

Economic Development and Traditional Social Structures: Some Theoretical Considerations†

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This paper discusses some issues currently preoccupying social scientists with respect to the process of development and its implications for Third World countries. These issues have become highly significant considering the momentum and nature of the development process being launched in the so-called "underdeveloped" world, within the context of modern nation-states.

Therefore, in this paper, we seek to identify:

- (a) What is meant by development;
- (b) How the encounter between this process and traditional social structures (with their own functional logic, based on earlier forms of production and social existence) takes place;
- (c) What the implications of this encounter are; and
- (d) What lessons we can learn in this regard from history and anthropology.

Development as a planned and organized process, the prime issue concerning both local and Western experts in Third World countries, is a recent phenomenon in comparison to the exposure of Third World countries to the Western Industrial system. The former gained momentum subsequent to the decolonization of the bulk of the Third World in the last half of this century, whereas the latter dates to at least the beginning of this century, if not earlier, when the repercussions of colonization, and later the two World Wars, became manifest in these countries.

At present there is practically no pre-capitalist society that has not, at least partially, been affected by the Western Industrial system. Almost all so-called "primitive" and peasant societies that have been the subject of anthropological enquiry are now linked to an external market system in which the value of goods and services is determined primarily in terms of money and which have, if not to a degree adopted, at least been introduced to Western science and technology.

A process which began with the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe has now infiltrated, to varying degrees, almost all pre-capitalist societies of the world —

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whether as an indirect consequence of market exchanges and incorporation of traditional societies within the integrated global monetary system or whether as a direct consequence of colonization and exploitation of the natural resources of subjugated societies for the benefit of Western capitalism.

Whereas the infiltration, whether direct or indirect, of the Industrial system in pre-capitalist societies may have perpetuated or even created pre-capitalist forms of production, (the goal being to ensure supply of goods and services needed for the market) the so-called development process, launched by government and non-government organizations in the Third World, under the banner of development and progress, is directed towards instituting specific material and structural changes within traditional societies, which are presumed beneficial for the indigenous population. The process hence has, assumed a new meaning and dimension within non or partially industrialized societies.

Within the context of modern nation-states pre-capitalist societies, increasingly find themselves confronted with an alien socio-economic system, a system which did not come into being as a consequence of a natural evolution of these societies, but one which, (embodied by its own inherent set of laws and values) is enabled by a process of history to exert very real pressures on pre-capitalist societies.

What, one may ask, do we understand by development?

Development in the modern sense, generally implies the institution in the Third World, of the Western-styled model of society. The direction of the process of modernization, in pre-capitalist societies has generally been:

- (i) passage from production primarily to meet basic subsistence needs of the community to production for the market;
- (ii) increasing detachment from contribution to production in the capacity of a social person to impersonal wage labour;
- (iii) renunciation of techniques traditionally employed in production to more productive modern technology;
- (iv) provision of facilities available in cities to rural areas (such as potable water, electrification, modern health facilities, formal school education, maintenance of law and order by state agents, improvement of communication networks etc.); and
- (v) industrialization accompanied by privatization of the means of production, investment of technological and human resources for personal profit, the development of monetized trade, exports etc.

The tendency of the process of development, among modern nation-states hence, has been towards launching pre-capitalist societies on a path which is expected to lead them to develop along the lines of Western societies. These efforts are based

on the inherent belief that industrialized societies are at the highest level of human achievement, and the so-called "less developed societies" must follow the same evolutionary path and ultimately reach that level. The exercise of planned development in Third World countries, hence, appears to be geared towards creating a universal model of society, linked to the local and globally integrated monetary system, mechanized technology, and centralization of the power structure.

The results of the development experience in Third World countries, with reference to these indices, however, have frequently been contrary to expectations. The fault, as all anthropologists will testify, lies in the basic assumption of development experts, that all pre-capitalist societies are destined, eventually, to become capitalist.

How, we may consider, does the encounter between efforts to institute the Western model of society within traditional social structures take place in actual practice?

The Industrial system developed in the West at a particular historical moment, in answer to definite conditions. In this system, economy constitutes an institution distinct from others and embodies certain inherent laws and values. Production in pre-capitalist societies on the other hand, is typically located in inter-personal kin and non-kin communal relations. Economic activity, in such societies, does not constitute an institution apart. It does not exist as separated from other social activities, but is embedded within the structure of the society. Members of the society produce, appropriate, exchange and distribute goods and services necessary for subsistence, in their personalized capacity of social individuals and embody a defined status and identity within the society.

In Karl Polanyi's (1981)¹ terms, economy does not occupy the same place nor assume the same social relations in every society, at all historical moments. Rather, it changes form according to whether it is lodged, or not, within kinship, political or symbolic relations of a given society. Or as Godelier (1984) would put it, whatever the kinship, political, or ideological system of a social configuration may be (and whichever of these may be dominant in a particular society) the network of social relations provide for practised forms of production and function as relations of production, in addition to playing other dominant or secondary roles in society.

The infiltration of the industrial system in pre-capitalist societies tends to diffuse the laws of the market economy, with accompanying behaviour patterns and attitudes, within personalized traditional social structures. The framework of modern political economy moreover, tends to place constraints and pressures on the direction social change is to take, often favouring implementation of the process of economic development on the model of Western societies where the system evolved.

¹Cited by Godelier (1984) in *L'ideel et le Material* Paris, Fayard. (Translated from French by the author).

The focus furthermore, in this process, is on increasing production, and economic improvement as Dalton (1964) remarks, is often gauged by the "impersonal growth of a national economy as measured by accretions to aggregate output over time" (p. 159). Lewis, (1955) on the other hand defines economic development as the "growth of output per head of population." (p. 1).

If economic development means: increasing production by abandoning techniques traditionally employed to exploit the resources of nature and adopting modern scientific techniques instead; and by gearing production for the market instead of catering to domestic subsistence needs, this process being accompanied by industrialization and urbanization, then must we strive towards instituting these changes within peasant and subsistence economies in order to achieve economic development?

Before we try to answer this question, let us reflect upon what history and anthropology can teach us in this regard.

Anthropologists have invariably studied societies with socio-economic formations based on, and functioning with respect to, a logic different from the logic operative in Western Industrialized societies which appear to be the point of reference of all development models. The discoveries by archaeologists of diverse material and social forms of human adaptation to specific eco-systems, in different parts of the world (for instance, Greece and Rome, Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China and Europe etc.) have revealed the existence and disappearance of innumerable forms of human societies (including class, classless, state as well as acephalous societies) during the recorded history of the human species. Historians furthermore, have documented different socio-political systems that have prevailed in recorded human history and analysed the conditions whereby economic and social systems reproduced and/or were transformed.

Given scientific evidence of the diversity of socio-economic systems that have existed in the course of human history, and continue to exist at present in different parts of the world, and a history of the human species which covers a span of fifty or so millenia, our present tendency to view the world exclusively in terms of a technologically and economically dominating minority living in Western countries, and to presume that the logic of Western societies reveals the true rationale of the human species, appears not only myopic, but also, if I may say so, illiterate. The system which developed in eighteenth century Europe, and the present impact of this system on the rest of the world, is, like other phases, a phase of human history. The laws of this system should not be viewed with the ultimate permanence attached to them, nor the behaviour induced by the system, as revealing the latent and true nature of the human species – which presumption seems to legitimize enforcement, at all costs, of the industrial system in societies to which it is alien.

Every social system (without ruling out the possibility of similarities with other

social systems) has its own functional logic and basis for transformation. Furthermore, the manner in which a system transforms, is also specific and relative to earlier forms of social existence, whether this transformation be evolutionary or a historical accident. Moreover, human thought and action as Godelier (1984) points out have only a partial role to play in determining the network of relations that develop to constitute a society, and the course of evolution this society will follow in history. Nature, and the properties born unconsciously of the human will during the development of the network of relations constituting a given society, have as much a role to play.

We may, within the light of these theoretical premises, consider the implications of the encounter between the processes of development and traditional social structures, and make a few suggestions with respect to our position on the issue.

By arguing against imposing the Western model of society on pre-capitalist socio-economic formations, the detrimental and homologizing effects of the market economy; and the priority attributed to increasing production, (the latter exercise being considered synonymous to development) we do not wish to lament the historical process that enabled the Western capitalist system to dominate, and exert the pressures that it does, on pre-capitalist societies. One does not lament a process of history. This process, as we have noted, is partially capable of taking its course, independently of human thought and action. Our purpose is only to draw attention to the particularity of the system and its implications, as opposed to its generally accepted universality. To illustrate that, the developments which took place in Western Europe as recently as the eighteenth century were a historical exception, and like other phases of history (which covers a span of 50,000 years or more) are transitory. Thus, to dispel the general belief that the laws and behaviour patterns inherent within the capitalist system constitute the latent and "natural" behaviour of all societies. The implication being that all social systems are different in important ways and harbour the potential to evolve differently. Our efforts at development must not, therefore, ignore the possibility of the coexistence of several socio-economic systems and several socio-economic rationalities, potentially capable of evolving differently, in favour of a disproved unilineal theory of evolution.

Given this contention, the role of the modern nation-state, in pre-capitalist societies, should not be seen as that of an organizing body, entrusted with the task of ensuring, the quickest and most effective possible means whereby pre-capitalist societies may become capitalist, reach the summit of "civilization" and thereby be at par with Western societies.

We would not, therefore, like Dalton, (1981) aspire to teach a new culture to traditional societies, in order to lessen the social malaise of implied changes, because we have no reason to believe that any society is more "rational" than any other.

What must then our goal be?

Effective governmental planning is considered necessary for regulating incentives, encouraging entrepreneurship, directing saving and investment, and controlling trade and prices etc., (Smelser 1981). To these we may add caution against:

- (i) destroying desirable and locally pertinent socio-cultural constructs;
- (ii) rejecting as primitive the folk wisdom and experience involved in traditional socio-ideological practices;
- (iii) expanding production for the market at the cost of neglecting existing and potential resources etc.

The manner and degree to which colonization, and/or the Western Industrial system, have affected traditional societies is not uniform. The mutation and decomposition of earlier socio-economic formations is consequently disharmonious and unequal, resulting in the genesis of more than one relation of production and in conditions that range from those that may be termed as "modern industrialized" to those reproducing earlier forms of production and social existence.

The changes brought about either by colonization and direct reorganization of traditional social structures, or by the encounter with the Western industrial system, have, in some cases, provided the impetus to development of contradictions pre-existing in traditional societies and in other cases created situations of conflict and exploitation. We, therefore, subscribe to the view that government planning be multidimensional, be able to see beyond the existing world situation and that our efforts at monitoring development in the Third World be geared towards:

1. The resolution of contradictions and situations of exploitation for which a potential exists within a society, (and which are consequently likely to transform at low social cost) whether this potential be a result of pre-existing conditions, or whether it may have come about as a consequence of the encounter with the Western Industrial system.
2. Controlling a wastage of resources resulting from insistence on production for the market, at the neglect of traditionally practised forms of production and by exploiting latent potentials (which do not work against traditional practices) that more productive technology might make possible.
3. The harnessing of modern technologies and facilities to suit the nature and requirements of a society, rather than unselectively striving to emulate capitalist societies which may not only lead to a destruction of traditional cultures, but also serve to reproduce the dependency on, and subordination by, capitalist societies.

This approach, we hope, will gear planning away from an unreserved application of the laws of the market economy based on an *a priori* belief in the universality

of these laws to a more pragmatic use of general premises as guides, for interpreting particular cases upon which policies may be based.

In conclusion, we may recall that human thought and action only partially determine the course of human history. The properties born independently of the human will, also play a role in its ultimate course.

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ESTIMATION OF THE POVERTY LINE

The poverty line has been estimated on the basis of the minimum expenditure required for the fulfilment of minimum nutritional requirements of a person. Food is the most basic of basic human needs. A human being needs a certain amount of energy, defined in terms of calories, daily. The amount of energy required varies with age, sex and nature of work of a person. It has been estimated that a person, on average, requires 2550 calories per day.

The consumption patterns of households belonging to the lower income groups have been used to determine food expenditure needed to obtain the required amount of calories. For different income groups, per capita quantity consumption of different food items are available from 1984-85 HIES, and caloric content of different food items is given in Government of Pakistan (1985a). With this information, the caloric content of the diet can be determined. Per capita consumption expenditure on food items are also reported in the 1984-85 HIES. These expenditures have been

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‡Government of Pakistan (1985a).