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# **SOCIAL POLICY SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**SHANKAR PATHAK**



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## **SOCIAL POLICY, SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## Preface

This book is a selection of my published articles on a common theme. Most of them were written during a period of eight years 1979-1987 (chapters 1 to 4, and 6 and 7). Chapter 8 was written for the ASSWI seminar on poverty, December 1975 and published later in a book edited by R.R. Singh (Concept Publishing Co.). Chapter 5 was part of a special project conceived and executed by Dr. Murli Desai, who was then on the faculty of Tata Institute of Social Sciences and it was published in the Indian Journal of Social Work in April 1997. Chapter 9 was specially written during January-April 2013 for this publication, to provide the readers with an overview of India's developmental planning of over sixty years, an empirical check on the conceptual-academic discussion of social development/development in chapters No. 2 and 3. Readers may supplement the data and possibly arrive at a conclusion different than mine. For over six months a wealth of data from a variety of sources were collected-official/semi-official (government and industry) independent academic writers or other prestigious organisational sources like A.D.B. World Bank, O.E.C.D. and R.B.I. Only a small selection of the collected data is used in chapter 9 and some additional data is presented in the Appendix III, Statistical Profile.

This is my seventh and last book being published during the twilight of my life (I am now 83 years of age). As before, the Printer and Publisher, Ramesha M.H. is responsible for this publication. Malati S.M. and K. Anantha Murthy took much trouble in converting my handwritten drafts of the last chapter, into computer-printed script for D.T.P. I am grateful to them. I thank Mr. Ramesha and his team for their untiring efforts which made this publication possible.

20 June, 2013  
Bangalore

**Shankar Pathak**

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Social Change and Social Development**

There is a resurgence of interest in social change all over the world. This is particularly evident in those societies described as developing societies. Perhaps, the main reason for this increasing emphasis on social change is the desire of the people in the developing societies to improve their living conditions as quickly as possible. In other words, planned social change in order to bring into existence a new type of society which will provide for better living conditions for the people is a fairly widespread phenomenon.

In recent years, the term social development has come into usage replacing earlier terms like social evolution and social progress. In much of the literature on this theme, social scientists have used a variety of terms like institutional change, social change, national development and social development etc., without always specifying clearly the sense in which these terms are used. It is essential to clarify the meaning of these terms for better communication.

The term 'social change' may be viewed as a neutral term to refer to the movement of the whole society or any unit of it from one state to another state over a period of time. On the other hand, social development is an evaluational concept which refers to movement or change in a particular direction that is considered as desirable. It presupposes a type of society which is thought to be better than or superior to the existing one. When society changes in a desired direction, which is the goal of planned change, it may be called as the upward movement of the society<sup>1</sup>. Social change may also be viewed both as a process and as a product. "Change may denote alterations in the state or relations of any object or objects or it may denote the processual context and events in which such alterations develop and are manifested. The first meaning identifies

change as observable modification [i.e. as product] the second as the process through which such modification occurs.”<sup>2</sup>

The concepts of social structure and social system have been widely used in social anthropology and sociology with varying meaning and scope. Unfortunately, there is no precise and widely accepted definitions of these crucial concepts. Same is the case with the concept of institutional change used frequently in U.N. documents and also by Titmuss. The first two and sometimes all the three terms have been utilised to denote the same idea. Some attempts at clarifying and distinguishing the meaning of these terms have been made by Moore, Smith and Blau. We shall draw upon their contribution for our purpose here.

Broadly speaking, social structure refers to the social arrangement that can be perceived at any given point of time. Moore has aptly remarked: “It is an act of self-assuring bravery on the part of social scientists to use so freely the concept of *social structure* for it implies that there is something solid, indeed stable, out there to observe. The term *structure* invites architectural images, of edifices occupied or awaiting inhabitants. Yet, the term is widely used in all analytical sciences as well as in some, [others] that are mainly taxonomic or descriptive”.<sup>3</sup> According to him there are five uses of the term social structure: (1) patterns of action, (2) social systems, (3) social differentiation, (4) statistical, distributive categories like age-structure and (5) orderly sequence.<sup>4</sup>

Both Blau and Smith speak of social structure as consisting of units or components.<sup>5</sup> This is necessary if social structure is to be viewed as a concrete, descriptive and an empirical entity. For Smith, “Social structure consists in those enduring relations and units manifested in recurrent processes of social action”.<sup>6</sup> By social system he means “a set of interconnected social processes and the structures they engage and sustain or modify”.<sup>7</sup> This definition of social structure includes two of the five uses of the term identified by Moore, i.e., patterns of action and social system. We shall use this definition of social structure in the context of a nation society.

Social change may be used as a generic term to refer to change in any unit of social structure or in the whole social structure. It

encompasses change in the structures of major social institutions frequently referred to as the basic, radical or fundamental transformation of society, changes in the structure of a social institution, and changes in the structure of an organization. For the sake of convenience these three types of social changes may be referred to as social structural change, institutional change and organizational change respectively.

Smith has given a clear and precise definition of social structural change. He states that “mere changes in [society’s] number of members or gross domestic product or urbanization ratio need not directly entail modifications in the nature or structure of the system itself”.<sup>8</sup> The former changes he classifies as extensive changes. “By change then we do not mean merely extensive alteration in the state of a system or the processes by which such alterations occur. Rather ... *those alterations in the structure of the system which involve changes in its characteristic processes and operational condition*”<sup>9</sup> (Emphasis supplied). Smith recognizes that both the above mentioned processes-extensive change and structural change go together. In his opinion, “the decisive criterion of [structure] change is modification or transformation of the structure”.<sup>10</sup>

Social change has also been defined by Moore. “Social change is the significant alteration of social structures (that is, of patterns of social action and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values, and cultural products and symbols”.<sup>11</sup> We don’t find it helpful to agree completely with this definition of social change which is very wide in scope, ranging from small scale changes in social groups to basic changes in the whole social structure. We can adopt however, a part of it referring to “significant alteration of social structures”. These social structures can vary in scope and size such as the nation society, regional society and city or village society.

The phrase ‘significant alteration’ needs further elaboration. From the perspective of planned change, significant alteration would mean extensive changes in the components of social structure as defined by Smith earlier which are necessary in order to achieve the



goal. Thus stated, normal changes that go on in any social structure such as replacement of individuals occupying certain social statuses like the offices of Prime Minister and President or changes of government following periodical elections will not be considered as significant. This is merely a simple circulation of personnel through social positions and should not be mistaken for structural modifications. A similar process which involves or generates modification in the *criteria or procedures of allocation* (of statuses) and in the scope, status and relations of the positions concerned would be a significant alteration in the social structure.<sup>12</sup> It also excludes changes which are too small and too inconsequential to have much impact on the direction of change toward the goal, i.e. trivial changes to use Moore's phrase. Life cycle changes of an individual such as marriage or old age, and change of fashions in dress and hair-style of a group are illustrative of trivial changes. In other words, the concept of significant alterations of social structures implies a certain magnitude and speed of change. What should be the magnitude and pace of change is an extremely difficult task to state at a general theoretical level. But we can attempt some further clarification of these ideas.

Let us take the cases of the family and the property system, As a result of several changes that are going on in the Indian society at present the families may be in the process of becoming smaller in size. If the experience of other societies who have passed through such evolution is any guide, a similar development may take place in our society also after two or three decades. Birth-rate may fall to the point that the annual increase in population may be around one per cent as against the present 2.15 per cent. If we want that this should happen during the next few decades and initiate a series of actions with the intention of achieving this fast rate of growth by influencing the voluntary decisions of couples, then the rate and magnitude of change would have to be such as to call it a significant alteration of structure. And the alteration will be at the institutional level of family such as norms and values which influence the size

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\* The Birth rate has come down and it is now 1.64 (2011 census).

of the family, and the type of family structure (e.g. nuclear rather than extended). The cumulative impact of these changes on the rate of population growth at the national level will produce significant alterations in the social structure.

Property system is considered in sociology and social anthropology as a social institution. It is based on the concept of right of ownership of property. This right may be practiced on the basis of customary law as well as by formal incorporation in the legal statutes. The details of this right vary from one culture to another culture. When land reforms are introduced by the state as part of planned social development, this ownership right may be severely curtailed or modified to a certain extent. Such changes in the property system would be termed as institutional changes or a significant alteration of the institution of property. If the state takes away the complete right of ownership of private property, it will be a structural change of such magnitude involving major social institutions like law, polity and economy, that it is appropriately designated as basic social structural change or radical social transformation. The land reforms introduced in India by several states like the abolition of zamindari, tenancy reform, fixation of land ceiling etc. can only be called as institutional changes. The abolition of property rights and the communization of land in Soviet Russia and China belong to the category of basic social structural change or radical social transformation.

An organisation is a secondary association of people established for a specific purpose such as to provide a societal service like primary education, health care and provision of care service to the needy etc. They may vary in size. Some of them will be geographically limited to a town or a city. Others may extend their operations to larger territories. Some organizations may even be international in scope. Organizations may also vary according to the degree of complexity from a simple one unit organization to complex multi-unit organizations. When a change is attempted or introduced to modify the structure of the organisation in respect of its units and their inter-relationship, in regard to the concentration

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **The Concepts and Goals of Development**

Evolutionary theorists of the nineteenth century believed in the inevitability of social progress. They thought that social change was governed by laws comparable to the laws of nature which ensured the movement of societies in the predetermined direction. In our own country social reformers like Rammohun Roy and M.G. Ranade subscribed to this evolutionary view of social progress. The social reform movements which were initiated by them were to facilitate and hasten this process. In other words, the spontaneous social actions were to be influenced by purposive actions. Like the concept of social progress, the currently popular term social development is also an evaluational concept. Unlike the evolutionists of the last century, the modern advocates of social development do not generally believe in the inevitability of social development. Social development, according to them, has to be accomplished through purposive and deliberate social planning (including economic planning).

It is not easy to define social development which is both vague and elusive as a concept. The economists who dominated the planning bodies in many countries of the world, initially overemphasised economic growth and later referred to certain social sectors as appendages which play a secondary, and a minor role in the whole process of economic development. After a series of experiences of the failures of this approach, they gradually came to accept the importance of social factors which led to a broadened view of development. Even then, economic development and social development were seen as two segments which are joined together without losing their separate identities.

Development economists and planners who treat social objectives as important and recognise the significant role of social factors in development, now speak of development as a broader

and comprehensive concept. They still speak of economic and social development as two components of the same complex whole and use the term 'balanced development' to denote an equal emphasis on the growth (economic) and distribution (social) objectives, which are conceptually viewed as being related to each other. The sociologists generally take the widest sense of the term social development, which includes many vital components such as economic, political, cultural and attitudinal elements. This duality of approach is reflected even in U.N. literature

This can be illustrated by selecting one definition from a sociologist and another from a developmental economist. According to Gore, a sociologist, 'The concept of social development is inclusive of economic development but differs from it in the sense that it emphasises the development of the totality of society in its economic, political, and cultural aspects'.<sup>1</sup> Dudley Seers who is considered to be the father of developmental economics originally explained development as following:

The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all the three have, it would be strange to call the result 'development' even if per capita income doubled.<sup>2</sup>

In the same article, Seers stated that 'the realisation of the potential of human personality' was the universal aim of development and this requires enough food to meet the survival of man, an adequate income to buy food and other basic needs of life, and a job not only to provide a person with income but as 'something without which personality cannot develop'. He noted the internal link between unemployment, poverty and inequality or to use Myrdal's phrase, circular causality of the developmental process. In a recent redefinition of development, Seers has stressed national self-reliance for which true and complete independence is necessary.

He also recognised the vital role of cultural factors in development and stated that 'as a general rule, let us say that "development" now implies, *inter alia*, reducing cultural dependence on one or more of the great powers'.<sup>3</sup> Development is not primarily about per capita income but also about distribution. So stated, it is needed in all countries developing and developed. As there cannot be a universally agreed conception of a good society, there cannot be a universally applicable definition of development. At a general level social development is defined by Myrdal as 'the movement upward of the entire social system, where there is circular causation and interdependence between conditions and changes of conditions with cumulative effects'.<sup>4</sup> What is meant by the upward movement of the whole system in concrete terms? Dudley Seers's definition of development is helpful to us here. If poverty, inequality and unemployment have declined from their present high levels, and there is an equitable distribution of benefits of growth which has resulted in the improvement of living conditions of those who are relatively poor, then it can be said that there has been an upward movement of the whole social system.

The modernisation theorists, on the basis of their analysis of developed western countries have formulated the dichotomous classification of societies as traditional and modern. According to them, social development means transformation of traditional societies into modern societies. Certain characteristics of these two types of societies have been developed. In brief, a modern society, in this view, is an industrial society with features that can be found in the advanced western democracies of Europe and North America.

There have been many criticisms of the modernisation theory. Without going into all of them it may be pointed out that it is highly impractical to expect all the traditional societies to become the proto-types of modern industrial societies of the west, which are characterised by a high level of industrial production and urbanisation, structural changes in economy such as greater dominance of secondary and tertiary sectors, low rate of population growth and a big export trade. This is not because of the constraints

of resources alone, natural and others such as capital, trained manpower and technology. The biggest constraint will be the market for industrial goods. If every country is highly industrialised and produces more than it needs, who is to buy these goods that cannot be sold in the domestic market? And many of them are not blessed with abundant natural resources necessary for industrialisation or modernisation.

It is generally agreed that whatever may be the conception of social development, it involves major changes in social institutions. The institutions identified for this purpose and the changes envisaged vary according to the particular theoretical orientation. Have the advocates of change in developing societies given sufficient thought as to what aspects of their societies need to be preserved and what other aspects changed? Are there lessons to be learned by the experience of the modern societies? Very little thought has been given to these important questions by social scientists. Some sociologists in the advanced western countries have stated that there is a trend away from nuclear family and a partial restoration, albeit in a modified form, of the extended family structure. The problem of loneliness and the social isolation of the aged, whose number is increasing in these societies, has assumed enormous proportions. Is it possible to preserve some of the features of the extended family such as the close bond with the kin groups, care of the old, mutual support in times of crisis, etc., through planned effort? And do we want to retain them? Not much thought seems to have been devoted to these questions either. To the same category belongs the issue of the growth of huge metropolises and the alienation, high rate of crime, atmospheric pollution, inadequate housing and other civic amenities, etc., that follow. While criticising the fatalistic attitudes and deterministic theories, some of the social scientists glibly speak of the inexorable process of modernisation,

What has been said so far in the above paragraphs suggests that the conception of social development in its concrete dimensions will vary from country to country based on its resources, and national deliberations on social change. 'The process of establishing

development goals and values nationally is itself a process of development.’<sup>5</sup> In arriving at a particular conception of social development, there are some serious obstacles. Is it possible for all people in a society to agree on the goal and nature of social development when it is spelled out in concrete details? How is this agreement accomplished, i.e., by what means? Societies, even modernising societies, are not homogeneous. There are several segments whose interests sometimes conflict. Redistribution of wealth and income may be welcomed by the poor, but resisted by the rich. And this is not possible unless there is redistribution of political and economic power. If these issues are to be discussed and debated by the population at all levels, it becomes a very complex task in any society and more so in a large country like India. Those groups with political power such as the elite may carry the day. In genuine democracies, the matter may be decided through a long process of debate, ending with a formal endorsement of the goal and conception of development by the people when a constitution is framed. And the constitution frequently incorporates the ideals and programmes evolved during the long phase of the struggle for national independence. This is generally true of most of the developing countries which were under colonial rule.

The leaders of the national movement, who are usually charismatic figures, formulate the ideologies of the movement which contain the main elements of the goal and nature of social development. In India, Gandhi and Nehru as the most prominent and charismatic leaders of the national movement for independence, contributed most for the emerging conceptions of social development. Sarvodaya is the Gandhian concept of social development.<sup>6</sup> The term literally translated means uplift of all. The idea is better conveyed by the term ‘good or welfare of all the people’. Gandhi did not subscribe to the utilitarian philosophy of the greatest good of the greatest number. The welfare of the entire population was his goal. This is possible only through the radical transformation of the existing social structure. The Gandhian concept of social development has been described by him and his followers as a



revolution. In a single word, it means *Swarajya* or self-rule, in contrast with the centralised governmental rule. The goal of social development is the establishment of a *Sarvodaya Samaj* (universal welfare society) which would be free from exploitation and based on the bedrock of the values of truth and non-violence. Such a society is essentially a rural society, consisting of several self-reliant, self-governing, but interdependent republics. There will be cities in such a conception of society if they did not exploit the villages. There will be place for machines which do not displace people and save the drudgery of all labourers.

Nehru's conception of social development was based on socialism and planned economic development on the Soviet model, but through democratic political instruments. Industrialisation, development of science and technology through trained technical manpower, and improvement of rural society through land reforms and community development were some of the main ingredients of Nehru's concept of social development.<sup>7</sup> It was mainly due to him that planned development became a programme of the Indian National Congress and later the policy of the new government after Independence. The conception of a new society which evolved during the national movement for independence was incorporated in the Constitution which was the culmination of a long process of national debate in a variety of forums such as the press, the political parties, and the discussions during the sessions of the Constituent Assembly. So, it is to the Constitution, particularly to its Preamble, that we turn for our understanding of the country's goal and nature of social development.

What kind of society do we want to bring into existence as a result of planned social change? The answer is provided by the Constitution and the various resolutions passed by the Parliament. The goal is to work for the creation of a society where social, economic and political justice shall prevail. The central values are freedom, equality and social justice. There are three aspects of equality-political, economic and social. Political equality refers to universal franchise which confers equal right to vote and hold office

of power without any discrimination based on sex, caste and economic or educational status. It also includes equality before law and what are termed as citizenship rights. Economic equality refers to equal possession of wealth and equal distribution of income on the basis of rational, non-discriminatory criteria. For example, payment of equal wage for equal work irrespective of the sex of the person concerned and no closure of employment avenues on the basis of sex or caste. It will also imply reduction of disparities in income and wealth by means of land reforms and restriction on amassing wealth. Social equality refers to status and equal opportunity for social mobility, irrespective of sex, caste and religion.<sup>8</sup> In the Indian context, it refers to the removal of all forms of discrimination in social and religious matters traditionally imposed on scheduled castes and women.

The concept of social justice is based on the principle of redress. According to this principle, 'to treat all persons equally, to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into less favourable positions'.<sup>9</sup> As Myrdal has pointed out, there is a close relationship between social inequality and economic inequality, and greater equality is a precondition for lifting a society out of poverty. And in a poor country the hardship of the poorest is more severe due to economic inequality.<sup>10</sup> In concrete terms, in the economic sphere, social justice includes the eradication of poverty, the provision of at least basic minimum needs to all, and redistribution of income in such a way that progressively the economic inequality between the rich and the poor is reduced. This implies provision of work to all the people who are capable of participating in production and redistribution of wealth such as land reforms, consistent with the central value of equality. It will be necessary to remove the gap between the few who control a major share of landed property and a large number of landless agricultural population. Land reforms will be a central feature of planned change. Political and social equality have already been granted by a series of constitutional and legislative measures. Yet, it cannot be said that political and social equality is a reality.

One of the problems of a developing country is that strong central political institutions are necessary to provide for a measure of political stability for the task of nation-building and to implement development plans, which results in concentration of political power at certain levels of society. Though outward forms of democratic government may remain, power tends to be concentrated in a few persons and groups. Yet, decentralisation of political power is essential for involving the populace in making crucial decisions affecting them and for implementing plans in accordance with local conditions and needs. A certain amount of decentralisation of political power, and provision for the largest measure of participation in the political and economic decision-making, is essential to achieve political equality.

In the sphere of social equality, this will call for elimination of all forms of discrimination based on religion, caste, sex, etc. Whereas social equality has been incorporated in law, it is far from being a reality. One of the key elements here is the lack of educational opportunities. So it is essential to ensure minimum equal educational opportunities for all and make active efforts to include all the population in educational programmes, whether by formal programmes during the school-going age or by other means like non-formal education, social education, adult literacy, etc. Provision of educational opportunities alone will not be effective, unless it is supported by economic capacity.

To sum up, the goal of planned social development in India is to create a secular, democratic, egalitarian society, which ensures welfare of all the members of the society. Redistribution of wealth and income, decentralisation of political power to enable the masses to participate in planning for social development, substantial improvement in the living conditions of the people, particularly those at the bottom of social pyramid, implementation of programmes of social justice for traditionally disadvantaged sections of the society, and expansion of social services, especially for the benefit of the poorest, are the main features of social development.

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## CHAPTER-8

### Conceptions and Misconceptions of Poverty

‘But I do strongly hold ... that, as far as is possible, our beliefs should accord with facts; *that unexamined ideas should be dragged* into the open and made to defend themselves; and that such ideas that cannot defend themselves deserve historical interest only-which is, indeed, a serious kind of interest, but that to pretend that they are alive is either dishonesty or, worse, sloth.’

D.G. MacRae

‘The deplorable evil result of the present, “administration and management of expenditure”, in violation of solemn pledges, is so subtle, so artistic, so unobservably “bleeding”, ... so plausibly masked with the face of beneficence, and being unaccompanied with any open compulsion or violence to person or property which the world can see and be horrified with, that, as the poet says:

“Those lofty souls have telescopic eyes,  
That see the smallest speck of distant pain,  
While at their feet a world of agony,  
Unseen, unheard, unheeded, withers in vain”

Dadabhai Nauroji

### Introduction

‘Time is out of joint for the social scientist’ - thus spoke a social scientist friend who is also a social actionist (by conviction only).\* The present time certainly seems to be most conducive for historians, philosophers, and even social work educators. A social work educator of three decades vintage, I have a weakness for history and possess a philosophical bent of mind. A combination of the time and temper could be irresistible for producing a paper like this.

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\* This is an allusion to the period of emergency.

The poor have always been a “happy hunting ground” for the politicians, the reformers and the academicians. This is not surprising. Poverty is good business for some people. Described as the salt of the earth nineteen centuries ago, the poor today are known as the ‘wretched of the earth’ and as the Fourth World.<sup>1</sup> And that in a nutshell is the historical progress. A survey of history of India reveals to us that the poor and the lowly have always been the first group to flock in large numbers to any new religious leader, or Messiah. It was so at the time of Buddha, the Compassionate; at the time of saint-philosophers of the *Bhakti Panth* during the 15th-16th Century A.D.; during the long period of Muslim rule; and after the arrival of the Christian missionaries who came to preach in India, when the British formed their first empire at the beginning of the last century.

In the ancient time when the religion had a great hold on the minds of men, the ruler and the ruling class (the predecessors of the modern politicians and the elites) learnt to consolidate their position of power with the aid of the ideologue, the Brahmins.<sup>2</sup> The theory of divine origin of the king, and the theory of *Karma* were inventions of the Brahmins. Poverty and suffering, according to the *Karma* theory, was explained on the basis of individual responsibility - the action of the individual and the ‘accident’ of birth based on his actions in a previous birth. This was around the 6th century B.C., at the time of Buddha. Very recently, during 1976, two statesmen\* who are described by the press as high dignitaries,\*\* on the same day spoke at two different places on the same theme. I quote from the press reports:\*\*\*

The first (a very high dignitary) “deprecatd the tendency among Muslims to look to the Government to provide them with jobs. It was foolish to think that all Muslims could be given government jobs. *Ignorance was the main malady among Muslims and they had developed a fatalistic attitude.*” He quoted from the Koran to say that “God helps those who help themselves.”

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\* A Statesman in defined as a person who is (re-) moved from a position of power into a position of appearance of power.

\*\* Not the Prime Minister, who was the most effective power holder in the country.

\*\*\* Emphasis supplied.

The other high dignitary stressed “that the scheduled castes should not depend on the government alone for their economic uplift. *They should have confidence in themselves* and work with determination towards a better future.” He said that “the Constitution gave equal rights to Harijans in all matters and there was no reason why they should not assert themselves as equals in society.” He asked *them to shed their inferiority complex* and he was sure that they would be able to overcome all obstacles on their road to progress.

The two dignitaries were referring to the two different segments of the Indian population which are known to be mostly poor. If you read carefully the two quotations from the speeches, I am sure you cannot miss the underlying perceptions of the poor and the causes of the poverty. There is a remarkable similarity between these ideas and the explanation given by the *Karma* theory. The poor are held responsible for their poverty and, their psychological make up or deficiencies in their personality are seen to be the major blocks in bringing about improvement in their material conditions.

Psychologism? Psychological determinism? Should you say that, then you would be accused of being a structuralist or worse still, a historical materialist. How does a structuralist view the problem of poverty and its causes? But then which kind of structuralist do we mean? Because, there are so many varieties in this group.

First of all, there are the social anthropologists whose focus is on primitive social structures. Then, there are the Marxist structuralists who see the origin of all human problems in the social structure and especially in the economic basis of it. We have a third kind known as the structural functionalists, who are the followers of the sociological grand theorist, Talcott Parsons. According to him, the major factors are to be found in the normative system. We also have structuralists who call themselves general systems theorists and in their conception the social structure is similar to that found in engineering. This is a mechanistic conception of social structure and cybernetics is the magic word. I need not have to remind you, I am sure, of the oldest of them all, the organismic structuralists. It

is a tradition dating back to the times of Comte, Spencer and Durkheim. Here I shall limit myself to a few types only.

Structural functionalists view poverty as performing an essential function in society. In other words, some amount of poverty in one form or other is essential for the maintenance of the social structure.<sup>3</sup> The poor and their poverty contribute to stability in the social system. There is some force in this argument. Because, we have empirical evidence to support this view.<sup>4</sup>

### Anthropologists and Poverty

The social anthropologists who, according to Edmund Leach, are sometimes relabelled as sociologists are traditionally interested in the micro-social structure of the primitive societies. In India, the social anthropologists have by and large confined their studies to the social structure of the village communities. In their conception of social structure generally, there is no place for the economic and the political institutions.<sup>5</sup> Even when they come very near to it as in the case of the concept of dominant caste, they skillfully skirt around it, and keep their attention firmly focused on such institutions like family, kinship, marriage, caste etc. In fact, in their conception, the social structure is limited to these four institutions. It is very rarely that an Indian social anthropologist or a sociologist in his study has concerned himself with economic institutions and that too with the problem of poverty.

The excessive and obsessive preoccupation with caste on the part of social anthropologists in India has been commented upon by Myrdal:

“They [the anthropologists] are still labouring with finding out how people live and survive, and they are regularly, different from us economists, dealing with only segments of the national society, and also mostly focusing their work on certain problems that have traditionally been at the centre of their attention, like, for instance, caste in India. They have seldom attempted systematically to lay bare the circular causation between all conditions in a society they are studying.”<sup>6</sup>



So Myrdal found himself compelled to be his own social anthropologist, transgressing the disciplinary boundaries of economics into social anthropology, in order to comprehensively understand the problem of poverty in Asia.

Following the study by Oscar Lewis in Mexico, a highly popular, if somewhat loosely formulated concept is the concept of culture of poverty. To quote:

“As an anthropologist I have tried to understand poverty and its associated traits as a culture or, more accurately, as a subculture with its own structure and rationale, as a way of life which is passed down from generation to generation along family lines. This view directs attention to the fact that the culture of poverty in modern nations is not only a matter of economic deprivation, of disorganisation or of the absence of something. It is also something positive and provides some rewards without which the poor could hardly carry on ....”

The culture of poverty is both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, high individuated, capitalistic society. It represents an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair which develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society. Indeed, many of the traits of the culture of poverty can be viewed as attempts at local solutions for problems not met by existing institutions and agencies because the people are not eligible for them, cannot afford them, or are ignorant or suspicious of them. For example, unable to obtain credit from banks, they are thrown upon their own resources and organize informal credit devices without interests.<sup>7</sup>

A number of studies have been carried out in developing countries based on the theoretical framework of culture of poverty.<sup>8</sup> Some of the writers are of the opinion that this deterministic and pessimistic concept of culture of poverty is not tenable, both theoretically and empirically.<sup>9</sup> I am in agreement with this view.

### Economists and Poverty

A social anthropologist (Srinivas) has unfavourably commented upon the Indian economists' reluctance to study poverty first hand on the basis of participant observation.<sup>10</sup> Their only

contact with the poor and poverty, if at all, is through their domestic servants, he alleges. To some extent, this criticism is valid. The Indian economists have been the first group among social scientists to take interest in the problem of poverty by trying to assess the existence of poverty and its parameters. However, in order to do that they have relied on secondary data made available by the governmental sources like the Planning Commission, the census data, the reports of the various committees and the National Sample Surveys. With the use of such devices like inflators, deflators, and multipliers, and also by using the various cost of living and wholesale price indices, with adjustments made to take into account the variation over a period of time and regional differences, the economists have made varying estimates of poverty in quantitative terms. They have also stated what segments of the population and what proportion of these segments are poor.

The main problem for the economists, the doyen of social scientists, has been to find the cut off point below which could be found the poor. This is called the poverty line.<sup>11</sup> Being purists, in science and scientific matters, and also generally inclined to be neat and tidy in their calculations they have formulated a universal definition of poverty which is not contaminated by problems of relativity or cultural diversity. The result is the concept of absolute poverty which enables them to compare the problem of poverty interregionally and internationally. This is making the concept as value-free and culture-free as possible.

In their attempts to define poverty in absolute transcultural terms they have been supported by the contribution of the nutritionists. The absolute poverty is based on the hypothesis that a person needs a certain minimum number of calories in order to merely survive. And according to some nutritionists in India, this requires an intake of 2250 calories per day per adult. The economists, and for that matter the nutritionists have not bothered as to what should be the nutritional composition of these 2250 calories. Because, it will complicate their task and introduce the cultural problems such as food habits.

One may note here that the formulation of the concept of absolute poverty has an implicit ideology. It means the goal of human

existence is merely to survive. In other words, a vegetative existence of human beings is the basis of this concept. Occasional illness which any human being can suffer from, certain minimum human social obligations which the anthropologists call as life cycle ceremonies such as birth, marriage and death, celebrations of certain minimum major festivals, a minimum exchange of gifts etc are considered as unnecessary and complicating factors. They will only make the concept less and less scientific, and thus make quantification more difficult.

As the image of science is built on mathematics, a concept of poverty which cannot be accurately quantified and calculated will have little relevance for the economists. Economics and economists have a very high prestige in this country and elsewhere. To a great extent, it is based on their capacity to mathematicise economic concepts. As I said before, they are concerned with purity about which, incidentally, the anthropologists have concentrated upon in their study of Indian caste system. Once in a while we hear a discordant voice from amongst them. I quote from A. K. Sen:

“...it is worth emphasizing that while “pure” systems of collective choice tend to be more appealing for theoretical studies of social decisions, they are often not the most useful systems to study ....Both from the point of view of institutions as well as that of frame-works of thought, the impure systems would appear to be relevant. While purity is an uncomplicated virtue for, olive oil, sea air, and heroines of folk tales, it is not so for systems of collective choice.”<sup>12</sup>

There seems to be something really grotesque in dehumanising the poor, by reducing them to an absolute common denominator and then convert them into mathematical figures.<sup>13</sup> It is not that I overlook the necessity of estimating the magnitude of poverty. What I am objecting to is the excessive overemphasis on this factor, irrespective of its implications and consequences.

The economists, particularly the mathematical species among them, are the model builders and the planners. In a way their task is similar to that of engineers. Like them, the economists make a prototype, then prepare a cast and after that fabricate the structure, and that is the model. In more senses than one, the engineering

analogy is appropriate. Their plan models are very finely built and into which all data about human beings and other physical resources are poured which are called as 'inputs' and their mathematical calculations will produce the 'outputs' stated usually in aggregates as GDP or per capita national income. For the purpose of these calculations and also in building the models, they treat the political institutions and political decision-making process as given.<sup>14</sup> When they find that their models have not worked out properly in practice as plans are executed, they are likely to throw up their hands in exasperation and blame "lack of political will" for upsetting their models. In a sense, they are star gazers. Perhaps, this is an occupational hazard arising out of their tendency to view all economic problems mostly in macro terms. Myrdal has aptly stated:

"....in one respect the economists have a characteristic which has given them superiority and made them the cavalry of the social sciences in this regard. In the tradition of more than 200 years they have, in their different sects, all been political economists, even those whose policy conclusions were non-interference in the market. They have never been scared of constructing macro models and producing economic plans for a nation and for the whole world. To illustrate this peculiarity of my profession, I used to point out that if you place an economist in the capital of an underdeveloped country and give him a few assistants, he will on demand produce a plan for development of that country. No anthropologist, sociologist, psychologist, or what have you, would ever think of behaving in this way."<sup>15</sup>

I have devoted much attention to the economists and their concepts and estimates of poverty. In the process, I have been frequently critical of this major group of social scientists. But, my purpose was not to minimise the lead given by the economists in the country in understanding and studying poverty, in making it a national issue (with ample support from interested politicians) and for suggesting certain policy measures for combating poverty. This is no mean achievement and the economists deserve full praise for their contributions. One of the reasons why the economists as a group were singled out for much critical attention is due to the fact that no other group of social scientists has shown any interest, academically or otherwise, in the problem of poverty.

### Sociologists and Poverty

I have already made reference to the omission of the problem of poverty by this group in the various anthropological studies which number more than six or seven hundred. Whether we have in India sociologists of the type we come across in U.K. and in some European countries, and also in U.S.A. is a matter for debate. There are those who argue that we have mostly social anthropologists and hardly any sociologists. We need not get involved in a theological controversy on this matter, which is really a waste of time. Srinivas may be right when he observes that there are vested interests which are responsible in trying to keep the distinction between sociology and social anthropology.<sup>16</sup> If there are sociologists who are concerned with major social problems whose vision is so wide as to include the nation-society or any major aspect of it, they are not easily visible. This is certainly true as far as the sociological study of the problem of poverty is concerned.

One reason may be that the few sociologists of this type that are there mostly belong to the structural functional school of sociology of Talcott Parsons. A recent reviewer in an American journal has commented that most of American sociology in the post-war years is in the nature of foot-notes to Parsons. If this observation is correct, much of Indian sociology then is in the nature of additional foot-notes to Parsons. Marx and subjects on which Marx has written, though very valuable for understanding many social problems, are considered taboo by Parsonian sociologists. Thus poverty, inequality, social classes and class structure, the problem of power, and the study of science are either neglected or ignored completely from the purview of the sociological studies. One or two sociologists who have hastened to add their bit to the debate on poverty in India when it became a prominent national issue a few years ago, have been too superficial to merit notice.<sup>17</sup>

The establishment sociology in the west has generally ignored the problem of poverty until about fifteen years ago. Even now, it is stated that sociology of poverty is an undeveloped field within

sociology proper.<sup>18</sup> It may be more appropriate to speak of the poverty of sociology rather than the sociology of poverty.

There is another kind of sociology which is definitely not part of establishment sociology. It is known variously as Marxist Sociology, the New Sociology (in U.S.A.), Radical Sociology, and Sociology of the New Left (in U.K.). Among some of the prominent names belonging to these non-establishment sociological groups, I may mention the names of C. Wright Mills, Irwing Horowitz, Alvin Gouldner, Norman Birnbaum, Herbert Marcuse in U.S.A.; and T.E. Bottommore, John Rex, Anthony Giddens, J.E. Goldthorpe in U.K. Unfortunately, there is hardly any sociologist of this variety in India, with the possible exception of A.R. Desai and Ramakrishna Mukherjee. Among the founding fathers of sociology in India, there were such giants like D.P. Mukherjee, Radha Kamal Mukherjee, and G.S. Ghurye, who were broadly speaking structuralists and who did not ignore the concept of social class in their theoretical writings.<sup>19</sup> It is a tragedy of great proportion that this grand tradition of sociology in India seems to have come to an abrupt end, so much so that the discussion of social class, inequality and poverty have ceased to interest the sociologists of the present generation.

The non-traditional and non-establishment sociologists have given considerable attention to the concepts of social class and inequality as part of which the problem of poverty could be perceived fruitfully. The main problem in modern capitalistic society, whether of the classical or the mixed economy type, is the inequality in the social structure. If the limited resources which are desired by all or most of the people in that society are usurped through the exercise of power by a few, then it is inevitable that there will be social inequality and poverty. The extent of poverty and the enormity of inequality will depend upon a variety of factors. It is futile to believe that through economic growth or development per se, the problem of poverty or inequality could be taken care of by adopting such measures like redistribution of income and provision of social security etc. Because, we are here faced with a situation which is explained theoretically as a zero-sum game. In the words of Rex, "in all markets, including labour market, the following formal

circumstances occur: 1) There are two groups of participants; and individuals from each group confront individuals from the other with opposed interests; the more other gets, the less available for oneself. In the trendy language of modern sociology, what we have is a “Zero-Sum” situation.”<sup>20</sup> It is my view, that sociologically speaking, we can understand the problem of poverty better in this perspective.

### Psychologists and Poverty

Generally, the approach of the psychologists to poverty has been to view it essentially as a problem of individuals who lack motivation either to improve their circumstances or to utilise the opportunities that are made available for their benefit. In essence, the psychologist’s approach is greatly similar to the earlier moralist view of paupers, and poverty as seen during the early period of industrial revolution in U.K. As is well known, it was believed then that pauperism was due to moral defect and what was needed was to improve the character of the paupers. When social work, in its extreme psychological phase uncritically borrowed the Freudian psychological theory, poverty was seen essentially as a personality problem, arising out of the intra- psychic conflict of the individual, as a result of early childhood experience. It was really the theory of moral causation in a new pseudo-scientific garb. It is not surprising that the change-over from the moralist era in social work to psychiatric era was so smooth.

It must be mentioned here that Freud himself had not said anything directly pertaining to poverty and its causes. It was really, the Neo- Freudians and the social work theorists highly influenced by Neo-Freudian theories, who are responsible for attributing certain personality defects as causative factors in poverty. In fact, a point of view has been put forth by one of the radical sociologists that Freudian theory possessed revolutionary potentialities for transforming social structure.<sup>21</sup>

A very well known and popular theory which developed as part of an attempt to explain economic development in advanced

countries and consequently, the reasons for underdevelopment in the backward countries is the theory of achievement motivation as propounded by MacLelland. To quote:

“What impulse produces economic growth and modernization? What is it like, and where has it come from? ..... Psychologists have made an unexpected contribution to this ancient mystery unexpected in the sense that they were not working directly on this problem when they made the discovery that ultimately shed some light on the process of economic growth..... In short, the impulse to modernization in ideal psychological terms seems to consist in part of a personal virtue n Ach and in part of a social virtue interest in the welfare of the generalized other fellow. Thus, the two psychological elements essential to economic success are these: the desire to prove oneself better than others and the need to promote -the common good at least of their minority group, which is often somewhat persecuted.”<sup>22</sup>

I find it unconvincing to accept that these two psychological elements are together responsible for development or underdevelopment, and hence for poverty. This is not to deny the influential role in economic development of a group of individuals known as the innovators or entrepreneurs. But to account for the entire social development or the existence of mass poverty on the basis of this factor alone seems to be a highly reductionist approach. This may suit conservative political forces, but will not be adequate as a theoretical perspective to understand poverty.<sup>23</sup>

### The Politics of Poverty

As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, poverty has been a good business for many including politicians. The political theorists as a group, particularly in this country have not given much attention to the problem of poverty and its solution. But, practising politicians have found it convenient to focus a major part of their attention and energy on the problem of poverty since time immemorial. If it was necessary in ancient times for the king or the ruling class to legitimize the monarchy and the dynastic rule by



resorting to the theory of divine origin of monarchy, politicians since 19th the century have found it expedient to legitimise their claim to hold power by an appeal to the poor. Where representative democracy prevails in one form or the other, with free elections as a means of acquiring power, politicians coin slogans and appeals with the largest portion of the population in mind, who in developing countries are invariably poor. A number of promises are made on the eve of elections, meant for the benefit of the poor which are soon forgotten, once they have acquired power. Even in other societies, where democracy of the type just mentioned is not operating as a political institution, the rulers consider it both prudent and advantageous to legitimise their hold of power in the name of the poor masses.

In our own country, we are told, that poverty of the Indian people played a very major part in both unifying the native population as a community in their struggle against the colonial power and in developing the sense of nationalism among the elite.<sup>24</sup> The raging controversy between eminent national leaders led by people like Nauroji, Ranade, Tilak and others on the one hand, and the ruling viceroys and their high officials on the other, on the problem of poverty in India and their causes is a historical illustration of this phenomenon.

### Medical-Nutritional View of Poverty

The medical scientists and nutritionists have also contributed to the debate on poverty and its elimination, especially in this country. The medical scientists, generally, trained to view human problems in a pathological perspective and that too, in terms of individual anatomy in the course of their work both as practicing doctors and as research workers have identified a number of morbidity conditions and diseases among a large portion of our population. Anaemia, malnutrition and under nutrition are some of the conditions noticed among children and expectant mothers, particularly belonging to certain socio-economic class. They have

also highlighted the fact that the greater portion of blindness among children in India is due to nutritional deficiencies which is preventable. They have contributed, undeliberately perhaps, to the distortion of the concept of poverty as essentially a problem of nutrition and its inadequate supply. As medical scientists, they may be justified to stop midway in their analysis of diseases affecting mass of the people without bothering to ask the basic question as to why these sections of the population should suffer from malnutrition, under nutrition, anaemia, and blindness etc. But, this has only helped to confuse the debate on poverty in India and also in evolving the strategies to tackle it. On the one hand, the Planning Commission has taken a calorie intake of 2250 per day per person as the basis for deciding the concept of absolute poverty, though the basis of this figure has never been made clear. On the other hand, it has resulted in suggesting remedies of the kind as was reported recently, that a spoonful of liquid nutritional supply to children will prevent blindness.

### Poverty and Social Development - The International Game

Ever since the United Nations Organization declared the decade of 1960's as the First Development Decade, the terms 'development' and 'social development' have become internationally popular themes in academic and political circles. As pointed out by Myrdal, the language of diplomacy dictated a description which was inoffensive to all member nations, irrespective of the kind of politico-economic systems, and a definition of social development which is delightfully vague i.e. economic growth plus social change. At the most there may be mention of mass poverty as a problem to be tackled and the need for "institutional changes", without stating clearly what these changes are. But one positive consequence of these initiatives by the U.N.O. has been, to focus attention on poverty as a major problem which has to be tackled for achieving the goal of social development. To the extent this has contributed in widening the narrow view of economic growth into a broader concept of

social development and in highlighting the problem of mass poverty in major parts of the world, this is a laudable achievement. At the same time, it has also led to the initiation of international research programmes and, seminars and workshops on poverty which have made poverty a good business for officials and academicians in many countries. Sometime this has led to highly ironical situations, when seminars on poverty or food shortage are held in luxurious hotels with lavish display of choicest of items on the menu.<sup>25</sup>

### The Poor as Outsiders

The poor have always been treated as outsiders by the society. In our own country the poorest of the society were called 'Panchamas' or 'Antyajas', literally meaning the fifth caste or the last born, and they were kept out of the pale of the caste society. As the Indian civilization developed into a settled and flourishing rural society, these out-castes who were also the poorest were physically kept outside the limits of the village. In modern times, the poorest among the urban population tend to congregate into areas which are called as slums or squatter localities. They are banished to the outskirts of the city, when the beautification of the cities becomes a major objective of the elite. This process is called relocation or resettlement of the slum dwellers. It is not significantly different than the way the untouchables were treated by the traditional rural society. The poor are labelled as the dirty, ugly people whose very presence seems to be an irritant to the eyes of the elite who would like to look upon "beautiful" scenery, like the skyscrapers in the Backbay Reclamation in Bombay. What could not be accomplished by the urban community development projects earlier through the process of persuasion and social education, and such catchy slogans and campaigns like 'keep your city clean', etc. is accomplished in a matter of moments by the new votaries of beautification of the cities, under certain circumstances.\* To these modern connoisseurs

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\* The reference is to the declaration of emergency and the forcible removal of slum-dwellers in India.

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## Appendix I

### Some Thoughts on Social Justice

It is not possible to discuss the various facets of the concept of justice and the problem of defining and implementing it. What I plan to do in this brief article is to present a few thoughts that are uppermost in my mind as I write this.

Speaking from the perspective of my country which is part of that umbrella term “developing countries,” I note that the concept of justice gained currency sometime in the 1960’s and became very popular in academic discussions and political debates following certain political events during 1969-70. During that year a document ‘Growth with Social Justice’, was attached to the central budget which the then Prime Minister presented to the Parliament in her first appearance as the Finance Minister. From that point onwards, a variety of terms have been used of which ‘justice’ was a part. Like fashions in dress, verbal fashions also change very fast. The latest version of it is distributive justice. I even notice in some national and international literature, the phrase, ‘redistributive justice.’ But there is one thing that is unchanging in all this rapid change of fashions: the reluctance to define whatever is said about justice. Is this just a case of laziness or a deliberate omission, I wonder.

I have spent considerable time in trying to understand what justice means and how it could be practised, especially by social workers, professional or voluntary. I agree with Nancy Berg and Paul Mussen, who state that the “Common core of all definitions is the concept of fairness, whose meaning varies not only among individuals but among cultures, civilizations and historical eras.” That is the sense in which justice is defined by John Rawls in his well-known book “The Theory of Justice.” Personally I like the statement by that socialist saint Vivekananda who said several decades ago: The other systems have been tried and found wanting. Let this one (socialist system) be tried-if for nothing else, for the novelty of the thing. *A redistribution of the pain and pleasure is better*

*than the same persons having pains and pleasures. Let every dog have his day in this miserable world."* (Emphasis supplied).

Whatever be the phrase-social justice, distributive justice, redistributive justice-the underlying idea is fairness by man to fellow human beings based on the principle of equality-social, political and economic. It implies undoing the wrongs done to segments of population for decades and even centuries by those who had the power to take the lion's share of all social resources including human dignity. It implies compassion, care and concern for the deprived and the exploited. These are fine sentiments, but should social workers who turned their back on sentimentality since the days of Charity Organization Society, because they wanted charity to be scientific, get involved in mere sentiments? Can one change the whole social structure evolved through centuries of human actions by a sentimental approach? Is it being a good professional? These are the questions which are likely to be asked.

To begin with the last question, The idealized role for a professional-at least until recently is that of a value-free neutral, apolitical social scientist, in one word, the role of an eunuch. That is a word not coined by me but used by Philip Hauser who took such a position. The other role is quite opposed to this. It is the role of an ideologist and social actionist. To borrow from another, there is a need for some partisan social workers in this imperfect world of ours. This was the role played by some Christian missionaries during the last century in the then state of Travancore, where some men were not even allowed to use the public roads, visit officers, were denied education in schools and if educated refused employment in the government. One of them described himself as a 'political missionary'. If we want to work for social justice, we have to be political missionaries. There is no other alternative. We cannot continue to speak like radicals and act like conservatives. That would be hypocrisy unlimited. I am acutely conscious of the fact that the task is not easy. But a beginning has to be made in all earnestness.

There are then two likely approaches to the question of social justice. One emotional and the other cerebral (or intellectual).

Philosophers, academicians and many professionals have used mainly the cerebral approach. The religious-minded and some politically committed people have frequently used the approach of the heart and then followed it up with some action. Purely cerebral approach might be sterile and an excessively emotional approach might lead to an ineffective outcome after the emotions have been vented or leave a society which is devastated by violence unchannelled. I should like to end this brief article in echo of Marx. Philosophers have defined social justice and the politicians have made slogans out of it; but the point is to practice it.

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