

## MODERNIZATION: A MYTH \*

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The concept of modernization has fallen into discredit. It is a legacy of the late, unlamented age of imperialism; currently the concept is used to strengthen neo-colonialism. India is one of the great civilizations that fell under imperialist domination; as a result, her political and intellectual leaders have become socially alienated. Homage to modernization is paid by Srinivas in the guise of Sanskritization; in the guise of Westernization by his critics; but both forget that so-called modernization is the major obstacle to the recreation of India as a great civilized society. This holds true of other colonized societies. Some aspects of the foregoing argument are examined in this article.

Industrialism in the West (and Japan) grew rapidly in the past few centuries but is now reaching a dead end. Industrial societies may perish in a nuclear holocaust or be strangled by ecological disruption they have wrought, unless they are saved by a revolutionary transformation that will begin with the realization that increase of material affluence beyond a certain level becomes humanly and socially destructive. Viewed in a global perspective, if all of mankind attained the level of consumption of U.S.A. or Western Europe, there would not be enough natural resources, nor sufficient air, water or space for any one. In short, the advanced indus-

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trial societies can enjoy affluence only so long as three-fourths of the human race remains relatively destitute.

The prosperity of the rich nations is propped by the poverty and exploitation of the poor nations. Either societies that are at present economically developed must prevent others from attaining wealth (whether or not by outright obstruction) or a way must be found for a fair sharing of the world's resources and wealth among all the people of the globe.

This will mean a reduction in the standard of living of the affluent sections of humanity, and, in the meantime at least a halt in its increase. If neither of these two courses is adopted (and the first one has become impracticable), mankind will suffocate to death.

What concerns us here in the growth of these trends is that the concept of modernization of societies based upon technological growth and increase of material well-being has come under critical scrutiny in the industrialized and affluent societies. To put it bluntly, U.S.A., Germany, Britain, France are no longer accepted as models that societies of the third world must emulate. Nations are no longer considered modern in so far as they approximate the political or social structures of Western Europe or North America. The questioning of these models is well advanced in the industrialized societies, where the search for alternative models is being carried on in earnest. Some Afro-Asian

societies have rejected the western model, as have Tanzania, Cuba, etc., but others are still enthralled by the web of ideas spun by the erstwhile imperialists and their intellectual apologists. Social and political scientists from the U.S.A. who have been discredited in their own country, and would hardly be permitted to speak publicly by their students or young scholars, nevertheless parade as specialists in India. Contrariwise, young Western scholars seeking answers to their searching queries about social organization and purpose turn to Indian, Chinese, or other long-enduring civilizations, but Indian scholars and political leaders are unaware of their own cultural traditions and its problems. They fawn upon the "Western" concepts in a servile and self-negating manner. For example, if a bibliography of "science of science" is published in Britain (itself copied from elsewhere) it will be copied slavishly in New Delhi. But the main operating tool of intellectual colonialism is the concept of "modernization." As long as we follow modernization as a goal, India will not gain political or social independence nor, ironically, will she be able to cope with the challenges and opportunities of the coming decades.

How did the developed "industrial" societies arise? Claude Levy-Strauss, the French cultural anthropologist, argues that a fundamental transformation in human organization took place in the neolithic period. At that time "the great city states of the Mediterranean Basin and of the Far East

imposed slavery, they constructed a type of society in which the differential statuses of men--some dominant, others dominated--could be used to produce culture at a rate until then inconceivable. By the same logic, the mechanistic revolution of the 19th century represents less an evolution oriented in the same direction, than a rough sketch of a different solution though for a long time it remained based on the same abuses and injustices, yet it made possible the transfer to culture of that dynamic function which the protohistoric revolution had assigned to society." Levy-Strauss argues that what we call cultural progress ensued because the division of society into classes or castes permitted subordinate groups to be used like natural resources. Progress of society was brought about by the enslavement and degradation of a large part of it. The result was that as Rousseau put it, civilization advanced but men decayed.

We shall return to a critical analysis of social differentiation as the basic factor in modernization. Here I would like to extend the concept of social differentiation to relations between nations. If the neolithic period saw the division of society into masters and slaves, the modern period was marked by the division of mankind into master nations and slave nations, into imperialist powers and their colonies. This differentiation on the global scale overlaid the division within the societies, particularly the imperialist, predatory

ones: social inequality was related to, justified by, and partly moderated and made acceptable through the dominance of the society as a whole, acting as imperialist power, over colonized societies.

A major point here is that societies which launched on a career of imperialist domination were sick, indeed they were themselves erstwhile colonies that had developed an enduring colonial mentality. England and Holland, to take only two, are both former colonies. Holland was a colony of Spain. England was once a colony of Rome but subsequently and more profoundly it was colonized by the Normans. The impact of the latter colonization is well-described by Aldous Huxley: "The English are Germans who have partially 'gone Latin'" he wrote. "But for William the Conqueror and the Angevins we should be just another nation of Teutons, speaking some uninteresting dialect of Dutch or Danish. The Normans gave us the English language, that beautifully compounded mixture of French and Saxon; and the English language molded the English mind. By Latin out of German: that is our pedigree. We are essentially mongrels: that is the whole point of us. To be mongrels is our mission. If we would fulfil this mission adequately we must take pains to cultivate our mongrelism. Our Saxon and Celtic flesh requires to be constantly rewedded to the Latin spirit. For the most part the English have always realized this truth and acted upon it. From the time of Chaucer onwards almost all of our writers have turned

by a kind of infallible instinct, like swallows, toward the South--towards the phantoms of Greece and Rome, toward the living realities of France and Italy. On the rare occasions when, losing their orientation, they have turned eastward and northward, the results have been deplorable. The works of Carlyle are there, an awful warning, to remind us of what happens when the English forget that their duty is to be mongrels and go whoring, within the bounds of consanguinity, after German gods." The conclusion I wish to draw is different from the esthetic self-adulation of Aldous Huxley. It is that this mongrel nation, the English, lacking in its own civilization or indigenous culture, spread like some cancerous parasite across the face of the globe. The cancer was British imperialism. Now political imperialism is practically dead so far as British power is concerned. But the process of mongrelization, of cultural rootlessness, and social differentiation, combined into a theory of modernization is a legacy of imperialism that, instead of rejecting, Indians and other ex-colonial people hug ever closer to our hearts and thus perpetuate and deepen self-enslavement.

Lately the U.S.A. has replaced Britain and other European powers as the imperial power, a brief glance into its social origins is in order. Our best guide is the late Negro social historian, W.E.B. Dubois, who wrote "[the U.S.A.] was a rich new land, the wealth of which to be had in return for ordinary manual labor. Had the country been conceived of as

existing primarily for the benefit of its inhabitants, it might have waited for natural increase or immigration to supply the needed hands; but both Europe and the earlier colonists themselves regarded this land as existing chiefly to be exploited, as rapidly and ruthlessly as possible, of the boundless wealth of its resources. This was the primary excuse for the rise of the African slave trade to America. Every experiment of such a kind, however, where the moral standard of a people is lowered for the sake of a material advantage is dangerous in just such proportion as that advantage is great. In this case it was great. For at least a century in the West Indies and the southern United States, agriculture flourished, trade increased, and English manufactures were nourished, in just such proportion as Americans stole Negroes and worked them to death. This advantage, to be sure became much smaller in later times and at one critical period was, at least in the Southern States, almost nil; but energetic efforts were not wanting, and, before the nation was aware, slavery had seized a new and well-nigh immovable footing in the Cotton Kingdom." The reason for quoting this statement is not to excoriate America for entrenchment of slavery in its social system but to point out that the premier imperial power today is itself a colony. It is a colony that seeks to colonise other nations because it has not emancipated itself from its colonial heritage. The theory of modernization is a major ideological weapon of the

super-empire and its camp followers. Indian sociologists, political scientists, etc. have fallen for it.

Let us summarize our argument. Certain societies such as Holland, Belgium, Britain, <sup>were</sup> colonized in the past and lost their cultural integrity: they were uprooted and became "mongrelized", to use Aldous Huxley's term. They had been colonised by societies that had become "hot", in the language of Levy-Strauss, because they introduced inequality in their own structure. Later on these uprooted nations launched upon a career of conquering and uprooting other peoples, at that time defenceless or vulnerable. Some of the latter were wiped out, such as many Indian societies in America and tribes in Africa. Others were cut off forcibly from their culture and reduced to savagery. Some civilizations survived relatively intact: China is one example. India, a great civilization, was fully colonised. In the first place, the British or European imperial expansion was not the triumph of a "lion rampant", as an English historian refers to it, . . . but the pickings of a jackal. Empire builders were cads who could not resist trampling upon and enslaving societies that happened to be vulnerable. More importantly, and in the second place, they were perpetrators of cultural rootlessness. Wherever imperialism succeeded, it destroyed the cultural integrity of subjugated people. It did so by implanting the idea that the latter were old-fashioned, super-

stitious, unmodern. That the word "traditional" should come to be a pejorative whereas "modern" implied good has been a crowning achievement of imperialism. That Indian scholars and political leaders should accept as their aim the "modernization" of Indian society is a measure of their alienation from Indian society.

Characteristics of modernization, commonly held out for emulation, include mobility and social dynamism, growth of individualism and of "interest groups", a "pragmatic outlook", social differentiation and specialization. In India it includes the dissolution of castes and their replacement by classes. Insofar as class differences have emerged it is claimed that India is making progress towards social modernization. In his writings, Srinivas bemoans that caste loyalties are becoming stronger; in his more sanguine moods he equates modernization with the decline of caste ties. At other times he poses Sanskritization as counterpole to "Westernization". Implicit in his writings is the Western model of a modern society. This Western model, we have argued, postulates cultural rootlessness. It means, on one hand, inability to define and appreciate the cultural heritage of one's society. The vacuum is filled by ad hoc terms such as "dynamism", "changeability", etc. that in fact signify rootlessness.

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On the other hand, the society pursuing the goal of modernization will have no values, beliefs or social bonds or desired relations between man and nature that would enable it to assess and utilize natural and social forces to its ends and values. In Western industrial societies, for instance, technological development and material wealth have become ends in themselves. Although they pay homage to certain beliefs, there are no values alive enough to assess and control these "material" social forces. The results are "runaway technology" and "consumerism". These dehumanize man. As Alberto Moravia defined it: "The consumer is a gut not so much because he consumes as because he is convinced like those simple organisms [the worms], that his function is to consume.... In short, the consumer is ready for any kind of consumption in the same way that the earthworm is ready for any kind of earth to pass through his intestinal tube." As against consumerism, it is proposed that "mankind is not bound either to produce or to consume limitlessly but rather to express itself within limits, limits established by itself, of space and time." I would like to go somewhat farther than Moravia and argue that what one needs is an ecological lodging, such as the Hindu-Muslim culture in India richly provides.

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how China is rejuvenating herself to cope with imperialism as well as challenges and opportunities provided by industrial technology. One does not have to accept Alberto Moravia's diagnosis to realise what he describes is a significant hypothesis: "I believe that the Cultural Revolution is aimed chiefly at restoring a 'natural' conservatism in China a conservatism suited to modern times and capable of enduring for thousands of years like that of the empire. The Chinese hatred for the past, then, is the hatred of an emerging conservatism (in the end all revolutions are conservative for they must preserve the conquests of the revolution) for a dying conservatism. The former is taking the place of the latter. But since the latter is slow in dying, it must be hated." At this short range, Moravia's remains a highly speculative hypothesis even though other reports from China tend to confirm it to some extent. But the cultural revolution in China makes sense as a determined effort to recreate the integrity and autonomy of the Chinese cultural community. This is the only way in which a vast and rich civilization such as China may prosper.

It is also the only way in which the ancient, rich, and vastly creative community of Indian people can endure and prosper. No amount of economic growth, technological advancement or other material development will move India off dead center. The cultural and ecological roots of Indian society

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were damaged by imperialist domination but perhaps not destroyed. A society less richly endowed and less complex (such as Japan) may lose its roots and prosper, even though as a parasite, as imperial power or colony; but this mode of existence is denied to India. In short, India cannot be modernized. It can only recreate itself.

Modernization necessarily implies a model outside; for India to adopt such a model is impracticable or self-destructive. The recreation of India requires, in the first place, that she establish her cultural autonomy, her self-dependence. The highest value for a community is the awareness of itself. In other words, the value or beliefs that motivate it are not abstractions. The fundamental belief is in the community. Principles or beliefs are abstractions necessary to talk about its various aspects. Faith is life. It is not a set of abstract principles or doctrines. The concept of modernization postulates that a society follow an abstract model. This may be necessary for societies that lack a viable cultural heritage. For India, as for China, such a path would perpetuate colonial dependence; ultimately it would be suicidal.

Surindar Suri



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