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Engaging with Modernity: Need for a Critical Negotiation

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Modernity has emerged as a dominant category in social science literature. An attempt is made in this paper to make sense of what modernity is and elaborate and interrogate different forms of engagement one could pursue with it. One could approach modernity in three different, though not contradictory, ways. Similarly, it is possible to think of three distinct forms of engagement which one can pursue with modernity. The case for one form of engagement, namely, critical and creative negotiation, is argued.

[Keywords: hegemony; liberating potential; modernity; progress; reason; reflexivity]

Modernity has had a deeply critical impact on social structures and cultural institutions across the globe. When it embarked upon its journey of reaching everywhere, it did have tremendous political and intellectual support behind it. Philosophers such as Voltaire, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith and others were deeply supportive of the Enlightenment Project (in 18th century Europe) which led to the consolidation of modernity. Later on, colonialism became the vehicle through which modernity made an inexorable entry into every possible society. Without such a solid backing from both political and intellectual sources, it would not have spread the way it did. Both in terms of reach and intensity, there are very few phenomena which are comparable to modernity. There is hardly any society which has remained immune to the influence of modernity and the degree to which it has impacted different societies is quite profound. Modernity, therefore, does demand serious and sustained engagement by the sociologists.

Although modernity is said to have begun in the West in about the 15th century, it acquired its distinctive character in the context of the Enlightenment Project in the 18th century (Pathak 1998: 17). By the term 'Project' one would get the impression that there was an absolutely coherent and unchallenged set of ideas over which there was complete agreement among philosophers who moved within its framework. This is not our position. There were different voices within the Project which demanded their space and supremacy. However, what is undeniable about the Project is that it does contain a set of distinctive underlying assumptions and expectations which were to guide social life in the years to come. Some of these assumptions and expectations such as reason, science, progress, empiricism and secularism, as and when they are realised, were supposed to contribute significantly to the enhancement of human condition by ushering in the era of modernity.

Despite the fact that modernity has emerged as one of the most powerful and 'hegemonic' categories, it remains deeply contested. How do we look at modernity? How do we engage ourselves with it? What are the tensions and challenges that one would experience in different forms of engagement? These are some of the principal questions we would be trying to explore in this paper.

Different Ways of Looking at Modernity

There are three ways, which are different if not contradictory to one another, in which one can look at modernity: as a philosophical *idea*, as a form of *society*, and as an *experience* (Callinicos 1999: 297). As an idea, it represents a radical rupture with the past. It privileges progress, science, optimism and universality. It critiques superstitions, blind faiths and pessimism. It encourages us to adopt alternative ways of looking at the world and its possibilities. Whereas in the past, the idea of God reigned supreme, with the emergence of modernity the idea of reason became dominant. Through the instrument of reason, it is possible to understand and explain the world. Invariable laws of nature, it is contended, are possible to formulate. Reason becomes the dominant mode of discourse. Modernity was conceived as the celebration of objective and instrumental reason (Kumar 2006: 2). It would strike at the very structure of tyrannical practices and superstitions. Kant, one of the celebrated advocates of modernity and its institutions, says, 'do not wrest from reason that which makes it the highest good on earth, that is, the prerogative of being the ultimate touchstone of truth' (1949/1788: 305). It no longer looks to the past for its legitimacy and justification. It looks to the future and creates its own self-justification. As Jürgen Habermas

argues, 'modernity can and will no longer borrow the criterion by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch: it has to create its own normativity out of itself' (1987: 7). The idea of modernity is irretrievably linked to the idea of progress and science. With modernity, progress is inevitable. Human advancement will continue unabated. Hunger, ignorance and superstition, which were the pervasive and dominant realities in the past, will slowly but surely disappear. Such is the unbounded optimism that the idea of modernity generated.

Secondly, modernity can also be looked at as a form of society which would be characterised by distinctive economic, political and social characteristics. Economically, there would be increasing mechanisation of production (use of inanimate sources of energy) (Levy 1966), a shift from agriculture to industry, growth of urbanisation as workers need to move from place to place where industries are located, growth of cash economy, consolidation of free market economy and monopoly capitalism, etc. Politically, there would be increasing decentralisation, democratisation, and greater participation of people in the decision-making process, growth of bureaucracy, and expansion of welfare policies due to public pressure. In the social sphere, a modern society has come to be associated with important shifts in values and institutional devices. In terms of value orientations, as Talcott Parsons (1964: 339-57) argues, there would be a shift from particularism to universalism, ascription to achievement, functional diffuseness to functional specificity, and collective-orientation to self-orientation. The former are characteristic of traditional societies and the latter, of modern societies. For example, he regards the Australian aboriginal society as primitive characterised as it was by value orientations such as collective-orientation, ascription, etc., and at the other end of the evolutionary scale are Western Europe, the USA and the then Soviet Union which are considered modern as the value orientations of self-orientation, achievement, etc. are dominant there. However, it needs to be pointed out here that Parsons does not regard the modern society as the one which is completely and exclusively characterised by the value orientations of universalism, achievement, functional specificity and self-orientation. But these value orientations are certainly more dominant. In terms of institutional devices, he says that market, money and bureaucracy are the most important institutional universals found in a modern society. Structural differentiation and functional specialisation are pervasive features of any modern society.

Thirdly, modernity can also be looked at as an experience, an experience which is full of contradictions. On the one hand, it promises many things: progress, advancement, removal of ignorance, power, joy, etc. On the other hand, it seeks to destroy everything we have and are

known by. It introduces an element of uncertainty, risk and confusion. Marshall Berman has put it succinctly:

> There is a mode of vital experience – experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils – that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this body of experience 'modernity'. To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world-and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know and everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pushes us into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air (1982: 15).

Thus, as one can see, there are different, if not contradictory, ways of looking at modernity. Each way of looking at modernity would make us sensitive to one aspect of modernity. The first one would highlight the philosophical aspects of modernity. The second one would enable us to look at the empirical manifestations of modernity. The third one would provide us with a profound account of the socio-psychological aspects of modernity. There has been rich sociological literature on the above aspects by Indian scholars (see, for example, Singh 1973, Nandy 1994, Gupta 2000, Pathak 2006), and a discussion of this literature is beyond the scope this paper.

Forms of Engagement

As stated at the outset, the compelling thing about modernity is that it demands serious engagement by sociologists. One can not remain immune to the deeply consequential aspects of modernity. What are the different forms in which we engage ourselves with modernity? Broadly one can identify three forms. They are (i) celebration and eulogisation of modernity, (ii) negation and rejection of modernity (either in its present form or complete rejection of the epistemology on which it is based), and (iii) critical and creative negotiation with modernity. The second form of engagement, that is, rejection of modernity, may mistakenly be viewed as no form of engagement at all. It is our considered view that the very act of rejection presupposes certain kind of engagement, though in a negative way.

Celebration of Modernity

One way of engaging with modernity is to celebrate it. This involves eulogising it, looking at it as a great possibility. Exploration of this possibility and its concretisation would completely change the way we live and the way we look at the world. With modernity, life will increasingly become orderly and free from the kind of problems which characterised the world. Poverty, superstition and blind beliefs will give way to knowledge, prosperity and rational outlook. Control over nature, which can be used as a tremendous resource, will enhance our standard of life and lead to general prosperity. By privileging reason, it would increasingly become possible for us to understand and explain the world through invariable laws of nature.

Modernity will do away with the constraints imposed by tradition, customs, beliefs and feelings. Reason will sweep away social and political beliefs and forms of organisation which are not based upon scientific proofs. Life is no longer ruled by the notion of God or divine power. It is no longer necessary to submit to the will of a Supreme Being. Such a celebratory tone can be noticed in the writings of philosophers of Enlightenment. For example, Rousseau who remained a steadfast supporter of modernity and its emancipatory potential because of its privileging of rationality was constantly driven by a desire to struggles against the obstacles that obscure knowledge and communication (cited in Touraine 1995: 17). To resolve conflicts among individuals, social contract comes into being. Social contract is nothing but the embodiment of reason. He does not see divine revelation as the organising principle behind society and replaces it with reason. The education of an individual must be such that it must free him from the narrow and irrational vision forced upon him by his family and his own passion. It must expose him to rational knowledge and prepare him to be part of a society which emphasises reason. It must enable him to organise his life on the basis of rational principles which the discourse of modernity constantly stresses.

The philosophical thought of Kant and Hegel too can be characterised as the celebration of reason and modernity (Habermas 1987; Touraine 1995). The modernisation theory propounded since the 1950s and 1960s is nothing but an undiluted acceptance of modernity and its institutions (Lerner 1958; Hoselitz 1960; Parsons 1964; Black 1966; Levy 1966; Moore 1967; Stephenson 1968; Smelser 1969). Historically, until the period after the World War II, very little interest was shown in the changes occurring in different societies (Pandey 1988: 7). The study of social changes assumed great significance in the 1950s and 1960s

when new nations came into existence and the colonial empire gradually faded. Interest began to be shown on the nations as to how they intended to fulfil the massive expectations of their peoples and with what institutional devices. Funds began to be allocated generously for conducting studies.

Modernisation became the main instrument through which massive changes can be initiated. Problems of poverty, disease, ignorance, poor infrastructural facilities can only be removed by undertaking the process of modernisation initiated in the West. Though it was viewed by some as a hegemonic device employed by the West to push through its own agenda of neo-colonialism, it was being celebrated as the panacea for all the evils afflicting societies in general in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Modernisation theories propounded in the 1950s and 1960s reflected the dominant mood during that time, which was that of privileging modernisation and the massive changes that accompanied it.

Persistent perusal of the process of modernisation would enable the 'underdeveloped' societies to reach the level of prosperity that is currently seen in the West. It is only in the interests of these societies that they adopt the value orientations, institutional devices and structural aspects that are present in the advanced and industrial societies. What has given impetus to this is the process of globalisation that has entrenched itself. Globalisation is the logical extension of modernity. It only seeks to advance further the ideas of reason, progress, universality and optimism. Among the people mentioned above, there are not many who would like to problematise the very idea of modernity and engage with the pathological forms it assumes when left to itself.

Negation/Rejection of Modernity

The second form of engagement that is pursued is that of negating modernity and its institutions. There have been extremely powerful voices which have positioned themselves in opposition to modernity and whatever it stood for. Such voices can be broadly divided into critical theory and postmodern theory. The critical theory emerged out of the collective efforts of all those associated with what came to be known as the Frankfurt School (established in the 1920s in Germany). Though there were differences among the critical theorists on several issues, what united them was a desire to critically engage with issues of the day. One of them certainly was modernity and its pathological dimensions. They launched an extremely powerful and scathing critique of modernity. Modernity led to the growth of technological rationality (instrumental rationality), consumer culture, commodification and instrumentalisation

of social relations and abstract and impersonal relations. Reason instead of becoming an instrument of liberation and emancipation has, in fact, become an instrument of oppression and hegemony. The tendency to homogenise and degrade diversities is an offshoot of modern sensibilities. From Theodore Adorno to Max Horkehimer to Herbert Marcuse we see the growing disenchantment with modernity.

The two world wars, the emergence of fascist regimes, the sharpening of socioeconomic inequalities, the continuous ecological destruction that is being inflicted are all outcomes of a project that has a scant regard for human lives and cultural sensibilities guided as it is by dehumanising and hegemonising technological rationality. There is certain degree of erosion of criticality and creativity leading to a pronounced inability to deal with issues of exploitation, oppression and discrimination. For example, one of the best-known theorists of the Frankfurt School, Marcuse (1972), talking about an important outcome of modernity, that is, consumer culture, would argue that the growth of consumer culture has clearly dented revolutionary potential and social critique. People are seduced by commodities and comfort. They are content in their material affluence and happy to wallow in the false freedoms provided by leisure and sexual opportunities. He said that subjectivities had been shaped by the needs of the capitalistic system. The 'one-dimensional man' is a shallow person living an illusory life, voluntarily seeking to fulfil false needs. He writes, 'Most of the prevailing needs to relax, have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs' (*ibid.*: 19).

Needless to repeat, the growing consumer culture engendered by capitalist modernisation has a lot to do with this. Marcuse became extremely popular among students across different university campuses for his call for an authentic and non-repressive sexuality as a perfect antidote to alienation under capitalist modernisation.

While critical theorists based their critique of modernity on the pathological form it has assumed – its excessive use of technological rationality, the growth of commodification and instrumentalisation of social relations and consumer culture etc., post-modernists rejected the very epistemology on which it is based. The essential components of the epistemology of modernity are science, objectivity, certainty, progress and truth. The postmodernists' engagement with modernity is based on the rejection of the following Enlightenment tenets (McLennan 1992: 330):

a. The view that our knowledge of society, like society itself, is holistic, cumulative and broadly progressive in character.
b. That we can attain rational knowledge of society.
c. That such knowledge is universal and thus objective.
d. That sociological knowledge is both different from, and superior to, distorted forms of thought, such as ideology, religion, common sense, superstition and prejudice.
e. That social scientific knowledge once validated and acted upon can lead to mental liberation and social betterment among humanity generally.

A closer look at the above tenets would tell us that the Enlightenment Project seeks to attain 'objective' and 'impartial' knowledge which is called science and is superior to what are called 'narratives' which are essentially stories or fables invented in order to give meaning and significance to our lives. The epistemology on which modernity is based takes the position that stories or tales do not provide real or true knowledge and their main function is to provide only existential or ideological comforts to us as we go through life. Stories and fables do not enable us to acquire objective, scientific and universal knowledge about the social reality. Their relevance is limited to local, personal and social contexts. In fact, they have the status of myths.

One can find a lucid rejection of the above in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). Lyotard reacts sharply to such an understanding of Enlightenment by saying that its view of pure and true knowledge is itself a grand myth. One cannot possibly come across a more powerful and hegemonic myth that that of scientific or objective knowledge. Scientific and objective knowledge are justified in the name of progress and emancipation which are, as he would argue meta-narratives. One would not give much credence to such narratives after one has seen events like the world wars, the ecological destruction, the growing inequalities and the frustration among the youth.

The ideas of certainty, objectivity, truth, history, optimism and progress, which modernity tried to privilege, have been subjected to a scathing critique. Instead, it is argued that we should adopt 'incredulity towards meta-narratives', thus privileging uncertainty, fragmentation, subjectivity, difference, relativism and pessimism. Knowledge which is the exclusive preserve of philosophers, scholars and scientists needs to be taken out of their hold and subjected to a deconstructive reading, thereby destroying the hegemonic construction of knowledge itself.

Critical and Creative Negotiation with Modernity

The third way of engaging oneself with modernity is to negotiate with it in a critical and self-reflexive way. Here the idea is not to eulogise it or

reject it in an unproblematic way, but look at not only the possibilities and opportunities it affords but also examine the pathologies, paradoxes, ambiguities and contradictions that it contains. The kind of engagement starts with the premise that modernity does have enormous potential in changing the course of human history and the way we imagine the world and actualise it. One indisputable thing about modernity is that it has made human life completely different from what it was before, characterised as it was by helpless submission to Divine Power. There was an implicit acceptance of an inability to do anything about the world (on one's own) which was full of ignorance, superstitions and blind faith. One had no choice but to succumb to the vagaries of nature. Nature would behave the way the Divine Power ordered it to. Modernity has changed that. It has given us the power not only to understand the world and the way we live but also the power to change it in a way which will benefit all of us.

At the same time, however, it has acquired certain pathologies. For one it has become hegemonic. The only way of understanding the world, it is repeated *ad infinitum*, is through the instrument of reason. All other ways of looking and understanding the societies, cultures, processes and institutions are denigrated. Reason has become an instrument of oppression. Feelings, faith and folktales, which are the alternative ways of understanding the world, have sought to be undermined.

Apart from the above, it has led to certain other pathological tendencies which need to be understood and grappled with. Otherwise, what is a great possibility will be turned into an unmitigated disaster. Nuclear wars, ecological destruction in the name of development, sharpening of socioeconomic inequalities, and growing sense of alienation and anomie are some of the tendencies which have been recognised and have troubled the minds of outstanding thinkers.

Such a critical appreciation of modernity could be noticed in the writings of celebrated sociologists such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, and more recently in those of Habermas, Anthony Giddens and Alan Touraine. Although Marx, Durkheim and Weber broadly moved within the framework of Enlightenment and of modernity and are deeply appreciative of the 'functional' aspects of modernity and its institutions, they also provided a powerful critique of modernity. They eulogised and critiqued almost in the same breath. For example, as Berman (1982) says, the *Communist Manifesto* can also be read as the 'Modern Manifesto'. Terms like 'modern industry', 'modern worker', 'modern state power', and 'modern productive forces' appear many times. It may be argued that the *Communist Manifesto* is the first major socio-political affirmation of modernity. Marx was deeply conscious of

liberating and modernising potential of science. It would lead to the development of productive forces. At the same time, he spoke of alienation – a pathological socioeconomic condition in which workers feel alienated from themselves, from others, from products and finally from the productive process itself. Capitalism (which can be viewed as an offshoot of modernity) and private property distort human relations, deprive man of his creativity, the joy in his work and cripple his relationship with nature, women, community and the larger world (cited in Pathak 1998: 21). Marx provided a scathing critique of capitalist institutions and their functions.

Durkheim (1964) noted the historical significance of transition from societies characterised by 'mechanical solidarity' to those characterised by 'organic solidarity'. In the former, solidarity is based on likeness. People differ least in terms of their values, likes, dislikes, attitudes etc. 'Collective conscience' embraces greater part of individual conscience. People are not free to pursue their own interests. The hold of collective conscience, however, begins to weaken when societies move towards a state of organic solidarity which is caused by an increase in volume and material density of society. Individual conscience begins to flourish which itself is a greater emancipatory and liberating development.

Although he was appreciative of the liberating potential of modernity, he also articulated his sense of discomfort and unease with what this can produce, that is, anomie. Anomie is not a state of normlessness, as it is popularly misunderstood. It is a state where conformity to norms is considerably weakened because of raid economic and social changes. There is a breakdown of moral order, a negative aspect of modernity. Thus, he calls for strengthening of moral community so that societies do not breakdown because of the unstoppable march of modernity.

Weber too spoke of the great potential of rationalisation (an essential modern attribute), its institutional manifestation of bureaucracy, and at the same time referred to the growing disenchantment. There is a loss of meaning caused by the process of disenchantment which itself is a product of modernity.

Giddens (1990: 46-53), one of the most celebrated and influential thinkers on modernity and its institutions, is severely critical of post-modernist thinkers and their rejection of whatever modernity stands for: its certainty, optimism, progress and idea of history. He rejects the idea that no systematic knowledge of human beings or trends of social development is possible. If it were so, even postmodernists would not be able to write whatever they were writing. What postmodernists are talking about today, Friedrich Nietzsche dwelt upon it a century ago

when something called postmodern sensibilities did not exist. This only goes to show that the critique of modernity was part of modernity itself and its capacity to deal with multiple and conflicting perspectives. It is part of the growing radicalisation of modernity which postmodernists are talking about. The critique of certainty is inherent in modernity itself. There is no such thing as knowledge in conditions of high modernity. Knowledge becomes hypothesis.

Modernity is regarded as consisting of those institutions and modes of behaviour which first appeared in post-feudal Europe but have increasingly become world-historical in impact. The central institutional features encompassing modernity are industrialism (social relations implied in the widespread use of material power and machinery in production processes), capitalism (a system of commodity production), surveillance (supervisory control of subject populations) and nation-state. The institutions mentioned above and which are associated with modernity are qualitatively different from those existing before them in the sense that they are essentially reflexive and dynamic entities. The pace of change is much faster. The scope of change is wider. As Giddens (1991) argues, the profoundness with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviour is much greater.

As stated earlier, modernity here is conceived of as a highly dynamic system. What lends dynamism to modernity are three essential elements: they are separation of time and space, disembedding of social relations, and reflexivity (*ibid.*: 18). What is distinctive about pre-modern cultures is that they had their own method of reckoning time, and time and space were necessarily connected through the situatedness of place. The separation of time and space in a modern setting provides a basis for the recombination of social relations with reference to the particularity of time, which is quite essential for the modern-day organisations.

Modern social organisations presume the precise coordination of the actions of many human beings physically absent from one another (*ibid.*). The second element of disembedding of social relations refers to the 'lifting out' social relations from local contexts and their re-articulation across indefinite tracts of time-space (*ibid.*). This is the key to the tremendous acceleration in time-space distanciation which modernity introduces. The third element which modernity is associated with is reflexivity which is susceptibility of most aspects of social activities and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information and knowledge (*ibid.*). Reflexivity is an integral part of social sciences which do not simply accumulate knowledge in the way in which the natural sciences do.

Yet Giddens is acutely aware of some of the challenges associated with modernity. A modern society is essentially a risk society. In view of the gradual weakening of traditional sources of support, the element of risk becomes that much greater. Under conditions of modernity, the future is continually drawn into the present by means of the reflexive organisation of knowledge environment (*ibid.*: 3). Generation of new risks, unknown in the past, is a real danger. Coupled with the element of risk is the element of personal meaninglessness, a feeling that life has nothing much to contribute, which becomes a psychic problem in circumstances of late modernity. Giddens is also opposed to all kinds of 'foundationalism' promoted in the name of modernity. 'Foundationalism' refers to the belief that it is possible to acquire certain knowledge about the society which is beyond all kinds of doubts and questions. Modernity, in the true sense of the term, would not approve of such optimism, as reflexivity and self-doubt are an organic part of modernity itself. There is a need to deepen such reflexivity which will lead to a heightened process of radicalisation of modernity. Modernity should be capable of coming to terms with its own reflexivity (Pathak 1998: 29).

There are equally powerful voices which are appreciative of the liberating potential of modernity and at the same time express a sense of discomfiture with certain pathological forms it has assumed. One such voice is that of Habermas (1985, 1987). Coming to the defence of modernity against the critique of Enlightenment by post-modernity, Habermas asserts that it has a great emancipatory and conscience-raising role to play. Whatever it wanted to achieve, it could not achieve because its potential has not been sufficiently realised. That is why he speaks in terms of the unfinished project of modernity. The need is to understand and realise its massive potential.

However, there lies a challenge in encountering modernity. The challenge is to fight the technological rationality that modernity has come to be associated with. Modernity has been reduced to be nothing more than instrumental rationality. Technological rationality is divorced from substantive values such as equality, democracy, human solidarity etc. It leads to bureaucratisation and commodification. It leads to a loss of meaning and sense of being uprooted from those values which give sustenance to human life.

How to rescue modernity from its obsession with instrumental/technological rationality and strive for a fuller realisation of its emancipatory potential, is the challenge we must accept. This is where Habermas' is theory of communicative rationality becomes pertinent (1984). This consists of the undistorted activities of people attempting in a genuine way to attain clear mutual understanding. It is only by engaging

in an authentic, dialogical and reciprocal communication that modernity can ensure joy, happiness, emancipation and freedom.

Poststructuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault would, however, question whether the Enlightenment Project can, or indeed should be salvaged at all. Others have pointed to the utopian aspects of Habermas' theory. For example, he talks about authentic and dialogical communication without referring to the institutional forms such as diverse media, grass-roots social movements, etc. that are required to support such a system of communication.

Talking about such institutional forms, Touraine (1995) refers to one of such forms. That is the terrain of social movement. Social movement is the terrain where one can bring 'Reason' and 'Subject' together. Touraine subjected modernity to a scathing critique without abandoning the realisation of the efficacy of instrumental reason or the liberating power of critical thought and individualism. His main argument is that modernity introduced a dualism between reason and subject, rationalisation and subjectivation, privileging the former over the latter. Reason has begun to be reified and put on a pedestal. Subject has been relegated to the background. His attempt is to introduce a dialogue between the two. In his own words, 'without Reason, the Subject is trapped into an obsession with identity: Without the Subject, Reason becomes an instrument of might. In this century, we have seen both the dictatorship of Reason and totalitarian perversion of the subject.... Is it not possible that they begin to speak to each other and to learn to live together?' (*ibid.*: 6). He seeks to extricate modernity from a historical tradition which has reduced it to rationalisation and to introduce the theme of the personal subject and subjectivation (*ibid.*). He speaks of a compelling need to bring Reason and Subject together and the agent of such a union is the social movement or in other words the transformation of the personal and collective defence of the Subject into a collective action directed against power, which subordinates reason to its own interests (*ibid.*: 374).

Conclusion

The most meaningful form of engagement with modernity would be that of critical and creative engagement. An uncritical and blind celebration of modernity, as modernisation theories of 1960s and 1970s tended to do, would not enable us to appreciate the problems, paradoxes and tensions that are associated with modernity. Its excessive stress or, in fact, reification of reason, technological rationality, commodification and instrumentalisation of social relations, its tendency to homogenise, and its discrediting of the local, personal and 'myths' needs to be critiqued.

At the same time, the total pessimism exhibited by some of the critical theorists and almost all the postmodernists while engaging with modernity is highly problematical. Modernity, despite the pathological forms it assumes when not handled properly, does indeed speak a different language, a language which is full of optimism and liberating potential. It was modernity which liberated us from the tyranny of tradition and superstition and tried to create a dialogic space. It enhanced and deepened the sphere of reflexivity, as Giddens would argue.

We need to be conscious of modernity, its possibilities and its reflexivity, and at the same time remain alert and sensitive to its hegemonic, de-humanising and homogenising logic and potential. This is precisely the kind of engagement which could usefully be pursued.

Notes

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1. Some of the important writings on modernity/modernisation by Indian scholars include Yogendra Singh's *Modernisation of Indian Tradition* (1973), Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1994), Dipankar Gupta's *Mistaken Modernity: India between Worlds* (2000), and Avijit Pathak's *Modernity, Globalisation and Identity: Towards a Reflexive Quest* (2006). The treatment of such rich literature was beyond the scope of this paper and would have to be undertaken in a separate article.

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