

ON SOME ASPECTS OF THE QUESTION OF DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH

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Meaning of development

In the popular concept 'development' means improvement of the standard of living for the masses meaning increased access to the conveniences of modern life through material prosperity and rapid social change. There is little or no concern for preservation and furtherance of human and social values or enrichment of the soul in the process although eminent philosophers in all times spoke for enrichment of the soul and expressed concern that human civilization will be exposed to great danger in the absence of a philosophical/spiritual approach to life. It is intriguing, however, that even with the state of knowledge and social consciousness of the present time societies can be forgetful of and remain passive to such an essential aspect of human existence.

The popular concept of development has led to the belief that economic emancipation and technological progress are the two most significant measures of development. Hence the emphasis on scientific and technological development, industrialization, creation of bigger urban centres and so on. Alongside, the concern for environmental pollution, ecological balance and quality of life grows inevitably. A curious aspect of these endeavours is that in the hullabaloo for mundane development and control, the need for the development of man himself remains forgotten.

The consequences of this basically materialistic approach to development have failed to satisfy the humanity in general and are defeating in many ways the very purpose of human existence. Thus we see that in the so-called developed societies human beings are engaged in a rat race for material possessions and in the process destroying some of the basic ingredients of good life such as the sense of belonging to the community, the sense of job satisfaction, cohesion in the family, consciousness of social responsibilities and so on. Also traditionally useful values of life are being progressively lost impoverishing the soul and furthering unhappiness and frustration in all walks of life as manifested in various forms of individual and social perversions.

Looking at the developing societies one can see similar trends with similar consequences although the pace is a little slower. The slower pace of the so-called development is really a blessing in disguise because many good aspects of life are still spared and in most other aspects disorganization is yet to reach a point of no return. However, the materialistic concept of development and the continued emphasis on fast socio-economic, cultural and environmental changes through bigger and spectacular approaches can cause, in no time, the damages one would like to avoid. The tendency for projecting the image of national development in spectacular ways, only too often, takes the attention away from the real issues which would otherwise call for modest approaches at local levels everywhere in the country. The result is anything but true social upliftment enhancing the disparities among sections of the society and increasing mass discontentment and social unrest.

What then is the real meaning of development? An answer to this query can perhaps be found in the domains of philosophy and religion. In fact philosophy and religion have common

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premise in that they both seek to establish the truth in its totality. The goal is the same although means differ. The modern philosophical and religious thoughts would appear to agree that development means progress of life towards 'completeness' meaning the stage at which the society will reflect all the attainable heavenly attributes. This gives a comprehensiveness to the concept of development incorporating the spiritual aspect of life with the material aspect and provides a strong philosophical base without which 'development' or 'progress' becomes meaningless in a metaphysical sense.

Approach to development

An agreement on the meaning of development as stated here does not make any easier the formulation of an appropriate approach to development. Rather it calls for a deeper understanding of man himself as an intelligent and social being. Man is motivated in this world by biological, psychological and social needs and these motives or drives direct him towards specific goals. The inborn biological needs arise out of homeostasis or the process of maintaining the physiological equilibrium whereas the social and psychological needs are products of experience. Although biological motives are fundamental yet psychological and social motives are, in many cases, more significant to man.

Man as an intelligent social being is ever engaged in a series of conflicts in life which directs his motivation to a large extent and keeps him going in this world. It has been said that these conflicts belong to three basic types—firstly, the conflict between man and his own self; secondly, the conflict between man and his fellow men and thirdly, the conflict between man and his environment. These three types of conflicts again have multiple dimensions in themselves. In order to formulate a sensible and effective approach to development, these basic conflicts of human life have to be taken into proper consideration.

In a country like Bangladesh where the overwhelming majority are very close to the mere subsistence level and where elaborate traditional institutions have still their roots in the society at large, the problems of development should not be found too difficult to deal with provided the right approach is there. For one thing, having been at such a level and having not experienced the complexities of life of a highly dynamic society, they are still simple at heart without complex inhibitions and crazy craving for material possessions and spectacular achievements in life. Although the need to achieve is a basic characteristic which distinguishes homosapiens from lower species, there is perhaps a need to restrain it, both for the good of an individual as well as for the good of the society. Developing societies are generally favourably poised on this count in that masses cherish a rather modest view of life and achievements. Under these circumstances it is possible to make new beginnings for real developments through modest approaches at grass root levels and keep the spirit growing through genuine involvement of the masses even though the achievements are rather modest. It is also easier to conceive and work for a society which would judiciously set its own standard of living and level of satisfaction striking a balance between the possibilities for development and growth and the conflicts of life in the framework of the true meaning of development.

Creating a sensible society

In a country like Bangladesh development should begin with the first objective of creating a sensible society. Then comes the question of adopting an appropriate strategy for sustained development commensurate with the genius of the people and other major development constraints. It is necessary to examine these two objectives in some details in order to understand their implications and formulate an appropriate plan of action.

By a sensible society is meant a society which is capable of formulating collective goals and work for achieving these within a broader perspective of progress and prosperity for the human race. The problems of creating a sensible society must be dealt with in the light of the two basic conflicts of life mentioned earlier namely, the conflict of man with himself and the conflict of man with his fellow men. The first type of conflicts originates with a basic psychological need—the need to achieve. The idea that the main driving force in life is the avoidance of pain and the main goal is survival is no longer acceptable. It is felt that while such theories may explain the behaviour of lower species, they cannot be applied to human beings. The need to achieve is not essential for survival—sometimes, in fact, going contrary to the biological drives and yet it is almost an innate motivation in human life.

While the need to achieve is a fundamental motivation, inordinate need to achieve can cause endless array of frustrations because in the real world achievements are hard to come by. Moreover an indomitable need to achieve can lead to intense competition between individuals or groups and cause hostility and a tendency to impute bad faith and shady tactics. The need to achieve may become so strong as to be disruptive if the individual becomes anxious over possible failure to achieve. Fortunately, however, man has a natural tendency to protect himself from the bad effects of repeated failure in competitive situations by lowering his 'level of aspiration' and inverting his efforts in more promising directions. Another significant point is that the need to achieve can be profoundly influenced by training, specially in the early age.

The second type of conflicts namely, the conflicts between man and his fellow men originates in some basic psychological and social needs such as the need for security and social justice, the need to respond to others through the exchange of love and esteem, the need for newer experiences and greater knowledge and the need for approval and a degree of prestige. These needs are affected and controlled by the state of stability in which the society is in. For example, in a relatively slow-moving society as ours in Bangladesh, human behaviours and relationships with each other are controlled to a large extent by a culture of customs, moral codes, of manners and of respect for social sanctions. Consequently social conflicts are relatively less both in variety and in intensity. On the contrary when conditions are rapidly changing as in a highly dynamic society, standards, norms and values are also in a state of rapid change thereby failing to act as effective guiding factors for the society. Traditional institutions loose their power to give the individual security and in a big city society the average individual does not feel that he is an integral part of any important group. These cause psychological and social disorganization in the form of maladjustment, psychological depression, crime, family disorganization and so on.

Thus the task of creating a sensible society will require the practice of a degree of restraint on individual and social aspirations and this is to be learnt through education and training at all levels. Also the conflicts of interests between individuals and groups can be debased through promotion of collective thinking, planning and action at local levels for common goals under inspiring leadership. Moreover there must be genuine efforts towards reducing disparities of various nature in the society so that the sense of deprivation and the consequent sense of frustration among some sections of the community in relation to others is removed, thereby injecting new life and inspiration in the society at large. It is difficult to lower the prevailing standard of living of a social group without serious discontentment but it would not be so difficult to freeze the standard of living enjoyed by the privileged groups for some years while all efforts are directed towards the upliftment of the less privileged groups. In the context of Bangladesh one implication of this would be to stop any further investment in urban centres

in the form of new community facilities and services until such times as the rural Bangladesh where 90% of the total population live at a much lower standard comes upto a reasonable standard of living as compared to the urban society.

Strategy for development

Coming to the question of an appropriate strategy for development it is necessary to understand also the conflict between man and his environment along with the two other basic conflicts already discussed in some details. The story of man's conflicts with nature is as old as the existence of man himself. Through ages man learnt to live with nature in peaceful co-existence. It is only in recent times that man gave up the posture of tolerance and began senseless and merciless exploitation of nature. In his effort to conquer and enslave nature with the help of science and technology man excelled in spectacular ways but at the same time created many newer and more serious conflicts which sometimes make one wonder about the wisdom behind all these endeavours.

In a country like Bangladesh where material resources are scarce but human labour is plentiful, the strategy for development must be aimed at mobilizing the human resources for achieving the desired goals rather than depend on machines and borrowed technology. To do it effectively we must understand human nature as well as we must learn to think creatively.

A human being in his daily activities is constantly aware of making 'decisions' and 'choices' which contributes to the development of his 'self-concept'. This self-concept is fundamental to the sense of responsibility and is enhanced through participation in the decision making levels. Moreover satisfaction from work is also dependent on the sense of responsibility shared as well as on the feeling that the work has social value. Consequently an appropriate strategy for development will call for participation of the people in all phases of the development work—determination of the need, formulation of the plan of work and getting the work done. This total involvement is only possible when the development efforts are decentralised and left essentially to the people concerned to work freely and creatively within a centrally formulated broad development policy framework for the region or the country as a whole. The true spirits of self-help must, in all possible ways, be encouraged but necessary external supports must be made available to reinforce local initiatives.

Apart from the benefits of genuine local participation further important aspects of this strategy for development will be that the selection of the projects will be most appropriate on priority basis and their execution will be much less likely to create ecological problems because of the fact that much more intimate knowledge and community devotion would be working behind the conception and execution of the projects.

Conclusions

This paper discusses some fundamental aspects of the question of development in Bangladesh. In the ultimate analysis development of a society is very much dependent on the character and strength of its socio-political institutions. It is the contention of the author that Bangladesh, being a nation of predominantly agricultural communities, is favourably poised for stabilization and strengthening of the traditional institutions through which truly effective and meaningful development is possible. Alien concepts, techniques and technology must not be imposed upon a society because this will injure the society's self-concept and destroy its spirit of self-reliance and creativity without which a society cannot really be free and prosperous. It is a highly opportune moment in the history of our people to pause for a while and think on our own what kind of a society is worth working for and what kind of progress is possible and desirable to achieve.