



Book Review - The History of Development By Gilbert Rist

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The book ‘The History of Development’ reflects Gilbert Rist’s understanding how the phenomena or the idea of development can be codified in a way as what ultimately advocates of western myth of development claim at the end of the day and eventually it’s their belief that what sort of idea of development, they have proposed is real and there can’t be any second thought on this. He highlights the evolutionary process of the understanding of development in more kind of critical way. Idea of development’ has had a long historical evolution and continues on this journey - forward and upward, though the latter is debatable and subjective. , the author points out how varying educational backgrounds and practices enables the person in question to have a differing sense of the term ‘development’ Many non-economists for example Francis Fukuyama, claim that there was an event in 1990s and that was the ultimate end of history. However, history doesn’t meet its ultimate and unfortunate end in anytime period whether it’s good or bad. Here what is important to note is that this book doesn’t follow this path which considers history an end in itself. History is account of continuous happening of events in past and it can’t be controlled. It doesn’t stop like what we see in watch. It’s nowhere different in any part of the globe.

According to Uma Kothari “Development is something beneficial is strictly set apart from colonialism as something deeply disreputable” (Kothari, 2005). Rist attempts to establish the foundations of development through the lens of economic, cultural, political, and social practices. He has good amount of understanding how to deconstruct the definition of development and redefine the idea of development. Further, he tries to understand the modern point of view of development and he argues how and why the understanding of development is incomplete. Rist also claims that certain activities are held frequently to maintain the ‘belief’ in the idea of development. Because of the contradicting nature of the opinions and meanings given by different scholars, such as Karl Marx, Adam Smith, Emile Durkheim. The Term development appears to be outrageous. He considers development to be a part of our modern religion, as modern civilizations are built on a foundation of specific beliefs and customs. Economic globalization and expansion of capitalism has been producing the uneven



development by integrating underdeveloped nations into a global capitalist. The author has proposed what has been argued by Durkheim the dual condition of a viable definition firstly that the whole concept need to be analyzed and secondly the external characteristics should be the key in explaining the concept so that even an alien can recognize and understand the idea of development. He points out how even the social relations have been captivated by the “economic approach”. He quotes Marx by saying that this approach has reduced family relations to monetary relations. Rist goes as far as comparing this with “generalized prostitution”. In that particular passage Rist mentioned about the relationship beyond the family relationship. The argument gets a bit farfetched and does not mention how markets act as an incentive for fields like medical science or even the leisure industry. The theory of neoliberalism finds it begging in new liberal models of economics. The development of capitalism has made the people to believe on market forces for the smooth functioning of life. The concept of laissez faire or free market does not like control or regulation. Profit is the sole objective of laissez faire or free market. In Marxian concept bourgeois has money to buy the labor power on the one hand and the proletariat has labor power on the other. The bourgeois compels the proletariat to sell his or her social necessary time in exchange of subsistence. As per Adam Smith, it is not for the benevolence that we trade one thing for another, rather for self-love. Alternately, the concept of gentle commerce states that market exchange is a guarantee of peace because it ties people to one another. But the reality is that the rich become richer and the poor get poorer, as the conversion of commodities creates inequalities, both within the country and on an international level. Further Rist draws a comparison between religion and development. According to him the idea of both concepts has been always seen as interwoven of good and ill. It is stated that religions too are vaguely defined by those who practice it, but none-the-less the same can be objectively defined by sociologists. This comparison is further extended to state that Development is the religion for the Modern society. Although the idea of Modernization has witnessed lot of ups and downs. People exposed to the western world are in the favor of modernization. For them modernization is positive change on the one hand. But conservative groups fear the disappearance of Koranic values in the wake of modernization. Rist also talks about how the emergence of neo-classical model of macroeconomics dominated the affair across the globe. Heavy reliance on free market in west generated good feeling in the leaders of developing world. The developing world had to buy the prescription in the wake of economic slowdown



and higher rate of unemployment. The agenda of the liberal economic policies could win the heart of many leaders in the developing world. Prior the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there were two ideas of economic progress. The centrally command economic notion could survive for less than one century. This notion was highly contested at various levels. Economic sanctions is commonly used phenomena to contain the flourishing of communism. He further argue that there is also a periphery model in this world system. There is a relation of dependence for development between the core and the periphery model. The hegemony of the core is maintained by the access of the political, economic and forces. In this core and the periphery model there is gap of development. The periphery model is underdeveloped and the core was comparatively more developed. What is happening within the core also influence the development of the periphery model. Reading about the Truman's Point 4 from where development started, we can easily relate to gilbert's idea of definition of development consisting of all goody things which are not practically seen or are difficult to perform. A new term also emerged here i.e., 'underdevelopment' dichotomy from Universal declaration of human rights and globalization (1948). It also gave birth to a new meaning of development as, "actions performed by one agent over the other". However clearly and correctly emphasized by author to not consider development as opposite of underdevelopment. Rather, underdevelopment is an idea of continuity of a substance. Underdevelopment was seen as handicapped poverty. Narrow of hunger and wanting decolonialization to be resolved with weapons and not words. U.S Looked at development as a form of technical measures exterior to the political realm from where we can also get an idea of its power. Then comes the beginning of the non-aligned movement to criticize colonialism, its participants came from Asia. From there the task of decolonialization started. But one thing missing was the mention of the present scenario by Rist, that is the explanation of how the aspects of colonialism are seen still today in all the south countries even after all the struggle of decolonialization and how the north is not doing efforts in decolonialization. The process as well as what was done is explained very well in the whole book but still outcome is not effectively explained. As all Asian countries joined hands depicting cultural cooperation to help each other in foreign capital and modern technology, the hidden meaning of development of world economy remained the same. Again, in the name of development being a concern for all, the selfish motives of groups were seen.



Rist highly criticized the popular stages of growth by Rostow based on the predictions which are highly uncertain. Also, one point which can be included in the book was Rostow's model being based on European countries and neglecting the conditions of growth needed for developing countries that were colonized.

In deed all the facts in this book shows the acceptance of ruling ideology which benefits the international trade based on inequality and ecological imbalance. This shows that the history of development is in reality linked with the history of continuous destruction of efforts of becoming self-reliant by developing nations.

Now one positive thing that we can find in this book was the realization of the bad deeds of developed by the developing nations. The concept of self-reliance is just like a war in the market system between the developed and the developing. It is a dream for people of the nations who wants to enjoy wealth, success, independence and freedom promised by the market. So southern countries joined hands and in 1970s they started achieving success after the Bandung and Asia- Africa conference. New international economic order positively helped in addressing notion of underdevelopment. Rist's accurate critique on the developments religious position describes the inequalities between the north and south. This idea reinforces sovereign socio-economic systems. While Rist mentions about these inequalities between the north and the south, the cause of inequalities between underdeveloped or southern states are not addressed. Rist mentions about the world community between the north and the South but here the earlier concept mentioned by him based on the dictatorship of north and dependency of South on North is contradicted.

He also mention about the Emphasizing on the structural adjustment, it is clear that so such autonomy to markets and the budgetary austerity mentioned in most policies results in cutting off the incentives related to the public services and basic benefits which shifts the whole focus on poverty being the main cause Rist explains the origin of sustainable development from the Brundtland report to Rio summits and various declarations. By glorifying the development and the various challenges we face because of it he critiques that these challenges are mainly because of the westernization and opposes the perspective that economic development can become equal for all. After a lot of negative remarks, he praises the work of UNDP to bring focus of sustainable development on the living conditions of



people. But this change was not enough to make all the industries and elites to change their perspectives and believe that development is not only economic development.

With the introduction of 2007 Report on Millennium Development Goals based on unclear links of objectives, evaluates a decrease in the proportion of Asian people living on less than one dollar a day as a result of economic growth, yet statistical data shows increased number of inequalities and 20% decrease in the consumption share of the poorest. This clearly shows how much of real intention they had in reducing the poverty. If we look at the statistics of 2021, we can find that even after 15 years of MDGs or 60 years of shifting focus on development the socio-cultural, environmental and economic systems are in woeful conditions.

Imperfectly talking about the rise of financial crisis and changes that occurred due to it. The spread of austerity has made it difficult for developing countries to adopt a sustainable life till now. Precisely criticized by Rist, the birth of austerity from the European nations who blamed poor countries for being only entitled to development despite of the fact, they were highly obsessed of return to growth causing a hurdle to poor countries for developing. With his final concluding remarks, without giving any satisfactory reason Rist confidently rejected the fact that development can occur without the involvement of selfish motives or capitalism with many facets. At the very end, Rist acknowledges modern world scenario. What author believes in is that what appears better today might not look very attractive tomorrow

References –

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