Re-visiting Development through subjects- Quest for a non-totalizing Paradigm

Prithwiraj Saha[1]

Abstract :

The paper seeks to look at possibilities for articulation of a development paradigm with universal claims, that is non-totalizing. It looks at the different development paradigms over the years from the vantage point of the Subjects. In the process it analyses the elements or universal claims and totalizing effects in the prevalent development paradigms and seeks to project a development Paradigm which is non-totalizing. It also seeks to understand, if for defining such a paradigm, there is a requirement of an alternative representation of the economy.

Keywords : Non-totalizing, development, subjects, decentred-disaggregated, universal.

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I. Introduction:

My point of analysis in this essay has been to articulate a development paradigm with universal claims that is non-totalizing. Before I begin the (desired) articulation process, I seek to draw some attention to the theoretical categories of universal and totalizing. While strolling in the sloppy terrains of these terms, I thought of taking the initial hide to the Dictionary.Universal as a word according to the Oxford Dictionary is something which is "applicable to all cases", whereas the meaning of totalizing derived from the same source states, "to make or combine into a total".

While analysing these meanings in the context of the desired analysis, the first point that strikes the mind is that can something which is 'universal' be non-totalizing? - the advent of the question is evident, since universality normally echoes totality, in turn making the contradictory existence of both an oxymoron. However, I seek to bring forth a difference between the two terms in a politico-philosophical level. Universal can be placed in the domains of a natural act talking of general applicability, but totalizing falls somewhat into a political domain which involves a relation of power. The way I see it, power relation in a totalization process involves projection of a grand narrative by foreclosing all other differences that are in opposition to the concerned narrative. In the domains of social sciences, such totalizing actions

have often been noticed, where the key beliefs of the power elites have been imposed by foreclosing all differences, thus presenting it as a "Regime of truth". Although universal in that sense, appears a relatively innocent, depoliticized term, the term universal claim is not. It again involves an active agency or a subject which is making the claim. However, for the purpose of analytical convenience in this paper, we do not initially attach the act of erasure of differences to universal claims. Hence, the basic difference that I pose is that a universal claim is a claim of something which is applicable for all. But when the process of that claiming involves foreclosure of all other differences opposed to the claim, it becomes a totalizing act. This difference should have been foregrounded well before proceeding forward.

Having made that difference clear, I proceed with the process of theorizing the category of "Development". In that course, I seek to trace the presence of universal claims and totalizations in the pre-existing development paradigms and look for some articulation of the required non-totalizing paradigm with universal claims. Theorizing any category begins with two basic nodes- the epistemology one undertakes and one's entry point. Here, while I seek to address the category of "Development" as a whole, I try to dig into the parts which constitute, as well as are constituted by the whole. That in a way, summarizes my epistemological position, which I derive from Resnick & Wolff's (1987) exposition of overdetermination . This epistemological position helps us to incorporate the dynamicity of the world beyond the narrow logics of causality. Under this epistemology, every entity is a process and is said to be constituted by all other processes existing in the society, which again follow the same logic of constitution of the former. Overdetermination has been used as an epistemological position by Resnick and Wolff in their version of Class focused Marxian Theory, from which I borrow for carrying on this analysis. In their words-

To say that theory is an overdetermined process in a society is to say that its existence, including all its properties or qualities, is determined by each and every other process constituting that society. Theory is the complex effect produced by the interaction of all those other processes. As such an effect, the process of theory embodies the different influences of many of its determinants.

Resnick and Wolff (1987)

Taking an overdeterministic epistemological position prevents the essay from falling into the traps of essentialism, which remains laden with reducing the attempted theorization to one or a few essence(es).

Having clarified the epistemological position, comes the entry point. While addressing the development paradigm in this paper, my entry point to the theory would be the individual(s). However, by individual, I tend to deviate from the celebrated deterministic notion of the individual in the discipline of economics guided by

instrumental rationality, working under a utility maximizing motive. Theorization of an individual of that kind reduces the individual to a mere economic objective, thus falling into the traps of reductionism or essentialism. The 'individual' I seek to pose as the 'subject' in this paper, is itself a process, which in every moment is determining and being determined by all other processes (economic, cultural, political, physical, natural, etc.) working in the concerned society. In that way, this subject is an overdetermined subject, which cannot be reduced to any specific essence because of its inherent cultural, psychological, political, economic and natural heterogeneities which are dynamic in nature. There's no denial that the choice of this entry point involves abstraction; but being an overdetermined process itself, the subject abstracted is not an abstract subject in itself.

This overdetermined subject plays a crucial role in my explanation of the issue of concern in the subsequent sections, where I seek to address "Development" from the vantage point of the subject(s), which are subjected to in the process of Development. The subsequent section analyses the dominant development paradigms appearing till date from the proposed entry point, in the same time tracing the elements of universal claims and totalizations in the same. The final section hints towards the possibility of a paradigm of development, which is universal, yet non-totalizing.

II. The Subject(s) of Development

Development has emerged as a concern in the field of academia and policy making mainly from the early 1950s. There have been various theories of development over the years in the discourse, which have had their important contributions to the field. This paper desires to throw light on them, but from the stance I had described earlier. The process of Development initially began with the motive of uplifting the so called underdeveloped, and that process of development was to be carried forward by agencies which may have been from outside of or from within the concerned subjects. However, the claims of development projects over the years have not only targeted the so-called 'underdeveloped' sections of the society but have flagged universality in terms of progress in the entire society. The way I see the dominant development paradigms over much of 20th century and early 21st century , I intend to move beyond the usual nomenclature of 'mainstream' and 'alternative' development paradigms and try to categorize them into three categories from my entry point of the subject stated earlier. These three categories illuminate in front of us three ways of understanding the process of development from a politico-philosophical lens.

a) Development for the Subject(s)
b) Development of the Subject(s)
c) Development within the Subject(s)

a) Development for the Subject(s).

Development since its advent, has been predominantly described as a progressive process (or project) of improving the conditions of the subjects while the action or mission of the agencies (mainly the State)entrusted with the duty has primarily been - continual progress of the 'downtrodden'. This model of development is linear and well-acknowledged. There exists a benevolent State which honestly intends to work for its subjects with the universal promise of progress.Development discourse holds ample examples of such development paradigms aimed at progress or betterment. On one hand, there has been the dominant form of economic growth-driven development of the Rostow's type, where the foundation of development lies on a positive transgression in the national income/output of an economy and the logic of transition states that benefits of growth would trickle down to the downtrodden. Economic growth in this sense acts as the normative catalyst and also the justifier behind all actions of the State. But often the modest intent of this top-down progressive action for the subjects is met with dissent from the subjects themselves. The universalization of the trajectory of development manifests itself as a totalizing paradigm, where the indigenous life forms perceive the actions of the State as actions of power, oppressing their natural conditions of life and livelihood. The development experience of the Indian economy post-independence is an exemplificatory example of this development provoked dissent and problems of totalizing tendencies of the grand narrative of development for subjects. Table 1 lists some such events.

Table 1: Development provoked dissent in post-independence India - Examples

Project/Development Action	Location	Date	Nature of Dissent
Narmada Dam Project	Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh	1961–Present	Displacement of tribal communities, environmental concerns, and inadequate rehabilitation.

Chipko Movement	Uttarakhand	1973	Protest against deforestation and commercial logging, led by local villagers.
Silent Valley Hydroelectric Project	Kerala	1973–1985	Environmental concerns over biodiversity loss in the Silent Valley rainforest.
Narmada Bachao Andolan	Narmada River Basin	1985–Present	Large-scale displacement of people, environmental damage, and inadequate compensation.
Posco Steel Plant	Odisha	2005–2017	Land acquisition protests by local farmers and tribal communities.
Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant	Tamil Nadu	1988–Present	Safety concerns, displacement, and fear of radiation among local fishing communities.
Singur Land Acquisition	West Bengal	2006–2008	Farmers protested against land acquisition for Tata Motors' Nano car factory.
Niyamgiri Mining Project	Odisha	2008–2013	Tribal opposition to bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri hills, sacred to the Dongria Kondh tribe.
Kashmir Hydroelectric Projects	Jammu & Kashmir	2010–Present	Protests over environmental concerns and displacement in the ecologically sensitive region.
Sterlite Copper Plant	Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu	1996–2018	Environmental pollution and health hazards led to massive protests and police firing.
Aarey Forest Metro Shed	Mumbai, Maharashtra	2019	Protests against deforestation and loss of green cover for metro rail construction.
Farm Laws Protest	Nationwide (Punjab, Haryana)	2020–2021	Farmers protested against three farm laws, fearing loss of income and exploitation.
Great Nicobar Development Project	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	2021–Present	Concerns over deforestation, displacement of indigenous tribes, and ecological damage.

Source: Self-constructed from various news portals.

Later inclusions to the development theories have been various welfare activities beyond economic growth and social needs programsaimedat the subjects who according to the state, are in some compromised positions. And with a genuine intention to uplift them, the state steps in with its gift of development. With Amartya

Sen's theory of Development as "freedom" (Sen, 2000) and the emergence of corresponding Human Development theories, Development Discourse projected far more universal claims of working for the subjects. This was because of the inclusion of several other parameters than economic growth, which really encouraged the Developmentalists to universally claim for working for all its subjects. However, the manifestation of such forms of development might also have power relations operating within, which might not be visible coercive forms as displayed in the aforementioned table, but operates within the psyche of the subjects concerned, evoking subtle totalizing tendencies. To foreground this process, I have to go to my second categorization of development as development of the subject(s).

b) Development of the Subject(s)

I use this category to show how the discourse of development had inherently held power dynamics within it. The use of the word "Discourse" here is intentional, as there has been a continuous discursive process of construction of a regime of truth around the dominant tradition of 'Capitalist Development' (Chakrabarti & Dhar, 2023). The entire growth-oriented development theories of the Classical or Neo-classical theories or the countering dependency theories have been the same. Such notions of development impact a subject heavily, as the former plays an important role in moulding individuals' thought, subjecting them towards an all-pervasive concept of itself. Foucault explains this by his concept of 'Governmentality', where the "mentality" of the subject is formed by an ensemble of "institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of [government]" (Sanyal, 2007). It is moreover like government of oneself by virtue of the wills of some other agency inflicted on the subject. The agency can be the State, the capitalist, the monarch, the system or any entity at a position of superiority in the relations of power. However, in the context of development as we know it, mainly the State plays the role of the active agency in its different renditions (neo-liberal, capitalist, etc.) along with the non-state agencies like the NGOs (International and National).

The relations of power work in such a manner that Development or economic growth induced development is perceived as the only form of Development. Any other opposing possibilities are eliminated or foreclosed. That's how Neo-liberalism works today- by developing subjects which comply with the terms of the system, the logics of the system. That is how (capitalist) development has worked for years, by developing their own subjects, by generating consent either through repressive apparatus of the state (during violent encroachments of subjects from their lands in the name of development) or through the Althusserian Ideological Development

Apparatus leading to interpellation the subjects (Chakrabarti & Dhar, 2023). The resultant paradigm of development generating from such a notion appears as a national project of catching up. It is sharply focussed on growth and material change, in the expense of dissolution of individual and communal rights and loss of ecological sustainability. If the subjects are developed (or made) in such a logic, then all such adversities imposed upon them with the trope of development appears to be beneficial for them. i.e. "Development of the subjects" works through the logic of "Development for the subjects". Such a notion of development of subjects according to a specific claim has to be totalizing, as it inherently involves foreclosure of differences, as I have stated earlier. Even Amartya Sen's theory of 'Development as freedom' reduces itself to individual as the subject and object of analysis and the collective subjects such as social classes do not appear in his theory, nor does any analysis of what articulates these collective agents such as exploitation and domination. Thus, Amartya Sen's paradigm too, though proposing a relatively 'liberal' paradigm of development, does not directly address the elements of class (or caste and gender) politics and conflicts from itself (Navarro, 2000). This shows, Sen's paradigm also comprises elements of totalizations in terms of power relations excluding certain processes .
The problem with both these notions, viz. 'for the subjects' and 'of the subjects' is that they theorize development from a top-down approach. Even if we do not take an ethical judgement, in most of the cases, the logical inconsistency in case of both these theories lies in the fact that, their propositions talk about the subject(s) without concrete engagement with the subjects. That logic paved way for the relatively recent approaches of bottom up development paradigms in form of localised communities on behalf of those opposing the top down approaches of development. To unpack that terrain, I seek to define the third category of my analysis.

c) Development within the Subject(s)

Recent developments in Development theorieshave been to dismantle the top-down approach of Development programmes, imposed upon by the agency or the authority on the subjects, owing to the presence of the elements of totalizations in it. The argument from the proponents of this section has been that a top-down approach is unable to incorporate the inherent heterogeneities within the subjects subjected to development. The resultant effect manifests itself in destroying the natural, environmental, social customs of the subjects concerned.In contrast, what these proponents propose is a "from below" approach of development by means of community development programmes, which are built within the subjects. I use the term within in the sense that the process of development proceeds from within the

subjects, where 'with' signifies the involvement of the subjects in the process of Development, andbeing started from below, it can relatively understand the perspectives and contextual conditions of the subjects well, thus resulting into development 'in' the subjects themselves.

It would be unfair to question the non-totalizing nature of these theories, but that is not true in entirety. There have been critiques from certain sections of academia against these theories on the ground that often these theories of development reduce themselves down to homogenization of the so-called modernization discourse in a singular category, ignoring the heterogeneities in the same. Pieterse in his paper, tries to propose a critique of these theories of development including those of the post developmentalist theories as:

Some of the weaknesses of this kind of position (anticipating the further discussion of post-development) are the following:

> Mainstream development is simplified as a single, homogeneous thrust toward modernization and its diversity, complexity and adaptability are underestimated.

> While the theoretical claim is for a dialectical relationship between mainstream and alternatives, the actual argument takes the form of a simple dualistic opposition and the dialectics, the ways in which main-stream and alternatives shape and influence one another, slip out of view.

> In order to maximize the opposition between mainstream and alternative, the appeal of the mainstream to various constituencies is underestimated.

Pieterse(1998)

However, these criticisms cannot be subjected to all those theories. But at least a portion of these theories though claiming to be within subjects, considering their heterogeneities, ends up in homogenizing the subjects, claiming some kind of universality. Another critique against these paradigms has been that although they critique the metanarratives of developments, they themselves often get critiqued of falling into the metanarratives of critiques. This precisely is the standard critique against Lyotard's Post modernism. Such a tendency can be totalizing in a sense that the subjects within the development process often get guided by certain principles, refusing to see other options and turning them down in names of homogenous categories of "capitalist" or "modern". In these cases, often non-state actors play roles of developing subjects of their kind. The critique

of grand narratives leads to valorisation of alternative narratives, which in some cases are as worse as foreclosing other possibilities, thus ending up in totalization.Thus, even development process conducted from within subjects can lead to totalizing tendencies, trying to project their claim as universal.

III. Moving beyond Universal Claims- a possibility?

Given my analysis of the literature over the years, interrogating different paradigms, what appears is that, universal claims tend to be totalizing. My conjecture in this point would be claiming anything as universal raises a possibility of a responsibility of legitimizing the claim, which often leads to delegitimization of certain other claims by elements of power. Under such a scenario, it becomes a thoughtworthy question that whether we need to move beyond universal claims? In that context, I seek to draw attention to another perspective, which attempts to get rid of universal claims.

Gibson-Graham in her bookEnd of Capitalism (As we knew it)(1996), presents a scenario where Capitalism is seen as a hegemonic formation, in which the capitalist class process dominates over all other processes existing in the 'economy'. She presents 'economy' as a De-centred Disaggregated space. Contesting the hegemonic of capitalism as the dominant social representation, she tries to show how the capitalist class process dominates over the other class processes by means of an iceberg representation(Figure 1). The initial terminology of the name of the book as end of a dominant structure may appear puzzling. But the (As we knew it) term describes the real project. What they aim is to dismantle capitalism as the social descriptor it is. Gibson Graham's (1996, 2006) theory projects a deconstruction of the representation of economy to a space where the non-capitalist processes prevailing can be foregrounded. They attack this capitalocentric representation of capitalism as universal, where everything is viewed and analysed through the lens of the Capital. Such a vision does not allow us to look at anything beyond capital. Such a vision, as I see it, is the most powerful totalizing machinery that works within the subjects, subjecting them to the trope of Development, foreclosing all other possibilities available to them in the process.

Figure 1: The Ice-berg view of the economy



Source: *End of Capitalism (As we knew it) by Gibson- Graham*

In contrast,Gibson-Graham proposes development of communities, which not being imaginary communities are formed on the basis of her notion of being-in-common. Being-in-commondoes not only imply economic community building by distribution of surplus, but also formation of ethical subjects who tend to look beyond capital and attempt to reside in common in all perspectives of life. Whether her notion of such an economy is good or bad, is beyond the purview of the paper. But they are essentially non-totalizing in the sense that what they claim as an 'economy' is not universal, in the sense of it being defined in terms of its disaggregated space itself. Or one can say, in this case the universal itself is an antithesis of itself, being decentred and disaggregated. It proposes a valorisation of communities at the level of local, but that never are disassociated with other class and non-class processes existing in the economy. Hence a development perspective of that kind from below rising from within the subjects, but not with monist universal claims can be non-totalizing and even a possibility for future. The universal here is the natural state of affairs, messy and disaggregated constituted by different processes. Only such a universal with no monist claims can be non-totalizing.

IV. Concluding with a Hope?

What I can conclude from this exercise is that, any paradigm with monist universal claims, majorly tend towards being totalizing. However, that is not a universal claim I intend to make. But I have also projected a perspective which doesn't make universal claims but is non-totalizing. I don't wish to propose an absolutist claim. But my conjecture would be a paradigm or a theory that in its core, seeks to provide space for the heterogeneities and differences without attempting to engulf them and accepts their presence in interconnectivities tends to have a universal element in it without the claiming of itself. That may not be called a paradigm, but might definitely provide a perspective, which opens up a space for possibility. For that, there should be a hope or a vision of such possibilities, as Isabelle Stengers states-

"Hope is the difference between probability and possibility"

And to have that hope, the subjects should get out of their capitalocentric vision of life. Once the subjects get out of that kind of a vision, there foregrounds a wave of possibilities, which may even turn the subjects into subjects being-in-common, and gives rise to some new development paradigm, which is universal without a claim, non-totalizing in nature.

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Notes

See Discipline and Punish by Foucault (1975)

The term "Overdetermination" was however borrowed from Freud by Althusser.

"Constitute" here has been used in the sense of 'bringing into effect'.

Here, I intend not to go deep into the prevailing literature of subjects by Althusser, Foucault, Lock, etc. and keep the meaning of "Subjects" simply as 'entities having some kind of a disposition'. However, that in no way is meant to undermine the role of interpellation of those subjects being subjected to and their mutual constitution with all other subjects. The formation of the subjects by the process of development are later described in the course of the paper.

See Arsel & Dasgupta (2015) to get a critical look on the development paradigms and the role of development studies.

It is difficult to critique Sen's frame of capabilities, given its broad scope and plural intent, which seeks to accommodate a lot. However, in terms of politics and practice, often direct addressal of issue require concern, a relative lack of which in Sen's theories in terms of class (and also caste and gender) guides my critique of totalizing tendencies in Amartya Sen.

Prithwiraj Saha[1]
Assistant Professor, Techno India Group - Institute of Management,
Kolkata, India.
& PhD Research Scholar, Department of Economics, University of Calcutta,
Kolkata, India
Email : prithwips.95@gmail.com