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Post-Development: New Perspective in Development Discourse

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ABSTRACT:

During the past forty years, international political economy has emerged as one of the most prominent and remarkable field of study in the discipline of International Relations which has turned the attention of scholars to a number of new frontiers of research such as financial markets, global governance, international organizations, global firms and production, economic regionalism, the North-South divide and most significantly the issue of development. The issue of development is one of those issues which have increasingly gained the attention of the researchers and academicians due to the emergence of international political economy.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to understand the issues and debates which are centered around the development discourse of last two or three decades especially because now development has become one of the prevalent factor which driven the contemporary world politics. It could be also argue that without taking development into account, the study and understanding of international political economy including domestic and international political events will be incomplete, limited or partial. Apart from that, this paper aims to offer critical perspectives on the development thinking of present time. This paper starts with the general understanding of development and the problems which emerged from this understanding. The paper also provides a brief summary of different meanings of development and the fundamental critiques of mainstream development from the perspective known as post-structuralism. Furthermore, this paper intends to explore the ways in which post-development critique can offer insights into alternatives to development.

KEY WORDS: Development, Global South, Post-Development, Post-Structuralism, Post-Colonialism, Power.

Introduction

The idea of development is one of the most hotly debated terms/issues in the 21st century and appears to be the buzzword. Different scholars

have different perspectives and views about it. It should be important to acknowledge here that there are various ideas and theories which are associated with the term 'development' and since the 1950s several theories about development are given in opposition to mainstream theories of development. Therefore, to define development is not as simple as it seems to be. Perhaps it is one of those terms that extremely difficult to define, if not impossible. The beginning of development as a project and as a Western political discourse is often attributed to "the former United States President Harry S. Truman's inaugural address in 1949" (Illich 1990; Sachs 2010). It was in this address that "he stated that foreign nations, particularly those that were labeled as 'underdeveloped' would require assistance in order to achieve 'industrial progress' and a raised standard of living" (Illich 1990: 6). Even Esteva and several others in the *Development Dictionary* refer to "Truman in the 1940s as beginning of the development era" (Esteva 1992).

The concept of development gained importance after the second half of the twentieth century. It was the time when a large number of countries in Asia and Africa gained political independence. Most of the countries in these continents were impoverished and often described as 'underdeveloped' or 'developing'.

In the dominant discourse of mainstream development, which has broadly followed the Washington Consensus and modernist thought, the term development was seen as a universal model, usually associated with modernization of a society, increase in economic growth of a country and so on so forth. "The mainstream discourse on development is based on modernization and the Western idea of progress, which creates a Third World made up of disadvantaged and needy populations" (Escobar 1995). Apart from that the mainstream development has also become an industry in which certain players have long term vested interests. Therefore, the mainstream understanding of development is very problematic and it gives a rise to the idea of post-development which has not only challenged the conventional notion of development but also rejects modernity. The post-development notion of development discourse is about making development more indigenous, localize and fragmented. Furthermore, it argues for moving away from state and including more no. of non- state actors like NGOs.

Arturo Escobar who is the most prominent figure in post development discourse, in his classic post-development text, *Encountering Development*, describes how the dominant development discourse plays out. Apart from that, Escobar also argued that "to 'help' the Third World to become modern and 'progressive,' the mainstream development discourse prescribes the help of the First World - countries whose model of development is based on modernity and progress and have the power and knowledge to 'help' the Third World" (Escobar 1995). From the post-development perspective, the mainstream thinking of development is an ethnocentric way to look at the world's inequalities, and therefore, development practice based on this discourse only makes the inequalities more pronounced rather than alleviating them.

Escobar in this work also makes a case for 'alternatives to development' which abandon 'the whole epistemological and political field of postwar development' (*Ibid.* 675). "The alternatives to development offer:

1) a critical stance with respect to established scientific discourse and … a rejection of the ethnocentric, patriarchal, and ecocidal character of development models;

2) a defense of pluralistic grassroots movements, in the belief that these movements, and 'new social movements' in general may be providing a new basis for transforming the structures and discourses of the modern developmentalist states in the Third World; and

3) a conviction that we must work toward a relation between truth and reality different from that which has characterized Western modernity in general and development in particular *(Ibid.)*. Escobar argues that 'development has functioned as a mechanism of power for the production and management of the Third World … through the systematic elaboration of forms of knowledge concerning all aspects of importance in the life of Third World societies, and through the creation of corresponding fields of intervention…' (*Ibid.* 676)".

Different Conceptions of Development

The concept of development has undergone many changes over the years. We can understand the term development in its both broader and narrower sense. In the broadest sense of the term, development conveys the ideas of improvement, progress, well being and an aspiration for a better life. However, the term development is also often used in a narrower sense to refer to more limited goals such as increasing rate of economic growth, or modernizing a society.

Development has become subject of considerable controversy today. The models of development which have been adopted in different countries have become the subject of debate and criticism and alternative models have been put forward. In the initial years the focus was on catching up with the west in terms of economic growth and modernization of societies that ignores diverse historical currents. According to Escobar, "the problem with mainstream 'development' is that it is external, based on the model of the industrialized world, and what is needed instead are 'more endogenous discourses" to (Escobar 1992: 411).

In the conventional sense development was understood as a top-down ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treat people and cultures as abstract concepts. Mainstream notion of development was "conceived not as a cultural process but instead a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some 'badly needed' goods to a 'target' population. It comes to no surprise that development became a force so destructive to Third World cultures, ironically in the name of people's interests" (Escobar 1995: 44). Therefore, the idea of post-development becomes very important as it denounces the Eurocentric view of development and explores the possibilities outside modern (Western) 'development' paradigm.

Emergence of Post-Development

Post-development has its roots in postmodern critique of modernity and has been greatly influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. The emergence of post-development lies in many factors. "It is the result of widespread disillusionment with conventional development and development failure" (Schuurman 1993b).

Post-development articulates dissatisfaction with the concept and practice of 'Development' that "lead not to the search for alternative versions of it, but to dismissing it altogether and calling for alternatives to development" (Esteva 1992; Escobar 1995; Rahnema 1997). Drawing on the work of Foucault, post-development portrays development as a monolithic and hegemonic discourse that constructs rather than solves the problems it purports to address.

"The idea of moving 'beyond development' may seem unduly radical and unrealistic when contrasted with a well-established and accepted modernist worldview that has long since informed and justified powerful economic and political interests in the pursuit of Development" (Andreasson 2010: 88). Post-development thinkers not only make a claim about the fundamental problems with the mainstream 'Development' but also suggest the alternative ways to think on it.

Defining Post-Development

The term Post-Development denotes a school of thought in development theory which is fundamentally critical of the very idea of 'development' and promotes alternative ways of thinking and acting beyond this idea. In the words of Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Post-development, "is the most recent radical reaction to the problems or dilemmas of post- war development efforts". Within the new discourse of development there are new actors playing a role that has become central to the concept of development, they are new social movements, NGOs, various development agencies etc. In the present time than the discourse of development seems to be following two paths. First is that the development discourse has gone outside the realm of state. Secondly there has been a rejection of conventional paradigm of development and pursuing alternative agenda.

Post-development (PD) was inspired by Ivan Illich and is usually linked to the works of Gustavo Esteva (1987), Wolfgang Sachs (1992), Arturo Escobar (1995) and Majid Rahnema (1997). Sometimes Vandana Shiva (1989), Gilbert Rist (1997), Serge Latouche (1993) and others are also seen as part of Post-development discourse. Their central aim was to expose 'development' as an ideology originating in the Cold War and thus to pave the way for alternatives. According to Escobar, following are the characteristics of Post-Development:

a) "the interest in alternatives to development, not the interest of alternative development

b) a fundamental rejection of the classical development paradigm

c) an interest in local culture and local knowledge

d) a critical perspective on established scientific discourses

e) solidarity for pluralistic grassroots movements" (Ziai 2007: 100).

Post-development and the call for alternatives to development, assessing the role awarded to new social movements and the implications for social change. There are two most fundamental hypotheses which are put forward by post-development writers. "*Firstly*, the traditional concept of 'development' is seen as a Eurocentric construct where the West is labeled as 'developed' and the rest of the world is perceived as 'underdeveloped'. This constitutes one society as the ideal norm and others as deviations of

that norm. *Secondly*, it is argued that the traditional concept of development has authoritarian and technocratic implications" (Parfitt 2002: 7). Post-development writers seek to "dismiss the post-World War II concept of development by reference to its top down authoritarian form, as directed by intrusive state mechanisms and international development agencies" (Escobar 1995; Esteva and Prakash 1998b). In short, "along with 'anti-development' and 'beyond development', post-development is a radical reaction to the dilemmas of development" (Pieterse 1998: 175). Post-development focuses on the underlying premises and motives of development. What sets it apart from other critical approaches is that it rejects development. "It is rejected not merely on account of its results but because of its intentions, its world-view and mindset" (Pieterse 1998: 175-176).

This Post-structural critique of institutional development's idiom and empirical field, known as post-development theory, draws on and extends Foucault's re-conceptualization of power-knowledge formations as discourse. The essential idea of post-development theory 'is to see the discourse on development articulating First World knowledge with power in the Third World' (Peet 1997: 75). It analyzes development as a significant discourse of power, focusing on "the way in which discourses of development help shape the reality they pertain to address, and how alternative conceptions of the problem have been marked off as irrelevant" (Nustad 2004: 13). Post-development scholars apply Foucault's work on the appropriation of the mind in modern societies to the relation between North and South and argue that development produces post-colonial subjects (cf. Brigg 2002) permeating the South as a category defined in relation to the North (Manzo 1991) through the disciplinary and normalizing processes of the development apparatus. The idea of post-development not only denounces the main stream, Eurocentric notion of development but it also tries to problematize the notion poverty in itself also. An important insight that runs through post-development is that poverty is not to be taken for granted. In the words of Vandana Shiva "culturally perceived poverty need not be real material poverty: subsistence economies which serve basic needs through self-provisioning are not poor in the sense of being deprived. Yet the ideology of development declares them so because they do not participate overwhelmingly in the market economy, and do not consume commodities provided for and distributed through the market" (Shiva 1988b: 10).

Post development takes development as a discourse. According to Escobar, the "discourse of Development, like the Orientalism analyzed by Edward Said, has been a mechanism for the production and management of the Third World ... organizing the production of truth about the Third World" (Escobar 1992b: 413-414). A standard Escobar quote is: "development can best be described as an apparatus that links forms of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention, resulting in the mapping and production of Third World societies" (Escobar 1996: 213).

Alternatives to Development

Many concerns of post-development are not new, they are shared by other critical approaches to development also. Though Post-development share a concern of dependency theory in terms of seeking autonomy from external dependency, but it is not

limited only to this rather, it goes further as a power -knowledge regime also. While dependency thinking privileges the nation-state, post-development, like alternative development, privileges local and grassroots autonomy. Post-development is different from alternative development. On the one hand, alternative development belief in redefining, reformulating of a development, whereas on the other hand, post-development seeks for alternatives to development not for alternative development. Escobar who is a prominent post-development scholar is 'not interested in development alternatives, but rather in alternatives to Development'. From post-structuralist perspective, alternative development is rejected because "most of the efforts are also products of the same worldview which has produced the mainstream concept of science, liberation and development" (Nandy 1989: 270).

The work of Foucault are useful for understanding the operation of power in the post-war development project, and for comprehending how power operates through the World Bank. In this way a critical engagement with post-development can improve our understanding and analysis of development. This paper offers a closer engagement with Foucault's conceptualization of power as one way of advancing post-development. As Foucault's work has inspired much post-development writing, this is an obvious starting point, albeit one which deserves to be complemented with engagements with indigenous knowledge and other scholarship.

Through its post-structural critique of development, post-development provides a fundamental dismissal of institutional development. According to Arturo Escobar, the deconstruction of development gave rise to post-development. Deconstruction (also deconstruct, deconstructionism, deconstructionist) refers to Jacques Derrida's philosophical methodology which prescribes "the process of breaking down conventionally accepted concepts, categories, and oppositions". More specifically, deconstruction in this essay critiques the received essence, or what is perceived as natural and normal by the mainstream, of categories, concepts or oppositions.

According to Jakimow, "the 1990's saw the emergence of post- development in response to the failing development industry. This new school of thought was inspired by post-modernist thinking and called for an abandonment of the modernization-as-development
paradigm" (Jakimow 2008). Post-modernism and post-development are both schools of thought that have completely rejected certain aspects of modernism (Muller 2006). Therefore, one could state that post-development is a school of thought under the umbrella of post-modernism. Post-development critiques modernism as a development model, or modernization-as-development. According to Escobar, "modernization-as-development is legitimated and justified by the idea that knowledge, as we sterner define it, is objective and above those that are in need of developing" (Escobar 1995).

In critiquing development, post-development thinkers deconstruct development while focusing on the role of power and knowledge in modern development (Müller 2006). Post-development theorists have declared development obsolete and bankrupt and have called for 'alternatives to development'. As pointed out by Nederveen Pieterse, post-development theory can be distinguished from other critical approaches to

development (such as dependency theory, 'alternative development' theory and 'human development') by its insistence that development be rejected entirely, rather than better implemented or altered in specific ways (Pieterse 2000: 176) .

Post-development theorists reject the PWWII development project, rather than development. It could, indeed, be said that they feel that the PWWII development project has not brought about development! Thus the call for an 'end to development' and 'alternatives to development' is a rejection of the post-World War II attempts to engineer particular changes in the so-called 'Third World' in order to bring about a situation deemed by various development theorists.

Post-Colonial and Post-Structuralist Approach to Development

Both post--colonial and post-structuralist approaches to development are the offshoots of modernity. On the one hand, post-colonial approach to development is a reaction to imperial Europe's colonial practices, while the post-structuralist approach to development is the result of (continuing) failures of modern (industrial economic) development to solve the problems of poverty, inequality and injustice everywhere.

Post--colonialism literally means 'after-colonialism' or 'after-independence'. However, according to Radcliffe definition it, refers to "...ways of criticizing the material and discursive legacies of colonialism" (Radcliffe in McEwan 2008: 124). In this way post-colonial approach challenges the very meaning of mainstream (modern) development discourse. The following is a brief compilation of ideas espoused by post colonialism:

-integrate indigenous knowledge system

-criticize destructive modernization and imperialism

-challenge single-path homogenizing development

-influenced by Marxist socio-political and economic analyses (e.g. exploitation, class struggles, centre periphery power relations)

-supports diversity of views and priorities (including non-Western views of feminism)

- belief in power relations dynamic

-attempts to overcome inequality for non-western people by linking North-South through fair-trade.

If post-colonialism is a reaction to imperial Europe's colonial practices expressed through its anti-colonial discourses than post-structuralism is a rejection against the hegemony of modern (Western) 'development' concept and practice.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude it can be argued that post-development is the phase which can be understood through different approaches for example post-colonialism, post-structuralism, etc. Apart from that this paper has also made several arguments related with the issue of development. For instance, the idea of development has become one of the important variables or a factor in today's globalized world which impacts on international political economy in so many ways. In this paper, it has been argued that the notion of development has change within the paradigm of post-development which challenges the conventional notion of development based on the materialistic conception of development and makes a case for the new ways for thinking about development discourse in terms of post-development which can provide better understanding of development. Furthermore, It has

been also illustrated in this paper that how the idea of development is very much related with power, domination and therefore, a means of controlling others. Besides that, it is also important to note down here that this paper doesn't have aim to downsize development per se, instead it try to highlight the potentials of development for empowerment of some societies or states on the cost of others.

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