

# Development and Its Discontents: The Story of a Janus-faced Concept

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## Abstract

The word ‘development’ is at the same time both ‘concrete’ as well as ‘contentious’. It is subject to the historic contexts determined by prevailing ideology of the period. The attempt is to focus on the post-World War II period. In this period, the word ‘development’ has also come into its own with accompanying words such as ‘modernization’. The present phase of neo-liberalism has its historic roots in evolving dominant consensus following the 1929 depression. From Keynesian economics to Bretton Woods, to the advent of deregulation policies of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, this article would be a metaphorical and theoretical exploration to the idea of ‘development’.

## Keywords

Development, race, equality and ideology

‘Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision,  
Will not stay in place  
Will not stay still ...’<sup>1</sup>

This article is an attempt to investigate ‘development’ as it attempts to ‘not stay in place’ and to ‘not stay still’. Development is of course a contentious concept, generating both friends as well as enemies with equal abandon. And it has done so for a very long while, given that it has been around, in spirit if not in body, from the time of the Industrial Revolution itself—at that time the promise was that of ‘improvement’. The improvement itself was soon to generate critics—some of them very fierce indeed. I mention this *en passant*, since I am mostly concerned with development in its post-war incarnation. What needs to be kept in mind is that these problems were not merely related—then or now—to the unexpected and frequently distressing consequences of ‘improvement’. The problems, in fact, were the process itself. It was partly to do with the word. Furthermore, this was to hold true of ‘development’ as well.

Like ‘improvement’, development is one of a group of words that one may call Janus-faced. Like the Greek god, they can present two different visages, each opposed to the

other. On the surface, such words are entirely clear-cut; indeed they reek of precision. What could be more unambiguous, more definite than, say improvement? Yet a few moments scrutiny shows that such words are used in widely, indeed wildly dissimilar ways. A paradigm example of this is the word ‘Race’. Here is a word that is utterly unequivocal, utterly explicit in fact. There is no manoeuvring around race; one is born into one’s race and that is that. No changes are possible. Yet, a moment’s consideration suggests that in fact, the very opposite is true. Far from being the clear-cut category that its proponents claim—and we think—it is, race is one of the most loosely used words imaginable. It is a word that has been used to label people according to every social, political, national, ethnic, religious and of course biological category conceivable. Even worse, this has been done in an entirely unselfconscious manner. To begin, there is the famous tripartite division of mankind. But then, consider ‘the Jewish/Muslim/Hindu’ race. Then there is the ‘Aryan’ race, the ‘Semitic’ race and so on. Of course, there is the German

race, the Indian race, the race of 'true born Americans', etc. As a result we ask ourselves, is it a biological criterion, or a political one? Is it merely a surface phenomenon of passing interest, or is it actually indicative of an innate value? Should we think of it as manmade, in the sense of being the result of the observer's personal biases, or is it really 'biological destiny'? A similar set of questions may be raised about 'development'. For instance, is it a technical concept, or is it a social one? Should it be about the upliftment of the many, or is it a case of 'trickle down' from the few? Do we assess its value in terms of technical criteria or moral ones?

These and other questions highlight a particular quality of word such as 'Race', 'development', as well as several others. Clearly, such words cover different conceptual categories and while the categories may overlap, they refer to different 'qualities' altogether, even when they speak of the same thing. Thus, these words can be characterized as 'slippery', in that they are able to face in two opposite conceptual directions at the same time. Criticize one of the aspects and it instantly morphs into the other. This slipperiness is explained by the fact that such words came of age at a moment that may be quite precisely described as the intersection of science and politics. The modern concept of race came into being at a time when some of the discoveries of modern biological sciences as well as the observations of the practitioners of the new discipline of anthropology were put to political uses by the ideologues of nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Ethnicity had in any case entered the discourse of nationalism by this time and given it a sharp edge.<sup>3</sup> The ideologues of race however had other goals in mind. They were monarchists, lovers of aristocracy and the *ancien regime*, authoritarians with a virulent contempt for democracy. Their purpose was twofold: first, to provide an intellectual riposte to the egalitarian trends ushered in by the French Revolution and wherever possible to reverse or at least to emasculate them; second, to justify the European colonization of Asia and Africa. Thus race might happily be described both as a form a politics disguised as biology, as well as a biological investigation, which mostly has a political goal.

In the same way, 'development' came into its own at the end of World War II. The background was the vast advances in technology that had been made<sup>4</sup> as well as the convulsions of both World War II and the decolonization process subsequent to it. Thus from its very beginnings, 'development' was both a technical process for the restructuring of states according to a political vision, as well as a political/social process to ensure that appropriate

technical decisions were taken. It is because this Janus-faced visage is presented to us, that the concept is so 'slippery'; it is possible to slip across conceptual borders at will, from 'science/technology' to politics and back again at moment's notice. To put it in another way, words like 'development' simultaneously refer to the social and technical 'facts' of development. 'It is this simultaneity of reference which gives such words their *slippery* quality'. In practical terms, it allows one to retreat behind development 'science' when its politics are questioned while responding to criticisms of the technical aspects by insisting on the social necessity of the enterprise. Those who are sceptical of this assertion are advised to study the recent arguments for nuclear energy, arctic/deep sea drilling or coal fired power.

In most senses, 'development' can be taken to mean the no more than the culmination of the Industrial Revolution, but with two caveats. The first is that now its fruits were meant to be open to all mankind. The second, that nations no longer had to go through the long arduous process of industrialization; they could simply skip all the intervening steps. This was obviously an exciting prospect. Further, given that the world consists mostly of the deprived and the disempowered, development assumed the contours of necessity. It remains so to date. It thus becomes difficult on the one hand, to think of reasons why the dispossessed should not have the benefits of modern industry and all that accompanies it—health, education, a higher standard of living and so on. Things obviously become more poignant when one considers that it is their natural resources that are supposed to benefit them, but which enriches a handful of people—preponderantly foreigners, but also a handful of local elites. On the other hand, its very provenance dictates that at the heart of 'development' lies a fatal duality. This is not simply the matter of the negative and the unforeseen but frequently devastating consequences of development/industrialization. It is also a matter of the ideological and theoretical biases that were quite implicit in the concept. Today we call it Technicism. I will come to this matter in due course; here I wish to note how several early critics responded to both faces of Janus. It should not surprise us that the individuals I mention were all poets; poets are often the first to catch on to such things. One of the earliest and harsh critics of the Industrial Revolution was the poet William Blake. By 1804, he was concerned enough of the way industrial development was destroying the English landscape to ask whether Jerusalem could be 'buildded here/among these dark Satanic mills?'<sup>5</sup>

Whilst ‘Satanic mills’ is literally where Satan is meant to keep his slaves, it existed in reality. The reference is to the Albion Flour Mill, the first steam driven flour mill in London and which polluted the entire neighbourhood with its discharges. But two years earlier, Blake had already perceived the technicist ideology that drove the industrialization of Britain. As early as 1802, he wrote begging God, ‘And twofold always, may God us keep/ From single vision and Newton’s sleep.’<sup>6</sup> For the poet, who did not at all reject science and the scientific enterprise as long as it was not reductionist (Blake was incensed by what he saw as Newton’s ‘clockwork model’ of the universe) and was able to see multiple significances in every phenomenon. ‘Twofold’ vision was science as part of the imagination, which in Blake’s world-view covered a very wide spectrum indeed. But ‘single vision’ represented a unilinear, reductionist, technical point of view which ruthlessly suppressed all alternative visions of society.<sup>7</sup> Roughly a century or so later, Rabindranath Tagore responded caustically to a group of people extolling the virtues of the new fangled rice mills, ‘Your rice mills are suffocating my blue skies to death.’ This is a comment that is comprehensible to not merely every environmentalist, but to climate scientists as a whole. And a few decades later, Eliot had this metaphor for modern man—‘... [H]is only monuments the asphalt roads/And a thousand lost golf balls’ (Eliot, *The Waste Land*). We will have reason to revisit Blake and Tagore later, but for the moment I would like to follow up Eliot’s metaphor and consider that symbol of national development, the modern road.

The relationship between transport and development seems clear enough, if for no other reason, ‘because the ingredients of a satisfactory life, from food and health to education and employment, are generally available only if there is adequate means of moving people, goods and ideas’.<sup>8</sup> And in the pantheon of transport, roads—the modern highway and even, the urban roadway—occupy a very special place. More than air travel, and more than even the railway, roads are a representative of both the romance of travel as well as of development status. Roads are a symbol of our desire to get away, to leave the familiar behind, and go from ‘here’ to ‘there’. At the same time, roads are an index of the state of a country’s ‘maturity’, as they move goods and people flexibly, speedily and indeed, from door to door. As for developing countries, ‘[t]he multiplier effects of road transport are potentially vast and the linkages, both forward [...] and backward [...] and employment generated help to give road transport its special place in the development process’ (Hilling, 1996, p. 196).

(India has always had questions raised about its status as an industrial nation because of the quality of its roads. Given the state of Indian roadways and the way they are used and maintained, such comments are by no means entirely unfair.) As road networks become more extensive and more far flung, the distant parts of the country are put in touch with one another. Indeed, the modern road has stimulated improvements in the quality of wheeled vehicles, which improvement has in turn helped improve road surface. Nor is this a new phenomenon. It has been noticed from the days of the early empires, especially the Roman and Chinese. Moreover, it is a cheaper alternative to flying. It would be fair to say that in almost every country, the road is the dominant mode of transporting both people as well as goods. The modern road, in short, is an icon of development.

However, it is a contradictory icon, a characteristic it shares with modernity itself and thus, with industry and development. It is of course widely accepted nowadays that modernity, as well as industrial development, have presented as a dilemma. Modernity’s effects, even its most intended ones, have had contradictory results! This is true whether one considers the unintended consequences of industrial projects, or of nationalism, dams and irrigation projects or medical practices. What could therefore represent the contradictory aspects of modernity better than the modern road, especially the modern multi-lane highway? It stretches straight as a die, from ‘here’ to ‘there’, mocking all barriers by passing over them, or under them or even through them. It is the very personification of the applied sciences and seems the very symbol of the endless march of social progress as it provides for the rapid movement of people and goods. Moreover, it does so in a manner scarcely imaginable little more than a century ago. As a concretization (pun very much intended) of technology, the modern highway/road presents an obdurate surface, which is capable of defying nature in most of its manifestations. Meanwhile, as though like a mordant caricature of modernity, its surface performs a classificatory function. To use it is to automatically be categorized. Using the modern highway or even the urban road entails falling into, or to put it more accurately, joining a flow of vehicles: slow cars at one edge, faster ones at other and often a special stream/lane for those overtaking others. In many countries, urban roads will have a special lane marked out for bicycle riders and even a designated lane for buses, both of which are segregated from car users. It is noticeable that the vehicles, though separated from one another by only by markings on the road surface, are

segregated one from the other by an elaborate system of mutually accepted strict rules (the Highway Code) as well as conventions ('don't be a road hog'). Casually breaching either can—and often does—result in disaster (but of this, in a moment). Further, like that which it is a metaphor for, the highway seems to carry on endlessly; one just leads to another. The traveller can only opt out by taking an exit, to one's own city, town, suburb or village.

From a vantage point of sufficient height, however, a distancing possibility unavailable in earlier eras, we can see that this image is chimerical. Roads do not end because all roads are connected. Eventually, narrow local roads join wider branches, leave town and finally join a highway and carry on. It only seems endless because it is really a closed loop. In fact, it is more a Möbius strip than anything else. Carry on going on one surface and you somehow arrive on another. Meanwhile, to carry the analogy on, the ordered movement organized by the system breaks down regularly. This may not always due to external forces. Sometimes drivers take liberties with the system and large accidents, involving many vehicles, occur. Movement stops on the road for miles. At other times, the road is overcrowded, perhaps due to a public holiday. Again, movement stops for miles—the famous 'tailback' so dreaded by highway users everywhere. Within towns and cities too, traffic flows interrupt one another; the threat of pedestrians straying on to the road is a constant factor, especially in school areas. In the 'developing world' road traffic is routinely interspersed with pedestrian traffic within town as well as city. Shopping precincts cause parking and consequently, movement problems, though this is indeed a problem everywhere. In many countries, the issue sometimes may be that of mutual incomprehension.<sup>9</sup> The inherent order of the system may give rise to disorder. One careless driver using the road less than thoughtfully may cause a multiple pile-up. The traffic flow may well stop for miles. As the room for manoeuvre becomes restricted, people travelling at considerable speeds but far from the road may find that they have come to a grinding halt. The smaller side roads may get choked as more and more people use the less frequented roads to get a move on. The source of the system's strength and order, its fixed nature, is now compromised and turns on itself; and the promise of harmony and freedom from constraint, inherent in the system, often remains just that—a promise.

Roads, apart from being a metaphor for linear progress—and its pitfalls—also serve to illustrate the flip side of modernity, the one where 'all that is solid melts in the air'. The highway linking two distant points and passing through

the countryside brings in its train an entire range of consequences. New forms are created in every direction, old ones destroyed or changed utterly, traditional ways threatened. Sylvan areas, for instance, might have to give way to concrete. Nearer the cities and for some distance, once uninhabited land turns into housing development, or suburbia—in many countries, even the infamous 'ribbon development'! People move in and such housing developments, even if seen as the epitome of modern living and representing a distinct upward movement in standards for many of their residents, nevertheless remain clouded by the miasma of 'sameness'. The patina of age that gives an established town or residential area its distinctness—occasionally derisively referred to as 'quaint'—is missing in such housing developments. If the road, on the other hand, passes near a village, small town or pre-existing housing development, or worse, through it, major inconvenience often follows. These can include sharp rises in the accident rate, intolerable levels of noise, property damage caused by the flow of heavy vehicles, air pollution and much else. In the 'Third World' in particular, it may create grievous problems for tribal populations by destroying woodland and forest and totally disrupting established lifestyles. At the same time however, previously isolated groups are connected—even if by *force majeure*—to the rest of the world. New job opportunities, along with new forms of exploitation are created and communication with the rest of the world opened up. Old traditions and forms not only mutate into new versions, but also find new purposes and audiences. Similar changes, though different in scale as well as style, are noticeable when city roads undergo radical alteration. The residents along the road find their lives changed.<sup>10</sup> Amongst other things, a widened road giving access to important areas of the city may well raise property prices, or bring it down.

This then is the core feature of the modern road, one that, in a sense, reflects the duality of modernity. A rigid, unmoving structure, it has only one real function: to speed up movement, but under strict regulations. People can get from 'here' to 'there' at rapid speeds, but are in no real position to look at their surroundings. Their eyes are firmly fixed on the road ahead. Ease of movement brings in its train not merely the possibility of long delays, but also new 'illnesses' such as 'road rage'. It is worth noting that similar features are also part of plane travel. Crowded aircraft, featureless airports, unexpected and long delays, traffic jams to and from the airport, the fear of crashes and the notorious malign official, all combine to produce the occasional bouts of 'road rage' in the air traveller. Train

travel seems less strenuous, until one enters the Indian railway station. It is not merely the density of the travelling public; a feeling that things may suddenly go wrong is palpable all the time. Much worse, they may be delayed, perhaps for hours. Further, even high speeds can have contrary effects; witness the complaints of the people living near the tracks of the bullet train. What is important to keep in mind is that none of this is limited to travelling in countries such as India. The very structure of transporting large masses of people seems to have this ambivalence built in. This having been said, it remains true that all the elements described are seen, in various combinations, more frequently in countries like India than in many other parts of the world. Indiscriminate addition of vehicles, indifference towards road maintenance, encroachments on the pavements, pedestrians on the road and off it, all these convert Indian roads into not merely transport bottlenecks, but also death traps.<sup>11</sup>

Let us say that some years ago we were standing at the crossing of two of Calcutta's busiest roads, Chowringhee and Park Street, at about 1:50 pm. It is a midsummer's afternoon, blinding bright and scorching hot. Here is what one would experience. The roads choked with cars, buses and various two wheeled vehicles, their exhaust fumes rendering the air virtually unbreathable. Taxis and buses are the worst offenders, the buses—both government and privately owned—belching oily black fumes. The popular explanation is that this is the result of using kerosene as an adulterant in fuel.<sup>12</sup> There are several policemen, of various ranks, placed at strategic points of the road. Many of them carry walkie-talkies. The pavements are crowded with pedestrians, who are chafing at the bit in their urge to cross. They keep stepping on to the road surface and thus reduce the space for cars. In their turn, the cars do not really come to a stop because of the pedestrians; they merely slow down to a crawl and carry on. The pedestrians meanwhile attempt to weave their way through the traffic. The procession of cars seems to carry for an indefinite period before showing any sign of slackening. When this happens, one of the senior policemen speaks into his walkie-talkie before giving an order. The lights change. However, the change is directly from red to green; there is no amber light to allow the pedestrians to cross, whilst motorists get into gear. As the lights change, vehicles rush forward as the air reverberates to the sound of a million hooters. The cars virtually jostle one another to be on their way. The buses (mostly the privately owned ones) pile up behind each other, the conductors screaming their routes to attract fares. Occasionally they block the crossing itself. In

the middle of all this are the pedestrians. The surface of the pavement is broken in many places; flagstones have frequently not been replaced, or replaced in such a manner that the unwary are easily tripped. The road surface on the other hand is in noticeably better condition. Not having even the traffic regulations on their side—given that 'there is no specifically designated interval when they can freely cross the road'—pedestrians can and do cross when and where they can. Now imagine this scene repeating itself at night, under the illumination provided by dim monochrome lights. Similar cities repeat themselves *ad nauseum* in other Indian towns and cities.

There are two points of note in the preceding catalogue of terrors. Both are indicative of the principles on which development has been based and practised and, not infrequently inflicted, upon various citizenries. I am not thinking here of pollution, congestion, dodgy drivers and suicidal pedestrians. What is noteworthy is, first, the road surface is in better condition generally than the pavement; and second, the lack of amber suggests that there is virtually no thought has been entertained regarding the pedestrian's well-being. What it signifies is that we mostly have a development process which is top-down and, often leaves the common citizen out of its calculations. Of course this is a rather familiar principle everywhere nowadays. Unfortunately this tendency has been part of 'development' from its early days and was most certainly noticeable from the early days of the Industrial Revolution onwards. However, it is the modern, that is, post-World War II incarnation that concerns us here. I have not considered development in the colonial period because of a number of reasons, including (i) it was haphazard; (ii) that it was utterly exploitative and basically for the benefit of the colonial masters and (iii) any benefits accruing to the colonial subjects were the result of their own efforts, with the colonial powers often doing their best to hamper any development. It had little to do with any 'development' in the modern sense of the word. In the aftermath of World War II, a consensus appeared among the developed liberal democracies that things simply could not be allowed to go on as they had during the 1930s.

There were several issues that helped form this consensus. First, there was the Great Depression of the 1929 and onwards. This was an economic disaster which decimated entire economies and left the colonies gasping for breath. Further, it was held that the economic destabilization caused by the depression fed directly into the World War II. (Little attempt was made, however, to judge how much, or whether at all, the Treaty of Versailles had anything to do



with World War II.) Second, there were the consequences of the war itself, with Europe devastated east to west. The shattered (west) European economies had to be rebuilt. Third, there was the period of decolonization that followed World War II. There was, however, a ghost at the banquet. There was the presence of the Soviet Union, which had been the decisive factor of the Allied victory and in the process, had come out of the conflict badly hurt but unbowed. It was now attempting to build itself to be a competitor of America. And within a short while communist China would make its presence felt. Both countries were to offer radically different alternatives to visions of capitalist development. Nonetheless, there was a general consensus that new organizations—economic and political, multilateral and institutional—were needed, under the aegis of the UN, in order to ensure both peace and prosperity.

Such was the pious hope when the victors met at Bretton Woods in 1944. Following this, a number of institutions did indeed come up between 1944 and 1945, including the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD, a subsidiary of the WB) and so on. On the other hand, '(t)he world, however, was still a very unequal place. Any hope that their colonial masters would lead the poorer countries to greater prosperity flickered and died as the rise of the US called time on European as well as Japanese colonialism' (Toye, 2006, p. 22). Despite this, there was some attempt made to alleviate poverty through the decade of the 1950s and 1960s. Countries such as India followed the Russian lead and had five year plans and invested in heavy industry and constructed large dams. This was both to improve agriculture, boost manufacturing, as well as for the purposes of 'import substitution'. The fact that nationalist leaders such as Nehru refused to toe the anti-communist line professed by the United States (US) meant that India was low on the list of those who were to receive WB aid. It is important to remind ourselves that for the first country to receive WB aid, that is, France; the condition was that they get rid of the communists in their cabinet. Within twenty four hours of the communists departing, France received 250 million dollars in aid. Two other countries requesting funds, Poland and China, were both rejected. Through the 1950s and 1960s, the WB remained a parsimonious and cautious lender. It laid down fairly strict conditions (severely balanced budgets, priority to repaying loans over all else, etc) and generally doled out much less than requested. Its priorities changed from late 1947, when European countries started receiving money under the Marshall Plan. It shifted its loans to

non-European countries. The result was that the bank started giving loans for infrastructure building—ports, highways and roads, electricity production and so on. It was in 1968 that the attitude of the WB really seemed to change. The amount loaned to the Third World increased massively as large amounts of money flowed into it. Moreover, the bank encouraged countries from the global South to borrow from private banks, which were flush with petrodollars in need of recycling. All of this was under the leadership of the bank's new President, Robert McNamara, once Secretary of Defense under Lyndon Johnson and prior to that, President of the Ford Motor Company. McNamara breathed a new technocratic life into the WB.

This is not to say that 'development' was not already a technical matter. It was. The basic notion of development was that economists would advise governments. 'This new sub-discipline was distinguished, above all, by its exploration of the problem of government engineered economic transformation [...] The key assumption [...] was that was that governments needed guidance from economists ...' (Toye, 2006, p. 21). Development economics was economics for all that, as a subject had become increasingly technical through the first half of the twentieth century. The technicalities lay not merely in the increasingly arcane theories that were being formulated; it was also that economics had been turning increasingly mathematical throughout this period. It had in fact started from the time of Alfred Marshall, in the 1890s. Throughout this period, neo-classical economics borrowed concepts from the sciences and statistical maths, including equilibrium, feedback loops, efficiency, probability, distribution and so on and, applied them to society and social behaviour. In order to do so, however, certain assumptions had to be made. These included turning utility into a simple choice among a range of goods, treating such preferences as the core logic of economic behaviour, treating individuals and goods as abstractions and so on. The result was a discipline that aimed for scientific rigour through the use of mathematics, but on the basis of a most peculiar picture of society, a consequence of society being tied to the Procrustean bed of mathematics and pruned accordingly. What was fascinating was the startling inability of the discipline, complete with its mathematical appurtenances, of being able to predict the Great Depression, anymore than they were able to predict the great meltdown of 2009. Even worse, there were the serious feuds between various schools of economic thought, especially between Keynesianism and the Austrian School, which, in due course, was to bear its bitter fruit.

In the meanwhile, Keynes ruled development economics and McNamara ruled the WB. What were interesting however, were McNamara and bank's development priorities. Under him, the bank encouraged projects to build schools, improve mass literacy, construct hospitals and other public health structures, etc. Under McNamara the bank also looked for an alternative source of funds apart from the western banks with their petrodollars. They found this in the global bond market. Meanwhile poor Third World countries made use of larger sums of money by borrowing. The consequence was a gigantic increase in Third World indebtedness. In 1971, Nixon delinked the dollar from the gold standard and in 1973 came the 'Oil Crisis' when oil prices rose sharply due to concerted action by OPEC. Inflation was set in. As the Third World borrowing mounted, so did their debt servicing charges. At the same time, the price of primary commodities declined quite sharply. Between 1976 and 1980, the end of McNamara's stint, Third World debt had increased on an average 20 per cent annually. The 1970s were marked by falling or stagnant output and increasing inflation—'Stagflation'. And in economic by itself, the fierce war of ideas between Keynesian and neo-liberal economics ended with Keynesian ideas in disrepute. Neo-liberalism had come of age.

More importantly, the lengthening queues at the unemployment office and rise in inflation throughout this period saw first the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. Next year it was the turn of Ronald Reagan to be elected. The age of TINA and 'Greed is good' had started. Thatcher and Reagan started the process of 'rollback' in their respective countries, by selling off state owned assets, deregulating financial markets, imposing strict monetarist economic policies, etc. In 'development', the era of the Structural Adjustment Policy started. The IMF and WB, which had been entirely taken over by neo-liberal economists, started imposing harsh 'conditionalities' on borrowing countries. The former's short-term loans were designed to balance internal and external accounts, generate savings and as always, ensure that repayments were made on time. Since these were severely debt ridden nations, the only solution they had was to make massive cuts in government spending, including all subsidies. The inevitable outcome was a massive increase in food, fuel and transport prices. The resultant discontent sometimes manifested itself in prolonged bouts of urban rioting. Given the circumstances, these countries had no alternative but to apply to the WB for long-term loans. This is when the structural adjustment policy came into play. These policies

included the deregulation of domestic markets; the sale of public utilities to private interests, often at throw away prices; trade liberalization measures; investment markets deregulation; 'reform' of the agricultural sector and so on. The intention behind all this was to open up national markets to international investors while at the same sharply curtailing the state's role. Further, all these WB prescriptions, intended to be medium term in duration, turned out to be long term, with little benefit to be seen for anyone but a handful of investors and the local elites. Two-year projects turned into five-year, then 10-year and in some cases 20-year affairs. The extension of the time frame was blithely explained away by citing the intractable nature of such problems, or by blaming the national governments for their lack of compliance.<sup>13</sup> In recent years, the focus has shifted to 'corruption', which it is claimed undercut developmental efforts (Swain, Mykhnenko & French, 2010). The entire Third World populations were virtually pauperized. The privatization of public utilities, including the water supply in some cases, caused enormous hardships for the poor. Health and education both suffered due to cuts and as it became unprofitable for private investors to cater to the needs of the poor. But finance capital and banks in particular made hitherto unthought of profits. Despite tremendous civil society protests, the situation would have continued unquestioned but for the fact that in their haste and greed, banks and financial houses managed to bring economic disaster on the entire world. The devastating effects of neo-liberal doctrines on Third World countries have been justifiably criticized. Moreover, now that the US finds itself mired in economic strife and European countries such as Greece are declared bankrupt, the criticism has become far more severe. More, the role of banks in the precipitation of economic crises is far more openly dealt with. I am however, more interested in two specific trends which seem to me to have plagued 'development' from the start. The first is development as elite dialogue. The second could, with considerable accuracy, be termed the 'single vision' syndrome.

'Development' has in most cases been characterized by a dialogue between elites. A good proportion of this was what might be called one-way dialogue. One set of people would tell another set what was to be done and what was offer for doing it. This started from the early days of the WB and IMF. To quote Toye once more, '[t]he key assumption behind the new economics of development was that governments needed guidance from economists on how to make economic development happen differently—and

especially, faster—in the future’ (Toye, 2006, p. 21). The feasibility and value of the projects for which loans were being sought would be assessed by various experts. The discussions would be between the experts. And of course, there would be international political elites, talking to their national counterpart. Because, as the case of France suggested, there might well be political decisions needing to be enforced. So ‘development’ was something that required development economists and even, plain old economists, as well as large scale planners, engineers, hydrologists, power engineers, agricultural scientists, transport specialists, irrigation experts and of course bankers and finance people. These people would talk to one another, exchange ideas and advise relevant governments. And within the borrowing states themselves, a similar mechanism would operate. Groups of experts and technical personnel would decide on the giant projects that were taking shape. And they were giant projects. A dam here, a port there, a road to connect a port to an industrial or mining area there, a set of irrigation canals, a giant power stations, perhaps a steel plant if the country could manage it and so on. These would be decided behind closed doors, the decisions being arrived at by a handful of people. Those who would be most affected were never asked for their views. Nor has this changed much today—consider attempts to slash social security or Medicare in the US, or increasing fuel and LPG prices in India. Consider arctic drilling or mountaintop blasting! The opinions of those adversely affected by these decisions have hardly been solicited. The recipients of the products, be it power, or water or an industrial job, were generally considered to be beneficiaries whose needs were being met. It was taken for granted that they would be delighted.

With the advent of neo-liberalism, the nostrums changed, but the underlying attitudes did not. Moreover, as a radical interpretation of neo-classical economics, development became all about techniques: of balancing budgets, structural adjustments, rolling back the state and so on. In a word, it was all technical, the techniques being designed to remould a country into its neo-liberal image, irrespective of its history, culture, etc. It is this reliance on technology and technique which is the second trend in ‘development’ from the early days. It was implicit in the idea that a country could ‘jump stages’, pulling itself up in mere decades to what had been achieved in the industrial world over centuries. It was merely a matter of putting the appropriate—and latest—machinery to work in a planned and systematic manner. Whether the project was really suited to the country concerned, whether local customs and

traditions militated against it, whether the locals had in fact their own solutions which could be made to work efficiently, was never really scrutinized in any depth. Even worse, little attention was paid to the possibility of things going seriously wrong. Moreover, given the type and scale of the projects involved, as well as the political kudos at stake problems were going to appear slowly and be denied for a long time. But in the end, they could no longer be denied. Now we know that giant irrigation/hydroelectric projects with big dams do not just oust peasants and submerge large tracts of land.

Nothing alters a river as totally as a dam [...] A dam is monumentally static, it tries to bring a river under control, to regulate its seasonal patterns [...] A dam traps sediments and nutrients, alters the river’s chemistry and alters the processes of erosion and deposition ...<sup>14</sup>

We know that irrigation projects bring much needed water but also sedimentation, schistosomiasis and salinization. Coal fired power stations electrify areas, but they cause lung diseases amongst those living around them unless special care is taken.

The paradigm case for the blind application of technology to a major human problem is the case of Indian strategies to control its ever growing population. Given that Indian poverty was seen to be a function of its overpopulation, population growth had to be reduced. When persuasive methods foundered, coercive methods were put in place, through a campaign of enforced sterilization. That the problems had much to do with custom, tradition, gender relationships and so on, was never seriously considered. The target populations were never really involved. When persuasion failed, no one asked why, or how and why Kerala had succeeded when the rest of the nation failed. Coercive methods were tried. Sterilization being invasive surgery, it was reliance on technology and technique. When this world view is combined with an ill concealed contempt for the poor, the results are frightful indeed.

When Tagore fell rather ill in his sixties, a number of doctors attempted to persuade him to take medication. Notorious for his disinclination to take any medicine, the poet refused. Finally one physician said, ‘Don’t you understand that this medicine will cure your ailment?’ The poet replied sardonically, ‘I know your medicine will cure my illness. Pray tell, what will cure me of your medicine?’ ‘Development’ is very necessary as a cure for many of our social ailments. But we need to make sure that we do not have to be cured of development itself.



## Notes

1. Eliot, Thomas Stearns. (1995, p. 194). Burnt Norton from 'Four Quartets', In T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems 1909–1962, Faber.
2. Montagu (1997). See in particular chapter one, pp. 41–82. Mosse, George, L., *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, especially chapters 3 and 4 for the foundations of racism and the early racist ideologues.
3. Consider the bitter debate between Voltaire and Montesquieu on the ancestry of the French—Frank or Gaul! On this see, Poliakov (1974, pp. 25–26). Also see the entry 'France, Francois, French' in Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*.
4. Amongst the technological advances in the decade before and after the war, were jet planes, radar, sophisticated radio communication, antibiotic therapy, refinements in mass production, nuclear weapons and power, as well as the beginnings of modern computing, to name but a few.
5. Blake (1985, pp. 488–489). This is of course one of Blake's most famous and most familiar poems. The poem in its entirety appears in the Preface to *Milton*, a poem in two books and the entire stanza reads, 'And did the Countenance Divine/Shine forth upon our clouded hills/And was Jerusalem builded here/Among these dark Satanic mills?'
6. Blake, William (1985, p. 475). These are the last lines of a poem he wrote as a letter to his friend Thomas Butts in 1802.
7. A perfect cinematic representation of 'single vision' is provided in William Cameron Menzies' film *Things to Come*, based on the H. G. Wells' novel. Here the technocrats and the poets clash and unsurprisingly—given Wells' Fabian ideas—the technocrats come out on top.
8. Owen, W, *Transport and World Development, 1987*, quoted in Hilling (1996, p. 1).
9. Take for instance the Bombay–Pune highway, a modern multi-lane job with all weather concrete surface, etc, which has drastically cut the travelling time between the two cities. On 7 August 2000, the *Times of India* published a photograph showing a villager herding his goats along the middle of the pristine concrete highway, his raised right hand warning off drivers. The traffic behind him had come to a standstill.
10. On this, see Fitch (1996) and Berman (1988).
11. See 'Cyclists & Pedestrians Account for Half of All Road Fatalities', *The Hindu*, 22 October 2013.
12. This was a commonplace till about two years ago. Governmental crackdowns since then have reduced this very sharply. The switch to LPG has also helped.
13. SAPRIN (2004, pp. 1–33). SAPRIN is the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network, an international network of civil society groups in nine countries, which worked with the WB to assess the impact of structural adjustment on the countries concerned. The WB distanced itself from the report in the final event.
14. McCully (1998). The literature on large dams is now fairly vast. I have made use of this book and also Hildyard and Goldsmith (1985).

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