

Prismatic View of Transformational Development -Applying A Spiritual Lens

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Abstract

Developmental Transformation represents a paradigm shift in the way development is conceptualized and implemented. Traditionally, development has been viewed primarily through the lens of economic growth and the efficient distribution of resources. This conventional framework emphasizes quantitative metrics such as GDP growth, per capita income, and resource allocation efficiencies. However, this approach often overlooks the deeper, more intrinsic aspects of societal well-being, including the quality of life, equity, and cultural integrity. This paper challenges these traditional metrics of development, advocating for a broader, more inclusive & spiritual approach. It posits that true transformation in development is not merely about enhancing material wealth but involves a profound shift in societal attitudes and structures. This includes rethinking the values that underpin policy decisions, the norms that guide societal behaviour and the institutional frameworks that shape social interactions. Drawing on the rich tapestry of Indian cultural philosophy, particularly the ethos of collective well-being and spiritual richness, this study underscores the potential of these age-old principles to inform and transform contemporary development strategies. Indian philosophy, with its focus on holistic prosperity and an integrated approach to life, offers valuable insights into how societies can evolve in a way that balances material needs with spiritual and communal well-being.

Keywords: Spirituality, Development, Transformation, Social Conscience, Social Change

Introduction

In the midst of an economic renaissance, our nation finds itself on the cusp of transformative change. With a surge in purchasing power, optimism pervades the air, promising boundless opportunities for societal advancement. Yet, beneath this veneer of prosperity, a stark reality persists – countless members of society languish without access to even the most fundamental necessities for a dignified existence. Nifty is soaring high. Waves of euphoria sweep through the nation, infusing every corner with palpable sense of joy and confidence. All around, conversations abuzz with anticipation as India basks in the spotlight, poised to ascend as the next global superpower. She emerges as the heralded next global powerhouse, attracting the attention of the world, collaborating & transforming, with its traditional cum modern outlook. These ventures promise a surge in employment opportunities, increased revenue, igniting renewed hopes for a brighter future. People of Indian origin wield influence in shaping the policies of foreign governments, amplifying India's voice on the global stage. Amidst this upsurge, expectations soar, and the nation stands on the cusp of a revival of its former glory. As India sheds the burdens of the past, there is a palpable sense of liberation and anticipation for the boundless opportunities that lie ahead.

Consequences of the aforementioned developments are a noticeable increase in people's purchasing power. With a heightened ability to spend, individuals have the means to indulge in both essential and luxury goods. To accommodate this newfound wealth, a variety of captivating and alluring options have emerged, providing ample avenues for splurge. Standing prominently amidst the nation's urban

landscape are the sprawling malls and multiplexes, symbolizing modernity and consumerism. Metros in particular, are witnessing a surge in infrastructural projects, with plans in motion for the development of new shopping complexes. These glamorous establishments, with their glistening facades, have become popular destinations for leisure and relaxation, appealing to both the young and the old. A single visit to these modern marvels often entails a significant expenditure, with spending limits reaching unprecedented levels. Besides the malls, there is a profusion of stylish coffee cafes, fashionable restaurants, high-end showrooms exhibiting cutting-edge gadgets, and diverse attractions crafted to allure consumers. This consumer culture carries no stigma; it's universally embraced, recognizing everyone's entitlement to spend their earnings according to their preferences.

However, amidst this seemingly perfect scenario, a closer examination reveals imperfections that mar the picture. While we readily assert our individual rights to spend freely, our focus on fulfilling our fundamental duties appears to be lacking. The reality is not as flawless as it may seem at first glance; flaws become apparent upon deeper introspection. The illusion of prosperity quickly fades away on exiting these opulent establishments and encountering scenes of poverty on the streets. Young children, dressed in rags, can be seen begging, or attempting to earn money by doing miscellaneous odd jobs. Across the road, one might come across skinny women with malnourished babies clinging to them, asking for charity. These poignant scenes of hardship are frequent, highlighting the harsh truth of enduring poverty beneath the facade of wealth. Although government and United Nations Organization statistics on poverty alleviation and human development are accessible, the unmistakable presence of poverty is evident in daily life. While substantial data supports these observations, direct experiences with the less privileged serve as a powerful reminder of the urgent necessity for societal transformation and assistance for those in need. Human Development Reports (HDR) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), reveal that despite substantial economic advancement, certain countries, notably India and China, lag in terms of human development. Released alongside the UN high-level summit, the report emphasizes international cooperation in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), conveying a clear message: progress has been made, yet it remains insufficient globally to meet the MDG targets. Additionally, some nations are experiencing a decline in human development, despite significant economic growth. Still, according to the HDR, there's reason to be optimistic. By bolstering international collaboration and garnering stronger political commitment from governments and communities alike, attaining the MDGs concerning poverty, malnutrition, life expectancy, education, and various other dimensions of human development is achievable. Despite the somewhat arbitrary nature of the MDGs, they serve as crucial yardsticks for gauging advancements in human development. India's efforts to decrease child and infant mortality rates have notably worsened, accompanied by an increase in gender disparities. Despite warnings being raised, the UN high-level summit did not witness any urgency among world leaders, regardless of whether they hailed from affluent or impoverished nations.

These statistics serve as a harsh reality check, shattering the illusions of our idyllic "world of oasis." They disrupt our comforting notion of "I am O.K, You are O.K," which we have shielded ourselves with both physically and mentally. These hard-hitting truths bring to light the existence of thousands of individuals who struggle to afford even two square meals a day, who lack proper clothing, who are illiterate, and who live in dire poverty. They represent segments of society that we have marginalized, relegating them to the periphery of our consciousness. These individuals are often referred to as the unfortunate ones, the "have-nots" of society, or even likened to gangrene, with little concern shown for their well-being. Their destitution evokes a sense of unease and prompts involuntary prayers of gratitude to a higher power.

The predictable aftermath of neglecting the underprivileged is both profound and dire. When children are denied the love, affection, and education they deserve, their innocence is replaced with the weight of exploitation and abuse. Instead of nurturing toys and books, they find solace in juvenile delinquency, eventually graduating to more serious crimes like arson, theft, abduction, rape, murder,

and looting. Likewise, unemployed youth, thwarted in their pursuit of meaningful employment, become disillusioned and ripe for manipulation by cunning opportunists. These individuals exploit the vulnerability of these youth, leading them down a dark path of crime and communal strife. Fuelled by frustration and denied the basic comforts of life, the youth unleash their pent-up fury through acts of brutality and violence.

These are undeniable facts that cannot be ignored. In presenting an absolutist perspective, renowned economist Amartya Sen asserts, "*If there is starvation, hunger..., then poverty is definitely there.*"

The current imperative is to achieve social or developmental transformation, which entails facilitating the attainment of societal wholeness. Development is most definitely not merely a narrow approach of resource allocation. It is a much broader vision of a transformation of society, a shift from stagnant ways of thought & narrow forms of social & economic organizations to new evolved ones. It is encompassed within the same domain as transformation and often associated with the initial underdeveloped characteristics of poverty, unemployment and crime. The objective of development is to establish equitable distribution of resources, alleviate poverty, and foster the establishment of robust and self-sufficient institutions. Development should be understood as facilitating individuals to become self-sufficient. It refers to the comprehensive processes of social change because change and evolution serve as beacons of optimism.

Transformation demands adapting to a new environment. It implies a shift from an undesirable state towards a more idealized one. A departure from conditions of poverty, social injustice, inadequate education & healthcare. It calls for fundamental reconfiguration of social processes.

Developmental transformation involves a change in the way people perceive & societies function. A change in the norms, expectations & institutions. It entails normative changes, questioning existing arrangements & continually seeking alternative & more efficient ones. This more expansive vision does not bring with it a corresponding set of strategies for promoting change but it indicates thrust areas that might have received inadequate attention.

Developmental Transformation is envisioned as a multi-dimensional process that integrates economic planning with cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. This integration promises not only more sustainable economic outcomes but also a more fulfilled and cohesive society. By exploring how these principles can be woven into the fabric of modern development strategies, a roadmap for development can be had, which is inclusive and equitable as well as culturally and spiritually resonant. It can be considered a social conscience, an element of spiritual expression. An eternal link exists between spirituality and social wellbeing. Social transformation thus deals with helping society reach wholeness and harmony.

Nevertheless, it is worth considering whether every culture necessitates a process of transformation. What constitutes a utopian society that all individuals should aspire to, and once attained, obviates the necessity for any subsequent changes? Individuals exist in varying contexts, with multicultural identities, different aspirations and challenges, within a social realm. It is imperative to consider perspectives of all stakeholders because some would definitely bear the brunt of all associated costs. Transformational development denotes a progressive evolutionary state from the past into a better future. Changing contexts demand adjustments and to address the challenges posed by a globalised environment, societies need to adjust to the needs of the new context. Transformation can be inferred as a shift from aberrations to inclusiveness. This necessitates examining spirituality as the facilitator in this evolutionary transit.

The Spiritual Dimension of Transformational Development

Spirituality should be a significant consideration in the examination of social development. Spirituality is the resurgent paradigm which cannot be ignored. Spirituality offers moral and ethical guidelines that direct ethical behavior in society and form the core of social change. Spirituality imbues society with a sense of moral fortitude, prompting responsible actions. Life is inherently

interconnected and cannot be divided into separate pockets. Spiritual realities are not distinct from social facts. Spirituality unites the population as the metaphysical is the reason of all sufferings. Spirituality is the golden thread connecting all humanity.

In the Indian context, embedded within our scriptures are a timeless ethos: the pursuit of universal well-being over the enrichment of a privileged few. Echoed through the ages, the mantra "*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinaha: Sarve Santu Niramaya, Sarve Bhadrani Pashayantu, Ma Kascidh-Dhuhkha Bhaga-Bhava!*" encapsulates this noble aspiration, calling for the happiness, health, and prosperity of all, with none left to languish in suffering. Swami Vivekananda passionately proclaimed that those educated at the expense of the masses yet indifferent to their plight are akin to traitors. He criticized the privileged for overlooking their less fortunate peers, encouraging them to actively participate in easing the challenges encountered by the most vulnerable members of society. In ancient times, the king bore the mantle of responsibility for the welfare of all. His reign was measured not by opulence but by the absence of sorrow and deprivation in his realm. This legacy persists today, fostering the belief that the government alone shoulders the burden of societal care. The original Middle English root of "wealth" ('weal') carried a richer connotation, denoting not just material riches but also well-being, happiness, and prosperity for all. In our modern era of consumerism and material excess, however, our focus has shifted from the well-being of all to the accumulation of possessions for all. This encapsulates the notion of transformational development in a spiritual vision based on ethos of values, compassion and sense of community, far removed from any institutionalized practices, marked by dogmas & entrenched beliefs. The spiritual dimension of religion fosters a sense of spiritual awareness and promotes a society that is spiritually attuned. Humanity seeks a novel spiritual foundation. This heightened spiritual consciousness prompts individuals to see all forms of life as inherently sacred, and fosters a human understanding that actively seeks to enhance the living conditions for all. Spirituality focusses on a collaborative existence because the equation is based on communal relationships and not on any hierarchy & power. Spiritually inclined human beings reverberate with a socially attuned conscience, calling out against injustices.

Society's true advancement surpasses mere infrastructure. It isn't measured by the proliferation of shopping malls or the towering presence of high-rise buildings, which merely symbolize the same essence. Development cannot be gauged by the number of people donning branded attire or possessing the latest camera-equipped smartphones. These represent consumerism and materialism, amplified by media, advertising, accessible financing, and retailers. Genuine development involves a broader outlook—a societal transition from stagnant patterns of thinking and economic frameworks to dynamic, enriching ones. It requires a fundamental shift in societal values, expectations, and institutions. Developmental transformation entails not only embracing change but also questioning existing structures and continually seeking alternative, more efficient ones. This broad perspective on development doesn't advocate for a rigid set of strategies to drive change, but rather highlights areas that might have been neglected. Take education, for example—it's crucial not just for building "human capital" but also for nurturing a scientific mindset, inspiring individuals to embrace flexible, innovative problem-solving approaches. Essentially, authentic development nurtures a fundamental change in people's thinking and societal operations. It promotes a move away from fixed paradigms towards a more adaptable and forward-thinking mindset. Globalization & technological advancements have brought about awareness of similarities of common values and issues. The world has become aware of a spiritual realm to which humanity can relate and which can contribute towards a social transformation. It is imperative to recognize that the privileged amongst us, do not have the luxury of choice in this matter. Urgent action is demanded from each of us by the society. We envision a society where education is universal, employment opportunities flourish, women are safe and honoured and cultural diversity is embraced. Above all, we aspire to be a society where humanity prevails and acts of barbarism are inconceivable.

Change doesn't always have to be revolutionary; it can begin with gradual, deliberate shifts targeting specific areas of improvement. Yet, the collective impact of these changes over time can be revolutionary indeed. The epochal wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi, '*You must be the change you want to see in the world*' is relevant here. This change must start at a personal level, with a firm understanding that our actions are not mere acts of charity but essential contributions to societal well-being. This paper calls for a reassessment of priorities. As we relish the present, we must also consider the legacy we leave behind for future generations. With abundant resources and enthusiasm at our disposal, we cannot turn a blind eye to the suffering of the majority. Certain suggestive avenues, though definitely not exhaustive for individual and collective contribution are summarized below. Important to note is that all efforts should be rooted in values for sustained and meaningful impact:

- Backing adult literacy initiatives.
- Offering elementary education to children.
- Creating job prospects for young people.
- Nurturing entrepreneurship.
- Enforcing vocational schemes for women.
- Advocating for health and sanitation campaigns.
- Participating in community enhancement endeavours.
- Preserving the natural environment.
- Guaranteeing access to public amenities.
- Striving to eliminate poverty.
- Tackling gender inequality.

Conclusion

The problem of my own bread is a material issue, but the problem of my neighbour's bread is a spiritual problem (Bosch, 1991). Developmental Transformation, therefore, entails a dynamic and iterative process of questioning, adjusting, and realigning societal goals and methods. It recognizes that development is not a linear path of progress but a complex interplay of various factors that need constant evaluation and adjustment. By embracing a more holistic approach that integrates economic, social, and cultural dimensions, this theoretical framework seeks to promote a more inclusive and sustainable development paradigm. This paper serves as a poignant appeal to the privileged echelons of society, urging them to introspect and take decisive action towards the upliftment of the marginalized. It underscores the imperative for collective responsibility in ensuring the well-being of all citizens, for true development can only be realized when prosperity is inclusive. It is not merely a matter of choice; it is a moral obligation that demands our unwavering commitment. Failure to address the plight of the marginalized carries profound repercussions, not only for those directly affected but for the fabric of the whole society. Let us heed this call to action, for in the empowerment of the marginalized lies the path to genuine progress and societal flourishing. Only when every member of our society is afforded the opportunity to thrive can we truly claim to have achieved development in its truest sense. The notion of a "developed and harmonious" society may appear too farfetched to some, especially amidst the harsh realities of poverty and exploitation. Yet, as Alfred Tennyson so eloquently pondered, "*Do we not live in dreams?*" Without daring to envision such a future, how can we summon the determination needed to pursue it? Society issues a resounding call to action. In these turbulent times, great expectations weigh upon us. We are the vanguards of transition, the sculptors of our reality. We possess the transformative power to effect change. As was once suggested very aptly by Mr. Kiran Karnik, President of Nasscom, '*If bread eludes us today, why not strive for cake tomorrow?*'.

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