



The Mother's Service Society

4.09.08

Panel on Development Theory

Panel Introduction

I welcome all of you to this panel on Development Theory and its role in the dynamics of social change. Let me give a brief introduction to what Development Theory is about and let me brief you all also with respect to what has been done so far regarding accepting and implementing this theory for speeding up development.

For thousands of years the world has progressed very slowly and also in an uneven manner. Then suddenly in the last two centuries the momentum picked up and development has accelerated considerably and its spread has widened a lot also. In 1990 UNDP made the observation that the world has witnessed more progress in the last 50 years than it has done in the last 500 years which shows a ten-fold acceleration

Though development is a popular topic engaging the attention of academics, governments and citizens for a good deal of time, the reality is that our understanding of the process of development is still very incomplete. We know that the spurt in development in the last 200 years that the world has witnessed is connected with advances in technology, spread of universal education, adoption of modern commercial practices and the spread of democracy etc. But there is no uniform consensus on the relative importance of these factors and neither is there an understanding of how developmental potentials are being converted into developmental realities. Frankly speaking there is not even a widely recognized definition of what really development is.

The traditional conception of development is that it denotes improvement in living standards and economic performance. But it is clear to many people engaged in research in development issues that improvements in economic performance is closely linked to other political, social, educational and technological factors that lie outside the sphere of traditional economics. Obviously this would mean that a comprehensive theory of development would have to look at society as a whole and take into account the impact of changes in every aspect of social existence. The foremost change that we must consider is the change in people's attitudes which caught the eye of past Academy President Harlan Cleveland who coined the famous phrase " Revolution of Rising Expectations" to describe the increased aspirations of people for better income and living standards.

For the past four decades **The Mother's Service Society**, a Social Science Research Institute based in Pondicherry south of Chennai has been engaged in formulating a comprehensive theory of development based on 32 main principles and hundreds of auxiliaries. The research is based on the thoughts of India's noted philosopher Sri Aurobindo who lived in the 20th century. During the past 10 years MSS has actively collaborated with the Academy in exploring various dimensions of development. In the 1998 Vancouver GA a special half a day session chaired by Harlan and Garry Jacobs was devoted to discussing the Development Theory and a workshop was also conducted for applying this theoretical approach to solving several contemporary development issues. Following the GA WAAS published a small booklet entitled "**Human Choice: The genetic code for social development**" containing essays on this subject which is available on WAAS website. In the next year in 1999 MSS and WAAS cosponsored a 3-day workshop on development theory in Washington D.C with another follow-up 3 day workshop on the same theme at Chennai here in India also. Harlan, Ivo Slaus, Walt Anderson, Carl Heden and Bob Berg and Bernard Lieater were among the WAAS fellows who participated in that meeting. This same subject also figured in another 3 day meeting held at New Delhi in 2004 which was sponsored by WAAS, MSS and other agencies. This was also discussed at the Zagreb GA.

We firmly believe that the formulation of a comprehensive theory of development will have a tremendous practical value. It can give us a clear insight into how and why development takes place and we can use that knowledge to accelerate the pace of development and remove impediments that stand in the way of further development. Even nations that feel that they have fully developed can use that knowledge to find out what more can be done. MSS is very pleased at this opportunity given to hold this session in collaboration with WASS.

Now I would like to introduce my co-panelists. My colleague Garry Jacobs is an American who has been living in India for the past 37 years. He is a consultant both in the field of business management and development issues. Together we have been researching in the field of development studies for the three decades and hope to come out with books about the comprehensive theory of development. Like Ivo he is also a trustee of the Academy and also chairman of the standing committee on Peace and Development.

Now that the introduction is over I would like to begin the session with a compact presentation on our conception of the process of development with a particular emphasis on the role of the U.S.A as an evolutionary leader. I hope to talk for 20 minutes and then allow 10 minutes for questions and comments. Garry will then talk. At the end of the session there should be about 20 minute left for general discussion.

America as an evolutionary Pioneer

We know the U.S to be the richest and most dominant political power today. At a superficial glance we are tempted to attribute her pre-eminence to her wealth and military and political power. But a deeper insight from the perspective of the Development theory will reveal that she enjoys her pre-eminence more due to her willingness to play a role of evolutionary leadership than from her accumulation of wealth. Before I describe what is that role of evolutionary leadership she is playing it may be necessary to describe some basic attributes of the process of development.

Development can be viewed as the interplay between two complimentary poles which are the individual and the collective. The collective helps the individual to grow by providing the organisational infrastructure which helps the individual to develop his talents and make use of opportunities he sees. The individual helps the collective in turn to grow by showing new avenues of progress by acts of pioneering creativity. When the collectivity sees the new

opportunity shown by the pioneer it responds by providing organisational support so that all the others can copy the pioneer's accomplishment and benefit by it. So increasing individual initiative and increasing power of social organisation are the two basic pillars of social development.

The organisation of society constitutes the web of social interrelationships, systems, institutions, customs and laws by which society channels its social energies into productive results and fulfills her aspirations for economic and other types of benefits. As development proceeds this web of interrelationships becomes more complex and integrated and the circle of such relationships widens from the family, community and village to towns, cities, empires, nation-states and finally to the whole world. Language, money and most recently internet have played a leading role in making that integration more and more extensive. Such increasing integration has made the emergence of human unity and global governance a practical necessity

While on the one side social organisation is becoming increasingly complex and more integrated on the other side the individuality of the individual members is also growing and evolving. Individuals are becoming more conscious, knowledgeable, skilled and more creative and dynamic also. Actually it is through the innovative, pioneering and adventurous activities of individuals that society in general advances and develops. If increasing social organisation makes the emergence of world government an inevitable development increasing individuality is making uniqueness at the individual level an extensive phenomenon of modern society.

In earlier stages of social development the collective reigned supreme and demanded the total submission of its individual members. The individuals were there to serve the collectivity and their individual wishes and opinions mattered very little. The collective imposed a common set of beliefs and customs and individuals were simply expected to obey the common standard and were hardly allowed any deviation. But as development proceeds society has come to realise that individual psychological variation enhances social development in a way similar to physical variation ensuring better adaptation for a species in the biosphere. So for the last 500 years society is encouraging the development of individuality by granting religious, social, political and cultural freedom by allowing the spread of democracy, education and by granting human rights such as the right to freedom of thought, worship and freedom of movement etc.

This flowering of individuality had its earliest origins in the cultural efflorescence of the Greek civilisation and in the granting of citizenship rights to non-Romans in the Roman empire. It continued through the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment and the French revolution and Industrial Revolution which all occurred in mainland Europe. While the individual in Europe gained substantial political, religious and cultural freedom through all these movements the final liberation of the individual from social conformity did not occur in Europe. It occurred across the Atlantic.

North America was a whole new continent of vast extent waiting to be populated. What was notable was that there were no organised social or political structures to impose authority or demand social conformity. The social segregation between aristocrats, commoners and working class that prevailed in Europe was missing here and that gave an unprecedented feeling of freedom and equality. Poor immigrants arriving in New York city in the 19th century spent on an average 7 to 77 weeks only in the city slums before upgrading themselves to middle class levels. Such was the rapid pace of development. There are many reasons for such a quick pace of progress. First the land was very vast and that gave a physical feeling of freedom. Secondly the state was either unwilling or incapable of imposing its authority on the population. That required

that local populations make their own arrangements for their defense, security and legal and educational requirements. That bred in them a strong sense of individuality which shocked visiting Europeans by its degree of freedom, boldness and enterprising initiative. Under these conditions the pressure for social conformity disappeared and the focus shifted to developing individual uniqueness.

It is a fundamental principle of the Development Theory that opposing forces work in a complimentary manner to generate a greater synthesis than it is possible if they function alone. The forces of individualism and collectivism, of progress and conservation, war and pacifism , religion and secularism, freedom and authority are some example of opposing forces working in a complimentary manner. Given the free atmosphere of America it is no wonder that the principle of freedom generated its own opposite of slavery. The confrontation between these two forces and the final victory of the positive force has resulted in a final synthesis whereby the level of freedom has improved to a remarkable degree. Similarly when the conflict between authority and freedom comes to an end the emerging individuality will be of a higher order.

What is unique about America is its faith in the individual and his capacities. It is this value for individuality that makes people flock to this nation in order to find their true worth and identity so that they can stand apart from the collectivity. An young woman Indian software engineer returning to her home country expressed this truism very nicely by saying that in America she is respected for what she is and not expected to just obey instructions and fit in. It is not America's economic power that has made her the leader of the world. If that were so she should have become the leader of the world more than 150 years ago when she attained economic superiority. But that was not the case. It is when her cultural uniqueness generated a tremendous energy and technological inventiveness that the mantle of evolutionary leadership came to her.

Social sciences are full of theories for explaining specific instances of human behavior such as supply and demand, class conflicts and organisational behaviour etc. But society is an organic whole and cannot be arbitrarily divided into parts. Comprehensive theory of social development will look at society as a whole and the theory will apply to the whole and not merely to its various parts such as economics, politics and management etc. The theory must be able to explain major events of history according to a single process and a set of principles. It must be able to see major events such as the American civil war, French Revolution, the Industrial revolution, colonialism and the great progress of the last 50 years as varying expressions of the same process. It must be able to explain the sudden cessation of violence in Northern Ireland and be able to come up with durable solutions to other long-standing problems such as the Middle East problem.

Such a comprehensive theory cannot be based upon the definitions of a single social science. It has to be based on concepts that are valid for all time. We define social development as the creative process by which society enhances it capacity to fulfill its goals and aspirations by releasing greater social energies and channeling that energy through more efficient, complex and integrated forms of social organisation. We view society as a vast reservoir of untapped energies

and potentials. Society constitutes the web of formal and informal relationships. The driving force for development is the conscious or unconscious aspiration for more benefits which leads people to sense untapped opportunities. That awareness releases energy which expresses through the innovative behaviour of some pioneers. If they succeed society comes forward to let others imitate them by providing the necessary organisational support for doing the same thing in a quicker and easier manner.

Human individuality has physical, vital and mental dimensions. At the physical level an individual is self-reliant, takes independent initiatives and is able to survive on his own strength. The harsh physical conditions of early colonial life plus the absence of extended family support made it compulsory for people to do everything by themselves and rely on their own resources only. The cosmopolitan nature of the American culture and the heterogeneity of the population prevented any one set of cultural beliefs and habits from becoming the norm and allowed a wide range of individual variations in behaviour and functioning. People were so busy trying to come up in life that they had no time to observe what others were doing and comment on whether somebody is conforming to the social standard or doing something unconventional. This allowed vital individuality to develop which makes individuals less inclined to follow what the majority is doing and fall in line etc. At the mental level individuality expresses by the individual thinking for himself and doing what he feels is right for him irrespective of social disapproval.

Freedom at the physical, vital and mental levels promotes the development of individuality and gives rise to pioneers and entrepreneurs who come up with innovative and creative ideas and discoveries. Henry Ford revolutionised auto production with his introduction of assembly line methods and his modest investment of 28,000 dollars in 1903 earned a cash surplus of 750 million dollars by 1927 which is a phenomenal expansion in monetary terms. He is the archetypal American pioneer and he was followed by many others

Different nations have dominated the world scene at different periods and this includes Greece, Rome, Italy, Spain, France and England. Such domination lasted a few centuries only and was never permanent. Greece dominated Europe for a century at the most and failed after its mental culture failed to integrate with the social life of the people. Rome took over and dominated European and the Mediterranean area for a few centuries with her army and laws and imperial institutions. But the costs of managing an empire became formidable and she collapsed not knowing that she could raise money internally through public finance. Italy discovered double-entry book keeping and bills of exchange and her commercial prosperity allowed her to dominate Europe for some time. England followed with her empire built on trade but failed to convert her empire into a world government as her version of democracy was confined to a tiny aristocracy and did not include the common man. The opportunity for leading the world has now come to America and whether she rise to the occasion or not depends on her choice.

Americans have developed individuality to the extent of providing prosperity to themselves. If this nation is to provide the leadership to the world in forming a world government she needs to develop a mental individuality also. That requires giving up the mental ego which insists on

thrusting its own opinions on others and developing the capacity for appreciating other people's point of view.

The development of individuality at the individual level and the growing awareness of the desirability of human unity at the global level are complementary movements. The formed individual is in a better position to know what unites him with others and what separates him from others and where he senses unity with others he can cooperate with them meaningfully. The time is now ripe for converting the U.N. into a true world government. The development of a world central bank and a world currency will vastly help that conversion. A leadership free of ego is the need of the hour. America should rise to the occasion and give that leadership.

