

# **Development and Violence**

Ashis Nandy

# DEVELOPMENT AND VIOLENCE<sup>1</sup>

by Ashis Nandy

The problem with the idea of development is not its failure. The idea has succeeded beyond the dreams of its early partisans who never imagined that they had hit upon something whose day had come. Developmentalism has succeeded where western colonialism and evangelical Christianity failed. It has established itself as one of the few genuine universals of our time. It has become an intimate part of every surviving civilization and changed the self-definitions of some of the least accessible societies. Development has converted even the seemingly non-proselytizable.

These changes in self-definition have gone in two directions. First, there has been a rearrangement of the components of the self in the affected cultures. A new hierarchy of preferred traits has emerged in them. In many Asian, African and South American societies, the traditional cultural preferences are now devalued and are a source of embarrassment for the more self-conscious members of these societies. Such preferences are feared as atavistic or retrogressive, even obscurantist. The ruling élites in these societies are now engaged in various forms of cultural engineering to get rid of qualities while they get integrated into the global cultural order.

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They are willing to go to any extent to drive their subjects like cattle towards the better world development promises.<sup>2</sup>

A less polite way of describing such self-engineering is to call it a mixture of self-hatred and mimicry leading to a new form of political authoritarianism.<sup>3</sup> The mix has become popular even in cultures being glorified the world over as great success stories in the history of development.

The often-violent retooling of the self has gone hand in hand with the loss of large parts of remembered past.<sup>4</sup> In society after society, uncomfortable and allegedly irrelevant aspects of the past are being shed as constructions fit only for the dustbin of history, again with help from the coercive apparatus of the state and with much of the world looking the other way. Today, only that past is being celebrated which is seen as conducive to modernization and development; only that past is being rued which is seen as resistant to modernity and development. Together the two 'relevant' pasts constitute history and become, after a time, the only memory accessible to the citizenry. The rest become a

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<sup>2</sup> See Shiv 'Visvanathan, From the Annals of the Laboratory State', Ashis Nandy (ed.), *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity* (Tokyo: The United Nations University and New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Claude Alvares, *Science, Development and Violence* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); Wolfgang Sachs (Ed), *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (London: Zed, 1992); and Culture, Voice and Development: A Primer for the Unsuspecting', in Japanese in Yoshikazu Sakamoto (ed.), *The Structure of World Politics* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989). In English in *Theses Eleven*, forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> Herb Feith's name for such regimes is 'repressive developmentalist regimes' and his definition would cover a galaxy of success stories' in development - from Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia and imperial Japan to South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Brazil, Shah's Iran, Ayub Khan's Pakistan and now Deng's China. See his *Repressive-Developmentalist Regimes in Asia: Old Strengths, 'New Vulnerabilities'*, paper presented at the conference of the World Order Models Project, New York, June, 1979, and published in *International Affairs, Christian Conference of Asia, Escape From Domination: A Consultation Report on Patterns of Domination and People's Movements in Asia*, Tokyo, Japan, April, 1980.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance, the papers in Frédérique Apffel Marglin and Stephen Marglin (eds.), *Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture and Resistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

historical, 'revivalist' myths: So do aspects of the self intertwined with that lost past. Violent suppression of that past, and the self associated with it, now enjoy enormous legitimacy as an attack against 'fundamentalism' and new forms of Oriental 'despotism'.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, human nature being what it is, a hegemonic vision throws up its own distinctive strains of dissent in the form of counter-visions. During the last two decades, voices have emerged all over the world against the totalizing thrust of development. These voices seem to carry the awareness that, just when the ideology of development is winning its most impossible victories in global politics, it has exhausted its intellectual possibilities. Many of the most sensitive minds of our times now find the charms of development so much tinsel glitter. The details of development now engage mainly the specialists concerned with its pragmatics or management. This loss of intellectual shine has, however, also led to a certain carelessness towards the nitty-gritty of development in the world dominated by the global media and international development experts. The dirty work of development can go on in the backwaters of the world, with many vaguely concerned with the fate of the victims but only a few engaged intellectually and on a day-to-day basis with their fate.

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<sup>5</sup> Japan is a neat example; it enjoys unmatched power and autonomy within the world of development but is unable to use them to ensure its own cultural survival. The dominant global consciousness has reconstructed the Japanese tradition as a set of two cultural strands. One consists of a cultural package that has led to Japan's present developmental profile; the other consists of a few cultural accessories and esoterica thrown in for the amusement of Japan's admirers and critics. The former is the substance; the latter the form that the outsiders must master for the sake of predictability or profitability when dealing with Japan. Even many Japanese have begun to see themselves through these imported glasses. For them Japanese history is becoming the history of modernization and the establishment of the development regime in Japan. The rest is becoming either folklore meant for the children and the elderly or 'culture' meant for the western thriller writers and tourists. If the present trend continues, it is doubtful if in the next century Japan's past unrelated to her developmental concerns will remain accessible to a majority of her own citizens.

Why this loss of credibility in the world of knowledge when developmentalism is so clearly triumphant in global politics?

The reasons are many, but the main ones all center around the gradual decline in the moral stature of development as an ideology. Many major criticisms of development do have a normative component - such as criticism of the development community's total faith in the global market, impersonal contractual relationships and professional expertise, its commodification of nature, and its naive trust in mega-organizations and mega-technology. In addition, development comes to all societies as part of a package, organized around the idea of the nation-state as the prime mover of all social change, a full-blown theory of progress through historical stages, and large-scale massification through urbanization and industrialization. All these are components of a concept of modernity that has a clear moral dimension. If development is, as Arturo Escobar suggests, 'a chapter in an anthropology of modernity', it cannot avoid the moral evaluation that is being increasingly applied to the modern vision itself. This evaluation has begun to go against development.

One other factor that may be responsible for the spreading intellectual mutiny against the gospel according to the development planners, for it partly explains the loss of the seductive charms of developmentalism. In the name of individualism, the ideology of development has gradually denuded the idea of the individual of much of its substantive content. With the invention of development, most things that were once a matter of personal initiative and choice have been so systematically handed over to agencies making impersonal, contractual,

professionalized choices on behalf of the person. The only initiative the person is left with relates to choices from among available consumables offered by the global market. From health care to child rearing it is the same story. While the area of individual choice has shrunk, a false sense of freedom is created through the removal of the contextualizing role of the community from the choice situation. Indeed, atomized in the name of freedom, the person now stands alone against the forces of the global market and mega-technology.

Simultaneously, violence associated with impersonal bureaucratic structures, of the kind Hannah Arendt talked about, has now acquired freer play. As wars, direct use of violence against unarmed populations, torture and blatant violation of human rights become less and less easy to sell, there is an increase in indirect violence, surveillance and destruction of the life support systems of communities unable to defend themselves by using modern institutional and legal remedies.<sup>6</sup>

These changes have been brought about not through old-style domination - through naked force and open exploitation. The changes have come through the co-optation of crucial segments of the recipient non-Western cultures into the developmental community - a new community of scholars, policymakers, development journalists, readers of development news, development managers and activists who

<sup>6</sup> According to one estimate, 21.6 million people - roughly the population of all the Scandinavian countries put together have been displaced by only the construction of dams in India. Gayatri Singh, 'Displacement and Limits to Legislation', in Raajen Singh (ed.), *Dams and Other Major Projects: Impact on and Response of Indigenous People* (Goa: CCA-URM, 1988), pp. 91-7; see p. 91.

Another study estimates that of the 60 million aboriginal tribals in India belonging to some 212 tribes, 15 per cent have been displaced by development projects, so that they could themselves be developed and turned into 'skilled human resources.' Smithu Kothari, *Theorizing Culture, Nature and Democracy in India* (Delhi: Lokayan, 1993), mimeo. Half of all the invisible refugees created by Indian development are by now tribals.

together sustain development as a sphere of professional, organizational and entrepreneurial activity. The global system backing the ideology of development has introduced in the recipient cultures new cognitive orders that apparently do not challenge traditions except for their 'irrational', 'easily disposable' aspects. Entering these cultures through well-meaning missionaries of development, preaching to all and sundry an accessible secular heaven on earth, these orders aim at nothing less than establishing an equation between the sustainability of the global development regime and the survival of cultures. So, what can be read as a major threat to the viability of non-Western cultures is identified as an emancipatory principle updating these cultures for our times and ensuring their survival.<sup>7</sup> Whatever may well-intentioned activists and scholars say, that is the ultimate political meaning of the slogan of sustainable development.

Why is the link between development and violence stronger in the Southern world? One reason can be that in the South, among those not fully uprooted or decultured, developmentalism is still suspect. Not because it is seen as a global conspiracy, but because it has been stripped of all geo-ethnic and temporal qualifications. In societies where communities have not collapsed and the citizens are not entirely massified, there persists a suspicion of a fully universal, space-and-time-transcending sociology of utopianism. For in such societies the privilege of venturing such sociology is given only to religions or theories of transcendence.

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<sup>7</sup> In a new book Arturo Escobar tells that part of the story. See his *Encountering Development: The Malang and the Un-Making of the Third World, 1945-1992* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, in press).

Thus, at the very moment the ideology of development seems to have touched something universal in human nature - when from Beijing to Berlin and from Moscow to New Delhi more people are taking to the clichéd makers of mass culture as the indices of having made it - some Third-World communities and activist-scholars have persisted in exercising a form of suspicion that is very uncomfortable to those dreaming of a homogenized global mass-culture hitched to a global developmental regime. In doing so they might be speaking also on behalf of other defeated civilizations, including even threatened communities in the superseded West, declared obsolete by the fully modern, reportedly the best-of-all-possible Wests. These activities assume that the struggle against developmentalism is a struggle for reclaiming the dignity of cultures that have been turned into a set of experimental subjects, waiting to be sacrificed at the end of a defined set of operations, either to end in a museum or in a university for a proper *post mortem*. Crucial realities of such cultures have already been excised to ensure - Arturo Escobar says citing Raul Prebisch - the 'doctrinal asepsis' of a fully specializing economics located outside time and space. For development economists, the Third World and its poverty are enabling concepts, which allow them to ply their trade as the resident doctors of our times, specializing in what is allegedly a culturally inherited but curable pathology. They would hate to admit that poverty is not an ancient disease that development cures, but an iatrogenic by-product of the healing touch of modernity itself.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 'Massive poverty in the modern sense only appeared,' Escobar claims, 'when the spread of the market economy broke down community ties and deprived millions of people from access to land, water, and other resources.'

Apart from everything else, there is the 'normal' life-span of an idea. Even the best ideas get dated and, human ingenuity being what it is, even the most emancipatory discourses get transformed after a time into new justifications for violence and exploitation. Even if development had not been a particularly oppressive idea at the beginning, it was bound to become one after being thoughtfully adopted by a series of despotic regimes as the final justification of authoritarian politics. As a product of this political process, the culture of development has to kill off all alternative visions of desirable societies. For the same reason, however imagining a post-development era has come to represent something more than resistance to a hidden structure of dominance; it now means giving back the savage world the right to envision its own future. Such envisioning, whatever else it does or does not do, promises to de-homogenize non-Western subjectivity's and re-pluralize the idea of social intervention and dissent.

This is not an indirect defense of Afro-Asian nationalism or a plea for a return to the idea of the noble savage. It is an attempt to acknowledge that human beings, given long enough time, can convert any theory of emancipation into new a justification for violence and expropriation. Development has now begun to take over from old-style religious conflicts, colonial wars and racism; it has created new opportunities for a play of those traits that once found expression standardized channels and justifications of human violence.

One specific issue remains. A painful feature of our times is that success in development has usually led to the emergence of authoritarian politics in Third World societies. One by one the societies

that have succeeded in development - or shown signs of doing so - have fallen prey to the very success they have tried so hard to attain, in total defiance of existing theories of democracy and development. This correlation between development and authoritarianism has grown even in open societies like India and Sri Lanka after they have opted for more conventional forms of development in the last decade.

We were told in the past that authoritarianism was due to underdevelopment. Development, we were told, guaranteed democratic freedom, at least in the end. Both those who believed in socioeconomic prerequisites of political democracy - from Talcott Parsons to David Easton and from Edward Shils to Karl Deutsch<sup>9</sup> - and those who believed in state-controlled economic growth as the sure road to their utopia - from Lenin to Jawaharlal Nehru - saw Oriental despotism as the primary model of authoritarianism. Both expected economic growth to lead the Asian and African societies towards freedom, not away from it. In the 1960s some scholars like Everett Hagen and K. W. Kapp even went as far as to posit a perfectly inverse relationship between the antidemocratic personality and the entrepreneurial man.<sup>10</sup> Even David C. McClelland and company, breathlessly trying to induce economic growth through higher achievement motive, incidentally produced the insight that the rise in achievement motive in a society before economic take-off usually led to lower levels of power and affiliation motives, and thus to lesser chances of imperialism and authoritarianism.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See a brief critical assessment of the political development literature and the 'pre-requisites' approach in Satish Arora, 'Preempted Future? Notes on Theories of Political Development', in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *State and Nation Building* (New Delhi: Allied, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Everett Hagen, *On the Theory of Social Change* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1962), K. W. Kapp, *Hindu Culture, Economic Development and Economic Planning* (New York: Asia, 1963).

<sup>11</sup> D. C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1961).

The experiences of police states such as South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, China and Brazil have played havoc with this way of thinking in recent times. It is not accidental that in the Third World, grassroots movements in general and civil rights movements in particular have increasingly become hostile to the very idea of development. Some of them do not even care whether one means by 'development' conventional development or the new alternative forms of development.<sup>12</sup>

To a second group of scholars, authoritarianism can be a means of development. These scholars do not word their thesis in exactly these words but they cite the examples of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Stalinist Russia, Pre-war Japan, the military dictatorships of Latin America, and Maoist China in support of their thesis. In these societies, high-pitched mobilizational politics within a closed policy have been used (1) to enforce consumption-restraints and collective sacrifices, and (2) to justify enhanced spending, in the name of development, on the military, the police and the other coercive instruments of the state. James Gregor has analyzed one subset of the genre neatly.<sup>13</sup>

Cynical and blatantly conservative though his thesis may look, it tallies with the experience of peoples who have been the victims of development and seen their rulers choose development over freedom whenever the chips are down.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, Special Issue on Survival, *Lokayan Bulletin*, October 1985, 3(4-5); Alvares, *Science, Development and Violence*; and 'Deadly Development', *Development Forum*, 9(7), October 1983; Madhya Pradesh Lokayan and Lokhit Samiti, *Vikas ki Kimat* (Ahmedabad: Setu, 1985); Kothari, 'Theorizing Culture, Nature and Democracy in India'; Suresh Sharma 'Development and Diminishing Livelihood' (New Delhi: CSDS, 1985), pamphlet.

<sup>13</sup> A. James Gregor, *The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University, 1974); also *The Ideology of Fascism* (New York: Free Press, 1969).

There is also the inarticulate thesis - inarticulate because it is implicit in the activism of many grassroots organizations working all over the world in areas such as ecology, cultural survival and civil rights - that development itself releases authoritarian tendencies after it crosses a certain threshold. This even in societies seriously trying to combine development and democratic participation. The thesis admits that development has always included authoritarian elements, even in the democratic West. The elements were held in check in the western societies by colonialism (to the colonies were exported millions of people marginalized by industrial growth in the West and from these colonies were imported into the West cheap raw materials for development), by restricted franchise (which partly filtered off from the public realm in Europe voices of the victims of development), by the suppression of ethnic groups that were made to pay the price of development in ecological devastation, uprooting and extinction (as with North and South American Indians), or by the export of authoritarianism to crypto-colonies (as the United States has done in South America for many decades). Once these advantages are lost, authoritarianism reveals itself as the other side of development even in the developed societies.

Such a point of view recognizes three aspects of development that nurture authoritarianism. First, as democratic participation increases and new channels of social mobility open up in a developing society, it brings towards the center of the polity groups previously marginalized. These groups threaten the power of those who control the society and monopolize the benefits of development. Particularly so because development has come to mean in practice the takeover - by the state,

the organized sector and the market - of the commons to which traditionally the weakest of the society used to have some access. These commons are then used to produce marketable goods that can never reach the original beneficiaries of the commons. So once some empowerment of the now displaced beneficiaries of the commons take place, they begin to pose a threat to the beneficiaries of development. For instance, a tribe living in a forest may have 'free access' to fuel-wood but once the forest is cut down to put up a dam and a hydel plant, the tribe may have no access to the new energy but could, in the process suffer from uprooting, loss of livelihood, and deculturation. Yet, the very experience of displacement and dispossession may politicize the tribe and make them a threat to the state. Authoritarianism becomes an easy means of containing these new participants in politics and controlling their demands. The containment - A. F. K. Organski calls it the repression of the newly mobilized sectors and identifies it as the very heart of fascism - is legitimized by the manifest normlessness and crudity of the politics of the new entrants.<sup>14</sup> The middle classes are always appalled by the unseemly style of the lower classes in politics. Authoritarianism often takes advantage of this culture shock to contain political participation.<sup>15</sup> And the slogan of development in such societies legitimizes this containment.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> A. F. K. Organski, *The Stages of Political Development* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1965).

<sup>15</sup> See my 'Adorno in India: Revisiting the psychology of Fascism', in *At the Edge of Psychology* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 99-111.

<sup>16</sup> The Emergency in India (1975-77) fitted the analysis in a copybook fashion. The state violence and suspension of civil rights that the Emergency produced came packaged in the rhetoric of development and though occasionally the rhetoric of 'putting democracy back on the rails' was also used, it was the emphasis on development that sought to justify the police-state methods used in areas such as family planning; control of media, and slum clearance. Similarly packaged arguments have come at different times from the Marcos regime in Philippines, from the military regimes in Pakistan and Thailand, and from Singapore and South Korea.

Second, development means sacrificing something of the present for the sake of the future. As development becomes a reason of the state, those who control the state feel justified in imposing these sacrifices selectively, under the guidance of experts. Authoritarianism becomes their technique of extracting sacrifices either from target groups identified by the state (in which case the sacrifices sectors on closer examination turn out to be the political dissenters or their support bases) or from those less able to resist making such sacrifices (in which case generally the ideology of 'trickle-down effect' or that of the 'market forces' is invoked).<sup>17</sup>

Third, though development in its present sense is being used for only forty-five years - President Harry Truman was the first to use the term in its present sense - the concept is now retrospectively applied to the 300-year-long process through which the developed societies have passed to reach their present state. Development in non-Western societies is supposed to be a shorter route to that state.

Thus, the idea of development has as its underside the memories of the violence and exploitation that went with the early phases of development in the West, and the idea includes the message that the underdeveloped world should make similar blood sacrifices to develop. The images of the nonunionized workers coming back from work after sixteen hours to rape their own daughters, children below the age of ten

<sup>17</sup> See for example Ashis Nandy, 'Introduction: Science as a Reason of State', in Nandy, *Science, Hegemony and Violence*. The idea of trickle-down effect has had a particularly long tenure in the South. In Third-World societies that have taken the capitalist path to development, the idea often serves the same function as the suspension of democratic rights does in the surviving socialist regimes. In both cases the aim is to extract economic or political surplus from the population, through the science of development or scientific history, both of which are used to justify inequality and violence in the short run in the name of future freedom.

working full day in the mills or in high-risk occupations like chimney sweeping, the enclosure movement in England, the women labourers and prostitutes populating the gin alleys - they survive in the western unconscious as an abyss into which the West may again slip if it gives up the ambition of scaling newer and newer heights of prosperity or loses the will to protect its interests aggressively. These anxieties are then projected into the global politics of development. That is why the developed democratic societies are often the first to endorse a military despot elsewhere, particularly if the latter is smart enough to mouth the idiom of development. That is why the Shah of Iran seemed an overly strict schoolmaster to his western admirers, whereas Idi Amin looked like a stone-age monster. The former was seen as a practicing developmentalist, even if a misguided one, the latter as an unalloyed Oriental despot.

Finally, development tends to sharpen religious, interregional and ethnic tensions by 'pitting' traditional communities against each other. This does not mean that such tensions were nonexistent in the past or that the planners provoke them. It means that by giving absolute priority to interests over passions, instrumental rationality over visions and worldviews, development converts the rich, multilayered relationships among the communities into an unidimensional, interest-based, competitive relationship. And it usually does so in a context where it has already introduced massive environmental changes and disrupted the traditional life support systems of the communities involved.<sup>18</sup> Once such a conversion has taken place, the conflicts

between communities are brought into and negotiated within the modern political and economic spheres. What was a complex encounter of cultures becomes, thus, a hard-eyed battle for the 'concrete,' development-related gains. The result is the creation of new opportunities for the state sector to step in as the final arbiter among the communities, in the name of facilitating or monitoring development or holding in check violence and primitivism. In the Third World, this arbitration has often been the main excuse or justification for short-circuiting the political process and introducing authoritarian rule.

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of Green Revolution* (Penang: Consumers Association of Penang, 1990); also Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), pp. 122-30.