

Modernity and Sustainable Development: Reframing the Diagnosis and Prognosis

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Abstract – Modernity is the distinct, multidimensional and unique form of social life and got identified with industrialism, Science and Technology and Development in general and Capitalism in particular. Being a visionary development paradigm and as a guiding principle, Sustainable Development calls for a convergence between the three pillars of economic development, social equity, and environmental protection. But the concept remains elusive and implementation has proven difficult and has often been compartmentalized as an environmental issue. This paper tries to investigate the relevance of Sustainable development and role of capitalism in the economic development environmental and environmental degradation and critiques of capitalism and prescribing some policies for the promotion of sustainable development.

Key Words: Modernity, Capitalism, and Sustainable Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Industrialization which came in 18th century Europe is the forerunner of modernity. Certainly, modernity did not emerge over night. It took about two centuries to develop. The attributes of modernity took multiple processes. Industrialization transformed the agricultural-traditional society into modern-bureaucratic-rational-capitalistic society. There was consensus among social thinkers that modernity ultimately led to progress and development. Admittedly, modernity started with an economic thrust, it finally took to a political shift, which divided the world into modern and modernizing and developed and developing. Modernization is both a theory and a process. As a theory it has given place to the condemnation of a large number of traditions; as a process it has landed itself to post modernity, which is, in fact, hypermodernity or late modernity.

THE EARTH SYSTEM:

It is a complex social and environmental system. Includes the vast collection of interacting physical, chemical, biological and social components and processes that determine the state and evolution of the Planet; and Life on it. Bio-physical components of the Earth System are made up of the Atmosphere, Biosphere, Hydrosphere and Geosphere. All of them provide Environmental processes that regulate the functioning of the Earth, the ecological services including food production; and Natural resources like fossil fuels and minerals.

A New Geological Epoch- The 'Anthropocene'

Has the Earth entered a new geological epoch – the 'Anthropocene'? Word coined by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen (2002) to capture the idea that humans are now overwhelming Nature. Other experts like Zalasiewicz (2011) say that we have left the earlier geological epoch, the *Holocene*.

From 'Holocene' to 'Anthropocene'

The 'Holocene' was the inter-glacial period of more than 10,000 years that provided humanity with extraordinarily good living conditions. When did the 'Anthropocene' begin? With the Industrial Revolution some 250 years ago, which resulted in industrial Revolution, An enormous proliferation of the human population, enormous consumption of natural resources, enormous dependence on fossil fuel an enormous proliferation of the human population, enormous consumption of natural resources, and enormous dependence on fossil fuels.

STATE OF THE PLANET AT THE DAWN OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

There is an increase in human population from 3.7 billion to 6 billion plus, oil consumption from 46 million barrels a day to 73 million, natural gas extraction from 34 trillion cu. ft. per year to 95 trillion, global vehicle population from 246 million to 730 million, air traffic by a factor of 6, deforestation to make paper to 200 million metric tons per year,

carbon emissions from 3.9 million metric tons annually to 6.4 million, average global temperature by 1-degree F, extinction of species, at a rate that has not happened in 65 million years, 40% increase in degradation of agricultural land, disappearance of half of the world's forests and half of the world's wetlands.

DIAGNOSIS

When we look at the diagnosis part, Capitalism is seen as the Culprit. Capitalism is the ubiquitous, all-powerful dynamo that drives our societies. Is Capitalism playing a constructive role in development? Mainstream economists would say, "Yes!". Most of us here would also agree. But critics have a different opinion.

CRITICS OF CAPITALISM

Karl Marx: Capitalism is a 'werewolf' and a 'vampire', ravenously consuming labour and mutilating the labourer.

M.K. Gandhi: *"An economics that inculcates Mammon-worship and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak is a false and dismal science. It spells death!"*

For Marx, modern society is above all capitalist society. Modernity or "the Capitalist mode of production" is contrasted with an early society which is described as "feudal", as well as even earlier stages which we need not get into. Marx described his social theory as "the material conception of history". This "material conception of history" has two primary starting points.

Modernity is defined as a two way progression of man positive developments, and also negative. Marx takes his own view of modernity. He believes that change will occur, but do not agree with how it will happen and who or what the results will affect. Modernity can be tied into many things in regards to the development of man.

Marx acknowledges that the major transformative power shaping the modern era is capitalism. This system is based on the principles of individual rights and global market exchange relations. The development of capitalism in Marx's view depends on the exchange of commodities as well as the advancement of capital in the form of money with the intention of generating a profit, produced through the use of wage labor. Capitalism, as it has developed, has turned human exchange relationships into ones of mutual exploitation, which is expressed in our relations to our objects.

First of all, Marx applied his dialectical philosophical principles to understanding of modern society in order to find out the nature of social change. The central idea of Marx's dialectical method is the

objectively existed contradictions to historical changes (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004, p. 130). Inherited from Hegel's dialectic philosophy, Marx believed that there are contradictions as dynamical forces existed in the whole process of social development. He was able to link this idea to the analysis of modern society, which significantly helped him to perceive a certain contradiction between human nature and the capitalist labor -- Alienation. Hence, contradictions under the modern society could be understood as the nature of social development from this dialectical perspective.

Secondly, Marx provided a critical analysis of the structure of the modern society with a reorganization of economic base as the deterministic cause to ideology. Taking his observations of the social, economic, and political environments into consideration, Marx saw the society as a certain system composing two distinctive components - the base and the superstructure. The base refers to material base taken form of the economic and class relations which always involves the mode of production, while the superstructure means other social organizations and prevalent ideas such as state policies (Fulcher and Scott, 2007, p. 30). From that we can see, Marx Believed that the superstructure is established upon the economic foundation and human culture and ideas are shifted according to the economic changes. However, although the political ideas seem a systematic reflection through Marx's analysis of social structure, when comes into the context of capitalism, he also pointed out that the society is not just simply an economic system but also a political system as a "mode of exercising power" and a "process for exploiting the workers" (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004, P.141). This idea can be understood as that the economic base is the centrality determining the other forms of social existences, which, however, highly differs from the view of Max Weber that will be presented in this essay later.

Thirdly, Marx was able to predict the future of capitalism through his view of historical materialism. Nevertheless, even through Marx at the very moment thought the right time was around the corner and the only lacking precondition was the consciousness of the working class, this image of a total harmonious society is still a fantasy which has never been achieved. Although in some Asian countries such as China today is under the governance of its proletarian party, whether or not will it walk into communist society is still not foreseeable. And just as Perry Anderson questions (1984, p. 100), suppose that the communist production has been achieved, how will the working class manage to maintain its solidarity? According to Marx, although the division of labour is an important feature of modernity, it is certainly not central because the division of labour is a product

of capitalism (Giddens, 1973), therefore it is capitalism which drives modernity.

For Marx capitalism is a system of commodity production, where maximize exchange value is the top priority (Giddens, 1973). In a capitalist system, social change is driven by changes in the productive forces and the slow change from Feudalism to Capitalism which brings about a new mode of production which was different because it brought about the rise in exchange value. Use value is the "value of good to the person who possesses it" (Craib, 1997:282), for example the enjoyment of drinking a bottle of wine, whereas exchange value is the "value at which a commodity sells on the market" (Craib 1997:279) so what the bottle of wine would exchange for. A commodity is what is created for the purpose of exchange rather than the use by the person who made it and the exchange value is what is determined by the amount of socially required labour spent on the production of a commodity. However for a worker what they sell is their labour power which is a commodity, which has use value and exchange value. The exchange value of labour power is what is needed to enable workers to live comfortably on, to enable them to buy food, clothe and educate children. However for an employer, the only reason in employing workers would be if their use value, in other words the value of stuff they produce is greater than what the employer has to pay them, so the exchange value of their labour power. The difference between the two is surplus value which is what the employer chooses. At the same time workers are working for their own wage, workers are working for their employers profit; workers are producing surplus value, and therefore they are being exploited (Craib, 1997

ANTI-ECOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF CAPITALISM

Development understood as the domination of Nature & the use of its resources solely for the benefit of Man. Prioritization of economic development at the expense of the environment. Endless conversion of natural resources into goods and services. Consumption taken to be the most important contributor to development.

CAPITALISM: SOME HARD TRUTHS

Capitalism has captured the world because of its ability to produce wealth. It appeals to the wealth-producing dimension of human nature. The result is the most powerful form of human organization ever devised – and the most destructive! As Capitalism becomes global, it destabilizes the ecologies of time and space, and subjects the Earth to "ecocide". Capitalism has become equal to Ecological Catastrophism! With precursors; Global Warming, Climate Change.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change is the result of changes in our weather patterns, due to an increase in the Earth's average temperature. This is caused by increases in Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) in the Earth's atmosphere. GHGs soak up heat from the sun and trap it in the Earth's atmosphere, making the Earth warmer. GHGs are produced by human activity which include: burning fossil fuels like coal, oil or gas and using energy generated by burning fossil fuels. These GHGs are produced by growing certain crops in agriculture, using chemical fertilizer, raising livestock, clearing land, breakdown of food and plant waste and sewerage, some industrial processes like manufacture of cement and aluminum. The main GHGs generated by human activity are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

Dangerous Climate Change and Five Human Developments. 'Tipping Points'

Dangerous Climate Change!

Five specific risk-multipliers for Human Development reversals can be identified:

1. Reduced agricultural productivity.
2. Heightened water insecurity.
3. Increased coastal flooding and extreme weather events.
4. Collapse of eco-systems.
5. Increased health risks.

Prognosis

The Current Understanding of Sustainable Development

The origin of the term can be traced to the establishment of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1982. Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland was appointed Chairperson of the WCED. The WCED came to be popularly referred to as the 'Brundtland Commission'. The Commission submitted its Report, 'Our Common Future' in April 1987.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

According to the WCED/Brundtland Commission Report of 1987:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without

compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The Brundtland Commission Approach to Sustainable Development

It links environmental degradation with man-made interventions, takes a positive attitude towards development: Economic development and environmental protection can be mutually compatible goals. The commission maintains that consumption patterns of the North are driven by greed, not need and acknowledges the responsibility of the present generation to future generations.

Policy Prescriptions for Promoting Sustainable Development

1. Structural Sustainability: Establishment of structures and institutions to promote Sustainable Development.
2. Industrial Sustainability: Creation of circular industrial eco-systems and Designing products for needs.
3. Agricultural Sustainability: Promotion of Polyculture, Agro-Ecology and Organic Farming
4. Urban Sustainability: Planning, guiding and regulating the built environment, based on ‘carrying capacity’ and Conservation of lakes, trees, parks/gardens. Treatment of wastewaters prior to disposal into rivers, lakes or the sea and an effective water management plan, with the following components: Rainwater Harvesting, encouraging conservative use, paying realistic prices and better maintenance and leakage and prevention.
5. Forest Sustainability: Ensuring retention of minimum forest cover. Co-ordination of authorities responsible for forest management functions. We have to make tribes, forest dwellers and stakeholders in forest management and preservation.
6. Energy Sustainability: There is an urgent need of shifting to alternative, renewable sources of energy and encourage changes in lifestyles. Introducing energy efficiency standards. Elimination of subsidies. Levy of energy taxes.

Essential Requirements for Promoting Sustainable Development

- Need to re-cast our vocabulary.
- Need to change our materialistic culture.

- Need to change our educational system.
- Need to change our value systems.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it can be concluded that, both modernity and its ramification on one side environmental protection and sustainable development on other side are inevitable aspects for any developing and under developed countries. No one can deny the role of both. So in the current plight of a developing country like India, there a urgent need of a peculiar combination of both.

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