

Backwardness

P.G. 2nd Sem

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Introduction:

The discussion on backwardness has many dimensions, the term has been defined in the context of conditions existing in the respective countries. In the global perspective the term Backwardness has been camouflaged by the analysts of different nations of the world. The term denotes or spreads out in various ways depending on its wise applicability like, underdeveloped/ developing/depressed/ havenots /lagging/poor/unbalanced and socially backward economy/less developed countries (L.D.C.). These are nothing but different connotations given to a very naked expression 'hunger' - a substandard level of human existence. To give proper justice to that depressed class, one may need humanitarian approach to analyse them.

Peter Haggett said "the term 'backward' causes natural irritation to readers in those countries it is used to describe and is logically unsatisfying since the situation in such countries is a dynamic one and most of them are moving forward quickly" (Haggett, 1975).

In 1951, the United Nations groups of experts expressed "we have had some difficulty in interpreting the term 'underdeveloped countries'. We use it to mean countries in which per • capita real income is low when compared with the per capita real income of the United States of America, Canada, Australia and Western Europe. In this sense an adequate synonym would be poor countries" (United Nations, 1951). These experts dealt with only per capita income and on that basis four categories have been defined. The nations having per capita income more than \$1,000 are highly developed countries, like U.S.A., Canada, Switzerland.

Eugene Staley in his book, "**The future of underdeveloped countries**" has defined the **underdeveloped countries** as "**A country characterised** (1) by mass poverty which is chronic and not the result of some temporary misfortune and (2) by obsolete methods of production and social organisation, which means that the poverty is not entirely due to poor natural resources and hence could presumably be lessened by methods already proved in other countries" (Staley, 1954). Eugene Staley measured the term 'backwardness' taking into consideration some very important criteria other than per capita income. He pointed out that the key factor of underdevelopment is 'masspoverty' which is again caused by obsolete methods of production and social organisation. Underdevelopment is judged in worldly sense not in

cultural or spiritual level. According to him, poverty embraces almost all problems of backwardness. The basic criteria in this respect are illiteracy, ill health, lack of transportation, obsolete method of agriculture and many other technological, economic and social problems, so a comprehensive development scheme is necessary to cross the hurdle of poverty. To overcome the gulf existing between an endless 'have nots' and a very few privileged class - the conscious human race is honestly striding ahead to guess the root of the trends for the well being of the poor. This sense is the force of driving motivation of the Economists or the Social Scientists of the affluent class to consider the potentialities of the majority of the world population living at substandard inhuman condition. Sometimes the limit of their area is arbitrarily drawn. So, some reasonable criteria are shown for definite delimitation of the backward nations.

According to Bowne, the majority of the population in underdeveloped countries undergo desperate struggle merely to eke out a bare existence and obtaining a minimum ratio of food, water, clothing and often shelter. If these elementary needs are not satisfied, the countless millions living in backward lands cannot contribute their full share to the economic and spiritual welfare of the world. Bowne also considered psychological factor as a measure of development, that is interest of the people to take part in economic progress.

Alfred Bowne offered four criteria for the level of underdevelopment, (a) low real income per capita, (b) low rate reproducible capital per capita and per unit of area, (c) a favourable ratio of unused resources to population, (d) a scarcity of entrepreneurial qualities in the population. In later age Bowne suggested some other criteria of underdevelopment like (1) high birth rate, (2) life expectancy from 30 to 50 years, (3) the work span of adult in U.D.C. is shorter in comparison to D.C., (4) they are chiefly agrarian rural people, (5) primitive method of agriculture is practised there, (6) backward character reveals from low protein intake, (7) low level of national income, (8) in backward countries, the administrative staff are not fully developed

The countries of the Third World exhibit invariably the existence of mass poverty. There is no definite or single norm to measure the poverty in all nations, because it varies greatly from nation to nation - country to country even from region to region - so the term is reasonably expressed as **(1) absolute and (2) relative poverty**. Absolute poverty is expressed in the level of minimum requirements of food, clothing and shelter whereas relative poverty is indicated even in few pockets of the richest country of the world like U.S.A. where it is better to be

termed as 'reasonable level of living'. Poverty is miserably strewn in the areas of the 'Third World' so as to make it a very important index of 'Backwardness'. Anyway, economic development of a country is primarily concerned with the causes and consequences of 'Poverty of Nation'. To identify the nature of poverty the first factor to start with is the difference in-per capita national income. Different approaches were made to examine the * slow growth rate and economic stagnation of the poor nation.

The proper approach to alleviate poverty and hunger is obviously Lho removal of inequalities. Poverty is very often relative and varies from place to place. Alleviation of poverty is a must, for eradication of backwardness. In all cases, poverty is correlated with G.N.P. per person to define the common characteristics of the poor people of the world. Some factors are found to be similar everywhere. According to **World Development Report (1980) they are as follows:**

- (1) Extremely low income.
- (2) Greater number of children under ton - mainly from large families.
- (3) More than three quarters of them live in rural areas, the rest in urban slums - but almost all in very crowded conditions.
- (4) Many poor families own a small piece of land, some animals or some tools.
- (5) They live by working long hours - men, women and children alike as farmers, vendors and artisans or hired workers.
- (6) As much as four-fifth of their income is consumed as food. Many of them are malnourished to the point where their ability to work hard is reduced, the physical and mental development of their children.

According to World Development Report (1980), the number of people living in absolute poverty is 780 million and this group of unprivileged section of the society continues to remain as poor from generation to generation. It is reasonable that the economists would not dispute that the inequality increases in the backward countries due to meagre technological innovation. However, the following indices of **underdevelopment based on the report of World Bank are being accepted.**

- (1) Low G.N.P. per person.
- (2) Low life expectancy rate.
- (3) Illiteracy.
- (4) 111 health/disease/high death rate specially in case of children.
- (5) Abnormal population growth.
- (6) Climatic differences indicating low productivity.
- (7) Malnutrition.
- (8) Poor quality of life.
- (9) Lack of technological innovation.
- (10) Institutional constraint.
- (11) Inexhaustive planning process.

FACTORS OF BACKWARDNESS:

Jagdish Bhagwati described sarcastically the poor nation as "it is the most emotive word, 'backward', that gets closest to the essence of their problem" (Bhagwati, 1971). According to him nearly two thirds of the population of the Developing World live with different socio-

economic problems like substandard income, illiteracy, bad-housing, lack of medical care and malnutrition. Most of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America are- the victims of these problems. Income inequality is the fundamental factor which exists between 'have' and 'have nots'. But according to Bhagwati "The selection of countries to be classified as underdeveloped is necessarily arbitrary, those with per capita income below the world mean seem to qualify without difficulty. Asia is the. most depressed area trailing behind Africa, the near East and Latin American in that order" (Bhagawati, 1971). Explaining the peculiar clustering of underdevelopment in the world tropical and semitropical zone he pin pointed the climatic influence which should be the beginning of geographical approach. Uncomfortable heat causes less industrious, whimsii cal nature of rain specially hazardous monsoon makes the lives of the people less smooth and less prosperous, resulting to low productivity, low national income and ultimately converging to hunger/poverty/backward/underdeveloped, now a polished expression 'developing'. As backwardness is relative, it should always be perceived in contrast to the Developed Countries. Richard G. Wilkinson expressed that there is a link between poverty and development, giving stress on ecological equilibrium. He said "the fundamental problems of underdeveloped countries in need of development are more likely to be technical than strictly economic" (Wilkinson, 1973). He thinks that I development emerges out of poverty and ecological equilibrium is needed for maintaining economic and social stability. As chronic underemployment, low per capita income, low productivity, backward technique are the primary causes of backwardness, so the concerned countries should depend on their own resources to shift from primary production to industrial production, by formulating proper planning process. Gadgil emphasised on capital resources expressing that the most salient feature of backward economy is the dearth of capital resources. He further expressed that slow progress and inexhaustive planning are also the hindrances of rapid economic growth. On the basis of technological progress he categorised the level of development as (1) advanced, (2) intermediate and (3) backward. Debesh Bhattacharjee has discussed the role of education in developmental programme of the backward nation. Eradication of illiteracy should be the main motto of the economists and sociologists. Over the views of the different analysts he commented that "the most important factor behind any rise in productivity is improved human competence, and since human competence is the result of education, research and development, the presumption is strong that these are the factors on which technical progress ultimately hinges" (Bhattacharjee, 1972). Famine as one of the major factors of backwardness is a frequent visitor to the depressed region, and it has a catastrophic effect on the national economy. Poverty and famine are the other side of the same coin. Backwardness is also recognised in extreme

climatic or meteorological condition like drought and flood. They' bring famine, poverty, malnutrition, low standard of living and end to backwardness. Andre Beteille expressed' one of the causes of inequality is the property, saying that "property is a basis of inequality not only in the United States, but also in a large numbbr of both advanced and backward societies" (Andre, 1977). Geographers should pay more stress to inequalities as it is the manifestation of spatial differentiation, though this degree of differentiation is very much relative in relation to the economic development. On the other hand economic growth depends on geographic specialization mainly in producing raw material, food, even industrial activities. The well being of the people depends on their ability to exploit the social and economic opportunities available to them. The Geographers should be concerned about the utilisation of the fruits of innovation, in the field of both primary production and technological progress. Spatial distribution of ununiformity indicates that we live in an unequal world. "Perhaps the most important feature of the geography of social inequality is that, the rich are generally spatially segregated from the poor. The segregation is seen nationally, regionally and locally" (Coates et[^] al., 1977). Underdevelopment is also' associated with 'Trade pattern1 and the backward countries have subsistence economy and advanced countries have specialized commercial economics. "The fundamental problem facing underdeveloped countries is their dependent relationships with the developed countries" (Coates et al., 1977). The backward nations are trying hard to cope with the highly technologically advanced countries, but in their own surrounding, they are entrapped with naked facts of life, substandard living condition, and the out come is very slow progress. "Inequality is not a matter of geography, and greed knows no boundary" (Lean, 1978). Lean's view opposes the previous analyst, expressing that inequality can exist beyond the geographical limit. He suggested that to alleviate the depressed condition economic growth as well as charity from the rich world is required. It will be relevent to mark KeithChapman's (1979) view on geographical spread of economic growth. He says that "on an international level, the various disparities between rich and poor countries is one of the most divisive aspects of the world order" (Keith, 1979). The motivation played against the unbalanced spatial growth is the availability of -resources naturally concentrated to some geographical localities.

(i) Capital Deficiency:

Capital is of crucial importance for economic growth, but this is what the under-developed countries lack.

With the low level of national output much saving is not possible but whatever there is, it is frittered away in conspicuous consumption and extravagance in social ceremonies or is invested in real estate or jewellery. Lack of sufficient capital handicaps all productive enterprise and inhibits economic growth. Such countries are caught up in a vicious circle of poverty explained below.

(ii) Lack of Entrepreneurial and Managerial Talent:

It is the bold and prudent entrepreneur and a wise manager who makes success of a business enterprise. Lack of this talent is responsible for missing available opportunities of profitable investment. Hence such countries remain economically backward.

(iii) Lack of Skilled Personnel and Technical Know-how:

Another very important bottleneck in the way of economic growth is the scarcity of technical know-how and skilled personnel. These elements of productive power take long in building up and foreign technicians are very costly. Hence, the underdeveloped countries remain underdeveloped.

(iv) Limited Size of the Market:

The purchasing power of the people is very low on account of their proverbial poverty. Hence the productive enterprises are handicapped in the sale of goods. Only an expanding market can provide a fruitful field for profitable investment and result in economic development of the country.

(v) Weak Infrastructure:

The backward countries lack an adequate and efficient means of transport and communications, a well-organised and developed banking system and adequate facilities for technical education. Without these no country can develop economically. Lack of adequate infrastructure is a big abstracted to economic growth.

(vi) Social and Institutional Set-up:

Social customs and attitudes of the people of backward countries are a great bar to economic progress. Conservatism, superstition, lack of ambition, undue regard for custom and status are a drag on economic progress. Economic backwardness in India is in no small measure due to

joint family system, caste system, peculiar laws of inheritance and the other-worldly attitude of the people.

(vii) Alien Rule:

Most of these countries have been under foreign rule which has kept them down. The foreign rulers could not be expected to take any genuine interest in the economic regeneration of the people. Economic backwardness of India may be largely attributed to the policies followed by its British rulers.

(viii) Growing Population: The explosive rate of population growth in the backward countries undoubtedly retards their economic growth. Whatever development takes place is swallowed up by the rising tide of population. The fruits of development are hardly sufficient to feed the torrent of babies.

(ix) Preponderance of Agriculture:

The bulk of the population is engaged in agriculture which is carried on in a primitive manner. Naturally the national income remains at a low level. Economic development cannot be brought about in the absence of rapid industrialization.

What is Social justice??

"Social justice is a broad term which includes economic justice and many things else. Economic justice is a necessary condition of social equality and may often be a sufficient condition also" (Datta, 1982). While discussing about social and economic inequalities, Dr. Datta analysed different economist's like Keynes and Rawl's, theories on full employment and equal distribution, economic opportunities etc. All these ' theories were postulated for finding measures to strike off inequalities. He showed how the inequalities would be tapered by illustrating a diagrammatic sketch of a realistic situation (Fig. 1). Situation I - There are two clusters of people 'A and 'B'. 'B' below the poverty line and small cluster 'A' above it. Situation II - By some infrastructural innovation 'B' enriches and becomes well off. So, to 'A', 'B' climbs over the poverty line. 'A' also goes further up so inequality increases. Rawls theory justifies the increase of inequality, but Rawl ignored the probable third situation where 'A1 will come down and 'B' will go further up so to minimise the inequalities due to Government's initiation and a suitable distribution of 'fiscal burden'. So social security from the Government's interference is necessary to remove the inequality, poverty or backwardness.