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Development as Freedom

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ABSTRACT

Over the centuries, there have been numerous hypotheses on development concurring to Amartya Sen, a 1998 Noble prize winner in Economics (on welfare economics and social choice theory and for the poorest) but contemporaneously, we are living in a world divided into two spheres: one of exceptional prosperity and another with unforeseen deprivation, pauperism and oppression. Dr. Sen has in his book titled 'Development as Freedom' linked development to expansion of freedoms of individuals through the lens of democracy, yet India juggles constantly between the development and democratic ideals. This work intends to highlight another perspective upon which development may be undertaken where democracy might not be taken granted for.

Over the centuries, there have been numerous hypotheses on development concurring to Amartya Sen, a 1998 Noble prize winner in Economics (on welfare economics and social choice theory and for the poorest) but contemporaneously, we are living in a world divided into two spheres: one of exceptional prosperity and another with unforeseen deprivation, pauperism and oppression. Where economic sphere has undergone remarkable changes on one hand, many problems are persisting around the world on the other hand, such as poverty, lack of basic amenities, illiteracy, violation of political freedoms as well as basic liberties.

“Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains”. This famous quote by Rousseau aptly describes the current situation referring to the

lack of liberty and freedom in exercising one's intrinsic rights. The current situation around the globe often associates freedom with the GNP, rise in personal incomes, etc. On the contrary, Sen refers to 'development' as an important aspect of freedom and social opportunities. Rather, he considers freedom to be central to the process of development for two apparent reasons:

- First, **evaluative reason** which says that the existing freedoms of people must be enhanced and they cannot remain status quo; and
- Second, the **effectiveness reason** which states that development can be achieved with free agency of people.

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It is because of the interconnections between different kinds of freedom that free and sustainable agency emerges as a major engine of development. Amartya Sen in his book 'Development as Freedom' explores these empirical connections which links the two aspects of the idea of 'development as freedom'.

The success of a society is determined by the substantive freedom that its members enjoy. Freedom is also a principal determinant in deciding individual happiness and initiative, and in ensuring social effectiveness. Human being is the engine of change! To bring about change, the already available freedoms to the common man should be expanded and he should be freed from various chains that acts as a speed-breaker in the road leading to development. These road-blocks takes away the freedoms that human beings enjoy during their journey to development. Amartya Sen envisioned advancement of freedom both as the primary end and as the principal means of development, respectively referred to as the 'constitutive role' and the 'instrumental role'. The removal of substantial unfreedom is integral to development.

In his celebrated work, Sen has indoctrinated upon the dynamics of freedom in great lengths, one being, economic freedom which is the basic and most fundamental freedom. Through the problem of child labour prevalent in India, he expands upon the concept of economic freedom since just stopping child labour is not enough. It means, those who are already in hardship, will face more economic distress due to lack of income which they were earning from child labour. He states that if we really want to

eradicate child labour, we have to address the basic needs of those children and their families to be able to provide them actual freedom. In terms of depravity, Dr Sen believes there is some overlap between child labour and slavery. Slavery is an ownership relationship in which one person owns another whereas child labour is a forced economic situation that takes away the opportunity for the child to acquire the skills and talents for future growth, the ability to do various things and empowerment in general.

He also talks about women becoming economically independent. The right to work is a fundamental freedom that is routinely denied to women in a number of countries. When you look at some of the neighboring countries, you'll notice that they have a cultural aversion to treating women with dignity. The concept of basic liberty and empowerment is undermined by the lack of freedom. Dr. Sen believes that economic independence is critical. There is a pressing need to free women from the confines of the homes. Women should get an option to choose for themselves the kind of work they want to do and not be forced into the kind of work family members are expecting them to do. There are many NGOs and self-help groups which are helping with empowerment of Women like SEWA and Kudumbashree and making a difference to the lives of women.

Conversely, he has also mentioned about African American in the pre-civil war period. The people working in America were getting better wages as compared to any part of the world but they were in forced or bonded labor. Actual Freedom means much more than providing just suitable

conditions at work towards earning money, but entitles the person's economic freedom.

Political liberty, economic chances, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security are among the core characteristics of freedom, according to Amartya Sen. These freedoms are individually very essential for a complete development of a person but they also complement one another. We all know that the economic entitlements are necessary for economic growth both for the citizens as well as nation. But is only one factor sufficient or I should rather say whether these individual instrumental freedoms sufficient enough to cover the entire aspect of development? The answer is, a big no. There are many interlinkages that are even more important in the development prospect than these freedoms standing alone. The increase in wealth of the nation must not be linked only to rise in private incomes but also on the expansion of social services to the underprivileged.

Therefore, freedom is both (i) the essential purpose of development and (ii) advancement and development is the process of expanding human freedom. It is "the enhancement of freedom that allow people to lead lives that they have reason to live". As a result, progress necessitates the eradication of main sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, low economic possibilities as well as systemic social deprivation, neglect of public infrastructure as well as intolerance or excessive repressive governmental action.

Sen's postulation is straightforward: "Opportunity is both the essential end and the

primary method for advancement". There is no point in getting freedom without getting opportunities. It is equivalent to no freedom at all. For example, if a child is deprived of getting basic education, he will not be able to realize his full potential though he has got freedom. In order to achieve justice and fairness and develop the capability of an individual, the state has to provide supportive framework.

Amartya Sen asserts, democracy and development are fundamentally related. They are linked because democracy is a basic human right whose advancement serves as a barometer of progress. As per Sen's claim, no democratic government can afford to face food shortage leading to famine because they will have welfare of people in their minds, as they have to be answerable to the voters and face the consequences at the next elections so it will try to work for the betterment of the people.

Development as an important aspect of social opportunities. Sen talks about life expectancy variations which are related to a variety of social opportunities that are central to development. This emphasizes the significance of support-led processes, but we must remember that support-led success is always shorter in duration than growth-mediated success, where economic prosperity and enhancement of quality life tend to co-exist. This also proves that a country need not wait until it gets richer to expand social opportunities to its people.

Further, Sen observes that, while nutrition and healthcare programs are typically slow-moving, at two points in time, these programs grew at a breakneck pace. These two time periods

correspond to the two world wars, which resulted in greater sharing of survival resources, along with sharing of health care and limited food supply. According to the detailed nutritional studies, during the Second World War, despite significant reduction in per capita food availability in Britain, the resultant situation was rapid decline in undernourishment as well as mortality rates excluding wartime deaths and an increase in life expectancy.

Famines, it is argued, do not occur in democracies because they are simple to prevent with full government support motivated by strong political incentives. This suggests that political freedom in the form of democratic arrangements contributes to the preservation of economic freedom and the ability to survive.

Conversely, Sen also contends that undertaking the road to development results into compromising of democratic values and that the upliftment of one shall always occur at the expense of another individual. Viewing the above relationship between development and democracy, India is suffering from the conflict of development and democracy in various forms, one of which is creation of opportunities to the downtrodden sections of the society through reservations at the expense of the general category of people in almost all public services. Here, to further the constitutional goal of upliftment of weaker sections, the fundamental right of equal opportunities is somewhere denied to the better-off sections of the society. This raises various concerns, such as:

- a. Isn't freedom of the general class of the society getting compromised for the sake of development of the weaker sections?
- b. Isn't equality of opportunity as laid out under Article 14 of the Constitution getting undermined?
- c. Isn't it becoming increasingly difficult to achieve equality of opportunity?
- d. Is it true that the deserving section is reaping the benefits of opportunities made for the underprivileged class of society or the fruits of such opportunities are enjoyed by others?

Well, the modern-day scenario reflects those democratic ideals have been jeopardized time and again for the upliftment of the downtrodden sections of the society. The intentions of the government in eliminating class distinctions and upliftment of weaker sections so as to bring them at par are well applauded but not to the detriment of the 'so-called privileged sections' as not all are equally privileged among the entire class. This demands for a different approach to facilitate the development of all the needy people not on the ground of class distinction but on the footing of economic slabs.

Going through the celebrated work of Dr Amartya Sen in 'Development as Freedom', he delves deeper into the dynamics of freedom and development. He further analyzes the major factors that limit freedom, such as poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities, systematic social deprivation, lack of public facilities, lack of tolerance, overactivity of repressive states and underactivity of states. Sen

thus defends the market's constructive function and opposes laws that limit people's ability to choose where they work, what they produce, and what they consume.

He further concludes that enhancement of human freedom is both the primary end and a principal means of development. This entails the development of individual human capabilities which can be accomplished only through various institutional arrangements in place.
