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A Critique Of The Conventional/Orthodox Approach

A CRITIQUE OF THE CONVENTIONAL/ORTHODOX APPROACH

BACKGROUND

Essentially ethnocentruc/western application of criteria of development/underdevelopment.

THREE APPROACHES TO "DEVELOPMENT THEORY" STEMMING FROM ABOVE BACKGROUND:

a. Index approach:

Basically the approach of the economist -- simple variables, (number of radios etc) as indicators of progress -- not linked together totally unable to capture qualitative changes in social structure.

b. Theories of Differentiation

Traditional societies have simple structures, modern societies more complex and differentiated. A vertical approach ignores (i) horizontal dimensions, (ii) interrelationship of power roles within industrial societies, (iii) complexity and history of many so called traditional societies that was far from simple, (iv) an equation of 'modern' with western capitalism, (v) an equation of desired values with the industrial work ethic and the values of free enterprise.

c. Theories of Exogenously induced change

Basically that inert, static, backward societies are brought to life by outside influences such as technical aid, knowledge resources, ideas, etc. This ignores drawing of capital from the under-developed the developed; implies totally wrong approval to the role of ideas - (the idealist theory of history). Ignores structive and stratification from which stems the conflict and from which values and change emerge. Inadequacy of 'growth' approach failure to recognise pressure on natural resources.

THREE APPROACHES MORE SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT MAY BE RELATED TO THE ABOVE

1. Correlation Approach

    a. Simple Association: The simple old Unesco approach say
        newspapers related to 'income' and 'urbanisation'. Note
        dubious conceptualization and no account of distribution
        re income.

    b. Causal: The Lerner take-off version of causality -- at
        heart little more than ecological determinism -- "peasants
        come to town, learn to read, study the newspaper and then
        vote wisely. Raises all sorts of question about the
        indicators used such as 'education', 'democracy', 'political
        development' all of which are devoid of content. EG Education
        as seen as the number of pupils passing through a school
        system not a system of cultural transmission or an agent of
        socialization - _____. In any case even taking the
        model with all its faults there are many deviant cases.
        Totally inadequate sociological understanding of the nature
        of society, social processes, etc, etc.

2. Empathy Approach

    "Psyche mobility" transform the personality -- mobile psyche ---
    mobile people --- progress etc. Weak methods. "What would you
    do if you were?" little replication: similar attitudes to
    Lerner's Balgat shepherd found in urban poor in USA. N.B. Lack
    of empathy is the result of frustrated experience not the cause
    of fatalism. Ignorance of nature of problems and movement in
    traditional societies and the political structure is evident.

3. Diffusion Approach

    From exogenous change approach. (Rogers) People must be persuaded
    to adopt, if they do adopt new society will be created. Media
    exposure is key intervening variable together with education.

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Again, look at definition of central terms such as 'change'.
This embraces exogenous influence, cultural determination and
the excessive emphasis on the quantitative e.g. (higher per
capita incomes. It is idealistic, individualistic, psycholo-
gistic, sociologically naive, ignores content of media dealing
only with exposure - nothing on the 'message givers', policy,
etc. Also individual characteristics (what really matter^(accoridng to Roger))
unrelated to social structure, institutions, stratification, etc.

Key concern is with (unstructured) innovative individualism.

OTHER POINTS TO NOTE: GENERAL

1. Middle class idealization of individual mobility and the rewards
   of deferred gratification -- "tighten your belt more effort
   more reward" ___

2. Superimposition of the desirability of western middle-class
   styles of life.

3. Emphasis on discrete units and isolated messages -- irnoring
   the role of communication with regard to broad types of action
   -- disembodies.

4. This all stems from the assumption that <u>the goals of development
   and the role of the media in attaining these are beyond dispute</u>
   ∴ Concern confused to process and, therefore, to the forms and
   instances of diffusion.

5. This means that values, individual and community needs have no
   place in what is essentially a quantified materialistic view.

6. Although the above mentioend emphasis might be associated with
   consumerism, the paradigm does not allow for the under and more
   pervasive influence of consumerism and related forces which stem

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from the overall international activities of the communication and related industries. Specific dev-com action is but a drop in the ocean when the international commercial flood -- which may be far more influential -- is taken into account.

7. The inadequacy of the paradigm has also resulted in the confusion and sometimes apparent dechotomization and even conflict which characterizes much of the discussion in the field including our own (two levels). An adequate approach would avoid the dechotomy and make the integration of macro and micro levels more feasible.

8. Further points in this connection include the following:

   I. DEFINITION
      1. Devcom has been defined at various levels:
         a. macro/systematic level, e.g. process, infrastructure, social structure, etc.

         b. micro technical level, i.e., development support communication.

      2. The two cannot be totally separated. Devcom can only be meaningful if:

         a. It can identify the problems of the system, points out the crucial elements and its working, and propose alternatives.

         b. It is capable of bringing the change or implement the alternatives by both:

            - intervention at the systematic level and

            - DSC to stimualte change through the mechanism of the technical/micro elements.

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II. REDEFINITION OF CONCEPT should include:

1. Awareness of the changing environment.

2. The concept of sustainable development, i.e., developing the capability of the system/society to support itself continuously in the future.

3. A new definition should at least touch the following aspects of Devcom:

    a. the function: to transform society from an unfavourable state to a better one.

    b. Objective: to develop the fullest potentials of the society and obtain the highest quality of life. Quality of life here meaning:

       - economic/material as well as social/cultural

       - physical as well as non-physical (e.g., justice, etc)

       - universal standards (accepted by all societies) as well as indigenous standards.

    c. Context: the environment of development and communication.

9. A completely ahistorical approach to traditional societies ignoring complexity, colonalism and i ernational capitalism. Therefore, no question of looking at such possibilities as cultural erosion, loss of identity, etc.

10. Undoing all the above is the total lack of an appropriate model of society a fake image of man, a crude approach to the notion

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of influence and an unsophisticted narrow appreciation of the communication process. It is this ahistorical, asociological orientation that is at the heart of the problem as it would be at the heart of the problematic of any other paradigm that coems in for scrutiny.

11. Finally, one cannot leave the critique without a further reference to the sociology of knowledge at the ideology of research. Obviously, research is not carried out in a vacuum. New research is completely untouched by external forces but some are more duly contaminated than others. Perhaps this is best illustrated by tht title of ROHAN SAMARAJIWA's well researched paper - The Murky Beginnings of the Communication and Development Fields: Vocie of America and 'The Passing of Traditional Society'. Let us strive to avoid further murky beginnings which often lead to sticky ends.

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