

**“GLOBALIZATION”
AND
THE EMERGING IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE***

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“I felt that I had found my religion at last, the religion of Man, in which the infinite becomes defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation” (“The Vision” - Rabindranath Tagore).

1. Introduction

The last century of the millennium whose pages we are turning has been intense with dreams and major social experiments. It has ended with a general collapse of initiatives at social transformation, and also total disillusionment with efforts for ‘development’ of so-called ‘developing’ nations. The victorious ideology of the day – capitalism – has sought to consolidate its triumph with a call for “globalization”, for freeing of markets for unchecked hunting by private capital within and across nations with total disregard for national and global welfare. For a period no answer to this was at sight, until at the turn of the century the Seattle-Washington Protests have rekindled the torch of resistance. In the present address I shall look at the experiments and efforts at social change in this century and at the ideology of “globalization”; trace elements of the new ideology that is emerging in the protest movement up to the resignation of Ravi Kanbur as the lead author of the World Development Report, and pose some of the central questions that the development discourse needs to address today.

2. Experiments in social change and development

Since the beginning of known human history sages prophets and philosophers have called for a more humane civilization than has prevailed at any given time. They have called for a more just social order, an order no less caring for human values than for pursuit of material wealth. The calls have been in vain. Over the last couple of centuries Marxism, calling for radical action for liberation of the oppressed and exploited and for promotion of the communal spirit in social life, inspired social and political action across the globe. This resulted in great convulsions in a number of

societies and world-threatening arms race between powers for and against such change. But changes inspired by this ideology have nowhere yielded a social order that does justice to the vision, and edifices built upon major social upheavals for such change have finally collapsed.¹ This has put the radical camp in disarray, and left humankind without an alternative ideological mooring to challenge the ruling faith.

On the 'liberal' side the last half-a-century has seen the rise and fall of a faith in 'development' that also mobilized thinking and action on a world scale. The call of 'development' promised prosperity to 'developing' nations without radical social upheavals. Development discourses swept the social sciences and national and international establishments; foreign "development assistance" flowed to 'developing' countries to hasten the promised prosperity; and state powers swelled to deliver the product. Definition of the product was monopolized by economists who put aggregate economic growth as the supreme measure with distribution concerns raised off and on as a secondary consideration. To the broad masses of people in the 'developing' countries the trumpet and march have signified very little if not alienation from their indigenous search for life. In the aggregate no significant dent on the material condition of their people has resulted while economic and social inequalities have skyrocketed. Social corruption and crimes have grown alarmingly usurping resources mobilized domestically as well as internationally in the name of development, a race in which the political elite and state organs have given impressive leadership. For a time the "South-east Asian miracle" appeared like a breakthrough, only to nose-dive to reveal the extreme vulnerability of such flights. Today there is little left of the faith in 'development', although national and international establishments and the mainstream of economists continue to use the rhetoric, promising now that while state efforts have failed the "free market" is the best way for nations to 'develop'.

3. "Poverty alleviation" and the "cheap labour" ideology of "globalization"

In the hands of protagonists of 'development' the definition of the 'product' has now taken a rather curious turn. Economic growth remains the leading indicator. Concern for distribution equity has been virtually abandoned in reverence for competitive pursuit of private greed acclaimed as the main stimulation for growth. In its place we find a loud concern for "poverty alleviation". The measure of poverty is based on a set of presumed "basic needs" of life, an absolute measure that ignores human

1. China with its own brand of "socialism" may be considered as a variation of this generalization - a nation which has risen from the one-time filth of Shanghai to an outstanding and powerful personality. But its social philosophy as well is veering back from the communal toward the individual..

aspirations and misery derived from one's *relative material status* in society. As I have said before repeatedly, such a concern for poverty alleviation in a **minimalist**, and **static**, sense amounts in effect to a concern for barely *maintaining the productivity of labour of the ordinary people*, as if they are nothing but “livestock” to be fed and sheltered to yield returns for the privileged in society²! From the point of view of rigorous accounting this “livestock” notion of poverty provides only for *maintenance* of “human capital”, and **the real question of distribution, or right to a share of, social income comes in fact after this provision!** Universalization of this notion of poverty and of a concern for “poverty alleviation” only in this *maintenance* sense signifies, indeed, the final ideological triumph of capitalism on a global scale. And the underprivileged themselves are being manipulated to internalize this ideology by being christened as “poor” notwithstanding the human qualities they possess (cf. Rahnema 1990).

One may see the import of such concern for “poverty alleviation” in a global strategy of development that “globalization” implies: the flow of international capital to exploit *cheap labour* in ‘developing’ countries, promising on the one hand greater employment to their people to alleviate their “poverty” and on the other hand high returns to capital thus flowing to a cheap-labour country. This, a process which is well on its way, is the essence of the rationalization of “globalization” for world development for which client nation states are being purchased with so-called “development assistance” confined now more to development of infrastructure to facilitate private entrepreneurship, with the condition that they open up their capital and labour markets to international capital to exploit their cheap labour.

Ironically, mass poverty even in this “livestock” sense has persisted unabated despite the shift toward privatization, and we have entered the new century/millennium with international and national establishments completely without a clue as to its solution. Like the “decades of development” one after another, “poverty alleviation” even as a bare subsistence concept has also served more as a slogan being recycled over and over again than as a reality (vide UNDP 2000. See also World Labour Report 2000 for evidence of sharp rise in child poverty in the world since the mid-1960s). Meanwhile, “poverty” is selling rather well to keep bringing external resources to the concerned countries for its purported alleviation, helping the elite in such countries in their bid to catch up with modern consumption standards, a chase that also suits the interest of international capital by creating markets for its ostentatious goods.

².i.e.for their “surplus” to be appropriated- essentially confirming the Marxian theory of exploitation.

With all this a crisis of moral values is being experienced, with rising personal crimes and institutional abuse of power to be checked mainly by law-and-order machineries which have themselves collapsed in integrity³. [As Heller said in his contribution to an World Congress at Cartagena in 1997 (Heller 1998), “*Institutions of ethical power*” are fast eroding. And electoral choices of people are getting reduced to choices between opposing political forces unscrupulously using money and terrorism in their bids for power and anxious to loot and plunder social wealth and international assistance resources rather than to provide responsible guardianship to society if one came to power.

Together, the economic deprivation of the bulk of the world's population and the shedding of moral values by guardians of societies are strengthening *religious fundamentalism*, to which the establishments are giving only a law-and-order response instead of credible guardianship toward meeting people’s aspirations which is the surest way to deal with this problem.

To this should be added the persistence of the phenomenon of *male domination* perpetuating oppression and violence upon women denying half of the human race equal status as humans – a sad commentary by itself on the male-ruled human civilization of the last two millenniums. And finally, *ecological ravage of the earth* by the pursuit of private greed has been on the rise outraging the sense of organic, tender relation between humans and nature as well as progressively threatening the very survival of Life on this planet.

4. The enlightenment and awakening

I present this scenario not as one of *despair* but as one of *enlightenment*. For those who have wanted radical social change we are enlightened today that mere structural change does not end domination nor for that matter does it transform evil into good – there is a question of *values* to be promoted which have on the whole been overlooked in radical discourses. We also know, today, that “revolutionary vanguards” do not necessarily get “de-classed” and might like to enjoy some “class” privileges once in positions of power.⁴ More basically, individualist urges once they

³ The self-proclaimed global leadership today has publicly shed all pretences for moral guardianship: its highest office has been impeached on questions of legal niceties while publicly abusing the institution of family and privilege of high office, with the incredible message from the society's guardians that legality is all that matters in public conduct of its leaders.

⁴ the classical radical notion of “de-classed” revolutionary intellectuals is rather romantic without operational content. The operational meaning of getting “de-classed” must be sought not in a romantic theory of “abolishing social classes” *but in making all privileges in the society subject to open social*

consolidate in the “deep culture” of a society⁵ may not easily disappear, and the radical vision of a “communist man” to re-emerge from an “individualist man” may have preconditions more than a mere “class revolution”.

The last century has been particularly generous in revealing these insights into the human race calling for dispensing with some basic illusions that have inspired many committed actions toward radical social change. As for ‘liberals’, the last half-a-century's efforts have also taught that societies cannot be 'developed' by channeling resources in the hands of "middlemen"(e.g. functionaries of state or other development agencies) as agents of development. There is no reason why individualist urges will not operate in such agents also to skew up the results in favour of themselves and their clientele rather than of the wider society.

Finally, the male instinct for domination, over women as well as over nature⁶, appears deep-rooted irrespective of economic and political structure of societies, and does not promise to disappear without sustained social education and struggle.

But through and in reaction to all this one positive force has also advanced, which is the *awareness of democracy, human rights and social and ecological justice*. Human rights - including women's rights - movements as well as movements for environment care are being more assertive than ever before all over the world. Even in the USA which has led the world in articulating democracy in concept and practice, disillusionment with its political institutions and questioning toward the real meaning of democracy have been growing in recent times. Finally, voices against corporate dominance which have been sporadic for some time past (and mainly outside the USA) have crystallized into a concerted popular protest movement in the

discourse instead of assuming the power to allocate privileges to oneself. This must also be the ultimate test of democracy: i.e. whether leaders of society submit to people's participation in the social decision about the distribution of wealth and incomes. See Section 5

⁵ “cultural codes in the collective sub-conscious of all societies which define within that society what is right and wrong, what is moral and natural, what form of behaviour is appropriate in given circumstances” (International Relations Committee Report etc. [2000], dealing with concern of native Hawaiians among other things to preserve their indigenous communal values vis-à-vis individualist values that have invaded them with US conquest of Hawaii).

⁶ See Capra 1983 for a discussion relating human oppression on nature with the “male” (aggressive) instinct. It is also interesting that Marx did not show an environment awareness, and this perhaps he inherited from the classical German tradition as reflected, e.g., in the writing of Goethe: “Man does best, after all, when he shapes his surroundings himself instead of taking shape from them. The whole world lies before us *like a great block of stone before the artichect* (ital. added), who only deserves that name when out of the crude mass he can build the vision of his soul...” Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship” (The Wisdom of Goethe, An Anthology chosen by Emil Ludwig, translated by F. Melian Stawell and Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck, Carlton House publication, undated copy)..

very “heart of the empire” participated by people coming from all over the world. In this, for the first time, organized labour, farmers, human rights activists, environmentalists, students, youth, the aged and mothers have joined hands some leaving behind mutual distrusts over decades, to come out in solidarity against corporate power. Through these protests and the associated networking that is spreading, positive human values are expressing themselves with unexpected intensity. This confirms that despite previous setbacks in actual efforts popular awareness of the need for fundamental change has widened as well as deepened. It is this overall awakening and ascendance of positive awareness and assertive popular action that give us hope for the future.

5. Elements of the emerging new ‘ideology’

Peoples and nations must be free to choose their own ideologies in search of their own self-realization, and ideological diversity would also enrich human life on this planet. But a search for one’s own ideology is enlightened by exchanges. Mankind needs also to search for some fundamental principles of healthy co-habitation to give *the strength of solidarity to the very flowering of diversity* (cf.Alli Chaggi-Starr, a participant in the Seattle Protest, Guilloud 1999, p 56). And there are also some basic urges that are innate to human beings as such. The protest movement is already suggesting urges of an ‘ideological’ character in this fundamental sense, and it should be important to trace them in a search for deeper articulation and for wider exchanges on the question. Voices from the movement, and analytical reflections on it as circulating through the electronic media (see References), suggest at least six such elements as follows

First, as already suggested, a **deeper meaning of democracy** is being sought which is more than just periodic party-based contests, with fair or foul means, for people’s votes to choose society’s *rulers*. The urge is unmistakably toward some form of democracy in which (a) society would be consulted on vital questions as and when they arise, and elected people’s leaders would be accountable to the people for specific major actions and not merely present themselves for an overall ‘pass’- or- ‘fail’ judgment in periodic elections; and (b) power would be decentralized so as to give the maximum collective “self-rule” to local communities. The call for democracy has been extended to the global level as well demanding substantive democracy in decision-making of supra-national institutions. In the context of this awakening toward search for the essence of democracy it is noteworthy that the ongoing protest movements themselves have followed organizing and decision making methods that show an exemplary commitment to “participatory democracy” -

viz. networking without centralized leadership, and decision-making on key questions by consensus and without pressures, leaving constituent groups to adopt specific action strategies by their own creative responses to specific situations⁷.

Secondly, the awareness of the protests is clearly **against concentration of global and national wealth** – i.e. against the “20-80 model” of distribution toward which human civilization has been converging in the race for private acquisition (cf. Martin and Schumann, 1997) - and demanding “equitable” sharing of wealth and incomes in a bid for social and global justice. The “New Student Movement” in the USA, in particular, is passionately denouncing the wealth gap, in the United States as well as globally, and is signing people up to fight for *global economic justice* (Featherstone 2000). This is a demand that is typically not in the character of the “free market” to fulfil insofar as the market serves the power of wealth itself, and must be settled by a truly democratic process, i.e. through *social dialogue and consensus* (see also n4).

By way of national development strategy to contribute to the reduction of economic inequalities both nationally and globally, none other than AFL-CIO the leading labour organization of the USA has suggested that instead of pursuing an export-led development policy developing countries should concentrate on **developing productive capacity to meet local needs** (Mokhiber & Weissman 2000)⁸.

Thirdly, labour (i.e., people) is demanding **fulfilling work** and not just “gainful employment”. This natural human aspiration is ignored in received economic theory that has presumed gains in income alone as the motivation for labour (*without having ever asked labour*), regarding this principal activity in life necessarily as a cost to be incurred to gain income. The demand for fulfilling work calls, therefore, for a paradigmatic review of the premises of economic theory. It also calls for a review of the notion of “basic needs” in development discourses insofar as human beings reveal an urge to fulfil themselves by directly satisfying labour - e.g. by way of *self-realization or enrichment of life* (e.g. creative labour⁹ or labour exercised in an environment of enriching human relation and exchange). In turn, this asks for a fundamental reconsideration of indicators of societal progress or ‘development’ vis-a-vis the ruling paradigm that is preoccupied with growth of social income as the principal measure of progress without consideration for the share of fulfilling labour

⁷ I was myself educated in this culture of participatory democracy by my interaction with the “Bhoomi Sena” movement in Maharashtra, India (de Silva, *et al.* 1979).

⁸ The protest movement is also calling for “fair trade”, a concept with an ethical overtone that perhaps needs to be operationalized in specific cases by consensus rather than by economic theory alone.

⁹ cf. Rahman 1993, ch 12, p 225).

in total employment in society. Finally, this also rejects the conventional notion that “poverty”, in the sense of unsatisfied “basic (*human*) needs”, can be alleviated simply by “gainful” employment without consideration of the nature of the work to be undertaken¹⁰.

Fourthly, **environmental care** which was not in the orthodox agenda for social change¹¹ is today a vital concern of enlightened visions of life on the planet and has been a central concern of the protest movements.

To the above explicit ideological urges of the protest movement may be added two implicit ones: one, and *fifthly*, while the protest movement has been specifically targeted against corporate power and greed resulting particularly in economic and environmental injustice, **gender equality** which already is in the agenda for social change has asserted itself in the movement through women having played major and frontline roles in it – an assertion of their equality by exercising it.

Second, and *finally*, the fact of students and youth taking prominent roles in the protests is a testimony that the *future* is not satisfied that its interest is safe in the hands either of the *state* - which in the neo-classical economic literature has been viewed as the *trustee* of the future but which has abdicated this responsibility and is also being asked to do so by the call of “globalization” - or of the *market* or, for that matter, of the *elders in society*. The demand, though implicit, is clear that **youth as direct representatives of the morrow should have a say in social decision making that affects the future.**

In essence, the above six elements of the emerging new ideology as expressed in the protest movement belong to **a deep concept of participatory democracy**, embracing also the standpoint of the grassroots “deep ecology” movement that is gaining support in recent times¹².

¹⁰ Amartya Sen’s dual concept of “entitlement” and “capability” (to choose one’s mode of life – Sen 1982) overlaps with this view.

¹¹ See n6 for lack of environment concern in classical radicalism.

¹² The “deep ecology” movement views humans as a part of nature and not above it and seeks a relation of mutual exchange enrichment and care between the two in the pursuit of life on the planet (cf. Capra 1996, pp 6-8).

Ravi Kanbur's resignation

The ideological struggle has sharpened in the world's highest "development establishment" by the resignation of Professor Ravi Kanbur as lead author of the World Bank's forthcoming World Development Report (WDR). Kanbur had an electronic consultation with 1,523 persons from over 80 countries on his first draft WDR which had an intense examination of non-income dimensions of poverty and recognition of insecurity, voicelessness and powerlessness. His letter of resignation has expressed concern about what he saw as unreasonable pressure to tone down the section on globalization in the WDR¹³. As reported, Kanbur's bone of contention was "**empowerment**" – code word for *redistribution* – vs "**opportunity**" – key word for *growth* (The Financial Express, Dhaka, 19.6.00), and this is in full consonance with the emerging ideology of the protest movement outlined above.

6. Some central questions for development discourse today

These ideological urges of popular forces call for deep reconsideration of the fundamental premises of economics/development economics if it is to claim any status as a science to serve humanity rather than vested interests that are ruling the world. In this final section I raise in particular three central questions for development discourse to seriously address today.

First, can we once and for all dispense with the **aggregate index fetishism** in measuring development¹⁴? Social scientists of the "humanist" school have long regarded development as a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a single measure (see a number of essays in Ekins & Max-Neef 1992). Amartya Kumar Sen (the only development economist and the only economist from the south to get the Nobel Prize in Economics), has also opined against the use of "one real number" for measuring development and has listed human needs like "health, or education, or social equality, or self-respect, or freedom from social harassment " as indicators of development in their own rights (Sen 1983, p 756). Just as measurement of human health and its progress is a "vector- or rather, a matrix - measurement" and

¹³ with "reliable Washington sources indicating that US Treasury Secretary has got directly involved in rewriting the globalization sections of this report"(Bretton Woods Project, www.brettonwoodsproject.org).

¹⁴ This question was raised and rejected by the present speaker, in association with others, in 1977 suggesting that development consists of changing the "genetic mould" of the society, i.e. the totality of social relations (Haque *et al.*) that may be best represented by a "sociogram" rather than by an aggregate index.

the medical science has not attempted to reduce this to a single indicator, the measurement of development must also use the vector (matrix) notion as Sen and many others have pleaded (or the notion of a “sociogram” – vide n14) in order for development economics to be a useful science for mankind.

Secondly, can we be more sensible about **measuring poverty** if we do want to measure it. In addition to what I have already said on this question, the irrelevance of an absolute notion of poverty that is being currently used as a concept in social goal setting is easily established by the fact that people on or in the neighborhood of the “poverty line” do not in general spend their full income on the prescribed “basic needs” and spend part of their income to meet some other needs as well. Thus on the one hand they remain short for meeting the prescribed “basic needs” even if they are no longer “poor” (!); on the other hand they are demonstrating that they have other vital needs to which they give greater priority at the margin with their “poverty line” income that therefore warrant inclusion in the concept of “poverty” (cf. Rahman 1997). It is also elementary knowledge that some of these other needs, which are *of greater priority even to low-income people than consuming the full quota of “calories” assigned to them by the poverty-watchers*, are derived from demonstration of “higher” consumption standards from which, therefore, the concept of “poverty” cannot be isolated. The notion of poverty, in fact, emerged in the first instance out of inequality in wealth and consumption: this notion did not (and is not known to) exist for egalitarian communities no matter how low their income is (nor did this concept exist for old man “Adam” the first human being on earth who indisputably was far below the “poverty line”!). Hence the notion of poverty, by genesis as well as in the perception of the people concerned, **is a relative notion**. As a corollary, *poverty can never be alleviated within the framework of gross inequalities in wealth and consumption*, and what we, therefore, need is ***alleviation of inequalities*** rather than ***alleviation of poverty*** as such.

This is quite independent of other dimensions of poverty like lack of security of life and honour and the daily misery and dishonour of particular means of earning income (e.g. domestic service, or rickshawpulling) which so many thinkers, including Amartya Sen, Kanbur and the present speaker, have stressed, the neglect of which in the mainstream poverty discourses is unbelievably inhuman and only confirms the ‘livestock view’ of the poverty watchers that I have discussed.

The third question is that of **growth versus distribution** which seems to be bothering many in the profession as well as in the development establishments and which seems to have triggered the resignation of Ravi Kanbur from the World Bank. There seems to be some sense of anxiety that preoccupation with distribution justice may work against growth thereby keeping people poor, whereas growth with inequality such as the “20-80 per cent” model is expected to yield may at least pull up people’s economic status over time by some “trickle down” process. In reality, however, there are instances of both growth that has increased poverty – a good recent example is USA where real living standards of the great majority of Americans have been falling over the last two decades albeit respectable rates of growth (Martin and Schumann 1996, pp117-18) which in part explains the emergence of the protest movement there; and also of mass-based growth that has not followed the “20-80 per cent” model (nor the dogma of “free-market fundamentalism”) - e.g. China, and to some extent South-east Asia in its “miracle” days (although its allegiance to a free capital market brought about the crisis of the century in this region). The question, essentially, is which social forces are to be the main torch-bearer of growth – the unscrupulous wealthy spending much of its loots in ostentatious consumption defaulting heavily on bank loans and generally showing a negative saving rate, or the broad masses of direct producers who cannot afford to be so delinquent and are actually showing exemplary loan discipline and marginal saving rates from an urge and compulsion to promote their lives if resources are channeled to them with requisite support systems. Resolution of the growth-versus-distribution question is, therefore, very much an ideological question rather than a technical one as it is being made to appear by one side in the debate. And this is precisely the crux of the ideological struggle that is sharpening in the world today – for the broad masses of the people to participate in the development process, not just as receivers of “residuals” from an inequitable growth process which takes from them more than will ever be returned and devastates their lives in inhuman ways in the process of thus taking, but as principal subjects of the growth process for fulfillment both as creators as well as consumers.

7. Conclusion

On the morrow of the new millennium we are at a juncture of human history when awareness against the continued abuse of the world’s resources by private greed, the wildly unequal living standards and domination and devastation of human lives and

nature by the power of wealth and masculinity is growing, and popular forces around the world are rising in resistance and are networking. The ideological urges of enlightened popular forces are clearly for a meaningful form of democracy which gives effective power to the people rather than to local national and international elite groups to guide the course of society and the world. It has been revealed that conventional systems of democracy do not ensure this and play into the hands of wealth and its muscles for domination over the people. The search for a meaningful form of democracy is therefore the primary task of the hour. As suggested, the specific form of democracy may vary according to people's cultures. But some broad elements are emerging from the ongoing popular protests which have been outlined in this address. These call for serious review of some of the basic premises of conventional (development) economics, and for independent thinking free from the hegemony of global masters.

I wish to hope that economists of Bangladesh will come forward to respond and to reclaim their position on the side of humanity where they were in this nation's historic struggle against economic disparity and social injustice. And let us not forget that the constitution of this country ordains the establishment of an egalitarian social order as per the aspiration of its people who already have given their democratic verdict on the search for an ideology long before the present ideological struggle at a global level started, and the task of economists respectful of democracy is to propose the modalities for implementing this verdict rather than to take their cue from the global masters of the day which are being indicted by popular forces all over.

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*from the website, by courtesy of Professor Jeanne Hahn, Evergreen State College, Washington, USA.

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