

Philosophy, Vision and Reality of the Fourth Five Year Plan

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The country's Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-1995) is already launched. One two-year plan and three five-year plans have preceded the Fourth Plan. It may be the appropriate time to raise some issues concerning the philosophy of the plan (the plan objectives), the specific decisions of resource allocation (strategies) and the relationship of these objectives and strategies to plan implementation (public administration). These issues and their implications call for consideration in the finalization of the plan. What should be the guiding principle of plans and who would be the beneficiaries out of those plans are the burning questions of the day. Such questions seem largely by-passed by the Planning Commission in the preceding plans presumably in their preoccupation with much less important questions like economic growth, GDP, per capita income, etc. This has been the case since the inception of five-year plans in this country since the Pakistan days. In these contexts, it is encouraging to note that the Fourth Five Year Plan talks of a 'philosophy of the plan' in brief outline without much explanation and justification. Although the authors of the Fourth Plan have not spelled out the philosophy in sufficient details, it may be related to its attempt at organizing ten socio-economic groups (p.1-6) and incorporating strategies for community participation. In such an attempt, a vision is available which in the preceding plans was conspicuous by its absence.

The pertinent questions in planning are : (1) Who shall plan ? (2) For what purpose ? (3) In what conditions ? (4) By what means ? Thus planning initiates the questions of goals, ends,

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values and the like by which social or government actions in the politico-economic spheres are to be appraised. The question of values presupposes future direction, i.e., what difference is planning going to make for the future? As John Friedman sees it, "Planning is not merely concerned with the efficient instrumentation of objectives, it is also a process by which society may discover its future". For, 'planning is an abstraction, standing by itself it has no clearly identifiable meaning'. To look for its meaning leads to the future that planning seeks to create by conditioning.

It is observed that most of the development programmes designed to promote increased employment ignored the interest of the majority of the rural poor. In recent years, several rural development programmes have been undertaken with focus on employment of poor households in rural areas. These together with other non-government programmes have made very limited impact on poverty and unemployment. According to Bangladesh Household Expenditure Survey (1985-86) conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 45 percent of the population were below poverty line (i.e., nutritional intake of less than 2200 k. cal. per person per day) during that period (Table 1). If the population growth continues unchecked, and the economy does not grow proportionately, majority of the work-force will be left unemployed over the plan period. Recent evaluations show that the material benefits of development plans have not 'trickled down' to the poor and that the degree of inequality has been increasing over the years despite some noticeable increase in GDP and per capita income.

A more recent evaluation holds that the on-going strategies have failed to develop client-controlled organizations of the rural poor, and that the diverse programmes under different auspices have failed to prevent increasing poverty and inequality. If these evaluations have any truth, what future do we see for Bangladesh? Will poverty, unemployment and inequality be reduced, let alone eliminated? Despite three five year plans and one two-year plan, no remarkable change was observed. On the contrary, gloomy prognosis awaits our future if the population predictably doubles itself by 2015. This is the year by which the Perspective Plan (of which the Fourth Plan is a part) completes its work. Does the Planning Commission have a vision of the country in terms of its poverty, unemployment, and inequality? How does

it plan to deal with those three indices in particular ? It constitutes a challenge to projections of increase in mere economic terms.

Table 1 : Percentage of Population and Households in Bangladesh with Calorie Intake Below Poverty Line, 1981-82

Calorie Intake Per day (K.Cal.)	% of Households in Bangladesh			% of Population in Bangladesh		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
1600 and below	29	19	31	30	21	31
1800 and below	44	34	45	45	37	47
2200 and below	71	63	73	73	67	74

Source : Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Report of Bangladesh Household Expenditure Survey, 1981-82 (Dhaka : BBS, 1986), p. 44.

The vision referred to includes the challenge and response in terms of grasping the relationship between history and biography—a 'sociological imagination' to comprehend the nature of the change involving changes in norms and values of all conscious social groups and individuals including government bureaucracies regarding the basic institutions of life, viz., family, property, school, office, factory and cultural habits. All these basic institutions would undergo change as the Five Year and Perspective Plans induce societal transformation. This calls for a sociological perspective of the forces of change initiated by the planned organisations. Can we visualise the nature of it even if indistinctly ? If we do, only then a planning exercise becomes meaningful and relevant.

Although it is difficult, but it is not impossible to point out the exact change achieved so far and to predict future changes. Let us take an illustration. B.T.V. on January 11, 1990 in its weekly TV drama, "Vishan Bipod, Shabdhan" (Great Danger, Caution) portrayed what Bangladesh would be like some 25 years later (exactly covering the Perspective Plan of the Planning

Commission). The play dramatizes the nature of changes in the basic value system of the society quarter of a century later under conditions of planned development. It shows how a freedom fighter became fed up with growing population problems in Bangladesh and left Bangladesh. Later he returned to help develop the country by participating in its planned development programmes. He wanted to set up livestock and poultry farms where a large number of people can be employed. His bitter experience with the efforts to get a licence from the concerned department without graft drove him crazy.

He went back to his village home to do something therein. To add to his distress, he discovered that his parental home had been occupied by villagers who advised him to take the next bus back to the city. He came back to his own brother in town where, to his chagrin, he realized that marriage and family ceased to be a matter of love, understanding and fellow-feeling and, instead, it became a matter of financial exaction. His niece expected that her uncle (a bachelor freedom fighter) would give her huge wealth, otherwise her boy friend would leave her and take another girl who has money. He found graduates pulling rickshaws and doctors, engineers and teachers unemployed. Some of those unemployed have willy-nilly taken to illegal and antisocial means of livelihood for sheer survival. They asked the freedom fighter : "You have fought to give this country freedom, but you have not worked to make it worth living in".

Who would answer these questions ? The play symbolizes the future state of the society. In some respects, such a state has already appeared in some parts of the country, if not everywhere. The basic values of the society seem to have been undermined. Thus, no work seems to get done in offices without paying some rent. Bureaucrats seem to have fallen prey to circumstances of poverty and graft. The red tape continues in official work disposal. People get harrassed in the name of development and plans, the privileged groups, landed aristocracy, officials both elected and appointed, and the village touts and political hacks in their 'interlocking directorate' reap the benefits. The objectives were noble, but the practice became prejudiced. Fortunately, this is perhaps not the whole truth about Bangladesh. There must be some honest officers and men among us. Moreover, this is only a drama, not real life. But can we say that our real life is really different from the life portrayed in the play ? Suppose, the real life

(the objective situation) is somewhat like that depicted in the drama or is going to be like that, what are we going to do ? The basic values like love, affection, fellow-feeling have been sapped, if not supplanted altogether under conditions of cut-throat survival. The basic institutions like family, property, school, office, factory, and cultural habits altogether seem to be in a state of flux breeding orientations unbecoming of a free nation. Goofing, irresponsibility, and unaccountability in family, school, and office seem to be the style and practice.

In these contexts, does the Planning Commission have a vision of Bangladesh society some twenty five years hence ? Let us consider the following instance, e.g., how many graduates do we need in agriculture, administration, medicine, engineering etc., by 2015 ? If we require, say, 5,00,000 of them, we must plan accordingly. The Planning Commission, universities and the employing agencies—all should be involved in planning the future courses of action right now. Otherwise, we in 2015 would be facing acute unemployment problem. The universities are producing graduates without any such planning. At the same time, the Planning Commission is allocating increased amounts to the universities for general education (B.A., M.A. etc.) without relating degrees to work. Should we pause a little before increasing the number of universities without caring for the type of graduates these universities would produce and their possible absorption in the economy. Does the Planning Commission have a role here ? These are some of the employment-related questions that must demand some critical examination.

As to rural poverty and inequality questions, the available findings suggest that instead of lessening poverty and bridging inequality, the gap is rather widening. If this is true, alternative approaches to rural development must be explored and examined. All on-going programmes are putting money and materials into the hands of rich landowners, local leaders, touts and government functionaries. How is the proposed 'group-based planning' (p.2 of the Preliminary Outline) of the Fourth Five Year Plan going to reverse this trend ? In the objective reality of patron-client relationship, it would be naive to assume that government programmes would run counter-clock-wise ? What are the guarantees ? What built-in mechanism does the Planning Commission propose ? How would it be ensured that the benefits of the planned change are not reaped by the rich ?

Without thorough-going transformation in property ownership viz., land, business, mills, factories etc., how does the Planning Commission hope that the "50 percent of the total population (landless, small farmers, rural and urban unemployed, the relatively poor and disadvantaged) would be able to formulate special projects for them for rapid alleviation of poverty" (p.2). The limited local level planning experience at the Upazila level does not support this expectation. People's Republic of China has been able to achieve some success in collectivisation (communes, brigades, teams, etc.) with a philosophy of communist revolution. Bangladesh has no such philosophy, or cadre to work for it, and its public bureaucracy is eclectic enough to serve any government with or without any philosophy. Without any such ideological commitment backed by ideologically trained manpower, how does the Planning Commission seek to achieve its own pious wishes or objectives ?

The Fourth Five year Plan talks of the efficiency of labour and capital and introduces a concept of an 'efficiency culture' (p.5). This is indeed an innovation of the Planning Commission to introduce it in the plan. Efficiency is a cultural trait and takes time to take roots. The lack of productive efficiency (i.e., getting things done in time, economically and usefully) has not yet been our administrative ethic unfortunately. The President has been repeating a phrase 'the politics of production', yet our production records, public management, maintenance and care are poor. We have yet to develop an administrative culture in which officers and men care about government property, work on schedule and produce results to be emulated. The President's surprise visits to offices, factories have not improved the productive phenomenon. In public administration, the work ethic, regularity and punctuality of office attendance, setting records of performance, healthy competition, etc., are still a far cry. These habits can not be developed within a plan period. Can these be developed late in office unless cultivated earlier in home and school ? Can planning help families and schools in cultivating such habits ?

These are among the many issues presenting challenge to Planning Commission to look beyond the surface. Otherwise, thoughtless allocation of amounts to either sector-based programmes or group-based programmes would be most unlikely to address the deep seated cultural mooring unsuitable for development. Basically, I am arguing to raise the level of planning from more economic analyses to cultural considerations. Without such considerations, the planned products would be counter-

productive as the TV drama overdramatizes. In this regard, I invite the Planning Commission to examine what C. Wright Mills has asked for the persons with sociological imagination (like planners). Mills asks three sets of questions such as :

1. What is the *structure* of this society as a whole ? What is the meaning or particular feature of *social order* within it ?
2. Where does this society stand in human history ? What are the *mechanics* by which it is *changing* ?
3. What kinds of men and women are coming to *prevail* ? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted ?

From these questions, it appears that social order (peace, respect for law) has something to do with social structure (major social groups and their mutual relations) ; that society is changing by induced intervention; that planning creates some people to dominate over others. Planning is affecting the social structure, social cohesion and social change by enabling groups of people to accumulate immense wealth which is used in ways - good or bad. It benefits some and hurts others. It is, therefore, of crucial importance to locate intended and unintended consequence of planning and plan countervailing forces in advance. The recent requirement of a 'concept paper' for each project has an item called social impact of the project. This is welcome and timely. This will initiate cost-benefit analysis of proposed project in alternative terms.

These questions deserve some considerations with planners, because it is they who are making history by creating new organizations and projects which affect basic values and institutions. It is reasonable to assume that there are people in the Planning Commission with the 'sociological imagination' to accept Mills' challenge and, hopefully, come up with a response. This response must reassure the people that the questions of philosophy and vision in planning are too important to be put off any longer. The role of public administration will then have the relevant direction.

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