

Book Review

Oswaldo de Reviero. *The Myth of Development: The Non-Viable Economies of the 21st Century*. London, U.K.: Zed Books. 2001. 224 pages. £20.99.

Since the early 1990s, a new stream of developmental thinking started getting momentum, questioning and refuting the supposedly undisputed developmental counseling, pursued by all nations and practiced for more than four decades. This critique of development, usually referred to as 'post-structuralism' or 'post-development', assesses the genesis of the developmental ideas in post-war era and also questions the desirability and prospects of the development in the contemporary world.

In the era of intellectual combat of developmental ideas, Oswaldo De Reviero's "The Myth of Development" is significant and thought provoking addition to the Post-Structuralist literature. De Riviero has tended to deconstruct the developmental ideas and identify the factors that the developmental thinking and practices entail and have been contributing to the impoverishment of the countries.

One factor that the author has attributed the prevailing poverty to and stressed upon more than any other is what he calls 'the unstoppable process of globalisation', and which he believes is beyond human control. For De Reviero, globalisation is a mean for multinationals and transnationals to make, what he referred to as, 'inroad into the sovereignty of nation states', which consequently has marginalised the national capitalism—a fundamental ingredient used by the now developed countries for their progress.

Another factor that De Reviero believes requires the attention of development intellectuals is the advancement in technology, coupled with intellectual property rights, which hinders the transfer of technology that helped western nations in their developmental process. This advancement in technology, especially in telecommunication technology, has sharply reduced the raw material needed per unit of output. Hence, the author argues that technological advancement in the name of increased efficiency has resulted in decreasing need of jobs and steady fall in the prices of the raw materials, which are among the very few assets developing nations possess.

Materialism and high consumption—the corner stone of the development quest—are other factors that De Reviero asserts are the cause of poverty in the developing and underdeveloped world. The prosperous economies have attained a certain level of consumption that defines their social status and prestige and is maintained at the cost of relinquished investment in poor countries. Since the rich are not willing to forgo their desire for materialism and poor do not have the economic power to influence the decisions of corporations, therefore the new economic order has placed the corporation as the pivotal center of global economy and manufacturer of its future. Since the corporations as center of global power, De Reviero argues, have no international responsibilities, therefore paradoxically economic and political power over the past few

decades have been centered in those who are not accountable to the citizens of any country for the negative consequences of their operations.

The Myth of Development has received huge applause among intellectuals and academic scholars for its brave and outspoken critique of the developmental ideas and practices. The reviewers of the book have mutual consent that De Reviero, although a diplomat by profession not an economist has correctly identified the gap between the development theory and the reality. For example, Haynes (2002) seconds De Reviero's conjecture that focus on comparative advantage has neither attracted foreign investment, as the theory suggests it should have, nor has been instrumental in helping achieved greater gains for the countries with comparative advantage in labour-intensive production. Haynes (2002) believes that the author correctly asserts that the pre-requisite for the comparative advantage to work in the light of theory is the prevalence of the perfect competition with minimal intervention in the market. Since no country during their developmental phase came close to the theoretical requisites of perfect competition, as public strategic initiatives were coupled with market activity to foster growth of industrialisation, therefore it should not come as surprise if the development counseling with focus on comparative advantage without its pre-requisites did not work for the countries around the world.

The distinctive writing style of the De Reviero has made the book rich in allegorical and analogical portrayal of the present day economic and political situation, thereby making the book easy to grasp for readership from diverse fields of expertise. For example, De Reviero associates the present economic situation with *ancien régime*, where nation-states are depicted as ageing aristocracies desperately clinging to power, receiving consistently failed social and economic policies from modern day 'supernatural clergy. The author depicts the IMF and World Bank, and transnational corporations as new bourgeoisie determined to overthrow the old order. Similarly, De Reviero compares the present economic order with Darwinism, wherein globalisation is turning world economy into brutal global jungle with the winners and losers completely polarised and losers are considered as different species and thereby denying their common humanity.

While the author has been up-front with portrayal of the realities of the development philosophy and practices in failure to achieve the aspired results in the underdeveloped part of the world, however, the reviewers of the book are surprised to see that the book of this nature has failed to take into account some of the very important aspects that could have further enriched the post-development discussion. For example, Ahmadu (2003) is unsatisfied with the analysis of the historical evolution of the nation state, as he argues that the book traces the history of evolution only to the point of the origin of western political thought. Consequently, what escapes from the attention of the author is the fact that strong economically viable nation-states, like, Aztec, Inca, Songhai, Timbuktu, Andalusia, to name a few, have existed before. With strong standing armies, effective administrations and judiciaries, these nation-states were involved in global trade of goods and services. To understand the underdevelopment objectively and offer long-term solutions for the present times, therefore, would require a comparative inquiry.

Another analytical fault that Ahmadu (2003) sheds light on is the ambiguity with regards to what the author conceives of development. While comprehending the issues of underdevelopment the authors has portrayed a development gap between countries by

using indicators like GNP, GDP and HDI, which have their genesis to the western economic thought and do not measure the multi-faceted developmental concept, embodying both material and non-material aspects. As a result, the author makes the readers confused if he is talking about economic growth or development. Furthermore, Ahmadu (2003) argues that although the desire to create unidirectional and one sided global hegemonic power has its genesis to the 1940s in the then President Truman's speech, and which spurred the developmental concept. As a result, the quest for the development has been incoherent with the classical and neo-classical economic thoughts, which were manufactured to serve some other purpose but development. In reality, neither science nor development philosophy has any ethnocentric appellations and each can be fine-tuned to serve humanity and therefore the failure of post-war developmental thinking should not be used as a rationale to discard the future development prospects for the nation-states around the world.

Given these insuperable challenges De Reviero sees a bleak future for developing nation-states, and suggests them to give up the quest for development and prosperity. He recommends to the poor nations a feasible response of 'pursuit of survival' to the prevailing crisis of poverty and underdevelopment. This alternative pursuit, as suggested by author, would be manifested by a coalition of the political leaders in each poor country for adequate supply of food, water and energy. This concluding part of the book has received significant negative feedback from the reviewers. For example, Haynes (2002) believes the author is presenting depressing message to the poor with little hopes and prospects to come out of their atrocious situations. Vakil (2002), similar to Haynes (2002), believes that the author brings the path breaking discussion of the book to a depressing conclusion, and hence making his case weak. Manchanda (2002) argues that the author is polemical of classical and neo-classical economic thought and with insufficient analysis uses sweeping generalisation to assert his point. Ahmadu (2003) argues that while presenting a bleak future to the poor the author has failed to see that the countries which have achieved higher economic growth did it so at the expense of gradual 'institutional social breakdown', which are not structurally visible now, but such subterranean social dysfunction pose significant threat to these societies.

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