Internal and External Interwined

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Sørensen, Georg

Publication date:
1986

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH SERIES
WORKING PAPERS

AALBORG UNIVERSITETSCENTER
SERIE OM UDVIKLINGSFORSKNING
ARBEJDSPAPIRER

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by
Georg Sørensen

NO. 20 1986

DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH GROUP
AALBORG UNIVERSITY
FIBIGERSTRAEDE 2
9220 AALBORG EAST
DENMARK

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UDVIKLINGSFORSKNING
AALBORG UNIVERSITETSCENTER
FIBIGERSTRÆDE 2
9220 AALBORG Ø

Georg Sørensen

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1. Introduction

One of the main accusations of early dependency thinking against theories of modernisation was the latter's neglect of external factors in coming to grips with the development problems of the Third World. The charge was undoubtedly justified: theories of modernisation did in most cases study problems of development within the framework of the single nation-state.[1]

With the emergence of dependency thinking this failure was remedied, but almost to an extent where the pendulum swung to the other extreme and focus was exclusively on external factors.[2] However, beyond the harsh and in many cases justified criticism against theories of modernisation, most contributors were ready to admit that external factors could not explain everything and could not be made solely responsible for the predicament of the Third World.[3] Today, few would deny that both internal and external factors play a role in the process of development of any given country, although the determination of what is 'external' and what is 'internal' is itself a problem. In dependency theory, the 'external' has to do with the forces of imperialism and the world market. A similar line of thinking is employed in the present context with a distinction between the period before and after Indian independence. Before independence, the external forces include the political, military and economic interests of the British in India; after independence, the dominant element of the external forces are the Western, mostly English, economic interests in India. Additional nuances in the definition of 'external' will appear from the context.

Meanwhile the distinction between external and internal has continued to haunt the debate on development, and has continued to provide a dividing line between those who find one or the other aspect most important.[4] The following is a contribution to moving the debate on obstacles to development beyond the akward distinction between internal and external.

Clearly, both external and internal factors may impede a process of development, and in many cases these elements are thoroughly intertwined. This is going to be demonstrated in the following, where focus is on what is claimed to be the five most important obstacles to development in India.

There is an additional respect in which the five factors addressed are of theoretical interest. They testify to the fact that development problems cannot be narrowed down to purely economic issues. They involve all the important aspects of society: cultural, political, social, and, of course, also economic issues.[5]

Some conception of what development is becomes necessary, when the subject matter is obstacles to development. This is not the place to go into a lengthy discussion on the definition of development. It is sufficient to emphasize that the dimension of development given highest importance in this article has to do with improving material welfare for the majority of poor. In this context development progress means improving of the situation of the poor in terms of food, housing, health, education, gainful employment, etc.

The assertion is that a process of development worthy of the name must involve some improvement in the welfare of the poor majority. Secondly, the claim is that India has made very little or perhaps no progress at all on this dimension since independence. Roughly half of the population (estimated total in 1985: 746 million) live below the poverty line (defined as 2,300 calories per day); more than twenty years ago, the proportion of poor was about the same.[6] This amounts, of course, to a significant increase in the actual number of poor people. In big cities like Calcutta and Bombay, this kind of poverty means that half of the population is living in the streets, literally on the pavement, often less than one foot away from the roaring traffic, in so-called "huts" made of plastic-sacks completely unable to provide cover against the more than 2,000 millimeters of rain that falls during three months every year. Every day life consists of hustling and begging in order to be able to eat, not to mention feeding the small children. In such surroundings, the expression "levels of poverty" acquires a new meaning; here, the worst situation means having literally nothing: nothing to eat, no clothes to wear, no place to sleep. A pair

of shorts and a plastic-sack "hut" means considerable improvement; an old bicycle means relative affluence.

In many respects, India has made significant progress: the industrial sector is fairly advanced and to a large extent controlled by local entrepreneurs; a "green revolution" in the countryside has boosted agricultural output to the point of making India a net exporter of agricultural produce. But neither industrial nor agricultural development has succeeded in making serious inroads on the problem of hundreds of million very poor people. I contend that this situation will not change in the forseeable future, because of the obstacles mentioned in the following.

2. The first obstacle: insuperable inequality

If there was complete equality in the Indian distribution of income, the annual amount per person would be US$ 260 (the per capita GNP in 1982)[7]; in other words, the overall income level is quite modest to start with. But there is of course no such complete equality, although the actual level of inequality of income distribution is not very dramatic in India, compared to many other Third World countries. According to an estimate based on data from 1975, the lowest 20 per cent of the population receive 7 per cent of the income, whereas the highest 20 per cent get 49.8 per cent. The corresponding figures for Tanzania, an example of a country with a per capita income on the Indian level, are 5.8 per cent of the income for the poorest fifth, and 50.4 for the richest fifth.[8]

But the postulate of insuperable inequality in India rests not so much on these estimates of the unequal income distribution (in any case, it is questionable what such figures actually tell about the living conditions of the poor; here, the data on calorie intake referred to above are more informative). It is more important that such inequality is compounded by other dimensions of inequality. I have two other dimensions in mind; one is land distribution, the other is the class/caste system.

"Particularly in the South Asian rural setting, inequality is in fact mainly a question of land ownership - with which are associated leisure, enjoyment of status, and authority".[9] There are extreme inequalities in the distribution of land ownership and the situation in this regard is not better today than it was in the mid-fifties, when the picture was as follows: "More than one-fifth of all rural households (22 per cent) owned no land at all. Another 25 per cent owned fragments of land or less than one acre. An additional 14 per cent owned uneconomic or marginal holding of 1 acre to 2.5 acres (that is, one hectare or less). In brief, the majority of all rural households, approximately 61 per cent, either owned no land, or small fragments of land, or uneconomic and marginal holdings of one acre or less. All of them together owned less than 8 per cent of the total area. These were the recruits in the army of the chronically unemployed and underemployed, the millions of the rural poor precariously subsisting just at the border or slipping below the line of poverty. They could be contrasted with what passed for large landowners in India, the upper 13 per cent of all households who had more than 10 acres and owned about 64 per cent of the entire area, and the even smaller elite of the upper 5 per cent having 20 acres or more, and owning 41 per cent of the area."[10]

Attempts at increasing agricultural output through the propagation of High Yielding Varieties (HYV), more fertilizer and improved technology (the socal-led Green Revolution) has tended to benefit only the larger landowners in the few selected states where it has been implemented (mainly Punjab, Harayana and Uttar Pradesh). This has contributed to an even worse distribution of land ownership. In 1976, the percentage of rural households with no land at all had increased to 41, from 27 in 1971.[11]

During the seventies, various schemes of land redistribution were drawn, but as we shall see below, they have not been implemented in a manner which significantly improves the situation of the rural poor.

There is a class-based inequality between owners and non-owners of means of production, both in the countryside where ownership of land is the most important single issue, and in the cities; and of course there are a host of other inequalities based of differences in skills and educational background, type of work, etc.

What makes these inequalities particularly grave in the Indian context is the interlocking inequalities based on cultural-religious grounds, the caste-system. The castes form a socio-cultural hierarchy or system of status which also involves precise rules for the separation of different castes, and a specific division of labour between castes. There are four main castes, the priests (brahmins), the warriors (kshatriya), traders (vaishyas), and farmers (sudras). In addition, there are a host of lower castes (jatis), which also includes the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes.[12] In an ordinary village of a few hundred households, there can easily be around twenty different castes.

The caste-system makes cooperative efforts extremely difficult, as there are complex rules guiding the interaction and functions of each caste. Solidarity and concerted efforts are also impeded, even among people placed under similar socio-economic circumstances, for example workers in industry and agriculture. Although the influence of the caste system has been somewhat weakened in the large cities, overall it is still quite strong. And in the countryside, "the village structure is still strongly affected by the caste system. While caste does not ensure economic ranking, it does influence rights to land and attitudes towards ownership... Generally speaking, each person is born into his place in the village hierarchy, although ... there are possibilities for movement both upward and downward on the social ladder. Unfortunately, landless sharecroppers and workers hardly ever move upward..."[13]

The lower castes tend also to be at the lower end of the socio-economic hierarchy, which means that class-based and religious-culturally based inequalities tend to reinforce each other, although the overlapping is not complete.

It is this interlocking of different hierarchies which tends to make inequality in India insuperable. What has been the influence of external versus internal forces in this regard? Even if we limit the meaning of "external forces" to the role of English interests in India, there is no straightforward answer to the question.

Clearly, the English did not invent the caste system; on the other hand, they did little to change it. Early phases of English presence in India were

characterized by traditional power policies, i.e. cooperation with some local rulers which were willing to recognize English supremacy, and punishment of others, hostile to the English.

It is in the socio-economic sphere that the English made their most important contribution to inequality in India. In the countryside, the ancient village communities with their significant element of solidarity between members of equal standing, were completely crushed. The aim of the English was, of course, to make the collection of taxes more efficient through a "privatization" of land holding, giving the tax collector cooperating with the English an especially privileged status.[14]

In manufacture, local Indian undertakings were outcompeted by superior English technology, with cotton spinning and weaving as the most important example. The Indian producers were forced to "go back" to agriculture.[15]

While it is clear that both internal and external forces play a role in building the insuperable inequality in India, there are two reasons why it is difficult to be both brief and precise about the role of the external forces, the English. First, there was a change in the English interests in India over time, primarily due to the shifts of dominant social forces in English society. In the early phases, the interests of the commercial bourgeoisie dominated English rule in India; from the early to mid-nineteenth century, the industrial bourgeoisie was dominant and although the interests of the two ruling class factions overlapped, they were not identical.[16]

Secondly, the English pursued different policies in different parts of India, not least due to the variations in local conditions. One example can illustrate both of these dimensions of British rule. Bihar and Punjab are two Indian states with a good ressource-basis for agriculture; today, Punjab is among the richest and Bihar among the poorest areas in India. Why this difference with similar starting points?[17] Bihar came under British rule as early as 1757 and the new masters began a policy of ruthless taxation, which resulted in the concentration of land and wealth on very few hands and complete dependency of the poor, landless peasants on the landowners.

Punjab, on the other hans, was independent until 1849 and the hundred years of Sikh rule (1750-1849) had paved the way for a relatively equal distribution of land. When the English took over Punjab in 1849, their main interests was no longer maximation of taxes, but the supply of raw materials for the English textile industry. Punjab was well suited for this purpose, the English claimed only moderate taxes and even helped weaken the power of the large landowners, the process begun under the Sikh. In a much later phase, farmers in Punjab were well suited to reap the benefits of the Green Revolution contrary to Bihar.

3. The second obstacle: the failure of the ruling classes to instigate real change

"Real change" refers to the dimension of development emphasized earlier: improving the overall living conditions of the poor, making inroads on mass poverty. In some respects, the situation is quite different today from the fifties and sixties. There is a growing social consciousness among the dominant social forces in India; "much higher levels of political awareness and new egalitarian norms are eroding the old caste and factional loyalities that buttressed previous patterns of vertical political mobilization. Progress toward removal of mass poverty is becoming a new touchstone for evaluating the performance of elected governments. This criterion of legitimacy, moreover, is widely accepted among the educated middle classes..."[18]

During the seventies, the change in awareness of poverty problems resulted in a large number of government programs, especially directed at the rural areas. For some years now, raising the income levels of the rural poor has been a prime objective of the nation's development planning. However, when it comes to practical implementation of the programs, to translating the well-meaning intentions into concrete action, there has been very limited success, if any at all.

One typical example of this comes from the village Duari in Uttar Pradesh, about 40 kilometres from Kanpur. There are 229 households of which more than half are scheduled and backward castes. Some 50% of these latter

households are landless. 90% of them are indebted to rural moneylenders at 5-10 per cent monthly rates of interest. Some six months a year work on a daily wage basis is available, "but most of the wage earnings of the weaker sections go toward debt repayment. Even then, the indebted in most cases manage to pay only the interests on the loan and not the loan itself. Even where the loan with interest has been partially or in rare cases wholly repaid, contingencies like birth, death, marriage and illness lead to a renewal of the debt syndrome. Net result is a situation of subsistent existence, occasional periods of starvation and persistent poverty."[19]

Since the early seventies programmes of land redistribution and the provision of bank loans for the rural poor have been operative in Duari. In their detailed account of the programmes, Prakash and Rastogi give the following evaluation: "Programmes of development meant for the benefit of rural poor have failed in their purpose. Land redistribution programme has been meaningless. The number of recipients is too few and the land distributed too little. Moreover, the land so distributed is unfit for cultivation. ... The programme of credit to rural poor at concessional terms has great potential for raising their income level. But this programme has been subverted by the functionaries involved in development activities. ... In all cases, the actual value received by the loanees has been 25% to 33% less than the figure stated on their loan documents. The entire procedure for grant of loans is not only lengthy but also characterized by payoffs at every stage starting with the availability of loan application forms. Illiteracy, poverty and vulnerability of rural poor and rapacity of government's personnel have contributed to this situation".[20]

There are a number of corrective institutional mechanisms, designed to take measures against the problems mentioned here. Such mechanisms are the "anti-corruption machinery, legislation governing usury and debt redemption, periodic monitoring and evaluation of development programmes, police, judiciary, elected representatives of people from village panchayat onward and a free press. Yet all these corrective mechanisms themselves are seen to have failed and/or become infirm and inoperative at Duari".[21]

It would be wrong to say, however, that there has been no progress whatsoever since independence, in improving the lot of the poor. In Duari, for example, road-building programs plus the provision of health and schooling facilities have had positive effects. Looking at the industrialization process in India as a whole, there have also been positive effects. Employment in urban industry, for example, increased from 3.8 million in 1949 to nearly 7 million in 1970.[22]

But it is also clear from the absolute magnitude of these figures that growth in the industrial sector is completely incapable of attacking mass poverty through rapidly increasing employment. In 1971, a World Bank report stated that "no foreseeable acceleration in the pace of industrial development in India (was) likely to produce enough jobs to make even a slight dent on rural unemployment and poverty over the next decade".[23]

The problem is not that there is no change. The problem is that the development strategy backed by the dominant urban and rural social forces is of such a nature that it fails to make significant inroads on mass poverty. In that sense, there is no real change.

Again, the role of internal versus external force is not straightforward. If we take the example of Duari, there seems to be two main factors responsible for the failure of the programs; one is lack of sufficient political will among the dominant social forces, the other is deficiencies of the administrative apparatus meant to implement the programs.

In both cases, the external influence is significant. It was the English rulers who, in order to gain firm control of India, destroyed the old structures of administration and law enforcement on the local level and replaced it with a huge bureaucracy with power and responsibility concentrated at the top. "The result was, of course, that the bureaucrats developed an eminent capability of mislaying and forgetting important papers. Only through direct intervention from the top or through bribery from the outside was it possible to get papers like that through the administrative apparatus".[24]

After independence, the number of public officials grew explosively, but the awkward, centralized structure has been maintained.[25] The problems involved in this whole structure are well-known, but "the serious national debate of changing the mould, the snobbery and prejudices of civil servants and making them capable to cope with the problems has seldom gone beyond the peripheral limits. The inheritance of master-ryot concept retains its old falvour under new idioms. The bureaucrat has produced inequalities and consolidated them by a plethora of rules, conventions and secrecy".[26]

In other words, it is Indian civil servants that are responsible for many of the failures in Duari, but their actions cannot be understood outside the context of the administrative structure created by the English.

The other important element in this context is the failure of the dominant social forces to implement real change. Insofar as foreign bourgeoisies have dominated the ruling coalition in India, as was the case before independence, external forces are of course responsible in this regard also. Since the late fifties, however, the leading forces of the ruling coalition has been of Indian origin, with the national, industrial bourgeoisie as the leading faction. There are indications that the national, industrial bourgeoisie in India wold have liked more profound reforms in the Indian countryside at some point,[27] but from the early sixties these forces made an alliance with the Indian agrarian elite on the one hand and external economic interests on the other,[28] behind the strategy of the Green Revolution. This meant large increases in production volumes, but there were few benefits for the rural poor.[29]

As far as industrial development is concerned, there have been numerous clashes between Indian and foreign interests, in particular with regards to control of the industrial expansion.[30] The national bourgeoisie has succeeded in achieving a dominant position in industry at expense of external economic interests. This means that industrial development in India has been a success in terms of decreasing foreign influence and achieving a higher degree of self-reliance. But as has already been indicated, foreign and national bourgeoisies have not had serious disagreements over the <u>type of</u> industrial development to be pursued in India. It has been industrial development very much in the vein

of the West and this kind of technology- and capitalintensive expansion has meant few opportunities for improving the conditions for the mass of poor.

4. The third obstacle: the failure of democracy

India is one of the very few countries in the Third World which has been under democratic rule since independence. This is some times praised as a significant achievement which was not to be expected in a very large country with extreme heterogenity on many counts.

In the present context, it is not deemed necessary to go into a comphrehensive discussion of various definitions of democracy and the shortcomings of democracy in a capitalist setting. Suffice it to say that we expect democracy to be a way of producing solutions which expresses the interests of the majority of the electorate.[31]

The urban and rural poor are the single largest group in Indian society, but the democratic system does not function in a way which expresses the interests of this large group. In this sense, democracy in India is a failure.

Why is this so? There are two main reasons, both having to do with the weakness of the poor. First, there are many cases where the democratic process does not function; in the rural areas in particular, the poor are often completely dependent on the rural elite and the elite's power over peoples lives means that they do also have the power to decide the voting of the poor at the elections. It has been said that the single biggest obstacle to development in India is the "powerful ability of the rural elite to paralyse the political system and prevent any kind of reform which threatens their position. The elite has succeeded in preventing taxation of surplus from agriculture. Such taxation is our singularly most important possibility of providing resources for development policies".[32]

The second element is related to the first. It has to do with the organizational weakness of the poor, in both urban and rural areas. Regarding the countryside, Francine Frankel notes "the inability of the rural poor after some thirty

years to generate their own leadership and organize the larger part of their numbers to challenge the hegemony of the landowning elites. A good part of the explanation must still be sought in internal cleavages among the peasantry based on caste, above all that which divides Harijans from members of other Backward classes. ... The poor peasantry, who had numbers on their side, found it impossible to build alliances across kinship, caste, and factional groups for common political action in larger arenas, when their own fortunes inside the village were still intimately tied to good relations with members of the landowning elites".[33]

In the urban areas, their are similar problems with internal cleavages based on caste and language. This is also the case with the industrial working class, but it should be said that there have been successful attempts at organization of industrial labour, both in terms of unions and political parties. As a consequence, workers in industry can claim some success in having their interests attended to by the political system. On the other hand, organized labour is also charactarized by cleavages along political lines, in as much as various parties compete in their attempts to organize the workers. The most important organisations in this regard are the Congress Party and the Communist parties.[34]

In sum, democracy in India has not been a success in terms of expressing the interest of the poor half of the population. But there is another respect in which democracy has functioned smoothly, and this undoubtedly accounts for the viability of democracy in India so far[35]: the democratic political system led by the Congress Party, has been eminently capable of serving the interests of the ruling classes, including functioning as a mechanism for sorting out and harmonizing the differences of interest between various factions of the ruling classes. This is no small achievement in a setting where the cleavages among factions of the elite are both deeper and more frequent than in most other countries in the Third World. John Martinussen writes that the Congress Party has a long history of striving to represent all the most important groups in society, and he adds: "In many ways this is an important and laudable endavour which has to a significant degree contributed to holding together the otherwise many-facetted and heterogenous Indian society. It is also an endavour which

has contributed to securing democratic rule in almost the whole period since independence. At the same time it should be said that there is an inbuilt social inequality in the ongoing adaption of Congress Party policies to the interests and demands of the strongest social groups. It means, of course, that it is the interests of the most powerful social groups which are looked after. And it is not necessarily the numerically largest groups which are the most powerful. On the contrary: more than half of the population of India is not only poor in an economic sense, but also when it comes to political consciousness and political ressources. This means that these people play no significant part in the policy on the Congress Party, although they are mentioned in the party's programmes".[36]

It could be argued that it is not democracy as such which fails to take care of the interests of the poor; it is the poor that are too weak in an economic, organizational and political sense, to make themselves felt in the political system. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that increased political strength of the poor - should that eventually be brought about[36] - can be translated to concrete policies against the interests of well-established urban and rural power-groups within the framework of the Indian democracy. Some even argue that a period of nondemocratic rule is necessary to ensure the enforcement of structural reforms in favour of the poor.[37]

What has been the role of external forces in the making and functioning of democracy in India? After independence, the foreign bourgeoisies - in particular, of course, the English - were economically quite strong in India. Their interests in India could be attented to by at least four different types of organisations.[38] First, there were the business units proper, the agencies or transnational corporations; secondly the chambers of commerce and other trade organisations, both in the home countries and in India; thirdly the organisations of the international system, created in the postwar era, in particular the World Bank and the IMF; and finally but not least important, there were the home states of the companies.

With a firm footing in the Indian economic setting, the foreign bourgeoisies could rest assured that their basic interests in India would not be set aside,

irrespective of the actual organisation of the political system in India. Against this background, the foreign interests were rather indifferent to the making of a democratic system - neither strongly in favour of it, nor strongly against it. It was the powerful social forces of Indian origin who were primarily interested in the erection of a democratic system in post-colonial India.[39]

5. The fourth obstacle: the lack of national unity

The Union of India consists of 22 states of 9 federal territories. There are 1600 different languages, out of which 14 are recognized as official languages. All religions are represented in Indian society, although the vast majority (83%) are Hindus. There are 11.2% Moslems, 2.6% Christians, 1.9% Sikhs, 0.7% Buddhists and 0.5% Jains.[40]

No other nation has the measure of regional, ethnic, linquistic and religious diversity which is found in India. The division of British India into Moslem-dominated Pakistan and Hindu-dominated India in the context of independence was a manifestation of one of the deep splits, but it certainly did not leave India with a solution to the problem of national unity. On the contrary, it was necessary to grant a large degree of autonomy to the single state, in order to appease the various groupings. This in turn created severe difficulties for the making of an efficient and coordinated policy of national development.

The borderlines between the states were drawn according to differences in language and it has more than once been demonstrated that the language issue is sensitive. The most important clash on this front came in the mid-sixties. It was foreseen in the constitution that Hindi was to become official language in the Union in 1965. However, Hindi was only spoken in the Northwestern and Central states. The Dravidian languages of the South have no relation at all to Hindi, and favoured the continued use of English as the official language. The keeping of English was the end result of the harsh conflict[41]; so in many cases, it is necessary to master at least three languages to communicate with one's fellow countrymen: one local state language, Hindi, and English.

One of the most important elements in holding the Union together has been the ability of the dominant Congress Party to forge coalitions with local power groups in the single states. In these quid pro quo arrangements, local candidates get support from the national party leadership during elections, and are secured a share of the national development project expenditure for their respective constituencies afterwards. In return, candidates rally maximum support for the Congress Party, often through the spending of considerable sums of their own money in the process.[42]

However, these arrangements rest on a shaky basis, and are of course subject to resistance from oppositional groups in the various states, and also from the political opposition on the national level. In 1966, for example, the communist party, CPI, had the following to say on the issue of national unity: "The dominant ruling group at the centre tried to establish a fake 'unity of the nation' by denying the right of every nationality and social group to have equality of opportunity and status in a democratic set-up ... the so-called 'struggle between nationalism and the fissiparous forces' - the struggle in the name of which the leaders of the ruling party are trying to beat the opposition forces into submission - is a fake 'struggle'. It is the means through which the dominant section of the bourgeoisie is trying to maintain its domination not only over the working people but even sections of their own class. The slogan of 'national unity' is thus the weapon with which the dominant monopoly group tried to bring their competitors into submission".[43]

Meanwhile, it has proved increasingly difficult for the Congress Party to uphold its alliances with local elites, and this in turn has layed the basis of increasing regional splits in recent years. "In recent years, there has been no alternative to the Congress Party at the national level. On the contrary, the largest opposition-parties today are so-called regional parties, getting their main support from a single state or region. Consequently, the main focus of these parties are on local issues, often without taking the rest of the country into consideration. Such parties may be well suited for governing single states, but they would hardly be able to govern the whole country.

The tendency for regionalization of Indian politics is felt almost all over the country, most significantly in the peripheral areas ... The strong position of the Tamil nationalist party in Tamilnadu is well-known, as is the dominance of the communist party in West Bengal. But it is a new development that Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tripura are now dominated by regional parties. In addition, Punjab, now under presidential rule, and Assam are in fact dominated by regional organisations".[44]

With so many splits, cleavages and contradictions in the country, merely managing to hold the Indian Union together demands superior political skill. And it has indeed come to be the acid test of the capabilities of the central government, whether it is able to succeed in this regard. It is in this context that Rajiv Gandhi's main political task is "holding the country together"[45]; but when most of the energies of the central government goes into this task, it is also clear that the larger issue of securing development progress must suffer.

It could be asked whether national unity is really necessary in order to achieve improvements for the poor? It we look at the hypothetical case of an India split into single states where central authority is more or less absent, leadership of the single states would be left to regional elites. This would probably mean even worse conditions for the poor in the poor states, and perhaps some improvement for the poor in the comparatively rich states, like for example Punjab. Overall, this would mean a deterioration of the situation of the poor. It is the level of central government which has the best possibilities of promoting programs to the benefit of the poor. This is the experience in India since independence, and this is why the lack of national unity is an obstacle to development progress.

What has been the role of external forces in this regard? Before independence, the English contributed to 'national unity' in the sense that they gathered all of British India under English rule. The motives were, of course, far from noble, and neither were the means. The goal was that of extending English rule as fas as possible, which at the same time meant a maximation of potential tax revenues. The means were ruthless power policies and bloody military campaigns. After independence, the role of external forces in the issue of national unity has been negligible.[46]

6. The fifth obstacle: the capacity of the poor to accept poverty

Since the analyses by Max Weber, it has been common to associate Protestant ethics with the capacity for rapid economic and social progress; Weber even went as far as claiming that industrialisation would have come as quickly to India and China as it did to Europe, had Protestant ethics only prevailed there.[47] Although few would go as far as Weber did, more recent research, for example by Gunnar Myrdal, has also emphasized the retarding role played by religion in India, when it comes to promoting socio-economic development.[48]

There is some truth in this, but two things should be added: first, religion is not the single most important impediment to socio-economic development in India, cf. the obstacles already described above[49]; secondly, religion in India has not been incompatible with profound economic change and the introduction of new methods and procedures, both in industry and agriculture.

However, I contend that there is a core element in Indian religion/culture[50] which helps prevent development of the type called for in this paper: improvement of the situation of the poor. In particular, I have two elements in mind: the acceptance of hierarchy and inequality stemming from Hinduism which has the caste system as its basis; and the preoccupation with spiritual matters related to the belief in transmigration of souls. These elements are core parts of an ideological superstructure in India which makes it much easier for the poor to accept his/her often desperate material situation.

The problem is perhaps pushed to extremes in the following comment made by MN Roy in his "Fragments of a Prisoner's Diary": "The belief in transmigration of souls breeds fatalism. Fatalism ruins initiative. A culture totally oriented towards matters of the spirit and the soul has through centuries taught the masses of India to resign. Rebellion is unthinkable for them. - But they must rebel! ... In order to conquer the future, we must shake off the past. The Indian people must be convinced that it masters it own destiny. Karma, destiny, transmigration of souls, the doctrine of not tying ourselves to the present world, the belief in an eternal, spiritual being - all this is ghosts from a dead past. ... The central element of our old culture is religion, - a blind faith in an

inscrutable power which must be obeyed. ... According to religion, everything happens for the sake of a divine purpose. This is why religion - the core element of Indian culture - in accordance with its own logic resists any kind of change through human interference. This fatalism wrapped in religion has been fatal to India. Any attempt to reform this religion is unfeasible, because the power of religion lies in its claim to be unchangeable. Hinduism in particular allows no reform. It is Sanatana Dharma, eternal, unchangeable, unfallible."[51]

Roy's statement undoubtedly goes too far in claiming the petrified nature of religion. In so doing, it reflects his standpoint as a communist (at the time of writing) attempting to promote materialist thinking and drawing something of bogey of the target for his criticism. On the other hand, if we allow for this, I believe that Roy has captured the basic elements of culture in India which makes development more difficult, because it lends legitimacy to present inequalities. This element of the culture in India was caught much later, in 1975, by a Danish observer: "To the Indian, existence is something to be settled between the single person and the divine principle, and the interference of others makes no difference as to the final outcome. I am not saving that this is a conscious attitude of many Indians, but it is an outlook which permeates everything, and which can be boiled down to a sentence which we also know in the West without, however, giving it much thought: you have to put up with it. It is an invitation to realize that what's done cannot be undone; that one must accept one's situation which cannot be changed - and through this process it is possible to discover oneself. It is an attitude despised by all so-called revolutionaries, still, it is the fundamental attitude in India".[52]

It is the attitude reflected in the words of the rickshaw-driver from the scheduled castes: "I was born into this Harijan-family because of the evil sins of my previous life. I am also poor. Now I try to be good in this life, so that in my next life I can be born into a rich family from the higher castes".[53]

As indicated earlier, the picture is not completely static. There are government programs and other attempts to improve the situation of the scheduled castes. And such initiative also help imbue the Harijans with the consciousness that changes are actually possible and much more ought to be done. However,

to talk about a veritable revolt against inequality among the Harijans is misleading[54]; the 'you have to put up with it' - attitude is still very strong.

Clearly, the elements of Indian culture/religion described here are of internal origin. The role of the English in this regard has been to exploit these cultural traits in the context of their overall power policies. This has sometimes served to reinforce, sometimes to weaken Indian culture on these points. On balance, the powerful forces of capitalist industrialization and urbanisation introduced by the English has mostly served to weaken traditional Indian value-systems.

7. Conclusion

There has been substantial change in the Indian society since independence. Capitalism has grown both in industry and agriculture, and the industrial sector in particular has diversified to the point of making India a significant exporter of manufactured goods as well as of technology.[55]

These changes in the economy have had some effects on the poor also. The infrastructure is better in many areas of the countryside - there are roads now where there were none earlier, and electricity has come to many villages. In addition, there is an increased consciousness among the poor about the larger context of their situation, some knowledge about processes on the national political level where there were none earlier.[56]

In 1918, an epidemic Spanish flu killed twenty million people in India. A similar event could hardly happen today. But half of the population is still below the poverty line, as was the case twenty years ago. Deeper-going changes are needed to get out of this situation.

Such deeper-going changes should involve contributions towards removing one or more of the five obstacles to development mentioned above. The five elements are obviously interrelated, and changes on one dimension could contribute to changes in others, amounting to a 'good circle' of development.[57]

It has been demonstrated that both external and internal factors play a role in the erection of these obstacles to development. It would, in other words, be misleading to focus one-sidedly on either kind of factor in coming to grips with the problems of development in India.

We have also seen that the obstacles to development involve not only economic, but also political, social and cultural issues.

The call for deep-going change sounded here has been put forward many times earlier, in the fifties and in the sixties; in the seventies and in the eighties. More often than not, these calls for change have been accompanied by the assertion that if change was not quickly forthcoming, India would explode in a chaos of violent social conflict, disorder and political upheaval.[58] But sadly, I do not believe that such warnings have a firm basis in the Indian experience. It is the irony of the Indian predicament that amidst all kinds of imbalances there seems to be an astonishingly stable balance between socio-economic, political, and cultural forces which contribute to the continued reproduction of mass-poverty.

NOTES

1) See for example Aidan Foster-Carter: From Rostow to Gunder Frank: Conflicting Paradigms in the Analysis of Underdevelopment, World Development, 4:3, 1976.

2) Theotonio dos Santos: The Crisis of Development Theory and the Problems of Dependence in Latin America, in H. Bernstein (ed.): Underdevelopment and Development, Harmondsworth 1973. Same: Dependence Relations and Political Development in Latin America: Some Considerations, Ibero Americana, Vol. VII: 1, 1977.

3) Cf. for example F.H. Cardoso & E. Faletto: Dependency and Development in Latin America, Berkeley 1979, especially the Post Scriptum.

4) See my discussion in Georg Sørensen: The Twists and Turns of Development Theory: A Comment on 'The European Experience' by Dieter Senghaas, Journal of Peace Research Vol. 23, No. 1, 1986.

5) It was probably Gunnar Myrdal's contribution which gave the decisive push to moving the debate beyond economics. See his Asian Drama, Harmondsworth 1968.

6) Data from Kontakt no. 4, 1983/84, special issue on India.

7) Data from Michael P. Todaro: Economic development in the Third World, New York 1985, p. 50.

8) Ibid., p. 149.

9) Gunnar Myrdal: Asian Drama; abridged in one volume by Seth King, Harmondsworth 1971, p. 88.

10) Francine Frankel: India's Political Economy 1947-77. The Gradual Revolution, Princeton 1978, p. 97.

11) Jørgen Harboe: Hvidt og grønt landbrug i Indien, i Kontakt 4, 1983/84, op.cit., p. 26.

12) Maren Bellwinkel: Die Kasten-Klassenproblematik im Städtisch-Industriellen Bereich, Wiesbaden 1980, ch. 1.

13) Myrdal 1971, op.cit., p. 204.

14) The process was vivivly described by Rosa Luxembourg in Die Akkumulation des Kapitals, Frankfurt 1970 (1912), pp. 292-97. An example of the ruthless tax demands of the English: during a famine in Bengal which killed one third of the population (1769-79), English tax demands remained unchanged.

15) A.S.T. Langeland & H. Holmboe: Indien og Sydøstasien, København 1971, p. 224.

16) John Martinussen: Staten i perifere og post-koloniale samfund: Indien og Pakistan I-IV, Aarhus 1980. Summary in English, pp. 1448ff.

17) Martin Gjerulff: Indiens rige bønder, Kontakt no. 6 1984/85, p. 24n.

18) Frankel op.cit., p. 580.

19) Om Prakash & P.N. Rastogi: Development of the rural poor: the missing factor, IFDA Dossier no. 51, Jan/Feb. 1986, p. 5n.

20) Ibid., p. 7n.

21) Ibid., p. 12. The text refers to other studies to make the point that Duari is a typical village in this respect.

22) Martinussen 1980, op.cit., p. 1246.

23) Quoted from Frankel, op.cit., p. 495.

24) Ole Christensen: Magtens støvede centrum, Kontakt no. 4, 1983/84, op.cit., p. 6.

25) "Down to the end of the Mohgul rule, India had been governed on the lines of a dynastic state, by an old autocracy. There was the emergence of a dominant social class with a built-in structure and style of power. The immigrant British administration elaborated its own style, retaining the native characteristics of social dominance of the ruling elite. The new democracy in the post-independence era almost inherited all that style; this is a paradox of the triumph of a minority over the majority". R.S. Varma: Bureaucracy in India, Bhopal 1973, p. 29.

26) Ibid., p. 3on.

27) Cf. Martinussen 1980, op.cit., pp. 1301-59.

28) Ibid., p. 1336.

29) Keith Griffin & A.R. Khān (eds.): Poverty and Landlessness in Rural Asia, Geneva (ILO) 1976, mimeo.

30) John Martinussen: The Indian State and the Multinational Corporations: Contribution to an Analysis of the Extra-Societal Determination of State Functions, mimeo, Aarhus 1976.

31) In democratic systems based in capitalist settings, like the Indian, the process takes place under limitations which have to do with the fact that democratic rule cannot contest the basic capitalist structure of society. Further argument along these lines in Nicos Poulantzas: Pouvoir politique et classes sociales, Paris 1971.

32) Bhoudhayan Chattopadhyay, quoted in Lasse Berg: Hvad sker der i de indiske landsbyer, Kontakt no. 4, 1983/84, op.cit., p. 23.

33) Frankel, op.cit., p. 577n.

34) Jørgen Dige Pedersen: Indiens splittede fagbevægelse, Kontakt no. 4 1983/84, op.cit., p. 37n.

35) John Martinussen: Indira Gandhis Indien, ibid., p. 17.

36) Loc.cit. See also Frankel's considerations on the issue, op.cit., p. 576ff.

37) "In response to the internal destabilizers, the institutionalization of popular power requires a period of nondemocratic forms of representation. The combined resources of interlocking ruling classes and the 'open' nature of the polity create a great deal of vulnerability to economic disruption and social dislocation, which could undermine the regime if political channels were not selectively closed. The institutional channels through which interest groups and parties linked to the ruling classes act may be closed or their activities sharply delimited. In a period of 'foundation-building', when the social order is being transformed, nondemocratic forms of representation are necessary for the consolidation of the new property relations. The reemergence of reciprocity and civilty is a postrevolutionary phenomenon bound up with the degree to which mass participation and solidarity replace indirect representation". James Petras: Critical Perspectives on Imperialism and Social Class in the Third World, New York & London 1978, p. 73. The viewpoint is admittedly dangerous, because there is evidence that the 'transition-period' of nondemocratic rule tends to be prolonged indefinately.

38) This is based on Martinussen 1980, op.cit., p. 791.

39) Cf. ibid., p. 872n.

40) The figures are from 1971, cf. Herbert Wulf: Indien, in D. Nohlen & F. Nuscheler (Hrsg.): Handbuch der Dritten Welt 7, Hamburg 1983, p. 125.

41) Erling Bjøl: Verdenshistorien efter 1945, bd. 3, København 1973, p. 341n.

42) Ole Christensen in Kontakt 4, 1983/84, op.cit., p. 15.

43) E.M.S. Namboodiripad, quoted from Frankel, op.cit., p. 343.

44) John Martinussen in Kontakt 4, 1983/84, op.cit., p. 12n.

45) Niels Ufer: Indiens dynastiske ledelse lever og har det ganske godt, Information, Oct. 31, 1985, p. 2.

46) In the present context, 'external forces' is meant to include economic and political interests from the industrialized countries of the West. Other 'external forces', for example Pakistan, have of course played a role in the issue.

47) Cf. Max Weber: Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus, in: Die protestantische Ethik I, Hamburg 1975 (Hrsg. von J. Winckelmann).

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