

## **CRITIQUE**

### **Development Against Freedom and Sustainability\***

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#### ***Sustainability and Socialism***

It is common understanding among natural scientists that if development means unlimited growth in production and consumption of materials, sustainable development is an oxymoron. That's because unending growth of anything in the universe is impossible—except perhaps the universe itself. In ecological economic parlance, sustainable development implies “development without growth beyond environmental carrying capacity, where development means qualitative improvement, and growth means increase.” Development can be sustainable only in a zero-growth economy, which would improve the quality of everyone's life, by ensuring conservation and the equitable distribution of natural resources.

This understanding leads to the “strong sustainability” position, which forbids any further depletion of natural resources so that the rest of humanity (including future generations) is not deprived of the goods and services of nature. Strong sustainability is consonant with the (eco)socialist view of sustainability and reiterates the Marxian critique of development based on exploitation and alienation of labor, which is inseparable from the alienation of humans from nature. The socialist critique of capitalism essentially converges with the Green critique of the utilitarian treatment of nature that has resulted in “the estrangement [*Entfremdung*] of the conditions of production, which in their simplest forms are the natural elements themselves.” While seldom articulated in mainstream Marxist discourse, the Marxian critique of capitalism endorses the strong sustainability argument that industrial development is unsustainable, because monetization of the natural world causes progressive degradation of human life and destruction of nature: “The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, .... the more rapid is this process of destruction.”

In the neoclassical development paradigm, nature has not only become a source of raw material for industry but a commercial value in itself. Biodiversity has now become a “reservoir of value that research and knowledge, along with biotechnology, can release for capital.” The capitalization of nature thus extends beyond what Escobar calls the “semiotic conquest of nature”: the invention of “natural capital” and “human capital” in the new economic parlance reinforces the hegemony of what Harvey calls “the standard view.” It enables capital to deplete nature, and deprive humans (including those unborn) of the value and future productivity of all components of nature. Thus, the standard view of development sacrifices intergenerational equity, in terms of welfare generated from natural resources and fulfillment of basic human needs, which connects the issue of sustainability to that of social justice—the principal concern of socialism.

Socialism envisages a sustainable, socially just society, where both intra- and inter-generational equity are established. Strong sustainability, endorsed in the (eco)socialist view, contends that money cannot buy the right to deplete the natural world; it reiterates Marx's contention that: “Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *bona patres familias*, they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition.” This responsibility toward future generations contradicts the standard view, which systematically discounts the future.

Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen, who is best known for his work on understanding welfare economics, poverty, inequality, and famine, enhanced the neoclassical notion of fairness by incorporating democratic values. But in the context of sustainability, Sen's theorization of justice, freedom

and democracy is marked by his negligence of the issue of environmental justice. From the “strong sustainability” perspective, Senian ethics warrants a new discourse on the relevance of environmental issues to the notions of democracy and freedom.

### ***Sustainability and Democracy***

Any form of democracy ensconced in capitalist economy where the concentration of wealth, power and privilege in the hands of the few subjugates the interests of the majority does not conform to the idea of participatory, civic democracy. The existence of democratic institutions is not enough to ensure democratic rights to citizens, nor do the formal rules of democracy necessarily engender economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency of governance, and security of individuals. The political-economic forces that dismantle the functionings of real-life democratic practice are prominent in most post-colonies. Corruption, political-bureaucratic subterfuge, leadership lapses and administrative inefficiency that nurture social inequalities, and even U.S.-sponsored insurgency (as happened in Chile and Nicaragua) pose continuous threats to democracy in many countries vying for industrial development.

India posits a stark example of democracy maimed by corruption, inefficiency and bureaucratic high-handedness that nurtures inequalities. “In some states, the legislatures are packed with criminals,” and village administrations are “often controlled by the local elite.” India’s administrative machinery is geared to deny the populace of instrumental freedoms, including freedom of the press and freedom of expression of opinion. Examples of what Bertram Gross called “industrial-communications-police bureaucracies” are legion: The editor of *The Hindu* was harassed and arrested several times between 2000 and 2004, because he dared to expose a number of scandals involving Members of Parliament. On July 25, 1999, the police arrested and detained Debashis Chowdhury, a school teacher from southern Bengal, on a charge of sedition, because he had publicly denounced the ongoing Indo-Pakistan war as an expansionist move by both the Indian and Pakistani governments to annul the Kashmiri people’s right to self-governance. Over the past few years, hundreds of innocents have been arrested and kept under trial for months on suspicion of having connections with terrorist groups in many states. On July 7, 2002, Abhijit Sinha, a government employee, committed suicide after being tortured and mortally disgraced in custodial interrogation on suspicion of some nexus with Naxalite “terrorists.” On June 4, 2005 the Indian police brutally assaulted Prof. Jean Drèze, a renowned economist and associate of Prof. Amartya Sen, along with several other activists in a “Right to Employment” campaign meeting, because the police suspected the campaigners were Naxalites. In this oppressive regime, any discourse of sustainability that critiques development shrivels into a dry academic topic.

Drèze and Sen contend that society has to work hard to maintain and preserve democratic traditions and protect human rights. They consider it imperative “to pursue vigorously the strengthening of democratic practice,” but it is unclear how that is possible in a regime where citizens feel powerless in the face of complex legal proceedings and a bureaucratic juggernaut. Indeed, when citizens’ motivation to make use of democratic institutions evaporates, democracy becomes non-functional. It would be impossible to “strengthen” a democracy that is already incapacitated by corruption, inefficiency and institutional impediments to enable conscious participation of citizens in governance. Strengthening a “democratic tradition” where democratic institutions are usurped by the power elite and perpetuate inequalities in wealth and control over resources cannot benefit the “disentitled” majority. As Drèze and Sen state:

Social inequalities may undermine democratic practices, even when all democratic institutions are in place. This also applies to the legal system, which is often far from impartial between different classes (even in the absence of any corruption), if only because richer people can afford better lawyers.

Nevertheless, Drèze and Sen stop short of stating that inequality is itself the *outcome* of development through concentration of capital, which cannot allow functional democracy. Under the paradigm of development, individuals are indoctrinated to maximize profits and institutions are geared to

enhance the privileges of the privileged and intimidate the disempowered. Drèze and Sen seem to identify the proximate cause of the disease: inequalities. But the ultimate cause, the doctrine of development, remains unchallenged.

The goal of a functional democracy is to remove all inequalities through civic participation and cooperation. A model of civic democracy is the Paris Commune of 1871, which Marx considered a template of socialist democracy, because it entailed “federalism, decentralization, participatory democracy, social justice, and a rapid improvement in workers’ living conditions.” Cooperation and participation in social production continues in industrial societies, too—both in capitalist and Soviet- and Chinese-style socialist states despite the fact that control over resources remains in the hands of a centralized authority. In capitalist as well as industrial Socialist states, generational environmental equity is sacrificed to achieve industrial growth. Consequently, the Three Mile Island “accident” finds its enormously worse counterpart at Chernobyl; the Love Canal story is hugely magnified in the Aral Sea’s story; and deforestation becomes no less intensive and extensive in modern China than it was in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Regardless of the shape of political superstructure, the doctrine of development itself destroys the common resource base, dissipates the future productivity of resources, alienates people from the fruits of their cooperation, and therefore from their communal essence.

### ***The Market vs. the Commons***

Because private property and profit are the foundation of capitalism, community arrangements are seen in neoclassical economics as violations of individual rights and freedoms. This explains why the capitalist system is “hostile to traditional governance in general” and invariably disintegrates the commons and the community. Marx described in detail the process of the abolition of the ancient commons by early capitalism, which led to a “whole series of thefts, outrage, and popular misery, that accompanied the forcible expropriation of the people, from the last third of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.” The capitalist market essentially “conquered the field for capitalist agriculture, made the soil part and parcel of capital, and created for the town industries the necessary supply of a ‘free’ and outlawed proletariat.”

This scenario of depriving the poor of their resource base through “the fraudulent alienation of the State domains, the robbery of the common lands, usurpation of feudal and clan property, and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of reckless terrorism” has repeated itself for centuries, drastically altering land-use patterns to infuse “progress” and development in country after country. The capitalist land-use policy was extended in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to Europe’s colonies, where people used to gather free goods from the commons, such as village tanks, forests and pastures, which contributed to rural equity.

But European colonial administration considered these commons unproductive. After the village tanks and wells were turned into private property, water scarcity became a problem for the poor, who did not hold colonial land deeds. In conformity with the prevailing English Utilitarian concept of nature, wild lands were considered wastelands and “a bar to the prosperity of the Empire,” resulting in the rapid disappearance of pristine forests in Europe and her colonies. Later on, when the forests were considered valuable as tree farms, the state took over all forests and outlawed hunting-gathering and shifting cultivation by indigenous forest people.

Modernization of land use has replaced the commons with either state ownership or private titles to the resources. Even when the state is the prime custodian of the forest, it uses the land to promote commerce and facilitate private profit-making. In particular, production in modern forestry directly serves the agenda of economic development, while its professed conservation objective conforms to the civilizing mission of colonial rule and the capitalist idea of progress. All colonial and subsequent nationalist

governments maintain both these objectives and tend to facilitate the growth of capital by destroying the commons and replacing customary community rights over resources with private ownership arrangements.

Private property rights encourage individuals to maximize utility and optimize short-term social welfare. Thus, private property leads to and justifies Hardin's "tragedy of the commons," which postulates that everybody is entitled to use the resource to maximize one's own welfare, although that behavior would curtail the right and opportunity of other humans, including future generations, to use the resource. For example, installing bore wells at every house would allow everyone to freely pump out groundwater to everyone's fill but will eventually lead to a general water crisis due to depletion of the groundwater stock. Of course, as critics have pointed out, such Hardinian "commons" are in fact open-access resources that nobody has a stake to conserve. True commons are characterized by community custodianship and regulated access. The Hardinian tragedy of open access resources specifically illustrates why a free-market economy cannot conserve resources. Conversely, the true commons that existed in pre-industrial societies in different parts of the world demonstrates the strength of civic democracy based on communitarian ethos.

### ***Freedom and Sustainability***

The question of freedom is crucial to the notion of sustainability. A society cannot be sustainable without affording freedom to its members. Clearly, an autocratic, repressive society cannot walk on the path of sustainability any more than it can foster democratic virtues. But even a democratic state committed to industrial growth cannot be sustainable, because it would always generate new restrictions, or "unfreedoms," and inequalities. If community stewardship of natural resources is a primary condition of sustainability, the community cannot be sustainable unless its members have freedom to participate in decision-making regarding the governance and management of the resource base. This form of socialism negates and takes the control over resources away from the elite in capitalist as well as centralized, hierarchical Socialist states bent on continuous industrial growth.

The question is, how much individual freedom is possible in a civic society where common interests are placed above selfish interests? Amartya Sen's analysis of development offers an explanation of the relationship between freedom and sustainability. Sen argues that true development is realized by extension to all spheres of human life when people have "capability freedom," which can only be achieved in social conditions that do not curtail a person's capabilities. Poverty is a source of unfreedom because it is "deprivation of basic capabilities." The poor are deprived of the freedom to choose "livings that one can have reason to value." To ensure capabilities, Sen argues, development must foster an enabling condition for all; health, education and social welfare must be incorporated into development programs. He argues that poverty embodies the lack of options and opportunities, but eradication of income poverty is not the end of this issue. Lack of freedom and "capability poverty" may exist even in conditions of high income. Sen cites a study that revealed that African slaves in the U.S. South often had relatively high pecuniary incomes and longer life expectancy than free urban industrial workers in both the U.S. and Europe. "And yet, slaves did run away." Furthermore, after the abolition of slavery, the whites' attempts to get the slaves back at higher wages never succeeded.

However, the concept of freedom, like truth, is far from simple and is subject to various interpretations. Freedom could be confused with the lack of discipline and encroachment into the freedom of others. Under one interpretation of free society, one may feel free to practice the trumpet at midnight. Despite the fact that the concept of democratic freedom is something most people understand, there are seas of difference in its interpretation and application. For instance, the U.S. state prohibition of smoking in public places including railway carriages and restaurants ensures nonsmokers have the right to breathe air free of secondhand smoke. But in other countries, India for example, such a ban may seem oppressive of smokers' individual freedom.

## *The Market as Liberator?*

Sen's notion of development as freedom *seems* to incorporate rational choice to satisfy personal and social needs in an equitable way. But his faith in the market as the provider of equal opportunity and free choice is misplaced. Sen argues that to ensure freedom for all, a free market is essential because the market enables individuals to operate on the fair ground of *laissez faire* competition. Sen accedes that market failures do occur, and at times the state needs to regulate the market, but he argues that the market nevertheless liberates the worker from pre-industrial serfdom. Sen even attempts to draw on Marx to support his conjecture of the market as the arbiter of freedom from the bondages of pre-capitalist labor arrangements, though he ignores Marx's exposition that capitalism creates novel forms of serfdom in place of the kinds of servitude prevalent in pre-capitalist societies. This description of the market as liberator identifies Sen with what Marx called "our bourgeois historians."

...the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-workers, appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds, and *this side alone exists for our bourgeois historians*. But, on the other hand, these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their means of production, and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in the letters of blood and fire. [Emphasis added.]

Sen observes that labor bondage linked with indebtedness "yields a particularly tenacious form of unfreedom in many pre-capitalist agricultures," and that the worker becomes free in capitalism. He fails to note, however, that the formal freedom from labor bondage does not by itself signify freedom of the laborer from exploitation and indebtedness. In Marx's words, the advance from the pre-capitalist to the capitalist stage of production "consisted in a change of form of this servitude [of the worker], in the transformation of feudal exploitation into capitalist exploitation." To recall the history of the growth of capitalism in Europe, the enclosure of the commons led to the mass migration of the uprooted poor to cities, where these "freedmen" would live as vagabonds and beggars. To them, freedom bore little practical meaning. The same story continues today in the hundreds of modern urban, river dam, mining, and power projects across the globe that have "liberated" millions of people from their homes and livelihoods in these places—"ecosystem people"—to become development refugees. Indeed, the market makes the worker free to choose which industry to serve to generate surplus for the capitalist. The ecosystem refugees who migrate to the city are surely free from the subservience to money-lenders and landlords under the traditional feudal system. But these people are now engulfed by a new industrial serfdom, where they must choose between selling their labor and starving. It is as if the convict is given the freedom to choose which way he wants to be executed—electric chair, poison, or gallows.

If the free market frees the worker to sell her labor to whomever she chooses, she can only do so if there is a demand for her labor. In real-life market arrangements, uprooted immigrants find the job market saturated, old industrial workers are laid off, most of those employed are underpaid, and all live in conditions that abrogate their basic capabilities. The industrial commodification of nature and the disintegration of the commons have led—and lead everywhere—to the rapid erosion of the resource base of the ecosystem people and their generational rights to the resources. Sen's vision of "instrumental freedom"—facilitated by the market—fails to take this unfreedom of the poor and the degradation of nature into consideration. Simultaneously, he ignores the fact that the market protects the capitalist's freedom to maximize profit by violating several aspects of basic human rights—that is, until the capitalist is constrained by laws.

Specifically, Sen refuses to recognize industrial development itself as the destroyer of freedom, environmental equity and intergenerational rights. He fails to acknowledge that the industrial capitalist

ethic of maximizing profit delimits and opposes the ecological ethic of pre-industrial societies, and that freedom of private property and profit in industrial society necessarily preempts that of the community.

### ***Exclusive Freedom vs. Freedom of Counterfactual Choice***

Freedom in industrial growth-based polity fosters an *exclusive freedom* of a handful of people—the elite. The rich and the powerful enjoy the freedom to afford themselves most of the public “entitlements.” This applies in democratic and totalitarian regimes alike, because inequalities are fostered and maintained in class societies. Although the market can take care of some material needs of individuals, “the control of globalizing economic forces (which guide the acquisition and expansion of capital) will constantly create new forms of inequity or environmental and social subjugation.” The poor are perpetually deprived of freedom and privilege in the course of development, because the freedom of the privileged few to exploit others excludes the freedom of the exploited to use the democratic apparatus of the state to protect their interests.

Sen envisages the *freedom of counterfactual choice* of citizens in a democracy where everyone’s “liberty to choose to live as one desires” is ensured. This freedom relates to “what one would have chosen if one had the choice.” Later on, Sen calls this freedom *substantive freedom* “to achieve alternative functioning combinations.” True development, according to Sen, is possible in a democracy where everyone has the freedom to choose one’s means of subsistence and desire-fulfillment. Martha Nussbaum interprets this freedom as an utmost advancement of human capabilities through two kinds of efforts: (a) promotion of internal capabilities (say, by education and training), and (b) establishing democratic institutions and material conditions to enable people to exercise these capabilities at will. This implies that the political system must empower citizens to assert their rights to free education, basic health care, old-age security, freedom of opinion, and so on. Once citizens are empowered, the rich and the poor alike would have the freedom to choose their means of subsistence, mode of living, and the pursuit of personal goals of material achievement. This freedom ensues from equal rights of all to life’s opportunities.

This notion of freedom, however, also implies that the rich industrialist has the freedom to pollute the air as much as citizens who breathe it have the right to oppose the pollution of their air. Citizens are likely to win the battle if they are well informed and educated, have a democratic will to assert their rights, and have enough means, as Dréze and Sen point out, to “afford better lawyers” to oppose the industrialist. Otherwise, the industrialist wins. This inequality exposes the disingenuousness of free-market environmentalism, which has little respect for community rights. Any significant shift in the direction of sustainability must reinvoke the communitarian ethos that will necessarily grate against the utilitarian free-market approach.

### ***Freedom and the Right to Informed Choice***

Sen’s notion of freedom in terms of counterfactual choice fails to provide complete rational freedom to individuals in harmony with the conditions of a free society. Various indicators of human development that Sen considers—citizens’ education in terms of years of schooling or the extent of women’s empowerment—do not necessarily translate into individuals making informed choices with regard to the long-term consequences of their behavior. In democratic societies throughout the industrialized world, patterns of individual behavior are chosen based on some immediately apparent benefit, without awareness of the less obvious consequences of the behavior in question, because individuals are not aware of the benefits of collective restraint over the use of the commons. This is despite the fact that rationality dictates preserving the resource base, and the actions of *homo oeconomicus* are supposed to be based on informed choice that is guided by rationality.

In the example where everyone draws water from one's bore well *ad libitum*, individual freedom and the right to private property are sustained, but groundwater as common property is depleted. The commons is doomed by citizens' freedom to extract, use and even waste water, because the individuals are neither aware of the value of the common resource nor the consequences of their irresponsible behavior. Informed choice for common pool resource users is contingent on the public perception of long-term collective costs and individual short-term benefits of the profligate use of the resource. "The failure to recognize this role of perception in common resource use is likely to result in incorrect predictions and misguided policy recommendations." Individuals in real life tend to behave prudently toward common property resources on which they subsist if they understand the consequences of their actions. Conversely, if individuals are unaware of the consequences, they typically waste their resource. Private rights deplete the commons because of the lack of public awareness of collective costs, not the dilemma of the commons.

Sen treats the issue of awareness differently in his discussion of informational bases of ethics. As an illustration, he shows that an employer's access to relevant information may lead to different types of freedom for different people. The employer compares the need of three potential workers who will all benefit by getting the job: a depressed person who is recently unemployed, a sick person, and a very poor person. The employer's knowledge of the different needs of these three potential workers will make it hard for her to decide which of them to employ, although every worker is equally efficient in the particular job to be assigned. According to Sen, upon employment, the depressed person likely will overcome her depression and become happy; the sick person will be able to be free from her illness, and the third one, the poorest, will be able to enjoy the kinds of freedom denied to the poor. "If all the three facts are known, the decision rests on which information is given the most weight." Thus, he concludes, information plays an important role in providing freedoms to the three individuals.

However, the access to relevant information regarding each worker's respective needs constitutes the *privilege of the employer* to decide which worker to employ. Sen completely ignores the fact that workers also need information in order to make appropriate choices about their jobs and lifestyles. Information regarding the nature and consequences of the job, for example, is crucial for the worker's freedom to decide whether to take the job in the first place. If any of the candidates in Sen's example happened to know that her work (say, in a radioactive mine or a toxic chemical factory with no safety measures) would be fatal to herself as well as her offspring, she might decide to *not* accept the job. But without that information, she will not feel it necessary to search for any other option. Indeed, such information constitutes the worker's *right*—not just privilege—to know her options and the consequences of those options.

Freedom of choice without prior information about the conditions and likely consequences is incomplete freedom, and often leads to new unfreedoms. For instance, a farmer may desire to grow more rice and may fulfill that desire by growing hybrid crops using highly subsidized agrochemical inputs without knowing that his use of these chemicals would drastically reduce his farm's natural fertility, impair his own health by polluting his food and water, and accelerate his production costs, which would lead to loss of income, indebtedness, and poverty. If the farmer had known these consequences, he would likely choose *not* to depend on the chemicals and the hybrid seeds that require heavy inputs of chemicals. He might choose instead to improve farm production by organic methods (for example, by using organic manures, green manure cover crops, mulching, and herbal pest control) if he had the right information. The information about the consequences would empower him to make a rational decision. This is not a hypothetical example. Hundreds of cotton farmers committed suicide in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh in 1998-1999, because they were unable to repay the loans they had taken for growing the enormously costly transgenic cotton seeds supplied by Monsanto-Mahyco. The farmers had no idea that the novel cotton variety would entail overexpenditure on pesticides and result in substantial yield losses. These farmers were apparently free to choose to buy the seeds, but they actually had no freedom of

choice, because they had no access to necessary information about the seeds' performance and the risks involved.

Lack of access to information constitutes a form of poverty, because it deprives people of "basic capabilities" that enable freedom of choice. Like income poverty, information poverty disables entitlement. A recent study has shown that large numbers of the rural poor in India have remained below the poverty line, simply because they didn't know they were entitled to receive benefits from various state welfare schemes (housing for the poor, old-age and widows' pensions, etc.). Instead, state resources earmarked for the poor have either remained unutilized or have been embezzled by a coterie of rural politicians, bureaucrats and rich farmers.

### ***Freedom and Power***

Sen acknowledges that the poor are deprived of the freedom to "make rational choices about their lives" by recounting an example from his childhood of a man, Kader Mia, who was killed in the 1947 Bengal riot. This impoverished man was compelled to go out "in search of work and a bit of earning" into a hostile area during the riots, "because his family had nothing to eat." Sen opines that if Kader had enough resources to stay indoors, he would not have lost his life on that fateful day. Because Kader was poor, he was not free, and therefore was compelled to go out.

Though this is a convincing tale of how poverty can restrain people's instrumental freedoms, it is possible to see this story from different perspectives. First, freedoms and well-beings are conditioned by, *inter alia*, social climates, such as the prevalence or absence of violence and crimes. In Kader Mia's case, he was poor in terms of both income and capability deprivation. Regardless of his level of income, his life and freedoms were jeopardized by the violent societal condition of the time. Surely income poverty enhanced his danger. But one might imagine that even if Kader had stayed home, rioters might have stormed his home and killed him there, since that is a familiar pattern with riot killings and was repeated in the 2002 riot in Gujarat.

Secondly—and more importantly—Kader and the thousands of others who were victimized in the riot were not free, because they had no power to influence the course of the riot. Indeed, many of the riot victims were not poor. Some middle-class people were also killed in the riot. All these people were mere puppets in a dirty political game played by India's political elite, who had set the rules and the outcome of the game. Neither the individuals who were murdered nor those who killed had any knowledge of the causes and consequences of the riot. They didn't initiate it and had no power to stop it. Similarly, the Jewish people in the Third Reich—both wealthy and poor—could not live as they desired, because they were not empowered to make crucial decisions about where and how to live. Clearly, poverty is one significant face of unfreedom, as Sen has shown, but not the only one. Freedom is a political concept in the broad sense, and therefore relates ultimately to power, which Sen does not adequately address.

A well-known fact illustrates this point. In most Southern countries, poor women are not free to keep their family size small, because decisions about reproductive matters are as a rule made by her male consort. Even in a rich family, the woman may have to repeatedly conceive, because her husband (and often she herself as well) wants a male child. This "son preference" is a legacy of the patrilineal, patriarchal society, and it severely constrains women's reproductive freedom. Because of the prevailing son preference, women themselves are often involved in female infanticide and sex-selective abortion (with the help of fetal sex-determining techniques) in South Asia. Women's empowerment and agency on economic terms alone are unlikely to remove this type of gender inequality, since, as Drèze and Sen recognize, "that agency is itself an integral part of the cause of natality inequality." The working woman who has achieved considerable economic autonomy and agency is not free in the existing patriarchy to make decisions about her own life—whether she should sacrifice outdoor work to care for the home, how much of the



household chores she must undertake, whether or when she should marry, when she should conceive, and so on. “What is needed is not merely [the] freedom and power to act, but also [the] freedom and power to question and reassess the prevailing norms and values.”

This assertion by the leading advocates of human development substantiates that legal and economic empowerment is not enough. The ability to question the authority of social and cultural norms and values constitutes political empowerment, which subsumes economic empowerment. But it goes much further than that. Freedom is a consequence of this political power, and the powerless, by definition, have less freedom. All the formal legal and economic power of women and the poor, therefore, yield incomplete freedoms. Decentralization of power is a facet of social and political justice, which can only be ensured in civic democracy. The very concept of civic democracy is built on decentralized power, which would usher comprehensive freedom and equal rights of citizens. This principal role of political justice and power constitutes the model of *homo politicus*.

In the process of keeping power decentralized in a participatory democracy, the community plays a vital role. The community is a key factor in determining freedom in a civic democracy, where freedom does not transcend long-term community interests. In this orientation of freedom, counterfactual choice is not arbitrary. Individuals’ “liberty to choose to live as one desires” must conform to the freedom of other members of the community—including those yet unborn—to choose to live as they would desire. Because individual desires are multifarious, and because some desires are mutually exclusive, everyone’s desires cannot be fulfilled. Everyone’s freedom must therefore be restricted, without necessarily violating the principles of democratic freedom. But this merely reinforces the necessity of a society to adhere to the rule of law. For example, traffic regulations that prohibit individuals from driving in the wrong traffic lane are necessary to keep drivers and pedestrians safe. No reasonable person would argue that such regulations—i.e., restrictions—keep the society in bondage.

In contrast, exclusive freedom of a section of the population that violates community rights, whether in a totalitarian or democratic regime, is inimical to the freedom and sustainability of society. The lumpen among the poor who were motivated to kill other poor people in the Bengal riot, German Nazis who were motivated to exterminate Jews in Auschwitz and other concentration camps, and the Soviet secret police that killed great scientists like Vavilov on suspicion of libel, made their societies unfree and insecure for citizens. Both the Bengal rioters and the Nazis were motivated to cleanse their land by exterminating people of a rival belief system (Hinduism, Islam or Judaism). The Soviet party autocracy sought to protect the land from anti-Soviet forces and chose to exterminate the suspect. From the killers’ perspective, they were of course “free” to act according to their desires, and indeed, chose a counterfactual option. However, any sane person would find this interpretation of freedom repugnant. The simple reason is that freedom does not concern the desire-fulfilling choice of individuals but concerns the community. A society may thwart an individual’s desire to kill his rivals and yet remain a free society, whereas a society that does not restrain the free use of arms may not ensure its citizens’ right to live in peace.

### ***Toward an Inclusive Freedom***

In Senian economy, freedom of counterfactual choice is an intrinsic right of humans in any social system. However, an economy that considers unlimited development as freedom of counterfactual choice is unable to ensure an *inclusive freedom* to encompass intergenerational equity. Freedom of counterfactual choice is inadequate to incorporate the ecological ethic of indigenous pre-industrial communities that prioritize the right of the community over that of individuals. The freedom of the community must also take precedence over the freedom of guilds of vested interests. If the community is not free to exert this power, it is not based on a mutually agreed system of social governance, which is the essence of democracy. However, mutually agreed governance is never perfect, because there is always a desideratum of people who do not agree to be restrained. A free society does not give everybody freedom to have or do

everything; it merely disallows some to do something that restricts the freedom of others. Individual freedoms ought to be truncated in order to ensure the counterfactual freedom of society, and thus to ensure social equity.

The slaves in the U.S. south were slaves because they were deprived of freedom of counterfactual choice. But this deprivation was possible because the society allowed their masters to keep them enslaved. As soon as the U.S. legislature outlawed slavery, it abolished the freedom of the guild of white planters to buy or keep slaves, no matter how well they would keep their slaves. Even if an individual slave chose to remain a slave, U.S. law prohibited that. Thus, in order to keep the society free and equitable, an individual's "freedom to be a slave" would be denied, just as much as another individual's "freedom to enslave" must be denied. The same argument applies to the individual "right" and "freedom of choice" when it comes to illiteracy, lack of medical help, child labor, supply of unclean water, abusing the weak, or committing genocide.

This aspect of freedom brings us to the issue of environmental equity. In the prevailing economic milieu, natural resources tend to be destroyed in the capitalist economy, because the environmental cost of economic activities are not accounted for. Consequently, industry enjoys the freedom to own and destroy natural wealth in the name of industrial growth. Rising environmental pollution and plummeting social and health conditions are the price of economic growth, which the citizens at large, including those yet unborn, are forced to pay. This constitutes a fundamental unfreedom of the community, because citizens did not know in the first place that a specific technology might poison the air they breathe, the food they eat, and the water they drink. The private and corporate freedom to destroy everyone's life support system must be curtailed to allow everyone the freedom to live in a clean and healthy environment. The counterfactual freedom of society to live in a clean environment is abolished by the freedom of industry to pollute the environment, and this is possible, because in this case, individual freedom is stymied by the alienation of humans from their umbilical linkage to the community (*Gemeinwesen* in Marx's term), from the fruits of their production and nature. Inclusive freedom of everyone—of society—is possible only when society is able to both know the consequences of production and control production. And the more that individuals are in control of production, the more they become integrated in "a fully social life in a community of integrated, harmonious men." This illustrates the Marxian socialization of production, which "seeks to redefine freedom, and in the process eliminates some present freedom." But the elimination of these individual liberal "freedoms" carry priceless rewards for society as a whole: freedom from want and equality for *all*.

Senian reliance on the market as liberator and arbiter of equity is the free-market version of sustainability, which suggests that environmental equity can be ensured through market mechanisms. For example, imposing taxes on environmentally harmful economic activities like carbon emission would curtail the private and corporate freedom to heat up the atmosphere and induce global climate destabilization. Carbon taxes might, the argument goes, increase the freedom of counterfactual choice of the majority to enjoy a better quality of life. Similarly, imposing energy permits would compel industry to reduce energy use in the production of goods and services. Such pollution taxes and energy permits would at least partly internalize the environmental problem in the economy, in that they would appear in the accounting schemes. However, this argument becomes groundless when we consider that full internalization of all environmental and social costs of pollution would necessarily stop certain kinds of production, because the aggregate costs are "too high to compute." For example: "If significant, irreversible thresholds are passed for irreplaceable ecosystem services, their value may quickly jump to infinity." When only a miniscule part of the total cost of economic activities is internalized by way of taxing, society, not industry, still has to bear the costs, because the increased production cost is passed over to society as an added price of the commodity. The only means to free society from the degradation of the natural world is to stop the production of commodities whose social, environmental and health costs are too high. This would constitute a form of inclusive freedom for all citizens; nobody can violate the

freedom of others to live and function in an environment which, in Sen's words, "they have reason to value." Inclusive freedom would thus discourage environmentally destructive economic activities, and lead to the valuing of intergenerational environmental equity above individual profits and privileges.

### ***Civic Democracy and Ecosystem People***

Today, in a world encountering a profound ecological crisis with upfront market globalization appropriating biodiversity and local knowledge and a division of labor that greatly weakens the agency of the industrial proletariat, there is a need to rethink a form of socialism where the community (*Gemeinschaft*), instead of the industrial proletariat plays the historical role of transforming the economy. In recognition of the civic democratic models in indigenous societies that still survive industrial assaults, a rethinking of the notion of civic democracy is urgent. The globalization of the acceptance of development-as-destiny is facilitated by the fantasies of consumerism, which engulfs the individual and functions best upon the breakdown of community at all levels. The very historical origin of the industrial proletariat from the dissolution of the community makes this class particularly vulnerable to the promises of consumerism as a source of happiness and freedom. The proletariat strives to catch up with the bourgeoisie's living standards, because "the advance of capitalist production develops a working class, which by education, tradition, [and] habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of Nature." In contrast, the rural community—especially the ecosystem peoples displaced by large development or extraction industries—still can thwart the industrial abuse of nature and resist co-optation. The hegemony of development crumbles when ecosystem people assert their rights over their resource base—as in the case of the Chipko movement in the 1970s and 1980s, which successfully resisted the destruction of forests in India. The experience of grassroots movements for sustainable resource use indicates that civil society, "the musculature of democracy," can facilitate and materialize a meaningful discourse on sustainability. A strong civic democracy can originate from a social setting where all members have equal rights and are tied to one another by bonds of responsibility and mutual respect. "In a civic democracy, equals come together voluntarily to promote the diverse interests of the group as whole." The functioning of civic democracy rests on the ability of ordinary people to participate in the institutional processes of making decisions on matters that regulate their lives—matters ranging from building community silos to punishing offenders who violate social sanctions on behaviors related to, for instance, resource use.

The idea of civic democracy structured by a sense of responsibility toward (both intra- and inter-generational) members of the community may be extended to include a sense of responsibility for non-human denizens of the earth. Here, too, cultural institutions of traditional societies could serve as a model to devise and develop political institutions, familial habits, and educational training to foster a worldview in which humans are an integral part of society *and* nature. This is instrumental for inculcating both a sense of stewardship of nature and responsible membership of society.

The idea of civic democracy is based on the model of *homo politicus*, rather than *homo oeconomicus*. Indeed, the political drive of people seems to subsume the economic drive, as humans tend to strive for political justice, which is a prerequisite for both freedom of choice and sustainability. The *homo oeconomicus* model of people pursuing only shortsighted individual interests fails to explain the persisting drive of humans for social justice and "interests in common welfare, as in the maintenance of a democratic constitution or sustainable development." And yet, "Guided by reason, the human being seeks agreement on justice and the common good with his surrounding community and, hence, tries to act and behave in such manner that he receives [community] approval."

Community approval/disapproval seems to play a significant role in molding individuals' behaviors and attitudes toward fellow humans and resources into a social norm and tradition that have conserved the commons over centuries in many parts of the world. In some cases, local traditions impose upon the

community more stringent restrictions than the legal prohibitions decreed by the government. For instance, customary edicts to protect sacred groves are more acceptable to pre-industrial communities than externally imposed laws restricting traditional land-use practices. Until modernization and market intrusion weaken the community management systems and supporting cultures, cultural sanctions are difficult to violate, because they are enforced by custom, transmitted across generations, and ingrained in the communitarian ethos for safeguarding the common interest.

The existence of physical spaces is an important requisite for the operation of civic democracy. This is demonstrated by the traditional community spaces maintained in traditional villages in India and Africa, where the majority of the members of traditional villages used to gather to discuss social problems, arbitrate disputes, and make decisions for community action. Reinstating such community spaces in modern societies is no less important for the functioning of civic democracy than reinvigorating traditional cultural norms. Both physical community spaces and traditional cultural events (like temple fairs and seasonal festivals) facilitate interactions among group members and strengthen personal bonds of interdependence among individuals.

Capitalist industrial forestry and wilderness management institutions ignore the worldview and resource management systems of indigenous societies because of the entrenched belief that local people and their traditional knowledge have nothing to offer for resource management. Rather, the standard view considers the pre-industrial way of life as inimical to wildlife conservation, primarily because the indigenous ecocentric view of nature does not reduce the intrinsic value of nature to its market value. Indeed, civic democracy, which relies on communitarian ethos, is an obstacle to market liberalism in which minimal state intervention allows individuals to pursue their self-interests relatively unfettered and oblivious to the social consequences of their actions. The pursuit of profit at the expense of the public good and economic growth at the cost of human values and quality of life “are made possible by liberalism’s minimalist state and the ability of individuals to amass great quantities of property or capital.” Civic democracy constitutes a part of the alternative development movement and paradigm, which seeks to reverse the domination of society by market-oriented economics. Civic democracy is therefore subversive to the political hegemony of the ruling economic elite, which dominates all social discourse, including that of change.

### ***Summing Up***

Neoliberal individualism isolates individuals from the social matrix, including traditions and accountability relations. Sustainability cannot be achieved in democracies upholding rights to private profit where freedom is truncated and generational equity is nonexistent. Sustainable development can only be possible in a society where the individual’s instrumental freedom is replaced by inclusive freedom, which thus ensures intergenerational rights. Inclusive freedom can only prevail in a vibrant civic democracy where a communitarian ethic opposes and transcends the market. Civic democracy obviates expropriation of the majority by a privileged minority, because class privilege itself disappears when the community is given higher priority. The Amish society provides a contemporary example, where consumerism, the most prominent sign of market advent, is defeated by community restraints on individual “freedom” to own more than others.

A vibrant community is like a rich ecosystem in which individual species interact in different ways to create a level of complexity that shapes the dynamics of each component species. The conscious participation and interaction of all members constitute a community, including its institutions and customs. Volitional acts of individuals for the benefits of the community—acts based on mutual accountability rules—ensure a functioning vibrant civic democracy, which is the prerequisite of establishing a system of generational equity and freedom. Models of civic democracy are found in many traditional indigenous

societies, because neither market systems nor planned economies have inbuilt features that guarantee participatory democracy, whereas indigenous cultures often do.

Reinstatement of the community is anathema to the individual (entrepreneurial) freedom to exploitation and profit and restores “all the guarantees of existence” to the poor. In Marxian as well as modern ecosocialist thinking, the community life and harmony with nature count as the governing factors in realizing total, integrated, free humans in a free society. As Pepper has shown, Marx embraced a view of “spontaneous, cooperative fellowship as a ‘natural’ state, given the appropriate mode of production, where people will see society as qualitatively more than just the sum of its individual parts—more than the wills or desires of individual people.”

In a civic democracy where inclusive freedom prevails, the expropriation and alienation of labor would become unfeasible, because producers are reunited with their means of production—that is, they identify themselves as the organic agents of production to satisfy their own social needs. Workers would not produce commodities for the sake of feeding the market but chiefly to satisfy the organic needs of the individual. Objects of conspicuous consumption like fur coats, designer garments and diamond-studded DBTEL cell phones would be rendered unnecessary, because they would no longer impart any privilege or status to the individuals owning them. Leisure, which is currently dominated by commercial sports, video games and TV, would be redefined by freedom from the global consumerist ideal.

Inclusive freedom can incorporate the counter-factual freedom of individuals and preclude social injustices without imposing legal statutes: It would eliminate social evils ranging from smoking in public places to gender discrimination and environmental harm from industrial activity, because it would abrogate any rights of individuals and cliques to acquire any privilege over the community. Inclusive freedom of the community would not only disallow economic, political and legal advantages to the privileged few, it would also disallow behaviors that may erode the rights and entitlements of future generations. Inclusive freedom would empower citizens to stop growth by strengthening apparatuses of democracy. Unless development is defined in terms of inclusive freedom to stop the exploitation of nature and humans (including future generations) by industry, it is not sustainable.

The ecological ethic of indigenous cultures that is reinvoked in ecosocialism seems to be an anathema to the fundamental principle of neoclassical economics—that of profit-maximizing rationality. Because *homo oeconomicus* is a consumer who is wont to maximizing utility and pursuing shortsighted individual interests, critics have pointed out that logically, he cannot have any interest in sustainable development. “Furthermore, Public Choice theorists have shown that interests in common welfare, such as maintaining a democratic constitution or sustainable development, cannot succeed in political processes but lead always to sub optimal and critical results.” Nevertheless, the human drive for political freedom and justice is pervasive. Democratic institutions encourage this drive to flourish and bear fruit, while a totalitarian regime seeks to abort it. But even when democratic institutions are in place, a neoliberal state cannot nurture democracy in the long run, because quantitative economic growth always engenders new forms of inequalities, subjugates community interests, and dispels the future productivity of nature. This is the reason why “industrial-communications-police bureaucracies” intimidate citizens in accredited democracies and why these democracies often fail to redress environmental injustices.

Functional civic democracy promulgates sustainability, because it upholds functional responsibility toward future generations. A commitment to intergenerational equity necessitates sustaining the resource base intact for undiminishing future welfare. This valuing of the future is “irrational” in neoclassical economic theory, which is subservient to the capitalist mode of production. The principal tool of capital by which “future environmental problems of immense size can be made simply to fade away” is discounting, which “leads ultimately to a disenfranchising of future generations.” Positive rates of discount and profit are the two interlinked wheels of development, which do not allow imagination of alternative

modes of operation or social organization. To establish a sustainable society, a complete reversal of the understanding and processes of destruction of both the natural and human world is required. This requirement can be fulfilled in a zero-growth economy, where average rates of discount and profit will shrink to zero. Sustainable society—a society that is oriented toward “enoughness, not moreness”—will mark the end of quantitative growth, the beginning of the qualitative growth of the economy, and true equality and sustainability for all.