

# **NAMING ANTI-DEVELOPMENTAL ATTITUDES**

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## **Attitudinal Base**

Every nation has a development culture of its own, and a nation's traditional culture has a tremendous impact on its development attitudes and attempts. An objective retrospection of Nepal's past developmental trends and planning history establishes this. We see how we have believed more in rhetorics than real actions. Most of our ivory-towered and foreign-trained planners, cosily seated on their high revolving chairs, have preferred to travel on maps and act on blueprints or paper plans alone. As a result, we have remained where we started from, as a weather-cock rotating ceaselessly on a fixed place. We always copycated whatever western model was in fashion at a given time, and when it proved to be a square peg in a round hole in our national context, we skipped and hopped for another one.

If some complained about the extremely low speed and level of development, planners and economists easily put their fingers on our lack of capital investment, insufficient know-how, and inadequate resource base and infrastructural framework to build on as causal factors. They generally tend to forget about the huge inflow of foreign aid and loans and natural resources we have used so far.

My position is that Nepal is neither idea-poor nor resource-poor. Our real poverty is in developmental attitude, willingness, commitment and action. Lack of right attitude is our main setback. Our vision of development still seems blur, particularly in aspects of how and for whom. We have become more and more reliant on foreign aid and loans than being self-reliant; more backward-looking than forward-looking or futuristic. Ivan Illich is right when he says, "Underdevelopment is also a state of mind" (1972: 136).

One has to ask, for example, why a village such as Barpak, with a population of 11,000, among them many ex-Gurkhas, did not have its own high school till the mid-1980s, while a merchantile town such as Bandipur constructed a high school in 1951.

(Shrestha and Mikesell 1991: 4)

### **Acquisition of Attitudes and Values**

As members of given society, we socialize and acquire and internalize a set of norms and values, knowingly and unknowingly. In turn, they colour our perception, form our attitudes, and shape our behaviour. They determine our mental mapping of the world we live in: how we interpret it for ourselves; how we perceive our locus and role in it; and most importantly, how we react to a given situation – with action or apathy, with alertness or complacency. “Values are the software which makes a nation’s social and economic hardware tick” (*The Economist*, Nov. 28, 1992: 29).

However, values that we acquire do not remain static. The more we come in contact with and receive exposure from the outside world, resocialize, interact, and intellectually mature with exposure to multiple media sources, our values are bound to change.

It is also the rule of time game that old values or orders change, giving way to new ones. In the force of gradually rising western values, such as individualism, consumerism and materialism, some of our age-old cultural values are sure to give way and crumble down by and by. “However strong values (Asian) may be, economic forces change” (*The Economist*, May 28, 1992: 23).

### **Sifting Values Good and Bad**

One thing should be kept in mind here. All modern values are not equally good and worth adopting. Nor are all traditional values and sociocultural norms outmoded and dogmatic. Such sheer generalisation and stereotyping are naive and misleading.

In Third World societies, there still exist some useful conservative values that are worth-retaining and even deserve further fostering. They have given their peoples and nations a distinct personality, character and identity. Also they have been helpful in keeping the fabric of their mosaic societies harmonious and intact. In a sense, they have given a meaning and intent to their life. Such hallmarks of practical wisdom include the joint or extended family system, high regards for elders and ancestors, a feeling of collective good, a deep-set sense of morality and social obligation, spirituality in life style, a respect for nature emanating from religiosity among other elements. Such values have survived against odds because of their underlying humanitarian aspects. So what we need to do is to analyse positive and constructive elements in old practices and sift away the negative ones from them.

This is not to say that there may be no value in discriminating between harmless ideas and inhibiting superstitions. For instance, some hill communities believe that a fruit tree will not bear fruit unless planted over a dead monkey. This is unlikely to be true but other cultural practices may be very practical. For instance farmers did not like to plant a certain kind of wheat, despite yields eight times larger than usual, because they felt hungry after eating it; it contained a very low fibre content (Wake 1984: 153).

While talking about the South Asian development scenario, P. T. Bauer has presented a gamut of attitudes, beliefs and modes of conduct that have hindered development here. Some of the points raised can be challenged because they reflect the writer's western bias. But most of them are realistic in nature.

Examples of significant attitudes, beliefs and modes of conduct unfavourable to material progress include lack of interest in material advance, combined with resignation in the face of poverty, lack of initiative, self-reliance and of a sense of personal responsibility for the economic fortunes of oneself and one's family; high leisure preference, together with a lassitude often found in tropical climates; relatively high prestige of passive or contemplative life compared to active life; the prestige of mysticism and renunciation of the world compared to acquisition and achievement, acceptance of the idea of a preordained, unchanging and unchangeable universe; emphasis on performance of duties and acceptance of obligations, rather than achievement of results, or assertion or even a recognition of personal rights; lack of sustained curiosity, experimentation and interest in change; belief in the efficacy of supernatural and occult forces and of their influence over one's destiny; insistence on the unity of the organic universe, and on the need to live with nature rather than conquer it or harness it to man's needs, an attitude of which reluctance to take animal life is a corollary; belief in perpetual reincarnation, which reduces the significance of effort in the course of the present life; recognised status of beggary, together with a lack of stigma in the acceptance of charity; opposition to women's work outside the household (Bauer 1971: 78-79).

### **Naming Anti-developmental Attitudes**

It is not feasible to deal with all these attitudes in this short article. So I wish to be selective and focus on some significant anti-developmental

attitudes and behaviour alone which still influence our developmental efforts and activities, which are change-resistant and have survived in the face of modernising forces of changes, and thus have so far made whatever changes have occurred shallow and superficial. We must not forget:

The actual change in consciousness involves a change in the meanings that a person assigns to everything in himself and his environment (Garner 1977: 46).

The issues I will deal here are casteism, fatalism, conservatism and anti-feminism (sexism). All or some of these have been reasons for the revival of or reinforcement in Islamic fundamentalism and Hinduism lately. They have been putting their weight on our developmental efforts and hindered or slowed down their pace a great deal.

**Casteism:** Caste system or casteism is a rare species of social behaviour still found only in Hindu societies in Nepal and India, and partly in some Japanese quarter. It is a kind of classical apartheid or one of the oldest social institutions that stratifies and segregates people into different social hierarchies.

Under this system, a large chunk of people, that is nearly eighteen percent of India's Hindu population (*Time*, 13 April 1992) and 14.64 percent of Nepal's total population (National census 1991) are unjustly classified as untouchables. Because of this, in the seemingly harmonious mosaic societies in these countries, there flows a latent undercurrent of discrimination, internal division, psychological rift and strain.

Historically, the caste system was introduced merely to facilitate the functioning of a society through the scientific division of works, or it was just a process of professional grouping. Later on, shrewd and crafty Brahmins who were positioned at the apex of the caste hierarchy, and who monopolised knowledge and learning of the Vedas or the holy scriptures "inserted new fictitious stories and *slokas* (stanzas) in the entire religious literature ... to maintain their prestige and supremacy" (Sagar 1975: 121).

Later on, casteism became strictly ascriptive and hereditary in nature. According to the parental lineage, a person is put under one of the Varnas or caste categories, namely Brahmin (Priest), Chhetri (Warrior), Vaishya (Businessman), or Shudra (Untouchable).

Birth in a particular caste is attributed to the *karma* (fate) or deed(s) performed in some unknown previous life, and thus was considered predestined and unalterable. This made untouchability a lifelong condemnation, passed from generation to generation.

Casteism also carries strong religious overtones (Srinivas 1970: 271), depicting predeterminism. Many religious teachers and reformers including Buddha, Gandhi, Kabir, Aiyappan, Ambedkar and so forth have tried to eliminate this social evil, but with limited success. Lord Buddha attempted to break this myth by accepting *khir* or milk porridge from a low-caste woman and water from an untouchable woman. His preaching against the dogma proceeds as follows: every person is the master of oneself, and it is the deed of a person in the present life which makes a man great (pundit) or small (chandal), not the birth in a particular caste. But the caste system lingers on to today, mainly among villagers and illiterate commoners in urban areas. It remains even in the minds of orthodox intellectuals.

How dehumanising caste can be and how it deprives untouchables from even basic human rights are evident from the following example. Let alone using the same well or tap, in Southern India untouchables are not allowed to walk in the same path as a Brahmin with a fear that they would defile and contaminate it. Even an untouchable's shadow is considered to be capable of defiling a Brahmin. Rao has well demasked the inhuman face of the caste system in the following lines.

An Izhava was not allowed to call his dwelling a house, but only a hut, and had to refer to his food as cowdung. He was not permitted to wear any footwear or use an umbrella. Izhava women were not allowed to cover their breasts (Roa 1981: 192).

### **Caste apartheid**

Most Badi kids are bastards and cannot identify their bonafide fathers. Consequently, they find it difficult to get their citizenship and have enrollment problem in schools. Even if they anyhow managed to get admission, they are usually segregated as untouchables – a casteist apartheid – and face humiliation in the society. Such behaviour discouraged them from joining schools, though they feel eager and willing to be educated.

(Gautam 1993)

Casteism thus erects an unsurmountable wall of social distance between castes. But its worst part is its tremendous psychological impact. Under this institution the high caste people tend to be megalomaniac; it fosters an attitude of moral aloofness in them (Kapp 1963: 52); and it makes them fundamentally and humanely insensate to the mass of the population who belong to the lower strata (Shils 1959: 257-58). Untouchables, on the other hand, internalise their caste-based feeling of inferiority. They perceive

themselves as lowly creatures in the society and build a negative self-image which in turn thwarts their personal development. They are either aloof or escapist in their approach to life and always prefer to live in a low profile. As Wagatsuma says about the Burakumin, because of their suppressed rebellious and vindictive feelings, they become delinquents, and learn bad habits and social pathologies in their environment. People can feel in them "something vicious, something dirty, something unnameable, but something which can be felt, like a strong odour" (Wagatsuma 1967: 130).

Such discernable caste-specific behaviour forms a typical 'caste culture'. Speaking about the psychological effects generative of such social behaviour, Berreman asserts:

Avoidance, apathy, withdrawal and over-compliance may be common adjustments to low-caste status, as are mobility, escape, and passive and aggressive resistance (Berreman 1976: 62).

Such apathy, compounded with lack of interest in material achievements, keeps low castes at the lowest rung of economic status. It becomes clear from the abject living standard and quality of life of the untouchables in India and Nepal, characterised by filth, squalor and unhygienic life. They face deprivation and consequently belong to the least privileged and poorest sector in society (Seddon 1988: 187). There emerges a distinct polarisation of wealth and power (Forde 1963: 62; Weber 1985: 26). Their ignorance, ill-networking, resourcelessness and powelessness make them even more vulnerable to further oppression and exploitation. In K. P. Malla's words:

However, behind this social and cultural facade lurks ugly social realities of ritual degradation and social and material deprivation of a vast number of outcasts of whom we rarely, if ever, speak except as a taboo (Malla 1993).

#### **Haliriti (ploughman – master relationship)**

The landowner – in Durai, usually a Brahmin lends the ploughman – generally a cobbler – a sum of money (between 100 and 200 rupees) and the latter agrees to work as the farmer's ploughman until the loan is paid... often difficult for a ploughman to repay his debt, and so he is, in effect, bound to work for the landowner indefinitely.

(Caplin 1972: 61)

### **No school for low castes**

Headman Bali, Burten decided to start teaching a small number of children... mostly cobblers in the village. The Rana Brahmins were furious and the outcry was led by the pandits... The Brahmins thought that if the cobblers became literate, they would have to plough and carry their own loads, and they didn't like the idea. They said that as priests, they had to work for their clients and hadn't time to work in their fields as well. So the school just folded up.

(Caplin 1972:61)

In addition to this, the concept of hereditary occupation inherent in the caste system leaves people fewer alternative choices and means for diversification in their traditional trades, which debar the process of industrialisation (Sagar 1975; Harrison 1982; Goldhorpe 1984). Weber also considers the caste system as a hindrance to economic development (1962:111). "Many studies of economic change in South Asia revealed that development has led only to a worsening of the position of the lower castes. When the local job market expands, they cannot obtain work, possibly because of caste discrimination or because they are unskilled and illiterate" (Caplin 1972:86). Kapp also rightly observes:

The segmentation and widespread antagonism... prevent the larger loyalties and development of a spirit of solidarity and participation without which neither economic development nor political democracy can be achieved (Kapp 1963: 49).

Mair, the well known sociologist, also holds a similar view. So long as the caste system continues, development remains a castle of sand. She asserts:

Economists argue that 'caste' will have to be abolished before there is hope of any successful development in India (Mair 1984: 89).

It is not, however, easy to get rid of casteism until and unless the blind faith on karma or fate, on which the system hinges, is dispersed.

**Fatalism:** Fatalistic belief is based on predeterminism. The believers think that their fortune is carved by God or some unknown supernatural force in heaven. Hence it is unmodifiable or unalterable by any human force. Such a philosophy of life breeds a sense of powerlessness and futility of any sort of action in attempting to change one's fixed fate.

Being pre-conditioned mentally like this, people become complacent and submissive to a given situation. They lose dynamism in life and adopt a non-initiative-taking attitude. In this sense, fatalism can be taken as an antithesis to progressive-mindedness and innovativeness. Mystified under this spell of Circe, commoners as well as immature intellectuals are mentally paralysed.

The iron grip of and dependency on fate is stronger in illiterate villagers than in urban quarters. Superstitions and ignorance go together, reinforcing each other.

### **Ignorance**

Mahili had a disease of spinal cords. She took it as a *Kancho Bayu* or an evil eye and consulted a *Jhankri* (a local witchdoctor) instead of seeing a medical doctor and thus was crippled for life due to improper treatment.

(Pradhan 1991)

### **Lack of health consciousness**

In Jumla Villages, people lack health consciousness. They are fatalistic, If health workers go to their places, they react like this what will this inoculation do if fate is not favourable?

Inoculators from the health post discriminate. They visit nearby Brahmin and Chhetri (high castes) villages but do not go to Sarkis (low caste shoemakers).

(Koirala 1991)

Sinha's research on Indian villages supports this fact. The less educated and poorer the people are, the more they are likely to be superstitious and fatalistic in their outlook and attitude. "The present condition was frequently ascribed to divine will or bad luck by a very large number of them" (Sinha 1969:205). It means ignorance/poverty and fatalistic attitude has somehow reciprocal causal relationship.

The direct implications of this anti-developmental attitude called fatalism are numerous. Apart from creating apathy and less interest in new ventures, they make people less receptive to new ideas, techniques and methods. Their idea of "limited goods" compounded with unscientific outlook refrains them from the adoption of progressive ways of working.

The Indian cultivator... even today often believes that an increase in yields is not due to improved techniques but to our fate and *karma* (Kapp 1963:12)

Likewise, talking about the difficulties in the implementation of the family planning programme in Nepal and Lesotho, an anonymous writer points out:

A woman's fertility is considered less related to her physiology than to her karma (fate), her role in past lives.

According to Freire, a humanist educationist with infinite faith in the potentiality of people in transforming the world, people's fatalistic attitudes, particularly among Brazilian peasants, are the consequences of their socio-historical conditioning, low level of consciousness and lack of self-discovery. In his view:

Fatalism in the disguise of docility is the fruit of a historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of a person's behaviour (Freire 1979; 47).

Third World commoners who are extremely religious-minded and traditionalistic in their lifestyle are very much impressed by the religious way of living. Religions generally help to sustain the existing order (Chinoy 1967:103). Keeping the spiritual aspects aside, most of the religious doctrines teach dogmatic principles and foster fatalistic attitudes (Goldhorpe 1984; Sagar 1975:219). That is why Marx has declared religion as opium for people. It keeps people docile and passive in the face of social injustice and oppression.

On a lower plane the religion (Hinduism) was characterized by fatalism; on the higher by inaction. There was little difference in the general effect of the two (Mishra 1962:37).

Keeping the orthodox Hinduism and its basic principle of unchangeable fate in mind, Weber considers it as the greatest hurdle on the way to economic development, and suggests a radical measure.

So long as the karma doctrine was unshaken, revolutionary ideas or progressivism were inconceivable (Weber 1962:123).

**Conservatism:** Conservatism simply means the adherence to old traditional systems and beliefs without any critical reasoning about their utility, validity and value in the modern world. Conservatism has always been a stronghold of religion.

It is not amazing that simple rural and urban folks with little contact with and exposure to the outside world are generally prone to it. They remain as old-fashioned as ever in their perceptions and behaviour. The most surprising fact is that many leaders and intellectuals in Third World countries, including some prominent and western-educated ones, also exhibit a certain degree of conservatism in their life style and behaviour. In India and Nepal, leaders may be seen with a team of astrologer-consultants who are supposed to advise them in state affairs. Similarly, they prefer to visit temples and attend religious rituals and ceremonies with an intention to project their public image as religious persons having regards for old customs and practices. In this way they succeed in popularising themselves among the gullible mass. The whole business is thus governed by a hidden political agenda rather than a religious motive.

In case of commoners they abide by old customs, values, rights and rituals because they do not know about alternatives or other choices available. They simply accept what were ascribed to them by their forefathers. During their lifetime, their socialisation process programmes or sets their minds in certain traditional values and conditions them to follow certain guidelines and modes of behaviour. Culture works as "residues from earlier epochs" (Worsley 1984:42).

### **Lavish living through borrowing**

Kamalkhoj, inhabited by 30 thousand Danuwars, lies in South-eastern part of Sindhuli District. Their ethnic characteristic behaviour shows that they are not futuristic. They have a bad social habit to take loans from local moneylenders and spend them lavishly in feasts, drinks and merrymaking. As a result they are being displaced from their own lands.

They neither send their children to schools nor get them inoculated. The number of literates is very low and infant mortality rate is high. Whenever these people suffer from diahorrea or cholera, instead of going to doctors they prefer to consult *Dhamis/Jhankris*, i.e. local witchdoctors of their own clan.

(*Bal Sarokar Magazine*, Yr. 2, No. 819)

Conservatism also has a linkage with the belief in astral control over one's life events. In Hindu society this sort of cosmological faith still lingers on, but it is a carryover of the past age, not a recent phenomenon.

In India, belief in destiny, astrology, and horoscope-casting were widely diffused for a long time (Weber 1962:119-20).

The Hindus always were, and in their overwhelming majority still are, firm in their conviction that everything in their mundane existence is determined and controlled by the planets and stars (Chaudhuri 1979:201).

In a recent research conducted by a Nepalese economist among the Tamang community in the hilly regions of Nepal, one of the findings was:

The people in the area believe that when god gets angry, it reacts by way of making people ill or sending heavy rains and hailstones or causing landslides and other natural calamities and so on. Whenever such things happen, they make every effort to please god and do not care for the extent of expenses they will have to occur (Adhikari 1988:2).

I myself have witnessed similar things in the past. The Tamangs in the villages of Daman, Palung, Tistung and peripheral areas in eastern Nepal give a certain amount of food grains to *jhankris* or local witchdoctors every year with a belief that they will prevent probable hailstones and thus protect their crops from natural disaster.

More bizarre are the rituals of *yaznas* performed by Brahmins to avert famine and natural disasters, or to reestablish world peace. In these religious performances, tons of food grains, butter and other edibles are burnt in the poverty-stricken countries like India and Nepal.

Another paradox associated with conservatism can be seen in the institutions of asceticism and monasticism in some Asian countries. In India and Nepal, where more than one-third of the population live below the poverty line, many so-called *sadhus* (Hindu ascetics) and *Bhikhus* (Buddhist monks) live a parasitic life, enjoying almost every amenity at the cost of these wretched poor people. The Hindu *matha* (religious institutions) and Buddhist *gumbas* (monasteries) hold tremendous properties. In most cases they possess huge areas of land. That is why some *mahantas* (religious head of mathas) in a district of eastern Nepal devote more and more time to land management and business than in their spiritual duties (Wake, 1984:164). Keeping this fact in mind, Chaudhuri calls these establishments "secular landlordism" (1979:185) and Goldthorpe complains about the transference of national resources in "unproductive monasticism" (1984:11).

These references clearly show that in these countries asceticism no more remains a spiritual institution. Instead, in modern times opportunism and consumerism have overshadowed it. Therefore, it has been reduced merely to a rhetorical principle or a decorative showpiece, not an empirical way of life.

Most people, whatever their personal religious belief, nowadays are involved in the rat race of hoarding more and more money. People feign to be religious to cover up their double standard. Religion borders to hypocrisy.

Buruma has well-portrayed such ambivalence of character – showing off strict compliance to conservatism – in these illustrative lines:

Thai prostitutes who get up to antics that boggle the imagination – and yet wear the amulets of religion and donate money to Buddhist monks (Buruma 1990:125).

On the other hand, the doctrine of asceticism has become instrumental in the hands of elites to domesticate and pacify commoners in the Third World. In the name of religiousity people are often provoked to act fanatically or in a fundamentalistic way. They are more often deceived and exploited by preaching such a dictum of selfless service as:

Thou art entitled to work,  
But never to its result.

(Bhagvada Gita, II, 47)

Among some African tribal groups, ascetic values are still highly regarded and strictly practised. Such values range from indifference to material affluence to the destruction of valuables in order to gratify their spiritual aspirations. For examples, the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) are reluctant to accumulate or admit wealth because of the fear of being bewitched (Pitt 1976:74). The Zuni (a branch of the Pueblos of New Mexico) are a people whose life is centred on religious ceremonial, being prosperous but without interest in economic advancement. On the other hand, the former Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island demonstrate what is almost a parody of industrial civilisation. At their potlatch ceremonies these people would compete with each other in burning and destroying their money and valuable possessions (Brown 1971:40).

Another feature of conservatism marks the meticulousness in observance of traditional social customs. For instance, in India and Nepal many poor folks spend more money in marriages, festivals, religious ceremonies and other rituals than they can afford. Consequently, in such activities they sometimes lose their land and property, and are reduced to further poverty and powerlessness (Chambers 1983; Adhikari 1988).

The general implications of conservative attitudes are multifarious and farfetched. The excessive reliance on supernatural forces diminishes the faith in human endeavour and perseverance. The overriding belief in traditional methods makes the breakthrough and dissemination of modern agricultural

techniques, medical practices and other radical changes among common folks in developing countries extremely difficult. Hence the slow pace of development.

**Complacency leads to lethargy**

This is a real event told to me by an experienced HMG officer, which clearly illustrates an attitude of complacency and self-created dependency.

The Nepal Government once provided local people in a food deficit area in far western region with rice in subsidised rate. After this these people slowed down their efforts in paddy cultivation. Unfortunately due to flood situation en route, when mules carrying food grain could not reach those villages on time, villagers starved.

Sometimes the adherence to dogmatic systems and values or conservative attitude and behaviour have caused disappearance of indigenous knowledge skills and technology. As I recall, my father once told me how in his boyhood he was cured of tuberculosis by a *Vaidya* (local physician) by means of traditional herbs when the disease was thought to be incurable all over the world. Similarly until today in Nepal some conservative craftsmen and painters hesitate to share their knowledge, skills and methods with others because of an old belief or hearsay that if handed over or transferred to an undeserving person, they would become ineffective and the former possessor would forget them. In this way a lot of invaluable knowledge and practices have become extinct. Otherwise, they could be useful assets for future generations and to the world at large.

Another dark aspect of conservatism is reflected in the negative male attitude towards women.

**Anti-feminism (Sexism):** Many conservative men in developing as well as developed nations consider authority over their wives as inalienable. Such a mentality unfailingly leads to male chauvinism. Let us look at this event that took place in modern Japan.

But I thought you were with us, part of the group... You're nothing but an ordinary foreigner after all!" Thus Juro Kara, a Japanese playwright, [rebuked] his friend Ian Buruma. Mr. Buruma had made the mistake of protesting when Mr Kara, drunk, threw a heavy ashtray at his wife (Buruma 1990:125).

How incredible that a present-day intellectual Japanese writer can look down upon his wife a woman as a subject for domination and humiliation.

The old gender discrimination or sexism still persists. Nor is it localised to a certain place or society. It seems more or less universal. However, it seems to be more severe in Third World societies where women's literacy rate is relatively lower; traditional values still dominate social behaviour; and a liberation movement of women is almost unknown. The domestication of women is taken as a natural phenomenon.

There is a dreadful apartheid of gender going on in the developing world that must be stopped (Newsweek, Mar 9, 1992: 23).

### **Women as salable commodity**

Badis, a wandering tribe-like community in far western region of Nepal, earn their living or bread by performing dances in villages. Their girls and women are mostly involved in flesh trade. Treated by parents and even husbands as highly valuable and salable commodity, they are usually forced to take up the profession.

(Gautam 1993)

Parents who prefer to have a son treat their girl child as a second class citizen. Unlike a male child, she is subjected to a number of restrictions and taboos. Socialised or socially conditioned in this way, she gradually tends to internalise her sex-specific role prescriptions imposed upon her by the conservative society, and she builds a negative stereotyped self-image and feels herself inferior to man. This self-attitude gets expression in her self-imposed restrictions that delimit her freedom of choice and mobility to a great extent.

In most cases women's life is confined to a narrow domestic sphere. For instance, in Muslim societies men take a pride in keeping women in seclusion (Mair 1984:68). Even if some women get an opportunity to work outside, the ideology or sense of dependency makes them vulnerable and open for exploitation in the hands of their employers (Bhasin 1985:190). They obtain less secure jobs, at lower pay, and with less opportunity of advancement than men (Young 1979:4).

At the national level too, very little has been done for women's development. Very few substantial projects have been launched to elevate women's socioeconomic status. The state, patriarchal in nature, shuns from their capacity building. In this way women's life-chances remain as limited as ever. They are either marginalised or dealt with as non-entities. Because projects are designed by men, women are invisible (Sharon in *Newsweek*, March 9, 1992).

Most planners, administrators and experts continue to have a male image of the Asian farmer (Bhasin 1985:206).

In such a situation, let alone not receiving an opportunity for personality development, projection of bright self-image or self dependence, women have mostly been deprived of even basic human needs and tangible social benefits. Consequently "It is women who usually account for the highest figures of illiteracy and lack of material and other resources on international statistical charts" (Leander 1985:26). The lack of opportunities or avenues has reduced them to powerlessness, which further reinforces their dependency on men. The lack of access to land, credit and financial and technological resources aggravates their position and work activities (Mukhopadhyay 1984:3).

Other agencies responsible for worsening the position and status of women in society are traditional social customs and institutions. The dowry system in India and southern parts of Nepal makes a girl a liability to her parents. Sometimes the father is subjected to increased penury, indebtedness and landlessness due to this system (Mukhopadhyay 1984:15; Chambers 1983:116). Similarly, in Africa and some parts of India and Nepal the custom of bride-price puts the freedom and movement of a bride at stake because the husband thinks that he has bought the authority over the girl (Mukhopadhyay 1984:15).

In the husband's house she is put under close scrutiny and many restrictions are imposed upon her. She is often surrounded by a host of do's and don'ts. This heavy domestic pressure and lack of freedom/mobility relatively narrows down her horizon and vision. Her mental or physical development is largely thwarted. Let us have a look at this typical taboo which illuminates the inhuman restrictions put on women in Malawi.

In Malawi this taboo prohibits pregnant women from eating meat, sugar or milk because it is feared that consuming these foods will transfer animal traits to the child. At the time when pregnant women most need these protein-rich foods, these taboos prevent their consumption (Colletta 1980:16).

Now the question is the reasons behind male sexist behaviour. Are men hostile towards women by their very nature? Are they also socioculturally conditioned and do they learn anti-feministic attitudes during their socialisation process?

Cultural factors, in the shape of mental attitude and traditional ethical systems are, what explain the behaviour of the majority of men (M'Bow, in Leander 1985:10).

Perhaps it is male ego, which makes men play a defensive role. So "When men are consulted on women's projects, tensions decrease significantly" (*Newsweek*, march 9, 1992, p. 28). Cultures and sub-cultures are generally moulded at the anvil of religion. Therefore, they are usually archetypal to it. It is more so in the case of Third World countries where the influence of religion and tradition is still stronger than in industrialised nations. Popular religion, by its very nature, is patriarchal or anti-feministic. In most societies, religious commandments have been responsible for strengthening and reinforcing anti-women social attitudes. For example, St. Paul advocates a woman for unconditional submission to man because "neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man" (Haralambos 1983:22). Similarly, Manu, a famous lawgiver of circa 200 b.c. in India, recommends for a state of perpetual dependency of woman on man. Tulsidas, the writer of the epic Ramayana in Hindi, goes so far as to declare: drums, Shudras (untouchables), bumpkins, and women ought to be subjected to beating.

Jewish Men even now thank god for not creating them as women. In some parts of India and western Nepal, there still exists a religious system to offer a daughter as a *devadasi* or *devaki* (maid-servant to god).

[Religions] continue to play the crucial role in south Asia in shaping ideology, and conditioning attitudes (Bhasin 1985:181).

Traditional religious beliefs are a powerful tool in the hands of those who are antagonistic to the improvement of women's position (Young 1979:30).

Apart from religious and social agents, popular mass media like books, films, comics and television also join hands with sociocultural and religious forces to perpetuate and promote the negative image of women in the society. These media generally project women as either ideal housewives or highly fashionable baby dolls or self-sacrificing and self-effacing mothers. A popular adage or message for women folks in Nepalese society goes like this: "to endure is equal to a thousand virtues."

More than male domination, such insensitivity to one's own afflictions and acceptance of self-degradation without any resentment does harm to women. More crucial are their own attitudes towards themselves, their own self-identification and their self-perceived locus and role in the society. They work as psychological barriers to their self-discovery. They cannot perceive their life positions as problematic. They hesitate to change their old lifestyle. This fear of breaking the myth leads them to the support of oppressive status quo.

A great many [of women] still fear a radical change... they have internalised the role historically allotted to them (M'Bow, in Leander 1985:10).

If we look back at the history, we see women are not so frail as portrayed by the media. Many women like Joan of Arc, Laxmi Bai (India) and Kirti Laxmi (Nepal) have immortalised their names through their heroic deeds. Many women scholars, scientists and thinkers have contributed, and are still contributing, substantially in enriching human knowledge and in human development. Women work much harder than men in Third World countries. The only need is to realise and unfold their tremendous latent potentiality. They ought to "discover a vision of life beyond that defined by social structures and networks of relationships" and "to create a new ethos" (Parikh and Garg 1989:14).

In Hindu society there is a curiously ambivalent attitude towards women, sometimes self-contradictory. For example, on the one hand, women are trifled by comparing with shoes or playthings. On the other hand, they are symbolically presented as such significant and powerful goddesses as Saraswati (learning), Laxmi (prosperity), Durga (power), and so on.

The Hindu tradition recognises and even reveres the Female Principle and elevates it to the status of a Divinity, while on the other hand it reviles the real flesh and blood women (Mukhopadhyay 1984:19).

An extreme example of woman power is Kumari – the Living Goddess, symbolising virginity and chastity – in Nepal, who every year symbolically bestows on the Nepalese Monarch the right to rule for the coming year (Anderson, quoted in Shrestha 1977:12).

However, the role and position of women vary from sub-culture to sub-culture even within the same country (Wake 1984:155-56; UNICEF 1987:163). In Nepal, housewives in hilly regions or in peasant families are freer and can enjoy better mobility and outside socialisation than women in higher families. For instance, the Tharu community in Nepal's Terai (plain) region still practises a matriarchal family system.

To recap, for women's underdevelopment women themselves are also responsible to some extent, for they "discriminate against themselves and consequently consider that the discrimination imposed upon them is justified and lose interest in the struggle to free themselves from it" (Leander 1985:26).

But the scene is changing gradually, though the pace may be slow. With growing literacy and exposure to outside world, Third World women's

awareness to their rights, gender equality, economic self-dependence, and need to self-empowerment is at high tide. They are coming forward to claim for their dues.

### **Conclusion**

My prime concern here is to look into some main attitudinal causes for Third World non-development. This leads me to critically review the present situation where the poor and powerless are getting poorer and more powerless because of their being poorly networked and far from power centres (structure) and having almost zero access to resources (assets).

I have deliberately not touched upon such attitude-based problems as regionalism, racism, tribalism, ethnicism and fundamentalism, though their roles in causing internal fragmentation, frictions, conflicts and infightings cannot be ignored. Each calls for separate meticulous analysis.

Segal, while talking about social and psychological aspects of local development projects stresses on the need for structuring the social environment towards inducing modern behaviour, and on the importance of mediating variables, such as individual perceptions, attitudes, values and other personality factors (quoted in Sinha 1988:123).

Assuming the relevance of some of our traditional cultural values even in the modern age, instead of going radically as a reckless iconoclast, we better identify attitudes detrimental to development and opt for a middle path.

Our idea is not to direct development in terms of religion (attitudes and values) but only to use religions and moral symbols to achieve a more open and integrated society (Tripathi 1988:332).

In order to fight against fatalism and conservative attitudes, we must open up our closed minds to new views, visions and lateral thinking, and act accordingly. We can begin it with the dispersal of old hackneyed myths that keep us back. However, change (in attitude and behaviour) should begin from the individual, by revolutionizing one's own mind and anchoring it to the right direction. One should believe in one's capability to change one's own world.

In order to get rid of the caste system and anti-feminism, women and lower caste people ought to come together, build a countervailing force and fight unitedly to get their entity established. They must empower themselves to be free from age-old shackles of humiliation and calculated deprivation. Education leading to self-awareness and conscientization can be a powerful tool. Strengthening their networks, becoming economically self-dependent and taking places in the power structure can be other steps for self-

empowerment. This is possible only if they form a sound and appropriate attitudinal base – towards themselves and the world at large – and throw away the yoke of age-old inhibitions. They must come out of their hard shell.

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