

Theories of third world development



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Post-development calls for development of theories based on the culture and struggles of the people from the Third World countries. Discuss whether or not theories derived from the culture of Third World countries could be free from the problems affecting the universal theories of development and if so how?

To begin the discussion on whether or not theories derived from the culture of Third World countries as propagated by post-development could be free from the problems affecting the universal theories of development, it is imperative to understand the concepts of ‘ development’ and ‘ post-development’. The following table provides a basic overview in the form of comparison, between the two concepts:

Basis	Development	Post-development
Concept	A series of interventions in transition-economies (third world countries) with the goal of facilitating economic growth and/or improving lives and livelihoods.	An alternate to development with an interest in local culture and knowledge, a critical perspective on established scientific discourses and a solidarity for pluralistic

		grassroots movements.
		Postmodernism,
Related Concepts	Modernization, Urbanization	Post-structuralism, Grassroot Movements
Origin	West	Third World Countries
View of the Third World	Needs dire help from the West to solve its problems	Capable of figuring out solutions to its problems
Basis for Critique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reductionism • Universalism • Ethnocentricity • Authoritarianism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homogenizing development and neglecting its positive aspects • Romanticizing local communities

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- Legitimizing
oppressive
traditions

Development has increasingly become an unsettled concept. From the initial decades of the development era providing a clear agreement on the need for some sort of development, despite an array of positions, we have come to a decade where the status of development has become difficult to ascertain. What makes development knotty is the tension between the universe of those who study the Third World and the universe of those who inhabit this world. Development is touted to be a pervasive cultural discourse with intense consequences for the production of social reality in the so-called Third World. This has been largely due to the problems that are associated with universal theories of development:

Authoritarian and specification of goal and processes: Development, by virtue of a universal scale on which it can be measured, leading to the identification of “ developed” and “ less developed” (or “ underdeveloped” or “ developing”) units, specifies the existence of a particular goal (development itself) and dictates the processes needed to achieve that goal, i. e. economic growth, industrialisation, and modernisation through the transfer of capital, technology, and knowledge from the North/West.

The fact that these theories are based on one particular conception, which is then assumed to be universal (while ignoring/subordinating other conceptions) they make development authoritarian as they prescribe

interventions in people's lives that these people themselves may disapprove of.

Ethnocentrism: Universal development theories entail emulating Western History and are synonymous with Westernization. These theories give a ready-made development recipe from the west and at their heart is the idea that economic growth can be stimulated in any country, by following a US/European model. This recipe was driven by behaviorist, positivist and empiricist approaches in the mould of “ scientific model” that prevailed in western universities and Research Centres and assumes that Western societies as ideal models and are complete in contrast to other societies of the Third World countries, the “ less developed” ones. These theories have been accused for viewing Third world countries as inferior versions of the European countries, because the standards of a good society are assumed to be both universal and identical with particular (European) standards. It is also believed that colonial tutelage gave way to diffusion of development (development aid/projects, etc.), but retained the purpose by providing Europe's past formula for development as the only workable one. In other words, development is like a phoenix rising from the ashes of imperialism.

Decontextualisation and Generalization: Another problem with universalization is that it groups all Third World countries into one category and ignores differences among them in an attempt to overgeneralize.

Indians, Kenyans, Mexicans, etc. are not seen as being diverse and non-comparable, but as somehow lacking in terms of what has been achieved by the advanced countries. It assumes that all Third World countries have the same problems linked to a lack of capital, knowledge, technology,

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productivity, institutions, etc. which can be solved with technocratic solutions, unconcerned with politics, relations of power and conflicts of interest, solutions that are rational and that no one can object to. It also neglects the differences between the supposed beneficiaries such as farmers and landless labourers, rural and urban poor, men and women, wage labourers and company owners, ruling elites and marginalised groups, etc. Universal development theories also do not take into account that the underdevelopment in the Third World is a result of Western Capitalist Explanation.

Thus, when their starting points and journeys aren't the same, how can the future discourse of the Third World ape the past of the First World? The 'a priori' approach of development for the developing and underdeveloped make it infeasible as the decision of the route is based on circumstances that are no longer there. For formulating bankable processes of upliftment, it is important that these nations be viewed as very different constructions of societal, economic, political, and cultural structures. Their progress into democratization or economic success will not come from mirroring the histories of the First World but must instead be unique to the needs, cultures, traditions, and prior establishments of each individual country.

Exogenous Nature: The theories were developed by a body of so called experts who merely drew from their own personal thinking in their task of changing the Third World countries, making it external.

Can a theory or method be forced upon people without first engaging in a conversation with the subject? If so, is the "product" created from this

exercise of value? Can years of lived experience be erased through a series of strategic planning sessions, or campaigns not rooted in any significant way to the reality of the subject being trained or required to participate in the activity? These are the questions that the paradigm of post-development answers in the negative. Theories derived from the culture of Third World countries could be free from the problems affecting the universal theories of development because of the following features of post development and thus of these theories:

Non-authoritarian with flexible goals and processes: The primary concern of post-development is to look for alternatives to development through an interest in culture and local knowledge by promotion of localized, pluralistic grassroots movements and its strength is in its anti-authoritarian sensibility. It also believes that there are numerous ways of living a good life and every society is free to invent its own and involves responses given by a group of people to particular problems or direct instances of power. Thus, post development is neither imposing a goal nor a process and distances itself from technocratically pre-defined standards and universal models. Therefore, the theories emanating from the Third World within the ambit of post development respect alterity and anonymity in the construction of subjectivities, with each society asserting its right to define its own path. These theories allow the subjects to use their own tools, and to go alone to not only develop answers, but also its own questions.

Cultural Relativism: Since these theories are based on the struggles and cultures of the people of the third world countries, local culture, artistic aspects and communal aspirations are often important concerns. These

theories are generally deeply interested in the history of their communities and the place they occupy in regional or national contexts. Post-development takes into account people's self-definitions as a crucial part in its inquiry and tends to create a new awareness of cultural difference, which contributes to the breakdown of ethnocentrism and universal values. Therefore, these theories entail discourses on difference, particularly cultural difference.

Contextualisation: Post-development is related to the visibility of the grassroots and entails local contexts. It situates itself within the context of local struggles and the linkages of local people in the world systems, lending it relevance and usability to people of the Third World in their daily lives and struggles. It encompasses a plurality of collective actors and revolutions at the micro level, with their own spheres of autonomy. The theories emerging from the Third World with applicability to the Third World presuppose an adequate understanding of the different social, political and economic structures of these countries and their respective histories.

Endogenous Nature: Post-development heavily relies on the knowledge of the Third World countries and this knowledge occupies an important role in the creation of theories for them and the decision making processes. It involves intellectuals from the Third World, alongside grassroots activists.

Post-development counters the problems of universalization of development theories by instating faith in theories based on the culture and struggles of the people from the Third World countries, taking into account their needs, wants, desires, histories, structures, etc.

An example of a theory arising from indigenous knowledge is presented in Jane C. Horan's (2002) study of indigenous economic development. In this, female textile producers in the Kingdom of Tonga received money as part of a 'Women in Development' aid-funded credit scheme. Though it was anticipated that the loans would be used to produce textiles for the local tourist economy, the women produced indigenous koloa textiles for the Tongan ceremonial economy which, according to Horan, enabled a "greater range of ideological, spiritual and material gains including cash" (2002, p. 206). Though "the default rate on the loans was low, and the women were engaged in a Tongan notion of development known as fakalalakaka, the funders and the critics of the schemes were either unable to or would not recognise development taking place" (Horan, 2002, p. 210). The study acknowledges what people are doing vis-à-vis what development doctrines expect them to do.

Other instances are indigenous movements originating from the south of Mexico, the south of Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia, picking up also in Peru because of anti-mining protests. These are social movements in which the indigenous component is stark, but there is also a black, Afro-Latin American component in several countries, and also a peasant one represented by those connected to Via Campesina, a federation of peasant movements who are opposing free trade and the privatisation of seeds.

What one needs to understand is that since development and post-development are at the extreme ends of the spectrum, therefore the problems of universalization as seen in development are not seen in the paradigm of post-development due to its highly localized nature. However,

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post-development (thus by extension the theories propagated by it) has its own set of problems, even though it forces us to confront the failures of the development agenda. Critiques of post-development believe that it overstates its case and neglects all the possibilities of positive development interventions, such as techniques of modern medicine raising health and life expectancy of people, by taking an extremely homogenized view of development. Further, it romanticizes local communities and at times, legitimizes oppressive traditions, and becomes just as paternalistic as the chastised development paradigm. It ignores the local forms of oppression and violence and is accused for being indifferent to the violation of human rights. While the movement towards cultural sensibilities that accompanies post development is a welcome shift, the plea for people' s culture, indigenous culture, local knowledge and culture, can lead if not to ethno-chauvinism, to reification of both culture and locality or people. Furthermore, by propagating thinking local and acting local, it tends to avoid global structures of inequality.

Though, the second wave of post-development counters a few of the aforementioned shortcomings by suggesting alternatives like the conception of communal solidarity, direct democracy, social movements, indigenous knowledge, etc. and state that the it is not the aim of post-development to offer a normative, new solution, the loopholes aren't still completely plugged and will not be till the time a viable alternative to development is proposed by this school of thought. In the absence of a feasible solution put for by it, post-development remains merely deconstructive of an existing paradigm.

In today's world, what is needed is a middle way, something between development and post-development that can incorporate the positives of universalization as well as localization. Till the time such an approach is developed, the choice pertains to choosing the lesser evil of the two.

References:

1. Horan, J. C. (2002) *Indigenous wealth and development: micro-credit schemes in Tonga*, Asia Pacific Viewpoint, 43(2), 205-221.