

## BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

### INTERROGATING DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM THE MARGINS

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#### **Prof. Madan -Chairman for the Session**

As I am sure you know this is a book discussion, a book on development interrogating the idea of development as the title states and structured around the idea of margins. The idea of margins has been with us for a long time and the margins have been with us even longer but they keep changing their connotations and margins, peripheries, presume central territories or centres and there is this kind of interrogation of the ideas about development which have in it from the margins. They are addressed the centre's questioning their legitimacy and their adequacy of the centres. The book is the outcome of the conference and has been edited by Frederique Apffel-Marglin and Sanjay Kumar and Arvind Mishra and we have four discussants to talk about the book. It is my pleasure to introduce the speakers.

Mr. Sanjay Kumar is secretary of the Deshkal society which was mainly responsible for organising this conference. And Dr. Arvind Mishra is a psychologist at the Zakir Husain Centre for Education Studies at JNU. Dr. Mishra will speak, he will introduce the book and then the four discussants will give their assessments and their critiques and their appreciation of their book and the book has of course very rich factual content but this factual content put in place in terms of a theoretical framework. Maybe I should say a couple of words about the first editor, Frederique Apffel-Marglin because she is not here. She is a very unusual person in as much as she embodies in her own life experience. The participation in a number of cultures, French, Moroccan, Indian, American, Peruvian. She was attracted to India many years ago and learnt Odissi dance. And then she did a remarkable study of the rituals associated with Devadasis at the Jagannath temple. Subsequently she has come a long way along with her husband, the economist Stephen Marglin at Harvard University and they have both questioned deeply and intensively questioned the western styles of theorizing about non-western countries and non-western experience of history.

And Stephen Marglin is a radical economist who wrote a book three years ago called the dismal science. For a Harvard economist to be talking about economics as a dismal science, dismal because he argues that thinking that like an economist makes you very parochial in outlook in as much as all your outlook is rooted in certain episodes of western economic history. And it makes you ignore other forms of knowledge and other ways of conceptualizing the human situation. It makes you undermine the importance of the community. That together the Marglins have edited a number of books on development questioning the idea of development, dominating knowledge, colonizing knowledge and other books and altogether they have been an inspiration to scholars in many places and I believe and I assume that the organisers of this conference were also to some extent influenced by the thinking of the Marglins. Our discussants today Prof. T.K. Oommen, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at JNU, former president of Sociological Association, former president of the Indian sociological society honoured by the government of India with the Padma Bhushan but most significantly of all honoured two months ago by the Indian sociological Society with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Over the years Prof. Oommen has worked in many areas including ethnic relations and Indian federalism and the various facets of social change including change in scholarly styles. He has written about the history, the various aspects of the development of sociology in India.

Prof. Vinay Lall teaches at Delhi University, for many years at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has explored relations between formed bodies of knowledge and politics and the writing of history and authored a number of books like Prof. Oommen.

Mr. Milind Kothari, interactorer, Housing and Land rights network is an architect by training but has been deeply involved in the civil rights movements particularly those concerning.....

And the fourth discussant is Mr. Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, very senior journalist who has been also off and on teaching in universities, lecturing on the relationship of media and society. They are our discussants and Dr. Mishra will speak first and we will give them an hour between themselves to talk about the book and give their reactions and then the audience questions. So we hope to have half an hour for the last segment.

So Dr. Mishra, will you please tell us what the book is all about.

## **Dr. Arvind Mishra**

I am one of the editors as has been told. So on behalf of editor I would like to take this opportunity to share this book *Interrogating development* marks an important moment in the ongoing journey of Deshkal Society. During this journey we came into contact with Musahar community in Bihar and interaction with them forced some of us to re-examine some of our taken for granted assumptions about people and society and this experience was so overwhelming, we thought to share our experience with people who are involved in similar pursuits in other parts of the world and that is how the international conference was organised with the title – *Culture Matters - rethinking development from the perspectives of margins* in 2006. And discussions and debate during this conference helped us to understand our activities in a broader context. And then we felt that to share our understanding and emerging perspective with larger group and that is how idea about publishing this book came to us.

I am a student of psychology and development is not typical topic in the discipline of psychology. So as a student of psychology I understood during my course of activities with this community that development is much more than technical and economic sense, it is an organized activity to organise self-definition of individual, of groups, of human subjectivity and also about the worldview. And that is how I found that my place is there in place. I am sure that four members in the panel they will tell about the book and so I am not going to take much time what this book is about. My basic job was to tell you that how this book came into existence.

As you all are involved in this issue of development, we hope that your presence and your participation in this discussion would be very valuable to us and so we look forward to your participation.

## **Chairman**

Thank you Dr. Mishra. That has been very brief but I am sure the discussants will use the extra time to tell us a little more about the contents of the book and its methodology and its theoretical background. I request Prof. Oommen to speak next.

## **Prof. T.K.Oommen – Discussant for the Session**

Prof. Madan, fellow panellists. Let me begin with a confession which is that I am very nervous not because my victims today are very distinguished people but because I am asked to speak for 12 minutes which is about 1/5<sup>th</sup> of a usual lecture that people like me are used to and therefore I don't know what to do within this golden 12 minutes.

Let me begin with the title itself Interrogating development. That gives the impression that development is one settled type. It is a fair question that I would ask back to the editors and to the contributors is what variety of development we are interrogating. In my own understanding, there are at least three perspectives on development. I shall call them the mainstream perspective on development or MPD. Alternative perspective on development, APD and of course an offshoot of that is human development perspective which is HDP which is a cross between the first and the two. But there is also the perspective which has laterally come to be known as post-development perspective, PDP.

Now the alternate perspective on development takes the position that it is essentially participatory and people oriented. The agency of development is not the state, certainly not the market but centrality in the context of development is given to the civil society, the NGO's. The foundations on which the critiquing comes from the alternative perspective on development is based on the epistemological route on local knowledge. Implementation strategy which is geared to decentralization of both the economy and the polity. But participatory development is now being co-opted by human development perspective. Even the mainstream perspective of development. What is taken to be local is not always what originated there but what is acceptable to the locals. Think of tomato for a change. I am told it comes from Peru originally but today no one would think it is a foreign substance in our culinary context.

So through a process of hybridization the alien is often indigenised and then becomes a part of the local. Decentralization is also widely accepted if not implemented by the mainstream perspective on development. And certainly the human development perspective has advocated decentralization strongly. Therefore the first observation that I would like to make is what is interrogated seems to be the praxis lag and not the theory gap. So these things are in existence

but nobody is really practicing it. There seems to be an inter-twining between mainstream perspective on development and the alternative perspective on development. Mutations between them occur and the one example of that mutation, the child of that mutation is human development perspective. While both MPD and APD pursues development certainly of various differing qualities, the post-development perspective, PDP rejects development. Development as it is usually understood. PDP critiques western modernity, techno-scientific progress, post-structuralism. It also rejects the very idea of modernity because it is culturally and historically variable. It is not that there is a modernity which was invented somewhere in the so-called west and spread to the rest of the world. So there could be many modernity's and the idea of multiple modernity is very popular these days in social science. So if modernity is culturally and historically variable which variety of modernity we are critiquing. Subsistence economies which serve basic needs are not peopled by deprived people in this perspective. They are defined as deprived by western theorists and standards, then they are labelled as poor and then advised to develop which is not their felt need. In that sense the post-development perspective would reject the idea of modernity and development and this idea of development is simply imposed on the poor, the third world etc. etc. i.e. according to PDP, poverty is first invented and development is then prescribed to eradicate poverty. What is required is therefore in this perspective not more development but a different regime of truth and presumption.

Now the main target of attack by the post-development perspective is western science particularly Newtonian physics, positivism, Cartesianism and the enlightenment thinking. But we must remember that science has been continuously reinventing itself through quantum physics for example, Kays Theory and Methodological anarchism. At any rate in social science which deals with the development discourse, positivism is not a favoured paradigm today. A development economist should be sensitive to the complex social reality.....politics, society, culture, gender, ecology, these are all well known. The question I am posing is therefore which perspective on development this book is interrogating. Clearly it is rejecting the mainstream perspective on development, not happy with even alternate perspective on development and much of the discussion in the book is precariously proximate to what I call the post development perspective. Some of these are actually occurring in one or another chapter. Thus viewed the book is not simply interrogating development but rejecting it as it is usually understood.

Therefore a more appropriate title would have been reconceptualising development. So that is my first point.

It is rather difficult to discuss a book like this as it consists of 12 chapters contributed by 12 people, eminent scholars, in fact more than 10 because several articles are jointly written with differing canvasses and scopes. Therefore I shall only highlight only a few points and overall concern shared by several authors is the role of technology in development. But technology itself is different, is of different grades and shapes. We talk about high technology, intermediate technology, medium technology, low technology and of course there lived a man called Schumacher who talked about appropriate technology.

So it is important to acknowledge that the problem is not technology per se but its deployment. I would certainly think that high technology is required. High technology is required for certain purposes and therefore we cannot completely ward off that. So we need all varieties of technology but these should be used in context where they are really needed and that is the idea of appropriate technology. The notions of appropriate technology and the regime of technological pluralism are missing from the book. Technology should avoid both echo sides and that is very great criticism we have and culturocide. I would have liked to elaborate it but the chairman will not allow it and so I will not attempt it. Because we all know what ecoside is but culturoside is a term which I have introduced long ago but fortunately nobody acknowledges it even the twelve authors of this book.

This is a systematic destruction of cultures of people. Usually small and weak cultures and that is why I have called it culturoside although the term which is occurring in this book cultural genocide which I think is a very awkward term.

Having rejected Cartesianism, the authors invoke frequently dichotomies, that is a very curious thing. A familiar example in the book being savarna avarna, avarna is not really used, Dalit dichotomy. The measures taken by the state did bring about limited change, nobody can deny it, an elite among the Dalits have emerged, if you like the Dalit bourgeoisie but the change is visible only in the context of what maybe called the secular dimension. The ritual state of even those who experienced substantial upward mobility remain low. That is we need to take cognizance of

the bi-dimensional character of the status system in caste society. The change in the ritual dimension is possible only through social reform movement and quite a few of them occurred in Indian society be it through the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC or the series of movements, Bhakti movements between 8<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century or even what Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and his followers did, not all of them, some of them in as recent as 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The point here is that in so far as the legitimacy conferred on the caste system through religious doctrines are not interrogated, the caste system would persist. That is why even those who pursue ritually degrading occupations such as pig rearing and that comes from the book, can achieve high economic and political status but they continue with the low ritual status. This is a very fascinating case study of a pig rearing people in Kanpur city. And the author shows that substantial upward mobility has happened not in terms of class and in terms of political clout but when it comes to ritual status they are no way near. There is what may be called a status incongruence. It is quite possible that the group can achieve very high status in one context but it need not necessarily be followed in other context. This does not mean that the powerless does not have their resources to interrogate the system. One such is constructing counter myths, stories. In fact there is no caste possibly in India which doesn't have original myths and that is always a wonderful myth and the story will always say we were wonderful once upon a time but now we have fallen down. And even in walking music in this context is important as one of the chapters deal with the Meers, the Muslims of one part of Rajasthan does. Another is protest migration of Musahars. Again another fascinating story. Usually when we think of migration we are leaving our home in search of bread in terms of better prospects but here is an idea, a group of people, it is not individual migration, it is a group migration leaving as a protest to the more important people, the upper caste in the village. Now this everyday protest interwoven with daily life rarely brings about structural changes. Interrogation does take place, there is no question about it but what are the consequences of this interrogation. Is interrogation in itself is important or that is it really leading to what maybe called incremental changes. One is not talking about revolution. So interrogation as operation successful, patient remains chronically ill, will that really matter.

Let me also note in passing that the marginals to which the chairperson already referred to themselves are of a wide variety. From cumulatively marginalized to those subjected to limited marginalization. The idea of cumulative marginalization versus dispersed marginalization is certainly talked about in social science but I have read the book, let me confess, but I could not come across this notion anywhere in the book. The purpose and quality of their interrogation varied vastly but that is not brought out in the four introductions made. It is a very interesting book in terms of its architecture. There is a long introduction to begin with and there are three sections or parts, each of which has an introduction from the editor. Very good plan but I did not come across these. I am not saying that we should all be thinking alike but sometimes one thinks if there is a basic point to be dealt with these things could have been also.

I am certainly going to conclude. The third part focuses on questioning what is called the capability approach launched by Amartya Sen but nurtured by several others, we are all familiar with these names. Clearly the interrogators in this context are not perched on the margins. So some of the interrogators are not lower caste or tribal or whatever but they themselves are at the centre. However the point made is profound. The capability approach is incurably individualistic. I think that is a wonderful point that is made in the book. The capability approach misses that capability is a function of circumstances which cannot be completely be remedied through formal education, better nutriment, endowing the individual with rights etc. the capability approach ignores the critical importance of social location of the individual. The disabilities in the broadest sense of the term are inherent in the location itself. The individual cannot easily emancipate herself from the shackles of the social location and hence the relevance of taking into account the characteristics of the collectivity in which individual belongs, in which he or she is located. However let us caution ourselves to the fact that while there is an excess of individualism in the west and we are all familiar with it, there is also an excess of holism in the non-west, I don't want to call it east but non-west. The tyranny of the primary group as sociologists would say often oppresses the possible flowering of one's talent. Therefore what we need in the contemporary world is moderation of both excessive individualism of the west and the excessive holism in the east.



Let me conclude by noting that, several of the chapters in this book are excellent in themselves but all of them do not confine to the announced topic namely interrogating development. High quality but low relevance in the context of the theme of the book. Let me conclude or stop Mr. Chairperson with a story, a real story. Once I invited a very well known person for a conference, I will not tell his name because you are all familiar with that name and I told him Prof. so and so, I would like you to talk on this topic. He smiled and said, theek hai, you can give me any topic but my talk will be the same. I thought several contributors to the book seem to be following this dictum for no fault of theirs.

### **Chairman**

Thank you very much Prof. Oommen. I would request the other panellists to not hesitate from questioning each other. You are not only telling us, the audience about the book, the contents of the book and the ideas behind the book, there is a kind of review of the book where you may question for instance whether the title goes as far as the intention but that there is the idea that inspired the book. I think there is a distinction which is made there. And do please ask each other questions.

### **Prof. Vinay Lall – Discussant for the Session**

Thank you Prof. Madan. Prof. Oommen has described to some extent the structure of this book and to that extent it won't be necessary for me to venture to do the same. When I came I do find the title insufficient but for very different reasons actually than the one that he has specified. The word interrogating is a little bit like the word rethinking. Everybody is rethinking this or that and you sometimes wonder if they have actually thought about it before they started doing the rethinking and the word interrogating quite frankly is an anodyne term. It doesn't really tell me anything at all and I must say it is also very unlike anything that Frederique has done. I know her work very well, I also know her and it is a very tame work given the kind of radical perspective from which she has done her work for the last thirty years.

I also agree with Prof. Oommen that this book in fact actually is really tantamount, let us put this way bluntly, a rejection of the idea of development. I think we have now reached that juncture in our reflections on development which begins roughly around the 1960's. I think the first

substantial work began to appear with the work of people like Ivan Illich and then going on to let us say Majid Rehnema's post development reader and of course a whole bunch of people, many in India, Ashis Nandy, Vandana Shiva, NGO's, activists, many of them I think contributed in very substantial ways to the literature and to the thought about development and I think at this point the question to really ask about the book is what does it contribute to what is already it seems to me a very substantial and rich literature on this subject. Why, I think because as I have said if you look from Illich's own development dictionary which is now 20 years old and it was far more than development, in fact the whole idea was to look at the relationship of certain key words such as modernity, nation state, development and so on, if we think about that particular juncture and down to the present day, the question as I said is the kind of critiques that have emerged in response to the literature on development and these critiques would argue that there is such a thing as alternative to development or development with a human face and so on, the position of this book is that all of this has to be rejected more or less.

Now the question is if that has to be rejected, what are the ways in which the authors proceed to outline a certain world view. And my submission would be that the last chapter of this book which by Stephen Marglin is in fact in many ways the key chapter, the chapter that sets out the terms of the debate although in fact he doesn't talk very much about development per se but he does talk about such things as what do we mean by knowledge, what is the nature of the so-called knowledge economy. What are the limits to intervention because one of the fundamentals that emerges, fundamental questions that emerges in the debate is to what extent do people have a right to intervene in the cultural practices of others if these practices are seen as inimical to something called development. And Stephen Marglin actually you can say gives quite an extraordinary example. The example that he picks is the example of female genital mutilation. You can also call it female genital circumcision. As he points out if you call it circumcision, then it actually points to the position of those who want to minimize the nature of the problem. If you call it female genital mutilation, it points to the position of those who want to maximize what they take to be the disturbing elements of that practice.

And one of the things that he points out, if you go back to Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher, that he himself had actually made an argument for male circumcision. So this is the

way in which he juxtaposed this because what he wants to suggest is that if you are looking at this particular practice, the point is that there are many different kinds of positions that one can articulate. And one can also say that what this practice amounts to is in fact quite different from one place to another. What he is trying to suggest here is this that all of these positions are nonetheless complicit in the idea, they are all complicit in the idea that banning this practice is desirable. This is a acultural practice that is abhorrent, that is barbaric and then he says that well is that really the position that one ought to advocate or is this the only possible position that one could advocate and so what he does is he puts into juxtaposition the argument from Moses Maimonides which as he says is widely accepted. It is now become part of the common sense of western European culture particularly Jewish culture. Nobody really questions the imperative to engage in male circumcision although it is widely practiced for example in Jewish cultures and was widely practices by the Protestants cultures as well and still is in some protestant cultures.

Now if one wants to extrapolate from that so this is an argument about what are the limits or what might perhaps be some of the limits to cultural intervention. But let us try to extrapolate something larger which seems to me as central to the concerns of this book and that is that the idea of development has a central relationship to the emergence of economic mat. I think this is in fact I think the argument that forms many of these chapters. What is it that actually informs the ideology of development. How is development different from social change. I mean six decades ago you would have used the term social change and you would never have seen the term development at all. And there is a significant difference. I think the significant difference it is being suggested here can be outlined in two particular ways which is that the idea of development is in fact ideological in a very different way than the idea of social change. It has a certain kind of explanatory value which makes all dissent difficult, if indeed there is dissent, then the people who are dissentious to the idea of development are very often seen as people who are retrograde, backward, traditional, so on and so forth. So this is one significant difference between the idea of social change and the idea of development.

The second fundamental impetus behind the idea of development then and what distinguishes it from the idea of social change is the idea of economic man. And this is what Stephen Marglin's argument fundamentally is. What do we mean when we speak about the development or the

emergence of the economic man. So what he does is he makes a distinction essentially between and he is not really the first person to do so but these are his terms. He makes a distinction between what you might describe as experiential knowledge and algorithmic knowledge. Now the contention is not that algorithmic knowledge is a monopoly of the west, the contention rather is that algorithmic knowledge is knowledge that is to be found in all the knowledge systems. The problem is that in the west this is the exclusive dominant form of knowledge, algorithmic knowledge. And what he is trying to suggest is that this algorithmic knowledge essentially views man, the human as an instrument of self-aggrandisement, self-interest. So this is the fundamental difference between the algorithmic conception of knowledge and the experiential conception of knowledge which is not predicated on the notion that one must instrumentalise our knowledge and move towards some notion of self-interest. How is this argument present in all the pieces because if I made a submission that this is in some ways the fundamental chapter then I would suggest that this is a fundamental theoretical chapter in some ways, I think you can see it very clearly in for example a chapter which I found to be very moving and I must say that I think that many of the chapters in this book are very moving, not all of them are of the same even quality but that always happens in an edited work of course.

But this is a chapter on the Meers and what is basically argued in this piece is basically the following. The Meers, these are musicians who are engaged in the practice of what one may describe as Sufi/bhakti music in western Rajasthan. This particular piece looks at what happens to this community, the word community by the way is also significant because algorithmic knowledge does not even recognize the notion of community at all. It simply in fact rests on the notion of the individual. The self-maximising kind of individual if I may use that particular phrase. So in this particular area where this field work was done by Rahul Bhai who wrote this particular piece, what he tries to show is how after the development of the Indira Gandhi Canal Project the eco system of the Meers gets shattered, their livelihood gets shattered. Now these are people who are nomadic, semi-nomadic pastoralists. Their music, their poetry evokes the barren landscapes of this area. Now the landscape itself has changed after the coming of the Indira Gandhi Canal Project. So their landscape has fundamentally changed. What you also have of course, and this is something that we saw in the Punjab as well, that you have on the one hand

the rise of big farmers and on the other hand you have the proleterisation of other farmers. A significant consequence obviously of the green revolution as well.

And one of the other significant changes here of course is that with the coming of the Indira Gandhi Canal Project, you also have the coming of the maulvis, the Deobandi Maulvis especially and this particular form of music is very much put into question. And I think that if you look at the pieces in this book it seems to me that all of them operate roughly in this kind of fashion. There is an implicit theoretical framework. This implicit theoretical framework a) deals with the idea of the economic man, the emergence of the economic man and the consequences of that for various kinds of communities. Some of the articles deal specifically with what Prof. Oommen had also mentioned, there are several articles that fall in that section and that has to do with the capability approach. I won't get into the details of that because notwithstanding the various minor disagreements that the various authors have by and large I think they all subscribe to some version of sense capability approach. But the fundamental ideas from this volume have to do not so much with the capability approach, they have to do with the idea of the economic man, they have to do with taking for granted the fact that we have excavated by now the idea of development fully. We don't need to do that. So we should try to understand whether there is any such thing as development which can be reconciled with a more profound conception of humanity. I think the conclusion in this book that it cannot be, that one cannot reconcile this thing called development as an ideological construct with a more richer conception of development of humanity.

And thirdly of course there is the conception of margins which is obviously in the sub-title because the various communities that are being dealt with in this volume are all communities which in some sense are at the margins. I don't think the idea of margins itself is theorized very much. It seems to me something that has much analytical salience unless one is able to say exactly what one means by the idea of margins because there are people who can live at the margins in a psychological sense and this is where for example Nandy's piece on humiliation which might otherwise seem to not fit into the volume comes in. there are different conceptions of the idea of margins that one has to deal with and one cannot do that simply in an economic register.

So I will pretty much conclude with that.

**Chairman**

Thank you very much. I would like to point out that the last chapter of the book which Prof. Lall mentioned is in fact a chapter from.....

.....idea of the rational choice making individual operating in a self-correcting market situation which Stephen Marglin sees as like at the very core of economic development. And then negative reaction to capability, the idea of capability approach from what I have understood from the work is too preoccupied with the idea of the individual.

**Mr. Milind Kothari**

Thanks Prof. Madan and good evening everyone. I am going to focus my comments on part 3 of the book questioning the capability approach. As others have pointed out this notion of capability is a critique of that, I think from my perspective I would say the book misses major opportunity to fully explore the human rights approach and I am going to keep coming back to this, the human rights approach as a method of analyzing the current situation of marginalized people, as a way of identifying accountability of those that are responsible and as a way of coming up with solutions necessary in the current scenario. So one example would be in the book there is a critique that the capability approach and the rights approach are too individualistic. They do not take into account sufficiently the importance of the collective identity of the collective nature of communities and how important that is in their struggle for self-determination. But here one major aspect that is missed and I think Prof. Oommen referred to this as the excessive part of holism in the collective approach is that the rights of individuals are not respected enough in a collective setting. I will give you just two very quick examples from my own experience. I was for some years United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing & Land and I was able to travel and one of the missions that I did was to Mexico where I was able to visit an indigenous community in the Chapers and when I spoke, I insisted on speaking to the women, I spoke to them, they spoke very eloquently but with a lot of pain about the violence that they faced from their men, about the fact that they are not involved in the decision making of what happens to the community including the decision on whether this particular group of indigenous people should

join the Zapatista movement and it showed to me very clearly that and when I spoke to the tribal leader and I raised some of these issues, they said yes, yes, all that is fine but we have a much larger struggle in mind. Larger struggle and we will get to these points later.

So from a perspective of women's rights, I think it is very important that we do work and respect the individual's rights. I will give you one very quick example. I was doing a global study on women's rights to housing, land, inheritance & property, I was in Kenya speaking to an indigenous community again to the male leaders and I raised the issue of women having the right to land and the right to inherit land and he said no, no, no, we cannot do that because it would lead to destabilization of our society.

So I think that this is one area that needs to be looked at. I don't think we need to posit this as an individual versus collective but we need to in fact develop ways in which individuals within collectivities, their own rights can be recognized. The other issue which I think is missed in the book and perhaps that was not the intention but it is something that I have found lacking in a lot of writing on cultural rights is what happens to these collectivities when they move to urban areas in a rapidly urbanizing world, what happens to communities that come to the cities. And are there now forms of collectivities that form, that come into play and what kind of a perspective would we look at in analyzing their situation.

The second point would be about in the book the chapters that are there on the critical importance of preserving language, preserving knowledge and cultural values I think make a very wrong assumption that if we were able to preserve the language and the knowledge base the community would be safe which is not true at all. If you look at the kind of the decimation that is taking place today because of development projects and so on, the challenge is much much larger. So there is a romanticism that is there which says let us preserve what is there and everything will be fine and that also assumes a particular nature of the state which is not true, it is not a state that would simply go along with that. And here I think what is very important is again the rights perspective and I mean in the human rights language we use the word indivisibility of rights. When you speak about the right of a community to take part in cultural life we also need with the same voice to speak about their right to a good standard of living, their right to self-determination which has been articulated now in the forest rights act, their right to

participate in decision making that affects their life, Prof. Oommen referred to that. I think it is important to broaden the base from which we look at cultural rights. The capability approach and in fact this is one of the flaws in Prof. Amartya Sen's work is that it assumes a benign nature of the state essentially to say that the state is fond of people who are muddleheaded, who don't have their policies right and if we convince them to adopt their capability approach, all would be well. Again here the rights perspective is very very helpful because it actually shows us if you look at the what is called the Violations approach which looks at who is exactly responsible for the mess we are in, it is very clear that we have to look at the basis of power, we have to look at who actually controls resources and land and so on. And here whether it is the contrasting or complementarity of the capability approach with the rights approach has been missed. And I am actually surprised that the book doesn't while much of it is based on the Indian experience, doesn't look at where we are in India today. I mean it doesn't look at the fact that we live in a country where there are huge flaws institutionally and in many ways that we have a constitution which is based on rights, we have an institutions that are monitoring rights, we have range of civil society movements whether on right to food or right to information, right to housing, we have the struggle of construction workers, safai karamcharis and all of them there is a consensus which has emerged that it is the rights approach which helps us in mobilizing, it is the rights approach which helps us in people being empowered and being mobilized to claim their rights. And much work is being done in this and this is not sufficiently examined in the book.

And also the rights approach, if you ask people who lead these movements will tell you that the assumption that the state can change is a wrong assumption because the state actually sustains and deepens the type of humiliation that Ashis Nandy speaks about in his chapter. So I think while the book raises very important questions and makes us think, makes us have a debate as we are having this evening. I am not so sure that the intention of the author was through the analysis assist social movements in understanding or in finding solutions of the problem or it would assist me as a human rights practitioner. In that it fails. It fails because it doesn't explore the rights language. It doesn't explore what it means to build upon the notion of the dignity of the individual and the rights language as I mentioned before ...very much with the movements. If you, I will just finish, I will just quote one paragraph of the chapter by Robin where it says that "finally it is important not to expect too much from the capability approach. Much of the work



that needs to be done by grassroot organisations is to organize basic political struggle than resistance. For that kind of work we need other approaches much more urgently such as ideas and strategies on how to mobilize people and shift the balance of power. This is all very true but the book fails to explore what those other ideas and strategies would be and one would be the human rights approach.

### **Mr. Guha Thakurta – Discussant for the Session**

Thank you Prof. Madan. I want to start with a disclaimer. I feel singularly like a fish out of water when I look at my co-panellists, being academically challenged and having not just even a quarter of foot in the world of academia. As a journalist, as a person who is attempting in my own small way to try to bridge the gap between those who know and those who don't in languages which they understand, I realise that this book actually or perhaps will never be read by the people about whom the book is written about. Because it also speaks a language which they would find very difficult to comprehend but which is very very easily digested in an ambience like this, words like imperialism, globalization, individualism, economic man can be easily comprehended by people over here. Having said that I must confess that I am far less critical of the book than my co-panellists because it is just providing insights from the margins. Does it provide alternate theoretical frameworks to help us understand better our contemporary realities better perhaps. It doesn't all the time. Are all the articles and papers on a wide variety of subjects, do they all gel into a coherent whole. Perhaps not on all occasions. But at the same time it does provide insights, I do believe from what is happening on the margin. And if I can attempt to try and draw some contemporary relevance from this book which grew out of a conference which began in 2006, two years later the world went through and one could argue it is still going through a recession the likes of which it has not experienced in more than seven decades. Not only our notions of what is capitalism, socialism, development, globalization need considerable amount of thinking, interrogation, re-examination, use the phrase you want to choose, I found very very interesting insights in trying to understand and appreciate what was happening today preoccupied as people like me are in the short term. I wonder here why we have an economist as the prime minister of India who is lauded by the president of the US who says that perhaps he has some solutions on how to get this world out of this terrible recession, will it be a L shaped

curve, will it be a W shaped curve. Barack Obama says we have the wise Dr. Manmohan Singh's advice to fall back on and here at home his government is buffeted not only on account of allegations of corruption but on account of his inability to control the prices of food which has arguable been made Indian society even more economically unequal and polarized that it was even a few decades earlier.

I find it very interesting that when in this book and I do agree with some of my co-panellists when they said that it is really the last chapter and Prof. Marglin's book on the Dismal science called economics that is really in a sense the crucial critical chapter because it seeks to tie up all the loose ends so to say.

Having studied economics 33 years ago in the Delhi School of Economics I myself find myself on the defensive when we see how at least how a half dozen individuals who have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics for their work on complex financial instruments called derivatives which many people today argue is at the very root of the economic crisis that the world has witnessed over the last few years and a crisis which we still haven't really got out of yet.

I find it interesting that this book actually offers me some insights into trying to understand why economists have been so disdainful of the relationship between culture and economics, between all other areas of social sciences and economics. I was flipping through the last part of the book and I find particularly ironical a statement which was made towards the end of the book and this was a quotation from an Englishman Lord Cromer who effectively ruled Egypt between 1883 and 1907 and this is what he said and I quote. "The European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of any ambiguity; he is a natural logician albeit he might not have studied logic." And he goes on to say, he talks about although the ancient Arabs are in a somewhat higher degree, the science of dialectics, their descendants are singularly deficient in the logical faculty. They are often incapable of drawing most obvious conclusions from any simple premises of which they may admit the truth. I found it amazing. And then Prof. Marglin says, pity the poor Egyptian whose only experiential knowledge at his disposal how could he hope to survive with the European close reasoning for him, of course he is being sarcastic but we have seen the turmoil in Egypt. We have seen the turmoil in Tunisia, we have seen how that is no longer confined even to north-eastern part of Africa, Sudan is soon to become two countries. It is

spreading across different parts of west Asia. I found it interesting when there were references made to Adam Smith's desire for a dignified life and throws an evocative term of quiet despoliation. And John Maynard Keynes is talking about his early defence of the idea that in a world of uncertainty decisions are driven by animal spirits. I am hearing this term animal spirits quite a lot in the last twenty years, most of it by Dr. Manmohan Singh in about how actually India took the worst of capitalism because we failed to develop that animal spirit in our middle classes and our entrepreneurs. So it is interesting because Keynes is back in fashion today and everybody loves Keynes, they are all following his policies. They had rejected him many many years ago ever since the Second World War.

I daresay narrow the modernizer is back in fashion. Not too many of us outside India perhaps are seen these paeans of praise to our first prime minister. I found it very interesting when there is quotes here about Nehru where he says that with the temper and approach of science a light of philosophy with reference to all that lies beyond we must face life. I think the recognition that in the name of a mixed economy he took actually the worst of capitalism and the worst of socialism, it was truly acknowledged by even those who did not agree with everything that is happening around us and those who ask for optimistic would also argue that perhaps we can still take the best of both worlds. It is interesting that at a time when General Motors which symbolized free market capitalism is today nearly 70% owned by the government of United States of America, our whole notions of capitalism, socialism, the market place, the alleged magic of the market place has been questioned all over again. When Prof. Vinay Lall talked about notions of self interest in my popular parlance I have a simpler phrase for it, it is called greed. And the importance or the effect of greed on what it did to the world economy is really acknowledged across the globe by observers everywhere. So when we talk about many ways of resolving the tensions between individualism and holism, between self-interest and obligation to others, between algorithm and experience between the claims of various communities and our allegiance between material prosperity and spiritual health. As an atheist I do believe indeed that we can resolve some of these tensions. And perhaps India is better placed than many others to resolve some of these tensions. And I do find a few hints, maybe not full solutions but I don't know if any of us have those complete theoretical frameworks or solutions, those alternatives.

Just a few observations. Some of the chapters are absolutely brilliant because they are self contained stories in itself particularly paradoxical about the impact of the Indhira Gandhi Nahar on the Meer community and how their livelihood systems were developed. Because the Indhira Gandhi Nahar together with the Bhakra Nangal Project arguably is only two major irrigation projects which have been deemed to be reasonably successful in independent India from just about every single major “irrigation” projects because multi-purpose projects have wreaked devastation across the country which has been fairly well documented.

At a time when we find that one of the biggest problems this country faces is that about a third of its geographical territory which is the richest in terms of natural wealth and mineral wealth is also home to the poorest in this country. It is also where left wing extremism is at its peak. These are issues that our rulers are still struggling to engage with leave alone resolve obsessed as some of them are in ensuring that our GDP grows by 9% each year and in fact in trying to understand the many problems that we are living through I did find quite a few insights from the margins when I very quickly went through this volume and these are the views of a lay person, a person lacking the scholarship of my fellow panellists. Thank you very much

**Prof. Madan – Chairman for the session**

We have about 45 minutes for questions and discussion but before I call for questions I want to ask the editors of the volume, do you want to say anything further at this point of time about the book. You want to wait before you take on the points which the panellists made. So who would like to.

**Mr. Rajiv Majumdar**

I have spent some time in the library looking at the various chapters of the book. I don't buy books any more. I think the panellists have taken up various aspects of the book and really made one task of understanding the issues raised inside much better. As an old time practitioner of conventional development I would say contemporary of the unreformed Stephen Marglin. I want to raise one particular issue and that is overall raised by the title of the book, questioning development or Interrogating development. Now this development which is being interrogated essentially by the post-modernists, post-colonialists, is this de4velopment a natural phenomenon

which occurs in society over time which we the old fashioned people used to think of as progress or is it a sense of induced development, induced action by policy makers, well wishers, do-gooders, the World Bank etc. and this makes a great difference. You can interrogate policies of various development agencies, government and so on, society generally, but I don't think you can equally interrogate the fact of change, spontaneous change over the centuries.

So if there is in fact, in the case of development, you go back to favourite word of modernity, alright modernity means enlightenment, if you like, industrial revolution, scientific revolution and so on. So these presumably have occurred and if people can question whether there is a uniformity in this all over the world and if not, the concept of multiple modernity is brought in to say that this is not a simple unilinear movement over history all over the world. But even if it is not unilinear, there is a movement or not, is there a progress or not. If there is progress and if society is different societies do over time want higher standards of living, whether or not it is derived from the west, if there is a desire for these things then are we to interrogate that and say no, we will not recognize that the tribal society, even in a tribal society there is a pressure towards some kind of change which gradually devalues the community out of which individuals emerge with the economic bag of wants.

This particular problem in our country was summarized do we preserve or attempt actually .....policy makers is to prevent this kind of disintegration of community. Is that what we mean by interrogating development. Now I put this question really to Prof. Lall and yourself Mr. Chairman because I know that Prof. Oommen is one my side, most of the others would not question development in that basic sense but I know that you two do to some extent and so my question is essentially to you.

### **A participant**

I have spent some time trying to refine it. I won't take long. I notice that you talk about the dismal science. I like the word science in there. I am a little surprised at it. I find that all the discussion of what is development takes me back a good almost twenty years or more to when I was forced to teach something called communication theory and I was forced to read someone called Wilbur Schramm, it suddenly became clear to me that at the centre of it all, at the start of

it all was something called innovation diffusion, they have products. They wanted to convince people to adopt products, adopt lifestyles and out of this communication theory group, a development paradigm group and if you extricate the notion of development from these origins you are actually rescuing it, giving it overlaid functions, giving it a life of its own. But I think if you take it back to its origins development was very much an imposed missionary like way of pushing a world view on to people who did not have it and who who you had decided for your own reasons were inadequate and so far as to say that people must change because “traditional forms of society are not capital creating”. So if you get down to that and you see that at the base of it all, all the lovely fluffy language you have about modern and different kinds of perspectives on development which include people etc., which give them some space, these are very overlaid. The original thing was prescriptive mode and it is only when this failed a certain sophistication and humility came to it. It was not looking at people and wondering what we were headed towards and how it could be facilitated. It was very much a hegemonistic mood. But if you keep that, then I think this is pretty much what the book is appealing to. It is looking back at the origins of development and not all the pretty refinements that came as we decided it was a science and had a life of its own and decided to rescue it.

### **A participant**

Yes, we need to interrogate development and surprisingly post-modernists did not touch development. So we would have different definitions of development but my question would be this even if we agree on development, is there any essence of development on which there is a wider agreement. Something like economic capability, something like social justice, something like quality, something like critical thought, something like change. Are these essence of development and modernity.

### **A Participant**

I would like to take up this comment, that instead of the book should we reconceptualising development. Of course that is something which needs to be done because the whole idea of interrogating, questioning as someone pointed out started in the 60's. So now considering the kind of challenges right now we have as not only as a nation but as a humanity, I think it is very

important that now one needs to move towards the prescriptive frameworks. What kind of prescriptive frameworks are required because yes, we have undergone an era of intellectual enquiry in questioning development and it has been an internationally accepted kind of thing like millennium development goals, we have targets for 2015. So I would say that the next series of intellectual enquiry, generation of analytical advisory outputs may be geared, that is what is my lesson, I am sharing a kind of lesson which I have to take personally and academically as a student of world order because I did a dissertation on concept of world citizenship. What is citizenship, analyzing social order and analysing world order and of course I did my kind of prescription. So I would like to make an appeal to this house that next five or ten years we should do work on coalescing diverse framework because as Prof. T.K.Oommen pointed out the multiple narrations or multiple terms on alternative development paradigm, human development. But now it is time we need to focus because United Nations will be certainly by 2015, United Nations 2 will be discussing analyzing the Millennium development goals. To what extent the development goals has taken place. And as Dr. Peggy Mohan pointed out, a very anecdotal evidence but then I think that is very much important that what were communicated to me as indicators for times.

As Prof. Stephen Marglin has himself pointed out, dismal science, like how to again build a community. So what I would look for is what kind of alternative framework is generated. Of course you have multiple narratives on development, multiple reasons on progress, multiple narrations on challenges, various cultures, various communities, various social groups.

What should be the collective consensus?

### **A participant**

My question is to the editors of the book and it is taking into account the discussion by the panellists. If we were to rethink the possible title of this book because it has taken up so much, Rejecting development – weapons for the margins. As a perspective, as a title, my question is instead of and we shift the focus there onto the margins. As has been pointed out, it has not been fully polemited or conceptualized in the book but what weapons does this book, what tools

does this book offer to the margins to reject this development paradigm that is being interrogated in the book.

### **A Participant**

One is that I really like the title of the book, Interrogating Development – Insights for the Margins. But this needed assertion because everybody was contesting it. I agree with this contention here. One. The second is the content is important but the content of the concept is also important. Development is the concept and the controller of that concept is what is being interrogated. That content of that container. If one were to pose two words as to what is vandalism and what is development, then to paraphrase what one father from Brazil said, that if something man made is destroyed, it is called vandalism; when something created by nature is destroyed, it is called development. So it is this paradigm where you stop a free flowing river because you have attached a particular financial value to it without taking into account that the free flowing river had a financial value which has not been compared with the dam projects or other projects, then you don't do that. Then the time has come to contest, challenge and interrogate development fundamentalism who have unleashed terrorism in the name of development and where development has emerged as a national security project because development I would conclude, I am concluding by saying that development has emerged in a national security narrative post second world war and if it is not then why is it that development is looked at as a national security issue. Thank you.

### **Prof. Vinay Lall – Panellist for the Session**

Let me just say a couple of things here. And to some extent I will be repeating myself albeit very briefly. I think that one has to make analytical distinctions between such terms as progress, social change, development and so on. If you look at the progress in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it has a specific attachment to certain conceptions that developed as a consequence of the enlightenment. The idea of progress becomes an iconic idea with which you pulverise certain portions of the word that don't exemplify that progress. And as I indicated very clearly in my remarks, there is always change. Every society goes through change. Let us not worry about the fact that the orientalist representation represented India as unchanging, much of the world as stagnant and so on. We



know that the usual course of things is that there is change. But development is very different from change and I actually quite agree with the gentleman who spoke at the very end, that one of the specific ideas about development is its relationship to the national security state. And you have to look at the documents that emerge in the aftermath of World War II, then development becomes a specific kind of ideological construct with certain kinds of epistemological mooring. And so it becomes a way to in fact create a hierarchy. It is also by the way not simply a special idea. I mean when we think of developing worlds and developing countries, developed world and so forth and so on, we think that it is a special category. In fact it is pre-eminently a temporal category and if you have to put the matter in a nutshell, what it seems to me development does is it basically condemns a large part of the world to live someone else's history, not their own history. I think this is in fact in many ways the premise of this particular book.

I just want to make one small comment apropos something that has been said by one of my fellow panellists, Mr. Kothari and this has to do with the question of language. I do not in fact actually find any kind of romanticism unlike what you had stated in the representation of the problem there because the argument in this particular chapter is a very clear argument. And that argument has to do with how when students are not taught in their mother tongue there are certain consequences so that when you look at dropout rate among tribal children or scheduled caste or scheduled tribe children, it doesn't have to do simply with the material circumstances that most people assume are central to that. In fact it has a great deal to do with the capability approach. There is also it seems to me a great deal of irony in this chapter because one of the things we have to think about is the question of these languages in relationship to English which is characterized by the way as a national killer language, that is the phrase that is used and I think we have to understand what that means. I mean if you look at Malaysia, I remember distinctly hearing a number of speeches by Muhammad Mahathir who was the prime minister until quite recently and the long serving prime minister of Malaysia and he made it quite clear that in Malaysia the obligation of all children was to learn English because this was the language by which you became an economic feature. The fact that English was the language of Shakespeare and Chaucer and Spenser and Milton and Keats and Shelley meant nothing at all. It was the sheer instrumentalisation of the language that only mattered. And this particular chapter it seems to me as a very eloquent argument against instrumentalisation of language.

**Prof. T. K. Oommen – Panellist for the Session**

I am both frustrated and happy because Prof. Vinay Lall just took the point I wanted. The whole confusion arises because modernity, development etc are viewed.....(end of cassette)