The changing development scene

More than half a century’s development experience has occasioned critical scrutiny of development goals and the means used to attain them. The conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations in the last decade of the last century focused on assessment of the achievements and failures of the prevailing development paradigms. In particular, the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, was a universal recognition of the world-wide crisis in social development. The gains in economic development, and even marked improvement in various indicators of modernization, did not resolve the crisis caused by the poverty, population and environment (PPE) spiral. In the report entitled The state of the world’s children 1994, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) warned: ‘There is a clear and growing danger that both present potential and past achievements may be overwhelmed, in the years ahead, by the growing crises of absolute poverty, rapid population growth, and increasing environmental pressures’.

The post–Second World War period was characterized by the twin processes of development and decolonization, fifty years of which have certainly led to remark-
able achievements. World-wide illiteracy figures have decreased; urbanization has spread; there is greater electrification; industrial growth has been stupendous; great advances have been made in science and technology; and the processes of globalization have changed the political and economic geography of the world. The decolonization process has created an indigenous elite, and encouraged people to assert their cultural identities. Development and decolonization have thus helped to link national societies to the wider world on the one hand, and generated in them a new sense of belonging to their own culture on the other hand. However, the modernization brought about by the operation of these two processes has been a mixed blessing, creating ambivalence between the global and the local. The homogeneous world dreamt of by the propagators of modernization has not come to pass. No doubt, we live today in One World, but it continues to have many voices and a multitude of cultures. All societies are increasingly becoming plural, and are facing the difficult task of managing multiplicity.

Such changes have made the world of 2000 different from the world of the 1940s. The beginning of the era of development gave rise to hopes for a global village that would eliminate social and cultural distance, and overcome geographical obstacles to make all destinations reachable with greater speed. To a certain extent, the present era of globalization—albeit spoken of more in economic terms with growing liberalization—can be viewed as a major indicator of the realization of that noble dream. But only to a certain extent. Knowledge has opened gateways of information, it has expanded cognitive horizons, and ideas and values are arriving in each cultural context along with material goods (including technology) from different sources. But these continue to be culturally screened, politically censored and suitably accommodated. Through a process of attrition and accretion, cultural maps of individual countries are becoming differently contoured. Not only has development influenced cultures, but also cultures themselves have actively played their role in determining development.

When the Third World entered the development phase, it was guided by external orientation. Men, materials, money, and even management of the polity—the four Ms of the development paradigm—had to be imported from outside to guide development. That situation, however, has changed radically. Thanks to the expansion of education, developing world countries now have trained manpower to replace outside expertise, and their resource base is growing larger; rather than being mere suppliers of raw materials, they have become producers of exportable materials. Financially, they are moving towards self-sufficiency, while still being dependent on official development assistance. Also, different models of managing the polity have emerged; however, although they all claim to be ‘democratic’, no single definition of democracy can be applied to the differing political systems. Even the earlier emphasis on economic development as the key to all other development is being questioned. It is now agreed that economic development should serve the cause of social development rather than be an end in itself. In other words, the hitherto practised paradigm of development has been rendered unworkable, and countries are now in search of alternatives.