India in 1952 for holistic development of rural areas. However the rural elite and the administrative plus political nexus resulted in a weak implementation of the schemes. However Anand Milk Producers' Union Limited (AMUL) is an excellent example of rural co-operative endeavor. Thus community development programmes in a democracy necessitate an active and alert public of any given community.

## **Sustainable development**

The concept of Progress has two different implications in the framework of ecology and sustainability. On one hand it presents an optimistic, business-oriented classic Idea of Progress. For example- Bright Green environmentalism endorses the idea that new designs, social innovations and green technologies can solve critical environmental challenges. Whereas on the other hand it presents a pessimistic view in regard to growing global crisis, for instance- Rampant industrialization, greenhouse gas effect, global warming, environmental challenges and so on. The second line of thought sees progress as a myth benefiting particular sections of society, inviting eventual environmental doomsday for all (Sklair 2005).

While the environment agenda, Sachs (1997) opines had been initially forwarded to pit development practices under crisis, it gradually began to be promoted like a banner highlighting a new era of development. The Stockholm Conference of June, 1972 was the occasion whence environment captured the fancy of international development community. Sachs states that whenever development theme faces a crisis, its international beneficiaries come up with a new format to re-embed the structure. Thus when around 1970s, the development projects produced counter effects in the form of deepening poverty etc. the notion of equitable development was quickly brought to surface to re-consolidate the face of development. In a similar vein, the Brundtland Report incorporated environmental concerns into the realm of development. Thus was born sustainable development as the new brainchild – a conceptual tool with which the centers of power could rather sustain both damages and repair of the global environment. Notwithstanding the politics behind sustainability, we cannot ignore the relevance of this approach in contemporary times.

## **The concept of local in Alternative development**

Our theoretical reading of development when analyzed in ground level from below reveals crisis and constraints in the sphere of local development strategies emanating from wider historicity of the politico- economic structures. It is thus crucial to locate

local people, farmers and various indigenous practices as "situated" in socio-economic, political, and cultural structures that both enable and constrain as locals process their resource management strategies specific to the area. A stable/suitable indigenous local-level development (which may be agricultural based) must address the social relationships underlying such structural constraints.

Concept of "alternative development" vouches for practice of indigenous and locally controlled forms of social change that are also environment-friendly. Many such agendas arise out of green movements, social movements and non-governmental organizations.

Alternative development does not necessarily have to entail purely "indigenous" dimension alone nor has it to be totally agro-based. Furthermore, some "alternative" goals, such as local control of the development process and cultural revalorization, are pursued through conventional means such as the promotion of agrochemicals, new crop varieties, and market-oriented production. This apparently strange mix of means and ends reflects local groups' pragmatic responses to increasingly difficult and modernized environments (Bebbington 1993).

**(e) Post-colonial turn in development approach:**

Post-colonialism re-discovers the modes of cultural perception—the ways of viewing and of being viewed. Post-colonial theory thus opportune the subalterns to speak up for themselves and give shape to their socio-cultural discourses, which would ultimately strike a balance between the hitherto imbalanced 'us/we' and 'them/others' binary power-relationship.

Homi K. Bhabha (1994) reflected upon the biased Western view of the world, that wears an ethnocentric attitude towards cultures, always regard their own on a higher pedestal and resorts to discriminatory categorizations of the world, for instance, 'The First World', 'The Second World', and 'The Third World'. Post-colonial work tries to

counter such biased accounts.

**(f) Post-development thrust:**

Post development theory (also post-development or anti-development) holds that the whole concept and practice of development is a reflection of Western-Northern hegemony over the rest of the world. Post development thought arose in the 1980s out of criticisms voiced against development projects and development theory, which justified them.

In an era followed by post-colonial writings, a number of post-development scholars like A. Escobar, G. Esteva, M. Rahnema, W. Sachs, J. Ferguson, S. Latouche, G. Rist etc. at around 1980s/1990s have variously problematized the very essence of the concept of development, stating that since its institutional inception development projects have always been unjust and discriminatory. It was in no sense to claim that development was altogether a new block in the town. All that it represented was a renewed, a reformulated conceptualization of development that otherwise heavily bore the stamp of ethnocentric binaries. The growing field of development programs of the United States and its (Western) European allies went on to assert its presence across the globe, creating the impression that all this was a responsible concern from their end to the rest of the so-called undeveloped / under-developed/ developing lot.

Thus, a perusal of the various manifestations of development approaches reminds me of Oommen's (2004, pp. 9) take on the career of development. He delineated three major perspectives in the history of development-

- (1) Mainstream Perspective on Development (MPD),
- (2) Alternative Perspective on Development (APD) and
- (3) Post Development Perspective (PDP)

Interestingly the various approaches discussed above can all be placed under these

broader frameworks.

MPD can be traced back to colonialism and the modernization agenda of the Western powers. Gradually it brought the strand of human development under its umbrella. The human development index (HDI) became the new unit of development measurement and it replaced earlier confines of economic growth or gross national product (GNP) measurement. Both neo-liberalism and human development seem complimentary to each other as they both focus on the individual as the main unit of development.

APD emerged in the form of a critique of mainstream perspective on development. Oomen (ibid, pp.16) states that there are two strands of this- first is an alternative approach to development. This is indicative of post structuralist manifestation whereby development is not discarded altogether, only the ways to achieve it are made to be more inclusive and participatory. Second is an alternative goal of development revolving around people for whom it is essentially meant! This includes various movements e.g. feminism, green movements, new social movements and so on.

Then there is the PDP which is more in the spirit of post modernity as it rejects development and it vigorously criticizes Western construct of modernity and technological or scientific progress.

The human development perspective has over the time become a point of intersection between MPD and APD (ibid, pp. 14).

### **International scenario in development practice:**

'For every dollar the U.S contributes to the World Bank, U.S corporations receive 1.30 dollars in procurement contracts.'

-Lawrence Summers (Bozzo2008)

### **The 2004 Human Development Report-**

In the words of the Report,

*Cultural liberty is a vital part of human development because being able to choose one's identity - who one is - without losing the respect of others or being excluded from other choices is important in leading a full life . . . Expanding cultural freedoms is an important goal in human development - one that needs urgent attention in the 21st century. All people want to be free to be who they are. All people want to be free to express their identity as members of a group with shared commitments and values - whether it is nationality, ethnicity, language or religion, whether it is family, profession or avocation. Globalization is driving ever-increasing interactions among the world's people. This world needs both greater respect for diversity and stronger commitment to unity. Individuals have to shed rigid identities if they are to become part of diverse societies and uphold cosmopolitan values of tolerance and respect for universal human rights. (UNDP 2004, p. 1, 12)*

### **The 'foreign aid for development' rationale**

The international development community has for quite some time now been promoting Big Push theory<sup>5</sup>(Easterly 2006) to support state led development models.

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<sup>5</sup>Big Push is generally a combination of (1) huge sums of foreign aid, (2) big investments in various sectors, (3) that the beneficiary country undergoes a rapid acceleration of growth, reference)



The UN Millennium Project, commissioned by Kofi Annan to assess how to meet the MDGs targeted by 2015, issued a large Report in January 2005 stating that poor countries were caught in a quagmire of "poverty trap". Only a big push of basic investments in public administration, human capital (nutrition, health, education), and key infrastructure (roads, electricity, ports, water, and sanitation, accessible land for affordable housing, environmental management) could probably drag them out of the quagmire.

Sachs in the 'The End of Poverty' throws light upon the need- factor established in the so-called underdeveloped or developing economies for a foreign aid (read big push) to come out of the poverty trap. (Sachs 2006) Now how far this kind of Big Push promotes egalitarian socio-economic development is another big question.

#### **Some reflections on polity and development:**

The onslaught of modernity agendas in a post-enlightenment world had its own implications for political economy. Where earlier the medieval period was thrived on a theological project of interpreting God's laws, the new age of renaissance and enlightenment strived to explore the social laws in the lines of science and rationality. In a similar vein, normative changes gradually brought in fundamental changes in human organization in terms of governance and administration. The popularity of democratic institutions is on the rise ever since. It is true that at and around the time of cold war authoritarian regimes popped up at various places but today's neo-liberal democratic institutions make it difficult for totalitarian regimes to sustain. Wherever there is authoritarian rule, conflict follows, e.g. Libya's disaster<sup>6</sup>.

The enlightenment scholars like Benjamin Franklin, Tom Paine, Thomas Jefferson

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<sup>6</sup>[world.time.com/.../libyas-disaster-of-justice-the-case-of-saif-al-islam-gad...](http://world.time.com/.../libyas-disaster-of-justice-the-case-of-saif-al-islam-gad...)

and others believed that the progress essentially involves a reorganization of the political structure to the benefit of the human condition. The contemporary inclination towards democracy in Western theory as an idea of linear progress is an off shoot of such line of thinking.

## Democracy

The term 'Democracy' originates from the Greek –'dēmokratía', meaning 'rule of the people', which was derived from-'dêmos', meaning 'people' and 'kratos' meaning 'power' or 'rule'. The English word can be traced back to the 16th century, from the older Middle French and Middle Latin equivalents.

Democracy<sup>7</sup> as a form of government rose to popularity on grounds of it being a government type based on majority by consent as against other forms of government where power is either held by one person, as in a monarchy and in authoritarian regimes, or where power is held by a small number of individuals, as in an oligarchy. Karl Popper contrasted democracy with dictatorship or tyranny, delineating opportunities for the 'demos' to control the 'kratos' of their leaders and to replace them if required without resorting to a revolution.

There are various forms of democracy that may exist, however there are two fundamental forms, both meant for all eligible citizens to be a part of the political process. One is direct democracy, whereby, all eligible citizens have direct and active participation in the decision making of the government and the other is indirect or popularly called representative democracy, whereby, political power is exercised through elected representatives of the people on whom lays the ultimate power. This kind of conceptualization of representative democracy burst in during the European Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, carried to the next level by the American and French Revolutions. Democracy is known for its practice of political self-determination, inherent in its very foundation, thereby, holding the

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<sup>7</sup> Refer to David Held's *Models of Democracy* for a detailed account or Gieben's *Models of Democracy* 2006.

potential to forward social, economic and cultural conditions that enable a healthy, free and unbiased political environment and vice-versa.

In the contemporary world, democracy has been so much in vogue that it has entered diverse arenas other than polity such as entertainment, food, fashion, education, art, literature, science and so on and so forth.

It is interesting to observe the transformation of liberalism into liberal democracy which went on to become the centrifugal form of governance in modernity embedded with the parallel current of progress (Gieben 2006).

#### **The interaction between democracy and development:**

*Contrasts, sometimes extreme, are a characteristic feature of the beginning of the twenty-first century, contrasts between the level of development of States, which can range from apparently boundless affluence to the most absolute destitution, and contrasts between regimes marked by the rule of law, respect for human rights and the participation of citizens in short, democracy and ones where lawlessness, arbitrariness and tyranny prevail or, indeed, where prolonged conflict has led to the very breakdown of the State (Ghali 2002, pp. 5).*

The above remark made by Ghali in connection to democracy- development ratio speaks of a tradition in development discourse that sees democracy as a vital player in the field of development practice.

What are the implications of democracy in today's increasingly globalized world beset with consumerist goals embedded in neo-liberal political economy?

Is the politics behind development aid more than it meets the eyes?

There are two distinct yet inter related planes on which we can study the

development- democracy nexus. One is to observe whether democracy as a political economy fosters development including its impact on socio-economic development and the second point being that the realm of socio-economic development is replete with deprivation of peoples' rights, marginalization, poverty etc. On the face of such circumstances whose development are we really talking about? Neo-liberal democratic institutions today increasingly deprive people of their rights in the name of development. There are ample examples in India where industrial displacement has caused severe problems for the local people. There have been no proper redressal mechanisms, often leading to protests, both violent and non-violent.e.g. industrial displacement in Korba (Dhagamwar, Vasudha et al 2003).

Sustainably equitable development is held to be closely interlinked with democracy. Democratic institutions, characterized by the rule of law, peoples' participation and respect for human rights automatically demand a minimum standard of living for its people, which in turn require a minimum level of development. Together these factors seem to promote and foster democratic culture facilitating equitable economic and social development.And then there is the old economic development argument claiming that with development comes more awareness and people start demanding for liberal democratic regimes. So in both cases, development and democracy on paper are closely held to be precipitators for one another. But what is the ground reality?

The concept of development today is no more reduced to economic determinism. Social, cultural, political and environmental dimensions are just as crucial. After the cold war ended, the Western super powers regained their supreme holding over global political economy. In an increasingly globalized world with the demise of most authoritarian governments and the emergence of civil societies and social movements, the democracy/development complex has caught the limelight.

UNESCO, the only organization in the United Nations system whose Constitution

refers to democratic principles, decided on 26 March 1998, to contribute to this vast issue by setting up a think tank. This was the “International Panel on Democracy and Development” (IPDD), which was made up of 20 leading figures from every region of the world and from a wide range of disciplines. I believe it would be immensely helpful to revise the proposed outcomes of this influential body of work so as to arrive at a broader understanding of development in a democracy and vice-versa.

In order to analyze this relationship, this international body delineated first what is meant by the democratic imperative, then the concept of development, and finally the interaction between the two.

Democracy is a system whereby the whole of society can participate, at every level, in the decision-making process and keep control of it. Whether it is really the case in ground reality is debatable of course.

An independent judiciary, freedom of speech and expression and free media definitely are crucial merits of the system. Also the legislative powers rest with the representatives elected by the people. This is where arises the crucial role played by the parliament which is supposedly a true representative of the people in all its diversity hence indispensable for smooth democratic functioning. Free and fair elections by universal suffrage are thereby a pre-requisite to every democracy. However these are only the structural aspects of democracy whereas for democracy to flourish, it has to be taken to the next level, beyond mere institutional framework. In the words of Ghali (2002)

*It also needs to be embodied in a culture, a state of mind that fosters tolerance and respect for other people, as well as pluralism, equilibrium and dialogue between the forces that make up a society. The concept of democratic culture requires all social, financial, governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as the relationship which links or separates them, to be taken into account.*

It is true that the structure of democracy sustains various important components that hold the potential for the human agency to work in co-ordination on the lines of development, but the interplay of structure and agency in this era of globalization also presents a darker side of democracy (visible only on an elaborately careful perusal) discussed earlier in the study.

The Panel zeroed down on 'Sustainable development' as standard conceptualization of development that is both multidimensional and desirable. Development is thereby perceived as a natural right among human rights. This broad development theme has many implications, empowering those who would be affected to take part in decisions affecting them. Panel members also stressed that development and justice go hand in hand, as development necessitates fair laws and rules.

Democracy and development are held to be complementary to each other. Basic human rights guaranteed by rule of law act as the common fortifying thread that works as the binding element for democracy and development measures to work successfully.

*The rule of law which is the contrary of arbitrariness, is based on the reign of the general principles of the law and on the concept of justice in society, hence its importance in relation to a democratic government. That rule of law entails, for power to be exercised, legitimacy, transparency and accountability. Those three elements, which underpin the rule of law, are vital for both the democratic process and the process of development (ibid.).*

Democracy has become a buzzword and it is continuously forwarded as most desirable form of government. Of course there are critics who highlight the darker side of democracy. It would make an interesting reading to analyze a country the dynamics of neo-liberal democracy in India, which seems to be befitting for certain sections of the people while the condition of the deprived lot continues to be

gruesome. But then in every political economy, there are some who benefit and some others who struggle to survive. Hence at the end of the day it seems to be a bigger question of our moral existence as a species in this planet (as in the moral development I mentioned earlier) and not just about the boundedness of the structure.

For instance, 'reservation' is the most popular tool of redistribution in Indian democracy even though objectively a major chunk of the people in these groups may have no accessibility to make up to the position of availing these reservations(Bardhan 1984 ).

What do then these symbolic policies actually do with the better lot amongst them availing the benefits and attention being diverted away from the more prominent challenges of improving the delivery structure of social services like basic education, health, nutrition and so on?

In the backdrop of economic reforms, increased competition leads to increased regional inequality, one of the toughest political economy issues in the coming years will be how to resolve the tension between the demands of the better-off states for more competition and those of the populous backward states for redistributive justice. Even these redistributive transfers (or direct subsidies), however, do not usually go toward correcting the severe infrastructural deficiencies of the poorer states, thus contributing to the perpetuation of the regional inequality, which in turn provoke regional terrorism.

In the next chapter, I shall deal in greater length on the manifestation of democracy and development in independent India, capturing the trajectory since independence, even before that till the contemporary neo-liberal turn, moving on to the theme of the chapter, i.e. ironies of development.

## CHAPTER 3

### DEVELOPMENT: IRONIES AND DISCONTENTS

*When someone works for less pay than she can live on – when, for example, she goes hungry so that you can eat more cheaply and conveniently – then she has made a great sacrifice for you, she has made you a gift of some part of her abilities, her health, and her life. The “working poor,” as they are approvingly termed, are in fact the major philanthropists of our society ... To be a member of the working poor is to be an anonymous donor ... to everyone else. As Gail, one of my restaurant coworkers put it, “you give and you give.*

*– Ehrenreich (2000)*

Bad governance coupled with problems of corruption, non-impactful policies or in some cases poor implementation of policies creates lacunae in development mechanism. The UN Millennium Project and Sachs (2006) argue, however, that it is the poverty trap rather than bad government that explains poor growth of low income countries and the failure to make progress towards the MDGs. There has been a growing promotion of various infrastructure development schemes, large-scale dam projects being a key one to foster socio-economic gains shockingly at most times at the cost of social and environmental damages, e.g. the Narmada River dams in India, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtse River in China... These genre of development actions reflect a more subtle bending for donors' than recipients' priorities. Some years back this was true of 'basic need' approach and down the years it has become true of sustainable development initiatives. So then is it more like a cycle of events?

Generally perceived as the most desirable, just form of government in contemporary world, is democracy just another Western product that needs revisions or does it really hold all the potential to justly quench the thirst of political animal that man is? It is beyond the scope of this book to address this question at length. What I intend to



do here is to evaluate the conceptualization of development in a democracy, taking the case of India, one of the biggest democracies in the world. It is both imperative and interesting to study the dynamics of inter relation between the two phenomenon in the Indian context. It is great to start with independent India however what is also important is to go through a brief history of the making of this India, which according to many, is still very much in the making. We must not forget that the historicity of democracy in India is different than that of its Western counterparts. These differences shape up the functioning of democracy in India. While in European history democratic rights were the natural resultant of continuous battles against aristocratic privileges and arbitrary powers of absolute monarchs, in India which was otherwise a fractured society, some groups consolidated against the colonial power, leading to consensus-building and in fact nation-building in the process. So much so that even today, despite being the largest democracy in the world, India is still a nation in the making. Pan-Indian nationalism coexists, sometimes peacefully and sometimes conflictually with assertive regional nationalism.

The Indian experience seems to suggest that the very nature of socio-economic heterogeneity may make the divided groups somewhat more interested in the procedural usefulness of democratic processes. In a country with an extremely heterogeneous society and the elements of even the dominant political coalition quite diverse, where no individual group is by itself strong enough to be able to hijack the state, there may be some functional value of democracy as a mutually accepted mode of transactional negotiations among contending group (Bardhan 1984).

#### **Development discourse in India:**

Jayal (1999, pp.151) states that development was an integral component of the modernizing mission of the newly formed independent India. It was a project that could not be compromised at any cost as it was the legitimizing force of Indian state that promised economic as well as societal transformation of the Indian society on the backdrop of political democratic culture. How far has the state delivered this in all

these years is food for thought. The building of dams and rapid industrialization were seen as temples of modernity by Nehru. However the famous Narmada dam clash provides a potent symbol of contested terrain of this development model that the Indian state was religiously following.

On the eve of independence, Nehru empathetically reminded the country that the tasks ahead included “the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity” were the basic foundations on which India would tread her path to development. The Planning Commission was thereby established, placing primal importance on government in economic activities. Modernization through industrialization, based on ‘Nehru-Mahalanobis’ strategy was the point of departure for India’s development planning. Once again we can make sense of progress and development equated with the provisions of bio-politics as significant chunk of development strategy was related to improving the capabilities of the population by facilitating them with levels of basic services in say health and education. There arose a deliberate creation of institutions and state sponsored policies forwarded towards meeting development goals. This dominated the scene until the mid-1980s when....Following the global macroeconomic crisis in 1991, economic policy of India took a major turn. Owing to immense internal pressure of foreign default and subsequent mandates of global institutions such as IMF and World Bank, India’s development strategy wore the coat of ‘liberalization, privatization and globalization. The ripple effects of this form of market manipulation in the favor of big-shots are evident presently in a large number of cases, for instance, natural resources market and so on.

How do we now look at these ironies of development in line with development as a practice of progress so earnestly sought after by India’s architects of development since the time of independence? Was it erroneous right from the days of its inception when it was concocted in the form of Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy? What about the current phase of development in India? How do we look at the concept of equality and human needs vis-à-

vis development in India? How does Indian democracy interact with development at various levels of structure- agency interplay?

Post 1990s economic reforms in India, the conflicts over natural resources are increasingly taking its toll on the lives of innumerable marginalized and deprived lot primarily those whom we categorize as tribals or adivasis. All this has increased with growing privatization and corporatization of these resources on one hand and exclusion of the larger public from any benefits. The question of indigenous development set apart, these people are being increasingly denied access to the resources in the very name of development. Such a paradox, isn't it? While the issue of land remains central to these debates over natural resources for growth centric development, much of the debates in the recent times have failed to capture 'water' as a fundamentally crucial resource demanding serious attention in the midst of severe crisis of several kinds.

In today's commercial world of economic growth dictates and privatization, water is seen more as a commodity in spite of it being a scarce resource; it is extracted more for sectors like energy, commercial agriculture, and industrial development than basic human needs that remain unfulfilled across the globe. Pollution and contamination of water bodies have become manifold in industrial areas, even in cities as well as in the hinterlands where pesticides and chemical fertilizers are used abundantly. It thus becomes impending to treat this problem from dual perspective-both as a matter of environmental protection and sustainability as well as primal fundamental right of every human being across the strata.

The kidnapping of the Sukma district collector in April 2012 and the issues that came up in the CPI (Maoist) party's statements were taken up by Haragopal in his EPW article wherein he stated that this had more to do with a neo-liberal inspired state sponsored development model that opens up its rich natural resources to corporates and multinationals for a pittance in the name of growth. The twists and turns in the event of things hereby should be yet another eye-opener to Indian democracy (Haragopal 2012).

According to Bardhan, (1984) political economy refers to the distribution of political and economic power in a given society and how that influences the directions of development

and policies that bear on them. To understand the present day crisis of development in Indian neo-liberal political economy, let us for a while take a look into the history of capitalist development in India- There is difference of opinion with regard to the role played by colonialism in the sphere of economic activity in India. According to Pavlov, colonialist regimes brought in a scenario which was crucial for the development of Indian capitalism. A.K.Bagchi on the other hand points out the rough patches in the growth of capitalism in many parts of India in the early 19th century owing to colonialist regime. There is no denying that the continuous extraction of surplus by the colonial power hampered the growth of Indian indigenous market, thereby leading to the underdevelopment of productive forces in the country. Colonial exploitation moulded the entire character of Indian economy. However post World War 1 and with the gradual expansion of nationalist movements in India, the colonial regime gradually started stumbling, opening up new opportunities for the Indian domestic market. The growth of railways, establishment of a few industries and nascent commercialization of certain agricultural products, albeit in colonial interests opened new vistas for Indian businessmen. To promote their interests, they even organized themselves into associations such as Bombay Mill Owners Association (1875) and the Ahmedabad Mill Owners' Association (1891).

According to Rostow, capital formation, taken as being at the source of economic growth and, thus, of development, is not just a question of maximizing profit, it's an attitude.

Aditya Mukherjee and Mridula Mukherjee point out that after World War significant changes were under way in the Indian economy and a certain measure of domestic development was taking place, albeit in spite of and in opposition to colonialism, which enabled the Indian capitalist class to grow and establish a considerably large independent economic base for capitalist accumulation during the colonial period and on a qualitatively bigger scale after independence. Despite several setbacks, especially during the period of the Great Depression, the Indian entrepreneurs made considerable progress. They established many factories in different parts of the country. By the mid-30s the capitalist class in India got actively involved in national freedom struggle, playing an influential role in the Indian National Congress.

Indian National Congress backed by the emerging middle class and capitalist class envisaged planned development through state intervention as a significant tool for taking the country to newer heights. In 1944, the capitalists came up with 'Bombay Plan' for rapid industrialization led progress and development of India. Both the National Planning Committee set up by the Indian National Congress and the Bombay Plan prepared by the leading Indian industrialists treaded the path of Keynesian approach. The democratic state-capitalist class nexus excessively promoted the concept of welfare state (already enshrined in the Directive Principles of state policy) on the background of mixed economy in India. The nature of the Indian State, as it has historically evolved is a contentious subject for scholars (across the globe) who have developed different theoretical perspectives to explain it. Given the nature of ironies evident in development practice of the Indian state, it seems that the end of colonial regime merely signified the transfer of political power from the foreign rulers to the newly constituted national ruling party, doing no good to the commoners. The element of national hereby is highly debatable. State led development models have outsized their rationale promoting the interests of the Indian capitalist class at most times. Moreover over the years, the Indian democracy has become more infamous for its biased regulatory nature rather than playing an equitable developmental role.

The foreign exchange crisis of 1956-57 markedly changed the approach of the Indian state towards foreign capital. And the oil crisis of 1973-74 served as the final death blow that precipitated economic liberalization measures in India. Notably the international bodies e.g. the IMF and the World Bank put forward strategic compulsions in the name of foreign aid. Moreover the 1975 state of emergency under Indira Gandhi's rule stirred the Indian scene. Andre Gunde Frank noted that the institutionalization of economic, political, and military repression under Indira Gandhi's emergency rule did no good to address major structural problems in the country.

The temporary economic fortunes during the Janata party rule (1977-79) did not alter anything fundamental in India's structural economic crisis. Ultimately the legacy of 1991 Economic reforms that lay in sync with trade liberalization prescriptions of the IMF-World Bank duo have been producing wide-spread implications on different arenas of Indian society in internal as well as the global front. The experiences of Indian IT industry\* in

particular has been that of phenomenal success. Advocates of IT channelized leapfrogging benefits point out as to how isolated villages without even conventional telephones have adopted cellular phones, citing this as one of the several instances of technology led progress (Konana and Balasubramaniam 2002).

We must not let ourselves be carried away by IT success stories as these are mostly in the context of narrowly defined corporate objectives. They need to be co-opted in the development projects carefully backed by long term thoughtful planning.

Farmer suicides in some Indian states have become a rampant tragedy born out of thoughtless commercialization of agriculture without creating necessary social safety nets. The post-reform period has witnessed growing regional inequalities in India. Thus the condition of democracy is continuously challenged in India.

#### **Demographic dividend in India:**

Another important factor in the discussion of development practice is the population pattern of a country. Demographic factors are prominent determinants of economic development debate and can be traced back to Malthus (1798) whereby he visualized the impending adversity of population growth and argued that if unchecked, population (that grows in a geometrical ratio as opposed to the arithmetical increase of subsistence) would bring about acute starvation, misery and massive environmental challenges in years to come. The notion of demographic dividend denotes a favorable stage in demographic transition which is marked by the possibilities of economic growth exerted by the relative higher share of working age population. Many economists and demographers opine that India is emerging to become a classic example of 'Window of Demographic Opportunity'.

Table 1.1 – Age distribution of India’s Population: 1961-2001

AGE GROUP	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
0-14	41.0	42.0	39.6	37.3	35.3
15-59	53.2	52.0	53.8	55.5	56.9
60+	5.7	6.0	6.4	6.8	7.4
ANS	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.6	0.3
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

Source: India, Registrar General (2004), ANS = age not stated

This table shows that the number of people in working age bracket is on the rise. Statistical estimation confirms a situation of demographic dividend in India but this favorable phase in demographic transition does not automatically promote economic growth. ((Bloom et al. 2003) For that other structural transformations are required at various levels, starting from poverty alleviation measures to growth of literacy rates to women empowerment, creation of greater employment scope etc.

### **Planning in India:**

The Planning Commission, established in 1950 is an institution under the ambit of the Government of India that most importantly formulates Five Year Plans in India apart from other functions. National Development Council (NDC), an extra-constitutional body was established in 1952 to secure co-operation between centre and state in regard to planning. It is more like an advisory body.

Table 1.2 State Planning in India

FIVE YEAR PLAN	DURATION	THRUST AREA	KEY POINTS	OUTCOME
First Plan	1951-56	Agriculture, irrigation & power projects		Successful Plan.Target-2.1%  Actual Growth-3.6%
Second Plan	1956-61	Heavy industrialization	Some of the largest industrial units came up during this time	Successful
Third Plan	1961-66	Emphasis on industrial growth continued but agriculture and allied sectors also received consideration		Officially declared unsuccessful  Target-5.2%  Actual-2.7%
Annual Plans	1966-69			
Fourth Plan	1969-74	Growth with Social Justice	Focus on aggressive Socialism through enactment of acts like- Nationalization of Banks Act, 1969; MRTF	



			Act, 1969; FERA, 1973.	
Fifth Plan	1974-79	Poverty eradication & Attainment of Self-Reliance	The 20 Point programme was coined for eradication of poverty	Janata Party Government that came into power in 1977 terminated the plan in 1978
Sixth Plan	1980-85	Poverty alleviation and Industrial Growth	New Industrial Policy 1980- brought in some liberalization of licensing policy. The beginning of the shift away from the Mahalnobis model of growth	
Seventh Plan	1985-90	Modernization & Improvement of Technology Emphasis on Enhancing Exports	Clear cut transition towards liberalization	Target-5% Annual Growth Rate-5.6%
Annual Plans	1990-92			
Eight Plan	1992-97	Alleviating Poverty and Removing Unemployment and providing a Safety		

		Net for those who would be affected by Structural Adjustment Programme.		
Ninth Plan	1997-2002	Growth with Social Justice & Equality		GDP growth was 5.35% against target of 6.5%
Tenth Plan	2002-07		Put in the most ambitious GDP growth target so far- 8%	GDP growth was 7.7% against target of 8%  However the benefits of growth were not balanced.
Eleventh Plan	2007-12	Social Sector and Inclusive Growth	Put the growth target in 9%	
Twelfth Plan	2012-17	Infrastructure Sector	Put the growth target in 8%	

Based on database of National Planning Commission, Govt. of India

The chart tries to show the thrust of planning objectives since the time of independence till date.

### **Neo-liberal political economy, marginalization and justice:**

The Neo-liberal economic reforms of 1991 in India have hugely stirred the political economy of the country generating various debates both for and against the measures and its legacy ever since in the Indian subcontinent. The reform debate often raises one crucial question of what liberalization and its off shoot neo-liberalization offers to people across the different segments or stratum.

The impact on organized sector is quite out there easy accessible - both trade associations and trade unions routinely respond to policy changes that affect them. However, the unorganized sector and under-privileged social groups, say the minorities, dalits, adivasis, tribes etc. have mostly had no way of articulating their responses (Babu 2004).

- ◆ What are the political economy compulsions of economic reform and liberalization?
- ◆ How can liberalization benefit these marginalized social groups?
- ◆ How does liberalization relate to social justice?

The framework of liberalization is generally held suitable at delivering social justice albeit not in a spontaneous fashion. Democratic institutions are believed to enable wider social justice and go hand in hand with liberalization set-up. Ironically, democracy has not necessarily translated into social justice and equality for all segments alike. Economic growth does not automatically invoke social justice or 'balanced' development across all social groups. The state should attend to the problem of why three-fourths of the population cannot even be counted as 'consumers'. What does this tell us about equality and development?

Considering the **trade-off between human needs and development**, how do we look at human needs? Only the sky is the limit for human needs and aspirations but for a vast lot of people even today, living under the sky limits it all to the ambit of what has been conceptualized as 'basic needs'. It is very true that the so-called developed lots have come a long way from 'basic needs' but it is crucial to distinguish two independent understandings of development.

One is the conceptualization of development as a holistic tool for imparting a more just and equal conditions of living. This is notably determined not just by socio-economic factors but also ethical considerations.

Second is the multi-dimensional nature of development that holds the tag of supporting diverse cultures with all their diverse perceptions of development, apparently beyond economic pursuits, in strong bonded with environment friendly measures?

In both these conceptualizations, we still very much have a strong case of symbolization.

What is the relationship between *justice and development* and second between *sustainability and justice*? Where on one hand sustainability invokes a sense of justice dispensing, justice itself requires sustaining of the conditions of a balanced life for all. It is more like visualizing justice as a requisite for achieving certain basic rights of all. Can global economy facilitate basic justice, can political economy facilitate sustainability or do we need some added dimension- say, 'moral framework' as in moral development mentioned earlier.

#### **Role of natural resources in local/regional development:**

The development of natural resources has played a significant role in the expansion of many regional economies around the world. Natural resources are an important catalyst that can accelerate economic growth, while some studies also show that informal economy growing parasitically around natural resources can produce some profound ironies in development.

Canadian economic historians Harold Innis and W. A. Mackintosh developed what has become known as the staple theory as a framework for analyzing the role of natural resources in the development process. This theory integrates the physical geography of natural resources with a theory of economic linkages to explain the spatial pattern and institutional structure of the development process in regions. In a nutshell, the staple theory is a theory of export-led growth based on staple products (Gunton 2003). Simply to say, regional economies with an abundant supply of accessible natural resources have a considerable advantage in the development process. But it has its own set of contradictions which may range from anywhere between human rights violation to human trafficking to plain inequitable development and corruption surrounding the nexus of formal-informal economy in natural resources. The impetus for the development of the coal industry in the north-eastern state of Meghalaya grew with the external demand for coal from neighboring Bangladesh apart from internal demands. The Indian state has largely failed to

address the outright violation of human rights in this case. Implementation of stringent law and capacity-building among discriminated sections will help create an enabling environment for the benefits of liberalization to flourish thus promoting a just development.

Liberalization should not mean only 'economic' liberalization or neo-liberal thrust. In a country replete with both horizontal and vertical divisions, discrimination has become wide spread. There is a gap between democracy and development in India. Negligence to reform society has been over the years responsible for the failure of empowering the deprived lots. Is it really negligence or is this the real face of neo-liberalism?

*The inability of national governments to effectively resolve localized problems resulting from corporate and industrial restructuring has negatively affected the standard of living in many communities. Local economies are tied to the national mode of production of which they are a part. Despite the evolution of a global economy that is orchestrated by transnational corporations (Reich 1992), national boundaries remain very much a reality, defined largely by mode of production. Critical ingredients of long-term localized development, regarding both productivity and social welfare, include a production system and set of social relations suited to partnership principles of cooperation and collaboration, appropriate organization of local interests to achieve consensus, and, finally, an active local government that articulates the needs of workers and firms through both supply-side policy (education, training, service provision) and indirect relations with the private sector through incentives that influence competitive firm behavior amid competing production systems in the global economy (Ettlinger as cited in Gunton 2003).*

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that:

*Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political and other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (United Nations 1948).*

Fair play of human rights require that governments create necessary conditions first fulfilling certain basic criteria e.g. education, health, sanitation, nutrition and employment generation as only then there can be a suitable atmosphere that sustains human rights. And when it is about child rights, it becomes more crucial to take care of all the factors.

### Human rights of vulnerable groups- 'The coal miners of Meghalaya'- A Case Study

The contribution of human resource to economic growth of any country cannot be overemphasized. However, development is not just about economic growth. The present chapter is an attempt to study the engagement of development with a vast array of uncalled for challenges which societies today increasingly face, suggesting ways of making sense of crisis- in particular, that of chronic poverty, child labor and human trafficking amongst others. It is found that a complex relationship exists prima facie, between chronic poverty and development measures since a majority of the poor working in informal sectors are usually crushed under the pressures of mainstream forces of 'development'. The dichotomy of formal/informal sector remains crucial to development; however there is a growing alarm to rather look into the linkages between the two. This study uses both secondary and primary data to highlight the paradox of development in Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, particularly the unimaginable plight of child labors in the illegal mining areas. The low wage child laborers contribute immensely to the local economy but by neglecting their plight; we are severely limiting the essence of development, the findings thereby lead us to the question, what development and for whom? Here I make an attempt to understand human development both from the perspective of policy-making praxis, rather the lacunae of it and also from a theoretical point of view based on ground reality.

Renowned historian Ibn khaldun had remarked long back that in civilization there is a limit that cannot be overstepped. When prosperity and luxury come to a people, they are followed by excessive consumption and extravagance, with which the human soul itself is undermined, both in its worldly well-being and in its spiritual life.

One fundamental fallacy of our times-development has become a tricky notion, immensely challenged by growing menaces in society. One such challenge is posed by chronic poverty which along with the loop holes in state machinery produce the now infamous 'Coal Minors' of Meghalaya. I propose to call the child labors in these mines as minors instead of miners given the fact that a huge number of them are small children, robbed off of their childhood.

The area of study is the Jaintia hills district of Meghalaya, an Indian state, with currently 49% of its population living below the poverty line. It is one of the seven districts in Meghalaya and is bounded by Assam on the east and the north, East Khasi Hills district on the west and has an international border with Bangladesh in the south. It has an abundant reserve of natural resources.

Table 1.3 Production of Coal in Meghalaya ('000 MT)

Year	Coal
1997-1998	3234
1998-1999	4238
1999-2000	4060
2000-2001	4064
2001-2002	5149
2002-2003	4406

Source: Statistical Abstract Meghalaya 2006

Meghalaya Coal, popularly known as 'Tertiary coal' is found in all the districts of the State. It can be used in a large number of industries requiring non-combustible coal. The possible uses are:

- Power Generation

- Fertilizer Industries
- Smokeless Coke
- Cement Industries
- Textile Industries
- Paper Industries
- Rubber Industries
- Brick-burning and Pottery Industries

The estimated coal reserves in the Jaintia Hills are about 40 million tonnes. (Swar & Singh, 2003) The main features of the coal here are- low ash content, high calorific value and comparatively high sulphur content. Due to the high sulphur content, the coal from the Jaintia Hills produces high environmental pollution.

It is crucial to highlight the major challenges involved on the way of achieving human development with reference to the study area and also critically evaluate the mechanism including the central actors who participate in advancing the ironies of development in the area, in context of inhuman child labor practice.

The case study is extensively based on secondary data (collected from various newspaper reports, government as well as non-government agency's reports) as well as primary data collected in the form of both formal and informal interview technique.

According to the ILO working definition, a child is a person below the age of 15 years, as set by the ILO minimum age convention, 1973 (no.138) or below 18 years for identified work as set by the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (no.182).

India's Constitution does not have a general ban on child labor. The central government of India does however have a legal obligation to ensure children are not in hazardous employment, both as a matter of enforcing the constitutional prohibitions and in order to protect the constitutionally guaranteed rights of the children at issue.



The Constitution prohibits the employment of children (defined as those under the age of 14) in “any factory or mine or... in any other hazardous employment” under the chapter on fundamental rights. This section does still allow those between the ages of 14 and 18 to work in mines and those under 14 to work in any occupation deemed non-hazardous. The fundamental right to education guarantees free and compulsory education to every child in India and the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 prevents child labor in hazardous occupations and regulates child labor in selected processes.

According to ILO (2002) one in every six children aged between 5 and 17 is involved in child labor in the so-called developing countries. India is one among these countries where the concentration of child labor is rather among the highest in the world and as shown in the table below, Meghalaya’s position compared to most other states in India is worrisome.

Table 1.4 Share of workers aged 5-14 years in the respective population total.

Distribution of State/UTs as per share of workers aged 5-14 years in the respective population total.	
Range	State/UT
0-2	Goa, Delhi, Pondicherry, Kerala and Lakshadweep.
2-4	Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Tripura, Andaman and Nicobar Is., Daman & Diu and Chandigarh.
4-6	Manipur, Jharkhand, Assam, Haryana, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh.
6-8	Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Arunachal Pradesh.
8-10	Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Nagaland, Rajasthan, Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh.

10 and above	Mizoram and Sikkim.
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Source: Child Labor Facts & Figures: An analysis of Census 2001

Table 1.5 Share of workers aged 5-17 years in the respective population total

Distribution of State/UTs as per share of workers aged 5-17 years in the respective population total	
Range	State/UT
0-4	Pondicherry, Delhi, Kerala and Lakshadweep.
4-8	Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Tripura, Andaman & Nicobar Is., Chandigarh and Goa.
8-12	Jammu & Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Haryana, Manipur, Daman & Diu, Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Nagaland and Madhya Pradesh.
12-16	Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka.
16 and above	Mizoram, Sikkim and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

Source: Child Labor Facts & Figures: An analysis of Census 2001

The ILO (2002) put forward many causes of child labor such as poverty, economic instability, political turmoil, discrimination, migration, traditional cultural practices, inadequate social protection, absence of schools, low adult productivity, and greed of employees and inadequacy of the enforcement machinery. Newspaper reports show that children are being trafficked every year into Northeast India from Nepal, Bangladesh and Southeast Asian countries. On the face of such criticalities, obtaining a true record of the trafficked children swallowed into the coal mine

zones of Meghalaya is very difficult. Investigations by Impulse NGO Network since March 1997 have confirmed the presence of a large number of children illegally employed in the coal industry in Jaintia Hills. The reports about the absence of safety regulations, the deaths of children that go unreported in the mines and the exploitative living and working conditions indicate that the prevalence of child miners, that I refer to as 'Coal Minors' in the Jaintia Hills constitutes what has been categorized as the 'Worst Forms of Child Labor' under the 1982, ILO Convention.

Informal sector generally betokens extra-legal and non-recorded economic activities comprising a vast array of diverse businesses, products and services. In today's market driven neo-liberalized economy, it is important to gauge the inter-connections between formal and informal sector, particularly, how informal transactions sip into and amidst formal transactions, influencing employment, productivity and environment as well. It is also particularly thought provoking to observe as to how certain elements of informal economy that shakes some of the most fundamental human rights, child rights in the case of the present study, thrive successfully in local economy, contributing to the national economy. The indicators of human development all come to a standstill in this context.

In the 1970s the formal–informal sector dichotomy started being studied. Subsequently, the ILO/UNDP employment mission report on Kenya (1972) came up with the following characteristics of the informal sector:

- (i) easy entry for the new enterprises; (ii) reliance on indigenous resources; (iii) family ownership of enterprises; (iv) small scale of operations and low productivity; (v) labor-intensive and adapted technology; (vi) reliance of workers on informal sources of education and skills; (vii) unregulated and competitive markets; and (viii) lack of governmental support.

Chronic poverty is defined as severe and long duration poverty, usually transmitted across generations, from which it is extremely difficult to escape, and which increases the vulnerability of the poor to economic shocks (Hulme et al. 2009). The Indian Government equates poverty with the tangible dimensions of deprivation, i.e., lack of access to food, nutrition, clothing, shelter, water and basic education, and uses "food deprivation" in particular to identify the poor

from the non-poor (Planning Commission 1993). The Human Development Report, 1997, brought out by the UNDP, argues for the need for broadening the definition of poverty to include deprivation in terms of creativity, freedom and dignity. Further, institutional exclusion based on gender is one of the main causes of making women poorer among the poor and this has serious implications for child labor. Article -23 (1) prohibits traffic in human beings, beggar, and forced labor; any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. The following is a national news headline that came as a shock for many people. (Sen 2012)

*“Jaintia Hills: In South Garo hills in Meghalaya, 15 labourers have managed to escape after being trapped in a coal mine since July 6. But another 15 are still trapped. Official sources said that over 30 miners had gone down to the 100 m pit at Nengkhoh village in Nongalbibra area and accidentally punctured the wall of an abandoned mine full of highly acidic water on Friday evening. In Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya, everyday children are sent into mine pits more than 100 feet deep for mining work. There are more than 5,000 mines illegally taking children in this death ride.”*

*“I have been working for almost 3 years. Here, who survives, lives on,” says a worker. “No risk. Others don't take this risk. We are only responsible for our lives,” says Vishnu, coal mine worker.” It becomes difficult during the rains. But if we don't go, then there is no money to eat. So we force ourselves,” says Vishnu.*

This incident came up as a horrendous reminder of an unequal society that we are all a part of. Moreover, this is not an isolated case, there are innumerable such cases, many of which do not even see the light of the day and go off record, unregistered and unheard. Moreover, these kind of mining activities also produce serious environmental hazards. Cherrapunjee, once famous for its heaviest rainfall today faces serious water threats. Narpuh reserve forest, deep inside the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, is among the few good forest patches which withstand the intense pressures of growth, development and mindless extraction of natural resources like coal and limestone. This marks the violation of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. As it is beyond the scope of this paper so I do not discuss this further here.

### **Findings:**

Work in the coal mines of Jaintia hills of Meghalaya is typically marked by convenience in recruitment on the end of the employers, ironically by trafficked entry in several cases of the child labors, reliance on inapt methods, infamously the 'rat hole' mining technique, local ownership of enterprises involving natural resources, labor intensive work with skills acquired outside formal schooling system and unregulated markets.

The informal sector draws people from all age groups including below and above the normal work age limit. It is notable that in all the data that I have collected, the child laborers somehow hesitate to speak openly about their problems and in most cases end up saying that they need money, hence they work, the choice is theirs, however it does not take much to read between the lines. They actually have no choice but to engage in the drudgeries.

Local entrepreneurs indulge in cost-cuttings, subcontracting some or all the stages of their production process to informal units, whereby they can minimize the labor maintenance costs. In the process, more and more children from the marginalized sections are drawn in this sector. Factors like vulnerability, powerlessness and isolation define the poverty situation of the child labors here.

In one interview which is a part of the case study, the contractor (identity not disclosed as per his will) gave us a rough picture of the scenario near Saarikilo mining area in Jaintia hills district, approximately 100 kms from Latumbai. He told us that he is a Nepali businessman originally hailing from Baksa district in Assam, settled in Shillong for quite some years now. He said he has taken the land for mining activities in contract basis from the local landowner. As per the contract he has to look after all the expenses of the mining activity including labor, equipment etc. and whatever profit remains at the end of it, is divided into the ratio of 25:75 (%) between him and the landowner respectively. This transaction takes place once in every week, (on the market day). On being asked about children illegally working there, he replied in a similar fashion that matches some of the secondary data, claiming that the children from helpless poverty-stricken families are sent here as they can earn money. He did not comment anything on the trafficking nexus, rather said that either the children come on their own searching for some work or the 'dalal' (middleman) brings them here.

Child labor, one of the worst forms of human rights violation, is found predominantly in the so-called developing countries, primarily in the informal sector of the labor market. In the coal mines of Jaintia hills, children get involved in work that by its very nature is extremely hazardous to their safety, both physical and mental health as well as their moral development.

The present study reveals the huge lacunae in effective state machinery and law implementation in combating with the severe problem of inhumane child labor practice in the Meghalaya coal mines. Chronic poverty of course comes out to be the critical face behind this bigger social menace and it is this very paradox of development that the present study highlights. Poverty is the foremost compelling factor that multiplies the sending of the children to work by parents instead of sending them to schools. Children who are unaccompanied by their parents or family members are more vulnerable to exploitation.

Out of the eight children interviewed, five of them were unaccompanied minors who said they were unaware of what work they were being brought for, all they knew was they needed to earn money to survive. A system of 'middlemen' seems to be in effect. As per their requirement, coal mine-owners or managers send information to these middlemen who in turn go into villages and convince poor families to send their children to work in. There is a sense of some fraud being done to bring them to work here. However, details of the spread of the network of middlemen or the amount of commission earned by them and the gendered dimension of child labor and trafficking are outside the scope of this paper.

Miners have to descend into the coal fields which are 100-150 feet in depth using precarious make-shift bamboo ladders. They are not equipped with any safety measure. There were instances of miners, including children dying inside the rat holes. Since none of the labor laws are enforced in the unregulated mining sector in this region, there is no system of providing compensation or insurance for death or injury to the miners.

Here is an excerpt of an interview with Hasina Kharbhih (Chair of Board, Impulse NGO Network)-

*"Rat-hole mining is non-scientific and unique as miners have to go down into the coal fields which are 100-150 feet and when mines are new they require children because it is only children who can go inside*

*these mines. Local children are never used in the rat holes, children from Nepal for the nature that children from the mountains are strongly built are generally used for this purpose and children from Bangladesh would mostly be doing the carrying of the coal in depots. Along with poverty issue and migration taking place, trafficking from Nepal via Siliguri into Assam, Silchar and then to Meghalaya has been what is happening. Howsoever they reach here; children's rights need to be protected" says Kharbhih.*

According to her, the highest earning mines basically belong to political leaders of Meghalaya so definitely they would not want any kind of intervention to take place. Even though there has been rigorous lobbying happening as in what we are trying to do, the best way they adopt is to buy time, files to be passed are kept delaying and then things keep moving for the benefits of the people who own these mines because many of the local people even though they might have lands with coal but many have sold off their lands to individual business people. There have been situations, especially during an investigation by Tehelka, supported by her NGO, children were found in the mines of politicians and when questions were put up before the authorities, they said that they must be playing there or have come with their families. It is really an irony to see things like that.

On being asked about international organizations taking up this cause, she mentioned about ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, HONG KONG strongly supporting the cause and also HUMAN RIGHTS NOW, JAPAN, also has helped to lobby nationally in terms of the supply chain as a part of the international campaign.

Traditional institutions openly violate mining norms, and customary heads like the Syiem of the Khasis, the Doloï of the Jaintias and the Nokma of the Garos let out land at will to private operators. Coal from Meghalaya primarily is sent to domestic industries in other parts of India for use in cement plants, but the primary market for coal from the Jaintia Hills is Bangladesh. The exporters in Jaintia Hills do brisk business. Human Rights Now, Tokyo-based international human rights NGO, conducted a fact finding mission in Jaintia Hills from May 31 to June 2, 2010 to investigate the extremely hazardous conditions of child labor here. It found that significant numbers of children are trafficked from Nepal and Bangladesh.

Five of the interviewed children stated that they were from Karimganj District in Assam, two of them said that they were locals and the remaining one was a Nepali boy, place of origin unidentified.

The nature of work is both over ground and underground activities, former includes coal carrying, breaking of coal and so on and latter includes coal cutting, digging and pulling trolleys. Mention must be made of the efforts pouring in from local NGOs in collaboration with some student bodies and government organizations to curb these illicit activities and save the lives of several children. The Meghalaya model being run by the Impulse Ngo Network has gained tremendous support worldwide.

The secondary data, notably pinpoint towards an RTI application filed by the Garo Hills Anti-Mining and Conservation Forum (GHAMCF) with the Ministry of Coal, New Delhi, and the Directorate of Mineral Resources, Shillong, revealing that Meghalaya has not been exempted from any mining laws of India, in contrary to the common belief that the state is exempted from the Coal Mines (Nationalization) Act, 1973, and as amended in 1976, it stands as the main law governing the eligibility to mine coal in India. Gone are the days of universalizing modernizing ethos which usually characterize mainstream development thought and policy, now it is high time that we advocate and practice a more diverse model of development that takes into account the meanings of development associated with the people from the marginalized sections of the society.

Table 1.6 No. of Health Centers in the Jaintia Hills (2006)

Medical Institutions	Numbers
Number of Hospitals	1
Number of Dispensaries	1
Community Health Centers	4
Primary health Centers	4

Source: <http://jaintia.nic.in/Flash&Profile.htm>



As rightly pointed out by T.K Oommen (2004) in 'Development Discourse: Issues and Concerns', the career of development has undergone several twists and turns. Although many scholars have rejected the very notion of development but for these helpless 'coal minors' of Meghalaya, an effective human development model percolating the different layers in which they are caught, is the only ray of hope. Such efforts have to come from within the society and not without. Of course it would need greater transparency on the part of the government but what is most important in a democracy is vigilance and sharing of responsibility by the public. In this area of study, the local landowners are perpetuating the ill effects of informal economy, ridiculing the essence of development. The over-all trend shows that despite debates about how best to implement development, success has mostly been uneven, both within and between countries.

In its reply to the RTI filed by a Samrakshan Trust representative, the central government agreed that the following laws are applicable to Meghalaya:

1. Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (and the rules under it)
2. Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973 (and the rules under it)
3. Mines Act, 1952
4. Mines Rules, 1955
5. Forest Conservation Act, 1980
6. Environment Protection Act, 1986
7. Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974
8. Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981

Legal ambiguity exists in the name of Meghalaya being a sixth schedule area where the rights for land (and by extension minerals) vest with the people. The Jaintia Hills district has a unique indigenous administrative system known as the Doloiship which remains the authoritative

governing structure for this region. The Jaintia Hills is governed by the Jaintia Hills Autonomous Council. Chandra Bhushan, deputy director general CSE(Centre for Science and Environment), elucidated that these laws need to be followed by the locals as their rights do not translate into the right to abuse environment. Similarly, it also does not legitimize the inhuman child labor practice in the region, supplemented by trafficking. Post 1981 ban on commercial logging by the Supreme Court, (in an attempt to prevent widespread environmental degradation), the poverty-stricken population of rural Meghalaya including the Jaintia Hills turned to alternative ways to generate income. Locals soon realized the worth of mining in the area. Ironically, none of the stringent environmental clearances and the safety standards that are applicable to mining in other parts of India, under the Mines Act, 1952, is followed here. After decades of unregulated mining, the state initiated to enforce its first-ever mining policy in 2009-2010. The draft legislation instructs mine owners not to employ children but it does allow rat-hole mining to continue which could prove to be problematic. As rightly pointed out by Joseph Lalhmachhuana in his article published in the North East Sun (2010), "The coal mine is the scene of a multitude of the most terrifying calamities where accidents have no special cases and these comes directly from the selfishness of the bourgeoisie."

According to the Shillong based non-profit, Impulse NGO Network, some 70,000 children are currently employed in Meghalaya's mines, with several thousand more working at coal depots. "There are even drugs to boost their stamina," says Kharbih.

Photo journalists, Daniel Berehulak and Mark Magnier have captured the plight of child labors in Jaintia hills in the following pictures:



Source: Wikipedia



Source: Wikipedia

The first Human Development Report (1990) opened with the simply stated premise that people are the real wealth of a nation. This has ever since guided all other subsequent Reports. Mahbub ul-Haq of Pakistan and his close friend and collaborator, Amartya Sen of India initiated the Human development approach. According to the former, 'Human development', denotes the basic development idea: namely, advancing the richness of human life, rather than the richness of the economy in which human beings live, which is only a part of it and not the be all and end of human life. Given this understanding of development, the situation of coal mining in Meghalaya raises alarming concerns as it adds to the economy but does not do anything substantial for the marginalized and helpless people including the child labors. The key parameters of human development can vary across time and space. The Human Development Index (HDI) and the Human Poverty Index (HPI) are important indicators of human development. As evident in the present study, child trafficking and child labor appear to be primary challenges amongst many others on the path of human development in this region. In the Human Development Index (HDI) of India for the year 2011, Meghalaya is ranked low at 26<sup>th</sup> whereas Kerala stands first in HDI among the states in India. Meghalaya, among the eight North Eastern States, is ranked low at 7<sup>th</sup>.

Everything that development models represent appears to be in crisis. Nevertheless, an unbiased knowledge of how different cultures have solved their problems would be instructive for all those in search of alternatives to our own dilemmas. A careful look at practice can generate new theory, and theory in turn can inspire new practice. As stated by Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2001), there is as many ways of explaining things as there are positions from which to view realities. We can probably define development as the organized intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement. What constitutes improvement and what is appropriate intervention obviously vary according to class, culture, historical context and relations of power. The Meghalaya Model was first employed to combat human trafficking, especially of children and young women, in Meghalaya. It comprises a comprehensive tracking system that brings together the state government, security agencies, legal support, the media, and civil service organizations. The model advocates coordinated execution of the four 'Ps' (Prevention, Protection, Policing, and Prosecution) and the three 'Rs' (Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Repatriation) by law enforcement agencies and civil society.

From a humanitarian standpoint- these mining areas are wracked with a nexus of problems, starting from poverty to child trafficking to the practice of child labor in inhumane working conditions.

From a theoretical standpoint- informal economy is a complex, nonlinear system intersecting with formal economy in unexpected ways, creating paradoxes in development model; not to forget the emerging power dimension in the study and the hint of conflict theory at work in Meghalaya coal mines.

From a policy standpoint, Meghalaya is not exempt from national mining policies and a new comprehensive state mineral policy must be implemented effectively.

Thus, joint efforts from government, public and non-government bodies are imperative in the region to mitigate the battle of poverty against development and thereby to break the chain of bonded child labor in the region.

## CHAPTER: 4

### THE CULTURAL CROSS OVER OF SYMBOLS AND DEVELOPMENT

*Progressive cultures emphasize the future; static cultures emphasize the present and the past.*

- (Harrison 2000, pp. 299)

#### **Culture and Development:**

Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis (2000) write extensively about the profound connections between culture and development. Various political and social movements across the globe as well as the emergence of new fields of research such as cultural studies and post-colonial studies along with the strand of post-modern school of thought –all together provide us with fresh insights on this otherwise lesser explored relationship. The idea of development principally as a desirable material progress (determined by improved living standards) does not give us the whole picture. It leaves out the critical role played by culture in relation to different practices of development.

The authors have elucidated the point of intersection between culture and development by unraveling the guise of progress –one in which modernization approach fundamentally seeks to spread Western culture as a normative way of life, claiming its superiority in delivering qualified living as a direct or indirect result of industrialization, urbanization and other forms of material progress. Thus the modernization culture of the West is equated with development so much so that ‘The modernization ethic, broadly defined, has been internalized by most people in South-East Asia ....People’s desires and aspirations, for themselves and their children, are framed in terms of modernization’. (Rigg as cited in Schech and Jane Haggis 2000)

Culture can be viewed either from a structuralist standpoint as in e.g. Marxist theory that sees culture as determined by economy or from an idealist viewpoint that sees cultural determinism at the center of things explaining all other facets including economic behavior (Szirmai 2005, pp. 487-488).

Tim Allen (2000) refers to the intrinsic quality of culture in forming our world view. The same community can be either perceived as being symbolically backward or advanced in its act of offering valuable insights to post-industrial societies.

The study of development as discourse can aid our understanding of the concept in terms of Western cultural construct. This in turn hints towards development being more of a cultural artifact (which can be moulded and manipulated or supervised by appropriate planning) than it being a natural process. This takes us to the next level of understanding development in two ways- one as an inherent process and the other as an intention (Schech and Jane Haggis 2000).

The first idea gives an ancient cyclical view of development whereas the second one is crucial in our understanding of modernization as well as post-modern approaches to development.

Though the concept of progress and development have been there since ages however as discourses prescribing practices they grew at around 19<sup>th</sup> century highly influenced by Western doctrine seeking unlimited prosperity post enlightenment. It is interesting to look at the unmaking and making of this notion of prosperity bathed in ethnocentric differentiations in terms of material progress and hygiene.

Thus progress was equated with a vital tool of policy that would aid in mobilizing human resources blinded by cultural constructs to do whatever necessary, even sacrifice to accelerate the coming of age glorified modern fate (ibid, pp.6).

How do we really define something as multi-dimensional as culture? The word has a long and evolved history. There are five prominent ways in which we can understand culture-

Table 2.1 Definitions of culture

1. Culture in the realm of cultivation : land, agriculture, animals
2. Culture in the realm of mind, arts and civilization
3. Culture in the realm of social development
4. Culture in the realm of meanings, total ways of life, shared values and beliefs
5. Culture in the realm of practices which produce these meanings

Source: Boccock (1992, p.234 in ibid, p. 16)



For the purpose of the present study, let us look at culture more closely from the fifth vantage point. Culture as the manifestation of social practices that produce meanings, hold a broader implication for development discourses. This line of thought reinforces the symbolic nature of culture and brings out the symbols and practices involved in the social construct of development. Structuralism is the theoretical backbone of this approach. Both concrete material objects and abstract non-material elements function as signs or symbols producing versions of development amongst people. Levi- Strauss, the chief exponent of structural anthropology, following Saussure, the father of structural linguistics, argued that the study of sign systems can go a long way in unraveling the structure of any system. It does not suffice to assert that development is not a homogeneous category which albeit true but does not quite explain as to how do we perceive (1) development (symbolically) as a continuous struggle for progress and (2) what lies beneath the unmaking and making of this progress laden development in human society?

The logic of symbolism when extended to the realm of development can aid us in understanding the conceptualization of development discourses and practices along with its age-long association with the positive qualifier of progress. Symbolism here works at two levels- one is the macro structural level where it helps us deduce the broader patterns of unmaking and making of development at the hands of power and second is the micro constructionist level that operates at every-day life reflecting the diverse representations. Together they aid us in unlocking the obsession of development discourse and practice with progress as a positive change.

Raymond Williams (1961) states that culture denotes the 'whole way of life' of a social group as it is based on an interplay of representation and power. Thus seen culture appears to be more of a contested terrain than a binding element (ibid, pp. 27).

Culture should not be misused thus as a bounded category with regressive translation of fixed symbolic systems directed for others to emulate in the name of progress and development. Hence when we talk about the relation of culture and development we must stress the dynamics of culture amidst globalization. It becomes rather significant to analyze the power dynamics that constantly create and re-create these symbolic systems in today's globalized world.

The constructionist approach of culture as symbolic systems was explored by the French philosopher-historian Michael Foucault through his writings on discourse, knowledge –power relation and bio politics. This perspective brings power and difference at the core of cultural thrust, highlighting the construction of shared/popular meanings through discourses (ibid, pp. 29).

### **Growth of consumerist culture:**

Scholars like Chomsky have pointed out that modern democratic institutions guided by the doctrine of neo-liberalism produce consumers more than it produces citizens. The contemporary manifestations of consumer culture in a highly globalized world have whole new range of implications for development. According to Latouche, colonial powers destroyed the fabric of indigenous economy and consumption pattern of the countries exploited. These were then categorized as traditional and backward who after independence needed to emulate their exploiters and follow Western model of consumption so as to catch up with their so called notion of advancement (read progress). It does not take us much time to realize the invasion of globalized western culture across the globe. The single culture of Coca Cola\* tells us a lot about universalizing Western tendencies of what Latouche calls the creation of rather anti-culture through 'loss of meaning and the society of void' (Latouche 1996, pp.73).

Consumption clad consumerism is not simply a matter of individual choice but has important social dimensions to it. It usually involves selection of goods and services to be consumed, utilizing that which has been selected and of course consumer satisfaction. Consumers may exist at different levels- as in e.g. household or family level; national, state or regional level e.g. government agencies; business houses, entertainment industry and voluntary associations such as educational institutions, NGOs, hospitals etc. Apparently consumption pattern in contemporary times have undergone vast changes in comparison to pre-industrial societies. Out of all the changes e.g. expansion of choices, increasing income levels and growth of middle class, awareness of consumer rights, one factor has gone a long way in influencing the cultural tenet and it is brand name in consumer goods and services, facilitated by the business of advertisements. As highlighted by Thorstein Veblen, much of the consumption pertained with affluence or luxury is what he calls 'conspicuous consumption' overridden with the idea that a

lot many cannot afford it. Advertising and marketing play a crucial role in this regard as they strategically sell non-essential goods to the consumers.

### **A specific reading of a documentary:**

#### **Background of the problem:**

Crisis of development in present world is not unknown to us by now. Alternative approaches to development were configured to tackle with such crisis. Sustainable development is one important face of development today. However in the global order of things, there is one natural resource that is being driven towards crisis increasingly and that is water. The significance of water for human survival need not be stated here. There are three fundamental problems encountering this invaluable resource today- one is the individual level problem of carelessness as in even today there are innumerable people who do not think twice before wasting or polluting water; second is the state level problem whereby the concerned authority fails to do justice to the maintenance of the rivers and other fresh water bodies and many a times there is poor policy implementation regarding water bodies. The problem of dam constructions is already a huge debate throughout the world and the third is the industrial capitalist driven problem whereby water is being increasingly seen as a commodity, as a supplier of raw material by big business houses.

#### **The documentary:**

It was only a few months back that I happened to watch this thought-provoking and emotionally stirring documentary '*Blue Gold- World Water Wars*' by Sam Bozzo based on the book '*Blue Gold : The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water*' authored by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke. The work is cinematically brilliant but more than the brilliance of its technical aspects which is not the focus here, I would like to draw attention to the narrative aspect of the film that uses striking yet relatable examples from across the globe to bring home the seriousness of water crisis that the world today faces. For my purpose here, I use two examples from India shown in the documentary - One is the kidnapping of Kannada film star by the bandit Veerapan in the demand of releasing large amount of water to the state of Tamil Nadu from the river Kaveri over which it has a long standing dispute with the state of Karnataka. This has been

narrated in the form of an interview of activist Vandana Shiva, also author of *Water Wars*. She categorically points out that this is fundamentally a problem of natural resource mismanagement and not a religious problem as it is made out to be. Another highlighter is the case of a coke<sup>8</sup> plant established in a rural area of Rajasthan. In sharp contrast of what the factory owners have to say about it not really being responsible for the water problem in the region, the plight of the poor villagers in the already dry region, now bereft of water for the poor powerless people, fundamentally caused by the plant is evident by little research done by the film makers and is captured well by the camera lens. When there is already a known accepted global problem of access to water, let alone potable drinking water, the logic of opening a coke plant in this area leading to extraction of all the water by the plant, leaving the poor villagers in distress does not quite make sense. But this is the slap of neo-liberalism on one's face! Water is increasingly treated as a raw material to be used at the advantage of the big companies and free trade hereby is apparently not equivalent to fair trade. "We are redefining how consumers get hydrated" says Coca Cola's 2000 annual report. What an irony! As the title of the documentary suggests it tries to warn us against turning water into blue gold at the hands of neo-liberal inspired consumerist culture.

Francis Fukuyama (1992) argued that post -cold war world scenario, followed by disintegration of the USSR, betokens not just the end of that historical condition but also the end of history as in liberal democracy is widely accepted as the most preferable form of governance across the globe. Thus it reflects a profound belief in liberal democracy and adjacent neo-liberalism as the ideological and institutional core of Western culture. Apparently it reminds us of the modernization theory! Contrariwise, in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996), Samuel Huntington argues that the non-Western countries have not been entirely blinded by the glitter of Western culture and many also resist against such hegemonic practices in the name of development. But I sometimes wonder whether there is more than it meets the eyes as in is it institutions at fault, the doctrines that are misleading or is the fundamental nature of human beings that is dicey!

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<sup>8</sup> The coke plant is only one among the several examples. And this is not just about Coke plant, there are of course several other companies adding to the same problem.

The crisis in development discourse was first highlighted by Marxist approaches at around 1970s but the crisis has come along a long way since then. Theoretical criticism is no doubt important to take the issues forward but it should also result in practical solutions without which our social sciences will remain like more talking and no action.

Globalization as a term signifies the multiplier chain effect of global interconnectedness definitely includes the spread of capitalism but is not confined to that as it invokes holistic and profound changes in relation to culture, technology, communications, and transportation and so on. After all who has not heard of the phrase about the world being a global village in contemporary times and all the hustle about “McDonaldization” of the world! (Schech and J.Haggis 2000, pp.59-60) Not that it is an altogether new phenomenon but its pace is definitely much more than it ever was before.

Consumer culture has grown tremendously since World War 2. Baudrillard tries to capture the essence of consumerism in labeling it as the production of hyper reality ((Lyon 2002, pp.69-76) for people from certain sections of the population, apparently the diverse creamy layers. He states that consumer objects display a system of signs that produces categorization and differentiation of people across the society. Signifiers, e.g. advertisements produce floating chains that may have only loose or no real connection with the objects in focus. Nike’s ‘Just do it!’ or Café Coffee Day’s ‘A Lot Can Happen over a Coffee’ are nothing but stimulators of human desires that has no limits.

The postmodern semiotic concept of hyper reality can be defined as a representation, a sign, without an original referent. Baudrillard believes hyper reality goes farther than confusing or blending the 'real' with the symbol which represents it; it involves creating a symbol or set of signifiers which actually represent something that does not actually exist e.g. Santa Claus.

The discussions in this work flow more in the lines of development as intention. It is no easy task at all and requires a whole gamut of knowledge of the historical, economic, political and of course cultural underpinnings layering the lives of those upon whom it is intended. Development for whom then acquires the center stage of development practice and inter-disciplinarity becomes an integral part of any development discourse. According to Barnett (2012), the main problems

facing most of the regions today are clothed in their sociological and political concern, i.e. the contexts within which decisions are taken. For instance the implementation of Green Revolution in India reflects that efficient production in some regions do not necessarily invoke social justice. Development thus appears to be a tool of social justice with apparent economic connotations. But then does development necessarily accentuate economic dimensions primarily? For millions of people out there who struggle for a single meal a day development can mean only one thing- 'Roti' (as in food); for some others it would mean 'Roti, Kapda aur Makan' (food, clothing and shelter) and for still others who can be safely assumed to be quite well-off, it would mean things beyond these or rather it would be more to do with acquiring newer types of luxuries in life. So then I believe development means different things to different people. Under such circumstances, can we manage to have a uniform understanding of development? More importantly, how would we comprehend this vastly heterogeneous field from a sociological perspective? Like Barnett (2012) puts it-

*Any discussion of human social relations is bound to concern itself with relative power and control over the various resources on which power is founded. Because social power takes many forms- economic, cultural, sexual, I believe that an understanding of the relation between sociology and the analysis of development can tell us a great deal about how and why development had occurred and how and why it might or might not occur. Increasingly we share resources, ideas and experiences which are common but we share them unequally. Sociology can tell us a great deal about the origins of this inequality and how it is maintained.*

What is striking is that the countries in the Western world that are today held high on the pedestal of development also have had undergone peculiar historical churning comprising deprivations, injustice, chaos and protests (even today there are occasional episodes of breakdown in the Western world and in fact today the entire earth faces deep environmental crisis as well ), nonetheless, if these countries are still stamped as developed it becomes necessary to analyze the markers of development. The modernization theorists would like us to

believe that the rest of the world- the others so to say could become developed provided they follow the Western culture (actually a hegemony). The Marxists, the Neo-Marxists, the post-modernists, the post colonialists have all come up with criticisms against such view. At the end of the day development discourses and practices are like the realists, (if I may call them so) would propose to be multi-dimensional entity with different meanings in different contexts. And given the fact that sociology concerns itself with an attempt to understand various contexts of the society, sociological studies of development are totally wanting.

### **Culture, Economy, Globalization and Democracy:**

It is interesting to note Jeremy Seabrook's statement in *Victims of Development- Resistance and Alternatives* - 'Economic system is an ideological construct' (1993, pp. 8). Thus even the economic organization component of development when seen as a line of progress needs to be analyzed in the broader context of culture, globalization and constructionism. No one can deny the impact of contemporary economic organization system on global environment. The commitment to sustainability is a moral commitment to sustaining the conditions in which human well-being can be achieved not only now and in the near future but also into the more distant future (Dower 2004). This concern takes us to the analysis of inter-play of agency and structure in the context of culture and globalization .How could probably the expansion of globalization be forwarded in a way that the goals of justice and sustainability vis-à-vis economic development be achieved along with the variations in cultural practices?

Though we seldom realize but it is true that we have to stop a lot of what we are doing presently- not just for the sake of the environment itself (as an independent end or a vital means to our collective future), but for the sake of peace and justice. We cannot sustain the environment or peace or justice or even the condition of their future possibility when currently they are not achieved in the world. Even most of the policies being pursued are often likely to make these desirable conditions less likely in the future than more likely - for that comprises a lot of what is happening in the global economy. The phrase 'sustainable development' is even worse because it suggests that there is something we already have - development - and what we need to do is to make adjustments so that we can continue to have what we already have. Sustainability is really

a radical idea, and needs to be seen as primarily about changing human practices and priorities, including what we do to achieve justice. This might seem a harsh comment. Is not justice largely achieved? Indeed without its existence in large measure could democracy function at all? If governments and companies fail to act in ways which justice would require, this is also partly because of the attitudes of ordinary people whose moral priorities at the end of the day make a big difference. And when I say people here for obvious reasons I suggest all of those who are in certain capacity to act upon rather than being merely acted upon. So if we agree that the global economy is not doing terribly well for human well-being now and into the future, we need to recognize that there is a whole series of inter-related things that need to be done - government policies, laws, economic incentives, public culture and education - and that these will not happen without the active intervention of many agents, in local civil society as well as in global civil society as part of 'globalization from below'. Globalization in the form of increased political, economic and social interdependence between countries in the world presents a major challenge to humankind. Falk draws our attention to the need of re-examining development through the prism of ethics and morality. International politics must be inclusive of participants from all walks of life, reflecting the diversity of status, gender, race, culture and class etc (Falk 2002).

Where on one hand globalization can be a genuine facilitator of development in a democracy, it can also produce more side-effects than desired outcomes if globalization itself is not democratized. The viability of a more participatory form of democracy hand in hand with inclusive development is a welcome notion but this participatory model ironically leaves out a huge chunk of population who can never have access to democracy. It then seems that all these concepts of justice, liberalism, human rights, equality of opportunity, democracy, progress and development hold good only for those who hold some form of power, be it economic, political, or social. Gender equality is one of the fundamental challenges without which democracy cannot sustain its true meaning.

### **Development and Symbolism:**

Like most people, writer Diane Coyle was shocked by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. But in her new book, *Paradoxes of Prosperity: Why the New Capitalism Benefits All*, she elucidates conditions that, in retrospect, could have invited violence. In a telephone interview



conducted by William Holstein for *The New York Times*, Ms. Coyle refers to a picture published in a magazine, where in, an African man is shown to have bought a pair of second hand shoes, trying to paint the Nike symbol on them. She says that the man had probably seen it in some television and tried to emulate an element of a certain life standard.

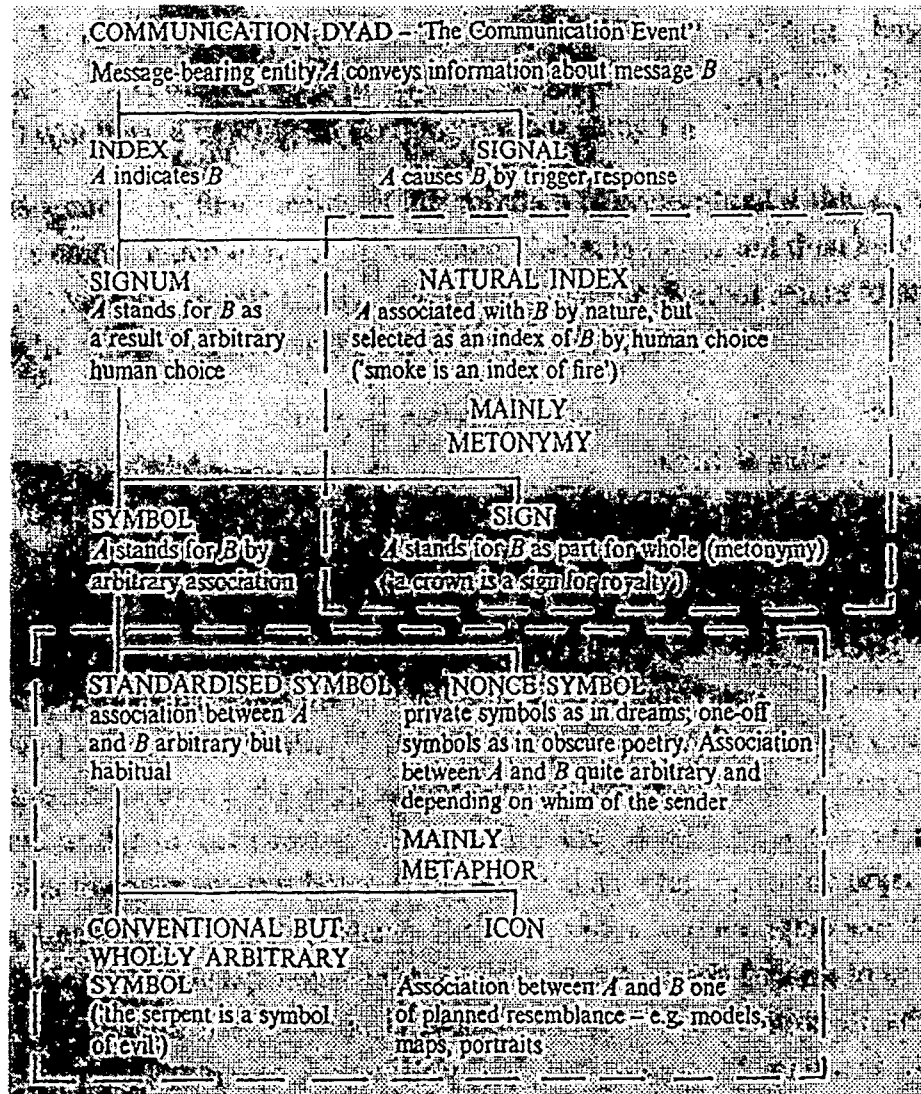
The picture mentioned in the interview tells us a story much more complex than it first appears. The African man in the example is the lay man. What he tried to do have nothing to do with the growth trajectory of the modernist theorists or post-modern criticisms of development models nor is he in a need to define development per se. What defines his needs and aspirations is dictated by something else. For him development is all about acquiring those symbols which signify development. Precisely the simple and linear way to get developed is thus to augment the stock of such symbols of development. This example leads us to some interesting questions. Who decides upon these symbols of development? From the perspective of the man in the example, what is the reality of development? Does it really exist or is it more of a myth that is created and continuously re-created by the symbols?

These are some of the pertinent questions that has driven me to inter relate development with symbolism. Let us now briefly turn into the theoretical realm of symbolism.

Semiotics, including semiology, is the study of signs and sign processes, indication, designation, likeness, analogy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication. Apart from linguistics, semiotics also studies non-linguistic sign systems. It is the latter part that I try to focus here. A systematic study of signs and symbols was pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of structural linguistics. To him sign is the combination of a concept (signified) and a sound image (signifier), where the bond between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, i.e., there is nothing inherent in the signifier which makes the bond (as in it is unmotivated); however it gets naturalized over the passage of time. His conceptualization of a sign was more of a linguistic sign. He also made a clear distinction between sign and symbol. In his words- 'one characteristic of a symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary (*unlike sign*), it is not empty for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and signified. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales could not be easily replaced by just any other symbol such as a chariot' (Saussure 1966).

Moving on to semiotics, it achieved a significant boost in the works of Charles Sanders Peirce. (1931-35). He conceptualized 'sign' or 'representamen' as something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, i.e., creates in the mind of the person an equivalent sign or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign that 'representamen' creates in the mind of the person is what Peirce calls 'Interpretant' of the first sign. The sign obviously stands for something, i.e., its 'object'. To Peirce, it stands for that object not in all respect but in reference to a sort of idea that he calls the "ground" of the 'representamen' (Pierce 1931-35). Saussure had marked a difference between linguistic sign (unmotivated) and a symbol (may be motivated). Peirce went ahead and highlighted that a sign may be an icon, an index or a symbol. An icon is a sign that refers to the object that it denotes merely by virtue of characteristics of its own and which it possesses, just the same, irrespective of whether any such object actually exists or not. An index is a sign which at once loses the character which makes it a sign if its objects are removed but does not lose that character if there is no interpretant. Now a symbol is a sign which loses the character that renders it a sign if there is no interpretant. So to say, in Peirce's terminology, a symbol is a representamen whose representative character consists precisely in its being a rule that will determine its interpretant (ibid). These complexities involved with terminology was taken up by Leach (1996) in a more detailed and analytical way. Unlike Peirce, he concentrated purely on the relation between the messages bearing entity carrying information about message. He offered the following classification-

Table 2.2



It is crucial to understand as to what makes a sign or symbol meaningful? According to Saussurean linguistics, it is the process of signification, i.e., the act of binding together the signifier and the signified which makes the sign meaningful. However, Saussure, in his *Second course in general linguistics* deals with this question more carefully and observes that the production of meaning is not a mere co-relation of a signifier and a signified only but perhaps more essentially an act of simultaneously cutting out two amorphous masses. Drawing on

Saussure, Barthes (1967), observes that meaning is truly fixed only at the end of a double determination — signification and value (that is the difference it has with other signs). All said and done, based on the theoretical aspects discussed above, we can resolve a few things which will have a bearing on carrying out our study further:

A symbol is something that creates in our minds a concept about a thing, where the symbol is commanded to refer to that thing. What is important then here is the 'symbol', the 'concept' in our minds, the 'thing' that the symbol refers to and the nature of the 'relation' that makes the act of referring happen.

Now let us go back to our earlier example of the African man-

The symbol there is that of the Nike logo, the thing that the symbol is referring to is a certain standard of life — one needs good amount of money to acquire that standard of living which is projected to be possible for most people only in a 'developed' state like the USA unlike the African region and the concept in mind is that of a feeling of being developed like those who use such brands. What about the relation? Is there anything inherent in the Nike logo that relates it to developed-ness? So in this sense the symbol appeared to be unmotivated i.e., standing in sharp contrast to Saussurean belief. However, we can turn to Peirce and Leach for explaining this phenomenon.

As seen earlier, Peirce was prompted to realize that the symbol refers to the object (here what we called the 'thing') by virtue of a law, which operates in a way that it causes the symbol to be interpreted as referring to the object. In a similar vein, Leach argues, that if A stands for B by arbitrary association and there is no intrinsic prior relationship between A and B; i.e., A and B belong to different cultural contexts then arises the question as to who sets this law or relation or arbitrary association? Here reference to Roland Barthes' explanation of 'garment system' bears relevance. Barthes (1967) argues that in relation to clothes, as written about in a fashion magazine, there is no speech (unlike Saussure who thought that language without speech is impossible). The language of fashion does not emanate from the 'speaking mass' but from a group which makes the decisions and deliberately elaborates the code. Similarly, in the example of the African man, the relation between the symbol and what it signified — the concept (development) was set by hegemonic cultures.

Similarly, there are a host of symbols popularized by television, advertisements which capture the fancy of a consumerist society. How can then the symbols of a particular culture become the symbols of development? There can be two explanations for this. First of all, development as an idea cannot proceed without symbols. It is a concept in our psyche. There is nothing inherent in anything around us that qualifies to be a symbol of development and hence the association is bound to be arbitrary. On the other hand, why western symbols predominantly? This takes us back to the work on power-knowledge relation by Foucault. This here appears to be a curious case of 'connotative semiotics', explained by both Hjelmslev and Barthes, where the first system (e.g., western culture) becomes the signifier of the second system (development).

The semiotic logic can be applied to the differentiation of world into the categories –first world, second world and third world or developed world and under-developed world. As we have seen earlier, meaning of a symbol comes when it is contrasted with other symbols. The western symbols acquire their meaning in their opposition to the cultural symbols of the so called traditional or underdeveloped world. However, the fundamental question that arises here is how do we call one cultural symbol better than the other? Does it not try to say something like coca cola is better than lassi (omitting the issue of nutritional composition) or packaged Nimbooz is better than local banta (lemonade)?

Each symbol is actually the result of a process called 'signification' — where a signifier is attached to a signified. So calling one signification better than the other will be like calling "1+1=2" being better than "2+0=2" i.e. inconclusive. There is nothing inherent in the symbols based on which societies can be differentiated as better or worse. But these contradictions are amply found in development discourses and practices. Development is projected as a progress in a directional sense — i.e. movement towards a particular direction (the upward moving graph PQ in fig 1).

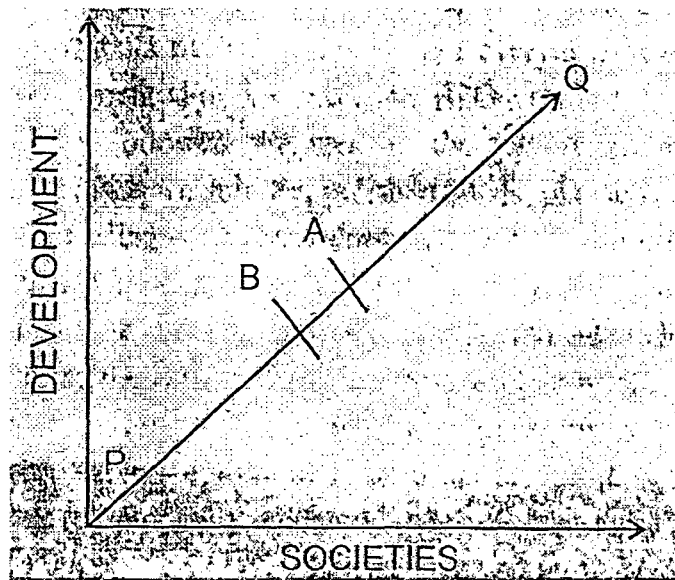


Fig.1

The essence of this direction can be attributed to the assumption that western cultural symbols are better off to their non-western counter parts. Semantic association of western symbols with development cements this position. The problem with this is that, any society B on PQ will always be considered as inferior to A. That is, we will always turn into A for predicting the future of B. This is the problem seen in most works related to development discourse. The point that I intend to draw home here is that, as the symbols of development are supplied by cultures and there is nothing inherent in them (symbols) that makes them do so, thus preferring one cultural symbol to any other is arbitrary and in doing so we will again fall in the trap of imposing direction to 'development'. As we are not at the end our civilization none of us can say PQ (in fig.1) is the best direction possible and hence the inherent capacity of B to take up an independent direction should not be hampered.

Sachs stresses on development as a myth that was wisely made to enter the worldwide socio-politico and economic domain. It all took a concrete shape with Harry S. Truman's speech on 20<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1949, where he addressed the concerns of the Southern hemisphere as 'underdeveloped areas'. But with the increasing and alarming ecological concerns, it is quite striking to think what if such development projections were anywhere near to achievement, had the development

of all the so-called underdeveloped countries of the world to the level of the so-called 'most advanced' been achieved, the consequent tensions would perhaps have taken an even more dramatic turn. For example, it has been estimated that a single edition of the New York Times eats up 151 acres of forest land. Other figures suggest that, were the rest of the world to consume paper, including recycled paper, at the same rate as the United States (with 6 per cent of the world's population), within two years not a single tree would be left on this planet.

So then what is this development that is being imposed on its target population? Whose development are we really talking about? In today's highly consumerism-driven society, is development not an over-rated project trying to manipulate the needs and aspirations of the masses?

It is not about receding to a state of nature, but more to do with the unbiased engagement of diverse cultures, respecting the indigenous solutions to various problems, providing a pool of alternatives to dilemmas.

There is another important issue involved in this semiotic expression of development, which is more elaborately pointed out by poststructuralists and post modernists in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. How far do the symbols reflect reality? For instance, the BPO and KPO industrial hubs in India seemed to have followed the western ethic from bottom to the toe. A multi-storey building, a cafeteria, formal clothes, tie, polished shoes, plastic coated ID, Elevators etc. — all of these gives one a feeling of developed ness. But the work done inside a BPO or KPO is not much better than that of the assembly line workers. This is what Baudrillard refers to as the 'hyper reality' of today's world — where there are floating symbols (signifiers) with little connection to the signified.

Now it seems fruitful to refer to Leach's classification of symbols. Leach (1976) classifies symbols as "standardized symbol" where the association between A and B is arbitrary but habitual and "nonce symbol" where association between A and B is quite arbitrary and depending on the whim of the sender, i.e., private symbol as in dreams, one off symbols as in obscure poetry etc. He, however, put both these types under the regime of metaphor. In the sense that I have discussed so far, the symbols of development seem like resembling the Nonce symbols. The sender continuously produces symbols according to his/her wish and the distant

receiver receives it as a sacred metaphor. What the receiver understands is also not his/her own but he/she goes back to the stock of other symbols sent by the same sender. It is thus a case of one culture completely pushing another culture into the background as if there is a battle of symbols and the salvation /wisdom lies in producing more and more symbols and throwing them into the battlefield for a win-win situation.

Concept of hygiene:

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'Hygiene' refers to a set of practices performed to keep oneself and one's surroundings clean so as to prevent illness and maintain good health. Though what is considered hygienic or not can vary across culture/gender/age groups and so on, however, this seemingly simple concept of 'hygiene' has a larger bearing on the notion of development, specifically in differentiating the developed (hygienic) 'we' against the lesser developed or under developed (unhygienic) 'others'.

It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with this matter at length here, however, I felt it is compelling to incorporate this idea as one of the leading germs in the world of symbols that create and re-create ideas of development. It is also interesting to note as to how the concept of hygiene as another significant symbol of development, (one that is not wholly arbitrary) also gives us a sense of bio-power in Foucauldian sense.

**Let me now start with the second research question- what forms our understanding of whether a society is developed or not?**

Any society is called developed when a difference is emphasized with respect to some other society. What marks this gap goes into the making of models for development. While trying to understand the nature of this difference, I realized that this gap, though economic but is strongly motivated by cultures of symbol. The societies that can turn more of its symbols as signifiers of the concept of development enjoy the directional position of being called developed.

Latouche (1996) highlighted that the drive towards global uniformity in cultures, lifestyles and mind -sets cause ecological disasters, endemic civil wars and national debt throughout the so called Third World.



Any model of development feeds upon some notion of fair treatment whether it is human centered development/ eco-friendly sustainable development / gender development or participatory model of community development. Starkly, these propellers of development never mean one and the same thing for people from various walks of life. For every so called developed ness, there emerge unjust conditions for numerous people. I cannot help but say that in this sense development appears to be another hyper-reality in contemporary world, not that I behold a pessimistic view of structure but certainly would take this opportunity to call for agency to unleash a breath of fresh air to the notion of development as progress, such that we can envisage a scope for allowing diverse indigenous practices to flourish in the spirit of real development of mankind. Let us not be so vulgarly short-sighted in terms of our development practices.

## Chapter: 5

### Conclusion

If the present manifestations of development models have reached a dead end, what really can we envisage facilitating the ambitions of the political man that man is, in a more pluralized yet tolerant way?

#### **Growth of development discourse as we know it today:**

The emergence of development discourse as an academic discipline tied down strategically with practices of development in the second half of the twentieth century is shown to be in large part due to increasing concern about economic prospects for the so called third world after decolonization. In the immediate post-war period, 'development economics', a branch of economics arose, ultimately leading to wide-spread initiation of 'Development studies'. Ever since then, it has culminated into being an increasingly inter- and multi-disciplinary subject. The era of modern development is commonly deemed to have commenced with the inauguration speech of Truman in 1949.

Development as we understand it today has travelled a long way from antiquity to the modern times. The concept of development has all along been a heterogeneous set of approaches that is highly diverse at any given point of time. Hence it appears only worthwhile to start with the underlying ideas of change rather than delving straight into the theories of development. In fact as highlighted by Nisbet, a single metaphoric conception of change has dominated Western thought since ages. The theory of social development, in his view, derives from the ancient metaphor of growth.

Since time immemorial, different scholars across the globe have tried to understand and theorize social change. Social change varies in scope and dimension. It is intrinsically linked with the notion of 'evolution' and 'progress'. The former betokens continuity and direction of change and the latter expresses change in some direction towards some final desired goal. There are various perspectives that explain social change- evolutionary (linear), cyclical, structural functional,

conflict. In recent times, there has been proliferation of what we could call as the development perspective. However on a closer perusal, we get a hint that concern with development existed right from the beginning only that it varied in its practice. Although twentieth century social science moved forward from its stress on unilinear evolution to multi linear evolution, nonetheless it did not stop its concern with the underlying metaphor of growth.

From biological to social to economic to a cultural turn, development has witnessed it all; such that it is today identified by many as a heterogeneous field of theory and practice. I have already stated earlier in this work that simply a pre-occupation with heterogeneity of development discourse will not do.

The question of political economy has increasingly become relevant since the rise of modernity. The thinkers and supporters of Enlightenment arduously pursued the construction of a rational social order, carrying the hint of progressive succession from theological to meta physical to scientific principles, in turn releasing more and more liberty and individual freedom. The manifestations of these turn of events were clearly felt in political economy approach. For instance, the world now had 'Liberal political economy', emphasizing on the importance of the so-called free market. Here goes Adam Smith's famous conception - it is the dynamism of 'invisible hand'.

**Now I return to our first research question, as to how do we perceive development (symbolically) as a continuous struggle for progress?**

- The concept of 'development' somehow always betokens a notion of progress and is seen as a qualifier of favorable change. But we must not ignore the fact that for a vast majority of the world population, this very positive connotation of the idea of development actually signifies a set of conditions, experiences or so to say symbols that are not a part of their life-world. There may be some who try to acquire these symbols but there are also a lot many who would choose to protest if required even revolt against them.

No matter what we say, but attraction toward hyper reality has indeed become the reality of today's growing neo-liberal consumerist society. There are people who have rejected the very

notion of development, even proposed for a post development era but development continues to invade not only official declarations and policies but even the gambit of grass-root movements.

It is true that several countries across the globe try to emulate the so-called advanced economies on the lines of modernization, nonetheless it is important to assess the interplay of structure and agency amidst the dominant aspirations of the poor lot and their governments in the context of development as basic- needs fulfillment. Accordingly, the varying levels of achievement of development programmes in both rural and urban areas in terms of wider access to potable water, increasing literacy rates, average nutritional levels and life expectancy, to name a few should not be left out. These achievements have been uneven, both within and amongst countries no doubt, nonetheless are important to look at.

#### **Symbols of progress in context of development discourses and practices:**

Since development can have variegated understandings, I stick to a study of development discourses and practices that is embedded in human society since ages, being carried forward in different capacities wearing different forms but principally attached to a notion of progress. The variation lies in what constitutes this notion of progress across time and space. At the end my work not just reviews the realm of development so far but also is an earnest attempt to invite some wanting and just symbols of development. The form of governance has always been a crucial point of departure for development strategies across the globe. The relationship of democracy in this connection to economic development has always been a major concern in the social sciences. Post World War II, with de-colonization taking place throughout the world, it became a matter of hot debate as in what forms would political institutions in the newly independent countries take. It was in vogue to opine that increasing economic development would result in evident social changes that would support and fortify democracy. For example, Lipset had long back in 1960s argued that democracy would be fostered by economic development and its structural consequences say in the growth of the middle class, increased levels of education and expansion of mass media that would facilitate the diffusion of democratic values and expectations. In sync with the logic of modernization theories, it is argued that the overall relationship between development and type of political regime is clear: the more democratic the state is, the greater is the level of development that percolates and vice-versa.

However, in the 1960s and 1970s, democracy failed to spread its wings. In Latin America, for instance, it was rather military dictatorship that reigned. At around that time until 1990s it was the socialist model that gained momentum justifying restrictions on individual freedom by visualizing meaningful democracy, one that places society over and above individuals.

According to dependency school, this trend was reflective of the intrinsic loopholes in the modernization approach. Development failed to process socio-economic and political transformations that had been visualized by modernization theories. Hence structurally there was growing polarization between nations, proving to be hurdles on the path of democracy. O'Donnell (1973, 1978), for example, argued that deepening industrialization generated social tensions and political conflicts that resulted in the emergence of bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes. Along similar lines, Evans (1979) argued that dependent development was likely to generate exclusionary regimes based on an alliance of multinationals, local elites, and the military. What has been happening in various pockets of India as e.g. the Naxalite problem or the ethnic conflicts in North-East can be a reflection of the state handicraft of terror in a neo liberal political economy. As an outcome,

*The assumptions of modernization theory that liberal democratic regimes would be inexorably produced by the process of industrialization was replaced by a new preoccupation with the ways in which the state apparatus might become a central instrument for both the repression of subordinate classes and the reorientation of the process of industrial development (Stepan as cited in Diamond 1992)*

#### **Development vis-à-vis democracy:**

Some of the influential sociological studies have tested the idea that late industrializing nations failed to experience the close relationship between socio-economic development and the consolidation of democracy that had characterized the earlier industrializing nations. There are a few significant pointers here that are not to be missed. First of all, the late industrializing nations as the very term suggests are late entrants in industrialization and if industrialization is what constitutes a major chunk of development, then, apparently we need to wait for years until these

NICs strengthen their foothold in world economy (with requisite foreign and domestic policies). Secondly we can engage with the ill effects of blinded industrialization pursuit in neo-liberal economies, thereby broadening our understanding of development and revise the functioning of democracy.

### **Development through the lens of modernity:**

Any discussion on development is bound to be inclusive of debates on modernity. There is a huge body of work in modernity that principally captures linear progress and rationality. It is interesting to look at the binaries through which these ideas are advanced. Modernity and development are explained with reference to modern/non-modern culture, technologically intervened nature/natural state of things, and dynamic/static tradition. Ever since development evolved as a discourse, it produced differentiating accounts of progress and rationality versus that of tradition and morality. We often go back to European enlightenment for locating the manifestation of such ideas, however it does not suffice to have a knowledge about such binaries rather it becomes all the more important to make a critical enquiry of the various dimensions in which scholars have based such studies.

Modernity's craze with progress would need a comprehension of the very notion of progress. What is this progress we look forward to? How is this progress embedded in the conceptualization of development, hence, eventually, it becomes significant to identify reasonable symbols of progress inter alia development. We could debate endlessly on what is reasonable but after all, the one that is both sustainable and non-discriminatory is what I would suggest as being reasonable.

Structuralism asserts conceptualizing social processes and change via binary oppositions, reflecting upon certain hierarchical arrangements found so to say in the likes of Enlightenment/Romantic, tradition/modernity, signifier/signified and so on. Post-structuralism attempts to break through the confines of dominant power relation in the hierarchy and examines them more critically. It reverts back to establishing the equally but un-highlighted dependency of the so-called dominant power upon the subservient entity. It thereby resorts to its popular tool of 'deconstruction' something found in post-modernism as well to unravel the different layers of

knowledge systems that produce the illusion of uni-directionality. The works of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Jacques Lacan and Jean Baudrillard are noteworthy in this arena.

There have been innumerable debates pertained with mainstream development studies that orient various trends in development practice vis-à-vis growing body of postcolonial, post-development and even anti-development orientations, however, just like earlier Marxist and then neo-Marxist theories came up challenging the modernist development agendas, these renewed engagements in contemporary times ought not remain lacking of systematic dialogue between mainstream development theories and policies in connection with contradictory propositions from various quarters of development. Is it really justified to shun away development projects?

What is all this talk about post-development really? Is development an impasse, is it a growing rhetoric, a reality or a myth and what has led to so much of uproar about moving beyond development? Are we done with development or is it the loopholes in development that has led some to look up for some answers in the ambit of post-development that is sometimes used synonymously with anti-development. Why these need to envisage alternatives to conventional development? It is not to miss that there lays some fundamental differences between post and anti-development, no matter how similar they may appear to be externally.

The demonizing and universalizing claims of many anti- and post-development writers about 'development' fail to take note of the aspirations of many millions of people who have benefited from various development projects.

Nonetheless Post-development writings have of course highlighted a very important aspect of this development mechanism as it functions in the present world. Whether it is economy or culture - all these development programs ultimately lead to a pool of unsustainability owing to ignorance of the pluralistic cultural and historical contexts of the people in a world of limited resource base. There is always an imbalance created by Western hegemony. Post developmental scholars emphasize on the viability of pluralism in the functionalization of development.

The idea of certain kinds of lifestyles are increasingly held as eligible of belonging to those who are from the developed lot and all that goes with it (which might primarily include mass consumption). These factors when associated principally with identification markers to

differentiate between 'we' against 'others' hints toward a kind of arbitrary symbolization of a certain type of development goal which cannot be a sustainably desirable goal for the majority of the world's population. This type of development compromises even wipes out indigenous culture or other environmentally rich and psychologically rewarding modes of life at various places. Post development theory is, above all, a critique of the standard assumptions about progress: who possesses the key to it and how it may be implemented.

Majid Rahnema cites Helena Norberg-Hodge mentioning that the latter explored as to how the notion of poverty hardly existed in Ladakh when she had first visited that country in 1975. Down the years when she goes back to the same place things changed tremendously. Eight year back when she had visited an outlying village, Helena asked a young Ladakhi where the poorest houses were situated. 'We have no poor houses in our village,' was the proud reply. Recently Helena saw the same Ladakhi talking to an American tourist and overheard him say, 'if only you could do something for us, we are so poor' (Rahnema 1997). Thus it seems that globalization has also imported cultures of vices amongst other things. Thus it gives me the sense of a limitation of the notion of progress something that has been mentioned by Cowen and Shenton. (1996)

On an ending note, I would like to cite an example of 'Zabo cultivation' by Chakhesang tribe in Phek district of Nagaland: 'Zabo' system combines forestry, agriculture, fishery and animal husbandry. Where on one hand, people in many regions of the world are still careless about water usage, the Chakhesang tribe developed this method long back with an inbuilt water harvesting and recycling system along with conservation base to control soil erosion and facilitate usage of run-off water collected from rainfall. "Zabo" means "impounding of water" in local dialect- now this is what I would call a non-arbitrary reasonable symbol of development.

My work may have raised more questions than it has answered them but nevertheless it hopes to take development discourses and practices a step forward. I, hereby, end with a poem written by my brother in hope of another beginning...

*As we rise from the ashes...  
all lives converging here  
moving forward ceaselessly,  
Progress: here we are adhered!*



*As time passes by unknown  
we move back and forth through it,  
all done and undone  
just as we see fit...  
The barren lands of tomorrow  
All down the pit  
Safely held to the sorrow  
This development we have here writ...*

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