

**THE IDEA OF PROGRESS IN THE MODERN ERA: A  
CRITICAL ASSESSMENT**

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**CERTIFICATE**

Certified that the dissertation entitled **"THE IDEA OF PROGRESS IN THE MODERN ERA: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT"** submitted by **JANAKI SRINIVASAN** is in partial fulfilment of the **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** degree of the University. The work presented is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree to this or any other University to the best of our knowledge.

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## Introduction

“...we shall find in the experience of the past, in the observation of the progress that the sciences and civilisation have made thus far, in the analysis of the advances of the human mind and the development of its faculties, the strongest motives for believing that nature has set no limit to our hopes”

Marquis de Condorcet<sup>1</sup>

“The idea of progress as possible, probable or necessary was rooted in the certainty that the development of the arts, technology, knowledge and liberty would be profitable to mankind as a whole. After two centuries, we are more sensitive to signs that signify the contrary. Neither economic nor political liberalism, nor the various Marxisms, emerge from the sanguinary last two centuries free from the suspicion of the crime against mankind... What kind of thought is able to sublimate Auschwitz in a general (either empirical or speculative) process towards a universal emancipation.”

Lyotard<sup>2</sup>

It is a constant refrain of our times among social and political movements and many streams of academic thought that there is a need for an alternative conception of progress. These demands for “an alternative” have come from such diverse quarters as postmodernists, feminists and third world grassroots organisations and new social

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<sup>1</sup> Condorcet, *Outline of an Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, quoted from Warren Wagar (ed), *The Idea of Progress since the Renaissance*, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*, Polity Press, 1989., p.10.

movements among others. The threat of ecological disaster especially has brought into questioning the entire notion that complete mastery of nature and its utilization for human betterment is at all possible. These demands for alternatives lead one to wonder what is it that the alternative is being sought to. What is the conception of progress that needs to be relinquished in favour of a better conception? Is there one such conception of progress that can be identified?

This is a study of the idea of progress. More specifically, it is to understand the concrete sense in which progress has been conceptualised and became part of the project of modernity. Intrinsic to modernity is the opinion of itself as a progressive force. Progress is as much a characteristic of modernity as it is a consequence of implementing the project of modernity. The demand for alternatives mentioned above must be seen against the historic encounter between progress and modernity. It is the contention of this study that opposition to the dominant conception of progress has been present since the very birth of the idea of progress.

At the most fundamental level the term progress conveys a sense of a better future; and the need for a better future cannot be disputed with. However, between the age of the Enlightenment which symbolized the rupture into modernity and the present times where a "post modern" age is said to have begun, an entrenched 'idea of progress' containing specific notions of what this future consists of has taken concrete shape. The rise of this dominant idea of progress can be understood against the development of capitalism. As

capitalism embraced the whole world, the idea of development arose to account for the condition of what came to be known as the third world.

Against the background of the above discussion, this study attempts to locate both the dominant conception of progress as well as the alternative tradition of discontent with the idea of progress. It is beyond the scope of this study to undertake an exhaustive overview of three centuries of debates on these questions. Therefore, I have selected a few important contributions to the debate on progress, each of which represent a viewpoint in a particularly illuminating way. I have identified three moments within both the dominant discourse of progress and the discontents with this discourse, respectively.

The **first chapter** examines the idea of progress as put forward by the Enlightenment. This conception of progress must be examined in context of the scientific revolution that signaled the entry into the modern era. The Enlightenment philosophes argued that it was possible to obtain knowledge about the laws that govern the functioning of man, nature and society and once this knowledge was obtained, it could be used to the betterment of the human condition. They based their optimism on the power of reason and the scientific method to discover the laws governing human and physical phenomena.

This idea was subsequently developed in the nineteenth century, when the specific form of industrial society emerged. The first part of the **second chapter** examines the debated among nineteenth century thinkers, who were engaged in understanding the changes that were taking place in the society of their time. These changes were seen as part of an

evolutionary process, of which the industrial society of their time represented the most advanced stage. It is argued that the theories of modernisation that came up in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century may be seen as a manifestation of the idea of progress. The second part of this chapter examines the main claims of modernisation theory. Progress was seen as a unidirectional change towards the premeditated goal of an industrial capitalist society.

As mentioned before, the discontents with the idea of progress are as old as the time of the Enlightenment itself. These discontents took a concrete form in the romantic rebellion. The **third chapter** examines the romantic critique of the enlightenment and its implications for the later debate on progress. Romanticism must be seen as the response to the changes that were taking place in European society with advancing industrialisation. As against the enlightenment faith in reason, science and technology, the romantics posited the values of imagination, feeling and diversity. The romantic critique of industrial society continues to provide inspiration to later day critiques of modernity and progress.

Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation is examined in detail in the **fourth chapter**. From the perspective of a colonial subject, Gandhi's denunciation of all that has been considered as signs of progress assumes importance because it reveals the connection between industrialism and colonialism. Moreover, Gandhi advances an alternative form of social organisation, based on traditional wisdom and moral renewal. Taken together, Romanticism and Gandhi's thought constitute a line of reasoning which has argued



against the dominant conception of progress by highlighting on the one hand the costs of progress and on the other hand the values of a pre modern past.

The Romantic and Gandhian critiques have resurfaced in the present day demands for alternative development. In the **fifth chapter**, I examine one form of the alternative to progress that has emerged as the post development debate. I shall undertake a brief study of some of the important ideas of post development and enquire whether it constitutes a convincing alternative to mainstream development theory.

In sum this dissertation seeks to provide a theoretical matrix of the ways in which progress has been thought about. The intention of this dissertation is to understand the specific sense in which progress has been conceptualised and become part of the project of modernity. The larger linkages between modernity, capitalism and development provide the context against which the current critiques of progress can be placed. As mentioned before this study will explore both earlier and latter day critiques of progress.

## The Enlightenment Idea of Progress

The idea of progress refers to the new orientation towards the future that surfaced in the eighteenth century in Europe. It expressed the possibility of infinite human improvement and maintained that the present was more advanced than the past in every way. The concept of modernity and the idea of progress were thus indisassociably linked. The foundations of the modern age as well as this new understanding of the present were laid by the vast changes that were taking place in Europe since the fifteenth century. Underlying and evolving along with movements such as the Renaissance, Reformation, the scientific and industrial revolutions and the rise of capitalism and the modern state were deep epistemic changes about man, nature and history. The concept of modernity as a new epoch representing a radical rupture with the past took shape in the course of the eighteenth century. Enlightenment is the name given to the movement that articulated and championed this sense of rupture.<sup>1</sup> The thinkers of the Enlightenment sought legitimacy for this new age from the prospect of progress. This chapter shall examine the idea of progress as articulated in the Enlightenment, particularly the French and Scottish Enlightenment. I identify the Enlightenment notion of progress as the dominant worldview in the modern era- one that has been the basis for subsequent developments in western theory and its applications to the rest of the world.

The Enlightenment is the name given to the new outlook that surfaced around the late seventeenth century to the French Revolution. It ushered in a new notion of human nature

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Callinicos, *Social Theory: A Historical Introduction*, Polity Press, 1999, p.14.

and man's purpose in this world. In this regard it coalesced the developments that had been taking place since the Renaissance. Like the Renaissance and Reformation, the Enlightenment thinkers denied the Old Testament notion of the original sin. The Reformation had put forward the argument, as against the dominant view of the then Church that since man is God's creation; he should be looked upon with value and not with scorn due to original sin. However, in seventeenth century Europe the scriptures and the classics remained undisputed sources of authority and both perpetrated the idea that civilisation had degenerated from a former Golden age. New knowledge and new ways of looking at experience during the seventeenth century gradually eroded these pessimistic certainties. Knowledge about other cultures, especially the Chinese, began a process by which Christian Europe was seen in a world pagan context fostering new attitudes and new inquiries.<sup>2</sup> Rapid mathematical and physical discoveries were made and new standards of clear and precise thought emerged. Seventeenth century science revealed new principles of order in natural phenomena, which seemed to reinforce the presence of a divine order, but the Judeo-Christian faith could not be deduced from it.<sup>3</sup> Scholars began to undertake a systematic scrutiny on the venerated texts of tradition, challenging myths and secular historians undertook a study of historical texts on the basis of evidence, logic and probability. All these amounted to the rejection of traditional assumptions and attitudes.

The idea that history could be seen as a record of human improvement was first clearly demonstrated in the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes* in the seventeenth century. To

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<sup>2</sup> Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment*, 1968, p.24.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Hampson, p.28.

the question, “can the men of today contend on equal terms with the illustrious *anciens*, or are they intellectually inferior?” Fontenelle, Charles Perrault and others answered that since knowledge progresses with time and experience and the power of nature to produce men of equal talent was permanent, the moderns were superior to classical antiquity.<sup>4</sup> They asserted that the scientific discoveries and technical discoveries of their time were a clear advance over earlier times.

In the age of the Enlightenment, all these developments resulted in what Peter Gay called “the recovery of nerve.”<sup>5</sup> This recovery was the result of a wide range of forces like “the spectacular career of the natural sciences, advances in medicine, the improvement in manners and growth of humanitarian sentiment, the slow crumbling of traditional social hierarchies, and revolutionary changes in the production of food, the organization of industry, the pattern of population- all pointing in the same direction.”<sup>6</sup> Perceptions about the advance made in the present in comparison to the earlier eras were accompanied by the vision that the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge has yielded an improvement in the human condition; and that this improvement would continue into the future. In France this understanding was most sharply articulated in the works of Condorcet, Voltaire, Chastellux and Turgot. J.B.Bury in his influential book “The Idea of Progress”, written in 1920, asserted that “the idea of progress means that civilisation has moved, is moving and will continue to move in a desirable direction.” “The desirable outcome of human development would be the condition of society in which all the

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<sup>4</sup> J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress*, New York: Dover, 1955.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, The Science of Freedom*, London, Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1969, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Gay, p.8.

inhabitants of the planet would enjoy a perfectly happy existence." This definition expresses the Enlightenment idea of progress. This idea that, on balance, history is a record of human improvement and that this improvement must continue into the future was the central premise of the notion of progress. The idea of progress incorporated a conception of the past as well as a vision for the future. It expressed a hope that the direction in which we are moving is desirable and that history would continue to pursue this direction in the future. This understanding of progress challenged the theories that spoke of the degeneration of man and civilisation through time. It also rejected the pessimistic views of human nature and the belief that the civilisational achievements of antiquity are unreachable. In its place it acknowledged the value of mundane life of man. It believed that knowledge must answer present human needs. Further, for our knowledge to continuously grow, it must be anchored upon sure foundations.

Although this conception of human advancement came with modernity, there is considerable debate whether the idea of progress is a modern one. Bury contends that given the conditions for a doctrine of progress, it could not have emerged in the ancient and medieval ages. While the ancients- Greek mythology for example- conceived human history as cyclical i.e. consisting of periods of glory and regeneration, the medieval Christian ages had transferred any hope of human happiness to the other world. Perfection lied in eternal salvation. The Renaissance, which overcame the pessimism of human nature in Christian thought nevertheless, saw all hope of improvement for mankind only in regeneration in terms of the achievements of antiquity. Thus, for Bury, the notion of progress emerged out of the circumstances in Western Europe in the modern times. The early modern view of man as a creative force in history and the moderns as the

equals of the ancients is the germ of the future doctrines general human progress. In the words of Morris Ginsberg, "the belief in progress was essentially linked with the growth of science and its application, with the spread of the rationalist and humanitarian outlook and with the struggle for political and religious liberty."<sup>7</sup> However a number of thinkers have stressed the link between the modern conception of progress and the medieval Christian thought. According to Carl Becker, the modern idea of progress grew out of the Judeo-Christian tradition of messianic intervention and salvation under the stimulus of the hopes raised by modern science. "As formulated by the *philosophes*, the doctrine of progress was but a modification, however important, of the Christian doctrine of redemption. What was new in it was faith in the goodness of man and the efficacy of conscious reason to create an earthy utopia."<sup>8</sup>

The enlightenment conception of progress may have expressed the age-old search for a utopia on earth, but this world-view was firmly anchored in the present. The Enlightenment reading of the progress was made possible by the developments in modern science. And, more importantly it entailed a rejection of religion. The church was seen to be an agent of repression and restriction. The Enlightenment thinkers wished to secularise every aspect of human life and thought. They rejected religion as authority of any knowledge as well as religion-based reasons for human life. Instead they looked towards science and scientific method as the basis of all knowledge. The Cartesian axioms of the supremacy of reason, stability of the laws of nature and rigorous standards of proof were widely shared though Descartes' philosophy of innate ideas and rational system

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<sup>7</sup> Morris Ginsberg, *Progress in the Modern Era*. Dictionary of the History of Ideas.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Becker, "Definitions and Origins", in Warren Wagar (ed) *The Idea of Progress since the Renaissance*, 1969.

construction were rejected. Newtonian physics, particularly his method, showed the key. Following Newton, the Enlightenment thinkers saw nature as a self-regulating system of laws. Man should study himself only as part of nature. There was an order in which all natural phenomena were linked and by meticulous observation of facts it was possible to discover these laws. The concept of nature was used to counter conventions and superstitions, which were regarded as unnatural. Human reason was the guide in the universe. It was a non-authoritarian source of knowledge, which can be tested.

This understanding of reason and truth was an expression of the epistemological revolution “which was part inspirer, part beneficiary of the seventeenth century scientific revolution”<sup>9</sup>. In the seventeenth century, Aristotelian science and its view of the universe, which had been dominant, was challenged. In this view, the universe was seen as embodying a meaningful order of qualitatively different levels and having a final cause. Nature thus had a purpose. Accordingly, man as part of this order could only come to self-presence in a rational vision of this cosmic order of ideas. Science then is the rational grasp of this meaningful order.<sup>10</sup>

This vision of the universe was challenged and the idea of final causes or meaningful order was expunged and replaced by, at first, a mathematical order by Bruno, Kepler and Galileo, and then by a view of the world of ultimately contingent relations to be mapped out by empirical observation.<sup>11</sup> Seeing the universe as bereft of any meaningful order meant that the human subject could no more define himself in relation to such an order.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Taylor, p.4-7.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Taylor, p.4.

Thus, this cosmological revolution fundamentally transformed the notion of the self. The modern self is self-defining. The categories of meaning and purpose apply exclusively to the thought and action of subjects. The individual no longer had to see himself as part of a divine order. The expunging of any final causes from the universe and seeing it as a homogenous empty space made nature an object for the human mind and knowledge about the laws governing them possible. Scientific methods of experiment, observation and proof were thus, extended to nature.<sup>12</sup>

The Enlightenment vision of the world was a rationalist vision. The fundamental tenet of the Enlightenment was the oneness of the universe. D'Alembert argued that the universe if properly understood would appear as one single fact and there was a unity underlying all phenomena. If all phenomena are linked, then so is all knowledge. But he recognized that there were limitations to the human mind. Therefore, instead of rational system construction, the attempt must be to reduce phenomena to the smallest possible number of underlying principles through meticulous observation of facts.<sup>13</sup>

The French Enlightenment thinkers endorsed the Newtonian model of the universe as a self-regulating system of laws. They were convinced of the ultimate intelligibility of the world and of man's capacities to decode it. Through the application of the scientific method of observation and mapping of regularities, it was possible for the human mind to know the operations of the world. Knowledge so gained was empirically verifiable. Moreover, with knowledge it is possible to control nature and thus put it to human use.

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<sup>12</sup> Taylor argues that the modern shift to a self-defining subject was linked to the sense of control over the world, p.7.

<sup>13</sup> *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment*, Routledge history of Philosophy,



Invariability of the laws of nature meant that cumulative knowledge was possible and human beings could use this knowledge for their own purposes. Knowledge was thus instrumental; it was meant to make society better and the proof of this lay in its technical application. This knowledge was possible by the application of reason. Reason was that inherent quality of all human beings, which enabled us to discover the intricate truths of mathematics and apply these to our understanding of the universe. Reason referred to the discursive faculty of all human beings and was characterised by proof, classification and deduction.<sup>14</sup>

The Enlightenment thinkers extended this understanding of the universe as a system of laws to include human beings. Human beings were seen as a part of nature and hence, an object of study in the same methods as the physical sciences. The science of human nature was thus thought possible. This meant that human nature was considered constant and that all human beings were essentially the same. The Enlightenment thinkers were humanists the world was considered a human stage. Their idea of God was a watchmaker's idea as the force, which set this perfectly operating self-contained system in action but then withdrew from it. The very idea of the perfect order in nature was cited by Newton and then by others like Voltaire as proof of God. But the world was seen as a human stage and all humans were the same. As David Hume put it, "...in all nations and ages, human nature remains the same..."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hellmut O.Pappe, Enlightenment, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, p.95.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in R.C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750*, p.9.

The possibility of knowledge about the laws of nature brought in a tremendous sense of control to the human self. This control made it possible to know and to use nature for serving the utility of man. The thrust on utility reflected the value placed upon the mundane and everyday life of men. Happiness and satisfaction of desires was seen as good as against the traditional view aiming at salvation. The value that the Enlightenment thinkers placed on human development and individual freedom was to be contrasted with the Church's insistence on abnegation and obedience.<sup>16</sup> The Enlightenment thinkers were opposed to traditional forms of authority, especially of the church, which they held to be an oppressive force. Truth and knowledge were no more regarded as the repository of the church nor was true knowledge to be gained by revelation. Though most of the Enlightenment thinkers were deists and not atheists, they were vigorously opposed to the church and considered it an agent of repression and restriction, which had prevented men from using their reason.

A work of the French Enlightenment which best embodied these beliefs was the Encyclopedia edited by Diderot and d'Alembert. This work aimed at describing and understanding the whole of nature and giving an account of every aspect of human knowledge. It exemplified a fundamental tenet of Enlightenment thought about the oneness of the universe. If all phenomena are linked, then so must all knowledge. The Enlightenment philosophies were convinced of the ultimate intelligibility of the universe and the capacity of reason to discover the secret of nature.

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<sup>16</sup> Kingsley Martin. *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, New York, 1962.

The Encyclopedia reflected the anthropocentrism and the pragmatism of the Enlightenment. It was based on the human perception of phenomena, not their true nature and sees knowledge as a response to human needs. Thus the discovery of the laws of nature was important because by knowing them man could utilise them for his benefit. The purpose was utility and happiness of man. As human beings were a part of nature there were laws governing human nature too. Thus they wished for a science of human nature. If only man could discover the laws of human nature he could order his life according to those principles and achieve perfection. This derived from a conception of human nature and reason as static and unchanging. The Encyclopedia reflected the Enlightenment admiration for the capacities and achievements of the human race and the confidence in the progress of civilisation.

We have seen earlier that the Enlightenment marks a distinct departure from the Renaissance and the Reformation in terms of the conception of valuable human achievements. This shift was spurred by the new attitude to time, which marks the Enlightenment rejection of the Old Testament chronology. This was greatly aided by the anthropological and geological findings of the age of the earth and universe, which demonstrated an immense time ahead for human life on earth. This extended the time scale for the historian as well influencing the way the past was considered and in identifying forces of historical change and how they operated

The Enlightenment thinkers believed in the unity of all phenomena and considered all phenomena including human action as subject to laws, which could be discovered. Thus the Enlightenment thinkers undertook a study of the past to discover these laws

determining the general route of history. This discovery of general laws of history was important in order to replace the Christian theory of providential design.

The idea that the historical process might be a record of improvement rather than of degeneration was first conceived in the 17th century-as already seen in the attack on the Renaissance notion of glorification of antiquity. Fontenelle had already articulated a theory of the indefinite improvement of knowledge. Various thinkers had put forward the idea that human history must be seen as a universal history of all peoples. But it was in the 18th century that this development was extended to general human history and explained in terms of the past.<sup>17</sup>

For the enlightenment thinkers everything before the present was superstition, darkness and error.<sup>18</sup> They had no sympathy for what they regarded the non-rational periods of human history. The decisive changes in history are technological. They saw history as the slow unfolding of human reason. Reason was a constant factor, which came slowly to its full maturity. It was unchanging and constant and not a product of society. The story of the past was then an educative manual in which reason struggled with ignorance and superstition.

In the *Essay on the Manners and Mind of Nations*, Voltaire proposed to show by what steps man had advanced from the "barbarous rusticity" to the "politeness of our own age".<sup>19</sup> He saw the history of man as a unity where the art, literature and philosophy were

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<sup>17</sup> Kingsley Martin, *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, New York, 1962.

<sup>18</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945.

<sup>19</sup> J.B.Bury, *The Idea of Progress*. New York: Dover, 1955.

the only important social products that had flourished in four great epochs of good government and enlightened opinion. The main obstacles to the progress of humanity were wars and religions. When these are destroyed by reason, he felt the world would rapidly improve. Voltaire saw only political causes in history. Though he attributed the advance of civilisation to the advance of reason and insisted that knowledge progresses, yet it is almost by chance that that the great epochs had been made possible. Like most other of Enlightenment thinkers he saw no value to any period when science is not dominant.

For the mainstream of the Enlightenment, history was not seen as of any value but as a record of human follies and irrationalities. They agreed with Voltaire for whom the study of history revealed a past of irrationalities. For him the only periods of value in history were of those epochs where science had been dominant. The philosophers were till then only interested in recent history, beginning with the ascendance of the modern scientific spirit. Gibbon, as against the Enlightenment tradition located a golden age in the past from which mankind had fallen due to his irrational urges.

However, some of the thinkers of the enlightenment developed the view of history as the progressive development of the human mind. They worked on an analogy between the human mind and the human race; thus just as the human mind slowly arises from irrational childhood to mature adulthood, history was also the emergence of the human species from its childhood. Scottish economists like Adam Smith and John Millar and Turgot in France interpreted human history as composed of distinct stages, each corresponding to a distinct form of economic organization and social practices.

Condorcet on the other hand interpreted human history as the cumulative growth of knowledge and intellectual breakthroughs. Both understood the Middle Ages as an aberration, though Turgot considered even the Middle Ages as necessary as human kind develops through a hit and trial method. I shall examine the views of some of these thinkers in some detail, as they were extremely influential in subsequent theories of social evolution.

Turgot conceived universal history as the progress of the whole human race through alternating periods of calm and disturbance towards greater perfection. The development of human society has not been guided by human reason but by passion and ambition. Turgot in fact believes that if reason had prevailed then progress would have been arrested as mankind would have, in the interests of peace, remained isolated and thus have had very limited interaction and a reduced range of ideas. Thus passions have been the driving forces till the point when reason could take over. In this conception the primitive people as well as their lack of reason has a value. All the experiences of the human race are important steps in the advancement of the race. Even the mistakes and follies are important as truth is discovered only over errors.

The growth of knowledge is the key to progress. Natural laws are invariable and man controls his life by knowledge and experience. When knowledge is complete, man will be able to make an exact adjustment to natural forces, all his troubles and errors would cease and a static utopia would be achieved. Turgot laid down two laws of development:

Firstly, every step people take when they are progressing causes acceleration in the rate of progress. Secondly, he anticipates Comte's division of intellectual development into 3

stages, namely, the theological, metaphysical and positive stage. Unlike most Enlightenment thinkers Turgot is able to assign a positive value even to the Middle Ages.

Condorcet epitomizes the forward-looking aspect of the Enlightenment idea of history. Writing after the French Revolution and hiding from the terror, Condorcet sets himself the task of working out the nature of indefinite progress in Enlightenment, to forecast its direction and determine its goal. He refutes Rousseau by holding knowledge and not simplicity as the key to morality and happiness. Society moves from bondage towards an ultimate perfection of freedom and reason. While progress is due to knowledge, it is engaged in a long struggle with error and with priests and despots who oppose truth for interested reasons.

Condorcet divides history to ten epochs, where the tenth represents the future. The ten periods correspond to important steps in knowledge from the formation of primitive society through discoveries of agriculture, alphabet and printing. The ninth epoch begins with the scientific revolution of Descartes and closes with the French Revolution. Condorcet sees a union between intellectual progress and that of liberty, virtue and respect for natural rights. So political liberty advanced along with scientific liberty. Ideas of equality, rights and democracy, discovery of economic laws and universal dissemination of the new philosophy of reason, liberation and humanity led to the revolution itself.

For Condorcet, there are 2 uses of the study of civilisation. It establishes the facts of progress and determines its direction in the future so as to accelerate the rate of progression. His conception of progress is France-centric. Progress has been limited to a

few. But now that men knew that the laws of both external nature and of the human mind were constant, a science of society was possible and men could learn to co-operate and control their future. Nature has set no limit to progress or the improvement of human faculties. And since the correct methods of discovering knowledge are now known mankind will never relapse to barbarism.

All nations could progress, as no people are incapable of reason. As inequalities within a society are those of education, opportunity and wealth, these could be removed. Condorcet sees his tenth epoch as marked by scientific discoveries, diffusion of the laws of nature, cessation of wars, removal of extremes of poverty and wealth, equality between nations and between sexes. In the last instance he is unique among eighteenth century philosophers. Condorcet thinks that the inequality among peoples and nations will be removed. The colonisers will themselves become educators aiding the "backward" peoples to use their reason and reach the condition of France and the United States of America.

Adam Smith and the Scottish economists developed the idea that history was the progressive development through four distinct stages of society, representing qualitatively different kinds of economic organisation. These four stages were: hunting, pasturage, agriculture and commerce. These thinkers along with Turgot used the present situation of the American savages as the bench mark of all humanity.<sup>20</sup> John Millar saw

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<sup>20</sup> Nannerl O. Keohane, p.34.



in human history a natural progress from “rude to civilized manners, the several stages of which are usually accompanied with peculiar laws and customs.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus the most explicit votaries of progress see progress at least since the Renaissance as unilinear, characterised by the use of reason and growth of science which will eventually extend towards the whole mankind.

As we saw earlier the Encyclopedists saw all knowledge as inter-related and assumed that with the discovery of these laws, human beings can fashion their lives according to them and thus reach perfection. The Enlightenment thinkers shared this view. Thus they based their agenda of a science of man on the analogy of the established sciences of nature.<sup>22</sup>

According to this view there is one constant human nature through all historical changes. The Enlightenment thinkers considered the goal of human knowledge as the mastery over nature. This was possible by the application of the correct method and was meant for the benefit and use of life.

During the eighteenth century the scientific inventions of the seventeenth century were increasingly applied and resulted in greater control over the forces of nature. New techniques and tools increased agricultural productivity, industries were beginning to adopt machines and advances in navigation made communication faster and brought more areas of the globe in contact with each other. The representative thinker of the age was James Watt in his combination of science and technology. His invention, the steam engine, is regarded as the decisive invention of the industrial revolution.

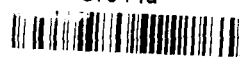
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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Callinicos, Social theory, p.23.

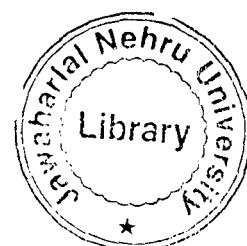
<sup>22</sup> R.G.Collingwood.

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Along with mechanical innovations, the institutions that made their widespread use possible were also put into place. “The Factory, the minute division of labour, industrial discipline for workers and managers, improvements in credit and transport were all inventions as deliberate and rational as the steam engine or the flying shuttle.”<sup>23</sup> Another area where major changes were taking place was that of medicine. The most important indicator of the improvements in medicine was the visible growth of population. The Philosophes employed the language of healing; they saw themselves as the physicians to a sick civilisation.<sup>24</sup>

For the philosophers all these changes demonstrated that life was getting better and more rational and this was the basis of their hope that progress will continue in the future. For the Enlightenment thinkers, progress was not merely visible in the increase in material abundance and technological innovation. The thinkers of the French Enlightenment were deeply influenced by the tolerance and civil liberties existing in England. Voltaire made a connection between the existence of free trade and free speech in England and it reinforced their belief that progress in one sphere reinforces the progress in another. David Hume suggested that the cultivation and felicity of his age depended on the conjunction of freedom in politics and invention in industry. “The spirit of the age affects all the arts; and the minds of men, being once roused from their lethargy, and put into a fermentation, turn themselves on all sides, and carry improvements into every art and science.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, An Interpretation, The Science of Freedom*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969, p.10-11.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Gay, p.13.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Gay, p.26.

The tremendous success in the sciences made the Enlightenment thinkers and their belief in the unity of all knowledge made the Enlightenment thinkers apply the same methods to the social and moral fields. The Abbe De Saint Pierre was first in asserting that progress in morality and politics would follow the application of scientific methods to these areas.<sup>26</sup> He envisaged infinite possibilities for human improvement through the power of reason as a result of government policies. As mentioned earlier, man was also seen as part of nature and hence there were laws of human nature, which if discovered would reveal the true nature of human beings. Men could then adjust themselves according to these laws and this would ensure the end of all superstition and unhappiness.

The Enlightenment thinkers were convinced of the superiority of their own age vis-à-vis the past ages. They saw in the refinement, polish and civility of their times the sign of civilisation as against crudity, barbarity and rudeness. Even where there were complaints that polite manners were artificial for the Enlightenment thinkers it was held to be much better, because it prevented conflicts.

A science of human nature was held possible through the methods of Lockean psychology. The materialists of the Enlightenment developed this aspect and arrived at the utilitarian pleasure- pain principle. The science of human nature according to Hume showed that human beings were mainly guided by self-interest and sympathy. The legislator should then create such conditions such that basic security is guaranteed to the individuals to pursue their ends. Adam Smith came up with the idea of an “invisible

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<sup>26</sup> Nannerl O. Keohane, "The Enlightenment Idea of Progress Revisited" in Chodorow Almond and Pearce (ed), *Progress and Its Discontents*, California, California University Press, 1982. p.33.

hand” which leads man to promote socially desirable ends even if these ends were no part of his intentions.<sup>27</sup> According to Judith Skhlar this concept of invisible hand referred to the idea that in a society of free and reasonable men social harmony would be inevitable.<sup>28</sup> All social conflicts and problems were due to ignorance or superstition and hence with the growth of reason, it was possible to change all those institutions and practices not conducive to reason.

For the Enlightenment thinker's progress lay in the hope that, with a gradual dissemination of knowledge regarding the laws of nature, public opinion could be built and changes in legislation made. These reforms, according to the principles of human nature, would lead to perfection and happiness. Here they were inspired by Locke's rejection of innate ideas and his view that knowledge is the response of the senses to the environment. A change in the environment effected through legislation and education can thus change human activities. This notion of reform from above saw its extreme form when the revolutionaries in France imagined that they could abruptly break with the past by adopting a new method of governance and a constitution. This would create a "condition of idyllic felicity in France"<sup>29</sup> and when adopted by other nations millennium would have arrived.

The Enlightenment was marked by a sense of universalism- of human nature, science and history. The thinkers of the French Enlightenment are convinced of the superiority of their present age and in the achievements of France in particular and Western Europe in

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<sup>27</sup> Hellmut. O.Pappe, p.97.

<sup>28</sup> Judith Skhlar, *After Utopia, The Decline of Political Faith*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957 . p.9

<sup>29</sup> J.B.Bury. p. 161.

general as constituting true advancement. This informs their proposals for the extension of knowledge and the Enlightenment ways of life to all the other peoples in the world. There is thus a singular path of development for all humankind from the primitive stage to the rational. Certain forms of mental activity were deemed as being and primitive and it was assumed that they would perish as the mind gains maturity and utilises reason.

To conclude, the Enlightenment articulated a particular notion of progress. It saw humanity as one and moving in a desirable direction guided by the faculty of reason and lead by the advanced nations of Europe. Progress was seen as a new creed, which took the place earlier occupied by the creed of providential design. Martin calls progress "a new religion".<sup>30</sup> The Enlightenment thinkers saw themselves as involved in a movement of dissemination of knowledge and science, which would spread the empire of reason and lead to perfection and happiness of all people. They saw in science the method of arriving at true knowledge and in reason the ultimate challenge to any authority that cannot be tested. In its conception of science, faith in reason and idea of human history as progressing towards perfection, the Enlightenment puts forward a vision of progress that has been extremely influential in the subsequent periods.

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Kingsley. p. 189

## **Progress Reaffirmed: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Ideas of Progress**

The Enlightenment was at the “threshold of industrial society, liberal democracy and the nation state.”<sup>1</sup> It marked the presence of the modern age. Modernity came to represent a society in which the Enlightenment project has been realized. It is a society in which the scientific understanding of the human and physical worlds regulates social interaction.<sup>2</sup> The idea of progress that the enlightenment had enunciated formed the basis of identifying the modern and evaluating the necessity and desirability of the changes that were taking place in different spheres in society. The enlightenment put forward the idea that it was possible to obtain knowledge about the laws that govern the functioning of man and society and once this knowledge was obtained, it could be used to the betterment of the human condition. This idea was subsequently affirmed and supplemented in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. In particular, the Enlightenment notions of science and instrumental rationality along with its belief in universal human nature were invoked in the next two centuries to develop a science of man and society and to explain the nature and pattern of social and historical change.

A few theorists of the enlightenment, namely, Turgot, Adam Smith and Condorcet had advanced the idea that history represented the successive development of the human

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Spybey, *Social Change, Development and Dependency, Modernity, Colonialism and the development of the West*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, p.68

<sup>2</sup> Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*, Polity Press, 1989. p.32

condition in stages, where each higher stage represented a superior form of life and increase in the use of reason and the discovery of knowledge, eventually leading to a more desirable state of affairs.<sup>3</sup> Implicit in this understanding of the historical process was the distinction between backward/primitive societies, which are characterized by myths and superstition, and modern societies marked by the achievements of science and reason. This contrast was endorsed and developed subsequently and over a period of time it became the basis of the dominant notions of progress.

The ideas that characterised the enlightenment were formulated at the time when the contours of industrial society were taking shape. Social theorists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century sought to understand the nature of the changes taking place in Europe and America during their time. They saw their society as an industrial society, a product of the changes that had taken place as a consequence of the scientific revolution. The industrial society, in their view, represented fundamentally different form of social organization marked “above all by the dissolving and dynamising effect of modern scientific rationality and its practical realization.”<sup>4</sup> They developed this contrast between pre-industrial and industrial societies in two ways, either as stage-theories or as dichotomous theories i.e. a transition between two polar types of social formation. Both forms of explanations were influenced by theories of evolutionism, particularly by the work of Darwin and Lamark in the field of biology and natural sciences.

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<sup>3</sup> French enlightenment thinkers however faced the vexed question of fitting in the Middle Ages of European history in this framework. All of them saw the medieval period as a regressive stage, where religion and superstition dominated society. Turgot, as we have seen gave value to the Middle Ages. only as part of the necessary process of trial and error that history is a product of.

<sup>4</sup>Alex Callinicos, pg.33.

Evolution implies a gradual process where the end of the process is preferable to its beginning<sup>5</sup>. The core of evolutionary theory is the belief in progress: the idea that all societies evolve from lower forms to higher, from simple and undifferentiated to more complex and differentiated. Further, present wise the western industrial system with developed division of labour was superior to the earlier forms of social organization. Explaining the transition to industrialism, some theorists draw a contrast between modern industrial society and the earlier traditional forms. Weber's distinction between traditional and rational-legal forms of domination, Durkheim's between mechanical and organic solidarity. Tonnies's between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft were part of this understanding. The second pattern of evolutionary approach was derived from the natural sciences, wherein industrial society is seen as the latest stage in a process of societal evolution. Theories of August Comte, Herbert Spencer and Henry Lewis Morgan best exemplified this perspective.

August Comte divided human history to 3 stages according to the development of scientific reason from primitive superstition to modern scientific reason and the change in social order which the evolution of consciousness gave rise to. Mankind thus develops from a theological state where the supernatural and religious mode of thought was dominant to a second stage (a metaphysical one) where the dominant mode of thought was philosophical and theoretical. The final stage was the positive stage with a scientific mode of thought. In this stage the industrial system will fully develop and the scientific understanding of the practical needs of social management will eliminate the conflicts

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<sup>5</sup> Trevor Noble, *Social Theory and Social Change*, Hound Mills: Macmillian Press, 2000, p40



and disorder that require the intervention of governments. They will thus wither away. Significantly, the dominant social group in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage is the scientists and engineers whereas it was the priests & warriors & lawyers & theologians in the first and second stages respectively. Comte saw mid 19<sup>th</sup> century as existing in the threshold to this positive era<sup>6</sup>. Much of Comte's work was retained by others writing on evolutionism. These are the conception of the stages as unilinear and a necessary sequence of development, science as mechanistic, deterministic with invariable causal laws the ability of science to tell final truth about the world <sup>7</sup>and the application of the scientific knowledge to the management society as the way to eliminate conflict and confusion. It will also avoid revolution and its blind utopianism. Indeed the slogan positivism was order and progress.<sup>8</sup> In fact this concern with orderly progress was to dominate modernisation theories where the peculiar state of rising expectations in the third world societies were held as portents of disorder or "breakdown of modernisation" and are offered as justifications for a strong centralised government, even dictatorships.

Modernisation theory was the result of the combination of structural functionalism with evolutionism. Progress was seen as the demonstration of the general adaptive capability of a society. The role of the educated elite lies in applying the science of society such that there will be order and progress for all.<sup>9</sup> This theme is also echoed in modernisation theory with emphasis on innovators and the intellectual elite.

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<sup>6</sup> Trevor Noble, p.43-45

<sup>7</sup> Trevor Noble, p.45

<sup>8</sup> Trevor Noble, p.46

<sup>9</sup> Trevor Noble, p.47

Herbert Spencer was heavily influenced by Darwin's works on the evolution of the species and his schema of classification gave rise to social Darwinism. Spencer continued with the general assumption the laws of nature unified all theoretical sciences and evolution was an obvious principle of law.<sup>10</sup> The process of evolution of human societies was also the process rise of civilisation. He saw the whole cosmos, as evolving from uniformity to heterogeneity and thus progress human societies was just a part of the cosmos. He developed 2 types of classificatory models of societies. To quote him,

"Primarily, we may arrange them (societies) according to their degrees of composition, as simple, compound, doubly compound; and secondarily, though in a less specific, we may divide them into the predominantly militant and the predominantly industrial- (that is)- those in which sustaining organisation is most largely developed"<sup>11</sup> The first schema is based on the degree of internal structural differentiation and increasing complexity as keeping with the laws of evolution and also as more stable thus implying that evolution results in more stable and organised systems. On this basis societies can be divided into an hierarchy wherein simple groups based on the family unit evolve to compound societies based on the clan and then to doubly compound societies based on the tribe and then finally to trebly compound societies based on the nation.<sup>12</sup> Societies representing the various stages in this process in this process of compound and recomposing appeared in a fixed evolutionary sequence.<sup>13</sup> At each evolutionary stage there is a struggle for survival both in relation to subsistence within the physical environment and in

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<sup>10</sup> Trevor Noble, p.49

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Spencer "Social Types and Constitutions" in Malcolm Walters (ed.), *Modernity*, volume 1.

<sup>12</sup> Trevor Noble, p.50.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Patterson, *Change and Development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*, Oxford: Berg, 1999, p.21.

competition with other societies. Thus the fittest forms are at the top of the hierarchy and they have progressed.

His second schema is based on the type of social coordination by which societies are structured. His distinction between the militant and industrial societies is part of the familiar tradition modernity distinction in social theory. In militant societies, social coordination was compulsory and the purpose was war. Individuals were subordinated to the imperatives of the society, hence there were limitations on property, liberty and mobility. Power is centralised, often in the ruler and the society was rigidly stratified according to rank and inheritance determined an individual's social position and occupation. The state existed to guarantee individual freedom and property rights and the principles of justice. Power was decentralised and there was wide spread social and geographical mobility. The values of the society were respect for others, trustworthiness, initiative and interdependence. Economically the goals were those of an industrial society. it was an open economy and dependent on free external trade.

Though Spencer insisted that these two types- industrial and militant -were to be found in all societies, he believed that in the course of evolution the former would supercede the latter. This was because increasing social differentiation made individuals steadily more independent on each other. It is here that the Darwinian element of his theory becomes important. Industrial societies survive because they are most efficient and are structurally differentiated. For Spencer the Victorian, Laissez-faire England represented such an industrial society and was therefore the highest stage of development.

Taken together Spencer's schema of classification articulates two important themes of evolutionism, of which are important to modernisation theory. One is the division of evolutionary hierarchical scale based on their level of structural differentiation. The other is the militant-industrial dichotomy where the characteristics of industrial society are superior. These two concepts are refashioned in the tradition-modernity dichotomy where the modern is identified with the western industrial society and the stages of development are delineated wherein societies are categorised on the level of their development. Darwinianism provides the deterministic element whereby those on the top of the evolutionary scale, i.e. the industrial society, is the form of society which can survive and so the fittest. Progress lies in the achievement of industrial society.

For Henry Lewis Morgan, regarded as one of the founders of evolutionary anthropology, progress lies in the movement from one stage to the next in the sequence and this resulted from technological innovations that transformed the modes of subsistence and the kind of social institutions linked with them. Different stages in the historical development of humanity are marked by the appearance of particular inventions. There is a functional relationship between economy and the form of political organization. Progress was ultimately inevitable and beneficial but rise of civilisation has destroyed something valuable i.e. a form of life without profit motive or private property. For Morgan the final destination of human society was not the current state of civilisation, but a "revival of a higher form of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gens"<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tom Patterson, p. 24-25

According to Durkheim, pre-industrial societies were typified by mechanical solidarity. It was mechanical because social solidarity was based on the collective domination of the collective conscience arising out of religious beliefs and sentiments.

Division of labour resulted in increased heterogeneity in the emerging industrial individualism and interdependence. Unlike the older type of society, which relied on coercion and tradition, in the new society process of differentiation resulted in an organic solidarity characterised by interdependence. While the western industrial society was ultimately superior to pre industrial society, it had to solve the problems of social integration. Durkheim saw the division of labour of his time as a transition period, characterised by 'anomie' i.e. rootlessness and a lack of regulation. The new solidarity had to be based on occupational associations giving individuals a sense of belonging and encouraging social solidarity and mutual assistance. This aspect was also stressed by Ferdinand Tonnies who felt that modern life was marked by formal and contractual relations and which replaced the older relations of gemeinschaft- community and communalism.

While the concept of differentiation, put forward in evolutionary theory was very important for later modernisation theory, the other important aspect was the idea of rationalisation, put forward by Max Weber. The distinctive feature of the capitalist society was its gradual adoption of a calculating attitude towards more and more aspects of life. Modernity is marked then by a change in attitude, where the rational approach that underlay science gets extended to every sector of society. Weber calls this the purposive-

rational action (as value rationality). Here rational actions are less frequently guided by values and more frequently by the proper choice of means to a given end.<sup>15</sup> Modernisation theories endorsed this new rational spirit. Weber did not welcome the outcome. For him rationalisation meant a separation of pure knowledge and truth and modern life was marked by loss of meaning.

Barring Spencer and Comte, most 19<sup>th</sup> century theories had ambivalence' regarding the new industrial modern order. They considered the costs of this development- the loss of community and meaning from life. But they saw modernity as an inevitable process.

The main elements of evolutionary theory were that societies move from lower simpler forms of life to higher more complicated and differentiated forms of life. Western industrial society was superior, in fact it lied at the evolutionary scale and all societies would eventually look like these societies. There was a sense of inevitably regarding the move towards industrial society, as change in this direction was considered natural. 19<sup>th</sup> century theorists did think that the emergence of industrial society broke up earlier forms of association and thus pose new integrative problems. Even Spencer hinted at a third form of society, which would be based on work. Weber spoke about the stifling of creativity that would occur with the predominance of rationality- a characteristic feature of industrial society. Durkheim talked about sense of anomie that characterised the individual consciousness due to division of labour.

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<sup>15</sup> Agnes Heller, *A Theory of Modernity*, Cambridge Polity Press, 1989. p. 36

Collectively, 19<sup>th</sup> century evolutionary theories suggested that mankind is moving in a direction, which satisfies ethical requirements, further that quantitative growth of social life at some stage or results in a qualitative change of the forms of life.<sup>16</sup> The change from a primitive pre-modern agricultural society with little internal differentiation of roles and occupational specialisation to a industrial society was characterised by greater division of labour and stratification along the lines of wealth, occupation and universal categories. The idea that division of labour is an efficient way of optimising production and organising the role and institutions of society in general was the basis of their concept of differentiation.

Evolutionism resurfaced in the mid-twentieth century and was incorporated in modernisation theory, in the form of structural functionalism.

The post second world war era saw the emergence of the erstwhile colonial regions of Asia and Africa as independent nations. This development raised questions regarding the future course of action that these countries must take in order to reach the levels of economic growth experienced by the advanced industrial countries. But as the economic growth was seen as part of the wider social framework, it was recognised that social and cultural change was also required.

Unlike the Enlightenment and nineteenth century social theory, modernisation theory directly addressed the question of progress with regard to the third world countries. The term third world refers to the newly independent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin

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<sup>16</sup> Ankie Hoogvelt, *The Sociology of Developing Societies*, London: Macmillan, 1976.p.11.

America. These theories sought to understand the ways in which the third world can put itself on the path of modernisation.

Theories of modernisation developed in the changed world context of the mid-twentieth century. They were faced with the question of the development in the third world. Till this time in the engagements with the idea of progress, these third world societies had been seen as the other- representing the sort of societies the west had left behind in the course of history. It was assumed that these countries would eventually evolve along these lines

Modernisation theories concern themselves with the problems of economic development, political stability, and social and cultural change in these societies. Unlike the eighteenth and nineteenth century visions of progress, which were based on optimism for the future of the West, modernisation theories were based on what the past of the West held for the future of the third world. In this conception, the West had “arrived”. These writers did not share the pessimism of the early twentieth century<sup>17</sup> in the West or the ambivalences of Durkheim or Weber regarding the processes of industrialisation. The modernising optimism was based on the perceived social, economic and political successes of Western society. In part they also represent the political concerns and needs of the present. In the context of cold war and the emerging global dominance of USA it was necessary to keep the third world on the capitalist side. Thus, the question facing the developed west was, what sort of policies could be adopted so as to put the third world on the path of

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<sup>17</sup> Cyclical theories resurface in thinkers like Spengler, Pareto, Sorokin and Toynbee.



industrialisation. The attempt to answer this question gave rise to a wide range of theoretical explorations on the nature of third world societies and the changes required in them for the purposes of development.

The enlightenment modernity was a critical look of the western world on itself. The enlightenment thinkers prescribed that the increasing application of reason and science to every aspect of life is the way to a better future and this is how progress occurs. On the other hand, theories of modernisation were advanced at a time when the west had clearly overtaken the world in terms of economic and political control. These theories were advanced as the prescription of the west to the backward areas of the world - largely the erstwhile colonies of the same western nations- also known as the third world. These theories sought to present the ways by which the third world can put itself on the path of modernisation.

The goal of modernisation theory was the establishment of an industrial capitalist society like the West. The western capitalist model was the norm and was almost uncritically regarded as the developed model, which all third world nations sought aspire towards.

In this enterprise, the theoretical insights of evolutionism, diffusion and structural functionalism were used. Of particular importance is the structural functional framework, which had dominated American sociology since the 1930s. Parsons developed the pattern variables.

The Weberian distinction between the rational-legal system and traditional system was formed the basis of modernisation theorists.

Influenced by the systems theory of David Easton, structural functionalism saw societies as more or less adaptive social systems, characterised by varying degrees of differentiation, with roles and institutions as their principles units. The balance or equilibrium of the various parts of the whole is maintained for as long as certain functional pre-requisites are satisfied. The entire system is kept together through the operation of a central value system embodying social consensus. Structural functionalism synthesised the two perspectives of sociological analysis of the nineteenth century, namely the tradition-modern dichotomy and the evolutionary approach that saw industrial society as the latest stage in a process of societal evolution.<sup>18</sup> Parsons saw the character of any social

Later parsons himself worked out his pattern variables along with the notion of “evolutionary universals” to arrive at a broad classification of various societies. The problematic of modernisation was the question of introducing the industrial society into the third world. This included not just the attainment of industrialisation but the social and psychological changes that accompany industrialisation.

This scheme was utilized by Frank Sutton to arrive at a classification of agricultural society and modern industrial society, according to their distinguishing characteristics. The characteristics of agricultural society are: predominance of ascriptive, particularistic and diffuse patterns, stable local groups and limited spatial mobility, relatively simple and stable “occupational” differentiation and a deferential stratification system of diffuse impact. In contrast, the characteristics of modern industrial society are: predominance of

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<sup>18</sup> Tony Spiby, p. 9

universalistic, specific and achievement norms, high degree of social mobility (in a general sense), well developed occupational system, insulated from other social structures, “egalitarian” class system based on generalized patterns of occupational achievement and prevalence of “associations” i.e., functionally specific, non-ascriptive, structures.<sup>19</sup> The norms of universalism and achievement refer to rationality as a norm for social behavior in modern society and this is a Weberian influence on this classification. Thus, in modernisation theory the tradition–modernity dichotomy was recast. The essential difference between modern and traditional society lies in the greater control that modern man has over his natural and physical environment. This control is based on the expansion of scientific and technological knowledge. According to Marion Levy, a society is “more or less modernized to the extent that its members use inanimate sources of power and/or use tools to multiply the effects of their efforts.”<sup>20</sup> Non- modernized societies show low degree of specialization, high level of self-sufficiency, cultural norms of traditionalism, particularism and functional diffuseness, lesser emphasis on money and market, emphasis on importance of family and flow of goods from rural to urban areas. The characteristics of modernised societies are the opposite of all the above characteristics. The major mechanism for change is the penetration of modern technology and social relations. Late modernizers accordingly have the advantage of access to the knowledge about the processes lying ahead.

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Sutton, *Analysing Social Systems*. in Jason L. Finkle and Richard W.Gable (ed) *Political Development and Social Change*. New York: John Wiley,1968, p.24-25.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Samuel Huntington, *The Change to Change: Modernisation, Development, and Politics* in Cyril Black (ed.) *Comparative Modernisation*, The Free Press, 1976, p.28.

The characteristics of traditional and modern society are mirrored in the characteristics of traditional and modern man. Alex Inkeles thus undertook an empirical study in underdeveloped countries to arrive at the characteristics of modern man, which distinguish him from traditional man. According to him, the idea of development requires a transformation in the very nature of man and this “transformation is both a means to the end of yet greater growth and at the same time one of the great ends itself of the development process.”<sup>21</sup> Modernity is a change in spirit; it refers to new ways of thinking, feeling and achieving. The characteristics of modern man (which are absent in traditional man) are: a readiness for new experience and openness to innovation and change, a disposition to form opinions over a large number of issues, other than those of immediate relevance, a more democratic attitude towards the opinion of others, orientation towards the future rather than the past, belief in the possibility of dominating the environment to achieve goals, belief in man’s ability to control the world, more awareness of the dignity of others and faith in science and technology as well as distributive justice.<sup>22</sup> These attributes are linked to the successful acceptance of the individual to the modern industrial nation. The influences that effect this transformation to the modern man are the processes of urbanization, education, nation state and its apparatus, mass communication, industrialisation and politicization. Modernity in this analysis is eminently desirable, both for the society and the individual.

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<sup>21</sup> Alex Inkeles, The Modernisation of Man in Myron Weiner (ed.) *The Dynamics of Growth*, p.138.

<sup>22</sup> Alex Inkeles, p. 141-144.

Daniel Lerner also argues that compared to the traditional individuals, moderns are happier and better informed.<sup>23</sup> In all these accounts tradition is a barrier to development. Modernisation is a global process and is associated with changes in not just institutions but also persons.

Neil Smelser is concerned with the effects of economic development on social structures. Economic development is taken as the growth of output per head of population. Several interrelated technical, economic and ecological changes accompany development. These are technological advances, agricultural reorganization, industrialisation and urbanization. All these processes, which generally occur simultaneously, give rise to three ideal type structural changes: they give rise to structural differentiation-which is the establishment of more specialized and autonomous social units, integration- state, law, political groupings are important in this process and social disturbances, which are an outcome of the uneven advance of differentiation and integration. These four major processes of economic and technological change are identical to the pattern that has occurred in the advanced West. The variations between different countries in producing these patterns of change mainly deal with the different particular features of various societies, like their pre-modern conditions, impetus to change etc, but he presumes that the effect will be the same if social disturbances can be controlled. He advocated the necessity of having strong centralized governments, where nationalism can become an instrument to break the hold of traditional religions, which are not as adapted to the needs

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<sup>23</sup> David Harrison, *The Sociology of Modernization and Development*, New Delhi, Heritage Publishers, 1989.p.16.

of modernisation as Protestantism.<sup>24</sup> The structural differentiation that he describes is in keeping with the model of the pattern variables. In Smelser's analysis, it is possible for the third world to emulate the Western path of industrialisation, if social disturbances can be controlled. There is a fit between economic growth and social change.

In much the same fashion, W.W. Rostow undertakes an analysis of the growth trajectory of the West, so that it is possible to discern those conditions that the third world countries must meet in order to undergo the same kind of change. He develops a schema of five-stage schema for economic growth, in which all societies can be placed according to their level of development. The third stage is the most important, where the barriers to tradition are finally broken off and the society "takes off" to economic growth. This can take place due to a variety of factors and requires changes in attitudes towards risk taking, application of science and new methods of production and working practices. In order to develop, the third world societies had to change their economies and their values and social structures according to that found in the advanced West. The end state is the mass consumption societies of the developed West mainly the US.

The works of these thinkers are indicative of the larger trend of modernisation theory. All modernisation theories regard the process of economic growth as almost inevitable if certain policies are followed. They ignore the effects of colonial economics or the continuing global system of economic exchange. As a result, they presume development as possible on the same lines as the West, and that development is largely driven by

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<sup>24</sup> Neil Smelser, Mechanisms of Change and Adjustment to Change in Malcolm Walters (ed) *Modernity: Critical Concepts*, Volume 1, p.155.

internal factors and depends on the strong will of the third world governments and the elite and entrepreneurial classes.

Even though modernisation theorists understood development as occurring through stages, the general tendency is to see transition from one polar type to another. The pattern variables developed by Parsons are used as the individual and social characteristics of all traditional and modern societies. These theories tend to view development as a largely internal affair, at least the causes of underdevelopment are internal, but development could “take off” through external stimuli.

Modernisation theory emphasizes and approves of the trend towards western capitalist modernity. Unlike the classical sociological theorists like Durkheim, Weber and Marx, who are ambivalent about the consequences of capitalist transformation, the modernisation theorists are convinced of the superiority of the western capitalist industrial model on grounds of economics as well as society. That is why they go into elaborate analysis of the characteristics of modern man and try proving that the modern man is happier than his traditional counterpart.

The main characteristics of modernisation theory are that they are based on a dichotomy between tradition and modernity, where all societies could be either traditional or modern. All these theories gave importance to the internal factors of a society as reasons for backwardness. Tradition was seen as a barrier to growth. They rely on change agents to spur up the process of modernisation. Development was seen as a process of successful diffusion the ideas, practices, technology that were brought in from outside.

It was in the theories of modernisation that the question of progress of the third world was directly addressed. In this process the western sociologists developed the insights from evolutionary theory, diffusionism and structural functionalism.

In the structural functional framework the distinction between modernity and tradition was given a sharper focus. Parsons developed his pattern variables to understand the ways in which social relationships had altered in the transition from non-industrial to industrial societies. In this he mainly recast the works of Tonnies and Weber. For Parsons and skills these pattern variables were basic dichotomous in role orientations. In this scheme modernisation was seen as movement from ascription to universalism.

Levy saw a fit between some role orientations and economic growth. He suggested that in the third world social and economic interaction is underpinned by traditional values rather than the impersonal, formal, rational criteria, which operated in industrial society.

The method that all these thinkers adopted involved an abstraction of the characteristics of interaction in the west and then use them as the model to judge third world actions.

Modernisation has been seen in various ways, in terms of differentiation, rationalisation or secularisation. There are critical variable theories of modernisation which equate the process of modernisation in terms of one single indicator. They follow the pattern of Weber who saw the modern reflected in the increasing process of rationalisation. Rationalisation reflected the increasing subjection of all phenomena to law. However most modernisation theories follow a dichotomous approach. They adopt the tradition - modernity divide and identify the goals with reaching the characteristics of the modern



society. Here modernisation is seen as an all-encompassing process affecting all aspects of the nation-state.

Whatever approach is adopted all modernisation theories derive the special characteristics of modernity from the western European and American model. In fact modernisation theories and the general approach to development homogenize not just the nature of third world but also the western world. All European and American states are seen as having gone through the same trajectory of development and as exhibiting the same values of modernity. Whereas there are great diversities within what is seen as the Western model of development.

All modernisation theories identify modernisation with industrialisation, and particularly of capitalist, industrial development. Economic development mainly refers to economic growth. Apart from the indices of economic development like gross national product, per capita income etc the other indices of modernisation are urbanisation, literacy, individualisation. There are social, political and psychological characteristics of modernity. These are arrived at by an analysis of the changes that took place in British and American society during the process of industrialisation. These characteristics are seen as crucial for the third world to emulate. Thus it is a two way justificatory process. Modernisation is identified with certain changes, so these will be exhibited in the countries undergoing modernisation. This is the way to ascertain whether the modernisation process is following the direction required. On the other hand most analysis agree that modernisation in the third world is likely to be planned. Therefore if the third world governments make sufficient changes in their social life it is possible to

induce modernization. Thus David McClelland asserts that governments must encourage the need of achievement in citizens. Though there is a sense that third world governments need to encourage social changes, modernisation is also seen to be a self-sustaining process after a certain level. In fact definitions of modernisation are about the ability to achieve and sustain industrialisation. The industrial way of life is regarded as antithetical to most of the values of pre industrial era.

The logic of division of labour associated with industrial production is applied to all fields, defined as the process of differentiation. Hereby, there is increasing separation of roles such that more and more roles (particularly that essential for the system to survive) are performed by separate institution. This increases efficiency. Such separation of roles and their institutionalisation is the logic of the structural functional approach. A system is supposed to be both stable and modern when it can ensure structural differentiation. Gabriel Almond applied this approach to the political system to conclude that those political systems which manage to achieve structural differentiation (each role of the government having a specific institution- example the judiciary, executive, and legislature) and sub system autonomy or are in the process of doing so are on the path of political modernisation.

Modernisation theories are thus eurocentric and unilinear. Even where there is recognition that all systems may not automatically follow the same path, there is the implicit understanding that they will eventually have to if they want to catch up with the advanced states. This notion of "catching up" is the corner stone of the modernisation [process. It is an unhistorical approach and ignores the dynamics of the process of social

change. The goal is predetermined, the processes to be followed to achieve that goal are well laid out, so the only thing left to be done is to implement the policies. Here is a strong emphasis on the need for centralised governments and strong leaders as well as a modernising elite committed to the values of modernisation. These are the factors that can overcome the barriers of tradition.

Modernisation theories are heavily influenced by the positivistic spirit. Thus they see a one best way to do things. This is particularly sharp in those people who stress on the logic on industrialisation. They see the industrial way of life as essentially the same and thus with the spread of industrialisation and nations will eventually look alike. This likeness will transcend cultures and ideology. This approach known as the convergence theories are advanced by Kerr, Galbraith etc. this trend leads to the end of ideology or end of history arguments.

The popular perception is that the modernisation paradigm has collapsed. It had fallen into disrepute with the dependency critiques, which pointed out that modernisation theories were ethnocentric, unmindful of colonial and imperialist influences and the global dynamics of capitalism, both its history and the present. It was in many ways an extension of colonial economics, with colonial sociology providing justification. In this analysis, modernisation is a not just based on wrong premises, but it is an ideological cover of the imperialist nations to retain their control over the global economy.

But with the neo imperialist renewal and the subsequent policy of neo-liberalism, the important aspect of modernisation theory as the special development paradigm for the underdeveloped west was withdrawn. Neo-liberal economies and the structural

development programs are being advocated for all nations. However, the framework of modernisation remains relevant inspite of the greatly reduced power of the nation state in the globalisation scenario. Neo liberal policies continue to be advocated by the western developed world to the third world nations as the path of progress. Moreover, the removal of the special case justification of development theories is based on an ignorance of international linkages and power politics which have impeded development as it blames the failure of development on the poor managerialism of the third world nations. This is just an extension of the modernisation argument wherein the reason for the underdeveloped state of the third world countries lied in internal factors- on their lack of modernity and its cultural factors. the persistence of tradition etc.

In so far as neo-liberalism is concerned it can be seen as an extension of the development paradigm based on instrumental rationality. Arguments in favour of neo-liberalism, globalisation etc. are advanced on grounds on efficiency and rationality. Technological improvement continues to be the basis of development, reinforced by the information technology boom. These arguments also cohere with that of post-industrial, which follows a teleological pattern based on technological advances.

I shall not go into the debate whether there is a post-industrial age that at least the west has entered into. (Callinicos argues against the notion that capitalism has taken a post-industrial form and this is a distinct mode of production). What I want to say is that advocates of post-industry develop the crucial ideas of progress. As it is a knowledge – value free scientific knowledge- and technology which are the key constituents of this approach.

What I am trying to say is that the notions of progress that came in with modernity and got entrenched with capitalism have not become redundant, despite the disillusionment caused by the failures as well as its costs.

The prospect of modernity is seen in two different ways, both articulating as aspects typical of modern visions of progress. One is the end of history and ideology arguments, which have emerged with the convergence theories and got reinforced by the collapse of the communist bloc. For these the teleology of modernity has been completed, with the ultimate victory of the liberal capitalist model.

The another is the clash of civilization thesis, where all the gains of modernity are being challenged by fundamentalist forces. This is a repetition of the tradition-modernity dichotomy wherein tradition represents all that is opposite and opposed to modernity and needs to be overcome if progress is to be achieved. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, even though one assumes that modernity has triumphed and the other that it is being challenged by renewed tradition. They are similar in being a reaffirmation of the superiority of the modern- in its dominant form.

## **The Romantic Rebellion**

The Enlightenment vision of progress and the dominant form that narratives of progress took as the enlightenment project entrenched itself with the development of capitalism was not an uncontested one. In fact discontent with this project of progress and modernity has been continuously expressed since the time of the enlightenment. In this chapter and the next, I will examine critiques of the dominant narrative of progress from two important standpoints, one that surfaced in the West in the last decades of the eighteenth century and another which appeared in India in the early twentieth century, namely, that of Romanticism and Gandhi. The Romantic Movement articulated certain specific ideas, which have been inspirational for many further critiques of dominant modernity. Gandhi, as a third world thinker developed his ideas in another context, that of a colonial subject countering the claims of western civilisation. There are many similarities between these two perspectives. As an early critique of industrialism and capitalism, Romanticism has been an influence on all subsequent expressions of discontent over modernity and progress. Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation is also based on an analysis of the corrosive effects of modern values on society. But it goes beyond it while envisioning an alternative pattern of social, political and economic organisation.

The Romantic Movement was a powerful critique of the Enlightenment worldview. Romanticism rejected much of what had been prized by the Enlightenment and considered by it as essential for its project of perfectibility of man and society. In opposition to the Enlightenment tenets of reason, science, and knowledge driven

progress, romanticism posited activity, imagination and creativity in man, nature and history.

The Romantic rebellion does not however refer to a single coherent movement and the term romanticism is associated with varied intellectual trends. These insights do not always cohere with each other. The main reason is that romanticism emerged in different contexts and in response to the different problems that the nations of Europe had with the Enlightenment worldview. For example, Romanticism came late to France and primarily took the form of the battle against neo-classicism. In Germany, Romanticism was a radical and thoroughgoing movement affecting all branches of philosophy, art, history and literature. It was a cultural reaction against French hegemony and an attempt at cultural revitalization. In fact a romantic school can be identified best in the Berlin–Jena group. The comprehensive philosophical systems of romantic idealism were developed in Germany and from Germany the currents of romanticism spread to different parts of Europe. It was a big influence on English romanticism, particularly the thought of Schelling. In England romanticism grew out of the native tradition and was undogmatic. The romantic poets- Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley- responded to the outcome of the enlightenment as seen in the industrial revolution and the profound changes it was affecting in society. Keeping these differences in mind, Arthur Lovejoy in fact cautioned us against the use of the term as a singular entity and instead talked about the existence of “Romanticisms”<sup>1</sup>. However it is possible to discern certain core values, motifs and moods that recurred amidst the diversity of the 'Romantic Movement', the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Franklin L. Baumer, *Romanticism*, Dictionary of the History of Ideas.

most important one being the rejection of the enlightenment worldview. As Barzun suggests, “what unifies men in a given age is not their individual philosophies but the dominant problem these philosophies are designed to solve.”<sup>2</sup>

As an intellectual movement, Romanticism was shaped by the two major upheavals, which shook the foundations of Europe – the French Revolution and the industrial revolution in Britain. Romanticism took its different forms and developed its particular insights in the responses of the various nations of Europe to these two revolutions, both of which were consequences of the enlightenment era. In my examination of romanticism I shall not go into details about the various regional variations and the chronological development of the 'Romantic Movement'. The purpose of this section is to delineate the main themes of romantic thought both in their rejection of the enlightenment and their constitution of a distinct romantic alternative. The key themes of the romantic movement is the emphasis on human creativity and imagination, an appeal to nature as a living force, an appreciation of diversity of cultures- past and present. As we noted in the first chapter, central to the enlightenment is its conception of progress and as I shall show intrinsic to romanticism is the rejection of this particular notion of progress and its project for the betterment of humanity.

According to Isaiah Berlin. Romanticism represented a shift in consciousness that cracked the backbone of European thought. This backbone was the belief in the possibility of a rational comprehension of the universe.<sup>3</sup> Nature was seen as a well-

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Barzun. *Classic, Romantic and Modern*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1961, p.14.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted Lilian R. Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective*, London, McMillan, ST Martin's Press, 1969, p.27.



ordered homogenous space, following a patterned regularity, which can be understood by empirical science and mastered by humans for their betterment. Enlightenment entailed a commitment to the exclusive dominance of scientific values and the employment of the scientific method to obtain knowledge. True knowledge itself was held possible if correct principles are employed and this knowledge was the key to good life. Moreover, knowledge so obtained was held to be valid, for all individuals and all times, as human nature was held to be constant. This concerned knowledge on moral and political questions also. Conflicts were the outcome of ignorance and so can be corrected. In this conception knowledge was a matter of discovery by the application of reason. The romantics objected to each of these contentions about human nature, nature, knowledge, science and the possibility of an well-ordered rational society embodying progress.

The main ideas of the Romantic Movement are prefigured in thinkers like Rousseau and Kant. Rousseau was the first thinker to question the enlightenment claims that civilization had improved the human condition. In the Parisian society of his time, marked by politeness and courtesy, he felt a sense of complete isolation and alienation. He realized that the fundamental defect of society was that it had regimented and stereotyped external life. Social man was no longer in connection with himself and was constantly living in the opinion of others. In what his contemporaries proudly called civilization, he found only artifice and conventionality. He denied that there was any connection between knowledge and virtue. He turned away from the glorification of reason, which typified the French enlightenment and appealed to the deeper forces of conscience and feeling. For Rousseau, man was fundamentally good. It was society, which had corrupted his existence, and the main reason for this corruption was the existence of inequality society

had destroyed man's inner equality. In the *Discours Sur les Sciences et les Arts*, he urges men to rid themselves of all oppressive learning and the splendor of knowledge and find a way back to the natural and simple forms of existence. The only source of true knowledge is self-knowledge and genuine self-examination. Everyone carries within themselves the true archetype of natural man and the need for to discover it beneath the wrappings of artificiality that had become characteristic of social man.<sup>4</sup> Rousseau constructed an ideal past of the state of nature, which was characterised by simple and natural existence. Like Rousseau, the romantics had a sense of primitive nakedness in the face of nature.<sup>5</sup> He countered the force of feeling to the force of rationalist understanding of the enlightenment and that of passion to the power of reflective and analytical reason.<sup>6</sup> These were important themes for the romantics.

In a different context, Kant had also argued that the answers to questions of value were not matters of expertise, but were matters of individual choice. Like Rousseau, he valued individual autonomy, but realized that there can be no autonomy if the precepts and values were given outside of the individual. Consequently, the commands must come from the inner voice of reason. However for Kant these commands were true, universal and objective, even though the individual self creates them. The romantic successors of Kant drew out the full consequences of the view that autonomy is the essence of morality and that values are internally created and not the objects of discovery, thereby breaking the old analogy between moral and scientific knowledge. In their writings, morality

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<sup>4</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1989, p.50.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Barzun, p.20.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Cassirer, p.83.

becomes a creative process and it is this that impelled the romantics to present art as the model of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

The 'Romantic Movement', in fact, began as an aesthetic revolt against the canons of neo-classicism that were imposed on all artistic activity. The enlightenment approved of the principles of neo-classicism as this was in keeping with their image of reality. Neo-classicism imposed rigid and formal rules on art and literature and curbed artistic imagination and creativity. Art was meant to replicate the ideal patterns of nature. Only universal and moral themes were to be taken up, and the typical and probable shown. The purpose of art was not to express but to instruct and moralise.<sup>8</sup> Art and poetry had been accorded an inferior place in the enlightenment as they represented imagination, which was a distorted picture of reality.<sup>9</sup>

Romantics upheld artistic imagination, creativity and individuality. Art is a process of creation and creation is an autonomous activity of man. The romantics reject the French enlightenment conception of the modern as reason, science and technology. Instead they see the modern as marked by innovations in arts and literature.<sup>10</sup> Underlying this aesthetic revolt is a different conception of human nature and reality and romantics articulate this new conception. The Romantics saw human nature as characterised by the need for creative expression, thereby making each individual unique.

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<sup>7</sup> Isaiah Berlin. "The Romantic Revolution: A Crisis in the History of Modern Thought", in Henry Hardy (ed.) *The Sense of Reality*, Noonday Press, 1999.p.178.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Skhlar. *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.14.

<sup>9</sup> The *sturm und drang* movement of late eighteenth century Germany was a rebellion against finite restrictions in any shape or form- literary, social or political. This movement foreshadowed many of the basic themes of romanticism.

<sup>10</sup> Alvin Gouldner. *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today*, London, 1973., p.325.

Fichte articulated this new conception of human nature. According to him, a human self becomes aware of himself from a clash with the non-self that is nature. Nature, which includes one's body and its functions, is dead matter, which the human self must subjugate to his own creative design.<sup>11</sup> The individual was a member of two worlds- the material which is characterized by cause and effect and the spiritual, where "I am wholly my own creation."<sup>12</sup> The characteristic feature of human nature for him is the capacity for free conscious creative activity. The source of action is not reason but the will, which is characterized by incessant striving. Fichte's attempt was to vindicate the freedom of the moral personality as against Newtonian determinism.<sup>13</sup>

This understanding of human nature as self-creation by the conscious activity of the will and not reasoned discovery of the truth is a characteristic feature of romantic thought. Since ends are created by men and not found by them, this means that there are universal standards for all men to follow. Reason is universal, but the will inheres in the individual and can conflict with other wills. But for Fichte the creative self can be a community too and there in his defense of the German nation.

In Fichte's understanding work becomes the expression of self and this is the source for the concept of dignity of labour.<sup>14</sup> From Fichte, the Romantics, particularly the *die romantik* group in Germany consisting of the Schegel brothers, Tieck, Holderin, Novalis and Schleiermacher, took the idea of an autonomous all-creative self, which operated

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<sup>11</sup> Isiah Berlin, 179-180.

<sup>12</sup> Isiah Berlin, p.180.

<sup>13</sup> Randall, *The Career of Philosophy: From the German Enlightenment to the Age of Decline*, vol II, New York, 1965 p.221.

<sup>14</sup> Randall, p.183.

through the power of creative art. But they did not agree with his understanding of nature as dead matter. This is because the Romantics understood nature differently. They saw in nature the same life force, which existed in the individual. Holderin, for example, nature is the very element, in which he moves and lives. It is itself something living, a reality immediately felt and experienced.<sup>15</sup> This new understanding of nature was part of the romantic rejection of the Newtonian universe of the enlightenment.

The Romantics objected to the mechanical mathematical vision of the universe, which underlay Newtonian science and the Enlightenment understanding of man, society and the world. According to the Romantics, the geometric spirit of this science subjected all life to reason and thus mechanised it. They attacked rationalism not because its results were false but because it was inadequate. Science could not capture the true essence of life. Mechanical science tried to understand the whole world according to its own standards. But nature was not a dry system of laws, which is out there to be known and mastered. Newtonian world was perceived as a cage. Science was seen as an attempt to impose a system of reality into nature, which did not correspond to its true nature. The romantics sought to save nature from the dissecting, mechanizing, alienating work of science. Romantics admired the endless creativity of nature and sought to imitate this energetic production. They desired not accurate knowledge about nature but an intuitive involvement with it. Nature lent itself to the artist not to the scientist.

This sentiment found an expression in the writings of many romantics. In Schelling's *naturphilosophie*, nature was represented as a world system, as the expression of the same

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<sup>15</sup> Randall, p.237.

life that appears in man. According to him the way to counter the Newtonian science was not to relegate it to the realm of experience but to examine it afresh in the light of more concrete experience. Nature is a productive process that has generated and sustained life. The world itself is a living, growing harmony of forces; it was a spiritual force, which was constantly struggling towards culmination in self-conscious spirit.<sup>16</sup> Wordsworth drew his understanding of nature from this vision of Schelling. For Wordsworth, nature was no longer something to be analysed and reduced to laws but a mysterious, vitalizing force that had to be sensed and experienced.<sup>17</sup> For him “man and nature are adapted to each other. The mind of man is the mirror to the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature”<sup>18</sup>

When Romantics objected to reason, they objected to the analytical division of man into reason and passion, where reason is privileged. The Romantics did not agree with the Lockean psychology, which limited human knowledge to the sense world of appearances. Knowledge is not the result of pure abstract contemplation, but as flashes of imagination. William Wordsworth, each of his poems illustrates “the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement.”<sup>19</sup> Their ideal is the totality of human experience and that is why the artistic vision of life is privileged. The Romantics protested against the abstract man of the enlightenment and against him posited the concrete living man with all his experiences.

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<sup>16</sup> Randall, p.253.

<sup>17</sup> Crane Brinton, *Ideas and Men*, 1975, p.148.

<sup>18</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' in Eugen Weber (ed.), *Paths to the Present*, p.24.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p.20.

From the Romantic point of view, knowledge gained by technological rationality is not of much value to human life. It offers a truncated vision of reality. Science ignores all that appears irrational to its principles and as a result leaves out huge areas of human existence from its orbit. Romantics celebrate these very irrational and unconscious urges of the human self. That is why they are interested in dreams. Schelling considered values and myths of the early peoples not as exercises of delusion, but as concrete embodiments of the human impulse to create.<sup>20</sup> Their paintings abound in the ugly and the grotesque. The purpose of human life was not the discovery of truth through reason, but active creation. The Romantics upheld the Promethean ideal of the defiant creator. The image of the artist as a defiant creator is closely bound up with the romantic celebration of the genius. According to Novalis, there was a need for a real psychology that will show that genius is the essence of all human nature, not just of the artist.<sup>21</sup> Thus the values that they upheld were different from that of the enlightenment.

The age of the Enlightenment was characterised by optimism for the industrial society, which was taking shape at that time. Romanticism is also a response to the profound changes that were taking place in European society with advancing capitalism, but the romantics do not share the optimism of their predecessors for this new society. Their views on these changes are reflected in their works of poem and art. In particular they constantly refer to the impact of the rise of factory system of production and increasing use of machinery. The changing landscape, increasing pollution, the migration of population from the countryside to the city are all the concerns of the romantic poets.

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<sup>20</sup> Isiah Berlin, p.185.

<sup>21</sup> Randall, p.238.

This is particularly pronounced in the Lake School of England and can be directly related to the fact that industrialization had taken most roots in that country. They recoiled from the artificiality of modern urban life. Wordsworth said in his preface to the Lyrical Ballads that his poems are written with the belief that the human mind is capable of being excited without gross and violent stimuli, the causes for which have increased with urbanization and the uniformity's of men's occupations.<sup>22</sup> Thoreau in response to the destruction of nature caused by the expansion of the Industrial Revolution exclaimed, "Thank God, they cannot cut down the clouds".<sup>23</sup>

In Germany moreover Romanticism took a cultural turn. As a response to French superiority in culture particularly in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, thinkers in Germany stressed the time-tested value of culture. The earlier manifestation of this is in Herder's work. Herder stressed on the importance of cultures and insisted on the incommensurability of cultures. Moreover, in Germany the Enlightenment never took that anti-church stand as in France. Pietism and Lutheran reforms had retained religion as important in German life and in the works of the German romantics there is a constant attempt to retain the valuable aspects of religion. It is no coincidence that many of the German idealists- Fichte and Hegel come from a religious background. Schleiermacher was a priest. However in their attempt to reinstate religion, the Romantics redefined and aestheticised religion.

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<sup>22</sup> Randall, p.21.

<sup>23</sup> H.G. Schenk, *Mind of the European Romantics*, p.175.



The enlightenment idea of progress was opposed by the romantics at many levels. All that the enlightenment valued as signs of progress – mechanical advances, universal prosperity, increase in useful knowledge, freedom from superstition- were of no value to them.<sup>24</sup> Moreover they were sensitive to the costs of this progress. For the enlightenment progress meant the advance of the race as a whole, but for the romantics there can be no advance of the race unless there is improvement of the individual. Things which have meant advance for the whole had actually impoverished the individual. Schiller thus spoke against division of labour.<sup>25</sup> Thus factory production had degraded the individual by treating him as a mere cog in the machine. Thus Schleiermacher commented, "This whole sense of common material progress is without value, since the work of humanity is carried out by an ingenious system in which each man is forced to restrict his powers."<sup>26</sup> Romantics were then the first critiques of industrial society and they anticipated many of the later critiques. Most romantics considered technological progress as of no value.

The romantics emphasized the value of singularity. As seen earlier, the human essence was creative. For them the distinctive human attribute is creativity and expressiveness. This diversity they valued in both cultures and individuals, as different cultures were seen as the expressions of the diversity of human nature. The thought that everybody could have the same concerns and a homogenous existence was anathema to them. Thus they revolted against the mass society that capitalism was creating. This can be seen as an example of their elitism. But it can also be seen as a revolt against the cultural homogenization and the imposition of a single standard of evaluation for everybody

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<sup>24</sup> Skhlar, p. 67

<sup>25</sup> Skhlar, p. 68

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in H.G.Schenk, *The Mind of the European Romantics*, p.24.

irrespective of history, culture or context. Such homogenization is actually judging everything else by the standards of a single society, most often the most powerful one.

The family, agricultural town, where manual labour is in accordance with the rhythm of nature and day and night, work and replenishment and the potent and naïve ideal of God characterize the ideal existence of the romantics.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike the Enlightenment thinkers, the Romantics did not see human history as a 'slow march of reason'. They were highly critical of their age and so could not see it as the summit of human happiness. Moreover, they shared with Herder a historical sensibility that was deeply appreciative of the past for its own sake. For Herder, each culture had its own notion of happiness, own character and pre-established laws of development. Therefore, no one period could be seen as the stepping stone for the next one. There can be no standards by which different cultures can be compared. Without any absolute standards, there is no ground for comparison.

F. Schlegel and Novalis were the first to recognize that historical relationships are not of a logical character. Herder's plea to understand cultures other than one's own prefaces the general romantic nostalgia for the past. They resurrected the Middle Ages, which had been denounced by the enlightenment. The Romantics are critical of their present age for having broken down the unity and totality of the individual. For Schiller, such a unity did exist in the past in the Greek times.

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<sup>27</sup> Bruce Wilshire, *Romanticism and Evolution: The Nineteenth Century Anthology*, Lanham, University Press of America, 1985.

The romantic longing for the past has to be seen as a bemoaning of the lost values and the unity of human identity in the face of the increasing instrumentalisation and dichotomisation of life. For them the values of the predominantly agricultural society was important. Moreover romantics valued diversity. For them the distinctive human attribute is creativity and expressiveness. This diversity they valued in both cultures and individuals, as different cultures were seen as the expressions of the diversity of human nature. This theme of culture as having a value has remained relevant and has increasingly been applied to critiques of capitalism and industrialisation.

The insights of romanticism have had an enduring importance. As the first major critique of industrial society, it has voiced concerns that have been recurring with the entrenchment of modernity and capitalism.

I have looked at romanticism from this point of view. Later day critiques of science, mechanization, industrialization and reason have drawn from this perspective. This demonstrates that a perspective on such lines has always been an alternative to dominant progress. Such a perspective involves the rejection of the very grounds on which claims of progress have been made. Faced with the devastating results of industrialization and modernisation, one type of response has always seen modern society and its institutions as an evil and an undesirable thing. They have frequently made a plea for a better life in terms of the past values and in the process idealise the past. This sort of response suffers from many pitfalls. It tends to reinforce the tradition/modern dichotomy, but values the traditional side. In the process, it traditionalises tradition, seeing the past as an uncontested given. While these thinkers could arrive at a nuanced, sensitive

understanding of the evils of modernity, it is not as trenchant in understanding exploitative systems of the past.

On the whole the Romantic Movement contributed to a critical perspective. Its value on individualism enhanced individual autonomy. Its understanding of history and culture was important and provided the basis for a moral critique of the exploitation of industrial modern society.

## Gandhi and the Critique of Modern Civilization

"We often think that changes of the kind that take place in Europe will also occur in India; that when some big transformation comes about, people who know beforehand how to prepare themselves for it win through and those who fail to take account of this are destroyed; that mere movement is progress and that our advancement lies in it. We think that we shall be able to progress through the great discoveries that have been made in the continent of Europe. But this is an illusion."

*M.K.Gandhi, Faith in Indian Civilisation, 1918<sup>1</sup>*

Gandhi's critique of what he called "modern civilisation" and its conception of progress shares many features with romantic and post-romantic thought in the West. He was influenced by the works of Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau and Carpenter and their arguments against industrial civilisation, science and technology. However what distinguishes Gandhi's contribution to the debate on progress is the perspective he brings in of a colonial subject whose country has experienced the changes associated with modernity in the form of colonialism. In that sense, Gandhi's critique is informed by the colony's experience of the "darker side of modern civilisation"<sup>2</sup>. The second distinctive feature of Gandhi's thought is the perspective he brings in of the Indian civilisation. Thus any understanding of India's engagement with the debates on progress and the implications of such debates for India in particular and the third world in general requires an examination

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<sup>1</sup> Raghavan Iyer (ed), *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1973, p.302.

<sup>2</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, The MacMillan Press, 1989, p.33.

of Gandhi's thought. Gandhi also puts forward an alternative to the western path of progress and modernity.

The *Hind Swaraj*, written in 1909, contains the essential philosophy of Gandhi. The main problematic of this book and his subsequent thinking in general is the question of India's subjugation by the British. For him the answer as to why the British had managed to colonise India and the ways in which India could gain her independence from the British must be sought in the nature of both the civilizations- British and Indian. He provides an answer to both the civilising mission of Europe, which was given as the logic for the colonisation of India and the rest of Africa and Asia and an answer, in anticipation, to the successor of the civilising mission i.e. the modernisation theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gandhi was also countering the elite-nationalist discourse on Indian nationalism. Gandhi saw colonialism as the logical outcome of the materialist basis of the British civilisation. All that the British and the elite Indian nationalists considered as unmistakable signs of progress was derided by Gandhi as the root cause of India's ills. He demonstrates how the railways, modern medicine, the legal system, modern education and above all machine-based industrialism had negatively affected Indians and caused exploitation of the weak. His is a forceful argument to reject the dominant notion of progress and find true progress in the ancient traditions of Indian civilisation.

For the elite nationalists, India could be colonised because of the backwardness of her civilisation, the lack of modern values in her culture and the degenerate state of Indian civilisation at the time of British entry into India. Therefore, however exploitative, British rule had brought in the benefits of civilisation to the nation. Thus while Indians must

reject British rule, they must also adopt the institutions and economic practices of modern civilisation in order to progress. For Gandhi this amounted to “English rule without Englishmen.”<sup>3</sup> Gandhi felt that it is this acceptance of the British claim of bringing in a superior civilisation and its values of science, technology and industrialisation that marked the Indian intoxication with the British civilisation and legitimated British rule. However, it was the very institutions and systems that Indians admired, which had been responsible for their colonization. Moreover, what was advocated, as the way to progress would destroy everything that was valuable about Indian civilization.

With this basis, Gandhi launches into a trenchant critique of all that is important to the dominant conception of progress and modernity. Modern civilisation, as it has emerged in the West and was being introduced in India, is based on a fundamentally flawed theory of man as a materialistic, self-interested and body-centered being who has made the gratification of bodily desires the purpose of his life. Modern civilization encourages competition, which tears at human bonds and produces a consuming feuding individual. It makes “man a prisoner of his craving for luxury and self-indulgence, release the forces of unbridled competition and thereby bring upon society the evils of poverty, disease, war and suffering”<sup>4</sup> It is this need to satisfy limitless consumption needs that is the basis of the scientific and technological advances of the West and the colonial enterprise. The capitalist search for profits leads to mechanization and industrialisation, with its disastrous consequences for human life.

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<sup>3</sup> Hind Swaraj (HS), Raghavan Iyer (ed), p.208.

<sup>4</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation & its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, 1993, p.86.

For Gandhi the very system of industrialized production is generative of exploitation. He rejects the possibility that industrialisation could be socialized and freed from the evils of capitalism.

“Pandit Nehru wants industrialisation because he thinks that, if it is socialized, it would be free from the evils of capitalism. My own view is that evils are inherent in industrialisation, and no amount of socialization can eradicate them”<sup>5</sup>

For him a system of mass production based on exchange is inherently exploitative. It is not the mode of production but the purposes of production, which is determining. So production will have to be restricted to immediate use. Any sort of exchange relations of production will make the village dependent on the cities. Thus for Gandhi an increase in wealth creation by production is immediately associated with exploitation of both the workers in the factories as well as of the rural people because it will require increasing consumption levels. There is no feasible way in which any process of industrialisation can avoid the creation of exploitative and inhumane relations of exchange between town and country.

The limitations of a civilisation based on this notion of man lacked moral and spiritual depth. It gave men no means to decide about the meaning and purpose of their lives. All wisdom was reduced to a sort of knowledge, which was merely an instrument of control over nature and other men.

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<sup>5</sup> Gandhi, Quoted in Partha Chatterjee, p. 88.



Thus the British came to India because of the inner compulsions of their civilisation.

“The sword is entirely useless for holding India. We alone keep them. Napoleon is said to have described the English as a nation of shopkeepers. It is a fitting description. They hold whatever dominions they have for the sake of commerce...Many problems can be solved by remembering that money is their God. Then it follows that we keep the English in India for our base self-interest. We like their commerce; they please us by their subtle methods and get what they want from us. To blame them for this is to perpetuate their power. We further strengthen their hold by quarrelling amongst ourselves. If you accept the above statements, it is proved that the English entered India for the purposes of trade. They remain in it for the same purpose and we help them to do so...They wish to convert the entire world into a vast market for their goods. That they cannot do so is true, but the blame will not be theirs. They will leave no stone unturned to reach the goal.”<sup>6</sup>

There is thus a direct link between colonialism and the nature of modern civilisation. The colonization of India was the inevitable consequence of the modern civilization. The source of imperialism lies in the system of social reproduction that the countries of the west have adopted. It is the limitless desire for ever-increased production and ever-greater consumption, and the spirit of ruthless competition that keeps the entire system going, that impel these countries to seek colonial possessions, which can be exploited for economic purposes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Partha Chatterjee, p.216-217

<sup>7</sup> Partha Chatterjee, p.87.

Modern civilisation aiming at increased production increasingly resorted to centralized production based on the division of labour and was sustained by the edifice of the state. A highly bureaucratic and centralized modern state with the monopoly of political power was a necessary product of modern society. Because poverty, unemployment and inequalities were inevitable with the modern system, there was need for a coercive state to control dissent. The state took upon itself the task of formulating laws governing the conduct of the populace and this went against the spirit of democracy. For Gandhi, the parliament is a flawed institution as it is constantly swayed by outside pressures and power politics. True democracy is possible only when politics is made accountable to social morality.

Gandhi examines all that is cited as the modern achievements that the British have brought to India. The achievements of western science such as medicine are subjected to a critique. Modern medicine takes away the individual's control over his body, by making his body subject to external examination. It encourages vice and over consumption by treating it and not leaving it to the solution of nature.

"...the doctors induce us to indulge, and the result is that we have become deprived of self-control and have become effeminate."<sup>8</sup>

The railways which have been cited as the reason for Indians developing a national identity, are derided for causing the spread of evil thoughts, diseases and making man restless and unstable. The rule of the law was again derided because lawyers, instead of

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<sup>8</sup> Raghavan Iyer (ed) p.230.

encouraging people to settle disputes amicably, encouraged them to go the courts and thus permanently damaged community life. Moreover, it deprived individuals of agency, making them a case study. The legal institutions had actually fostered communal discord among Hindus and Muslims. The other great achievement of the British – the English education- was also critiqued as irrelevant for true wisdom. This sort of education was merely an instrument to serve material and not spiritual ends. In fact it was the English knowing people, which had enslaved India. Thus those very attributes of modernity, which had so excited the *philosophies* and made them construct grand theories of utopia, were critiqued as instruments of domination and immorality. Gandhi stood the attributes of modern civilisation on its head and rejected them as aiding any meaningful conception of human life. For example, the existence of legal systems took away the community's self-legislating powers. All this made men empty and passive objects of the rule of experts. That the institutions of modernity have implied the loss of human agency and made them subject to an expert culture has been an important and familiar critique.

The test of a true civilisation is that it aids the development of such distinctly human qualities as self-determination, autonomy, self-knowledge, self-discipline and social co-operation. "Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of his duty...Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions."<sup>9</sup> Gandhi argued that Indian ancestors by limiting indulgences, avoiding competition, avoiding large cities and

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<sup>9</sup> Raghavan Iyer, p.231-232.

promoting a village based agricultural life had created the ideal situation for the moral development of the human personality.

“it is not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fiber. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet.”<sup>10</sup>

In Gandhi's account ancient Indian civilisation gets glorified. It is an instance of traditionalizing tradition, wherein the historical and actual conditions of tradition are glossed over to present an idealistic account in the face of modernity. This was present in the romantic critiques too. While Gandhi recognized that his ideal village community was just an ideal and today's villages would have to be purged of many ills, the caste system, in the main, this device of projecting into the past is an expression of nostalgia. Thus Gandhi found it necessary to say that the varnashrama dharma was not an exploitative system, even as he fought against caste.

Machinery was the main symbol of modern civilisation and for Gandhi it was an unmitigated evil. “ It is machinery which has impoverished India...Machinery is like a snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes. Where there is machinery, there are large cities: and where there are large cities, there are tram-cars and railways; and there one only sees electric light...Honest physicians will tell you that where means of artificial locomotion have increased, the health of the people has suffered...I cannot

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<sup>10</sup> Raghavan Iyer , p.232.

recall a single good point in connection with machinery. Books can be written to demonstrate its evils.”<sup>11</sup>

In his philosophy of khadi, Gandhi found the means to address the issue of self-sufficiency. The philosophy of khadi was the means by which Gandhi countered the supposed benefits of the social division of labour. The values of modern civilisation encouraged the aggressive and selfish attributes of human beings, not their tender aspects or their benevolence.

“Benevolence which is inherent in human nature is the very foundation of the economics of khadi. What Adam Smith has described as pure economic activity based merely on the calculations of profit and loss is a selfish attitude and it is an obstacle to the development of khadi”<sup>12</sup>

The philosophy of khadi was meant to overcome the division between mental and manual labour. The restoration of village communities as the vital centers of economic life implies institutionalization of production by the masses, instead of the present system of mass production.<sup>13</sup>

Decentralisation of production is part of a general project of making village communities a self-regulating polity as well. As against the system of parliamentary democracy, which presumes that individuals are self-interested, he proposes a system wherein politics is directly subordinated to communal morality. Gandhi sought an alternative in the

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<sup>11</sup> Raghavan Iyer , p.256-258.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Partha Chatterjee, p.90.

<sup>13</sup> Ramashray Roy, *Self and Society: A Study in Gandhian Thought*, New Delhi, Sage, 1984, p.137.

institutions of panchayats where the local community will make its own decisions. His ideal of *Ramarajya* was independence- political, economic and moral.

“The end to be sought is human happiness combined with full mental and moral growth. I use the adjective moral as synonymous with spiritual. This end can be achieved under decentralisation. Centralisation as a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society.”<sup>14</sup>

While his utopia was statelessness, he recognized that it was an ideal and sought to restrict the power of the state to the minimum. The state could make laws to aid the rural production. He realized that the modern state was an abstract system but the Indian society valued direct and unmediated relations between men. His ideal consisted of small, cultured, thoroughly regenerated, well-organised and self-determining village communities, whose affairs were managed by panchayats. The village panchayat would have legislative, executive and judicial powers and rely on its moral authority and the pressure of public opinion to ensure order and harmony.<sup>15</sup> It would promote education rooted in religion, thus enhancing the moral values of the individual.

Gandhi's is thus a moral critique of the entire edifice of modern society. He denied that reason could be made the basis for human life. While Gandhi admired the scientific spirit, which is aimed at the relentless pursuit of truth, he held that knowledge acquired by the sciences applied to very limited areas of human living. He believed that the knowledge

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Roy, Ramasharaya. p.140.

<sup>15</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination*, The Macmillan Press, 1989, p.115.

yielded by reason was tentative and reason needs to be guided by wisdom, conscience, intuitions and moral insight. In fact where reason cannot function, it is faith that functions. This is a familiar theme among the romantics and Kant.

For Gandhi the true aim of human life is the pursuit of truth. Truth is moral, unified, unchanging and transcendental. It could only found in through uncompromising moral living. It can never be expressed in the terminology of rationalist discourse. Modern civilisation functioned on the distinction between politics and morality and thus starved human life of its very essence.

It is in the simple existence of a peasant in a self-sufficient rural community, without the division between mental and physical labour that Gandhi found the best evidence of his utopia. "I believe that if India, and through India the world, is to achieve real freedom, then sooner or later we shall have to go and live in the villages- in huts, not in palaces. Millions of people can never live in cities and palaces in comfort and peace...but for the pair. truth and non-violence, mankind will be doomed. We can have the vision of that truth and non-violence only in the simplicity of the villages. That simplicity lies in the spinning-wheel and what is implied by the spinning wheel."<sup>16</sup> For Gandhi material progress, beyond the minimum satisfaction of basic needs, could not contribute to moral progress, which must be the true aim of human nature. Beyond that, "material progress add not an atom to our happiness"<sup>17</sup> which lies in moral progress. In fact wealth leads to moral turpitude.

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<sup>16</sup> Raghavan Iyer, p.285-286.

<sup>17</sup> Raghavan Iyer, p.360.

The essence of human nature must be spiritual. For Gandhi the true nature of civilisation lies in its ability to contribute to the moral well being of the individual and cultivate in him the qualities of self-discipline.

Gandhi saw the nature of the encounter between Britain and India not as that between eastern and western civilisation but between ancient and modern civilisation. This allowed him to retain many Western values, particularly Christianity and draw the attention of the West to their own civilisational heritage. Thus by adopting modern civilisation the British had turned their backs on their own civilisational heritage, mainly the precepts of Christianity. Modern civilisation had disrupted the fundamental unity of all mankind.

Thus Gandhi's project was universal, as the true principles of religion and morality are universal and unchanging. However, he continued to stress on the civilisational greatness of ancient Indian civilisation and his immediate project was to regenerate the ancient civilisation in India so as to gain political independence. Gandhi straddled between the universal nature of his philosophy and the stress that each civilisation has unique attributes, which must be preserved and not be submerged by imitating the Europeans.

Unlike the modernisation theories where progress was seen as the movement towards technological advance, agricultural reorganization in favour of commercial agriculture, industrialisation and urbanization, Gandhian ideal is aimed at the reverse turn towards subsistence agriculture, rural life, handicraft manufacture and restriction of technology use to the minimum.



Modern science and rationality are dehumanizing. The knowledge unearthed by the sciences was applicable to very limited area of human living. Gandhi found imperialism and violence as intrinsic to the entire edifice of modern civilisation. It meant the rule of a minority over the majority. He found modern civilisation as resting on the domination of workers, consumers, weaker nations and weaker races.

Gandhi's insights are valuable, as many movements in India have traced their agendas of localism, decentralisation, indigenous education, preservation of indigenous forms of agriculture and handicrafts as well as patterns of living and environmentalism to his philosophy. His influence is particularly strong on those who have developed his reliance on the knowledge systems and civilisational particularities of India to critique the science and rationality based western civilisation. They see in him a justification for rejecting technology, western science, industrialisation, and the entire social and political institutions of the west on grounds that they are violent, inhumane and anti-nature. I shall look of some of these theories in the next chapter to illustrate my point that Gandhi's critique is in the nature of the general line of reasoning which reject the idea of progress. Moreover it is one of those philosophies, which sees the answer for the problems of the modern predicament in the culture and value systems of the third world.

It is a thoroughgoing critique of the modern industrial capitalist civilization and rejects its claim to superiority over other previous non-capitalist civilizations. It highlights the adverse consequences that the modern industrial society has for the lives of the poor and the marginalized. He is particularly insistent on rejecting machines and their effect on society. Gandhian thought rejects the overemphasis on reason as the principle for

determining the truth and validity of all aspects of life. He puts his trust in religion, faith and in time tested principles and forms of living arrived at by earlier civilizations. Frequently Gandhi's critique of technology and machinery extends to all out rejection of all forms of machines. He rejects all that has been valued and upheld as unmistakable signs of progress both by the west and the elite educated leadership in the colonies. These include new and faster modes of communication and travel, urbanization, industrial production, modern medicine, modern legal system, and forms of governance- the parliamentary form of democracy etc.

Instead Gandhi presents an alternative in the ancient agricultural communal society, in a more idealized form. He finds that form more conducive to human nature. Gandhi resorts to the simplicity of rural pre industrial life, albeit purged of its undesirable elements, as an alternative. His main critique against the industrial system is that it devalues the individual and is immoral. The benefits of technology have no relation whatsoever with the moral development of the individual. Instead by encouraging competition, consumerism and profit motive, it makes people immoral.

While Gandhi's thought shares the basic ideas of the romantic and post romantic critiques of industrialism, it differs from romantic thought in important ways. Like the romantics, it deplores the loss of community and the uprootedness that modern methods of organizing labour has on an agricultural population. However, while the romantics turned to nature and the aesthetic ideal as an alternative, Gandhi puts forward a vision of a non-consumerist and spiritually fulfilling life, anchored in certain principles of human behavior and existence. Romantic nostalgia for the past was a yearning for a time when

the totality of human life had not been disrupted. For Gandhi, the past provided a model of social existence, which could be regenerated.

Moreover, Gandhi's critique is from the perspective of a colonial subject. The romantic rejection of the values of the enlightenment and the form of society that was based on those values was an internal critique of Europe. As a colonial subject Gandhi is writing from the standpoint of a region whose civilisation has been degraded as backward by the post enlightenment thought. It was the assessment of the colony as backward and uncivilized, which was used as a justification for the colonial rule, the civilizing mission of the colonizer wherein the colony would be put on the path of reason and progress. This distinction between a backward society and a modern one has been important in all narratives of progress. As colonialism took root the colonized regions were cast as the backward society, representing primitive forms of life.

So Gandhi's thought was a counter to both the British claims of bringing in civilization to India and the typical educated Indian response that India must drive out the British but adopt their institutions and practices to progress. In the Hind Swaraj and through out his other writings, he seeks to demonstrate that the so called supremacy of British way of life is actually based on flawed principles and priorities and the reason for British conquest must be sought in the very nature of this progressive way of life. Moreover any hope for true progress lies in going back to the ideals and principles of ancient Indian civilisation. This way the only way not just for India but for the true progress of all mankind.

He called the modern civilization Satanic and saw the conflict between the Indian and British civilisation as being one between the kingdom of Satan represented by the

historically upstart civilization of the West and between the kingdom of God, represented by the Indian civilization, which had managed to preserve itself in its villages. So that is why he saw the true India as existing in the rural communal life. The perspective of the peasant was the one he adopted.

For Gandhi the test of a true civilization is whether it can enhance distinctly human powers of self-determination, autonomy, self-knowledge, self-discipline and social cooperation. But modern civilization, which saw man as a passive consumer and a creature of unlimited wants, is aimed at the completely opposite set of characteristics. That is why it is just a civilization in name. Every aspect of modern civilization is actually aimed at the reduction of the powers and the potential of the individual and enhances only the power of a small elite. He takes up all that is held as distinctive and progressive attributes of modernity and shows how they reduce the autonomy of the individual, encourage vice and corruption. It is in this light that he examines modern means of transport and faster communication, the legal system and modern medicine.

As against this image Gandhi posits the idyllic image of the self-sufficient village living a simple lifestyle in harmony with other human beings and with nature. The breakdown of this communal lifestyle is the target of the British, guided as they are by their economic self-interest

The key concepts of the dominant understanding of progress – science, knowledge, technology and rationality- not only play no part in Gandhi's utopia but is subjected to a thorough going critique and rejected as the basis of any improvement in the human condition. He sees it as undermining of man's unity with his environment and fellow men

and of the stable and long-established communities. Gandhi's critique of modernity involves the rejection of technological rationality and the scientific temperament. He denied that science could ever be the basis of life. Against these he emphasizes traditional sources of wisdom, and experience, which cannot be scientifically validated. Thus one can understand Gandhi as part of the discontents of progress. By stressing of the costs of progress, Gandhi rejects the very concepts of modern progress.

## Post Development Critiques

The previous two chapters dealt with the prominent ideas articulated by the Romanticism and Gandhi in opposition to the dominant conception of progress. At the minimum, they refuted the notion that the modern era is a record of any improvement in the human condition. They disputed the connection made between increase in scientific knowledge, technology and progress. The insights of the romantics and of Gandhi have resurfaced in the context of the failures of development and modernisation in the third world and the exhaustion with modernity in the West. It has spawned an entire series of alternatives, which, while not cohering together, critique the fundamental assumptions of the dominant form of modernity and progress. Alternative development refers to a wide range of perspectives and has changed over time. They were the result of dissatisfaction with the mainstream development, where development meant achieving economic growth lead either by the state or the market through the spread of science and technology, which moreover assumed that the benefits of growth would trickle down to the rest of the population. Among these alternatives there has emerged a position, which has placed itself in opposition to the very notion of development. This is known as the post development approach. In this section, I shall examine the main arguments of this position. Post development is a distinct form of rejection of the dominant notion of progress as it is not an attempt to rework modernity in the light of new concerns. Post development, instead, rejects the entire development discourse as undesirable as it is deeply implicated in systems of power and is a part of the imposition of alien concepts to the third world.

Alternative development emerged in the 1970's with demands that development must address the satisfaction of basic needs of the people, be endogenous and self-reliant as well as in harmony with the environment.<sup>1</sup> Thus instead of being led by the State or the market, it is a demand for development from below, which refers to both the community as well as the non-governmental organizations.

Various kinds of alternative development critique conventional agendas of progress, growth, modernisation and neo-classical economics, as linear and universalistic. They focus on social transformation, not growth as the goal of development, implying a shift from economic capital to social and cultural capital. The agency of development is seen in civil society, through local politics, grass roots struggle and the efforts of non-governmental organizations. According to the advocates of alternative development, there is need for a people-centered approach to development. This has meant that a new value gets accorded to culture and indigenous technology as well as ecological sensitivity. The very idea of sustainable development was advanced so as to ensure ecological balance.

Over the years, the agendas of alternative thinking – basic needs, sustainable development, participation-have got incorporated in mainstream development discourse. The notion of human development as well as more decentralized policy initiatives have been endorsed at the policy-making levels. Sustainable development was accepted as a goal at the UN conference of Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro in

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Development Theory: Constructions/Deconstructions*, New Delhi, Vistaar Publications, 2001, p.75.

1992. Non-governmental organizations have become a part of all development initiatives- whether undertaken by the government or through independent organizations.

The notion of alternative development however exists, referring to a wide range of movements and critiques. Moreover, even as the perspectives which initially emerged from alternative development have been incorporated in the mainstream, there are huge problems of actual implementation as well as the conflict between different policy making agencies like IMF- which is associated with the neoclassical economics, World Bank which has now concerned itself with good governance and poverty alleviation and the UN agencies which are associated with human development and gender development.

However, from within these demands for and in opposition to alternative development, there has emerged a perspective, which has questioned the very possibility as well as the desirability of development. 'Post development' as this set of critiques has come to be known, shares many of its critiques of mainstream development as well as the positive evaluation accorded to grassroots struggle, cultural diversity, and indigenous technology with alternative development. However unlike alternative development –which itself is an amorphous group advancing various concerns and perspectives- it does not see any sort of reconciliation with development possible.

Post development is distinct in terms of the demand for an alternative *to* development and is related to the western critiques of modernity and techno-scientific progress like critical theory, post-structuralism, Foucault's conception of knowledge as power and ecological movements. Post development thinking starts with the premise that it is impossible for



the majority of the world population to achieve a middle class lifestyle<sup>2</sup>. Post development like the other discontents of progress focuses on the costs of development as entailed in the dominant progress project. In this approach the underlying premises, motives and the worldview of development are examined and then the whole project of development is rejected. This rejection is based on a critique of science and technology as implicated in systems of power. All notions of development are seen as cultural westernisation and homogenization. Progress on these lines is connected with the marginalisation of cultures and ecological destruction. Development is seen as hegemonic in its approach and intentions.

A fundamental idea of post development thought is its critique of modern science and technology. As an alternative it advocates the adoption of indigenous knowledge. Thus it has many affinities with the Gandhian critique of modernity. Gandhi's main point for rejecting modern civilisation was the moral consequences that an industrialized system of production and mass consumption had for individuals. He made a link between machine-based industrialized system with colonialism and violence. Theorists like Ashis Nandy, Vandana Shiva and Claude Alvares also make the connection between science, modern forms of production and capitalism with violence and colonialism and also endow their ideas with a cultural critique. Their critique focuses on the ecological consequences of science and its connection with totalitarianism and violence and its adverse effects on culture and indigenous knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse. *Development Theory*, p.99. Also Ashis Nandy, p.9.

Claude Alvares argues that modern science and the technology based on it constitute fundamentally violent ways of handling the world and understanding. According to him, Western science, based on abstract reason, is intrinsically violent. That is why modern economic relations, based on science and technology, take the form of war activity.<sup>3</sup> Science and violence are linked in two ways. Firstly, scientific method itself as well as its metaphysics is violent. Secondly, science and colonialism are interlinked because science itself is a colonizing activity. The application of science to life-processes like food, agriculture and medicine have had negative consequences and caused immense harm. This he seeks to demonstrate by drawing out the consequences of the application of science in the fields of agriculture, medicine, forestry and food as well as the effects of machine based industry. Secondly, the machinery that has been through the application of physical laws has resulted in pollution and ecological imbalance. This is because industrial processes are in variance with life processes and natural events.

Since science is intrinsically violent and colonizing, it is not possible for the third world to use science for emancipatory purposes. Moreover, Alvares locates violence in the nature of science and not in the abuse of science by a dominant class. This science is based on reason and the primary quality of reason is abstraction from experience. The picture of reality that emerges from this method is flawed. This abstraction, which is the basis of all scientific experiments, makes the method the only criterion for truth. This scientific rationality is a modern western notion and Alvares argues that other traditions, like the Indian tradition, have considered reason as an insufficient way of reaching the

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<sup>3</sup> Claude Alvares, *Science, Colonialism and Violence: A Luddite View* in Ashis Nandy (ed) *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requirement for Modernity*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1988.p.71.

truth. This notion of science, according to Alvares, is authoritarian and undemocratic. Science has redefined rationality to refer to its own knowledge. Access to knowledge has become a matter of privilege.

What distinguishes modern man from medieval man is the movement from an organic base of nature to a scientific base of machines.<sup>4</sup> He argues that the principles and philosophical worldview of western science does not have the capacity to understand nature. Science has always attempted to control nature, but nature “cannot be controlled, precisely because of its irreversibility, uniqueness and more important, its diversity.”<sup>5</sup> As a result, science has imposed its own order on to nature, and therefore sought to reduce the diversity of nature by eliminating it. This can be illustrated in the elimination of the diversity of seeds and their replacement by a few ecologically harmful but high productive varieties.

Alvares argues that this attempt to enhance control by eliminating diversity is part of the overall agenda of modernity itself and is not restricted to modern science.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, science has a specific notion of resource utilization. It is based on the idea that only the most efficient technologies can be utilized. Modern science has been imperialistic in two ways. It has allowed for the language of colonialism, whereby colonial rulers claimed that resources ought to lie with those who can most efficiently use it. Moreover, it has overrun the alternative knowledge systems of other cultures. These alternative technologies have different ways of resource use, based on an experiential system.

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<sup>4</sup> Ashis Nandy, p.78.

<sup>5</sup> Ashis Nandy , p.85.

<sup>6</sup> Ashis Nandy, p.85.

Modern science has reduced all other forms of knowledge as irrational, because they do not conform to its rationale of efficiency, which is based on the machines. Alvares contends that intolerance of other forms of technology is a basic feature of modern science.

The entire programme of development is the extension of this technological vision to the third world, whereby it replaces the indigenous techniques in the third world. This is a very important critique of the dominant model of development. Industrialisation based on modern science assumes that resources are infinite and the earth can digest large amounts of pollution. And modern economics does not account for the ecological costs of the produced goods. This has resulted in tremendous ecological damage. Science and technology, generally seen as liberators, are actually oppressors. He thus argues for a luddite response to the introduction of science and technology by the communities on which these are imposed and for a reversal to an organic perspective of life. Such responses can best come from countries like India, which have rich alternative systems.

Alvares' views are representative of much of post development thinking. In a similar vein, Ashis Nandy argues that modern science by its very nature is an enterprise open to co-optation by the powerful and the wealthy. science is moreover increasingly collapsed with technology. The third world countries have upheld huge technological enterprises as the way to achieve development. This has included big dams and vast infrastructural projects. As science and technology are deeply implicated in systems of power, these institutions largely function outside the system of democratic control. The legitimacy for science and technology has generally accompanied the rejection of traditional forms of

culture and ways of life as having any value and are seen as impediments to a modern technological order.<sup>7</sup> Science and technology are seen as the answer to all the problems facing the country. This sort of expert reliance has meant that science and technology have become substitutes to politics. He calls for an assessment of the modern science and an integration of some of its important aspects into traditional visions of knowledge and traditional sciences can become the basis for answering present needs.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Ashis Nandy and Claude Alvares have both raised the main issues of post development. They have put forward the view that modern science is incompatible with other technologies and forms of knowledge.

I shall now examine the main issues raised by post development. In post development, the whole agenda of development is seen as the imposition of alien cultural standards and concepts on the third world. The notion of progress is identified as western, which does not understand the differential experiences of the third world. All development is imperialism, "the new religion of the west"<sup>9</sup> and needs to be rejected. Thus according to Wolfgang Sachs, the west had in 1949 arbitrarily declared that the peoples of the South were underdeveloped and poor and then imposed or palmed off on them the idea and programmes of development, through which the whole world was made one unit and the ways of life of various peoples uniform.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ashis Nandy, p.7.

<sup>8</sup> Ashis Nandy, p.11.

<sup>9</sup> Rist, quoted in Ashis Nandy, p.99.

<sup>10</sup> Saral Sarkar, Development Critique in Culture Trap, Economic and Political Weekly, June 22, 1995, p.1846.

Post development is based on a critique of modernity, where science has been the dominating vision of modernity. As has been observed earlier, western science and technology are critiqued on the grounds that they are flawed and violent ways of knowledge. As a counter to the utilization of science, indigenous knowledge has been offered as an alternative.

The argument against development is that it is nothing but westernisation and this has meant a threat to indigenous ways of living. This conflict can be illustrated by the debate over poverty that the post development theorists have made. According to people like Vandana Shiva and Sachs, subsistence economies, which have frugal lifestyles are not deprived and cannot be counted as poor as they serve basic needs. Such frugality is different from destitution, which can arise when subsistence economies are weakened through the interference of growth strategies and from scarcity, which takes place when the logic of growth and accumulation based on commodity based need takes over.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is development which causes poverty, not the lack of it.

Poverty then must be seen as a resource, and the agenda should be to implement growth strategies and poverty alleviation programmes by building on frugal lifestyles using local resources and technology. Moreover, there is a spiritual dimension to poverty, making poverty moral and voluntary; so poverty alleviation programmes are indifferent to the agency of the people. Such an approach draws insight from Gandhi, who believed that poverty could lead to moral growth. While such an approach has the merit of cautioning against uniform and top down understanding of development, it also uncritically assumes

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<sup>11</sup> Pieterse, p.100.

that interaction with the market brings in poverty and runs the risk of romanticizing poverty. In this debate over poverty, post development theorists have sought to demonstrate how uniform standards developed by the West cannot be applied to the rest of the world, as other cultures have their own standards and values.

The other aspect of understanding development as westernisation is the whole issue of protection of indigenous cultures. Many ecological arguments are made as an attempt to protect cultural plurality. “And alongside this biological survival of marginal communities is the continual threat to the survival of their cultures. The undermining of cultural plurality is thus built into the dominant model of ‘progress’”<sup>12</sup> Dominant notions of progress have not considered the issue of diversity of cultures because of the conviction that eventually all societies will converge. The issue of cultural diversity and protection of indigenous forms of living thus assumes importance. Development is seen as an exercise in cultural homogenization and violence on the third world, caused by consumerism.

Thus post development theorists critique development on the grounds of harming local culture and sidelining indigenous knowledge. The key issues in post development thinking then are protection of cultural diversity linked with protection of biological diversity. These are based on a critique of science and knowledge and its linkage with domination- over nature, over indigenous knowledge and therefore over the third world countries. It seeks autonomy from the regime of science as power and puts forward a view of self-reliance in terms of the endogenous.

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<sup>12</sup> Smitu Kothari, quoted in Sarkar, p.1846.

The relationship of post development to alternative development can be illuminating about their politics. Alternative development is rejected by the post developmentalists because its efforts are also “products of the same worldview which has produced the mainstream concept of science, liberation and development.”<sup>13</sup> The opposition between the two is considered radical and irreconcilable. Under the heading of “alternate development, a wide range of anti-productivist and anti-capitalist platforms are put forward which aim at eliminating the sore spots of underdevelopment and the excesses of mal development.” (105). Part of the understanding of post development is that it is opposed to any sort of social engineering, which is crucial to development initiatives. Progress even when considered inevitable, envisaged that the most developed countries would guide the ones on the lower stage to lead them to the goal. But post development thinkers are extremely wary of telling people what to do and are plagued by questions of who represents the authentic voice of the community.

The main criticism that can be raised against all these approaches understand community and culture as closed systems with least interaction with the outside world of the market. Indigenous communities and cultures are seen as the last custodians of a paradise in a world, which has been overtaken by consumerism and Americanism. As against the modern dream of all humanity, this is an anti- modern position where any sort of universal outlook is considered inherently undemocratic. Post development therefore views alternate development with suspicion because it is new management. The politics of post development has been associated with indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity. It opts for Gandhian frugality, non-consumerism, for grassroots movements and

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<sup>13</sup> Ashis Nandy, quoted in Pieterse 105



local struggles. As Pieterse points out none of these amount to rejecting development. There is tremendous faith in grassroots movements because it “disrupt(s) the link between development, capital and science and thus destabilizes the grid of the Development apparatus”<sup>14</sup>. There is an attempt to forge a coalition of marginals-peasants, deprofessionalised intellectuals and urban marginals. This reflects a shift from class- based struggles. This can be seen as one of the major weaknesses of the post development approach.

While they are valuable as critique, they have no alternative. They amount to some sort of ludditism where all machines, all consumerism, all large-scale production need to be rejected. Moreover, the only concrete alternative they offer is that of a subsistence-based local economy. Therefore beyond a the demands for local autonomy, in an age where globalisation is linking up to remote villages, without any linkages with other struggles against the in justice of development involving those in the mainstream is a nostalgia for the past and not constructive at all. In fact there is a remarkable similarity with the outcome, as it does not involve the State, it amount to just what the apologists for neo-liberal economics have advocated. Escobar’s rejection of the state as part of a radical questioning of social engineering and the faith in progress has the same effect of justifying neo-liberal turn, where the state institutions further the power of the multinational agencies and the capitalist without the minimum responsibility to provide any relief to the populace.

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p.104.

Anti-development does not represent the views of the victims of development. Post developmentalists aspire for a grand “anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-productivist, anti-market struggles.”<sup>15</sup> In fact there is no such unity of purpose between the various social movements in the third world and most mediate with the state to secure access to development programmes.

Perhaps the most important aspect of post development politics is that it does not regard class interests as a worthy domain of action. As it sees all knowledge as mediated by power, it ends up focusing on very small pockets of resistance. Even there it does not involve critical enquiry into the cultures, regarded as outside the influence of mainstream politics. There is a refusal to engage with issues of material welfare and this gets reflected in the non-presence of redistribution demands in their agenda. One can see a similarity with Gandhi’s refusal to allow forced redistribution of land and his concept of trusteeship. The kind of local communities, where inequalities of material sources do not exist and are insulated from the influence of market forces, are only a few pockets of tribal occupation. More than anything else, this is a cultural critique of development. However cultures must also be seen as a terrain of power.

Romantic and nostalgic elements abound in its reverence for the community. There is neo-ludditism in its opposition to science and technology. It refuses to understand that there may be alternative routes to modernity and entrenched modernity is that which is closely associated with capitalism.

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<sup>15</sup> Escobar, A, quoted in Pieterse *ibid.* p.108

A cultural critique of dominant modernity does not amount to giving up on modernity's capacity to create new cultures based on individual autonomy and equality. It reflects both a desire for the new and a nostalgia politics for a lost age. The important aspect of post development politics it is that is located not at conventional locations of struggle – like labour unions or even unorganized labour. It seems to think that every social group that is a part of mainstream economic relations has been co-opted and therefore locates its struggle on fringes of the economy. However even those not directly consumers are implicated in the capitalist system and enclaves of “pure” communities are tough to find. Moreover it raises issues of indigenous knowledge and culture that are deeply problematic. It traditionalises tradition and sees it located outside of power relationships.

The critique of dominant modernity that these visions offer are important. Entrenched modernity has indeed, due to its specific understanding of reason, science and knowledge, led to the marginalisation of cultures or any other form of life which did not conform to its notion of rationality, other forms of knowledge which did not conform to its conception of science. Modernisation has had adverse effects on different cultures and this is true of both within Europe and outside. The problem however with this post development approach is that its critique has led it to look at the arena of culture as non-assessable go critical interrogation. The politics that follows from limiting itself to certain specific section even as it opposes all of capitalism is one of rejection.

### *In Conclusion*

The critique of the dominant understanding of development that post development offers has raised critical issues. These concern the role of science and technology in the modern world. The issue of protecting cultural diversity, indigenous knowledge systems, ecological balance and democratic grassroots engagement with the form of development have also emerged in alternate development and post development discourse. The history of the concretization of the dominant idea of progress in terms of the capitalist industrial system has indeed been one where indigenous knowledge systems and cultures have been marginalised. The terms 'science' and 'technology' have assumed a value in themselves to the extent that these terms are regularly invoked to push through a top-down notion of development. Development has typically been an affair of experts wherein 'one best way' towards a better future was to be scientifically discovered and implemented. The dominant idea of progress based on a rationalist vision of the universe has made a connection between increase in knowledge and progress. The diverse threads of the discontent with progress have questioned this unproblematic connection. While the Romantics and Gandhi considered scientific knowledge as inadequate means to understand the world, the alternate and post development critiques rightly view science and technology as domains of power. However, as most post development critiques consider violence and imperialism to be *intrinsic* to the modern scientific worldview, they see no other alternative but to reject science in its entirety. This rejection is due in no small part to the post development view of the control of nature as a failure on the part of modern science to reach a meaningful understanding of nature.

The tentative conclusion to this study however, is that this complete and radical rejectionism is simply the other face of an unproblematic acceptance of the tradition-modernity dichotomy. A recognition of the enormous value of these critiques does not entail an acceptance of this dichotomy. In terms of an alternative, post development can only offer the alternative of subsistence-based local economies and cultural units. In doing so, it refuses to deal with the question of material welfare. The dominant notion of progress presumes a unilinear development towards an industrial, capitalist, consumerist society – a homogenized vision that is insensitive to cultural diversity. This study has been only a tentative foray into these complex issues. It has hopefully underscored the need to explore these issues further without endorsing to either side of the problematic binaries we have highlighted above.

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