Ideologies of Development

Brij Mohan

Social development has mostly been a “White man’s burden”. Since the future of social democracy is embedded in variegated developmental crisis, WEIRD (Western, educated, industrial, rich, and developed) paternal–material concerns must transcend platonic guardians’ hierarchized values. This article is a critique of certain ideologies and their vicissitudes of capitalism considered to be the vanguard of future development.

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... [A]ll scientific speculations, of whatever kind, as human endeavors, must perforce be subordinated to the idea of progress, to the general theory of human development. (Auguste Comte, 1830–1842; 4, p. 274).

Human and social development follows the same trajectory in the evolutionary process. People and society, however, muddled through phylogenesis and ontogenesis for mutual development. This journey has gone through numerous stages and varied processes. As civilization evolved, developmental forces shaped both individual and society, albeit differently.¹

[E]conomics developed an account of human behavior as far from Utilitarian morality as it is possible to get. *Economic Man* is utterly selfish and infinitely greedy, caring about nobody but himself. He becomes the bed-rock of the theory of human behavior. (Collier, 2018, p. 10).

Brij Mohan, Dean Emeritus, School of Social Work, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA, swmoha@lsu.edu; brijmohan128@gmail.com

¹ This article uses “Economic Man” as a generic expression without any politically incorrect bias. I do so in deference to Paul Collier’s recent work on the subject. For a detailed narrative of the issues, see Mohan, Brij, and Guy Bäckman (2020).

Social development is intrinsically related to eradicate the sources of inequality and unfreedom toward achieving a civil society based on freedom and justice. Thomas Piketty uses “ideology in a positive and constructive sense to refer to a set of a priori plausible ideas and discourses describing how society should be structured” (2020, p. 3). Its varied dimensions are cultural, social, economic, and political. When I talk about *re-structing* a society, my assumptions include the prevalence of nihilism, melting down of social institutions and the need for a new social contract.

The Great Depression as vividly portrayed in *The Grapes of Wrath* silently revolutionized the American psyche. As human suffering and the wounds of war added to the magnitude of social problems, programs emphasizing social security and public assistance emerged to rebuild the broken system of residual safety net. Institutionalization of public welfare measures brought the welfare state to offer relative sustainability and endurance. It wasn't *socialism* as contemporary conservatives contend. It was *liberalism* reinvented by “the universal virtues of capital and ... necessities of empire.” Liberalism is at its best when any egalitarian project seems to threaten capital and free markets.

The *New Deal* and *War Against Poverty* raised institutional support for progressive development and policy. The Reagan–Thatcher counterrevolution resuscitated the *Economic Man* at the expense of the welfare society, and the “moral state” emerged. The backlash against social welfare characterizes new authoritarian populism. Welfare has become a dirty word that no presidential candidate in 2020 dares to speak about. Bernie Sanders has become a footnote to history.

Paul Collier is one of the most respected development economists who comprehend things benevolently and pragmatically. However, the recipes that he has offered in *The Future of Capitalism* amount to wish fulfillment. Thomas Piketty's new book *Capitalism and Ideology* (2020) has offered a post-Marxist view of Capital that I consider relevant in the wake of continued racial-social unrest in the United States, turmoil in the Middle East, mayhem in the Sahel, Sino-Indian conflicts, and the rise of “new world disorder.” (*The Economist*, June 20, 2020, p. 8).

In a new Dickensian era, uplifting people's lives amidst faltering social institutions and massive cultural meltdowns, policy discourse on social development is a crucial obligation. It's a disciplined endeavor embedded in a pragmatic vision and prescient planning. Dominant *Economics* and consequential *Development* constitute a complex nexus that thwarts inclusiveness, diversity, and justice. The outcome is pervasive nihilism and alienation. To paraphrase Nietzsche, “It's the triumph of nihilism.”

“*Economic Man* is utterly selfish and infinitely greedy, caring about nobody but himself. He became the bedrock of the economic theory of human behavior” (Collier, 2018, p. 10). I see this view of a person as a Darwinian rather than a Hobbesian dictum. The hidden malaise of unhappiness, fear, and angst is a global phenomenon. Social development, as a euphemism only, sustains chaos and resentment without transforming oppressive systems. The construct of ‘developing nations’ fallaciously deepens certain contradictions. Which

'developed' nation truly represents a utopia? Is the United States, the capitalist kingdom, is truly 'developed'? Read: "America is called a nation in decline: a rich country too divided, selfish and racism to keep its citizens safe?" (*The Economist*, June 13, 2020, p. 34). As *the Economic Man* comes to preside over mega-corporations and citadels of power, the fictitious wall between "developed" and "developing" nations crumbles down. National pride—an ugly compound of populism and tribalism—seeks its own ambiguous identity, which further increases nihilism.

This paradoxical specter of counter-development raises many issues that Paul Collier ignores. His benign hope for "restoring inclusive politics seems implausible in the west dogged by the paroxysm of nativism—Brexit; European Union's fears and anxieties; anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic passions; and American Trumpism—and populism. Restoration of ethics, inclusive society, and politics is what we need. But it's not congruent with capitalism's deoxyribonucleic acid.

Surveillance Capitalism heralds a new age of power that will manipulate and constrain human freedom. Put simply, "rigged economy" is more than a game of profit-making. Shoshana Zuboff's chilling observation (*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, June 24, 2020):

We still have the power to decide what kind of world we want to live in, and what we decide now will shape the rest of the century. Our choices: allow technology to enrich the few and impoverish the many or harness it and distribute its benefits. The Age of Surveillance Capitalism is a deeply reasoned examination of the threat of unprecedented power free from democratic oversight. As it explores this new capitalism's impact on society, politics, business, and technology, it exposes the struggles that will decide the next chapter of capitalism and the meaning of information civilization. Most critically, it shows how we can protect ourselves and our communities and ensure we are the masters of the digital rather than its slaves. (Zuboff, 2019).

I explored "freedom" and "unfreedom" in a dialectical framework nearly 35 years ago (Mohan, 1985). In his *Development and Freedom*, Amartya Sen follows the same logic: "The removal of substantial unfreedom," he argues, "is *constitutive* of development" (1999, p. xii). Development is "seen as a process of expanding substantive freedoms that people have" (1999, p. 297). Looking at individual freedom as a "social commitment" (1999, p. xii) looks benign, but annihilation of the forces of oppression entails heavy burden on "individual agency." In *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, Sen signifies Arrow's "social choice and individual values" as the basis of modern social choice theory that determines "social welfare functions" (2017, p. xiv). The vocabulary of welfare and development are intertwined in Sen's conception of social welfare and development. Sen's attempt to weld economics and abstractions together is more academic than pragmatically realistic. The problems that bedevil humanity challenge most of his absurdly

abstract notions of freedom and justice. Ideas he offers—capability, function, happiness, well-being, choice, etc.—are owed to people who usually remain unacknowledged. “Social Choice” for example? Didn’t Eve Burns write about these in the fifties? How do these choices impact policy is crystal clear when you read Burns (1956). Yes, “social choice” is a notion, which earned him a Nobel. Choices are determined by “circumstances of life” that impact “quality of life.” It’s David Gil who wrote about quality of life circumstances (1970, [1973] 1996). Yet, it makes little sense to a person (“individual agency” as he smugly calls) who is born with no choice in life! It does not take a genius to append a 33-page bibliography to an article with little relevance to a poor man. Emmanuelle Bénicout, a French critique, poignantly concludes “Against Amartya Sen”:

In fact, few ever reach the end of Sen’s books, for the very simple reason that they are incomprehensible for the uninitiated ... Moreover, as he uses a gamut of obscure notions (including “capability,” “functioning,” and “utilization function”), considerable effort is required to decipher his thinking. ... Sen is an entirely orthodox economist with respect to his vision of the economy and the role of markets, that he offers nothing specific or original with respect to how to resolve problems such as poverty, and that his multi-criteria ethics does not bear scrutiny for reasons that are as old as philosophy itself. If he garners consensus, it is perhaps because everyone is able to read what they wish in his confused discourse.

I agree. Sen represents the economics that has little bearing to the stark reality of life. I fear we, humans, are no more masters of our destiny. We outsourced instinctual proclivities and strengths to the artifacts of a dystopian fallacy. Like robotic tools, corporations are soulless creatures. Their amorality is a threat we have sidelined in a state of false consciousness. Social scientists with empathetic orientation evolved social work as a profession, which is both “policy”- and “practice”-oriented (medicalization of social service in a therapeutic culture is the latter).

Social work’s professionalization is a 20th century development even though “helping” is ingrained in hoary altruistic traditions. Today, we continue to teach human behavior and social policy as two of the main foundational course requirements. I usually taught during my last 50 years’ tenure at different schools of social work, mainly Louisiana State University. Students, largely mistaught by a dualist faculty orientation, see social policy as a macro intervention that “practitioners don’t require” (an oft cited reason for disliking social policy). The micro–macro duality has been responsible for the lack of holistic understanding of human behavior that we claim to teach. Social work instructors, by and large, talk about mental health largely based on the Bible of their *practice*, i.e., Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM5). The opus of my whole work has been *unification of social work* toward the reinvention and *transformation of social work* (Mohan, 1999).

Economic–social policy and development are intertwined to uplift the general human condition. All constructs within social welfare and social work constitute a fulcrum to achieve well-being and happiness. Pedagogy is the vehicle to impart inclusiveness. Much of curricular design, despite accreditation standards on the books, failed to grasp the inherent unity of a behavior policy paradigm. The cult of practice, reinforced by locally preferred licensing policies, perpetuates exclusionary mediocrity and anti-intellectualism. A therapeutic culture thrives on human vulnerabilities and vicissitudes of its institutional structures and values. The human condition as Ernest Becker contends is determined “between appetite and ingenuity” (1975, 1–5).

William Easterly’s *The White Man’s Burden* told an unpalatable truth: *Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (2006). Collier has not addressed Easterly’s question, *Can the State Build the Great Society?* And, the issue is more relevant today (Easterly, 2006):

The Achilles’ heel is that any government that is powerful enough to protect citizens against predators is also powerful enough to be predator itself. There is an old Latin saying that goes, “*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*”—which translates freely as “Why would you trust a government official any more than you would a shoplifting serial killer?” (p. 117)

The espoused global agenda for social development (and social work) will remain an important plank of global economy and free market ideologies. However, this neither mitigates nihilism nor destroys the forces that breed inequality and injustice. Jared Diamond, a well-known author, is perhaps mistaken: cultures, countries, societies, and nations can’t resolve their problems as people tend to do (2019). Ambiguities of development are fraught with conflicts and fissures. The post-war “human project,” a Western Model of social development was equally flawed. A document published by the United Nation in 1951 noted:

There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated.

Mishra (2017) maintained that those who were left behind in the under-developed world erupted with terrifying rage, resentment, and violence. Varied manifestations of their alienation define present-day paroxysm of despair.

Social development’s fetish with asset-based utopia is misguided at best. Human well-being is a product of shared values and commonly enjoyed prosperity. Modern capitalism runs counter to this fundamental value. The “end of poverty” (Sachs, 2005) is not the “end of equality” (Kaus, 1992). The “bottom

billion" (Collier, 2007) reminds us the persisting crisis of global economy, which is hardly sustainable. For example, even *The Economist* admits that our "infatuation with home ownership" has "caused one of the rich world's most serious and longest-running economic failures." Its leading editorial is captioned: "The West's obsession with home ownership undermines growth, fairness, and public faith in capitalism" (*The Economist*, January 18–24, 2020, p. 9).

Collier's earlier belief that poor, developing nations are "stuck" because they hit some "chutes" and missed "ladders" (2007, p. 5) is wrong. However, his observation about social and economic development has merit: "A definition of development that encompasses 5 billion people gives them the license to be everywhere, or more honestly, everywhere but the bottom billion" (2007, p. 4).

Economy and economics shall have no meaning should humans and their fabled edifices fail to overcome their own trappings. No one is secure in the *Cyberspace*. The choice is ours: neither mine, nor yours.

In a techno-digital future, humans will not think and live as persons. The meaning of both 'social' and 'work' have changed (Mohan, 2018). Social theory, which has guided Western thought and practice, will have to transcend its *narcissistic*, *Darwinian*, and *psychoanalytic* view of development. This is not a prescription for change; it is a reflection on the "poverty of culture" (Mohan, 2011) that sustains counter-development. Absence of counterprojects opens vistas of historical alternatives that might define the future of capitalism and socialism.

I believe poverty is more of a political than economic problem. Varied belief systems (aka ideologies) design complex hierarchies like caste in India. It may also be viewed as a alternative creed primed by traditions that perpetuate a particular order. This is an important takeaway for social development, especially in the post-pandemic era. My view is strengthened by Piketty's theory of inequality: "Inequality is neither economic nor technological: it is ideological and Political (2020; p. 7)." Inequality is a product of politico-ideological systems of belief:

"The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of ideologies and the quest for justice. ... Unlike the class struggle, the struggle of ideologies involved shared knowledge and experience, respect for others, deliberation, and democracy." (Piketty, 2020; p. 1035–36)

It is my belief and studied conviction that social development's only goal is to *re-structure* civil society regardless of its GDP and geographic location on the globe. There is no "escape from evil" (Becker, 1975) unless "the science of man" (Becker, 1968) is redefined and well established.

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