

## Narratives of Development

*Date: March 27-29, 2006*

The conference was organized by the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata in collaboration with the Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities, Calcutta University. The aim of this conference was to analyse narratives of development, bringing the social sciences and humanities together. At the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata, the humanities and the social sciences are in constant dialogue under the rubric of human sciences.

Development, as it is recognised today, is a complex and polyvalent concept in which facts and values/norms co-exist and generate narratives that are not merely descriptions or tales but also ways of seeing and organising reality. For example, for quite some time development is no longer being measured only in terms of GDP and economic growth. Going beyond these accepted indices, development is now considered in relation to health, education, gender parity, and freedom, in the largest sense. It is this emphasis on human engagement that has given to social sciences the quality of a narrative.

At the same time, the voices of the marginalized, like women, Blacks in the US, or Dalits in India have imparted a dissident edge, destabilizing complacent and hegemonic narratives of development. In wider terms, creative narratives such as novels or short stories often present a graphic account of the reality of particular socio-economic and cultural milieux. Such narratives complement the social scientist's account of development in those milieux, and extend the gamut of development studies. Meanwhile, political economists generate their own narratives of development in which facts bear a complex relation to norms. Our conference brought together economists, political scientists, literary scholars, gender studies scholars, public health scholars, philosophers, and others to explore this enormously fertile theme.

The Governor of West Bengal, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, inaugurated the conference with an address focusing on a vivid historical 'narrative of development', a document recording a meeting in Sevagram just after Gandhi's assassination, attended by some of India's most distinguished leaders and social workers.

Our other eminent speakers and their topics included:

- Imrana Qadeer ('The Health Planning Process in India')
- Uma Chakravarti ('The Mantra of Empowerment: From Sathins to Self-Help Groups in Rajasthan')
- Himani Bannerji ('Always Towards: Development and Nationalism in Rabindranath Tagore')
- Martha Nussbaum ('Narratives of Invisibility: Sophocles, Ellison, and Mahasweta Devi')
- Sabyasachi Bhattacharya ('Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Educational Development in India')
- Sumanta Banerjee ('Development' under a Colonial Regime: Municipal Reforms as a Form of Surveillance in Nineteenth-Century Calcutta')
- Amiya Kumar Bagchi ('Global History is not a Matter of a Tournament of Nations')
- Pradip Datta ('Narratives of the Past: The Many Temporalities of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay')
- Subhoranjan Dasgupta (Narrative Within and Beyond the Nation: Iliyas's Chilekothar Sepai)
- Achin Chakraborty ('In Search of Constitutive Plurality in Development Discourse')

- Dipankar Sinha ('Narratives 'Sweet' and 'Sour': Development, ICT, and the Field in India')
- Samantak Das ('The Persistence of Social Darwinism: Tales of Learning and Missed Opportunities from Rural Bengal')
- Barnita Bagchi ('Resourceful Women? Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Gendered Social Capital')

More than one hundred and fifty academics, students, and development practitioners participated in the conference.