

Elites in the Developing Countries

Abstract

There is no context in which the idea of elites is invoked more frequently at the present time than in discussions of the problems 'underdeveloped countries'. Economic, political or other changes first bring about modifications in the prestige and power of different social groups, and those groups which are increasing their power then seek to take control of the changes. In the present day developing countries, therefore, we have an excellent opportunity to examine the social forces which are creating new elites, as well as the activities of the elites ⁽¹⁾

Each of these countries has, of course, some unique features and problems arising from its history, its geographical situation, or its particular relationships with other nations, which may have a greater or lesser influence upon its development; but there are also many important characteristics which are either common to all the underdeveloped countries.

Keywords: Elites, Developing Countries, Modernization.

Introduction

It is the political elite in the underdeveloped countries which has been pre-eminent in deciding the course of their development. The origins of this elite are to be found, in most cases, in one or other two groups mentioned earlier- the nationalist leaders, and the revolutionary intellectuals – which in some cases are associated. In almost all the Asian and African countries intellectuals have taken a prominent part in the struggles against colonial rule.

In India who can be described as intellectuals in the modern, secular sense are in any consistent, radical or effective way critics of their society, or creators of new social doctrines which can inspire popular action, and for the most part the influence of the intellectuals is assimilated to that of the new middle classes as a whole, whose style of life brings about small and gradual changes in taste and manners⁽²⁾

The existence of a hereditary intellectual elite- the Brahmins- from which many of the modern intellectuals come, ensures that they remain attached in manifold ways to the religious and social ideals of the traditional society: and even the recruitment to intellectual occupations from a wider social area, which might tend to diminish this attachment, has so far failed to produce a self- confident, modern intellectual class, which could assume a leading position, because of the divisive forces of caste and religious loyalties.⁽³⁾

Elites and Developing Countries

Who are the elite? Elite are the most influential and prestigious stratum in a society. The "elite" are those persons who are recognized as outstanding leaders in a given field. Thus, there are political, religious, scientific, business and artistic elite. Pareto, Mosca, C. Wright Mills, Lasswell, Mannheim, Bottomore, etc, have given different definitions. Elite theory's origins lie most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936). Mosca emphasized the ways in which tiny minorities out-organize and outwit large majorities, adding that "political classes" – Mosca's term for political elites – usually have "a certain material, intellectual, or even moral superiority" over those they govern ⁽⁴⁾

Pareto postulated that in a society with truly unrestricted social mobility, elites would consist of the most talented and deserving individuals; but in actual societies elites are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who usually enjoy important advantages such as inherited wealth and family connections. Pareto sketched alternating types of governing elites, which he likened, following Machiavelli, to lions and foxes. Michels rooted elites ("oligarchies") in the need of large organizations for leaders and experts in order to operate efficiently; as these individuals gain control of funds, information flows, promotions, and other aspects of organizational functioning power becomes concentrated in their hands ⁽⁵⁾



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A developing country, also called a lower developed country, is a nation with an underdeveloped industrial base, and low Human Development Index (HDI) relative to other countries.^[6] On the other hand, since the late 1990s developing countries tended to demonstrate higher growth rates than the developed ones.^[7] There is no universal, agreed-upon criterion for what makes a country developing versus developed and which countries fit these two categories,^[8] although there are general reference points such as a nation's GDP per capita compared to other nations. Also, the general term *less-developed country* should not be confused with the specific least developed country. Countries with more advanced economies than other developing nations but that have not yet demonstrated signs of a developed country, are often categorized under the term newly industrialized countries.^[9]

According to authors such as Walt Whitman Rostow, developing countries are in transition from traditional lifestyles towards the modern lifestyle which began in the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries. Contents People used to speak of the "underdeveloped" countries of the "Third World". Now, "Less-Developed Countries", or "LDCs" is seen as the more polite term to use. In the days of the Cold War, the "First World" were the nations of the West that were allied with the United States and called themselves the "free world", as against the "Second World", the "Communist Bloc" that was dominated by the Soviet Union. Those two powers competed for influence and dominance in the weaker, less-developed nations of the "Third World".⁽¹⁰⁾

After the fall of the Soviet Union, many people no longer saw the world in terms of such rigid divisions, and people started talking about the LDCs -- whose severe economic and political problems stayed just as bad as they had been under any other name. Almost all of the world's Less-Developed Countries were once colonial possessions of one or more of the great European powers: England, France or Spain (or, to a lesser extent, Portugal, Italy, Germany or Belgium). Their independence was mostly obtained at some point in the 20th century. India removed itself from British rule in the 1940s; many of the nations of West Africa became independent as recently as the 1960s. The former Spanish colonies of South and Central America became independent in the 19th century -- however, many argue that colonial rule there was, in effect, transferred from Spain to the United States.⁽¹¹⁾

Elites in the Developing Countries

In such conditions the importance of elites, who are capable of inspiring effective action, of controlling and directing events, is greatly enhanced. It is further enhanced by the lack of experience in social and political organization of the mass of the population who have in many cases been maintained in subjection and inactivity by autocratic rulers.⁽¹²⁾ Some of the important elite groups have been distinguished in a study of industrialization, which suggests that there are five ideal types of elites, who customarily take the leadership of the industrialization process

1. A dynastic elite.
2. The middle class.

3. The revolutionary intellectuals.
4. The colonial administrators.
5. The nationalist leaders.

Two of these elites have been relatively unimportant in the most recent period. The colonial administrators created, in many countries of Asia and Africa, some of the prerequisites for industrial development, by establishing an effective administration and judiciary, introducing modern education etc.⁽¹³⁾

The general problems of the underdeveloped countries arise largely from the accelerated pace of industrialization which is sought, and in varying degrees achieved, and which has been provoked to a considerable extent by the example of those countries which are already industrialized; from the rapid growth of population resulting from the improvement of medical care and other welfare services; and from the social and political conditions in which economic development has to take place. The industrialization of the Western countries began, in most cases in far more favorable conditions of economic organization, political cohesion and stability, as well as being a more protracted and leisurely process.⁽¹⁴⁾

Elites, Social Change and Modernization in Developing Countries

For analyzing this problem, we can divide the elite in two groups:

1. Development system elite,
2. Maintenance system elite.

They create new institutions or change old institutions to remove obstacles to economic and social growth. We could say, development system elite are characterized by allegiance to economic and social progress, ideological commitment, and constant policies. The maintenance system elite, by contrast, are those who give high priority to maintaining and preserving the existing political system instead of advocating economic and social change. They believe in compromise among competing political and interest groups.⁽¹⁵⁾

The present political elites in the developing countries, who have more vested interests to achieve, belong more to maintenance system than to development system, with the result that they have failed to reconstruct the nation's social and economic framework to develop and implement radical economic policies and social programmes. Yet, the political elite, being the planners and decision-makers, play a very significant role in the countries development. It may even be conceded that much of the development in the developing countries is due to the efforts of the 'activist' elite we had in the last few decades.⁽¹⁶⁾

But this also is a fact that if the development has as yet reached only its half-way point, it is because our political elite have proved to be a barrier in the process of modernization of the society in several ways. Their discriminatory attitude, blind conformity to tradition, indifference to development, their vested interests, political rivalries, factionalism and corruption have adversely affected the techno-social changes taking place in the society. Words and promises can never raise the standards of living of an impoverished people. The elite have to organize specific campaigns with specific objectives. It should

not be a snowballing of public opinion. Campaigns should not be based on advertising gimmicks⁽¹⁷⁾

Elites and Poverty in Developing Countries-

Why do we need even to raise these issues in relation to developing countries when so much attention has apparently been paid to the political and policy dimensions of poverty over so many decades? There are two parts to the answer, both relating to the important role that international aid and development organizations play in defining the poverty and anti-poverty agendas in so many contemporary poor countries. . Indirectly and unwittingly, they may thereby reduce the level of real political commitment to anti-poverty programmes, in two ways:

First, they establish standard international concepts and definitions of poverty that lack the potential to mobilize national elites morally and politically against poverty. Second, they propagate a narrow, economists view of the political process that leads to consistent underestimation of the political support for public anti-poverty action and consistent exaggeration of the threats and obstacles that face those governments that engage themselves seriously against poverty.⁽¹⁸⁾

There appear to be some related reasons why the perceptions that elites have of poverty are neither fixed nor precise reflections of the empirical 'realities' of poverty, but rather amenable to persuasive re-interpretation.

First, elites in developing countries generally know rather little about the poor. This is a pejorative stereotype that was largely born out by our interviews. Second, the concept of 'poverty' - and related notions such as 'deprivation' and 'destitution' - are imprecise in ordinary language. There is a common core interpretation of the word 'poverty' in English, roughly captured by the phrase 'lacking a socially acceptable level of income or material possessions'. But meaningful uses of the term stray far beyond that core. Third, there is scope to use moral arguments to motivate developing country elites to support positive action on poverty because of the ambiguities in their relationships to the poor. These relationships vary widely from country to country⁽¹⁹⁾

The biggest contrast that struck us was in the spatial relationships of elites to poor in Bangladesh and South Africa respectively. The Bangladeshi elites may have little direct interaction with the poor, but cannot avoid being in close proximity to them. Even in the elite residential areas of Dhaka, the poor are on the streets by day and camping out by night. By contrast, most South African elites live - and sometimes work - in areas where the poor are never seen. Despite these national differences, we can make some generalizations. The elites of most developing countries are far less economically dependent on the labor of the poor than those whom Charles Booth addressed in late nineteenth century Britain.⁽²⁰⁾

The elites of most contemporary developing countries are less likely to be large employers. More are dependent on politics and state service or on business activities like trading, banking or other types of services that employ relatively few people. Equally, a lower proportion of the poor are employed by large-scale capitalists. The poor are more likely to be

unemployed, to be engaged in small-scale production or business, rural or urban, or to be employed in very small-scale enterprises.⁽²¹⁾

All our elites see crime as a problem in terms of their daily lives. White South African elites are obsessed with the subject, and do view measures to tackle poverty as a potential solution. But the 'poverty' they link to crime is the unemployment of young men in the Black townships. The much more acute poverty of the rural Black population is barely recognized, and not seen as problematic in the same way. At the other end of the scale, Bangladeshi elites do not connect crime closely with poverty. The crime that concerns them is attributed not to the poor - who are generally described in patronizing but benign terms - but to gangs and networks of urban thugs from 'middling' background, many of them connected to local politicians and to the law enforcement agencies⁽²²⁾

Elites and Nationalism in Developing Countries

The leaders of nationalist movements obviously from one of the most important elite groups in the Asian and African countries, where the impetus for economic development came originally from the struggles for political independence. These leaders may be the products of Western Universities and radical student movements, of indigenous business and professional communities, or of traditional elite groups, but they resemble each other in the fact that their power derives from leadership of a political party which is based upon, and expresses, nationalist sentiment.⁽²³⁾

The nationalism of the developing countries is a consequence of the struggle for independence from alien rulers, and also of the nature of the problems which confront these countries after independence is gained; especially the need to create or consolidate a nation out of related but still separate tribal or linguistic groups, and the economic need to plan on a national scale the industrial development of the country. This is not to say that nationalism is the only 'political' formula, which sustains these ruling elites. In Africa, nationalism is infused with socialistic doctrines on one hand, and with the ideas of pan-Africanism, taking shape in actual projects of federation, on the other. Similarly, in most of the Asian countries nationalism has a strongly socialistic cast, and in some countries of the Middle East and Latin America the growth of nationalism is associated with socialism by reason of its opposition to foreign business interests. One factor which makes nationalism, by itself, an ambiguous doctrine for the political rulers of the underdeveloped countries is that it may be backward- looking and seek to revive traditional institutions and traditional elites, especially in those societies which have preserved their own ancient civilization. A classical instance of this pattern of in the revival of Hinduism in India, which was both used and furthered by Gandhi in creating a mass movement Of opposition to British rule; but other instances can be found in some Arab countries, in Pakistan, and even in some parts of Africa, where Islam has provided a rallying point for opponents of colonial rule.⁽²⁴⁾

Thus, although the nationalist political leaders have powerful forces on their side- the memories and rituals of the struggle for

independence, the desire to create a viable nation and the compelling need for national planning of economic life- they also confront serious difficulties, which arise from the conflict between traditionalist and modernists within their own ranks and in the society at large, from the lack of precision and coherence in the doctrines upon which they base, in part, their authority, and from the moral deterioration which is likely to occur among the leading cadres and officials of the ruling party in a one- party system of government, in so far as the actions of individuals are not strictly controlled either by a traditional code of behavior or by a clear and vigorous social doctrine.⁽²⁵⁾

Elites and Globalization in Developing Countries

In many respects, government officials are to the economic development of the new nations, what the capitalist entrepreneurs were to the economic development of Western societies. But for all their importance their power is more closely circumscribed. The capitalist entrepreneurs were an independent class whose influence spread through government and administration, while the officials are the subordinates of political leaders, there is no more a managerial or bureaucratic revolution in the underdeveloped countries than there is in the advanced industrial societies.⁽²⁶⁾

Late capitalist culture and economy inform and reinforce each other reciprocally. Global capitalist elites maintain hegemony through wielding their power and wealth in ways that promote continued concentration of power and wealth in their own hands, thereby, furthering their ability to reproduce and reinforce hegemonic economic and political relationships. The global concentration of wealth and power in the hands of transnational's and corporate and banking elites furthers the ability of capital to advance its economic and cultural agenda.⁽²⁷⁾

Growing income gaps between the rich and poor provide evidence that this concentration is occurring, and these gaps have never been greater than at this point in time. During the last decade of the 20th century, despite promises that globalization would reduce poverty if developing countries would stay the neoliberal course, the numbers of those in dire poverty grew by almost 100 million people at the same time that world income increased by an average of 2.5 percent annually. Development proponents often point to relative rates of economic growth as an indication of economic convergence, saying that those developing countries experiencing high growth rates will catch up with the industrial world in terms of living standards.⁽²⁸⁾

There is also a problem with those who speak for given Global South countries. At the IMF, finance ministers and central bank governors govern the institution; at the WTO, trade ministers represent their countries. Representatives sent to each of these institutions tend to represent a select constituency within each country they represent: trade ministers representing the interests of the business community and finance ministers and central bank governors representing the financial community. The interests of a small minority -- and a minority whose interests closely approximate those of the business and financial communities in the developed world -- are advanced over the interests of the vast majority of the

population of many countries. This situation is profoundly undemocratic. Concerns for the environment and social justice are virtually ignored while the interests of national elites and global capital are advanced.⁽²⁹⁾

Neo-liberalism is a more contemporary form of politics, developing through globalization. It places strong emphasis on economic growth through open markets, free trade and privatization of the state. For developing countries it played out in the Washington Consensus, which was implemented through the World Bank and International Money Fund (IMF). Development targeted de-regulation of market forces, through reducing control over trade and minimizing expenditure on social services (such as health and education), as it was believed that the market is a more efficient way to better livelihoods. This emphasis on economic development had put politics and the power relations within society on the backburner for many countries.⁽³⁰⁾

In effect what has happened is that many developing countries were coerced by more powerful donor countries. Thus, the world elites can be compared to previous colonization practices in imposing policies and strategies, in return for access into the global market. It raises the question around countries' agency, rights and democracy between nations in our global world. In effect the neo-liberalist approach has been elitist countries controlling and oppressing poorer countries through trade.⁽³¹⁾

Elites and Political Development in Developing Countries

Political Development has been articulated to be part of society since the time of ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. Over the centuries politics have evolved through a range of phases from the monarchies and kingship to elected parliamentary systems. Today, western society views a form of democracy as the ultimate aspiration that forms the pinnacle of political development. Politics matter and influence everybody's daily life. For example, Aung San Suu Kyi recently addressed her people (the Burmese) to '... imagine a different kind of social contract between ruler and the ruled based on the highest human aspirations of compassion, loving-kindness, sympathetic joy and equanimity'. Thus, for her political development is about spiritual and humanistic ideals. On the other end of the spectrum economists argue that political development in the form of 'good governance' is central to improve economic growth, alleviate poverty and create democracies.⁽³²⁾

Political development is a complex idea that is constantly evolving, according to Kingsbury, 'political development is an end or a good in itself.' Karl Marx, never specifically wrote about political models, however through the interpretation of his theories, others such as Miliband, Lenin, Stalin and Mao have interpreted his views into communist political regimes. For Marx, politics stemmed from the interpretation that society is made up of different classes. The working class was struggling against the bourgeoisie or the elites who were the owners of property and capital. The elites ran the state, and their power was viewed as a form of oppression against lower classes. Marx hypothesized that through

classes bonding together, equality will be created and the role of the state will completely wither away.⁽³³⁾

Weber was influential in our understating of the western political systems comprising of states, bureaucracies and the military. Weber believed that the state possesses the power and responsibility to govern and legitimately use physical force if necessary. Weber, discussed 'leader democracy' and emphasized the importance of charismatic and statesmen-like leaders, although he wasn't concerned about the characteristics of elites he believed that political leaders had to be charismatic for democracy to be sustainable.⁽³⁴⁾

Elites and Social Distinction in Developing Countries

An élite is a selected and small group of citizens and or organizations that controls a large amount of power. Based on the social distinction with regard to other groups of lower strata, most of these selected groups are constantly searching differentiation as well as separation from the rest of society. Several groups are constantly seeking different social resources in order to define their specificity.⁽³⁵⁾ Elites and social distinction have a long vibrant history. Since the beginning of the Greek society and the Roman Empire social status has been relevant. Whereas Greek society was mainly broken up between free people and slaves, the social structure of ancient Rome was based on property, wealth, citizenship and freedom, with a significant importance of heredity.

Even though in both societies social stratification existed, in the case of the latter social status was established through objective norms. Later on, in both Middle Ages and in Modern Times this form of distinction through the social status prevailed, and probably it could be considered as the main principle of social organization currently.⁽³⁶⁾ Research in social sciences has emphasized the tendency of elites to persist and reproduce their power over time at "political and economic levels, potentially undermining the effectiveness of institutional reforms. For instance, one specific form of élite persistence is illustrated by the existence of dynasties, a particular form of élite persistence in which a single or few family groups monopolize either political or economic power."⁽³⁷⁾

Numerous scholars have studied the élite distinction. Whenever they have brought empirical evidence to support their position, the main shortcoming has been extrapolation: that is the claim to provide sociological Laws on the grounds of one particular case during a given period". However, when sociological research started to connect social distinction with the creation of elites, a new theoretical background emerged. Under the premise of "no judgment of taste is innocent", A remarkable quote, which resumes one of the main principles of distinction in social sciences, is the following: "Principles of division, inextricably logical and sociological, function within and for the purposes of the struggle between social groups; in producing concepts, they produce groups, the very groups which produce the principles and the groups against which they are produced"⁽³⁸⁾

What is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilization: the evocative power of an utterance which puts things in a different light or which modifies the schemes of perception, shows something else, other properties, previously unnoticed or relegated to the background a separative power, a distinction, diacrisis, discretio, drawing discrete units out of indivisible continuity, difference out of the undifferentiated."⁽³⁹⁾

One of the most important contributions is the idea that social class plays a significant role in the construction of a personal identity. Thus, as social classes are in permanent interaction during the daily life, several "social differences" are reinforced such as the taste, which according to Bourdieu is an "aesthetic" value defined by the ruling class. These social uses of communication are also related with the relation between elites and mass. However, distinction is also related with other social uses and resources as power in politics and wealth in economics.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Elites and Political Representation in Developing Countries

Political elites and representation are often related due to the fact that these groups are constantly searching to control government. In modern democracies, political authorities have to represent the interests of citizens. For winning elections, politicians must succeed in convincing electors: "political life is not merely the making of arbitrary choices, nor merely the resultant of bargaining between separate, private wants. It is always a combination of bargaining and compromise where there are irresolute and conflicting commitments and common deliberation about public policy, to which facts and rational arguments are relevant"⁽⁴¹⁾

Politicians are frequently dealing between the "mandate" of the post and the interests of people that represent. Currently, these interests are expressed by public opinion polls. Political representation in most Western democracies depends of political parties. The functioning of democratic systems is determined not only by either for the action of citizens or the performance of political system, but also by the behavior of political actors.

Decision-makers in public institutions are political elites and they operate through political parties. What is in permanent tension in current societies is the relationship among power, conflict and authority.⁽⁴²⁾

Political elites have to deal with power institutions and "shape" the political system. In some cases the elites elaborate strong rules in order to maintain their power avoiding political competition. In other cases, the elites must compete among them and/or with others citizens. Thus, is society controlled by a small group of insiders? This is the paradox of political elites: between political representation and the maximization of their own interests.⁽⁴³⁾

Will the Political Elite Rise to the Need of the Hour?

If the present practice of reflexive finger-pointing is not abandoned when one's

recommendations are not followed, then the society will never congeal into a nation. We all admire the tremendous achievements of China over the last three decades. They have lifted more people out of poverty in a shorter span of time than in any other period of human history. But they were only able to do so under conditions that most in the west, including Guyana, would claim to be of quite restricted freedom. The new leadership, for instance, was basically 'selected' rather than 'elected'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Some argue that the discipline the Chinese political system imparts on the populace may be duplicated under conditions of greater political freedom. But as the experience of India and other developing countries, the answer is not quite so simple. As to where the line is drawn is a question that only responsible leadership in a democracy such as ours can answer.

There is also a trade-off between high income growth and equal income distribution. We all aspire to the standard of living in the developed countries. But today there is great dissension in those countries over the ridiculous income-gap between the top 1% and the remaining 99%. This trade-off had always been faced in countries in their early stage of development. The question raised now is whether it continues even into the developed stage of economic development. To assume that we can somehow avoid this trade-off, as the local political rhetoric asserts, is plain irresponsibility.⁽⁴⁵⁾

One trade-off that is presently creating much angst in the local landscape is that investment and technology transfer, which is the basis for generating sustainable high growth levels necessary for catapulting us into 'developed country' status, means high interdependence in international relations. More specifically, with China awash with foreign reserves that could facilitate technology transfer embedded in investments, we would assume that the politicians would agree on better bilateral relations. However, from the continued cacophony raised over the spate of Chinese investment and the concomitant conditions, it appears that our politicians want the investment, but not the strings. This is not how the real world operates, and we only have to revisit our previous dominant economic partnerships for a reality check.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Conclusion

In the present underdeveloped countries the need for popular support arises in great measure from the example of those countries which are already industrialized, and which have high living standards and elaborate provision of social welfare. The whole process of economic development has become more deliberate and self-conscious than it was in the first industrial revolution. (47) There remains the difficulty that in many of the underdeveloped countries the elites are very widely separated from the rest of the people, by their Western education, by their origins in higher castes, in land-owning or business families, or in the families of tribal chiefs, and by their whole style of life. This situation presents the danger that some kind of authoritarian elite rule will grow up, especially when we consider the long habituation of the people in these countries to such forms of rule. At the same time, the prominence attributed to, or acquired by, small elite groups partly defeats the purposes of

planned economic growth, by excluding or discouraging enterprising individuals in the lower.⁽⁴⁸⁾

In spite of the great prominence which elites, and even individual leaders, attain in the underdeveloped countries- partly by the contrast which they present with the backwardness of the general population – it is not, in the last resort, the activities of these elites and leaders alone which can decide the success, or determine the form, of the course of development upon which they have entered. Of course, the elites must be capable and efficient; but that is not enough. They must also express adequately, and pursue steadfastly, the ideals of those social classes which constitute the great majority of the population and which are struggling at the present time to escape from their age-old confinement to a life of poverty and subservience.

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