

Transition and development in India/Anjan
Chakrabarti and Stephen Cullenberg; New York:
Routledge, 2003 (1972-2000)

CHAPTER 7

Class and Need

*An Alternative Political Economy
of Development*

Since its official inscription in the Erfurt program of 1891, radical development theories have had a long and rich tradition. We traced some of their theoretical renditions in chapter 1 and then analyzed in detail its Indian counterparts in the form of the debate on the Indian modes of production and subaltern studies debates. Despite the differences and debates on the stages of history that underlined all such variegated radical theories, there was a general consensus among radical thinkers regarding the trajectory of development and transition. Development proceeds from the *center* to the *periphery*. The center is *advanced* in the sense that it possesses a more developed form of the forces of production while the periphery is *backward* because it lacks it. There are different levels at which the center-periphery or the advanced-backward criteria could operate. The center might be the West while the periphery the backward non-Western countries. Within the Western and the non-Western countries, the center might be the industrial sector while agriculture is the periphery.

The privileged status accorded to the center at some level is never questioned in these radical theories. The transition debates in Russia also never questioned this dualism and, in fact, theories of transition were consciously devised (war communism or primitive socialist accumulation) to make the center powerful. In the context of transition to capitalism or socialism, all such debates had a clearcut end in mind—the development of forces of production epitomized by technological advancement. Industri-

alization through capital accumulation was the strategy identified to achieve that and subsequently became the key term in the debates. For society to progress, the center must be strengthened and once that is done, development would percolate to the periphery. So development came to be associated with the rate of development of capital accumulation. Even the world system theorists, like Frank and Wallerstein, who identified the developed countries—the center—as the cause of underdevelopment in the peripheral countries, considered the growth of industrial center in the peripheral countries to be crucial for the development of the periphery. For them, it was the fettering of the industrial center in the periphery by the center countries/developed world that led to the underdevelopment of the domestic center in the peripheral countries and of the peripheral society as a whole. More broadly, this emphasis on industrialization through capital accumulation was not exclusively held by Marxists. The mainstream, too, emphasized the role of industrialization through capital accumulation (see, for example, Lewis 1954 and Harris and Todaro 1970). Generally, the literature on “industrialization through capital accumulation” gave a naturalized, ontological emphasis on technological change (for example, the forces of production in historical materialism) and its development and, in that context, took capital accumulation as being the harbinger of progress of society. While industrialization through capital accumulation was considered a commonly held virtue by both camps, the radicals generally believed in the inability of capital accumulation to industrialize the periphery. Thus, in almost all debates on transition and development (such as that on the modes of production in India or the subaltern studies theory of transition and development), theorists understood underdevelopment as a blocked development of capitalism or its higher form, socialism. As a result, the debate over the possibility or impossibility of “industrialization through capital accumulation” became the key to the twentieth-century development discourse.

Despite the fissures and fractures conditioning the road map of development, radical developmentalism—as epitomized by the Indian modes of production debates and the subaltern studies debates—was consistent in upholding the presence of a societal essence: the economic centered on capital, and defined its own dynamics around the logic of capital accumulation acting as a ground to the conception of a social totality and its evolution. Subsequently, the social totality in the development literature was divided into hierarchies constitutive of independent and autonomous spaces that are self-reflective—mode of production and superstructure, forces of production and relations of production, industry and agriculture, capital accumulation and need. This hierarchical division that was generally telescoped under the terms “center” and “periphery” or couched

in a similar nomenclature with similar connotation became the most potent form of constructing debates of development. These economic categories produced a series of binary divisions often charged with ethical and moral undertones—good and evil, forward and backward, modern and primitive, West and East.

Critiquing the received radical approaches to economic development as being guided by the methodological principles of essentialism and historicism, Ruccio and Simon (1986a, 1986b), Ruccio (1991), Chakrabarti (1996, 98), Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (2001a, 2001b), Gibson-Graham (1996), and Gibson-Graham and Ruccio (2001) argue for adopting a contrasting notion of a discursively created, disaggregated class-based social totality for debating the issue of development. Our critique of the Indian debates on transition and development along these lines assimilates comprehensively and develops in new directions this anti-essentialist and anti-historicist approach to transition and development. This critique of the orthodox approach to transition and development along with the alternative idea of social totality is consistent with those that point to the generally overwhelming emphasis on capital accumulation-based approach as being essentialist (Resnick and Wolff 1987, Gibson-Graham, Resnick and Wolff 2001a, Norton 1986, 1988, 2001).

Alongside this critique of radical developmentalism, a parallel critique was developed that came to be known as the antidevelopmentalism/postdevelopment school of thought. Arturo Escobar's (1995) attempt to critique “industrialization through capital accumulation” based development is typical of such reactions (also see Nandy 1987, Shiva 1989, and essays in Marglin and Apffel-Marglin 1990).¹ We generally agree with Escobar and the anti-postdevelopmental school of thought regarding their critique of the essentialism of the received theory of development. However, in the same spirit as Gibson-Graham (1996) and Gibson-Graham and Ruccio (2001), we are critical of the unproblematic way in which a capital-centric notion of the economy is accepted by Escobar and others. The focus of the postdevelopmental discourse is on the cultural and political aspects and a critique of the pre-given, naturalized, capital-centered economy. Having criticized the received notion of the economy without having problematized it to begin with, Escobar and the postdevelopment theorists abandon the *concept/field of development as economic development*. Thus, both the economy and development as contested spaces are effectively abandoned in that discourse.

Postmodern Marxist theory displaces the economy from the locus of capital accumulation to a decentered, disaggregated notion of class defined as processes of performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labor. The renewed problematization of the economy opens up a

new class-based language that rejects any allusion to a totalizing framework, naturalized ontology, atemporal fixity, certainty, uniformity, and eschatological meta-narrative. Given such a postmodern discursive space, the focus is to provide a critique of a monolithic conception of capitalism as centering the discourses on development and on the discovery of diverse noncapitalist possibilities (existing alongside capitalist class process) that have hitherto been suppressed. The complexity of such class processes that comprises variegated ways in which surplus labor (or as its physical counterpart, surplus product) is performed and appropriated is what Gibson-Graham and Ruccio (2001) called a class mapping of development or what we named a class set of development (also see Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (2001a). Thus, from development we are back to class analysis and in fixing attention on the transition of class processes the moment of development disappears from the postmodern scope, a disappearance that we want to interrogate in this chapter. But a lingering doubt remains: If not capital accumulation, what moment of development are we talking about, about whose disappearance we are so concerned?

It is worth remembering that development is not simply about “industrialization through capital accumulation” but consists also of the dual/other of capital accumulation—*need*. The above-mentioned critiques of orthodoxy, including that of Escobar and the postmodern Marxists, problematized the logic of capital accumulation but not need. And unlike the postdevelopment theories, even though the economy is problematized in the postmodern Marxist frame, development as need remains unaccounted for. While post- or anti-developmentalists like Escobar (quite paradoxically) *fetishized capital*, postmodern Marxists have ended up *fetishizing surplus labor* for no matter what noncapitalist class space one generates, it is still part of the nodal point of surplus labor (albeit a provisional one). The dimension of need and hence of development in that imaginary is suppressed.

How then do we account for development as need in a postmodern economic/class/surplus space? Answering this question is the primary objective of this chapter. We develop an articulation of the notion of class with development (as need) with the goal of constructing a mutually constitutive relation between the two. That is, we build a nonessentialist and nonhistoricist theory of development as need from a Marxist standpoint, a new radical alternative to the received theories of development economics.

The class mapping/set of development proposed by postmodern Marxists is a relatively new approach that understands the economy and its transition in terms of an overdetermined relation between production (epitomized by fundamental class process or FCP as performance and ap-