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‘DS View’, an academic activity in which students, researchers and faculty are encouraged to write short academic essays on the Development discourse, aims to generate discussion on issues concurrent to the times we are living in. The topical range may include academic debates on issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, conflict and human security. The essay for DS View can be expository, argumentative, persuasive or analytical.

The topic of fourth DS View is **‘Post-Structural Anthropologists: A Critique’** written authored by Fahd Zulfiqar.

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Post-Structural Anthropologists: A Critique

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Post-structuralism is a theoretical tradition asserted on the fact that the world around us is shaped by language. Language is made up of texts which can be written and/or oral. These texts constitute discourses which condition our thinking, govern our knowledge and form our actions. The theoretical orientation of post-structuralism is premised on criticising development discourse, most importantly the discourse's ability to perpetuate global inequality and poverty.

For over two decades anthropologists have adopted these post-structural epistemological and ontological positions. Post-structural anthropologists have often been cited as trailblazers for unleashing the reality of development discourse as constructed by the West. They have also professed that production of knowledge by the West on the East is neither experiential nor situated. In Foucauldian theoretical tradition, knowledge which is produced by the East and subjugated by the West can aptly represent the needs and aspirations of those residing in the East. Anthropologists Arturo Escobar and James Ferguson have also extended this critique by asserting on how development is *institutionalised* and *professionalised* according to the aid conditionalities set forth by development projects, the World Bank and Structural Adjustment Programmes. Institutionalisation and professionalisation of development means that pre-appointed board members of IFIs make one policy document and prescribe as solutions to the issues of all the developing countries. This one-size-fits-all approach has been criticised by James Ferguson in his ethnographic research on Lesotho. Another contribution of post-structural anthropologists to this critique is that Development as a conceptual apparatus is being used by the West to represent East as destitute, hungry, uncivil and underdeveloped.

The methodological and analytical frameworks being used by anthropologists for a critique on western discourse of development are borrowed by the post-structural theoreticians and analysts. The post-structural epistemological positions, theoretical orientations and analytical tools are being put into use by anthropologists through content, discourse, rhetorical and argumentative analyses. Anthropologists as critical linguistics, social semiotics and discourse analysts have joined the elite group of post-developmental theoreticians who deconstruct texts of major development theories, models, paradigms and policy documents to extract multiple narratives from these deconstructed texts. Empowerment, agency, decentralisation, social security, human rights, among others, are being tagged as buzzwords just to infiltrate development projects into developing countries. The way discourse has been colonised by the West reduces development to a majoritarian construct with minimalist consideration towards multiplicity and dynamism of the East.

While this elite group of anthropologists is being praised for deconstructionist approach to development and variant methodological frameworks to achieve this deconstruction end, they are also being criticised for relying more on text over context. The anthropological research is context specific to the communities and the local knowledge they get is experiential which if collected and analysed sensitively can produce results effective for the community's betterment. The reliance on deconstruction and discourse is causing to fade away the spirit of reflexive methodology, field-driven data elicitation methods and iterative process of data handling as employed by anthropologists. The anthropological insights based on ethnographical accounts can help in challenging, re-considering and reframing the assumptions of development models, paradigms and projects as explicated by the West.

There is no denying to the fact that anthropology's post-structuralist critique has created awareness on how development discourse shape and construct global poverty and extend Western domination through development projects. The intersectionality of anthropology and development aimed to expound a normative definition of development. Unfortunately, this intersection has stipulated a rather instrumental theorisation of development. The critique on this intersection has vigorously amplified the compromises which the development anthropologists are forced to make while setting methodological frameworks. The months of participant observation is being replaced by 2-4 weeks so is the process oriented research strategy which is being substituted by the outcome oriented strategies. These replacements are the result of oversimplistic and overgeneralised solutions vindicated by the development professionals.

An anthropological post-structural critique on development has not translated into changing material realities of the poor. The ability of anthropological discourse towards ameliorating people of their poverty (through their research) is being limited by resorting to post-structuralism. Any genuine attempt by the outsider for promoting change is being tagged as neo-colonial. Neo-colonialism or semi-colonialism has been cited as governing institutions through which, apart from the bodies, the minds of the once-physically colonised (and now non-physically colonised) and post-colonial subjects are colonised.

In their attempt to deconstruct development discourse to expound the links between power, knowledge, poverty and inequality, the post-structural anthropologists have forgotten to give an alternative model or paradigm to development. The critique, though well-received and acknowledged, has merely reduced itself into an intellectual exercise. The need is to strike a balance between text and context, thematic and structural analyses, generic and dialectic definitional apparatuses, mainstream and unorthodox development theorisations, outcome and process oriented and deconstructionist and reflexive approaches to development. A more nuanced focus on poverty, inequality, hunger, and powerlessness than hegemony of development discourse may help in producing context specific research with more realistic recommendations to solve the issues of developing countries.

References

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Escobar, Arturo. 1995. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press.

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