Development Revealed

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Introduction

Our perspective on development reveals a lot about who we are as a people and what we believe we are capable of. Consider the dominant view of development. Development is widely understood to be an organised collective undertaking for improving the intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction of people (Aurobindo 1963:51). Essentially, this perspective states that development has two primary dimensions. The first is the use and manipulation of the material world's resources to increase human satisfaction and well-being. The second is the advancement of knowledge, whether it is culturally dependent or more universal in scope.

Implicit in this understanding of development is a third dimension. For a people to undertake development they need not only knowledge and resources, but also the ability to make and carry out decisions that influence people beside themselves. They need power.

Thus the dominant understanding of development emphasises marshalling power, knowledge and resources to improve material, sensational and aesthetic well-being. The academic study of development largely reflects this understanding.

Yet what if there were more to development than what is typically believed? What if we were to demand more of development than is normally the case? This paper explores the implications for development of incorporating another primary dimension—the inner dimension.

Development's Hidden Dimension

Naturally knowledge has many forms and objectives; in the context of development it usually relates to how to develop materially and socially. We expect knowledge advanced by development to respond to specific problems like community organising, gender relations, improved farming methods, and so forth, as well as the broader goals of general public education. But rarely do we expect it to guide us how to make better connections between loving more effectively and better serving our society, for instance.

Yet by virtue of being human we cannot help but give attention to more than the abundance the material world offers. We have inner needs — we aspire to give, to belong, to love, to show compassion, to experience having a high purpose, and to be an instrument of peace — and we want to know how to achieve these. Such aspirations depend on us making wise choices, based not on often-tempting short-term satisfaction, but lasting goodness. To be spiritual is to reflect these aspirations in one's thought and actions.

At its best development is an interplay between humanity's very highest aspirations and the demands of daily living. When this occurs development integrates its various dimensions — power, knowledge, spiritual growth, and the wise use of resources — in a way that is practical and inspiring. For too long the spiritual growth of people and the study and practice of development have been isolated from one another or posited as being in unending opposition.

As practitioners, teachers and students of development, we are confronted by the inner dimension of development at three levels: recognising it, practicing it, and teaching it. To explore these issues, we can usefully turn to a recent example of this form of development.

The Example of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmitgars and its Implications for Development

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, 1890-1988, incorporated spiritual practice into development work under harsh and oppressive conditions with startling results. His development work aimed at uplifting the spiritual, cultural, economic and political workings of his proud and largely tribal Muslim people, the Pathans (also known as Pashtuns or Pukhtoons).

Pathans hail from the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan and Eastern Afghanistan. At the turn of the last century their society was colonised, stagnant, and violent, worn down by feuds, inequalities, factionalism, poor social cooperation, and plain ignorance (Taizi 2002, Banerjee 2000). Their ancient code of honour, ethics and revenge, *Pukhtunwali*, was struggling in the face of British colonial rule which had distorted traditional political, economic and cultural processes. The British had helped to create a landlord class that acted as indirect rulers, which hastened the decline of traditional Pathan land redistribution practices. The British also manipulated the jirga system of justice to their own ends. 'The Pathans were in no position to offer concerted resistance to the British' (Banerjee 2000: 45)

Yet in the 1930s and 40s Khan raised a nonviolent army of up to 100,000 Pathans to fight British imperial rule. This army, called the Khudai Khidmitgars (KKs), remained resolutely nonviolent in the face of severe repression, violence, and humiliation from British colonial rulers (including severe torture and massacres), despite the Pathans having a renowned history of violent resistance using handmade guns and daggers (Easwaran 2000). For his efforts Khan was rewarded with thirty years in prison, more than one-third of his adult life (and more than Nelson Mandela). His people referred to him as *Badshah Khan* and *Fakhr-e-Afghan* (*King of Khans* and *The Pride of the Afghan* respectively), while many in the broader Indian subcontinent simply knew of him as the Frontier Gandhi.

Michael Nagler identifies four widely held myths about nonviolence: that nonviolence is only for gentlefolk; that since nonviolence is weak it can only work against weak opposition; that nonviolence is okay for Hindus and Buddhists but not for Muslims; and that nonviolence cannot be used in, or instead of, war (Nagler 2001:244-7). The KKs exploded all these myths. This was nation building of the highest order.

> Those leaders are seldom born who raise their society from the ignominious depths of ignorance and obscurity to the heights of enlightenment and glory. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was one of this rare breed of leaders (Taizi 2002).

How did he do this, and what lessons can we draw out for the practice and teaching of development?

Selfless Service

Khan's early development work focused on education and community organising. But the solution to unifying his people and his practical development concerns 'lay in the cultivation of a greater sense of *service* in Pathan society' (Banerjee 2000: 56). Mir Rahman, a KK, stated:

> [Khan] said that in order to get rid of those [the British] who were in land that was not theirs, we first had to reform our ways. He said that he needed volunteers to help in this task. He said that he had nothing to offer, no salary or money. What he wanted was not very many people; but at least one man who would be honest and willing to serve the people (Banerjee 2000:62-3).

Khan summed up what he meant by selfless service when he said:

> if you want your country and your people to prosper you must stop living for yourselves alone, you must start living for the community. That is the only way to prosperity and progress (Khan 1969:95).

Khan was himself an impeccable model of selfless service:

> Badshah Khan went on serving, reforming, and resisting tyranny for almost 80 years. I cannot imagine finding anywhere in the world's history a life of more unbroken service in the cause of freedom (Easwaran 2000:186).

Individual KKs state why their leader was so effective in rousing them to previously unimagined heights. 'We recognised Badshah Khan! People always recognise practical people with a drive to do things,' said one. 'Badshah Khan himself conveyed a sense of total self sacrifice — that was the secret of his growing following,' said another (Banerjee 2000: 66).

A social support structure was put in place to help the families of imprisoned, injured and crippled KKs. Seemingly small acts of service had a big impact:

> People recalled with gratitude the fact that when Badshah Khan went around villages and wanted to talk to farmers working in the fields, he used to make his escorts plough the land so that the farmers could sit and talk to him without losing valuable time (Banerjee 2000: 97).

People are attracted to work in development for a variety of reasons, some of which are selfish and some of which are noble and wholly good. While it is too much to initially expect *all* motivations for doing development work to be for the benefit of the poor and marginalised, there is much to be gained by studying inspiring examples of selfless service like those of Khan and the KKs. Such examples cannot help but raise awareness on three levels. First, it prompts reflection by individuals on the core reasons for why they undertake development work, and the intrinsic rewards of serving others. Second, it raises awareness of possible outcomes when interventions are made in communities where people are largely living for themselves only; furthermore sensitivity to it encourages recognition of already existing acts of service within communities. Third, it asks of the practitioner what kind of example they themselves are giving to the people they work with.

Moreover, selfless service by practitioners helps strengthen resistance against affiliation with the problematic interests of powerful organisations in development, which offer lucrative financial payouts to those working with them — something that affects many in the professional development sector, in and out of the academe.

Revolutionary Organisation

Severe poverty was rife among Pathans, who largely lived in rural areas. They had six percent adult male literacy (Banerjee 2000: 209). Yet the KKs were primarily a movement of the poor. 'An elaborate

system of training and infrastructure' was created to survive long years of protest, beatings, and jail (Banerjee 2000: 102). Class divisions were carefully dealt with through dual structures, one military, and the other civil. The latter attracted the educated and the older, while all classes populated the former. 'The selection procedures of the military wing deliberately ignored social status and imposed a social egalitarianism' (Banerjee 2000:137). Very poor people could be appointed into high posts like that of General; selection was based on character and behaviour, not social status. The nonviolent army provided a

> surrogate tribe to which to belong, and a new set of criteria for honour which were ideological and behavioural rather than material, thereby allowing each and every man to be, and feel himself to be, a member of full and equal worth. Thus the dual civil-military structure allowed a brilliant combination of conservatism and innovation, ascribed status and meritocracy, hierarchy and egalitarianism (Banerjee 2000: 139).

By their example the KKs throw down a challenge to mid-to-large size development organisations. Consider organisations like the Asian Development Bank (which is 'Fighting Poverty in Asia and the Pacific'), the New Zealand Agency for International Development ('Eliminating poverty through effective development partnerships', and the Australian Agency for International Development ('Helping developing countries reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development'). These institutions have a clear social hierarchy, and a social culture distinct from the lives of the poor. Their staff do not eat, dress, or talk as the poor do. They do not live among the poor. They do not share the same worries or take the same risks. They are not poor. In this respect they share something in common with the literate elite who helped run the civil arm of the KKs. But unlike the KKs, they do not have an institutional arm that incorporates the poor directly and allows advancement based on character and behaviour. Instead they have a detached relationship with the poor that is mediated through partner governments, civil society organisations, businesses, consultants, and occasional direct interaction. The partners themselves mirror to varying extents socioeconomic hierarchies within society (with notable exceptions within some civil society groupings). Under this arrangement, the poor can never feel like they are a member of full and equal worth in setting development priorities and undertaking development work. The dominant understanding of development recognises power as essential, yet the poor do not have any power in organisations that are supposed to exist for their benefit. For instance peasant and urban poor groups do not have representatives on the ADB's board of directors working alongside its bankers and managers. NZAID and AusAID do not have institutional arrangements for the poor to work directly with their Executive Director or Director General.

For the poor to be meaningfully incorporated into the decision making of large development organisations, a change of culture within such organisations will be necessary. Cultural change was something the KKs excelled at.

Cultural Change

Through his organising work Khan brilliantly redefined cultural norms to such an extent that revenge was replaced by patience as the highest ideal. Jawaharlal Nehru, who later became India's first prime minister, was astonished by the Khudai Khidmitgars' nonviolence, and found it incredible that 'the man who loved his gun better than his child or brother, who valued life cheaply and cared nothing for death, who avenged the slightest insult with the thrust of a dagger, had suddenly become the bravest and most enduring of India's soldiers' (Easwaran 2000:20). Not only the British but many Indians looked down upon the Pathans as brutes. When the British inflicted cruel violence upon the nonviolent Pathans, colonial claims about their inherent superiority in contrast to the violence and social decay of the Pathans were demonstrated to be false. Khan used the Pathans traditional sense of honour for a new and spiritual end — he told them that people all over the world would marvel to see what they thought was 'such a barbarous nation observing patience' (Banerjee 2002:156). Thus he transformed individual and tribal honour into shared honour of all Pathans; focus moved from self-centred to nation-centred, from selfish to selfless.

The conversion to nonviolence is a striking example of empowering the poor to renegotiate allegedly fixed cultural rules. It also vividly demonstrates the power of inner reflection when brought to bear upon social problems. To be nonviolent in the face of certain violent retaliation took courage, willpower, steadfastness, self-reform, selfless service and self-sacrifice. Khan (like Gandhi) pointed out that 'the highest expression of bravery and honour was to confront the British weaponless' (Banerjee 2000:157). Banerjee states the KKs' nonviolence was not a mere tactical manoeuvre, but

> rather a creative ideological position that was grounded in Islam and Pathan custom and which was genuinely embraced by many rank-and-file KKs as a guiding principle which they have continued to cherish and follow in the rest of their lives (Banerjee 2000: 209).

Khan ensured that the spiritual notion of jihad prevailed over its violent interpretations:

> The Khudai Khidmitgars' struggle was directed not only outwards to the enemy, but also inwards, to free themselves from 'ethically base' motivations such as pride and envy. . . . [Nonviolence] gave its practitioners unprecedented pride in themselves and their actions, pride which still remains fifty years after the event (Banerjee 2000: 214).

Banerjee here is referring to the metamorphosis of pride from negative into positive, from inordinate self-esteem to that of self-respect and personal worth. A key spiritual concept is harnessing the energy inherent in a destructive trait and rechannelling it to positive ends. The great Bengali mystic Ramakrishna highlighted greed as a key impediment to spiritual growth — but he also said if you are to be greedy, be greedy for spiritual love. Likewise, Mahatma Gandhi, a close friend of Khan, said:

> I have learnt through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world.

That Khan had an eye for seeing beyond the strengths and weaknesses of the culture in which he was raised is obvious. How he innovated, and was able to communicate these innovations in a way a variety of people could relate it, is less obvious, and we turn to it now.

Cultivating a Spiritual Imagination

Exploring how Khan innovated culturally raises tough challenges for the academe and how it teaches development. We can start by noting that Khan held up a higher image of Pathan identity than was normally the case to his people, fellow Indians, and the British. Likewise, if it is to fulfil its potential development studies will need to insist on a loftier image of what it means to be a human being than society generally demands. Khan encouraged the KKs to make connections they were unaware of between their inner life — personal qualities like patience, forgiveness, compassion, humility and love — and the consequences their actions and beliefs had on their society. Likewise, development studies has the opportunity to fire the imaginations of students and faculty by encouraging such connections itself, with education taking place in the broader context of a journey of self- and societal-discovery.

Arguably one of the greatest contributions Khan made was getting his people to make a conceptual leap when they renegotiated their cultural norms in making the dramatic transformation from centuries of violent revenge to vigorous nonviolence. He had his KKs rethink on a higher level the way they ordinarily viewed society: it changed from something they had to fit into, to something that was trying to fit into them. They were now consciously participating in a continual social process they had previously been in engaged in as unknowing passive recipients. Their understanding of how society's rules and promises were formed and reformed, and how they related to them, was transformed. Neither tradition, nor what fellow Indians or the British thought about them, forced them to make their future in the image of their past. Spiritual insights and demanding practice combined to make the KKs realise that the parameters of their collective and individual engagement with society were up to them to decide.

What is particularly interesting about the KKs' efforts is that they occurred in the context of ending the Pathans imperial subjugation at the hands of the British. That is, they no longer wished to be negated as a people by the divisive domination of a militarily more powerful people. But crucially, they rejected coercing the British through negating them in turn. Instead of seeking to conquer the British through violence as they had tried previously, they engaged spiritual qualities within themselves that led them conquer not the British but egotistical tendencies like revenge, envy and seething anger. With the resulting spiritual power would come the chance to truly challenge the British. The inner and outer dimensions of this are well illustrated by KK Safaraz Nazim:

> To induct people into the philosophy of the movement the first step was to instil a sense of service. Then came a sense of non-expectation and humility and from there on came a feeling of non-violence. The KK had to first understand the importance of humble, selfless service (*khidmat*) to the people. The term Khudai Khidmitgar literally means the one who serves God. Badshah Khan said that the best way to serve God was to serve one's fellow beings. Revolutionary political activity . . . could come only later (Banerjee 2000:79).

The challenge for development studies is to use a methodology to teach development that results in students and faculty consciously evolving themselves and their society to a more advanced state, both inwardly and outwardly.

In 1959 C. Wright Mills called for the adoption of the sociological imagination, 'a quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities' (Wright Mills 1959: 15). The sociological imagination connected social structures and history to the forming of people and their nature. It valued most highly the use of the intellect to understand people within the context of society. Mills saw society itself as the framework for individual growth. He said 'The kind of moral and psychological beings men [and women] become is in large part determined by the values they experience and the

institutional roles they are allowed and expected to play' (Wright Mills 1956: 15).

If development studies is to be committed to inner as well as outer development, it needs to cultivate the spiritual imagination. The spiritual imagination is the quality of mind that allows its practitioners to connect the unfolding of their spiritual identity to the broader social reality in which they live. To exercise it is to experience drawing together love and the intellect — and the robust will to put them to work — in understanding and shaping not only society but also what Eknath Easwaran (1987: 14) identifies as 'character, conduct and consciousness'. It demands working to transform oneself, and it knows that only by doing so can one recognise the potential of spiritual growth in others. And in the context of development, that means that only by commitment to personal spiritual growth can the practitioner have any chance of realising the true potential of development.

The sociological imagination and spiritual imagination complement one another. Consider ethics. Here the sociological imagination starts by asking 'how does society shape moral conduct?' The spiritual imagination asks how an individual can be the change they wish to see in the world (to borrow a famous phrase of Gandhi). It seeks to reveal within oneself the source of the drive to be what Easwaran calls (1989: 17) a 'blessing instead of a curse on the rest of life', and explore how this drive can be harnessed in the expression of social norms and ideals.

The effective use of a spiritual imagination by students, teachers and practitioners of development depends on hardy, constructive and pragmatic spiritual skills and insights. The practice of meditation and its allied disciplines are the most effective way to develop them. The study and practice of meditation at major universities for academic credit is not unheard of — the University of California at Berkeley offers such a course.

Sustained meditation practice makes it possible to minimise and eventually even largely eliminate selfish and egotistical tendencies. Development studies itself courts egoism, and hence stands to benefit directly from offering meditation courses. Present more often than we would like in the beliefs of the educated from financially richer countries is a vain superiority over others built on the belief that their society is the model by which other societies must measure themselves. Present also is the notion that education gifts the educated a special superiority over the average run of humanity, reflected in the academe's tendency to use bewildering, pompous and unnecessary language.

Traditional Development

Khan was unimpressed by excessive materialism — he believed Muslims lost their ‘honour, dignity and sank into ignominy’ when they ‘began to love wealth and possessions’ (Khan 1969:31) — but it is wrong to assume that he neglected traditional development per se. ‘There are two objects in view,’ he said repeatedly, ‘to liberate the country and to feed the starving and clothe the naked’ (Easwaran 2000: 133). He opened his first school in his home village of Utmanzai when he was just 20 years old. It was an ‘instant success’ (Easwaran 2000: 66). His efforts eventually led to a network of schools open to all irrespective of caste or religion, whose curriculum included history, language, mathematics, and vocational training like carpentry and weaving (Shah 1999: 23). Later, when the KKs were formed, education and sanitation were constant themes in training camps and daily life. Upon joining KKs had to take solemn vow, which included promising ‘to devote at least two hours a day to social work’ (Khan 1969: 97). Villages were swept clean, latrines built, and drains dug (Banerjee 2000: 53). Stories abound of Khan changing Pathan attitudes toward menial and entrepreneurial work by his personal example. ‘He particularly stressed Pathan’s taking to professions other than agriculture, since there was not enough land to support them all as farmers. He even opened a shop at Utmanzai to set an example to fellow tribesmen’ (Easwaran 2000: 82). A journal, Pakhtun, first published in 1928, contained articles on Pathan patriotism, language and literature, as well as political essays, dramas, religious writings, guides to hygiene, and contributions by women which repeatedly questioned their oppression (Shah 1999, Easwaran 2000). Women joined the KKs, girls schools were opened, and Khan had his sister give speeches, a major innovation. Khan said ‘God makes no distinction between men and women. . . . If we achieve success and liberate the motherland, we solemnly promise you [women] that you will get your rights’ (Easwaran 2000: 133).

Conclusion

'It was Badshah Khan's spiritual power that convinced us. We feel that he is still alive and among us today,' said KK Jarnail Abdul Aziz (Banerjee 2000: 66). Khan’s emergence from a stagnant society to become a leader of rare spiritual depth challenges those of us from more advantageous circumstances to ask what we ourselves are doing to advance humankind. He held high a bold development vision and laid the cultural and organisational foundations on which to achieve it. Given the gruelling circumstances in which Khan and the KKs harnessed love, power and knowledge and put them to work on transforming both their inner identity and their society, there is no one who can claim that incorporating an inner dimension into development is impossible or unnecessary.

1. Built upon The Challenge of Inner Development, presented at the 3rd Biennial DevNet conference, Massey University, 5-7 December 2002.

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