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Exploring Ecological Swaraj or Radical Ecological Democracy : A Path Towards Postdevelopment In India

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Abstract

The new phase of Postdevelopment theory is the phase of both deconstruction and reconstruction. Besides being a critique, it delves into the search for alternatives to development. Because of the claustrophobia of Development and recently neoliberalism and globalization, changes started to occur in almost all the axes of life (social, cultural, political, economic, ecological and scientific and spiritual). Many age-old concepts like Buen Vivir in Latin America, Ubuntu in Africa, Swaraj in India are getting envisioned in a new way through various social movements and alternative ways of living around the whole world, especially in the global South. Various 'Transition Discourses'(TD) are coming into existence which not only resist the arrogant intervention of development, but also resurface the other forms of life in this world. "A world of The third", non-capitalist in nature, is emerging which was hidden for so many years under the dominance of the Development Age. And these all are making the alternatives possible. A new experimental journey of postdevelopment is on its way to create a 'Pluriverse' - " a world where many worlds can be embraced". In the context of India, the purpose 'Development' serves is double. On one hand, it is ideologically driven by a capitalistic, patriarchal, anthropocentric framework which symbolise the hegemonic rule of the Western modernity. On the other hand, it is often considered a 'second colonialism' in disguise which strengthens the burden of colonial culture in the minds of the people. Despite such a context, alternatives are growing here in India, while people start to get out of the false consciousness of development. The emergence of 'Ecological Swaraj' is a very apt example of this journey. 'Ecological Swaraj' is a non-Eurocentric notion of development which is currently being developed by Ashish Kothari and many other scholars and activists with him in the roots of India. The framework, while questioning the whole paradigm of development, has primarily sprung up from various grassroots initiatives in different parts of India and social movements occurred in India. As well as its core values also come from the various emancipatory intellectual discourses of India. The whole framework is very recently articulated as 'Radical Ecological Democracy' (RED), a framework for a new governance system guided by the principles of ecological sustainability and social equity.

Keywords : Development, Postdevelopment, Ecological Swaraj, Radical Ecological Democracy

Background

"In our own civilisation there will naturally be progress, retrogressions, reforms and reactions; but one effort is required, and that is to drive out Western Civilisation. All else will follow." (Gandhi; Hind Swaraj)

Throughout the colonial era in India, a civilisational clash was very much evident. Scholars and activists like M.K. Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Prafulla Chandra Roy and many others were in action to cultivate the roots of our own civilisation against the imposition of Western civilisation upon us. This was not only the case for India, rather almost all the colonies were in this battle of resistance against the West.

It all started with the initiation of Colonialism. Both capitalism and colonialism were the brainchild of the Enlightenment era and thus were blood brothers. At the end of the 18th century, Europe faced the crisis of economic development due to the scarcity of land and raw materials for industrialisation. But soon they overcame it by tracing new sources all around the world. They set up their colonies and got access to "biotic resources from there and fossil resources from the crust of the earth..."

(Sachs, 2009 a). According to Sachs (2009 b), "there would have been no industrial society without the mobilisation of resources from both the expanse of geographical space and the depth of geological time".

But the whole process of colonization was not that plain and simple. Colonialism had its roots into the Western Modernity. Besides extracting raw materials, through colonisation, the concept and the ideological pillars of Western modernity were imposed upon the rest of the world. The two most important ideological pillars of Western modernity were Dualism and Orientalism. Orientalism established the whole East and their civilisations as the inferior 'Other' of the West. British colonialism had ample examples of it. "We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue...the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects" (Macaulay Minutes, 1835; http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html) Dualism, on the other hand, legitimised this process of 'Otherisation'. Dualist structure creates the division of Tradition/Modernity, Nature/Culture and many more where one is given hegemonic superiority over the 'other'. With such a process colonisers started to colonise the whole societies, from the very institutions to the minds of the people. And thus the 'other' societies lost their autonomy and their uniqueness of living and a new era of 'Colonial Modernity'¹ was started into these societies. This Colonial modernity was identified much by the process of modernisation of the various legal-political-economic institutions of those colonised societies. Colonial modernity has a very long-term impact upon those societies as it was shaping a different worldview for those societies by importing various ideas like Progress, Growth, Industrialisation etc. Simultaneously it was a process to hide the uniqueness of these societies under the shade of modernisation.

After almost two hundred years of rule, colonialism finally comes to an end. But till then, colonial modernity was on the upward curve and its ideological pillars occupied almost all the institutions and the other parts of the lives of the colonies. As a result, though decolonization happened in political and economic sense, through the rise of independent nation-states and new economic powers, "a decolonisation of imagination has not occurred" (Sachs, 2009 c) at all. On the contrary, the era of colonialism had created the social problems of hunger and poverty, given birth to the new middle class in the colonies. And in consequence, a new sense of justice and equity was born in the colonized livelihood, which could not have been possible without the colonial rule. People of the global South were craving for the civilisational model of the West and "across the world hopes for the future are fixed on the rich man's patterns of production and consumption" (Sachs, 2009 d). The new middle class, to incarnate their American dream, largely demolished the conditions of the poor. These unprecedented conditions of the newly liberated Nation-States prepared the context of the 'Development Age' in the post-colonial world.

The Development Age

Immediately after World War II, Henry Truman, being the President of America, announced his 'fair deal' for the newly liberated global South. On January 20,1949, in his inaugural speech, he divided the whole world as 'Developed' and 'Underdeveloped'. He urged to the world:

"More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people. . . . I believe that we should make available to peace-loving people the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. . . . What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing. . . . Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge." (Truman[1949])(as cited in Escobar, 1995). With the initiation of Truman's doctrine, the Age of Development started its journey.

But ontologically Development meant something else than what Truman dictated. "In common parlance, development describes a process through which the potentialities of an object or organism are released, until it reaches its natural, complete, fully-fledged form. Hence the metaphoric use of the term to explain the natural growth of plants and animals"(Esteva, 2009 a). Initially the term 'development' was used synonymously with the term 'Evolution' in Biology. Later, in 1774, Herder used the

term in Social History. In Marx's works, development was given significance and was used to connect to both Biology and History. But, with the establishment with Western hegemony, the word set out for a new journey where it was used as a colonizing power through the process of industrialisation and it meant a unilinear way of evolution, destroying all other ways. (Esteva, 2009 b). Truman was the flag bearer of this later transformed meaning of development which had its genealogy in colonial rule.

Colonialism had established a long-term connection with Development, when it created the project to 'develop' the Orient. It took a sharp turn in the 20th century when colonizers around the world started welfare projects for their colonies. A 'dual mandate' was created: "the conqueror should be capable of economically developing the conquered region and at the same time accepting the responsibility of caring for the well-being of the natives" (Esteva, 2009 c). A prominent example of this was the transformation of 'Law of Development of the Colonies' by the British government into the 'Law of Development and Welfare of the Colonies' in 1939. (Esteva, 2009 d). This kind of step was taken by the colonizers with an anticipatory assessment of the whole situation. It was a sharp move initiated in the colonies which had served a two-way purpose. On the one hand, it was a project to keep the colonies dependent upon the West for the future, which later transformed into the project of Development. On the other hand, this project was created upon the 'needs' of the colonies, that 'needs' which were created by the colonizers themselves.

In the post-colonial era, Development became a panacea of colonial modernity which was filled with the reality of industrialisation with its reliance upon modern scientism and pure technical efficiency and advancement. Because of the pervasion of development, new concepts and terms of progress, evolution, maturity have become part and parcel of lives in colonial modernity. In Earnest Heckle's words, "Development is, from this moment on, the magic word with which we will solve all the mysteries that surround us on, at least, that which will guide us towards their solution" (as cited in Esteva, 2009 e). This panacea, in its official inauguration, was very much accepted in all the ex-colonies. Because the ground of acceptance was prepared much before in the colonial era, as explained earlier. As a result it was the global South who became the most loyal and committed defender of development.

The age of Development kept certain promises to attract people. It claimed to have its expert knowledge to eradicate poverty, to reach zero hunger problem, to achieve the American dream, and by fulfilling such promises it will reach its ultimate goal of 'rich man's equity'² all over the world. To fulfil this target of development, institutions like The World Bank, International Monetary Fund(IMF) were created who started to sanction loans to these 'underdeveloped' countries for their development projects. The United Nations(UN) also accepted the promises of development in 1951 and started its own initiatives to promote development in the deprived nation-states, later mentioned as the 'Third World'. Many theorists of development emerged, primarily in the West, later in the countries of the 'Third World' also. Due to its genealogy in industrialisation and its values rested in the concepts of growth, maturity and so on, Development, starting from its journey, started to occupy various economic and political institutions of these countries and set the focus on economic growth as the sole way to achieve its dream of the model of Western civilisation. But soon this focus of economic growth became shattered as the index of hunger and poverty was on the rise in the 'underdeveloped' countries. A new bunch of social scientists emerged around the 'Third World' countries who announced that both economic and social aspects are important to achieve the goal of development. The UN also supported the declaration and formulated 'The Economic and Social Council of United Nations'(Ecosoc). UN Development Decade of 1960-70 stated that,

" The problem of underdeveloped countries is not just growth, but development.... Development is growth plus change,[it added]. Change, in turn, social and cultural as well as economic, and qualitative as well as quantitative....The key concept must be improved quality of people's life." (as cited in Esteva, 2009 f). Later, with the emergence of the crisis of fossil-fuel resources, climate change and global warming, development started to decorate itself with new values and goals. The concepts like Sustainable Development, Alternative Development, Green Economy came into existence.

But among all this grandeur, there always remains a basic paradox within the whole development discourse. It is the Western modernity, through its colonial invasion, destroyed all the distinctive forms of lives and cultures in the colonies, looted them and, in turn, created the problems of poverty and hunger there. And it is the same West, after colonialism officially ends, came to the field with the project of Development to solve the problems created by themselves. The result was also very paradoxical. Despite the promises of eradication by development, poverty and hunger persisted, now with more affirmation, in the 'Third World', with the integration of many new problems. Development was that project which sustained the ideals of Western modernity in the ex-colonies in a new disguise. But despite the economic and political decolonization, why didn't the people of the South realise the basic fallacy of development?

The answer lies in all the institutions and the changing lifestyles and worldviews of the people of the global South under the influence of colonial modernity. Colonialism was not something which started with an alien rule and had come to an end with the rulers gone from that country (Nandy, 1997 a). Rather colonialism was that particular pattern of rule which invaded the minds and institutions of the natives. They relied much on intellectual invasion, rather than occupation by armaments. In consequence, this two hundred years of colonial rule had created 'colonial culture' in various colonies which was basically a 'shared culture' between the rulers and the ruled. "This colonialism colonises the minds in addition to the bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds" (Nandy, 1997 b).

Succinctly, the age of Development has two fundamental purposes. It was that apparatus of the West that helped to rejuvenate the flow of the capital all around the world after a global crisis of the 20th century. Because of the two World Wars, the great depression of the 1930s and the independence war of various colonies, the flow of capital had been hit badly and again an economic crisis was on the rise. Simultaneously by the Russian Revolution, an emerging communist power was becoming a threat to the hegemonic rule of the West. In this dire condition, to continue the flow of capital and to save it from the attack of Soviet Union, a new expansion was needed. The anticipation of this crisis was felt during the very first half of the 20th century and that is why the blueprint was in making since that time. And the result was the discovery of the panacea of development, which gained immediate legitimacy in the newly decolonized societies and made possible the uninterrupted circulation of capital. The West also sustained the struggle against communism.

The other purpose is to retain the colonialism of the West in disguise, which was a necessity to fulfill the previous purpose. The seductive logic of development reimposed the ideals of Western modernity upon the newly independent nation-states, this time with more successful and legitimate implementation of the socio-cultural duality, Western scientism, a universal path to progress and their arrogant intervention on the 'Other' societies. Development has economized these societies and created 'economic men' (based on the ideals of growth, maturity etc.) who will, in turn, develop a consumerist mindset to serve the purpose of Western consumer style society. The 'Development age' was in actuality a 'second colonialism' in disguise.

Coming of an Postdevelopment Age

During the 1980s with the emergence of economic neoliberalisation in the global South and the decadence of Soviet Union, the discourse of development made a sharp turn. It was no more a project to resist the influence of communism in the 'Third World'. Rather the formula is changed now. Initially it was a project working in the new independent nation-states under the guidance of the State and it was concerned with the economic shifts of these countries from agricultural economy to industrial one. But in neoliberal economy these boundaries of nation-states became blurred for the economy and the pervasion of transnational markets became the utmost priority for the augmentation of capital. The concept of globalisation came to rule the world economically, culturally and politically. In such a state the purpose of development was also changed. Old rules are not applicable anymore. Development became transnationalised according to the need of the free market and took the formula of "accumulation by dispossession" ³ all over the world. In this era, development targeted those people and those geographical

areas which still didn't come under the dominance of capital. It started to invade the remaining commons (land, water, forest) of the global South for the expansion of capital in the name of development by dispossessing the people from there.

On the other hand, since the 1970s the dreams of development were being disrupted as the hunger and poverty indexes were becoming high year by year. The economic growth of the 'underdeveloped' countries was often met at the cost of devastation of nature and the exploitation of various communities, which really shocked the common people. Around the global South, "the shiny side of the development is often accompanied by a dark side of displacement and dispossession." (Sachs, 2009 e). But despite all such things, the discourse of development was in action to declare its improvement by importing the concept of 'Redevelopment' - "to develop again what was maldeveloped or is now obsolete" (Esteva, 2009 g). This process of redevelopment, in turn, produced the concepts and projects like Sustainable Development, Alternative Development and Green Economy. But this time also, as it was bounded by the 'needs' of capital and market expansion, it fails to meet the 'needs' of the people.

So the fallacies of development were being exposed all around the globe. The people who were suffering most were getting out of their false consciousness and started to create resistance in several places against the exploitation of development. Social movements emerged in the grassroots to resist the neo-colonization through development and the aggressive intervention of the free market and capitalism. People, activists, theorists in several corners of the world, to get rid of this hegemony of development, started to immerse themselves in the quest for alternatives to 'development'. The legitimacy of the whole paradigm of development is finally put into question which inaugurated a new era - a journey beyond development-centric life - an era of Postdevelopment.

Postdevelopment as a Critique of Development

As development was being identified as a power technique used by the West towards the rest of the world, the rejection also became vehement all over the world. Development with its ideals and practices had constructed a particular knowledge system, a certain notion of living which had established its hegemony over the 'Third World'. Once the dark truth behind development started to reveal, both the grassroots movements and some intellectual discourses demanded a paradigm shift of the development. They felt the need to go beyond the Western-laden development discourse. And thus, Postdevelopment emerges, primarily as a theoretical critique of development. Postdevelopment, in its initial stage, appeared as a Foucaultian critique of development, inspired by post-structuralism. It was because the early thinkers (Rahnema, Esteva) of postdevelopment theory perceived development as a 'discourse', inspired by the works of Michel Foucault, and used many terms and concepts used by Foucault in their critique of development. But whether postdevelopment is really a Foucaultian critique or not is a debatable issue within the discourse of postdevelopment itself. Aram Ziai (2004 a) is of the opinion that the deconstruction of development didn't always occur from a Foucaultian perspective in postdevelopment theory. There are thinkers like Marglin who never used any such perspective in their understanding of postdevelopment theory. Any attempt of "referring to the post-development idea in the singular runs the risk of caricaturing a number of different writers' ideas" [Kiely,1999 (as cited in Ziai, 2004 b)].

Postdevelopment as a theory made its first appearance in 'Encountering Development'(1995), a novel creation of Arturo Escobar. Here the writer first made an attempt to deconstruct the whole discourse of development. According to him, development is an apparatus which is specifically used as a 'system of power' to create its own monolith of progress, destroying all other ways of life. It colonized, with its expert knowledge production, the whole 'Third World' and made people subjects of its experiment. There are other thinkers also who discussed and deconstructed the discourse of development and exposed several other dimensions. Eduardo Gudynas (2017 a) identified development as a project which ensures a universal model of progress by the sole engine of economic growth and material progress of people. It is also a dualist project which differentiates between society and nature and announces the dominance over nature by society with its 'technical optimism'. Thus it helped to spread a consumerist, Western lifestyles over the Third World and successfully commoditized the social relations, men-women and the environment also.

Deconstructing the whole paradigm of development, postdevelopment thinkers came to a conclusion that development is nothing but an "Eurocentric discourse, an imperialist project, and (often) a meaningless concept" (Ziai, 2004 c). That is why postdevelopment announces the end of the development era and continues to look for 'alternatives to development', rather than development alternatives. Postdevelopment set the target to break the epistemological basis of development and to transform 'economic man' into autonomous men and women again. It took an attempt to "delink the desire for equity from economic growth and relinking it to community and culture-based notions of well-being..." (Sachs, 2009 g). Escobar defines the visions of postdevelopment more vividly :

"An interest not in development alternatives but in alternatives to development

An interest in local culture and knowledge

A critical stance towards established scientific discourses

The defence and promotion of localised, pluralistic, grassroots movements" [Escobar, 1995 (as cited in Ziai, 2004 d)].

Wolfgang Sachs (2009 h) also understood postdevelopment theory as "a transition from economies based on fossil-fuel resources to economies based on biodiversity". To him, postdevelopment theory attempts to end the centrality of the economic worldview in the society and stands for the people's rights "to act according to values of culture, democracy and justice" (Sachs, 2009 i).

It is very much evident that postdevelopment doesn't have any unified definition. Many thinkers have explained this theory from many aspects and perspectives. But one thing for sure, it has challenged the economic dominance in the lifestyles and thought process of people. Besides being a critique, postdevelopment is envisioned as a lense by which well-beings of life can be understood and realized from several other perspectives beyond the hegemonic one of development.

But this journey of postdevelopment also fell into traps while critiquing and itself got criticised. Because of works of some thinkers it is labelled as a theory of crude romanticism of pre-modern and preindustrial societies. And the most fierce criticism, which was thrown to all the postdevelopment thinkers, is that postdevelopment theory is another critique of development, without any notion of construction. (Pieterse, 2000 a).

Postdevelopment in its Phase II

These criticisms are taken into consideration in postdevelopment theory. And because of such criticisms, conflicting discourses emerged within the postdevelopment theory. Among the early contributors in this debate, the significant one is Aram Ziai. He has identified two variants of postdevelopment theory and made a separation between them. According to him, there are few postdevelopment thinkers like Esteva, Rahnema who criticised development discourse very uncritically, and romanticizes traditional cultures and lifestyles as if there is no criticality within these lifestyles. According to him it is really against the ethos of postdevelopment and does not open any space for real alternatives to development. Moreover he feels that because of such romanticism and uncritical vision, these thinkers sometimes applied Foucaultian critique in postdevelopment theory with less clarity. This particular understanding of postdevelopment theory, as Ziai understands, can be labelled as 'Neo-populist Variant' of Post-development theory. This variant has also made the standard criticisms valid for postdevelopment theory. "Apparently this kind of essentializing of 'development' is necessary in order to arrive at the radical repudiation of development, and without this anti-development pathos, the post-development perspective loses its foundation" (Pieterse, 2000 b).

The other variant, according to Ziai (2004 e), is the 'Sceptical Variant' of postdevelopment theory. With the works of Escobar, Rist, postdevelopment becomes a project of radical democracy. This variant sees existing social structure as inadequate to practice true democracy, and thus relies on the grassroots movements and resistance that are occurring all around the world, especially in the global South. It proposed the radical decentralization of the existing power structure and announced that there are "numerous ways to live a 'good life' and it is up to each society to invent its own" [Rist (as cited in Ziai, 2004 f)]. This variant can be considered as a "manifesto of radical democracy in the field of development.... It extends social conflictuality to the area of development policy and development aid through reformulating relations of subordination implicit in development

discourse as relations of oppression. In contrast to earlier theories of imperialism and dependency, the critique is not restricted to economic issues but includes the field of culture and knowledge and questioning the whole perception of some countries being 'developed' and others less so" (Ziai, 2004 g).

Another significant debate in the discourse evolves through the use of the prefix 'Post'. Gudynas made an important contribution here. Some thinkers (like Rahnema, Esteva) interpreted the prefix as some 'future development' or sometimes anti-development position. Gudynas (2017 b) opined that this kind of stance acts to weaken the link of postdevelopment with post-structuralism and there is a risk of emergence of some alternative development again. On the other hand, there are thinkers like Escobar who envisaged postdevelopment as a space for "creating new discourses and representations, diversifying the agents of knowledge production or supporting resistance" (Gudynas, 2017 c). Elise Klein and Carlos Murreo (2019 a) also engaged in this debate positively :

"Our own preference for 'postdevelopment' without the hyphen (rather than 'post-development') is meant to purposefully denote the ongoing tension in demanding a temporal break with development, an 'after development'. In contrast, the alternatives in practice are working alongside, interspersed with and counter to development and not awaiting some complete break with development in order to begin".

All of these contemporary thinkers actually made a departure from earlier thinkers of postdevelopment. They opined that in the journey of postdevelopment it is not always necessary to take a crude anti-development position. Nor there remains always a possibility to make a complete rupture with the development in order to start a fresh journey towards the search of alternatives. Because there are still many students, activists who are on the side of development, but they really want to do good for the world. These thinkers are of the opinion that postdevelopment theory should always look critically to the discourse of development as well as the discourse of postdevelopment, and should collect those good components of development in its journey towards alternatives.

Although in its initial days, postdevelopment was majorly engaged in critique, it was not completely devoid of any vision of 'construction'. Escobar uttered in the early phase of 1990s that to unmask development and to bid farewell to the 'Third World', both deconstruction and reconstruction are necessary. His utterance also had a reality through the emergence of various grassroots movements and resistance in many corners of the global South since the 1980s. Dissatisfied by the hegemony of development, people in these countries started to look for alternative forms of life that were hidden in their own culture and their roots of social life. Age-old concepts like 'Swaraj' in India, 'Buen Vivir' (good living) in Latin America started to emerge in new time-space dimensions with new principles which promote the autonomous modes of living. Social movements like Chipko in India, Zapatista in Mexico were becoming celebrated and widely discussed, among thinkers, activists, and many other people, for their emancipatory potentials and enriching views of living life against the exploitation of development.

Postdevelopment, with the hands of contemporary thinkers, immersed itself in "search for alternatives, in a deeper sense, that is, aiming to break away from cultural and ideological bases of development, bringing forth other imaginaries, goals, and practices" [Gudynas & Acosta (as cited in Demaria & Kothari, 2019)]. A new approach of 'postdevelopment practice' is also initiated to exercise on the creation of space for alternatives. "Postdevelopment in practice begins with the insistence that an enduring diversity of socialites, a multiplicity of Southern knowledge and nature/culture assemblages and post-colonial political economies reveals already existing alternatives" (Klein & Morreo, 2019 b). This particular approach of postdevelopment practice proves that there exist several alternative spaces which were shaded for years by the hegemonic, arrogant rule of development. Now these spaces are getting revealed through various approaches and movements. Dhar and Chakrabarty (2016 a) recently denoted such alternative spaces and creations as "the world of the third" which is neither capitalist nor pre-capitalist, according to them. But they are non-capitalists in nature, often filled with the potentials to become post-capitalists in nature. Dhar and Chakrabarty talked about a 'postdevelopment praxis' where postdevelopment is perceived as "critique of existing paradigms of development", as a " rethinking space" and a "thinking praxis beyond statist developmental interventions or mere intervention-implementation programmes" (Dhar & Chakrabarty, 2016 b).

Although 'postdevelopment in practice' and 'postdevelopment praxis' have nuanced differences between them, nevertheless, they both bear the marked alteration from the first phase of postdevelopment and succinctly establish postdevelopment as a space more focused on discussion and cultivation of the alternative creations of forms of life. This also proves that, over the times, the discourse of postdevelopment is acquiring vast and diverse explanations and is being exposed with new dimensions to approach the world.

Arturo Escobar (2015 a) identified this phase of postdevelopment as a part of greater 'Transition Discourses' (TD) that "call for a significant paradigmatic or civilizational transformation". In various parts of the world, several TDs are growing, though there are concrete differences between the TDs of the global South and the global North. Postdevelopment theory attempts to make a connection among these TDs of South and North to decrease the gaps between the TDs of these two spheres of the world. By connecting the TDs, postdevelopment theory goes beyond the idea of a universe and, in turn, envision "a world where many worlds can be embraced". Or in other words, postdevelopment theory starts a journey towards 'Pluriverse'- "a world where many worlds can fit".⁴

"TDs are emerging from a multiplicity of sites, principally social movements and some NGOs, and from intellectuals with significant connections to environmental and cultural struggles. TDs are prominent in the fields of culture, ecology, religion and spirituality, alternative science(e.g., complexity), food and energy, and digital technologies" (Escobar, 2015 b). One such emerging 'Transition Discourse' from India is the inception of 'Ecological Swaraj' or 'Radical Ecological Democracy'(RED) - a conceptual framework innovated by activist and intellectual Ashish Kothari, particularly developed through various grassroots movements and alternative forms of life originated in India with some intellectual inputs from Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhiji (and many others) and use of age-old concept like 'Swaraj' in India. In this thesis I have made an attempt to explore and understand the TD of 'Eco-Swaraj' using postdevelopment as the frame of research.

Research Objective

The major objective of this article is to understand the conceptual reality of Eco-Swaraj or Radical Ecological Democracy (RED) in the background of postdevelopment theory. In other words, this article will make an attempt to understand and explain the correlation between RED and postdevelopment theory.

Exploring Ecological Swaraj or Radical Ecological Democracy

Before discussing the relation between Radical Ecological Democracy(RED) and Postdevelopment theory let us delve into the conceptual reality of RED. The whole journey of the Development Age has created illusions among the people, mostly among the people of the global South. But as soon as people realise the claustrophobia of this development age, the 'crisis of illusions'⁵ starts to come to the surface. People, all over the world, started to revolt against this interventionist development, forward to their journey in quest for alternatives to development. India was no such exception. From the 1970s onwards, various social movements took place in several parts of India against the Development Age and its several expressions. A benchmark can be set to the rise of the Chipko Movement. Though social and political scientists have read this movement from several perspectives, this movement has raised some fundamental questions regarding the method of living, expressions of life which, in turn, surfaced the questions of ecology in living, reality of community in postcolonial India (and world as well), and most importantly aware the world about the expression and intervention of capital in disguise of development. Later on, as India officially took this neoliberal economic policy and tried to reinforce the logic of development, movements like 'Narmada Bachao Andolan', movements in Niyamagiri in Orissa, Singur and Nandigram in Bengal all started to erupt and uttered a common 'NO' against the development. But the most intriguing factor of these social movements is that most of them are not limited in just a revolt against the state and the corporates. Within and beyond those revolts there are glimpses of celebration of their own forms of living against the imposition of developmental dream. These movements highlighted those diverse forms of living and doing that are growing in numerous parts of India for so many years and also are struggling to resist the all pervasive intervention of capital. These have hammered the intellectual psyche of India (if not mass psyche till now) and pushed the scholars, activists not only to question the journey of modernisation and development but also to explore (critically

for sure) such diversity of forms of lives, cultures which pose themselves beyond this developmental mode of living and the notion of developmentality.

Ashish Kothari is one such activist and scholar from India, among many others, who have studied these social movements and alternative livelihoods and critiqued the present socio-economic reality of India. "The economic crisis is not only an anomaly that can be corrected with some reforms, it is a symptom of fundamental faults both in the ideology of development and its current avatar of globalisation." (Kothari, 2009). According to him, such 'fundamental faults' of development result in the crises of ecological devastation, rise in poverty and hunger and severe inequity in life of common people.

But this 'crisis of illusions' is not the ultimate reality. Kothari has observed that various grassroots initiatives like Ladakh Hill Community Development, Madhyapradesh's 'fluoride warriors' and many others are also in existence in many parts of India. They have proved that alternative lives are possible which are not really guided by the principles of colonial modernity. On the contrary, they have developed their own notions of well-being from their livelihoods and cultures.

Ashish Kothari with his other fellows and his works through the NGO 'Kalpavriksh' and the initiative of 'Alternative Confluence' has developed a conceptual framework of living from these social movements and grassroots initiatives which he named 'Ecological Swaraj' or 'Radical Ecological Democracy' (RED).

This conceptual framework of RED envisions a new notion of well-being guided by ecological sustainability and social equity - a concept of equity which is entirely different from 'rich man's equity'. This framework can more precisely be defined as a conceptual model towards a sustainable and equitable mode of living guided by certain principles and values. According to Kothari, these values and principles have been developed "through widespread discussions with grassroots groups and civil society" (Precept, www.radicalecologicaldemocracy.org). Though the concept of 'sustainable future' has already gained a variety of connotations in development and transition discourses , Kothari has made his meaning very clear. "Moving towards sustainable and equitable alternatives is not only about recycling and reuse, clean technologies and waste reduction but also about fundamental changes in the way we relate to nature and to each other". (Kothari, 2009 b).

Let us now put some closer look on those principles and values which have constituted this conceptual framework. The two most fundamental principles of this framework are ecological sustainability and social equity upon which the other values are evolving. To build a sustainable ecology we first need to admit that the ecological resources of the earth are limited. Already more than enough of those have been exploited since the dawn of Industrialisation till now. That is why we who belong to the present generation are facing severe ecological crisis in our lives. We need to build such forms of life which respect the limitation of ecological resources on earth and prescribe some mode of living which integrates the " ecosystems and ecological functions on which all life depends (including all hydrological, chemical, and physical process that give us air, water and soil without which we cannot live)". (Kothari, 2009 c).

The second important principle is social equity which has become essential for today's society because of the ever expanding inequality and social exclusion caused by development in recent decades. This principle is a mixture of "equality of opportunity, full access to decision-making forums for all, equity in the distribution and enjoyment of the benefits of human endeavour (across class, caste, age, gender and other divisions) and cultural security". (Kothari, 2009 d).

Based on these 2 principles, this particular model of living has grown certain values (developed by Kothari and his fellows) – **Diversity and pluralism** promote " the plurality of ways of living" existing in India. It opposes the process of homogenization of every aspect of life which has already been done by the ideals and apparatuses of colonial modernity. It speaks for the diversity of living in the society.

Cooperation acts to promote community cooperation to live life by replacing the present individualised competitiveness in living. Community cooperation speaks for community living but does not pose an uncritical stance towards traditional community and its exploitation and conflict. That is why it actually speaks for a regeneration of community living with some quality values.

Inspired by the thoughts of Gandhi, this model speaks for **rights with responsibilities** which was very much a phenomenon of traditional Indian lives. This signifies an 'ethical citizenship' for today's world where "individuals and collectives are responsive to each other's needs and rights, and to the needs and rights of non-human nature"(Kothari, 2009 e).

Dignity of labour is also much important to reach a sustainable and equitable future which will also make an attempt to reduce and extinct the hierarchy of intellectual and physical labour. It will put equal emphasis and dignity to both of these labours and will take effort to create balance of these two kinds of labours in every individual of the society.

Respect to subsistence, i.e. towards self-reliant livelihoods is much important in this framework of RED. Subsistence lifestyles are today rejected as 'primitive' because it rejects the idea of the modern market. But a regeneration of this concept is important for today's alternative courses.

Simple living and the qualitative pursuit of happiness actually challenge the 'good life' defined by modernity. It aims to go beyond consumerism by prioritizing non-material satisfaction instead of the material ones and in turn aspires to change the notion of 'good life'. The motto of this value is " 'moreness' should be replaced by 'enoughness' ". (Bender, 1975). It speaks for "the pursuit of knowledge, happiness through cultural and social interaction, links with nature and simple lifestyles" (Kothari, 2009 f).

In contrast to the aggression of globalisation and its neoliberal ethics, Kothari has envisioned RED as the collaboration of diversity, localisation and landscapes. It proposes to free India from one particular model of economy, governance, health, education and environment imposed by the neocolonisation of the West. According to Kothari, localisation is based on the belief that the people who live "closest to the resource to be managed would have the greatest stake, and often the best knowledge to manage it" (2009 g). Following this thumb rule, certain landscapes should be looked after locally and thus this particular pattern of localisation would also be able to generate massive employment and livelihood opportunities. In such a way a great diversity will also be built up all over the country. Thus, Kothari(2009 h) envisions, the State becomes a less crucial pillar of the country while communities and the civil society take the central decision-making position in the society. The State will then have to "assist the communities in situations where local capacity is weak".

With such prudence RED also becomes " an evolving framework of governance in which each person and community has access to decision-making forums of relevance to them, and in which the decisions taken are infused with ecological and cultural sensitivity, and socio-economic equity". (Precept, www.radicalecologicaldemocracy.org). As a whole, conceptually RED can be envisioned as a project of Radical Democracy. But as grown in the lands of the global South, the idea of radical democracy is rooted in the practices of subaltern social movements. (Conway & Singh, 2011 a). RED framework, since its inception, "being grounded in the grassroots movements, often with little or no reference to the largely Western centric political-theoretical tradition" (Conway & Singh, 2011 b) is a potential manifestation of this alternative radical democracy in India and in the global South as well.

Besides its indebtedness to the grassroots movements and alternative practices, the concept of RED is also much inspired by the emancipatory thoughts and works of Marx, Rabindranath, Gandhi, Ambedkar and many such thinkers. 'Swaraj' is a very prominent concept used in this framework which will be discussed later in this thesis. Besides 'Swaraj', other thoughts of Gandhi are reimagined in this conceptual framework. There are also concepts like 'Sriniketan' of Tagore, 'annihilation of Caste' by Ambedkar and many others which have influenced the ideas of alternative education, regeneration of communities in this conceptual model of RED. But at the same time, it is true that intellectual influences and inspirations are not explicitly stated in the conceptualisation of RED. This particular aspect demands more focused attention to build RED with more concrete and diverse dimensions which will help to manifest it as a transformatory concept.

With its principles and values, Radical Ecological Democracy is evolving as a conceptual model of life which is entirely different, if not opposite, from the present dominant model of colonial modernity. As a framework, it is maturing day by day while engaging with various grassroots initiatives and other alternative discourses. Simultaneously it is also promoting new values and principles against the dominant trends of modern consumerist livelihoods and is being experimented as a model of

life. Thus it is open to import new ideas, values and principles with transformatory potentials to manifest itself in a more concrete way and denies any possibility to become a full-proof model of life.

Like modernisation and development, it does not make any claim to be a blueprint of a new world. In contrast with development, this model does not impose itself anywhere practically or conceptually. It also doesn't propose any unitary model of progress. Rather, being developed through diverse grassroots movements and emancipatory intellectual currents, it speaks for diversity and plurality of living from its core and thus rejects the idea of the unitary path of progress. Moreover, this model doesn't make false promises like the Development Age had done to the people, nor it dictates any single 'good' for all of the world. Rather, the principles and values of RED speak for the emancipation and autonomy for diverse and plural forms of life on the earth so that they can realise their own 'good' and they need not to be dependent on someone else's expertise or advice or promise.

Radical Ecological Democracy in Relation to Postdevelopment Theory

RED has its roots in social movements, alternative practices growing in India since the 1970s. On the other hand, postdevelopment emerged as a theoretical critique of development discourse in the 1980s. Both of these have their own autonomous journey with unique entities. But it has to be remembered that though these two have their own distinctive realities, they are not entirely disconnected in their approach and destination. Grassroots movements against development and its ideals have been the manifested expression of postdevelopmental critique of development. These movements and resurgence of alternative practices are the true essence of 'deconstruction and reconstruction' in postdevelopment (PD) theory. By setting their destination towards a transformation of this present condition of the world (dominated by capitalism), both RED and Postdevelopment theory have taken resources from these initiatives occurring all over the world. So it is very evident that they will have some relation between them to act toward a common achievement.

Because of their orientations and their emergence in the global South, both RED and PD have built a spiral bonding between them as Transition Discourses. They have certain points of convergence and again on some points they diverge from each other. But in no way this spiral bonding restricts their autonomous walk toward transition to a different world.

Both RED and PD identify the present dominant model of life (which can be symbolised by industrialism, capitalism, anthropocentrism...) as the root of exploitation of the earth and the diverse forms of life there. Both RED and PD share a radical 'cultural and institutional' critique of the present model of life. But regarding criticism, PD provides a more nuanced critique than the RED framework, because its theoretical roots lie in the criticisms of development discourse and subsequently modernity and capitalism. RED, on the other hand, is more focused on the alternative practices. It majorly concentrates on the project of the creation of alternative conceptual models of life. Again both of them actually function and flourish through their engagement with various social movements and intellectual currents, but one can't consider themselves as the social movements. While functioning through social movements, PD usually is more focused on economy, culture and politics and their several expressions in life. RED, on the other side, is much focused on tradition, governance, ecological and social inequity. PD and RED both, in their orientations, are also an unique amalgamation of academic and non-academic activities. In their journey, both need to move very cautiously to avoid the trap of being co-opted by the dominant models of life. Thus both RED and PD, combined as larger TDs, "posit a profound cultural, economic and political transformation of dominant institutions and practices". (Escobar, 2015 c). They also expose the devastating condition of the earth and the relation of beings (among human beings and between human and non-human beings) on this earth. Both of these TDs call for interdependence of all beings and "bring to the fore one of the crucial imperatives of our time : the need to reconnect with each other and with the non-human world". (Escobar, 2015 d).

The precious interaction between RED and PD not only creates new political imaginaries toward a radical transformation, but it also proves that diverse sociality, alternative epistemologies exist and they need to be nurtured. This interaction and exchange is also the result of PD's commitment to engage with other grassroots initiatives and alternative practices. This particular engagement process with other alternatives growing around the world is known as Postdevelopment in Practice,

which is a new dimension in postdevelopment theory. This particular approach claims that postdevelopment is not solely limited to a theoretical critique, it is also a doing - diverse forms of doing exist in postdevelopment theory which can be recognised as postdevelopment in practice.

Postdevelopment in practice identifies spaces which hold 'alternative assemblages' like RED. RED, with its principles and values, creates such a space where many alternative grassroots initiatives, movements make a confluence. Thus RED becomes a potential space to be commensurable with postdevelopment in practice. We will try to build a connecting point here between RED and Postdevelopment in Practice - RED as an expression of postdevelopment in practice.

As Klein and Morreo (2019 c) say, postdevelopment in practice does not end in 'dreaming up alternatives' but "entails examinations of events, lives, practices and knowledge that are different to development". They also say that this particular approach begins by admitting the existence of diverse and alternative realities all over the world, and it commits to further work upon that reality. RED with its action and orientation reflects the ethos of postdevelopment in practice. The conceptual framework of RED not only consists of alternative practices but it also attempts to go beyond modern research and rationality through its alternative thoughts and activities. Following Esteva and Escobar (2017), it admits that " we will not have modern solutions to modern problems because modernity itself already collapsed". RED thus keeps the potentialities to become a concrete manifestation of postdevelopment in practice which can be explored further.

This particular relationship also creates a space for a vision of 'postdevelopmental praxis' which aims to reduce the 'hyper-separation' of practice and theory in RED framework. According to Dhar and Chakraborty (2016 c), "five questions become important in postdevelopmental praxis :

- (a) doing, not just knowing (postdevelopment is not just writing about wrongs, but about righting wrongs [Spivak, 2004 : 523-81])
- (b) doing what, i.e. doing differently, doing postdevelopmentally and not developmentally, marking economic difference
- (c) doing with and not doing on (hence immersion, hence co-researching, co-authoring transformation as in the action research programme in Development Practice)
- (d) doing where, not 'third world' but 'world of the third'
- (e) doing with who : not the underdeveloped, but the different ; not the appropriate(d), but the inappropriate(d) in subaltern subject position ; not the third worldist subject of lack."

A postdevelopmental praxis completely breaks the dualist binary logic system of modernity and attempts to go beyond it in quest of a different world altogether where these epistemologies and institutions of capitalism no more work with dominance. Radical Ecological Democracy (RED), with its values and principles, has emerged from the movements and practices of these spaces which are markedly different from the capitalist world system. These spaces which have been discarded or concealed by the West for so many years actually exist beyond the hierarchies and dominance of colonial modernity. The resistance of these spaces against the capitalist intervention and their alternative forms of living bear the proof of their aspirations to disown the identification with the capitalist ethos and worldviews and to develop their own forms of life which constitute a world which is the 'world of the third' (following Dhar & Chakrabarti, 2016 d) - a different, unappropriated, subaltern world, which is devoid of the ideals and institutions of colonial modernity and have their own values and principles of living.

The concept of RED bears the imprints of the 'world of the third' in its values and principles, is also capable to develop a postdevelopmental praxis(by encountering those five questions) through its orientation and action and thus can set out a journey towards post-capitalist future from a non-capitalist present.

There is no doubt that, in a strong sense, the hegemonic dominance of the colonial modernity over the years and decades have obliged the common people to look for alternative discourses to live lives on their own. "The prevailing pre-transition ethos - consumerism, individualism and anthropocentrism - has given way to another triad : quality of life, human solidarity and ecocentrism". (Raskin, n.d.). Succinctly, postdevelopment and RED are expressions of this transitional ethos. Postdevelopment through its promise of 'reconstruction' has evolved from criticism to action and thus has become an open receptacle which

engage, interact and exchange ideas and thoughts with various alternative discourses. RED, on the other hand, to develop itself conceptually and to act within and beyond the 'world of the third' has created a world-wide network which attempts to engage with several other alternative initiatives all over the world. The network also serves as the platform to let those initiatives come to the forefront to pose alternatives to the capitalist world system. Thus PD and RED are on the same voyage - a voyage towards a 'Pluriverse' - " a world where many worlds can fit". Through its diverse forms of doing, theoretically postdevelopment in its present phase is active to build a notion of pluriverse against the homogenous idea of 'modern' universe. "Notions of pluriverse imply multiple ontologies, multiple perspectives on one world. Universalist discourses and globalist projects are grounded in a unitary ontology and imperialist epistemologies which assume that the world is one, that it is knowable on a global scale within single modes of thought, and is thus manageable and governable in those terms". (Conway and Singh, 2009 c). Conceptually RED is also one such receptacle of multiple worlds with a vision of " rich lives, not the lives of riches", against the universalist project of development. Thus it is in a very reciprocal relationship with the theory of postdevelopment and also is an important part and parcel of the project of 'pluriverse'.

Conclusion

The whole discussion of this thesis finds its roots around the question of emancipation of the earth and its lives from the claustrophobic ambiance of colonial modernity and its various apparatuses and institutions. But one thing which we can't ignore is that the concept of 'emancipation' is a very modernist idea in essence. If there was no 'Enlightenment', possibly we couldn't have any conversation today regarding 'emancipation' and 'liberation'. But, as we discussed earlier, Enlightenment has its own philosophy and propagates its own ideology. While it promotes one particular version of anything, it automatically discards all other versions. So is the case with the idea of 'emancipation' or 'liberation'. Historically the Western modernity has discussed 'emancipation' from the trajectories of freedom and progress. And since its inception, "the concept of progress has been linked with the European Enlightenment and the idea of growth which eventually gave birth to Colonialism that can be identified as the first wave of globalisation. (Shiva, 1998). If we provide a closer attention we can also see that Marxist theory of emancipation also couldn't get out of this trap of "the normative dimension of Enlightenment narratives of progress and development - the epistemology of the North" [Parekh (cited in Cox, 2010 k)], and eventually gets compromised in its quest.

Particularly in Indian civilisation, emancipatory discourse has its own autonomous journey and evolution since the dawn of the civilisation. The eminent examples could be drawn from the spread of Buddhist philosophy in ancient India, Sufi and Bhakti movement in the medieval period and many other movements of those times. These movements had not only set the diverse paths of liberation in Indian civilisation, but their diversities also had an immense impact on the emergence of plural forms of life on the land of India. But as soon as colonialism invaded India, it started to impose the Western rationality and, in turn, seized all other ways of life and notions of emancipation. The two hundred years of colonial rule had obliged India to find escape routes from the sufferings of modern civilisation. As a result, cultivation and exploration of many other emancipatory pathways (through various thoughts and forms of living) had already been started inside colonial India. Some of these well-documented experimentations are Tagore's thoughts on Education and his idea and establishment of 'Sriniketan', Gandhi's idea of 'Swaraj', Mahendralal Sarkar and APC Roy's thoughts on Science and their works on it and there are numerous others also, archived and mostly non-archived. In content and in essence, many of those are now recognised as emancipatory discourses beyond the European rationality and Marxist thought of liberation.

All of these examples and efforts prove the aspiration of liberation among people from an universal idea of emancipation. As long as the journey of modernity elongated these aspirations have become more intense in 'peoplehood'. The most recent examples are the people's struggle and resistance against the intervention of globalisation (the most recent evolution of capitalism and expression of neoliberalism) all around the world. Shiva has rightly explained :

"Globalisation myths are full of tales of growth and how growth removes poverty. What is overlooked in this myth is that globalisation creates growth by the decimation of the environment and local sustainable livelihoods. It, therefore, creates poverty instead of removing it". [Shiva, 1997 (as cited in Cox, 2010 l)]. Ashish Kothari has analysed the nature of globalisation

in India where he described it as economic globalisation in primary stage - " a shift away from an inward-focused model of self-reliance towards a stress on exports and imports, the opening up of various economic sections to foreign investment, liberalisation of regulatory regimes and a move from public section investments to privatisation". (Kothari, 2011). This globalisation has aggravated the difference and inequality among people, among human and non-human beings at a very severe stage. As a result of this huge irreconcilable gap, people are certainly losing their faith in these products and ideals of colonial modernity, and looking forward as well as backward for alternatives, their own autonomous living principles, to save themselves and to save the mother earth.

This is a mini delineation of the historical trajectory of the birth of a Transition Discourse like 'Eco-Swaraj' or 'Radical Ecological Democracy'. Its conceptualisation is a historical task as many glimpses of transformation in grassroots and in several intellectual currents are being encapsulated and will be further attached to this conceptual framework - a conceptual way of non-capitalist living which envisions a journey towards post-capitalist society.

The most important feature of this alternative paradigm is that it speaks for a shift away from the central dominant position of economy and other material things to the non-material aspects of living - "the quality of life, the quality of human solidarity, and the quality of the earth" (Raskin, n.d.) as the foundation for a new life, a better life. Thus this alternative paradigm moves towards a 'Great Transition' in its mission and vision - "search for a deeper basis for human happiness and fulfilment....expressed through diverse cultural traditions". (Raskin, n.d.).

Through all such understanding, principles and its vision for a new world, RED becomes a rightful phenomena to be expressed through the postdevelopment theory. Though I have dared to touch this aspect of the relationship between these two discourses in this thesis, with a very little knowledge of mine, I believe, being an unfinished project RED has much more to offer to postdevelopment theory and vice versa. Their correlation will further enrich the academic arena and most importantly will contribute to the experimental project of postdevelopment theory - the journey towards a pluriverse, which is still in a very nascent stage and demands much more focus and labour on it.

But all of which discussed in this thesis is the emancipatory potential of RED or 'Eco-Swaraj' as a conceptual framework. Its development as a praxis, or its roots, works and impressions in the grassroots are not examined or discussed in this work. Many other nuances of this approach like its connection with religion, spirituality, urbanism are not explored that much till now. There are many aspects of life which can be of immense importance for this paradigm as well as this paradigm also needs to take effort to explore further aspects of life to develop itself as a more manifested and diverse framework of 'Transition Discourse'.

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¹ Colonial modernity considers modernity to be something that was formed after the 'Western impact'.

² A sense of equity and justice popularized with the vision of American dream ; captured by the ideology of capital accumulation and consumerism

³ The concept was given by Neo-Marxist thinker David Harvey

⁴ A famous slogan from the Zapatista movement of Mexico

⁵ The term is used by Ashish Kothari in a conversation with Escobar, Acosta, Demaria and Saleh, to express the false consciousness created by development