

Power of development

Author(s)	Crush, J. S.
Imprint	Routledge, 1995
Extent	xvi, 324 p.
ISBN	9786610114481, 0415111773, 0203975987
Permalink	https://books.scholarsportal.info/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/tf/2009-12-01/7/0203975987
Pages	276 to 287

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BECOMING A DEVELOPMENT
CATEGORY

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History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, and if
faced With courage, need not be lived again.

(Maya Angelou 1993)

‘Colonial domination,’ claimed Fanon, ‘manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people... [T]he intellectual throws himself in frenzied fashion into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavorably criticizing his own national culture’ (1967:236–7). Mesmerized by the glamorous notion of development, I was mentally slow to scale its ideological contours, to comprehend how development ideology is produced and reproduced, how it is propagated across space and through time, how it conquers the minds of native elites, and how it paves the path for a monolithic culture of materialism which stigmatizes poverty and the poor. Increasingly, it has dawned on me that my own development odyssey served as an autopsy of how the imported discourse of development had possessed the mind of a national ruling class, and how such a mindset had, in turn, played a major role in deepening the social roots of poverty—all, of course, in the name of development.

This chapter is an account of the process of my own seduction. This is a self-reflective narrative, a wrenching dialogue with myself, based on my encounter with development as a young student aspiring to join the ranks of educated elites and the well-to-do. However, my objective here is *not* to write my own personal biography; this is rather a post-mortem of the body of development by a colonized mind, designed to serve as a research method. Even though such a methodology is uncommon in academic research, it is valuable in exposing the experience of most elites—whether self-made like myself or those born and raised in elite families. This personal narrative reveals how and why the discourse of development, with the help of foreign aid, solidifies the colonial mindset in the post-imperial world, crafting cultural values, thinking, behaviour, and actions. This is how, under the guise of development, the culture of imperialism is methodically reproduced in order to maintain continued Western dominance over the myriad of nation-states which have emerged since the downfall of the formal colonial-imperial order. As

Edward Said (1993:25), describing the lingering legacy of imperialism, points out: 'Westerners may have physically left their old colonies in Africa and Asia, but they retained them not only as markets but also as locales on the ideological map over which they continued to rule morally and intellectually.'

As a *garib* (poor) boy growing up in a rustic town of Pokhara in Central Nepal more than 40 years ago, I had few possessions of material value. My aspirations were limited to an occasional desire to have enough food and some nice clothes. Based on the contemporary measure of poverty, the World Bank and its agents would have labelled my family extremely poor. Indeed, the 1992 *World Development Report* shows Nepal as the fifth poorest country in the world. I grew up in a tiny house with a leaky roof. My family had about 1.5 acres of non-irrigated land. Along with some vegetables, we usually grew maize and millet. My mother sometimes brewed and sold millet liquor, known locally as *raksi*. This is how my family eked out a meagre existence. Life was always hand-to-mouth, a constant struggle for survival. It was not unusual at all for me to go to school hungry, sometimes three or four days in a row.

I specifically recall one Dashain—the biggest Hindu festival which is celebrated with a great deal of fanfare for ten consecutive days. It signifies a celebration of victory of good over evil, namely the victory won by Goddess Durga. During this festival, most temples are littered with blood from sacrificed animals (uncastrated goats, roosters, ducks, and buffaloes). The smell of blood and raw meat is everywhere. Large quantities of meats are consumed during this festival. Even the poorest are expected to eat some meat, one of the very few times during the year that most poor families get to do so. Dashain is not just a religious celebration; it is equated with status. There is immense pressure on every family, rich and poor, to celebrate the festival with as much pomp and show as possible. Parents are expected to get brand new clothes and other material items for their children. As a consequence, each year countless families plunge deep into debt. Many mortgage, if not sell outright, whatever little land or other assets (e.g. gold) they have to raise money for celebration. The festival is very expensive, with many households never recovering from debt. My father used to call Dashain *dasha* (misery) or the 'Festival of Sorrow.'

That particular Dashain, I was 8 years old. My family had no money to acquire any of the necessities for the Dashain. It was the eighth day of the Dashain, two days before its culmination. On the eighth or ninth day, families are supposed to sacrifice animals. We had not even a rooster to worship Goddess Durga. We all sat in the house the whole day, huddled around and feeling sad, not knowing what to do. My parents could not get me even one new shirt, let alone a complete outfit. Even today, the memory of that Dashain brings tears to my eyes. Because of that bitter memory, I have never been able to enjoy any festival. Finally, on the morning of the ninth day of the Dashain, I received a small sum of money from my brother-in-law, for whom I had done some work. The money saved that Dashain, and my family was just able to ward off a social embarrassment.

To my innocent mind, poverty looked natural, something that nobody could do anything about. I accepted poverty as a matter of fate, caused by bad *karma*. That is what we were repeatedly told. I had no idea that poverty was largely a social creation, not a bad karmic product. Despite all this, it never seemed threatening and dehumanizing. So, poor and hungry I certainly was. But underdeveloped? I never thought—nor did anybody else—that being poor meant being ‘underdeveloped’ and lacking human dignity. True, there is no comfort and glory in poverty, but the whole concept of development (or underdevelopment) was totally alien to me and perhaps to most other Nepalis.

There is a word for development in the Nepali language: *bikas*. Following the overthrow of the Rana autarchy in 1951, the word began to gain currency. A status divide emerged between the *bikasi* and the *abikasi*. Those who had acquired some knowledge of so-called modern science and technology identified themselves as *bikasis* (developed), supposedly with a ‘modern’ outlook, and the rest as *abikasis* or *pakhe* (uncivilized, underdeveloped, or backward). There was money in *bikas*, and the funding for *bikas* projects, mostly through foreign aid, was beginning to swell. Development was thus no longer just a concept. It became a practice which fortified, and even exacerbated, the existing class hierarchy. The wealthy, the powerful, the more educated embraced *bikas*, becoming *bikasis*. The *garib* (poor) were *abikasis*. As the logic went, the poor became poor because they were *abikasi*; they impeded *bikas*.

Bikas was generally associated with objects such as roads, airplanes, dams, hospitals, and fancy buildings. Education was also a key component, essential to build human capital. Education could salvage the *abikasi* mind, but only if it was ‘modern,’ emphasizing science, technology, and English, the language of *bikas*. Sanskrit, previously the language of the learned, was a deterrent to *bikas*. There was tension in the family. Educated children were viewed as future agents of *bikas*, and our parents were usually seen as *abikasis*. True, there were things our parents did that had little scientific basis or made any logical sense. But there were also many things they did that had more practical values than the theoretical ‘science’ we were learning at school. Yet, in the eyes of *bikasis*, whatever human capital, productive forces or knowledge our parents had accumulated over the years did not count for much. Many students felt ashamed to be seen in public with their parents. The new education gave us the impression that our parents’ manual labour was antithetical to *bikas*. So we sneered at manual work, thinking that it was something only an *abikasi* or intellectually ‘underdeveloped’ mind would do. It was not for the high-minded *bikasis*. The new educational system was producing a whole new way of thinking about the value of labour. *Bikas* meant, to apply Ivan Illich’s (1992) logic, denying as well as uprooting the existing labour use system, traditional bonds, and knowledge base, rather than building on them.

Before development, hard manual labour was a common way of life. The vast majority of people did it from early childhood, from the time they were 7 or 8 years old. Now the delusionary vision of *bikas* had made it an anathema. The new attitude toward labour created a backlash against education in general. My father

opposed my education although I always did manual labour. Many children were actually pulled out of their schools by their parents before completing their elementary education. In an agrarian society like Nepal, children formed a vital source of labour or economic assets, but they had developed an aversion to manual work as a result of education. So what good was their education if it meant depriving the family of much needed family labour and potential supplementary income the children would generate when hired by others? Such a calculation was particularly important among the poor parents who did not see much prospect for their educated children's employment in the civil service—the principal source of salaried employment for the educated. To most poor parents, their children's education did not mean an investment in future prosperity; rather it entailed, at least in the short run, lost labour and potential income.

The devaluation of manual labour was hardened by our observation of Westerners whom we considered educated, developed, sophisticated, civilized. We rarely observed any of the growing contingency of Westerners in Nepal doing manual work. They all had at least one maid; some had two or three. Even meagrely paid Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) had personal cooks or maids. Many lived a life of luxury. They saw themselves as advisers and exhibited an aura of superiority. We thought that their life-style represented that of a modern, educated *bikasi*. Consequently, local educated people began to emulate them and aspire to the 'good life' the Westerners enjoyed and represented. Development was the fountain of good life.

Not all parents resented 'Western' education, however. For the elites, the architects of the national culture, modern education was the umbilical chord between themselves and the West. Since they cherished such linkage and wanted to be associated with *bikas*, educating their children in 'modern' schools and in the West was very important for them. Within Nepal they preferred to send their children to St Mary's School for girls and St Xavier's School for boys, run by Christian missionaries, mostly from England. Several wealthy families in Pokhara sent their children to these two schools, both located in Kathmandu Valley. When these children, some of whom lived in my neighbourhood, came back home during breaks, we could hear them speak fluent English. They would have little contact with us, and sometimes treat us like *pakhes* (uncivilized). Educationally, we felt very deficient in front of those elite children. The new education was preparing a new generation who not only controlled the rapidly expanding bureaucracy, but also dominated the development enterprise, thereby reaping the lopsided benefits of *bikas*. Education and *bikas* both not only displayed a distinct class character, but also accentuated the prevailing class biases of colonial society. Most educated people shunned hard work and looked for work in the civil service sector where they could boss their juniors around. They wore two disparate faces: one looking meek and saying *hajur*, *hajur* (yes sir, yes sir) to those above them and another stern and rude, treating those below them as worthless subhumans.

By the mid-1950s, the idea of *bikas* had been firmly transplanted in the Nepalese psyche. Whether *bikas* was actually occurring did not matter. It had

permeated almost every Nepalese mind, from peons to the prime minister and the king. The higher the bureaucratic authority, the louder the voices of *bikas*. *Bikas* was regarded as a secret passage to material paradise. The myth of *bikas* projected materialism as human salvation, the sole source of happiness, emancipation, and redemption from hunger and poverty (Ullrich 1992:275). Materialism appeared to have replaced a traditional Hindu conception of *bhakti* (devotion) and *dharma* (duty, good deeds) as a channel of *moksha* (salvation). Not that Hinduism is devoid of material values; it has always played hide-and-seek with materialism. *Laxmi* (the goddess of wealth) is actually highly revered. But this new form of materialism was much more pronounced and had quickly emerged as a new deity.

I believe it was 1951 when the first group of British Christian missionaries arrived in Pokhara (missionary activity had started in Nepal much earlier). Although they probably were not the first white people to come to Pokhara, they are the first ones I remember. Because of the British policy of Gorkha (Gurkha) recruitment, many recruits from the surrounding hills had already served the British. While the citizens of other colonies were exploited as slaves, indentured plantation workers, and coolies, Britain's exploitation of young and able Nepalis was somewhat unique, raw material for the war machine of the British imperial army. Although their bodies belonged to Nepal, their labour belonged to the British. In this sense, the dance of British imperialism was already in full swing across Nepal.

The missionaries' 'civilizing mission' brought Christianity and modern medical facilities to the town of Pokhara as they set up a small hospital called the Shining Hospital. While the hospital seemed to have brought medical miracles as patients often responded faster to their (Western) medicines than to local medical practices, it also undermined local medical knowledge. Missionaries mocked our local medical practices, and made us feel ashamed of them. Even more important, however, their presence led to a total psychological metamorphosis in our perception of whites. Almost everybody, regardless of their socioeconomic status in the community, started addressing white missionaries, or for that matter all whites, as *sahib* or *sab* for males and *mimsab* for females (master, boss, teacher, or sir/madam depending upon the context). Although the word *sahib* is a fairly common honorific term, it clearly has connotations of dominance and subordination. Whites, called *sahib* from the very start, were thus accorded a dominant position. The *sahib* culture became engraved in the Nepalese mind, a culture in which whites were placed at the apex, with the Nepalis looking up to them in the way devotees look up to the statues of their gods, begging for blessings or waiting at the end of the table for crumbs to fall. This, in turn, accentuated whites' pre-existing feeling of superiority and, in their own minds, justified their treatment of us as uncivilized and inferior or as needing salvation.

Previously, white people were often referred to as monkeys (in appearance). The Hindu caste codes regarded whites as *mlaksha*, the polluted, the untouchable, and hence relegated to the bottom of the caste hierarchy. If any high-caste individual (Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya) touched a white person, that person

would be considered unclean, and thus required to undergo a cleansing ritual. In fact, as late as the 1940s, all Nepalese recruits serving in the British imperial army and those who had crossed any of the oceans were, upon their return home, subjected to such ritual, for they were presumed to have come in physical contact with whites. Now whites were no longer viewed as monkeys or as *mlakshas*. Instead, they were beautiful, the *sahibs*, the masters, a super caste, even to the highest ranking caste group: the Brahmans. Even the most sacred of the Hindu social codes was no longer sacrosanct when it came to applying them to white people. Here was a fundamental transformation of Nepalese culture, attitude, and behaviour towards whites. It was hard to fathom why whites had been elevated so quickly to the top of the social hierarchy. The oppressive and archaic caste system had simply been rearranged to accommodate the emerging *sahib* culture and nascent *bikas* enterprise; caste relations had been transformed into power relations in our dealings with whites, the latter occupying the position of power and prestige.

The hospital was a sign of *bikas*, the first such symbol in Pokhara. It was brought by white people, the harbingers of *bikas*. To us, they were obviously economically superior. They spoke the language of *bikas*; they knew the modern science and technology of *bikas*. They embodied *bikas*. Being associated with them, learning their language, and imitating them became important attributes of *bikas*, attributes that all *bikasis* were expected—and wanted—to possess.

Shortly after the arrival of British missionaries came an airplane, an old DC3. When some people heard the roaring sound of an approaching airplane, it caused an incredible commotion in Pokhara and surrounding villages. The serenity of bucolic Pokhara surrounded by hills and mountains was disrupted by that noisy machine. When the airplane landed, pandemonium broke out throughout the town. Almost everybody flocked to see it. We were clamouring to touch it as if it were a divine creation, sent to us by God. Some wondered how something so big could fly. Others searched in their Hindu religious tradition to see if they could identify some divine figure resembling an airplane. They did find one: the Garuda, the eagle-looking Hindu mythical bird, the heavenly vehicle of Vishnu, who in the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva is the universal god of preservation, the Saviour. The airplane was the talk of the town for several days. We had seen another facet of *bikas*. Not only could *bikas* cure the sick, but it could fly like the Garuda, carrying *bikasis* around the country. We adapted this *bikas* symbol to our own Hindu tradition. *Bikas* was justified.

Then came a used jeep, flown in by the mechanical Garuda. The jeep was brought in pieces, along with a foreign mechanic to assemble it. In that jeep, some saw the chariot driven by Lord Krishna during the epochal war called the *Mahabharat*, the war fought for justice between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, brothers from two different mothers. In that war, the chariot carried Arjuna, who led the five Pandavas' forces representing justice and ultimately defeated the evil forces represented by the one-hundred Kauravas. The jeep was later followed by bicycles and oxen-driven carts. Such was the order of transportation development

in Pokhara and in many parts of Nepal: a retrogressive order. This was quite symptomatic of the whole process of development, everything backwards. What we were observing was imported *bikas*, not true progress from within. We had achieved very little on our own. *Bikas* was our new religion. Various material objects represented the pantheon of *bikas* gods and goddesses. The symbolism of *bikas* and Hinduism were uncannily alike.

The first wave of *bikas* was encapsulated in the first five-year development plan launched in 1956, and almost entirely financed by foreign aid. As this plan institutionalized the development enterprise, the march of *bikas* was now official though few knew where it would lead. Following the advice of Western experts, Nepalese *bikasis* advocated industrial growth. Some actually built factories, even before embarking on the path of agricultural improvement and setting up infrastructure. Merchants in Pokhara established a match factory, but the venture collapsed because of the absence of marketing networks and transportation facilities. Such a regressive trend continued to mar the national development horizon. North Atlantic consumer culture penetrated, unchecked, every nook and corner of Nepal, rapidly generating previously non-existent wants and hence scarcities, a situation which only aggravated poverty. The local production system remained incapable of meeting the demands of this rising consumerism. So, *bikas* had arrived in Pokhara (and in Nepal in general) in many forms, represented by various objects, most of which had little use value for the general public. Excitement filled the air even though few outside the *bikas* circle climbed the ladder of progress. The jeep was symptomatic of Nepal's *bikas*: second-hand and out of reach of the masses.

In 1962 the first group of PCVs arrived in Pokhara, most of them as instructors to teach different subjects. I was in the sixth grade at that time. Before their arrival, a high school was constructed with financial aid from the United States. Our high school was chosen as one of the first multi-purpose schools in Nepal. Along with regular courses, it offered vocational education in trade and industry (carpentry and rudimentary drafting and electric wiring), home economics (cooking, sewing, and knitting), agriculture, and commerce (typing and some shorthand writing and bookkeeping). Vocational education was designed to produce a pool of skilled workers, to build human capital, needed for development, because our existing knowledge and skills were presumed worthless. So we, the vocational students, were expected to fill the knowledge and skill void and play a big role in national *bikas*. We were subsumed by this tide of *bikas*. We were its recipients, groomed as its agents.

In order to carry out the vocational training plan, fancy chairs, desks, and tables were flown in from overseas as part of the aid package. All sorts of tools and equipment for various vocational fields came from the United States which planned and funded the whole project. The headmaster and three vocational teachers went to the United States for training. We had no idea that our school, Pokhara, Nepal were the fulfilment of President Truman's grand plan for the 'poor, underdeveloped' peoples. Through the Peace Corps initiative, President Kennedy

took the Truman plan to new levels, placing his own stamp on it. The Peace Corps plan was the least expensive yet most effective mechanism of intensifying American influence and countering communism. Perhaps, most PCVs were not aware of the grand plan either. There was a good mix of volunteers. There were some who had joined the Peace Corps (PC) for an idealistic purpose: the dogooders. Some had joined the PC, to avoid being drafted for the Vietnam war, and others did it because they were indulging in the hippie movement or alternative lifestyles. They were going overseas, as PC volunteers, to 'exotic' countries, some in search of cheap marijuana and hashish and others in search of cultural relief from the material opulence of stale suburban life. Nepal was viewed as a mecca for such relief. How ironic that many volunteers, sent to promote American values and materialistic development, were themselves yearning for reprieve from that very same material life in a culture that was described as backward and poverty-stricken.

We sought ways to be close to Westerners, for we viewed them as the messiahs of development. Since the PC policy presented the best opportunity to be close to whites, we hailed it. PCVs were usually friendly and accessible unlike most high-flying diplomatic types and so-called development advisers. PCVs lived and socialized with local people, and rarely demonstrated the religious zeal of the missionaries. We constantly hung around the PCVs, and fantasized about going to America with them. We neither knew nor cared about the motives and hidden agenda of the Truman/Kennedy plan. The degrading spectre of colonialism appeared to have vanished like a shadow. The vituperative language of colonial hegemony and racial superiority had been replaced by a new language with a neutral tone. A euphemistic lexicon of American partnership and collaboration for development emerged. It proved to be a potent seductive force in the modern diplomacy of domination. So I was sold on *bikas*.

Bikas seemed to be spreading: a brand new school with a corrugated tin roof that had nice windows and blackboards, fine furniture and tools, objects beyond our imagination, and of course an ever increasing horde of Westerners. For those who grew up going to school in an open field or in open sheds made of bamboos and thatch, who used to play football (soccer) with unripe grapefruits, the school looked like a castle in a fairy tale. I had never dreamed of such things; now they were part of our daily reality. Our school even had a generator to produce electricity and operate fancy equipment. *Bikas* looked glistening and sumptuous, at least on the outside and at school. A little bit of US educational aid had done wonders. So we thought. We felt like we were taking a giant leap to the top of the stairway. We did not even have to work, let alone work hard. *Bikas* could bring things instantly, and we did not have to work hard to acquire what we wanted. But we were all bewitched. Foreign aid had become our sole medium of material nirvana. Pride in self-achievement and self-reliance was conspicuously absent.

Bikas solidified the colonial notion that we were incapable of doing things for ourselves and by ourselves. The colonial 'civilizing mission' was resurrected as the mission of development. These Western 'civilizers' first undermined our

relative self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and then categorized us as inferior and poverty-stricken. Closely interwoven with nature and its cyclical rhythm, our way of life was certainly different, but not inferior. True, it was not prepared to bring nature under large-scale human subjugation. But our relatively harmonious coexistence with nature was interpreted as a sign of backwardness and primitiveness. Development was measured in terms of the distance between humans and nature. The greater the distance between the two, the higher the level of development. The distance between the two definitely increased—in some cases literally, as poor Nepalese village women walked further and further every year in search of fire wood and animal fodder.

In hindsight, I see a great deal of sadness in the glitter of *bikas*. While we saw *bikas* at school, there was no change at home, at least not for most poor families. *Bikas* had done nothing to reduce our hunger. Life at school and at home were an ocean apart. Every morning we went to school excited, ready to enjoy our new chairs and work with fancy tools. After school many of us returned home to face the same old hunger. Nonetheless our expectations had been raised. Disappointment became more frequent as the gap between the promise and the reality widened. Since wants were rising, poverty had grown a new face. It had a much deeper materialistic undertone than ever before. Poverty was never so frightening and degrading in the past. We did not help ourselves either. Self-reliance and cooperation gave way to despondency and dependency. In the past, if a trail was damaged, the villagers from the surrounding villages organized a work force and repaired it. Now the villagers felt that somebody else, a foreign donor or government agency would come and fix it. Nowadays, nothing moves without foreign aid.

Before the onslaught of *bikas*, the poor and poverty were rarely stigmatized. Despite the oppressive feudalistic social structure that existed in Nepal, the rich seemed to bear some sense of shared moral responsibility toward the poor. Patron-client relations, though onerous in many ways, offered some economic cushion for the poor (Brass 1990). Poverty in the past was padded with a modicum of security; now it meant total insecurity. The principles of *bikas* denigrated traditional behaviours. Everything was defined in stark economic terms. Those who disregarded these principles were labelled irrational. Development categories were being constantly invented and reinvented, used and reused.

The national ruling elites internalized the new civilizing mission of development. As Nandy (1992:269) has observed elsewhere: ‘When, after decolonization, the indigenous elites acquired control over the state apparatus, they quickly learnt to seek legitimacy in a native version of the civilizing mission and sought to establish a similar colonial relationship between state and society.’ As envisioned and practised, development legitimized the ruling elites’ authority. Well-accustomed to the Western way of life, irrespective of their political ideology, they subscribed to the mistaken belief that Western-style development was the only way out of poverty. They also managed to project themselves as the

champions of the poor. Prevailing modes of life were vilified by development fetishism acquired from the West.

When I reflect on my own development experience and journey, it is transparent that my mind had been colonized. I was proud of my contact with PCVs. Being able to speak a little bit of broken English was a big thing. I viewed my PCV contact and English-speaking ability as my *bikas* ladder to the summit of modernity. I acquired American values, copied their habits. In my mind, I thought like an American although I had no idea what that really meant. I believed that if a person spoke English, they were very bright, *bikas*-minded, and sophisticated. That person also gained respect from others. At school, I decided to pursue vocational education because it was an American initiative. We were told that if we passed the national high school matriculation examination in first class, we would receive a full scholarship to go overseas to study. Such a prospect had a magnetic appeal to my colonized mind. Since foreign education was deeply cherished, many students aspired to go to America and Europe to study. America was the most preferred destination, followed by England and other countries.

I passed the examination in first class. But no scholarship came my way. A sense of betrayal surrounded me. With my *bikas* hopes and dreams dashed, there seemed a big void in my life. I felt that *bikas* had failed to deliver on its promise. With nothing left to look forward to, I became a primary school teacher, attended college in the morning, and stayed active in student politics. Then, in 1971, my life suddenly took a new turn. I received a letter from a Peace Corps friend who had returned to the USA in 1968. Thanks to his efforts, I obtained a full college scholarship in Minnesota. *Bikas* had at last arrived. Such was the development odyssey of my colonized mind. In recent years though, I have come full circle. I am no longer the passionate subscriber to Western development that I once was. The more I observe what is happening in countries like Nepal, especially the social, political, and economic outcomes of their booming enterprise of development rooted in Western materialism, the more I question its value.

These days, I am frequently haunted by the many diverse images I have encountered over the years—all victims of development in one respect or another—some struggling to survive, some going hungry, and others rejoicing in their financial success and ostensive material acquisitions. In my quiet moments, many muttering voices fill my ears, with a sense of both ecstasy and deep pain. ‘We have been seduced by the goddess of development, by the voracity of the North Atlantic material culture,’ pronounce these voices. Yes, I too have been seduced; we have all been seduced. There has been a structural violence of our psyche. But who caused it and how can it be repaired?

I am not trying to suggest that whatever was old was good and desirable and that every aspect of our lost heritage should be reclaimed. Nor am I implying that the old social structure should be revived in its entirety and that we should adopt an exclusionary position and advocate ‘nativism.’ Such a fundamentalist position is neither possible nor acceptable. Nobody should be oblivious to the many tyrannical practices of our feudal-religious heritage. My contention is that the

indigenous economic system and values were generally self-reliant, self-sufficient, sustainable, and far less destructive of humanity as well as nature. At least, it served as a hedge against total deprivation. But now in the name of *bikas*, the dignity and humanity of the poor were questioned, while poverty itself deepened. Yet, this seemed to matter little. We had already developed a blind faith in *bikas* and its objects. We accepted development as a *fait accompli*. We seemed to have convinced ourselves that more *bikas* meant less poverty. What a fallacy!

In this self-reflective narrative, I have recounted the development journey of my own colonized mind. In doing so, I have attempted to show how the culture of imperialism transfused Nepalese society, how the colonial mindset was created among its elites, how manual labour and indigenous economic activities were devalued. In all of this, foreign aid played a critical role, captivating minds and actions. Many still claim that foreign aid is being used to achieve economic development for all citizens. We still insist that the poor need the kind of development we have practised since the early 1950s. Although the poor were never asked if they wanted to be helped or preferred Westernized development at all, now they too seem to have been intoxicated by the brew called foreign aid.

A cruel choice confronts us all. The underlying logic of this narrative dictates that we reframe our mindset and take a hard look at the seductive power of development. Even if we can gather enough strength and determination to navigate a relatively self-reliant path, our efforts should not be guided by what Edward Said (1993) calls ‘nativism’—a twisted nationalistic tendency often rooted in religious fundamentalism, which is no less dangerous than the seductive power of ‘Westernism.’ The way I see it, the elites—whether self-made like myself or born and raised like those from elite families—are at the root of most social and economic problems haunting Nepal. In the name of development, we pursued our own interests, both individually and as a class. We incarnated ourselves as domestic *sahibs*, denigrating the poor and their labour. In our attempt to look and become Westernized, we have created a monster out of developmentalism, lost touch with our social consciousness and humanity, and surrendered our national dignity and culture. We trust Westerners more than ourselves, virtually in every respect. We learned how to seize the currents of international development, propelled by the World Bank, US Agency for International Development (USAID), and other prominent development agencies. We turn their fads into overriding national concerns, instantly churning out reports to corroborate our claims. When they were concerned about deforestation and other environmental problems, we suddenly discovered our deforestation, soil erosion, and many other environmental ills.

Let us get serious and have enough moral courage first to challenge our own elitism and vested interests. Let us free ourselves from the trappings of Westernized development fetishism; let us unlearn the Western values and development thinking which have infested our minds. However, unlearning is not complete without relearning. So let us relearn. All of this, of course, requires that we consciously deconstruct our colonial mindset. This is a colossal battle against

the entrenched culture of imperialism. If it is to succeed, it needs to be fought on two fronts. First, the battle is waged at the personal front to decolonize individually our colonized minds. Second, the battle is fought at the societal front. This demands a collective force to deconstruct the colonial mindset that pervades Nepalese society. The outcome of the second battle will depend on the degree of success achieved at the personal front. If we muster enough moral courage to wage these battles and win them, we can then consciously demystify the seductive power of development. I am fully cognizant that this is very bitter medicine, but we have few other choices if we want to create a future of human dignity and relative economic autonomy.