

## ISSUES

# Whose progress is it anyway?

**I**ndia, in economic parlance, is a developing country. This allusion entails the hope that it will eventually become a developed country and like most hopeful statements, such a depiction involves the covert implication that it ought to become developed, hence superior.

This notion of development, engenders a value-laden, hierarchical approach to seeing the world. The developed-underdeveloped polarisation of the world automatically begets the superior-inferior and good-bad dichotomies. Like most normative concepts, the validity of the one of development is seldom questioned.

The normative implications of development are *prima facie* accepted by all who thrive to abide by the rules set by the developed countries. The reason behind such an ubiquitous acceptance is the technological-military supremacy of the West.

That meaning of development was seemingly obvious in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Europe introduced Asia and Africa at gunpoint to its civilisation. The notion emerged from the syllogism: European civilisation with superior arms is superior, and therefore, is developed. Europe is technologically developed, therefore its civilisation is superior. Once this tautology got established, the consumerist argument became more convincing: living conditions are better in Europe. Thus, East ought to be developed.

This logic has always justified the destruction of indigenous cultures. Thousands were killed in Australasia and the New World, and European diseases like syphilis, gonorrhoea and small pox were deliberately spread. These areas were thus converted into neo-Europes. Since then indigenous people are living in abject poverty with no voice in parliaments of the US and Canada.

The Western ideologues have proposed all primitive and uncivilised cultures to be brought into the mainstream techno-urban civilisation. The enlightened people elsewhere have readily joined this 'development-oriented' bandwagon from the West.

Whose definitions of primitiveness and civilisation, do we follow? The European idea was that the history of human culture is an evolution from a near-nature state through phases of progress to civilisation *per se*. Civilisa-

tion came into being by virtue of man's ability to tame and exploit nature. Modern civilisation is superior to nature; like Europe is superior to Africa and Australasia, man to woman, and whites to blacks.

Since the European civilisation was defined by European anthropology, a science born of Euro-imperialism, as the pinnacle of culture. All existing societies that did not quite conform to it came to be defined as living fossils whose reason for existence had already been superannuated.

Is there any justification to develop the world the Western way? It is now a truism to say that the baneful spill-offs of modern technology, pollution, diminution of resources, psychological maladies and spiritual void characterising modern civilisation, would never have festered humanity if only it were ensconced in the primitive cultures.

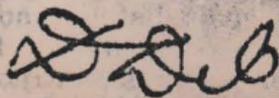
But one objects to this because it is essentially defined in terms of using technology for better resource use. Is the modern technology really better than the primitive one?

While the ancient societies did not learn to harness atomic power, the pattern of their resource use was in most cases judicious, maintaining the resource base recuperative for millenia.

Modern technology, on the other hand, is exploiting resources, while failing to take care of replenishing them. Water, forest and minerals all are being exhausted without a thought for the future. This profligate mode of resource use is what passed as solely development-oriented technology.

Profligate resource use pattern was prohibited in the pre-industrial societies. These constraints prevented exhaustive exploitation of common property resources. Now environmental movements frequently refer to those norms of resource use as sustainable development.

This elucidates the puerility of the race of the Third World countries for development. It is high time that the "underdeveloped" redefine development in the light of history of technology and ecological prudence.



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