

Book Reviews

Hassan N. Gardezi. *Understanding Pakistan: The Colonial Factor in Societal Development.* Lahore: Maktaba Fikro-Danish (1991). Pages 162. Price: Rs 99.00.

After almost forty-four years of existence as a sovereign nation, Pakistan still remains an underdeveloped country. This underdevelopment and poverty is not the original state, that is, it is not entirely inherent in the original social and economic structures or cultural traditions of Pakistan; rather this socio-economic retardation of Pakistan is due mainly to the integration of Pakistan's society and economy in the world capitalist system. This integration of a weak and stagnant semi-feudal society with the industrially advanced capitalist societies has gradually resulted in an unequal relationship and an international division of labour, which binds Pakistan as a 'periphery' to the highly developed and industrialized metropolitan 'centres' of capitalism, and in which resources tend to flow from the former to the latter.

Hassan N. Gardezi advances this radical hypothesis by characterizing Pakistan's socio-economic formation as 'peripheral' capitalism which is internally ruled by a tiny, but powerful, minority of feudal, capitalist, bureaucratic, and military elites. These ruling elites, says Gardezi, are externally dependent on and subservient to the highly industrialized capitalist countries; and the colonial factor has determined the contours and character of Pakistan's socio-economic system.

According to this theory of dependency, the indigenous elites, in association with the middle strata and in league with foreign bourgeoisie, exploit the common masses of Pakistan and plan, develop, and direct the social and economic system in a way in which all privileges, resources, wealth, and power tend to concentrate in the hands of these ruling elites. Hence, the benefits of economic growth in Third World societies such as Pakistan have not reached the poor.

The main thesis of the book is that in this relation of dependency (of Pakistan's state and society) both internal and external factors function as organic parts of a single phenomenon. Without breaking this dependency relationship, Pakistan cannot evolve a progressive and independent social, economic, and political system. Before we explain the strengths and weaknesses of the dependency theory, let us briefly examine the contents and themes of the book.

The first chapter, "In Search of a Perspective", states that the theories and paradigms of sociological analysis developed in the West, particularly North America, have not helped to study realistically the nature and significance of the colonial factor, which subjects the state, society, and culture of a Third World country to the sway of metropolitan capitalism. In the framework of the American social sciences of the 1950s and 1960s, consequent upon the emergence of the

U.S.A. as the leading capitalist power in the international economic order, it was reaffirmed as a preconceived notion that Third World societies such as Pakistan were basically agricultural and traditional in their social structures, and to grow economically they needed to be modernized according to western concepts, experience, and standards.

The economic model of industrialization in Pakistan, therefore, was based on this Western experience of transforming agrarian feudalism into industrial capitalism in which the elites consisting of entrepreneurs, businessmen, and bureaucrats led the social change.

The first generation of Pakistani sociologists, economists, and demographers, trained in American universities, applied these Western theories to modernize the agrarian/traditional society of Pakistan beginning in the 1950s; but they failed miserably because, according to Gardezi, these modernizing theories were developed in Western culture: they did not accord with the social, economic, and cultural conditions of Pakistan. As the Western scholars and planners concentrated on creating and strengthening the new elites and middle classes in Pakistan, they excluded the large masses of people from their economic models.

This failure of the Pakistani scholars in identifying and defining the real problems of the society, in the opinion of this reviewer, cannot be solely attributed to the pre-suppositions of American theorists as it was also due to a crisis of identity. Pakistani scholars, in general, identified themselves as a privileged elite, having no relation to the poor and illiterate masses of Pakistan.

The second chapter, "The Inception of a Social Science in Pakistan", traces the development of the discipline of sociology in Pakistani universities in the 1950s. Because of the American influence, Pakistani sociologists generally adopted the concepts and propositions of American sociology, which was based on the American values of a developed industrial society. However, the contemporary academic sociology in Pakistan, Gardezi says, has become creative and innovative because Pakistani sociologists are now looking for a separate identity for their discipline. The author forecasts that the emphasis on the discussion of more relevant problems will increase. He also suggests greater independence from the structuralist-functional theory of American sociologists like Talcott Parsons, the adoption of more problem-oriented and applied research, historical analysis, participant observation, and case studies.

The third chapter "Neo-Colonial Alliances and the Crisis of Pakistan" analyses the economic and political crises (before Gen. Zia's Martial Law) in Pakistan which resulted in class and regional disparities and led to the secession of East Pakistan in 1971. According to the author, the basic crisis of Pakistan was the division of society into the privileged elites and the under-privileged poor masses. This chapter recounts how the colonialists developed these elites for their own

interests in the pre-partition days.

Thus, when Pakistan came into being, political power was transferred to the top elites who did not identify themselves with the masses of the people. This division into a ruling minority of rich elites and large impoverished masses has created distortions in the society, since Pakistan is also structurally integrated in the global capitalist system. According to the author, only a radical and revolutionary approach to development can lift Pakistan from the deepening crisis (p. 32).

Chapter Four gives a historical sketch of the changing modes of production in Pakistan. The British rulers did not eliminate the pre-capitalist relations of production in the areas which later became Pakistan, but instead superimposed the capitalist relations over them. The colonialists, in general, strengthened feudal relations of production in the primary sector of the economy. Gardezi posits that the 'peripheral' capitalism in today's Pakistan now consists of industrial capitalism and the pre-capitalist semi-feudal formations. The strategy of economic development, since Ayub Khan's regime, has been to emphasize the free-market economy, industrialization based on import-substitution consumer goods in partnership with metropolitan monopoly capital, heavy reliance on foreign aid, utilization of cheap labour power of the poor masses, and generous incentives and concessions to private entrepreneurs.

Chapter Five examines "Labour, Poverty, and Growth in Pakistan's Peripheral Accumulation", during the 1980s. Gardezi doubts the Zia regime's claim, at the end of the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1983-87), that Pakistan had become a model of economic development among the developing countries by achieving a growth rate of 6 percent. He analyses the real nature and meaning of such a growth rate in a Third World country on the periphery of global capitalism. Comparing some indicators of economic progress and poverty in Pakistan with those of its neighbours, China, India, Burma, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, the author concludes that in Pakistan's economic performance the important thing is the degree and nature of exploitation and the reproduction of labour-power built into the regime of accumulation. This exploitation of labour creates surplus value for economic growth as well as mass poverty. The author correctly observes that "while Pakistan leads all the countries in per capita income, except China where the post-Mao leadership has espoused a policy of rapid economic growth, it has the lowest life expectancy and highest infant mortality rate with the exception of Bangladesh, lowest school attendance rate, and a rate of inflation comparable to India. In other words, it shows the worst combination of symptoms of poverty in the region despite its leading position by indicators of economic growth which have continued their upward trend until almost 1987" (pp. 58-59).

The benefits of economic growth in Pakistan since the 1950s, as elsewhere in the Third World, have not reached the poor. This is the reason that development

economists sometimes direct their attention to "Growth with Social Justice", and at other times to "Basic Needs Strategy", and to "Human Development". Gardezi is correct in concluding that the approach of the development economists, which takes factors responsible for the creation of poverty (of the masses) and growth (of the rich elites) operate at two different levels, is misleading.

In the sixth chapter ("The Theory and Practice of Population Control"), Gardezi is critical of the capitalist approach of population control in the Third World countries. He thinks that the best method of controlling population is that of modern China; that is, if radical social and economic changes are brought in society on an egalitarian basis through land reforms, economic equality, and radical restructuring of society, then fertility rates tend to fall as economic development and prosperity lead to a decline in population. The techniques of population control in Pakistan, the author says, were dictated by the imperialist interests (p. 82). Thus, it can be seen that China's average annual population growth declined from 2.3 percent in 1960-70 to 1.2 percent in 1980-86. Pakistan's average annual growth in population increased from 2.8 percent in 1960-70 to 3.1 percent in 1980-86, which is one of the highest in the world. Pakistan in 1986 had a birth rate of 47 per thousand compared to China's 19.

In the seventh Chapter ("Pakistan as a Post-Colonial State"), the author defines Pakistan's post-colonial state in the words of Nicos Poulantzas; that the "state is not a monolithic block but a strategic field". He contends that "the Pakistani state is not only overdeveloped, but an alien force which wields a disproportionate degree of power over the rest of civil society" (p. 90).

In the eighth chapter ("The Third Path of Islam: Compromise with Imperialism"), the author says that the ruling elites of some Muslim countries, like Pakistan, claim that Islam is an economic system and, therefore, it is an alternative to both capitalism and socialism. It is correctly argued in this chapter that the so-called third path of Islam is a "brand of religion-politics which promotes the very material and ideological conditions on which the forces of imperialism thrive" (p. 104).

The ninth chapter ("Pakistan after Zia: The Legacy and Prospects") describes in brief how Benazir Bhutto came to power after Zia's death. Gardezi thinks that Ms Bhutto and PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party) have changed their original pro-people strategy. They now appeal for support to the rich elites of *zamindars*, *waderas*, *khans*, and *sardars*, and their power brokers within the military-bureaucratic oligarchy, and not to the poor masses of Pakistan.

The last chapter ("Epilogue: The End of the Second Passage") concludes the discussion. Three forces are stated to sustain the praetorian role of the Pakistani state, which block the path of democratization in the country; these are (1) an overdeveloped military-bureaucratic oligarchy, (2) a peripheral-capitalist mode of

production, and (3) religious fundamentalism. All these three forces reinforce and sustain each other.

The book under review thus follows the dependency thesis, according to which the underdevelopment, poverty, and retarded socio-economic and political conditions of Pakistan are caused and perpetuated by the world capitalist system into which Pakistan has been integrated, first, as a colonial territory (before its independence in 1947) and, after 1947, as a post-colonial state.

Without breaking the colonial chains of dependence and subservience, and without wresting power from the ruling elites, Pakistan cannot be transformed into an independent, egalitarian, and industrial country. Real social change requires radical restructuring of society. It is of two types: revolutionary and evolutionary. Although he could have discussed the pros and cons of the evolutionary or the revolutionary method, Gardezi does not spell out the way out of this dependency relationship. That is, whether this delinking is to be absolute or selective.

In attributing internal underdevelopment to external forces, dependency theory tends to absolve the internal factors of their responsibility. It may be asked: What is the nature of the autonomy of the internal structures, forces and classes? Of national bourgeoisie, landlords, bureaucrats, industrial workers, peasants, industrialists, and intellectuals? What is the actual role of the political forces? Dependency theory, if taken to extremes, closes its eyes to the autonomy of the internal factors and structures. No society is static. Social change takes place in the context of the internal and external relationships of a country. To break the neo-colonial relationship of dependency is a national cause of liberation. No single class of peasants or workers, as recent history shows, can win independence. All classes, the bourgeois, the middle and the lower classes, the peasants, and the labourers have to act together in a revolutionary or evolutionary way, depending on the conditions and circumstances of a country. As everywhere in the world, ideology is giving way to pluralism and pragmatism, and the core (centre) and the periphery are not divided as closed and watertight compartments, there is a semi-periphery too. Even internal socio-economic formations are undergoing changes, some becoming dependent and others independent. India and China are more independent than Bangladesh or Nepal. Dependency is, therefore, more a state of degree than of nature.

Dependency theory is useful in a general analysis of the problems resulting from the dependency relationship, but it does not fully explain the complex specifics of individual Third World countries. As the theory developed in the late 1950s and 1960s from the writings of scholars like Paul Baran¹ and Raul Prebisch² – who

¹Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957.

²Raul Prebisch, *The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems*. New York: The United Nations, 1950.

advanced their thesis that economic under-development of Latin America, Asia, and Africa, was mainly a product of the external economic dominance of the advanced capitalist countries in the context of a world capitalist system – if proved useful in its general approach but tended to place too much emphasis on the external factors, overruling the possibility that the internal forces in some countries played an autonomous role. As it is too general in application, it does not throw much light on the nature of the weaknesses and incapacities of the internal forces, structures, and classes. If we cannot define and understand our own weaknesses, we cannot remove them. Liberation of a Third World society from the relationship of a dominated dependency is a scientific process; it depends on a clear understanding of this relationship, of the structure of indigenous social classes and forces, of the nature of the economy, and of the culture, history, and traditions. It also requires total social transformation and creation of a new, free, independent, and dynamic human being. There is, of course, the truth in the dependency theory that the development of the industrialized countries is in part due to the unequal relationships in the world capitalist system, but it is not correct to say that all our deficiencies and weaknesses are solely caused by the foreign bourgeoisie. We are also responsible for our failures and incapacities.

Recent changes in development economics, in its criticism of import-substitution industrialization, of *dirigisme*, of the public sector, social welfare, and minimum wage legislation, and the hegemonic policies of the World Bank and the IMF in attacking State enterprises and undermining the interests of the working classes throughout the Third World countries, are all leading to what James M. Cypher calls "reinventing dependency". . . "in an unprecedented effort to shove the periphery into a situation of passive subordination".³ Cypher also thinks that "never in its history has the Fund [IMF] had so much power over the periphery" (p. 65). This writer believes that the present privatization policy in Pakistan will deepen this dependency relationship, and will increase unemployment, inflation, sharpen class polarization, and regional disparities and exacerbate misery of the general masses because Pakistan's scarce resources are again being diverted to maintain the ruling elites in their power and privilege to the exclusion of the poor masses of Pakistan.

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³James M. Cypher, "The Crisis and the Restructuring of Capitalism in the Periphery", in *Research in Political Economy*. Edited by Paul Zarembka. London: Jai Press Inc. 1988. Vol. 11, p. 65.