South-South Cooperation and Inclusive Growth

Ongoing criticism over the efficacy of a modern development model characterised by an imbalance of power with respect to terms of action has in recent years spawned discussion regarding the utility of ‘South-South cooperation’ as a potential new development paradigm. We agree with many of the critiques levelled at development in its current form, particularly when considered in the context of the clearly growing disparity across the globe between those who have and those who have not (see Ortiz and Cummins, 2011). But we also have reservations related to questions as to what exactly South-South cooperation means, and indeed worry that this ‘new’ paradigm is not new at all if it merely reinforces a hegemonic view of two ‘worlds’, a North and a South. The primary objective of this Working Paper is thus to contribute to an understanding of how South-South cooperation might distinguish itself as a genuine alternative to prevailing macro-level development approaches.

During the colonial era the sciences of economics and anthropology were intimately connected; the latter discipline in particular grounded in highly Eurocentric understandings of the biological evolution of species. With this fact as a starting point, we undertake a critical historical analysis of economic thinking to reveal the neo-liberal impulse of the Washington Consensus as heavily infused with notions of ‘natural progress’ and ‘survival of the fittest’. As a mode of ‘othering’, the discursive entanglement of economics and anthropology, we argue, had the effect of actually creating inequality by projecting humans as having followed a particular evolutionary or developmental trajectory—either ‘forward’ or, as it were, ‘backward’. And because (as of the early 21st century) ideological structures are so deep-rooted, it continues to have this effect. The socio-cultural phenomenon known as casteism, ‘the Southern problem’, is a standout case in point.

The relentless concern among so many economists with augmenting people’s purchasing power, guised as it is as ‘progress’, is where casteism acquires deep-rooted, it continues to have this effect. The socio-cultural phenomenon known as casteism, ‘the Southern problem’, is a standout case in point.

By adopting resistance strategies which, in relation to essentialism, are much more nuanced, including embracing alternative knowledge systems (for example, Dalit oral histories) that dislocate the hegemonic Euro-American perspective, the Global South can potentially help the rest of the world embrace the contingent, the discontinuous and the unrepresentable as coordinates for remapping and rethinking borders that define one’s existence and place in the world. For South-South cooperation to be effective it must define itself by ‘unexpected moves’ that disrupt the kinds of language games—‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ included—that characterise the current world order. In turn, this must entail recognising the paradox of similarity and difference, as revealed by the lived experienced of Bangladesh’s Dalits of Indian origin as compared to other ‘low-caste’ peoples around the world.

References:
