

Models of Modernity

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Opinion

Modernity, as we know it, emanated from the twin revolutions of Europe: Industrial revolution and French revolution. The economic principles of industrialization and the political principles of French revolution have been built into the development processes of many nations. This is particularly true of post-colonial nations, wherein the principles of the above said modernity have been incorporated into many of their constitutions. These two, economic modernity of industrialization and political modernity of equality, liberty and fraternity have been related processes. Often in developing countries the first has been inadequate. That is to say the industrial modernity has never been realized fully in developing countries. The developing countries of Africa and Asia in particular, to this day, largely remain pre-industrial. And this has limiting consequences on their political modernity. The requisite economic basis, by way of industrial modernity has never come to materialize in order to make way to political modernity. The political modernity therefore is circumscribed by the many limitations not only of their variegated historical past but also by their inadequate industrial development since the decolonization.

Therefore, what one finds in many developing countries is a not an archetypical modernity of Europe, but different degrees of approximation to it. The political economy of these countries is still held back by the unresolved agrarian and rural question. The agrarian pre-modernity, with all the particularities and backwardness that it carries, colors the nature of the modernity in developing countries. Industrialization could not take place in developing countries owing to the policies they adopted since the decolonization, owing to dependent nature of their economies and owing to the unequal international political economy. Thus, these are mutually reinforcing factors that keep many of the developing countries politically pre-modern. Of all, the main point that we would like stress here, is the continuation of large populations

in developing countries in agriculture which keeps them tied to backward productive forces and social relations of production. This keeps the entire nations beholden to an archaic pre-industrial past. The breakthrough that the European and other advanced nations have achieved from agriculture to industry, from rural to urban, from pre-modern to modern does not happen, or happens only in a very distorted manner in developing countries of Asia and Africa today. This is after nearly seven decades of decolonization.

And worse, owing to the globalization and the crises that we have seen since the 9/11 and wars on terror the question of realizing modernity has seen a reversal in many countries. There has been an emergence of cultural aversion to western modernity and going back to native principles. This has resulted in increasing emergence of backward looking nationalisms and rightwing governments. This apart, one should also keep in mind, very starkly indeed, that there is no de-contextualized modernity anywhere in the world. The modernity in the developing world can only have the birth marks of the particular society in which it is born. Therefore though the economic principles of industrial development and the political principles of liberty, equality and fraternity appear to be universal principles, their emergence or development in particular societies will only be imbued with particularities. This also means the imperfect realization of the principles. This is true in terms of economic, social and political institutional processes and their inter sectionalities. Thus, there cannot be one model of modernity any more. There are different models of modernity: Asian modernity, African modernity and so on. This may sound paradoxical, but is inevitable in an imperfect world.

The situation has come to such an impasse that in many parts of the developing world there are even questions of whether adopting the principles of (what was European) modernity at all relevant or meaningful. And there is slide backwards to rely in pre-modern

world views and modes of life. This raises a pertinent question. Is modernity relevant today? This authors thinks yes, because, the principles of enlightenment embodied in modernity and the political principles of liberty, equality and fraternity have been historically been a step forward to mankind. It is immaterial today whether these principles are of European or some other origin, their value on human grounds is immeasurable. And, let us also be aware of the fact that many reversals that the developing countries are witnessing today from modernity have the effect of reinforcing the pre-modern, and primordial inequalities and oppressions. Far from emancipating the ones who are chained to history, they strengthen the bondages. Thus, this is more than a rhetorical question as to

how many people will enjoy what kind of liberties, what kind of egalitarianism and what social and economic opportunities in terms of industrial modernity. To deny the importance of modernity is to deny the possibilities of development to a large number of people caught in pre-modern routines of agriculture, pre-modern social relations of inequality and oppression and pre-modern institutions of particularity and irrationality. Today it is important to reaffirm our faith in the principles of modernity, thereby, on the founding principles of the polities of the many developing nations of the world. This is in the face of the many reversals from development that the humanity is witnessing in this part of the world: Modernity and its characteristics being the most pre-eminent amongst them.



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