

Book Reviews

Victor S. D'Souza. *Development Planning and Structural Inequalities: The Response of the Underprivileged.* New Delhi: Sage Publications 1990. Pages 206 + Index. Price: Rs 180 (Hardbound).

Development planning in India, as in other developing countries, has generally been aimed at fostering an industrially-oriented policy as the engine of economic growth. This one-sided economic development, which results in capital formation, creation of urban elites, and underprivileged social classes of a modern society, has led to distortions in the social structure as a whole.

On the contrary, as a result of this uneven economic development, which is narrowly measured in terms of economic growth and capital formation, the fruits of development have gone to the people according to their economic power and position in the social structure: those occupying higher positions benefiting much more than those occupying the lower ones. Thus, development planning has tended to increase inequalities and has sharpened divisive tendencies.

Victor S. D'Souza, an eminent Indian sociologist, utilizing the Indian census data of 1961, 1971, and 1981, examines the problem of structural inequality with particular reference to the Indian Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes – the two most underprivileged sections of the present Indian society which, according to the census of 1981, comprised 15.75 percent and 7.76 percent of India's population respectively. Theoretically, he takes the concept of development in a broad sense as related to the self-fulfilment of the individual. The transformation of the unjust social structure, the levelling down of glaring economic and social inequalities, and the concern for the development of the underprivileged are for the author the basic elements of a planned development. This is the theoretical perspective of the first chapter, "Development Planning and Social Transformation".

As the real aim of development planning for the author is the transformation of society and the levelling down of all inequalities, he rightly attacks the assumptions of Indian planning strategies, which take for granted that economic growth or quantification of national wealth can lead to a democratic transformation of society. His main thesis is that the Indian experiment of planning has resulted in gross inequalities because, according to him, social structure has a peculiar nature and character all of its own. The impact of economic changes takes place according to the established position and status of the social classes. The rich benefit more than

the poor and the weak. The underprivileged are totally ignored.

In Chapter Two, the author argues convincingly that the changes resulting from economic planning in the existing social structure in India have exacerbated the inequalities and tensions in society because these have occurred through the existing social structure. Chapter Three explores the problem of the growing inequalities among the Scheduled Castes in India in the spatial and social structural context after growth occurs. Chapters Four, Five, and Six discuss the changes in three dimensions – based on the variables of education, urbanization, and industrialization (non-agricultural occupations) – of the two major underprivileged sections of Indian society, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, during a period of twenty years of planned development, at three points of time, 1961, 1971, 1981. He analyses the problem at two levels: first, he treats the entire country as the universe and the states as the units; and at the second level, he takes the states as the universe and the districts as the units, thus posing the problem in the broad national spectrum ranging from the district to the national level.

Chapter Seven concludes and summarizes the discussion. He concludes that no social transformation is possible in India unless the planning strategy is changed and is aimed at transforming the society as a whole, in a radical and revolutionary way and not merely in terms of the economic growth of the rich and powerful classes to the exclusion of the underprivileged castes and tribes.

In spite of the social, political, and economic changes brought about in India after Independence in 1947, the author states that the widely pervasive caste system has not broken down because no direct and radical attempts have been made to change the social structure. Consequently, most of the economic changes that have taken place “have been absorbed by the social structure to subserve its existing pattern” (p. 38). The author has in particular concentrated on some case studies in the Indian Punjab (including the state of Haryana), where the poor Scheduled Castes constitute an almost one-fourth of the state’s entire population. He names the major castes in the Punjab [categorized as high, medium, and low] as Brahmin, Rajput, Bania, Arora, Khatri, Jat, Kamboh, Dhobi, Kumhar, Tarkhan, Suniar, Jhewar, Chhimba, Nai, Ad-Dharmi, Balmiki, and others as Miscellaneous.

A study of inter-generational occupational mobility conducted by the author in 1980 in three villages of Punjab and Haryana (published in 1985) showed that the higher castes had benefited from economic growth (Green Revolution) more than the lower castes. This is the reason, the author explains, that despite changes in the economy, the caste hierarchies in the villages have remained intact.

Similarly, the author concludes from the case studies in the Punjab that “economic development has accelerated the growth of urbanization which provides better economic opportunities. The growth of urbanization, however, is again spear-headed by certain castes, especially those belonging to the upper levels of the caste

hierarchy (Brahmins, Khattris, Banias, etc.), which are therefore over-represented in the urban areas. However, among the higher castes, the cultivating castes which dominate the rural scene are least represented in the urban areas. Therefore, there is a polarization not only in the general composition of the rural and urban population but also in the elite sections of the two areas" (p. 50).

This phenomenon, according to the author, is becoming ubiquitous. What is happening in the Punjab is also happening in the whole of India; the higher castes tend to be over-represented in the urban areas while the castes comprising the Backward Classes and Scheduled Castes are greatly underrepresented, which is leading to acute social tensions and a sharp polarization in the Indian society of today. This means that the religious and communal conflict presently raging in the Indian Punjab is, in a sense, a reflection of this economic inequality and social tension.

The author shows convincingly that both regional disparities and hierarchical inequalities in the educational attainments of the Scheduled Castes in the Punjab have increased. As both types of inequalities increase with development, the educational inequalities among Scheduled Castes *inter se* also increase.

The findings of the author in general reveal the fact that, excepting education, there is little or no correlation between the development of the Scheduled Castes and the growth of the rest of the population in the variables of modernization (education, urbanization, and industrialization). This was the result of the Indian planning strategy which concentrated on global planning but not on target-group planning, i.e., preferring overall planning in which the richer sections of the population and economically advanced regions were as a strategy allowed to reap benefits, which, it was hoped, would trickle down later to the underprivileged. The target-group planning strategy, on the other hand, aims at developing those underprivileged sections of the population and backward regions which cannot benefit from this global development. Target-group planning in education, however, according to the author, has benefited the Scheduled Castes in India.

As for the Scheduled Tribes in India, they comprise (Census of 1981) 7.76 percent of India's total population and almost one-half of the population of the Scheduled Castes. They lag behind the Scheduled Castes. Whereas the Scheduled Castes are "socially marginal", the Tribes are "spatially marginal". Unlike the Scheduled Castes, the Tribes are segregated from the mainstream of the society, they are more backward than the former but they are not subject to the scourge of untouchability like the Scheduled Castes.

The study thus emphasizes plainly and courageously that mere economic change or growth brought about by planning is not sufficient for the reduction of structural injustices in a modern society like India. If economic change is not directly aimed at transforming the social structure as a whole in the desired direc-

tion, the social structure inevitably channelizes the former according to its own design, thus depriving the weak classes, castes, groups, and backward regions of the social and economic benefits.

The study clearly demonstrates that both the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes live at the lowest rungs of modernization of the Indian society. However, the Scheduled Castes are more modernized than the Scheduled Tribes. As the Scheduled Castes are more integrated in the society than the Tribes, "the effect of planning percolates down to the Scheduled Castes faster than it does to the Scheduled Tribes" (p. 196). Hence, social inequalities are also widening within the Scheduled Castes themselves and between the Castes and the Tribes. Those living in the more developed regions are developing faster than those living in the backward areas.

Due to overall economic development since 1961 the underprivileged sections of the Indian society have, of course, gained according to the trickle-down principle, but the author believes that this is not due to the progressive measures of planning; instead "fortuitous circumstances created by the structural factors" (p. 199) are considered responsible.

Appropriately, attention of the Indian planners is drawn to the indicators of distributive justice. The author concludes this important study with these cogent and terse remarks: "Already, with economic development, the cleavages in society are becoming even more ominous. In the rural areas in any region, one or two caste groups have monopolized the ownership of land, and, likewise, in the urban areas people from a handful of castes and ethnic groups control the commercial, industrial, and administrative sectors. The vast majority of the population, both in the rural and the urban areas, is without any assets worth mentioning. Unemployment, especially among the educated youth, is assuming alarming proportions. In the ever-growing urban sector, the population living in slums and [*sic*] which belongs mostly to the underprivileged sections, is growing much faster than that of the non-slum areas" (pp. 201-202). This in a nutshell, is, the present social and economic scenario prevalent in India.

The study underlines two broad types of problems in relation to the backwardness of the underprivileged Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of India: first, inequalities are constantly growing among the sub-groupings within an underprivileged class; secondly, the underprivileged category is relatively more deprived of the benefits of economic growth as compared to the rest of the population. The causes of these two types of problems are quite different and are the logical results of the global strategy of planning, which helps only the better-off sections of society. The author, therefore, suggests target-group planning for the underprivileged, as this has given good results in the field of educational development of the Scheduled Castes.

The book adopts the interdisciplinary approach, which has proved highly fruitful. It is a blend of mature scholarship, insight, sympathetic altruism, and empirical realism; and makes an important contribution towards our understanding of the problem of structural inequalities relating to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the pariah and the untouchables of Indian society. In some Indian states, like Punjab, the poor Scheduled Castes comprise 27 percent of the entire population. Economic development and industrialization of India is meaningless without a corresponding betterment of the conditions of the underprivileged.

Whether the communal tensions prevailing in the Indian Punjab are also aggravated in part by the social, economic, and political polarizations which have alienated the underprivileged Hindu and Sikh castes from the social mainstream, in both the rural and the urban areas, the author does not explain. The recent bloody agitations of the upper caste Hindus throughout India against an increase by the government in the quota for jobs for the Scheduled Castes does explain the political sensitivity of the problem.

Furthermore, the author does not analyse the census data relating to the changes in the Scheduled Castes labour force employed in various categories of employment; in services, private and public sectors of the Indian economy, defence and police services, railways, post offices, etc. Such data from 1961 to 1981 may have been useful in order to gauge the discrimination in recruitment meted out to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The percentages of literacy, urbanization, and non-agricultural workers, taken by the author as indices of modernization for these underprivileged of the Indian society, are too broad to capture the real nature of their poverty and backwardness.

This is a very important research work based on a progressive theoretical framework and rich empirical evidence. Basically interdisciplinary in its approach, it is chiefly addressed to development economists, planners, sociologists, and policy-makers. The problems discussed by the author seem to be relevant to the economic conditions in Pakistan, where, like India, development planning has led to social polarizations, class inequalities, and regional disparities.

Ziaul Haque

Pakistan Institute of
Development Economics,
Islamabad.