

PERSPECTIVE FOR NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT*

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As one in the field of voluntary agencies for more than 25 years now, I have been struck by a lack of adequate communication between two categories of functionaries--- both involved in development. I draw attention to the undisputed gulf between the governmental or semi governmental development workers on one side, and those of what may be called voluntary sector, on the other side. Belonging to the latter category, that is, the voluntary sector, I feel it would be useful to put our concerns, our context and our aspirations in a proper perspective.

The first part of this note is devoted to the context---a changing context of the voluntary sector in India, The second part handles briefly the question of evaluation of Non-Governmental Organisations for Development, which is often viewed in a restricted way as a tool of assessment, whereas it is a potent instrument to work towards an alternative? society in India. The third part is a sum up, and an indication of what needs to be added to this, to render it into at least something of an approximation to a perspective.

I, Voluntary Sector in Development: The changing context

1. Development, new as a concept, but age-old as a happening:

Today, development discussion is so pervasive that we may commit the mistake of ignoring its antecedents. It is necessary to recall that development is nothing new and has a hoary past. Man's efforts to acquire control over the elements; the making of implements; the seeking of mechanical advantage; settled agriculture; development of habitat; the search for motive power and a variety of sources of energy; discoveries and inventions, of new lands, of methods of communication, of quicker movement, whether of men or merchandise; building capacities to prepare for the rainy day---all these are part of the *age-old* development process, even though it was not so termed until recently.

2. The new concept of development: The concept of development, it would appear, can be traced to as far back as 14th century A.D. But it would be realistic to say that the development concept in vogue today, as evolving out of *practice* extensively and reflection continuously, is certainly no older than the post---first World War era. In the classical *and* neo-classical economic discussions, it was always demand and supply, price theory,

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the possibility of over—production, *and* things like that, which bothered top—notchers among economists. Even in the revolution in economic thought associated with J.M.Reynes in the 1930's, it was employment which was the concern, rather than development. The Soviet experiment, it must be conceded, has given a lot of focus to the concept and practice of development. Setting targets to be attained, whether in particular commodities or *in* the totality of national income; goals of self-sufficiency; improvement of health status of groups of population within a specified time horizon---all such exercises received an impetus because of the Soviet experiment. Data base for planning, building up of national income statistics, forecasting growth rates under autonomous regimes and deliberating on interventions needed to speed up what may happen in normal course – these are again of recent vintage

One more word on this. The blurring of the distinction between civilian situations and war theatres and war operations—the concept of total war or total war preparations, to which all activities get geared---gave a boost to planning and development concepts, for better or worse, in the 20th century. There is the view that if there were no war-like endeavours, including defence R & D, then there would have been very little development, too. In this scenario, some nations led, but almost all nations followed suit, changing the nature of the state, of governments and of semi—governmental apparatus, in a way unthinkable at the turn of the century, and in a way irreversible apparently. This has pushed government to a pedestal, at a pace which is by no means normal, both in the planned economies and those swearing by free enterprise. Today United States has as big a public sector as several planned or mixed economies in a relative sense, and even with the collapse of socialism, the public sector in Russia is bound to loom large. The nature of state has indeed undergone a sea—change in this century; in a significant part, the change is because of perceived or real security and military factors..

3. The rush towards commanding heights for government has nothing to do with its civilian capabilities:

This of course became apparent only slowly and retrospectively. In any case the rush had a non-civilian urgency, beyond the pale of relaxed debate. But it became clear that Governmental work develops its own logic *and* dynamics, whether in the developmental field or *in* non developmental operations, as Parkinson tellingly, if funnily, brought out by data on the phenomenal growth of the British Colonial Office during a period when the Empire was being disbanded! The same point is most blatantly thrown up by the collapse of the Soviet experiment, particularly that of aspects like collectivisation of agriculture, but this is also *evidenced* by the dis-enchantment with the proliferating institutions under President *F.D.* Roosevelt's New Deal, or. with the *performance* of Social Democratic governments in *Europe*, or even with that meticulously built and cherished institution of the first post-Second World War British Labour Government, the National Health Scheme, or by our own movement into privatisation without anyone really making more than a murmur of formal protests

4. State apparatus has been good or efficient for spreading ideas: Fine distinctions between races, nations, climatic conditions or between soft states and hard states *can* be drawn, but state power appears efficient only *in* particular situations, for transient historical reasons. One instance : when the world was divided

between colonial powers and colonies, the former having reservoirs of resources to draw from (through, for instance "Home Charges" - so called-, or extortionary land revenue systems), there was an impression of efficiency on the part of imperial states.

Similarly, following the *end* of formal imperialism, the entrenched position of developed industrial west gives the impression—of continued degree of state efficiency in those countries. But this is superficial, as it is the consequence of the historical bequest of a set of complex and exploitative international relationships built during the classical imperial phase of world history. These exploitative international relationships have been carried forward to the post-imperialism world order, *and* they are so potent that, looking back, one could say that for the West, there was no need to continue formal imperialism to be claiming unfair shares of world resources, This is well achieved by such post-second world war unequal arrangements as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and also by keeping the ruling classes of the third world satisfied by such sops as World Bank assistance, International Monetary Fund stand-by arrangements, PL-480--like assistance, debt rescheduling , and so on.

The point being made is that the apparent state efficiency in the west is because of unequal access the west has to resources—earlier through classical imperialism, and now through neo-coonial international relationships. There is not much evidence of state efficiency per se anywhere, without an expense account of sorts, and this is in contrast to the efficiency levels of (say) religious orders in performing not only spiritual roles but in taking up such secular tasks as providing relief at the time of natural disasters.

It was Acharya Vinoba Bhave who dramatised the limitations of state apparatus in spreading ideas,--- *and* development is after all internalisation of ideas---, *and* this the Acharya did by drawing attention to the renunciation by Gautama of his throne to become the Buddha to spread the message of truth, a message which has legions of adherents 2,500 years later- This profound observation of the Acharya on our having to get away from government methods to spread ideas and to make them owned by common people needs to be commended to non-governmental as well as governmental development functionaries.

5. Role of state on a Maximal basis or a Minimal basis?: This is the century *in* which man's control over nature became truly significant, science and technology opening up the possibilities of realisation of decent standards of living that could not even be imagined before.

This also is the century of the common man, of *universal* suffrage, of national self-determination, of recognition of ethnicity *and* ethnic rights, of equality between men and women, of the goal of health for all, *in* short, of human rights for all, irrespective of caste, race colour, language, sex or religion.

"Welfare state" was articulated as the objective of national endeavours almost everywhere outside the socialist world ; in the latter socialism was anyhow towards much the same objective. In this century most nation-states thus rationalised the acquisition of power that was apparently needed for military and security reasons but anyhow seemed adequate to usher in the welfare state; or its equivalent.

But what was the outcome? Only welfare or development of the few was catered to; and inequalities within states, and between states, grew to serious proportions. In the developing world the numbers below

poverty line swelled, and whole groups were trapped in situations of squalor without any hope at all. State power did not prove to be the *appropriate* instrument to ensure universal welfare.

In our context it was Jayaprakash Narayan who underlined a more relevant requirement as a "Welfare Society" in contradistinction with a welfare state, the latter (as a matter of empirical fact) having rarely demonstrated its efficacy to ensure universal welfare but more often becoming coercive and oppressive of individuals and particular groups within, or exploitative of those outside, making use of the state power. Mitterrand's "Socialist" government thus has no compunctions in conducting nuclear tests without any consideration to the implications of this to the ancient communities of the *Pacific* atolls, as much as the Thatcherite government of United Kingdom had no hesitation to make the striking miners bite dust. Our own treatment of tribes in the name of "development" does not give us any glory either. If there is truth in this view point, the efforts of all of us, in government or outside government, have to be evaluated in terms of whether we are contributing towards the building of a welfare society. In this, state and non-government agencies have roles, but the yardstick of evaluating development efforts of either come out clearly.

In any case, during the last fifty years the pendulum definitely swung in favour of minimal power to the state in the place of the predilection for maximal power. But why is the state power actually the God that failed?

6. Over-Centralisation the key factor in the state power proving to be ineffective or its oppression becoming pervasive: It is not again the state power per se necessarily which is the evil. It is the over — centralisation, of which state power is the clearest manifestation, which is at the root of the trouble. While democratic processes *are* in theory adequate to counter the negative aspects of state power and centralization, in practice these processes amount to debating issues rather than applying mid-course corrections through reasoned delving into issues. The completion of quinquennia for change would be far off relative to the seriousness of particular issues, and the Government of the day, whether in the Parliamentary or Presidential form of democracy, adopts a steamroller approach despite debate's. Such fine checks as the right to recall have remained in the realm of ideas, and even if applied seriously may not make such difference to the working of over-centralized complexes.

Leaders of men this century were worried about this problem, and each had comparable answers: all power was to be vested in the Soviets, according to Lenin; self-sufficient villages connected as oceanic circles ; was the right check on state power, according to Gandhiji; and Jayaprakash Narayan gave something of a blueprint for reconstruction of the Indian polity from below, and *became* a whole-hearted votary of Panchayati Raj when the idea was first mooted in Jawaharlal Nehru's time (Jayaprakash Narayan, who could on occasion be a political innocent, went to the extent of supporting the Basic Democrats system of President Ayub Khan of Pakistan, inviting on himself a lot of flak !).

Any how on one thing there was unanimity among thinkers: the tendencies of centralization including statism had to be effectively countered.

7. But anything amended to the state even as part of the decentralised structure misses the substance of

decentralisation: What appears in theory as decentralisation can and has invariably been sucked into a monolith, and this has been attested by our experience with the Panchayati Raj. Can there be anything which is altogether outside the state apparatus to ensure that statism is kept at bay?

Of course, whatever we think of in this context cannot be anarchist, as one may not reject an ordered society but seek a welfare society where the initiatives are with the society, with the common men and women, and not with the state. Jayaprakash Narayan again was the most articulate of our leaders who stressed on the building up of welfare society, starting altogether from the other side of the hedge, eschewing the temptation of deriving from the state fiat.

In this, Jayaprakash Narayan had undoubtedly drawn a lot from Gandhiji's idea of inter-connected village republics, with Satyagraha as their sanction, as also from Rammanohar Lohia's call for permanent civil disobedience. Very significantly, when the first Janata Party Government was formed in 1977—an undoubted contribution of the JP movement, which started in Bihar during 1973—74 and spread to Gujarat, and the rest of India—, Jayaprakash Narayan had no illusions about what the state machinery could achieve even under a dispensation which he blessed. On the other hand, again significantly, he used, whatever energy he was left with— he was already a dying man—to promote local people's committees, particularly in Bihar, to keep a vigil on government, at the centre and the states, of which he was the creator (in a manner of speaking).

8. Citizen initiatives the true answer: Call such initiatives voluntary agencies or non governmental agencies, which are a kind of sovereign bodies in a limited yet profound sense, which are their own decision-makers, the decision-making happening within their small geographical areas of work. Such voluntary agencies of course can be effective, and can (in fact) function only if a total perspective is seen as possessing merit by the governmental and non-governmental functionaries. It is not as if once the perspective is accepted, there will be less for the state to do and more for voluntary agencies. On the other hand there will be more to do by all including state functionaries.

9. Voluntary agencies : The changing concept: Time was when a voluntary agency programmed a welfare scheme for an area or a group of beneficiaries. Until some years back this evoked no question within the area of work or from without. But now it is common place that a voluntary agency is expected to :

- a) strive to help the powerless to acquire power,
- b) help leadership to emerge from the historically neglected sections of population, including women; and
- c) establish a relationship with the community that is marked by transparency from the beginning through exercises that would involve the local community in a whole range of planning and evaluation processes from the very initial stages.
- d) These were not the kind of considerations that propelled voluntary agencies fifty years back, but these have now become the accepted litmus tests -for voluntary agencies. But such invaluable time would not have been lost, if all development workers, whether of government or voluntary agencies, remembered

the Gandhi an thought and tradition properly and that the Bandhian methodology was as relevant in independent India as earlier.

10. Can voluntary agencies be that important in the total Situations?: Voluntary agencies have been somewhat defensive, disclaiming any intention of being a parallel government. To start with there was serious doubt, when our own leaders took over from the 'British in 1947, whether government work was not all that was needed to wipe every tear from every eye—the noble object set by the Father of the Nation. It did take time to understand that there was no denying the immutable laws of state power, whether the rulers are of our own hue or some other. Once this realisation came, voluntary agencies started asserting themselves though still in somewhat muted terms. When the extent to which statism could go was demonstrated during the emergency, there was no longer any need to be defensive, and all innocence had to be shed as regards the potential, and possibility, of state power to do incorrect things.

Is all the above firmly based on facts? A few notable initiatives of voluntary agencies with at least some positive results during the post-emergency period speak louder than any theorizing:

- a) The country-wide agitation against the atrocities on women, and the changes forced in law following the Mathura case—all this was the achievement of a net-work of small
- b) groups of women activists all-over the country.
- c) The successful campaign against the power project in the Silent Valley of Kerala -this was spearheaded by environmentalists.
- d) The dropping of the faulty Forest Bill by Government of India as a consequence of a campaign by voluntary agencies working in the field of forestry and tribal development—all these agencies again came together for this specific demand.

Let it not be thought that the activism of voluntary agencies is only post-emergency phenomenon. Far from that: the Chipko movement in Uttarakhand, for example, dates much earlier. On the other side, several innovative programmes are owed by the country to voluntary agencies: the community health programme of Jamkhed; the work of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad in inculcating scientific temper; and, yes, the whole Bhodan—Gramdan movement, and constructive programmes on the gifted lands of the movement.

If all these did not go further, that is because a common perspective was not, and is not, shared by Government and voluntary agencies.

11. Power of voluntary agencies can be as negative as state power: A final balancing statement is needed. Without accountability built into the organisation from the first day, a voluntary agency may degenerate into something which can conduct itself in a way which could be—let me not mince words—pernicious: In fact the purpose of evaluation is to ensure such tendencies are continuously countered, and my general thesis is that evaluation as an on-going process should be the point of departure for any fledgling voluntary agency. There has been considerable discussion on a code of conduct for voluntary agencies during recent years. Of course such code of conduct must be voluntarily developed by our sector itself and should include an insistence on evaluation

as a built-in process of each voluntary agency, and it should be mandatory for all supporting agencies to have this as a criterion for extending support. For all the expectations from them to be fulfilled, voluntary agencies have to be functioning democracies, linked as oceanic circles as Gandhiji dreamt in the context of village republics.

Would that amount to something like a parallel government through voluntary agencies ? If too much is not read into the expression, and the idea coheres with the established and evolving legal framework, and the principle of non-violence, pray, why not? This would be possible only if the governmental and voluntary sectors view development in a shared perspective, and each does not wait for outsiders to evaluate them, but builds into their on-going processes systems of evaluation.

II. Evaluation of Work of Voluntary Agencies.

12. The general philosophy of evaluation: The community with which a voluntary agency is working is the best evaluator of its work this is the terse view on evaluation. It is not suggested that external inputs would be always redundant, but even to use those properly, on-going internal evaluation as a built-in process is essential. This is not additional work to be shunned; it is part of the work itself. It is not merely a tool to assess it is a tool to build a whole gamut of community development processes leading to a caring society, a welfare society, like : using traditional wisdom; building democracy; awareness creation leadership training; caring for the economically and socially handicapped; working towards equality of women; taking up responsibilities transcending the immediate, like environmental care, larger national concerns, etc. All these are facilitated by evaluation as an on-going process contributing to the building of a welfare society. In the development and planning process, a lead role seems to be inevitable, to start with, to some individuals or groups of individuals. But evaluation has got to be by the community at large, and this has got to be from the very initiation of development work.

While it is not advisable to trace everything to earlier thinking and thinkers, it would seem that accepted ideas on evaluation of today, like Participatory Rural Appraisal., can be read out of Gandhi an thinking- Mass contact and education, constructive programmes and readiness to protest against injustice were integral to the sanction behind the advocated self-sufficient village Republics in the Gandhi an vision of India. Going clearly beyond today's appraisal methodologies, which are more of assessment tools, the Gandhian methodology was geared to community building, besides, of course, assessment of work.

It is to the credit of Rammanohar Lohia that he saw the need for Satyagraha, or civil dis-obedience, even after Independence, and this he recognised far ahead of Jayaprakash Narayan. In all this, these far-sighted leaders were seeking tools of community building with justice, not merely those of assessment.

13. Objectives of evaluation: It is useful, in the light of the above, to state these as, to :

- i. Enable the voluntary agency to move in the direction systematically developed in consultation with the community, and this has to be ensured by the participating community which gets increasingly perceptive and skilled ;
- ii. Identity any relevant factors or dimensions not noticed or taken into account in the beginning, and help

the voluntary agency build appropriate measures in the planning process. Again the role of the community is inevitable as it is the community wisdom and traditions, which, unfortunately, often get ignored in the development process.

- iii. Take note of any new factors that emerge which could not have been foreseen earlier and provide in the planning process commensurate measures, and only an aware community can ensure this and
- iv. Review through inter-action the appropriateness
- v. of the original objectives and streamline the same if the emerging situation warrants the same, and this has necessarily got to be through a reference to the community.

Evaluation is still perceived quite often as an exercise in making an inventory of shortfalls, but the four-fold evaluation process given above is a creative exercise. The above way of looking at evaluation does not seek to push under the carpet short-comings, but goes beyond noting shortfalls, particularly because the plan under implementation has been earlier chalked out through an elaborate exercise involving the people. The aim is to learn from failures as well -as achievements, both being *placed* in a perspective by the evaluation exercise.

14. Conditions for success of evaluation: Any evaluation by an external agency succeeds to the extent internal evaluation has been already built into work- In such internal evaluation, both the project staff and the community itself should be participants through a democratic process. For this to succeed, the requirements are

- i. Periodic assessment of work by staff through their own meetings and documentation.
- ii. Regular reporting of the work to the community through their own institutions.

If these conditions are fulfilled, evaluation by an external agency would be on aspects that cannot be covered by internal evaluation, *and* let us emphasise that, all the time, internal evaluation is building and strengthening the community. The external agency's work would then be most meaningful in terms of the four-fold exercise described earlier. Inevitably there will be overlap between the internal and external evaluation, the former being assessment and community building rolled into one. Both types of evaluation relate to the following questions :

- i. Are the planned activities taking place as envisaged?
- ii. Are the people responding to training and educational inputs as expected ?
- iii. Were the capacities of people under-estimated or over-estimated?
- iv. In case of short-falls, what are the reasons is it facilities and equipment, or training and educational material, or capacities of the trainers and teachers ?
- v. How efficaciously is the community acquiring decision-making ability and using it ? How is this reflected in the institutional frame created and manned by people themselves? Are people in a position to hold their own in discussions with project staff?
- vi. Are the intended's "beneficiaries" turning out to be the actual ones? If not, why?
- vii. Are the people realising that the roots of their problems are embedded in the iniquitous system, and do they

understand that their efforts should be judged on whether they are making a dent on the system?

- viii. Is the community seeing the need to seek allies beyond the project area even to attain their immediate objectives? Are they similarly willing to be allies to others?
- ix. Is the planned time horizon turning out to be realistic?
- x. Are expectations about resource mobilisation being fulfilled
- xi. What is progress of the community in developing leadership of its own?
- xii. What is the progress in lessening dependence on outside resources?

Evaluation, which raises questions, collects and interprets data and assesses the responsiveness and participation of the people to the *programme*, is always an occasion for reaffirmation and renewal, for which further measures or steps are thrown up as a consequence of the evaluation exercise. Equally important, evaluation should bring out documented experience with significance to the wide network of voluntary agencies, both because the tackled problems are not of local concern alone but because the problem resolution needs collaboration from outside. This is in line with the oceanic circle idea of Mahatma Gandhi.

15. Evaluation, a method to set away from top-down approach: It is a truism that concentrated inputs in intensified areas did not lead to percolation of benefits to those most in need. A whole new approach should now be given the fullest scope for people's own initiatives, as also internal evaluation by people and communities themselves, as a way to promote their initiatives. When these succeed, these would lead to more demands from the people on the government sector, not less. Thus, when we say people should have more initiatives we must emphasise that we are not leaving government free to attend to graver matters of state. On the other hand, we are pushing government to attend with urgency to such graver matters of state—the *ordinary* people's problems. Evaluation by people themselves of the work of voluntary agencies is the method towards this. It is perhaps absence of this earlier on an adequate scale which made voluntary agencies fall short of expectations. We have *no* more time to lose.

III. A Sum Up

16. Welfare society through voluntary action: It is absurd attempting construction of the edifice of an alternative society from scratch ignoring the past and history. State is not an appropriate instrument to construct an alternative society, and anything linked with statism and state may have the externals of an alternative but would really become part of the ineffectual monolithic state apparatus. That is why one has to get away from state initiatives and look to voluntary agencies which can build on the ancient communitarian spirit and traditions of small communities. Linkages between such voluntary agencies as Gandhian oceanic circles must be part of the effort because no small community can be an island unto itself.

All this would be possible only if such a perspective is shared by government *and* voluntary agencies, as otherwise the efforts would not even start off. If the perspective is shared, then voluntary agencies would be entitled for a part of national resources as a matter of their right, which is the only meaningful answer to the

myriad question often raised on the dependence of voluntary sector on external resources.

17. What of non-rural sector?: One could fault the above presentation on several scores : firstly, it is silent on the urban sector, where identifiable communities marked by any stable composition may be absent ; secondly, even the assumption that there is still something left of a traditional communitarian spirit and tradition, around which voluntary agencies would be able to work, can be dismissed as something of a myth or as a romantic idea ; and finally what about the corporate sector which seems to be all— pervasive with its visible political clout? Are we setting before ourselves the unachievable task of rolling back history?

We can only attempt a partial answer to these points. One need not be cynical about the view that enough of traditional community spirit still survives in the rural society as this is a matter of observation by several voluntary agencies. Enough has also been demonstrated of the efficaciousness of participatory methods of planning and evaluation as instruments with potential to strengthen the remnants of the communitarian foundations of rural India.

While we are mainly concerned with India, we cannot but take note of similar communitarian stirrings world-wide, Arnold Toynbee, the distinguished historian, towards the end of his life, wrote feelingly of what is still cherished of the nostalgic past of the small communities of Anglia and Northumbria of England. This is of course true of a Wales too. Several explanations *can* be given to the break-up of the Soviet Union, but what may emerge out of any analysis could be the revived community memories of distant past, as an important factor contributing to the break-up. In our own country, we have clear signals of the craving for identities of small communities, which are too often dismissed in a simplistic way as divisive?, as we do not have the resilience to render the nation-state genuinely accommodative of diversities. The important point here is that the identities, self—defined and assertive, belong to small communities with an ancient past, small communities that have been swamped by history over which they had no control equally important is that this is an international phenomenon, which reflects in apparently ephemeral political events, that would in fact bear deeper scrutiny. Internationalism and world solidarity should aim at recognising these deeper craving of small communities for identity, which cannot be swept under some tidy looking blueprint of world order, or ignored in the name of out-dated notions of sovereignty. This vision, and nothing less, should be the perspective for voluntary agencies today- And for the Government, too.

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