CHALLENGES OF MODERNIZATION: THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVE PARADIGMS

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ABSTRACT

Mankind is in the twenty first century. Perceptive persons throughout the world are now animatedly engaged in speculating about the future of modern civilization, future of society, future of their institutions and organizations and above all future of mankind. In its origin and evolution, the idea of modernization has been tied inextricably to that of westernization. Many might like to subscribe to modernization but they would not like to submit to western hegemony. Is it possible to have modernity that will be completely untainted by any association with western ideas and values? This paper tries to address why modernization has lost some of the appeal it once enjoyed. As the process unfolded its social costs became more and more apparent and seemed to outweigh its benefits. Certain homogenizing tendencies inherent in modernization make it appear as a perpetual threat to social and cultural identity of a nation as a whole. Modernization rooted in tradition should contain adaptive values, determining persistence and worthiness of life. There is also an effort to draw attention of those who are genuinely concerned about the future of Indian society and are committed to be futuristic and evolve alternative paradigms to enable us to meet the challenges and problems of the future.

Modernization is a process that involves changes in all areas of human thought and activity. It aims at socio-economic and political transformation to achieve progress on development.

Modern Civilization

Ancient civilizations were area-specific. For example, Harappan civilization, Babylonian civilization, Mesopotamian civilization and Egyptian Civilization, Greek-Roman civilization and Chinese Civilization were located in specific areas. But now, particularly since globalization, terms like global capital-based economy and global village are frequently used. Modern Civilization can be spoken of as a universal category, as with the advent of Information Technology, robotics and automation have changed the aforesaid scenario. All that we see around us, and all that exists has a past and a future; its past is in the present, and the future is also contained in the present.

This applies to modern civilization as well. When did modern civilization arise? It can be said with certain degree of certainty that the **Industrial Revolution** and the **Renaissance** gave birth to modern civilization. Has it reached its peak by the end of 20th century and is it in a process of decay now? Has the modern civilization reached its zenith, is it problematic and needs to be investigated?

Global Civilization

After the collapse of the socialist world system, there is a common tendency to talk about unipolar world in which case Modern Civilization means **global capitalist civilization.** The nature of global capital is hegemonic and one can describe modern civilization also as an imperialist civilization. Imperialist Civilization expresses itself in common production technologies, production distribution, transportation, education, language, health and living etc. The social relations are essentially market-based relations and the human-social virtues are transformed into commodities. Private property is at its base. The slogans of 'Liberalization' and 'Globalization' are the two major carriers of private property under the pseudonym of 'Privatization'. **'Maximization of profit and minimization of loss settle all ethical questions.'**

The march of modern imperialist civilization toward **homogenization** – **one economy, one politics and one culture** is highly devastating and destructive. It has lost all its power to solve current social, economic, cultural and ecological problems. A pertinent question arises- Is there a way out?

Concept of Modernization

Few terms carry as diverse connotations as does modernization. Reduced to its essentials, modernization may be defined as primarily a process of **socio-cultural transformation** generated and marked by **technological progression, institutional innovation, rational value reorientation, and psychic and physical mobilization** of people driven by heightened aspirations.

Modernization refers to a model of progressive transition from a pre-modern or traditional to modern society. Historians view modernization as urbanization and industrialization. Modernization is also linked to reasoning and rationalization. With a rise in modernization, the individual becomes centre stage and supersedes the family and community as the basic unit of society.

Modernization in the Indian Context

To speak of it on a broad scale, modernization in India has transitioned two phases, namely, colonial and post independence. Each phase further has sub phases. The colonial phase, for instance, could be viewed in terms of the sub-phases: infrastructural, formal institutional, rational-cultural, and national struggle for independence. The post- independence phase is marked by three sub-phases: constitutional, technological and managerial.

As the old equilibrium is disturbed, Indian Society is in a flux. Process of growth seems to have thrown in its wake stresses and strains that are in need of reconciliation. While western models of growth have been rendered unimpressive to the problems of developing societies, emergence of effective alternative strategies for growth with equality tend to be elusive. Tradition survives in spite of strides in modernization. Old seems to be in **incompatible tandem** with the new.

With the Industrial Revolution, a fundamentally new era of civilization started, characterized by **change and mobility**. The speed of technological change has been increasing almost geometrically. Within our own lifetimes, we have witnessed the rise of the automobile, the radio, the motion picture, the air plane, the hydroelectric dam, missile, radar, the atomic bomb, computers, internet, the mobile phone and many

other interrelated and revolutionary products of the physical ingenuity of man. The rate of change has accelerated until it has reached, if not passed the threshold of social tolerance.

It has also skirted the threshold of the human capacity for learning. It is possible for a man to learn new skills late in life, providing that they are purely mechanical or intellectual, but it is very difficult for all of us to learn **new emotional attitudes**. When a sequence of new situations confronts an individual to which his pattern of reaction is not adapted, he is bound to undergo considerable distress. This distress prevent him from taking the steps needed to produce proper adjustment between the new technology and the new set of human relations which that technological method requires. Our habits and knowledge at individual levels need to be revamped so as to cater to the demand of adaptability in the present world.

Cultural Lag

We are victims of a cultural lag in as much as we still live emotionally in the past and have not caught up with the new conditions brought about by science and its technical achievements. Machine civilization with all its magnificent material achievement has created a gap in our emotional household by liberating energies we have not yet learned to use in a constructive manner.

The remedy lies in an emotional reorientation, restoring disturbed relations between psychological attitudes and social organizations. To accomplish this is the function of the social institutions to which the shaping of personality and social attitudes are traditionally entrusted- first of all the family, then the religious institutions and also the educational institutions.

The Pathological Family

Innumerable studies within the area of private, social, family and community organizations show that loosening of family controls, malfunctioning of the family institution, de-structuring of the family thanks to inevitable forces of latest changes, are important factors in creating pathological conditions in any society. The issues of misbehavior and crime; alcoholism and drug addiction; neglect of the aged, orphans and destitute; increasing number of wayward youth and street children; child abuse; prostitution and AIDS; loneliness, friendlessness and anonymity, and similar other related social problems, psychological stresses and concomitant psychiatric ailments have all been found to be directly related with the decline in family functioning or aberrations in family institutions.

It is not rampant in traditional societies, but it is certainly true of industrially developed and over-urbanized societies. There is also the need to develop an interlinked support mechanism to face future challenges and appropriate strategies be chalked out by conscientious social workers and other social professionals for the same.

In today's times one can witness many social movements and struggles happening everywhere around the globe. Some of these tend to oppose the negative features of contemporary civilization like exploitation of labor, violation of human rights and civil liberties, social, economic, political and cultural atrocities,

rapes, murders and violence, racial, religious and regional discriminations, deforestation, degradation of ecology and environment, domination of worldwide economic process and global capital. These movements are now giving rise to newer international social organizations and networks that reflect peoples' growing dissatisfaction and alienation from modern civilization and a growing consciousness and concern for newer and better life. These movements themselves must be subjected to critical analysis within the current context to evolve alternatives for the long term. One must understand how social consciousness would transform and whether its ready for the unconventional changes needed in society. This denotes the problem of whether change should be evolutionary or radical. The long run lessons from the experiences of Soviet Union and China within the last century in creating alternatives need careful scrutiny.

Modernization has brought us a range of extraordinary benefits like material wealth, technology, medicine, transport, communication, longer life expectancy, personal freedom, to name a few. But it has also plunged us ever deeper into greed, consumerism, despair and frustration. It is thus naturally accompanied by stress, uncertainty, insecurity, apprehension, loneliness and instability. Seldom has the world felt so fortunate and resource abundant, yet also confused, agitated, panicked, tensed, and self-absorbed.

Increased material wealth has failed to make us happier. On the balance scale it is always the non-material wealth that weighs down more than the material when happiness and fulfillment are concerned. Science and technology have paved way for rapid development and higher standards of living. Technology is one of the greatest contributors to modernization and has become the backbone of modern society. But this is also fraught with exploitation and over use leading towards destruction. The present generation is disconnected from the world around them. The online world and virtual reality has engulfed real life relations and friendships. Worth of a person is defined by the number of followers and online friends. The various gadgets distract and isolate us from each other and also from enjoying the wonders of the world. Isolation leads to depression and anxiety which in turn affects our mental and emotional health.

Earlier joint families were predominantly seen in India. It taught us love, care, discipline and belongingness. It provided a feeling of security and the warmth of togetherness. Modernization has replaced it with nuclear families and they are unable to adjust to differences often leading to conflicts and arguments. The constant technological advancements have indeed contributed to society in various ways but they have also eroded the culture and traditions that have lasted for centuries.

We live in a totally different world as compared to a few decades ago. Agencies of socialization like the family, neighbourhood, schools and organizations have not been able to keep pace with the speed of development and are not equipped to provide the necessary guidance and life skills to enable us to respond effectively to the unprecedented complexities of the new world. How to survive the modern world requires a search for alternative ways of coping in these turbulent times.

Search for Alternatives

Reflection and introspection can be the foremost saviours to provide an in depth understanding of survival strategies for the overwhelming dominance of money and material, career and profession, science and technology, comfort and convenience, freedom and individualism, as against happiness and wellbeing,

peace and security, emotions and sentimentality, care and satisfaction. We must accept that modernity is a disease, and that understanding it will be the cure.

The search for alternative paradigm does not entail a great innovation, a new discovery or a complex model. It simply means exploring our inner world to gain a new perspective on ourselves as human beings and the meaning of our existence in this world. Critical thinking will help answer the basic questions of life-

- What do we want from life
- What makes us happy
- Do I live fully
- Do I seek to make a positive difference to the world I live in

We must learn not to be way led by external pressures and outer forces, instead learn to analyze and inquire the real meaning of life and what we desire from it. We need to develop the wisdom to realize the importance of love, relationships, truth, beauty and above all simplicity. And for this we must cultivate the virtues of courage, determination, fortitude and resilience. In our quest for happiness, we must not compromise ethical living and morality with the dazzle and glitter of modernism.

The above analysis and also the issues raised suggest that there is a desire for building a theory for understanding society and evolving a brand new practice. We must consider the assorted alternatives that present themselves to us, say, the Marxian and also the Gandhian approaches, to create a beginning. We need to search for alternative forms of civilization that can replace the modern market based and technocratic civilization and make society more humane and just.

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