

DIALOGUES ON DEVELOPMENT

The Individual, Society and Political Order

RAMASHRAY ROY, R K SRIVASTAVA



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Ramashray Roy

and

R.K. Srivastava



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Dialogues on Development

*To our
Dialogue participants*

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Preface

The central contradiction of modern times lies in the fact that, while every individual *qua* individual is supposed to have his own unique pattern of development, it is some external agency—the state and the ruling elites who think on its behalf and act in its name—that plans for his development. One may object to it by saying that this ‘planning for development’ is not to determine the pattern of individual development but only to create socio-economic conditions propitious for individuals to realize their potentiality. There is no doubt some truth in it. If, as Lord Keynes insists, ‘economic development is the possibility of development,’ then individual development is possible only when a firm foundation of economic development has been laid and the economy becomes vibrant and scales, one after another, higher peaks of achievement.

There was a time when private search for well-being through augmentation of fortune was supposed to create heaven on this earth. No doubt, individuals were not given that much credit for sacrificing their own felicity for the good of others. However, the pursuit of self-interest was itself to lead to collectively beneficial results. The transformation of private motivation and choices into socially benign consequences was supposed to be presided over by the Invisible Hand in whose efficacy Adam Smith had so much trust and which reflected itself in unrestrained market forces. The Invisible Hand has, however, proved to be a dummy god. It has faltered and failed in carrying out its assigned responsibility of producing socially benign results out of autonomous decisions of separated individuals. Consequently, the state has had to step in to bolster, guide and, if necessary, partly replace the Invisible Hand in order to fulfil the dream of heaven on this earth.

It is, in short, this rationale that underlies the objection referred to above. It is also interesting that this line of argument has pervaded the psyche of modern man, his practices and institutions to such an extent, that he is incapable of judging the worth of the merchandize because of his fascination for the spell-binding wrapper it is packaged in. He cannot see that what is supposed to be propitious pre-conditions for man's development invariably turn out to be the determinants of the pattern of his development. This is what happens when man is supposed to be a process and that too of a particular kind rather than an event. As Heschel points out:

Being human is not a thing, a substance; it is a moment that happens; not a process but a sequence of acts or events. A process happens regularly, following a relatively permanent pattern; an event is extra-ordinary, irregular. A process may be continuous, steady, uniform; events happen suddenly, intermittently, occasionally. Processes are typical; events are unique. A process follows a law, events create a precedent.

Being human is not a solid structure or a string of predictable facts, but an incalculable series of moments and acts. As a process man may be described biologically; as an event he can only be understood creatively.¹

But modern thinking about man and the edifice of his institutions grants man his creativity but insists on its unfoldment through typicality. They grant him uniqueness but try to erect around him walls of ordinariness. They recognize the need for his total development but require its occurrence piecemeal. It is in this perspective that the contradiction we talked of earlier is rooted. It is this contradiction that accounts for the sad metamorphosis of man as an event to man as a process. It is, again, this contradiction that is responsible for the assumption by a few of the task of developing the many.

The continued legitimacy of this perspective is, no doubt, based on the silence of consent. However, when this silence becomes too oppressive, insights into the structure of modern man's predicament struggle to find articulation. *Dialogues on Development: The Individual, Society and Political Order*, the title of this study, is one particular facet of this struggle. It represents, at one and the same time, our own dissatisfaction with the dominant paradigm of development

¹ Abraham J. Heschel, *Who is Man?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1965), pp. 42-43.

and an attempt to break the silence of those who suffer—without articulation but not always mutely—because of the graciousness of their developers. It records what common men think about development. But to break the silence of consent requires breaking away from the positivist-evolutionary approach which takes pride in reducing an event to a process. It requires a method of communication that, instead of treating people as objects, considers them as partners in exploring truth. This is the 'dialogic' method which we used to initiate the process of co-discovery.

The dialogues were carried out not in modern Babylons but in the backwaters of what is considered to be the most backward State in India, Bihar, in about half-a-dozen villages of Mahnar Block of Vaishali District. The dialogue participants are twenty village folks who look at life not as an intellectual question but as a problem reflecting a state of perplexity, or even distress. Their views, as reflected in the dialogues, call not for an answer but for a solution. We are sure that a solution can be found if only we give up our fascination for answers and pay heed to what ordinary men—peasants, landless labourers, factory workers, etc.—traversing ordinary walks of life have to say.

Had it not been for the Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development (GPID) Project of the United Nations University, Tokyo, this study would never have moved beyond its embryonic form. We are particularly indebted to Johan Galtung. The GPID Project provided us with the occasion to give this study a concrete shape and the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, favoured us with a grant to carry it out. We are very thankful to them. Needless to say, they bear no responsibility for either the faults this study may be suffering from or the views expressed in it. Throughout the course of this study, our colleague and now the Director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, D.L. Sheth, gave encouragement and parted generously with his stimulating ideas. We are particularly grateful to our dialogue participants who gave their time ungrudgingly and shared their views which form the basis of this study. We regret that academic ethics forces us to preserve their anonymity. Finally, we record our thanks to P.M. Sudhakaran for preparing the manuscript for publication with care and patience, sometimes going beyond the call of duty.

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**NEEDS, DEVELOPMENT
AND SOCIAL ORDER**