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# Changing trajectories of global agenda of development and ramifications on economy, environment, and society: Reviewing developed and developing regions with special emphasis on India

Anjan Chakrabarti \*

*Ugc-Human Resource Development Centre, The University of Burdwan, Golapbag, Burdwan-713104, West Bengal, India*

## Abstract

The evolution of development discourse and institution building of every society depends on economic, political, social, and cultural factors of a region. The admixture of all these factors has, in turn, shaped a new society with its own socio-economic, cultural-political specificities. Thus, as economic factors being the measures of the basic needs of a societal change, it influences every other factor to bring in concomitant changes in non-economic factors, resulting in a cycle of changes among the societies across the regions. The general objective of the study is to look into these relationships between changing economic factors and its effect on the changing societies at global, national, regional and sub-regional level. Industrial revolution in Europe, transition from feudalism to capitalism, emergence of concept of nation, slow and steady penetration of capitalism transcending boundaries of developed regions to less-developed regions of the world - barring from communist countries - is generally viewed as panacea for development. The inter-relationship among economy, environment, and society has been viewed from the prism of development agenda set by the Western world. However, this paper, observed that the ramifications are different and heterogeneous across the globe. The development experiences of communist country like the then USSR, Latin American and African countries, India and its sub-regions are grossly different- be it economy, environment or society-in spite of the fact that most of the countries are following almost same development discourse conceived and propagated by the West.

**Keywords:** Industrial Revolution; Development; Capitalism; Communism; Environment

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\* Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* [anjaneco@gmail.com](mailto:anjaneco@gmail.com)

## **1. Introduction**

The evolution of development discourse and institution building of every society depends on economic, political, social, and cultural factors of a region. The admixture of all these factors has, in turn, shaped a new society with its own socio-economic, cultural-political specificities. Thus, as economic factors being the measures of the basic needs of a societal change, it influences every other factor to bring in concomitant changes in non-economic factors, resulting in a cycle of changes among the societies across the regions. To bring noteworthy economic change in any society, associated transformations in attitudes, institutions, and ideologies are equally important (Killick, 1995). On similar line, Gunnar Myrdal (1968), while delving the issue of underdevelopment in Asia, emphasised on rationality, economic planning, social and economic equalization and improved institutions and attitudes.

In fact, economic growth has continued to remain at the core of modern development discourse, which is an offshoot of 'post-war era'. Western development economics thus remained preoccupied in prescribing various mechanisms through which a country either can become an industrialized nation or can grab hold of advanced industrialized countries. To slot in the concept of modernization with that of development thinking, in the form of the concept of nation building was conceived as an attribute of political modernization. Consequently, from nineteenth century to late-twentieth century, philosophy of development gradually moved from structuralism, which emphasized on macro structure to 'agency oriented view'. It is the 'agency oriented view' that incorporated attributes like pro-poor growth, limit to growth, sustainable development, etc. The common synergy has been developed between global agenda for development and various attributes of local developmental policy interventions for various countries and again within the countries, in various regions and the process continues unabated. The progress of 'agency oriented view' is monitored by various multilateral international agencies. With the decline of welfare economics, the distinction between developing and developed societies has been blurred (Pieterse, 2010). Countries are no longer remained as 'self contained units', action of one country has a profound impact on the others. The new terminology 'global issues' has been coined to justify various common problems/constraints that the inter-related world system is facing. The general objective of the study is to look into these relationships between changing economic factors and its effect on the changing societies at global, national, regional and sub-regional level. In this context, an attempt has been made here to unravel the changing trajectories of global agenda of development and its ramifications on economy, environment, and society and heterogeneity so evolved over time, in developed and developing regions of the world.

## **2. Industrial development and western world: Prelude to development**

Modern history primarily narrates the transition of society from a predominantly rural mode to an industrial mode of production, or, in other words, the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The industrial revolution in Great Britain acted as a precursor to this transition (Kuznets, 1966). Western development economics remained engaged in developing various mechanisms through which a country could either become industrialized or catch up with the advanced industrialised countries. However, the romanticism attached to

Industrial revolution has been demystified by one of the greatest social scientists of the modern era, Bertrand Russell. Russell in his long essay on *The Impact of Science on Society* (1953) mentioned that “...the industrial revolution caused unspeakable misery in England. I do not think any student of economic history can doubt that average happiness in England in the 19th century was lower than it had been a hundred years earlier.’ Friedrich Engels provided an evocative description of the squalor of city life in England, during the middle of the nineteenth century on the basis of his personal experiences of working as an agent in his father’s Manchester factory:

*Such is the Old Town of Manchester, and on re-reading my description, I am forced to admit that instead of being exaggerated, it is far from black enough to convey a true impression of the filth, ruin, and uninhabitableness, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health which characterise the construction of this single district, containing at least twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. And such a district exists in the heart of the second city of England, the first manufacturing city in the world. If any one wishes to see in how little space a human being can move, how little air - and such air! - he can breathe, how little of civilisation he may share and yet live, it is only necessary to travel hither. True, this is the Old Town, and the people of Manchester emphasise the fact whenever anyone mentions to them the frightful condition of this Hell upon Earth; but what does that prove? Everything which here arouses horror and indignation is of recent origin, belongs to the industrial epoch (Engles, 1892: 53).*

The “unspeakable misery” arose out of the fact that during industrial transition a huge rise in involuntary unemployment took place. England contained the social unrest by dumping the unemployed 'vagabonds' in Australia and America. The West negotiated the industrial transition or transition to capitalism by accommodating its surplus labour force in colonies away from their coast, where there was plenty of land. It is a proven fact that before the rise of capitalism, the rural economy was free from mass unemployment in normal times. As Schumpeter (1996) pointed out in his *History of Economic Analysis*: “Mass unemployment was unknown to the Middle Ages except as a consequence of social catastrophes such as devastation by wars and plagues.” He further added, “The rising capitalist industry in the long run absorbed unemployment...when the pace of industrial development quickened in the second half of the 18th century, technological unemployment put in an appearance as a mass phenomenon and frequently overshadowed that long-run effect. This explains why the rising factory system was associated with so much misery. For a time, though not everywhere to the same extent, all barriers to the deterioration of the worker's lot were giving way.”

In spite of that, industrialisation in the West became synonymous with modernization, and to dovetail the concept of modernisation with the discourse of development, ‘political modernization’ in the form of nation building was added. Long distance trade expanded and newly emerged modern states started playing a pivotal role in the unification of the domestic market to propel economic growth. Social security measures were also incorporated to contain the unfulfilled aspirations of the people, who had not been accommodated in the industry-led economy. The newly emerged city-based middle class assumed dominance within society and they became the agents of accentuating the accumulation of capital through extraction of surplus from

the agricultural sector with able assistance from the state. This entire phenomenon had been previously unknown to traditional society and its social norms and customary obligations were weakened. A psychological insecurity crept into the minds of the people. Therefore, the modern history of the West, on the one hand, undertook the task of glorifying the transition of society from feudalism to capitalism, and on the other, the same history had to confront the strains and stresses that society confronted during the protracted phase of industrial transition. However, the strains and stresses had been overshadowed by a philosophy that proposed that happiness depended on the ever-expanding satisfaction of ever-increasing wants by commodities recently produced and then discarded for still other newer articles, ignoring the fact that this philosophy might lead to addiction and violence across the social spectrum. The question of what constituted inner freedom and human happiness had conveniently been bypassed by the dominant historical discourse of modernity. Western development discourses overtly or covertly ensured that consumerism would continue to expand across the globe and bulging defence expenses would be a part of nation building process irrespective of the economic condition of a region (Datta, 2009).

### **3. Industrialisation and development: Beyond Europe and beyond capitalism**

However, the industrial revolution did not occur at the same time in all parts of the globe; and in many regions of the world, it is yet to occur. Even if it is accepted that industrial development is a vehicle of development, it circumstantially varies from one country to other. Many of the early-industrialised nations of the West started their journey to capitalism without a firmly rooted democratic polity or even in absence of democracy. England, during her early industrialisation period, had given voting right to propertied classes and women of all classes had no voting rights. Russia became highly industrialised under Stalin's authoritarian regime. China, one of the fastest growing countries is under single-party dictatorship. In many countries, authoritarianism and extreme economic backwardness coexist, but modern history also hints that many countries of the West, in their early stages of development, achieved industrialisation by applying authoritarian methods (ibid.). Looking back at the history of 20th Century, It could be seen that the October Revolution dominated the first part of that century. It precisely aimed at to bring about a new social order by overthrowing capitalism. Social historians identified it as the emergence of Socialism and a move towards achieving Communism. Marx though identified capitalism as powerful means of industrialisation, but denounced it on the ground that it entails high degree of income and wealth inequality, economic instability, unemployment and a great deal of social injustice and exploitation. Therefore, the crux of the revolutionary theory that was conceived by Marx and partly by Lenin can be summarised like this: Workers do not possess the means of production; it is owned by the capitalists. Capitalists, in search of increasing profit, exploit workers by forcing them to work more and produce more. Workers do not receive an additional wage for additional production and exploitation continues and surplus for capitalists keeps on increasing. Thus Capitalism has been viewed as mode of oppression by the owners of property against who do not possess property. Therefore, Lenin, through Revolution, ensured the shift of State power from the capitalists to the working class or proletariat. Private property was altogether discarded, means of production are owned by the state. Production, distribution are thoroughly controlled by the state to ensure well being, equity for the

society. The dreams of this new kind of society transcended the boundaries of USSR and spread to a significant part of the world. However, the new society that emerged could not sustain more than 70 years and crumbled officially on 26 December 1991. The USSR disintegrated. It is understood that a high degree of centralisation of power, gradual integration of party bureaucracy and state bureaucracy created a privileged and oppressive class and worked against the interests of working class. These privileged classes were no longer seen as the representatives of people by the proletariat and the quest for freedom and people's outrage finally brought the end of the Soviet system.

#### 4. Development without structural change: Latin America, Africa, and Asia

The general Western discourse on development advocates that the economy is a cycle of regeneration of production, consumption, saving and investment. The prescribed path of development should follow a path where rapid increase in total factor productivity will bring high rates of per-capita output and high rate of per-capita income will put the per-capita consumption at higher level and in the process it will provide an incentive to bring in changes in the production process backed by suitable technological changes through a process of continuous investment in research and development. With the steady rise in per capita income demand for manufactured goods as well as services will rise faster than the demand for agricultural products and this would bring structural changes within the economy. The economy and society shall continue to reach high up the developmental ladder. These structural changes generally occur through market adjustment in the inter-sectoral resource allocations and as a result, in an early stage of economic growth, demand for industrial goods increases and finally leads to the rise in demand for services with relative saturation in consumption of industrial commodities (Kuznets, 1971; Syrquin and Chenery, 1988).

However, we find confusion galore as we turn towards East Asian, African and Latin American countries. Most African and Asian nations were colonies of Western European countries, primarily Britain and France but also Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, and Spain. Under colonialism, these economies mostly acted as providers of raw materials, and market for manufactured commodities from the West (Hayami, 2005). Western colonisers tried to mould economic structures, educational and social institutions of their colonies in accordance with the Western developmental paradigm. More precisely, "three powerful and tradition shattering" (Todaro, 1991) ideas have been imposed upon the colonies; they were private property, personal taxation, and payment of tax in terms of money instead of kind. These ideas made a heavy dent in the autonomy of local communities and forced them to face various newer forms of exploitation. British legacy in India can be used as an ideal example; especially the way colonial rulers handled land and the then land relations and ruined the domestic industry to enhance their mercantile pursuits. Lord Cornwallis had conceived the Permanent Settlement on behalf of the British government anticipating that switching over to a fixed revenue system would encourage the *zamindars* – who had the sole responsibility for rent collection, land improvement and management – to produce more, as had happened with English farmers in England. Since revenue payments were fixed, it would provide incentives to *zamindars* to maximise their income and in the process, accrued profit by the *zamindars* would be invested in agriculture. As a result, agricultural

production and extension of cultivation would improve. Cornwallis asserted, "Land property will acquire a value hitherto unknown in Hindustan and the large capital possessed by many of the natives in Calcutta which are now employed in usury or monopolising salt and other necessaries of life will be appropriated to the more useful purpose of purchasing and improving land"; *zamindars* would turn into "economical landlords and prudent trustees of the public interest" (Guha, 1963). It would also be beneficial for the State because the settlement would guarantee stable revenue and the cost of collection of revenue would also be minimised (Cooper, 1988). It would therefore become imperative to protect the property rights of the *zamindars* to have a steady flow of revenue. Therefore, a hierarchical judicial system was set up: native Commissioners were given charge to hear suits for small sums at village level, the *Diwani Adalat*, (the civil court) was set up at the district level and the apex of the system, *Sadar Diwani Adalat*, was also created. However, Indians were kept out of higher judiciary on the pretext that they were corrupt (Bandopadhyay and Krishnaji, 1983).

It was further assumed by the colonial ruler that coercion and confrontation with the cultivators should be avoided since they were not directly collecting the revenue from the tillers of the land. Therefore, peasant unrest would be minimised. In Permanent Settlement, it was conceived that a fixed rent would also be introduced for the cultivators but this never become a reality (*ibid.*). Prior to the introduction of Permanent Settlement, the categories of land lords that existed in Bengal province were as follows: i. The Old Independent Chiefs like the Rajas of Cooch Behar, parts of Assam, Tripura etc., who maintained their territorial ownership by paying tributes to the Imperial power in Delhi. ii. The old established landlords (*bhuswamis*) like Rajas of Rajshahi, Burdwan, and Dinajpur who were the *de facto* rulers of their estates and regions. iii. Revenue collectors having hereditary rights of collecting revenue appointed by Mughal rulers. iv. Revenue farmers who managed their own cultivation and simultaneously collected revenue.

However, after the introduction of Permanent Settlement, the various categories of landed gentry -- through a process of relegation and elevation -- were merged into the single category of *zamindar*. All were granted perpetual, hereditary, proprietary rights to the soil, subject to the payment of permanently fixed revenue to the East India Company. The revenue was fixed at ten-eleventh of the assets, i.e. annual gross rental and the remainder and in the process one-eleventh was left for the landlords or *zamindars*. A group of sturdy, rich and less enterprising peasant class with proprietary rights emerged at the top by replacing a sizeable number of old *zamindars* who became the victims of Sunset Law or Revenue Sale Law under Permanent Settlement. The ordinary *raiyyat* remained at the bottom. An estimate has observed that within two decades of the operation of the Permanent Settlement, about half of the *zamindari* lands of Bengal changed hands (Islam, 1979). Old *zamindars* found it a difficult proposition to pay revenue on time because uncertainty in agriculture was quite high due to vagaries of monsoons and hence uncertainty crept in regarding paying rent on time. Thus, when the *zamindars* defaulted, they mounted pressure on the peasants, who deserted in some regions (Chowdhury, 1982).

A tremendous sense of insecurity was infused into Indian traditional society. In this sense, the modern history of the West, on the one hand, undertook the task of glorifying the transition of the society from feudalism to capitalism in the West, and the same history had imposed strains and stresses on the societies of colonies of European colonizers.

Latin America has had a long history of political independence and shared colonial heritage with Spain and Portugal. Therefore, in spite of having geographical and demographic diversity, Latin American countries do have similarities in economic, social, and cultural institutions with European countries (Todaro, 1991). But that did not allow them to be at par with developed countries of the West in terms of economic prosperity. The absence of industrial revolution and prolonged dependence on agriculture with the feudal agrarian system were and continue to be partially responsible for the backwardness of many Latin American countries.

It has been noted by Michael P. Todaro that "the constellation of interests and power among different segments of the populations of most developing countries will itself be the result of their economic, social and political histories and is likely to differ from one country to the next. Nevertheless - whatever the specific distribution of power among the military, the industrialists, and the large landowners of Latin America; the politician and high-level civil servants in Africa; the oil sheiks and financial moguls of the Middle East; or the landlords, money lenders, and wealthy industrialists of Asia-most developing countries are ruled directly or indirectly by small and powerful elites to a greater extent than are the developed nations." (ibid. :23) Therefore, to bring about development in the wider sense, emulation of Western Development models is bound to fail without bringing about changes in the social, political and economic institutions of a nation.

## 5. Development and environment

The development agenda pursued by the West during post-Industrial revolution period remained completely insensitive towards Man-Nature relationship up to 1970s. As a consequence, the multi-pronged threats of gradual exhaustion of non-renewable resources, threat of environmental pollution, depletion of ozone layer, and depletion of forests, global warming, and environmental catastrophe loom large over the entire human civilization. Garret Hardin's publication '*Tragedy of Commons*' in 1968 had attracted the attention of the developed world towards the environment and its degradation. The environment thus became a part of the international agenda in June 1972, at the United Nations Conference on Human Environment held in Stockholm. In the same year, the book 'The Limit to Growth' commissioned by the '*Club of Rome*' was published to show the consequences of a rapidly growing world population on the one hand and finite resource supplies on the other. Five variables (world population, industrialization, pollution, food production and resource depletion) were examined on the assumption that exponential growth accurately described their pattern of increase and that the ability of technology to increase the availability of resources only grows linearly. Finally in 1987, the Brundtland Report announced "the marriage between craving for development and concern for the environment." (Sachs, 1997) In the process, the poor were identified as agents of environmental degradation and the report argues that "poverty reduces people's capacity to use resources in a sustainable manner; it intensifies pressure on the environment ...a necessary but not sufficient condition for the elimination of absolute poverty is a relatively rapid rise in per-capita incomes in the third world". The report defined sustainable development as "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (World Commission on

Environment and Development, 1987) The report of the World Bank (1992) has also offered a generalized version of sustainable development and to them development is about improving the well-being of people and sustainable development is development that lasts.

A new wave of state interventions, political governance and regulation was initiated in third world countries to save the planet, to keep society's action under control and to contain the exploitation of nature within tolerable limits. Consequently, centuries-old tribal and peasant practices of survival in harmony with nature in a sustainable manner were completely ignored (Pietila, 1990). Their traditional knowledge base and approach towards natural resource management, the role of traditional/communal institutions towards the use of common grazing land and forest resources have hardly been taken into consideration by the state (Ramakrishnan et.al, 2002; Ramakrishnan, 2008). The role of technology cannot be undermined but global environment agenda miserably failed to develop new technology that could take care of the organic and deeper philosophical relationship between Man and Nature.

## **6. India's experiment with development**

It is indeed true that India's experiment with development in post-independence period is unique on many counts. India, at the time of independence, was marked by mass poverty, illiteracy, inequality, high degree of dependence on agriculture, strong presence of feudal relationship in the agrarian sector, industrial and technological backwardness and rapidly growing population. No country in the world of the size and socio-cultural diversity of India ever attempted industrialisation within the political framework of a democratic constitution. India had to negotiate with its messy inheritance in 1947 with partition, communal riots, and a few self-governing territories in parts of North-East India and group of princely states with their apprehensions and unwillingness to join in Indian Union (Bhambhri, 2008). The political geography of India underwent a change because in the process of nation building, linguistic reorganization of India had to take place. The State Reorganization Act was passed in the parliament in 1956 and India settled the issue of language-based states by making diligent compromises with the notion of pluralistic society.

During post-independence period, if one of the challenges before the country was the political and cultural consolidation of the country, the other crucial task was to build the economy from scratch. Consequently, development through planning, bringing about institutional changes in the form of land reforms, devolution in the form of democratic decentralization (through 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendments), strong government intervention in redistribution of scarce resources to ensure "growth with equity" became key components of the policy formulations in the first two and half decades in post independence period. However, a paradigm shift took place in 1991 when India initiated economic reforms and made gradual move from quasi-socialist economic structure to a capitalist structure. The state decided to play a facilitating and regulatory role, giving more freedom to entrepreneurs and the private sector and opening up the economy. A two-pronged strategy was envisaged in the course of economic reforms. To rectify macro economic imbalances such as balance of payment crisis, bulging fiscal deficits, the stabilisation programme was



initiated. For instance, the trade deficit increased from Rs. 124 billion to Rs. 169 billion between 1989-90 and 1990-91. The current account deficit was also increased from Rs. 113.5 billion to Rs. 173.5 billion during the same period. The fiscal deficit to GDP ratio was more than 7 per cent during the 1989-90 to 1990-91. The foreign exchange reserves, meant to cover import costs for two years (1989-1991) were just sufficient to cover two and half months of imports. Simultaneously, structural adjustment programme was introduced to ensure smooth movement of foreign and domestic capital and integration of the domestic economy with global economy. Achieving high economic growth, continuous rise in per-capita income, withdrawal of government restrictions for the smooth operation of market forces, removal of barriers to facilitate internal trade etc., became the foci of economic reform in India. The average annual growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the first three (1950s to 1980s) was only 3.6 per cent. During the 1980s, the GDP growth rate accelerated to 5.6 per cent and after economic reforms in the 1990s, it continues to grow at a rate of 6 per cent or more (Bhattachacharya and Sakthivel, 2004). A common synergy was developed between global agenda for development and various attributes of local developmental policy interventions for various countries and again within countries, in various regions and sub-regions (Pieterse, 2010).

It is generally accepted that integration into a state structure or/and integration into market reduces marginalisation and vice versa. A degree of compatibility exists between strategies and policies with economic development and growth of jobs at the regional and sub-regional levels. However, strategies and policies for economic development are often contested and become contentious because national and regional economic strategies mostly focus on economic competitiveness within the realm of a knowledge-driven global economy, and scant attention is paid to the implications or impact of this on potentially deprived population. Experiences of India, during the reform period do suggest that high economic growth has entailed high income inequality vis-à-vis regional and sub-regional inequality. Widening gap of income between the farm sector and non-farm sector, marginalisation of rural workforce has increasingly been felt (Rao and Hanumappa, 1999; Bhalla, 2005; Reddy 2006; Reddy and Mishra, 2008). The Gini coefficient for rural India increased from 0.27 per cent 0.28 per cent with rural inequality rising in 11 states between 2004-05 and 2009-10 (Kapoor, 2013). Unlike the West, India does not enjoy a favourable land-man ratio nor is it possible for it to send its surplus and distressed population to any virgin place outside its territory. Growth of market space may have created wider space for formal sector but the capital intensive nature of the formal sector has forced the rural migrants to settle in the expanding informal sector characterized by a high degree of income uncertainty. In hindsight of the reform process, demands for separate states or various kinds of territorial/regional autonomy based on identity, ethnicity, and cultural specificity and demand for 'positive discrimination' have been on the rise in various parts of India and in many of the cases those movements tend to be violent. The concept of a region has become a contentious issue. The presence or absence of the market has an implicit or explicit role either to fuel or to abate these types of movements. In the process, interaction between market, state, and people has turned out to be a matter of intense debate.

It has often been argued by the social scientists that in the era of globalisation, policy makers have become increasingly oblivious that India, especially with a history of prolonged colonial rule, often exhibits the simultaneous existence of two or more enclaves of socio economic systems, characteristically and conspicuously different from each other, and each dominating a part of the society, the economy and the

polity. These enclaves markedly differ in matters of ownership of resources, production relations, the social spirit, institutions, customs, attitudinal structure, socio-economic and political organization, technological know-how and its applications, and so on. Thus, India has a structural dualism at the very heart of its political, social, and economic systems. The very concept of 'development' provides a fertile ground for the realization of alternative space, and course of action for alternative praxis at the national, regional and the sub-regional levels.

## 7. Conclusion

In concluding remarks, it is worth quoting a passage from Douglass C. North's 2003 Gunnar Myrdal Lecture (delivered at Palais des Nations, as 2003 Gunnar Myrdal Lecture) which may provide us with an idea regarding the analytical genre the present work has actually attempted to pursue: "So we have changed the world; essentially we have conquered the physical environment. We have made possible a world of plenty. We have enormous piles of statistics to tell us that we have done so. But in conquering the physical environment we have created a human environment that is immensely complicated and over which we have very imperfect understanding. Therefore, on the one hand, we have made possible a world of plenty, and a world in which human beings live more than twice as long as they did before, and have the possibility of well-being on a level that would be beyond the comprehension of our ancestors. However, we have also created a completely new set of problems in a human, political, economic, and social structure that we are only able to use very imperfectly to solve and maintain what we are concerned with. One cannot make sense out of the world with just economic reasoning. You have to know political and social theory and, as you are going to see, you must also know some cognitive science. Now, the reason why of course you need all these is that we do not live only in an economic world, a political world or a social world; we live in a world that is a blended mixture of all these. In the world that we are trying to confront with respect to solving problems, we have to develop a body of theory that integrates all of them." Therefore, a serious introspection is need of the hour, especially for third world countries, which are populous and are having extreme heterogeneity in economic and socio-cultural structure. Major efforts are required to ensure job-led growth instead of job-less growth. Development paradigm and ethics of the developed Western nation may often prove to be counter-intuitive.

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