



Reaching out to real people

By Afshan Subohi

A viable model of development for India and Pakistan would be one that stands on the strength of democracy and social justice. This is what the people of the two nations aspire for and value most. This is also propounded by Kristoffel Lieten's book *Views on Development: The Local and the Global in India and Pakistan*, an addition in the series on the subject of development from Three Essay Collective. The book is scholarly. Based on empirical data collected from villages of India and Pakistan, it is an interesting intervention in the ongoing debate over the question of development and growth and the many possible policy options towards this end.

Instead of addressing the issue from afar with the help of modern theories alone on the basis of presumptions and attempting to suggest solutions to the problems of this multiethnic, multi-religion and multicultural complex society with peculiar characteristics of its own, the author chose a difficult path. He spent time in rural hinterlands of the subcontinent in an attempt to reach out to the real people, ordinary Pakistanis and Indian. He has tried to understand not only their problems but also the solutions that they suggest. Recalling his experience in the course of research for collecting material for these essays he says in the preface: "Sitting in the hut of a 35-year-old non-literate lady in a village close to Ayodhya, of all places, and her explaining to me the meaning of God, is one of the various images that come to my mind, which tells me that lots of wisdom, experience knowledge and insight are available from people who are living the process of development."

Three essays in the book address three important issues of the development debate on the region. First is the essence of the economic crisis and run of the mill reaction that orthodox theorists have provided as an answer. Second is the question of trade-off between different policy options in the development process. The resource scarce economies cannot introduce all advisable changes simultaneously. Third is the difference in the rate of fertility in different areas of the region, its causes and effects.

The author cites several examples from the analyses of economists who have worked on the meaning of development in the Third World context. In his view post modern development theories with explicit political, social and economic programmes, though they are absorbing as themes for discussion, are superficial. Positions taken on the issue by such scholars do not, in most instances, conform to what the people of the region perceive and understand as development or its absence.

The second essay gives an insight into the life and setting of villages on both sides of the Wagah border. It carries excerpts from interviews of ordinary people in villages. The author has solicited views of teachers, peasants, sharecroppers, cart drivers, wageworkers, etc. on development. He found even simple people to be aware and quite articulate despite their low literacy level. They considered education for both male and female children very essential. The wageworkers and small peasants were in favour of industrial employment. Their preference was for agro-based industries. A point that was stressed across class and gender was the desire for more development through government intervention and support. "People expect state rather than the market to function in fairness to all."

The author makes the observation that material changes in terms of improvement in infrastructure, such as link roads, etc. have made old views of the peasantry redundant. "The dominant paradigm in the past has been the construct of a submissive and mystical peasantry. In the orientalist vision, the European discourse on Asia, South Asia is regarded as hierarchical, stagnationist and unchanging. An Indian peasant, including the Muslim one, could not be anything but a caste-conscious, God-fearing and indolent person." The author, however, found rural dwellers almost similar to their counterparts living in any other region of the world in their hopes and aspirations.

On the issue of fertility, Pakistan was found to be unique in the region with a comparatively high fertility even when compared to Iran and Bangladesh, two other Muslim countries in the neighbourhood. The author argues that "given the changing socio-economic conditions and given the widespread apprehensions about high fertility, policy measures and access to family planning methods have become of primary importance".

He does not see religion as a factor primarily responsible for high fertility rate in Pakistan. He was not satisfied with the arguments of some demographers and economists who view economic reasons for this high rate. In their view poor parents see children as an economic investment so as to be supplied with additional labour power. The author did not find evidence on such economically calculating behaviour. He considers ineffective and inactive government programmes of contraceptive access and knowledge responsible for the trend.

Instead of making macro level generalizations on the basis of preconceived notions the author has adopted a micro level approach to draw conclusions regarding the trends found in the region.

Views on Development: The Local and the Global in India and Pakistan By Kristoffel Lieten Three Essays Collective, 57-C, LIG, Motia Khan, New Delhi 110 055, India Email: info@threeessays.com Website: www.threeessays.com ISBN 81-88789-16-X 99pp. Indian Rs150. Reviewed by **Afshan Subohi**

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Three Essays Collective has brought out a new title:

'VIEWS ON DEVELOPMENT: THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN'

by Kristoffel Lieten.

In his eloquent style, and with an enormous reservoir of empirical data collected from long duration stays in villages of northern India and Pakistan, Kristoffel Lieten gives voice to the under-privileged. He has produced three poignant essays, which directly address core issues in the development discourse: the impact of the various routes of rural development on the village population, the attitude of men and women towards population growth and family planning, and the very meaning of development. He does this while simultaneously addressing the theoretical issues and carefully presenting the views, hopes and dilemmas of people in rural India and Pakistan. The essays combine academic rigour and real life experience and will be useful for anybody interested in development issues.

The essays are titled as follows:

1. Faltering Development and the Post-modernist Discourse
2. State and People: Village Views on Development in India and Pakistan
3. High Fertility, Education and Child Labour in Pakistan

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From the flap of the book:

Kristoffel Lieten's book on the development debate is a timely intervention that takes into account what people themselves conceive of as development. In an era when Third World policy makers and ideologues are obsessed with abstract notions of 'growth' and 'information revolutions' under pressure from liberalizing policies of the Western world, or the politics of 'cultural difference' which argue for 'different needs' of the Third world, Lieten argues that the only viable model of development for these countries is one that stands on the strength of democracy and social justice. He also underlines how much there is in common between India and Pakistan in terms of popular aspirations and development issues.
