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MODERNITY AND DEMOCRACY IN INDIA: QUESTIONING THE TELEOLOGIES

Anil Kumar Vaddiraju*

Abstract

This paper focuses on a two-pronged argument: 1) that both popular and populist democracy and 2) political economy in India work against, or increasingly against, the realisation of modernity.

Therefore, what we have is an imperfect realisation of both modernity as well as democracy. The paper stresses equally on political factors such as religious nationalism, failure of secularism and secularisation, and the trends of populist mobilisation in terms of caste and religion, as it does the economic factors. This work, though, concentrates on modernity and democracy in India, and does not fall within the modernisation framework. Nor does it see that modernity is an inevitable destiny. I argue that Indian socio-political and cultural modernity is premised on the Indian economy and the development of productive forces.

Hence, it is reasoned that the key to Indian modernity is in the Indian political economy. As long as the productive forces and social relations in the Indian political economy continue to be backward, there is no necessary inevitability that we will progress towards a modern democracy. However, the paper is retrospective in argument, rather than prospective or futuristic.

Keywords: Modernity, Democracy, Industrialisation, Urbanisation, Secularism, Caste, Tribe, Religion, India

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to question the teleologies that are propounded by modernisation theory and Marxian theory regarding the transition of India towards a modernity as envisaged by them. The paper does not endorse the telos propounded by the theories; instead searches for the reasons for the non-realisation of the telos. The purpose is to argue that a strictly teleological—read Eurocentric—view of India is not possible. It is argued that two factors account for the non-transition: the political processes of democracy, which favour populist politics in terms of caste and religion and also the non-transition in the economy, which hinders such transition. This paper does not underplay the political dynamics of democracy; on the contrary argues that democracy is one of the main reasons for the non-realisation of the Eurocentric telos propounded by the theories.

The paper is divided into seven sections. The first section deals with some definitions of modernity and puts forward the argument of the paper; the second deals with religion and secular modernity in India; the third deals with caste, tribe and affirmative action in India; the fourth deals with industrial and urban modernity; the fifth section deals with the problems of modernity; the sixth deals with capital, class and accumulation and the seventh and concluding section returns to the question of modernity and discusses its pros and cons.

While we present some economic data and political economy arguments about the Indian transition to capitalism, it does not mean that we are losing sight of the relative autonomy of politics and

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are being deterministic. In this paper, we are dealing with the questions of modernity and democracy in India more *retrospectively* than prospectively, forecasting that we have reached the ultimate goal of democracy in India.

Definitions and Arguments

This section elaborates the concept of modernity—by which we definitely mean more than 'etiquette and social graces'- and attempts to explain how Indian democracy and Indian political economy fail the project of modernity in India. The argument is that increasingly populist and majoritarian mobilisation in the political sphere and the inadequate and incoherent transition in the sphere of political economy both act as hindrances to the fuller realisation of modernity and its political accompaniment, liberal democracy in India.

This paper explores the relationship between two concepts, modernity and democracy, with regard to India. (As for the suggestion that democracy itself is a modern institution, we would plead that modernity is larger than democracy and is not only a political institution but also a social phenomenon.) The concepts themselves need some discussion before we can explore their relationship and institutional grounding in India. This section discusses the origins of modernity in Europe and the origins of modernity in India. The section lays down the *raison d'être* for the paper. The section essentially argues that there is a need for refocusing on modernity in India, in spite of all the literature that exists in the modernisation theory mode-- as the political, social, cultural, and economic achievements since Independence on this front appear to be slipping away gradually.[1].

Modernity can be explored either philosophically or as a historical phenomenon. Rudolph and Rudolph,[2] for example, provide the following comprehensive definition of modernity:

> "'Modernity" assumes that local ties and parochial ties give away to universal commitments and cosmopolitan attitudes; that the truths of utility, calculation and science take precedence over those of emotions, the sacred, and the non-rational; that the individual rather than the group be the primary unit of society and politics; that the associations in which men live and work be based on choice not birth; the mastery rather than fatalism orient their attitude toward the material and human environment; that identity be chosen and achieved, not ascribed and affirmed; that work be separated from family, residence and community in bureaucratic organizations; that manhood be delayed while youth prepares for its tasks and responsibilities; that age, even when it is prolonged, surrender much of its authority to youth and men some of theirs to women; that mankind ceases to live as races apart by recognizing in society and politics its common humanity; that government ceases to be a manifestation of powers beyond man and out of the reach of the ordinary men by basing itself on participation, consent and public accountability.'

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[1] Khosla, Madhav and Milan Vaishnav (2022) 'India@75: Religion and Citizenship in India' in *Studies in Indian Politics*, 10 (1): 8-13.

[2] Rudolph Lloyd I and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, 'Introduction', in *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India,* Bombay: Orient Longmans Limited, pp.3-14.

By democracy, we mean the constitutional liberal representative democracy as it obtains in India today, which is itself a product of the struggles of the freedom movement and the achievements owing to the struggles prior to Independence. Philosophically, modernity is known to have been born in the West circa 1500 AD during the time of the Renaissance, when a break with the medieval ages began. And a search towards non-religious world views to govern human affairs began. Modernity, thus, is understood philosophically in terms of the development of rationalist and secular outlooks. This process of the development of modernity took over a long period of time since the Renaissance up to the time, and culminating in the Enlightenment in 18th-century Europe. Thus, this development of non-religious world views of rationalism and secularism and doing away with religious bigotry, is generally considered as the development of modernity. The core features of this modernity are a focus on reason or rationality, the emphasis on humanism in arts and humanities, a priority for all that is human over all that is divine, and a belief in ever continuous progress. This is, however, a philosophical argument[3]; the argument at the level of the superstructure.

Theoretically speaking, in a broad sense, both Modernisation and Marxism envisage certain modernity quite on the lines of societal secularisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and progress towards the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. While Modernisation theory envisages a democratic road to achieve this, Marxism envisages a revolutionary road. I am aware that the revolutionary road envisaged by Marxian theorists is complex and varies from theorist to theorist according to the party in question. The point is a gross one. While the finer details of the class characterisations, identification of the classes and the parliamentary or extra or non-parliamentary roads taken, approach or its absence to attaining the revolution differ drastically. While this author believes that to be true, the *telos* aimed at is more or less modernity.

The experience of the journey towards such modernity in India through the liberal democratic political institutions has been very interesting. While the Indian state took off with great ambitions towards rational, secular, progressive modernity, the trend, of late, seems to be ebbing. There are political reversals both on the front of democracy and modernity. To put it more crisply, popular democracy seems to be working against rational, universalist modernity. That these two are not going together is a major disjuncture of our times. We are becoming more and more religious and caste-conscious and less and less universalistic and humanistic. The supposed transition is not simply taking place. While we do not think that we have reached the end of history so far as liberal democracy in India is concerned—to paraphrase Francis Fukuyama—what we are attempting to question in this paper is the innocent hope that we will someday transcend the religious and caste morass that we are increasingly sinking into. My argument has nothing to do with the reaching of the end of the history of Indian democracy, as Fukuyama thought regarding the world at large. I am writing more retrospectively than prospectively.

Modernity and democracy are products of a dual revolution in Europe: The industrial revolution and the French Revolution[4]. Modernity is followed by liberal democracy. As I have written earlier,

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[3] West, David (2010)' Modernity, Enlightenment and Their Continental Critics' in *Continental Philosophy: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 8-45.

[4] Hobsbawm, Eric (1996) *The Age of Revolution-1789-1848*, New York: Vintage Books.

> "We in India have adopted the principles of these two revolutions (and more, we even hoped for a vague socialism), into the theory and practice of our democracy. However, of the principles of the two revolutions, the political principles of the French Revolution, liberty, equality, and fraternity, however internally contradictory in a capitalist society, have been postulated without the accompanying industrial revolution and development. The situation is that we have provided for ourselves political rights and democracy without providing accompanying means to realise them" (Vaddiraju:2021).
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> "Certainly, the unresolved agrarian question, slow pace of industrial development and distorted economic growth of the service sector have all led to the nature of economic development that is not symmetrical or equally poised with political democracy and rights. Since democracy overwhelms the economy, hence the calls to foreshorten the democratic principles and practice. The consequent result is the present political development of nationalism and authoritarian populism" (Vaddiraju:2021).

The central argument of the paper is in terms of the two strands that we have discussed above. We have argued in the first paragraph that popular democracy is increasingly coming in the way of a humanist, rational, universalist modernity. In the second paragraph, we have argued that the political economy of the country also sets limits to the realisation of modernity. *This paper, therefore, concentrates on the two-pronged argument. 1) That both popular and populist democracy, and 2) political economy in India, work against, or increasingly against, the realisation of modernity. Therefore, what we have is an imperfect realisation of both modernity as well as democracy.* It does not see that modernity is an inevitable destiny. I argue that Indian socio-political and cultural modernity is premised on the Indian economy and the development of productive forces. I place the idea that the key to Indian modernity is in the Indian political economy. As long as the productive forces and social relations in the Indian political economy continue to be backward, there is no necessary inevitability that we will progress towards a modern democracy. I am, therefore, hanging on to the argument on three aspects of political economy: industrialisation, urbanisation, and the nature of class relations/capital accumulation. Therefore, I favour a more deterministic argument; I argue that we have, over the past 75 years since Independence, developed a paraphernalia of liberal democratic institutions and processes without an adequate economic basis. Therefore, all the inadequacies of modernity and democracy emanate not from the politico-institutional processes, rather from politico-economic processes. However, as historical actors are conscious beings, historical contingency is more common and challenging the teleological necessity is very much possible, as the consciousness of history by historical agents prevents the past from repeating itself. Carr precisely pointed to this historical non-repetition in his writing[5].

This could be partly because, as Varshney[6] argued, India adopted liberal democracy and its institutions, much before it modernised—that is, before its industrialisation and urbanisation and remained for a long time since Independence a country that is populated by predominantly agricultural communities. The transition to industrial/ urban society did not happen in a major way and did not come in the way of

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[5] Carr, E.H. (2001) (Intd. R.J. Evans) *What is History?* Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave.

[6] Varshney, Ashutosh (1989) *Democracy, Development and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

its democracy, though the democracy is shaped by such a fact, but it drastically affected its modernity. Even today, India happens to be agrarian to an extent of 60-65 per cent, with more than 50 per cent labour force working in agriculture. That these productive conditions and relations shape its political economy, and democracy is an indubitable fact. However, modernity is supposed to set the bar higher and expect the agrarian economy to transition towards an industrial economy through structural transformation. That this is not happening is one of the reasons why Indian modernity is crucially affected by the process. The *telos* posited by the theorist is never realised in reality. The theorists who posit this *telos* are both modernisation theorists as well as Marxian theorists.

It is also true that the working of electoral democracy itself, with the democratic upsurges marking the same from time to time, while it is dynamic at the same time, also, *ipso facto*, imposes inherent limitations on the realisation of modernity. The democratic upsurges, in terms of the emergence of backward classes into politics first and of the Dalits later, have definitely broadened the basis of democracy. By the same token, increasingly of late, they have also led to calls for a majoritarian politics. As long as the mobilisation remained on caste lines, it appeared as if it were a *cause célèbre*. However, the democratic upsurge also turned mobilisation in terms of both caste and religion; the trend goes against the demands of modernity and also democracy. The religious mobilisation today is not only based on religious identity groups but is also based on the mobilisation of the same groups to which the second democratic upsurge after the Independence movement was attributed.

Religion, Secularisation and Secular Modernity

In this section, we provide a critique of the Indian variant of secularism. We are *not* critical of secularism *per se*. We contend that communal peace is of utmost importance, and for that, perhaps, Nehruvian secularism would have served the purpose better. It is the contention in this section that Indian democracy is increasingly working against secularism. I argue that this is owing to the faulty nature of 'Indian secularism' as it was adopted in the beginning itself. It is well known that the two options available for the makers of the Indian Constitution were either to adopt an attitude of 'indifference to all religions and religion itself' (*dharma nirapekshata*) or to adopt an attitude of equality of all religions (*sarva dharma sama bhava)* before the Indian state. The first concept was a more unambiguous one taken by Jawaharlal Nehru; the second one, which was eventually adopted by the Indian state, was the one advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. It is argued in this section that the original ambiguity surrounding the concept of secularism is the one which later led to the confusion about the role of the state vis-à-vis religion and eventually led to the democratic mobilisation in terms of religion.

It is necessary that in a paper on modernity, there be specific emphasis on the question of secularism. For modernity is supposed to be in contrast to religion. Modernity, as it evolved in the West—at least in Europe—is supposed to give less space to religion in public life and politics, pushing the same to the private realm. Politics in the modern sense is supposed to be politics around issues other than religious ones. The clear divide between the church and the state is supposed to be the hallmark of modernity. While in India, there is no church or organised religion for the majority religion, the same divide between the temporal and religious is supposed to prevail in politics.

Rajeev Bhargava has earlier elaborated the concept of 'Indian secularism[7]' as consisting of two principles: a) principled distance (of the state from all religions) and b) contextual secularism[8]. This section argues that while these principles are lofty enough, they are also quite ambiguous and ambivalent. Given the ambiguity of translating the lofty notion of secularism in India into everyday law and policy, we have ended up giving up the policy altogether. What is, therefore, needed in this context is not eulogising the 'Indian secularism', but examining why such lofty secularism often failed when it came to concrete law and policy. To put this more crisply, Indian democracy increasingly works to defeat Indian secularism owing to its inherent flaws. In this attempt, my critique is not against secularism. Rather, the criticism of its particular Indian variant and its alleged superiority over others.

It is understandable that in circumstances immediately after the partition of the country, and raging communalism, with competing religious communities demanding recognition in the Constitution, the concept of S*arva Dharma Sama Bhava* was adopted by the Constitution. The Constitution provides the right to religious faith and worship, and also the right to propagate one's religion by peaceful means. It is argued in this section that ideally the Indian state should have kept total distance not only from all the religions, but religion itself, leaving the same for private conscience. And the Indian state should also have kept the public sphere and space rid from all religion. Arguably, this concept of secularism, where the state and public sphere have to have nothing to do with religion at all, is more closely akin to the French concept of secularism. This concept clearly demarcates the boundaries between the state and religion.

Unlike Rajeev Bhargava's concept of 'principled distance', the state should have maintained an unambiguous distance from religion in India. That is to say, the Indian state should not have recognised religion as a public and political category. This would go even further than 'indifference' to religion or a far stronger concept of secularism than even Nehru would have liked to have.

Religion should have been left to society without entering politics and the public sphere. With the concept of *Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava*, the Indian state had entered into a territory not aligned to its modern Constitutional interests and intents. Allowing the fundamental right to religion is very different from meddling in the affairs of the administration and finances of temples, and the financial subsidisation of religious pilgrimages. While this has been the case, the state ought to have adopted a stricter concept of secularism, also to prevent communalism from spreading. This should have been done in order to prevent monks and *sadhus,* and *sadhvis,* their counterparts in other religions, from occupying important positions in the political offices and public spheres. This would have counteracted the spread of communalism, and the state would have remained non-communal. By adopting at the very outset an ambiguous concept of secularism, the Indian state has given way, over the long run, for communalism to emerge and spread in *all* religions.

While the state could not preach atheism and impose and force atheism on diverse religious communities in India, both public and private, and over the Indian polity, as the communist states do, the

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[7] Bhargava, Rajeev (2023) *Reimagining Indian Secularism*, History for Peace Tracts, London, New York and Calcutta: Seagull Publishers.

[8] Bhargava, Rajeev 'Political Secularism' in John S Dryzek, Bonnie Honig and Anne Phillips (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Indian state at least should have kept the politics, public offices and public sphere away from religion. This concept does not preach hostility to religion. This is a total separation of religion and politics. Gandhi, by saying that he cannot see politics and religion as separate, imposed his own configuration of the concept regarding both on the entire polity. Gandhi perhaps could have said that he cannot see ethics and politics separate from each other, but for Gandhi and the majority of Indians in his time and ours, there is no ethics available to lean upon other than the religious ethics. That India, as a country, failed to develop secular ethics on which politics and political morality could be built is the tragedy which led subsequently to the failure of the project of modernity.

In this context, Nehru's policy of indifference to religion would have worked, perhaps, far better. The state may allow religion to be practised as a matter of right, but only in the private sphere and not in public office. As a normative document for society and polity, the Constitution should have striven to push religion into the private sphere and not allow it to emerge in the public sphere.

While the debate on the definitions of secularism exists[9], it is undeniable that the idea of secularism is dependent on the process of *secularisation*. This process of secularisation has not been taking place in India. What has been taking place is de-secularisation.

However, there is a paradox involved here, so far as modernity in the sense of industrialisation and urbanisation is concerned, even the Hindu Nationalists and the BJP would like to have them. In that sense, the BJP and NDA (National Democratic Alliance) are indeed modern and champion a modernity of India that is industrial, urban and fully capitalist. Of course, they would favour indigenous capitalism. The latter is structurally very difficult in a global economy.

Modernity differently defined in terms of non-religiosity would not be of interest to the BJP and NDA. Atheism certainly is an anathema. Therefore, one should be careful while discussing modernity in today's India. Political mobilisation is, in Hindu nationalist terms, economic policy; on the other hand, it would favour ultra-modern industry and cities. Therefore, if we define modernity in purely historical-empirical terms, indeed, the BJP and NDA may fulfil that. However, it is the critique of religious majoritarianism that would be opposed by this dispensation. I have argued in this section that democratic mobilisations are increasingly taking a religious turn, and democratic mobilisation per se does not guarantee modernity. Furthermore, it is these mobilisations in terms of religion that are working against the modernity envisaged in the Constitution. I have also argued that there is an inherent flaw in the concept of *Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava*— did not lead to 'principled distance', that is to say the policy in practical terms meant that the state would treat all religions equally and meddle in all religions equally— this concept has not kept the state from intervening in religions in terms of temple administration, pilgrimage subsidisation and et cetera. On the other hand, the Nehruvian concept of the state, where the state would have totally distanced itself from religion but would have strictly implemented law and order vis-à-vis religious discord, would have been far better suited to the Indian context. Of course, this is a conjecture only.

India continues to be a plural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country. The state in such a context cannot get embroiled in the question of religion. In the above, I have critiqued the concepts of

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[9] Bhargava, Rajeev Secularism *and its Critics*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

'Contextual Secularism' and 'Principled Distance' as elaborated by Rajeev Bhargava's concept of Indian secularism. What I find most difficult is that at the level of law and practice, the Indian state, with all its compromises and inconsistencies, has failed the question of modernity. Thus, secular modernity is often questioned and compromised by democratic mobilisation, which increasingly works in favour of a majoritarian Hindu nationalist mobilisation. This perhaps would have been avoided had we adopted the Nehruvian concept of –*Dharma Nirapekshata*—or indifference of the state towards all religion. What we argued in this section is *not* against secularism, *nor* against religion, but the specific manifestation of the same in the form of Indian secularism, which we think is ambiguous and ambivalent. We think that given the plurality and multiplicity of religions in India, the Nehruvian concept would have suited better to its social conditions and would have prevented the multiple communalisms from emerging in the post-Independence period. *Dharma Nirapekshata,* combined with keeping strict law and order, would perhaps prevent the problem of communalism. We are completely sympathetic to Mahatma Gandhi's point of view. We only plead that the present historical circumstances may require us to revisit and intellectually deliberate on the same.

Caste, Tribe, Affirmative Action and Modernity

It is a truism to say that India is a caste-ridden society. There is a highly venerable sociological tradition of studying caste in India. This tradition stretches from the inception of sociology in India till recent times[10]. Ghurye, Srinivas, Betielle, Gupta, Jodhka, Deshpande and others have written on this phenomenon. These writings are vast and variegated. Among political scientists, Kothari is prominent and the first political scientist to devote attention to the role of caste in Indian politics. Throughout this section, we mean caste as *jati* within and beyond the so-called *varna* system. Particularly, its Hindu majority community is socially hierarchical. This is not to say that the phenomenon of caste cannot be found in other communities. Minority communities, too, have caste stratification. Despite the 75 years of economic and social change in India, caste continues its hold on Indians. Caste is found strongly in rural areas, but it is also present in the urban parts of Indian society. Caste is a primordial loyalty in the sense that caste is defined in terms of birth, and is a major stumbling block against modernity, as described above, in India. The only way to alleviate the discrimination and deprivations caused by the graded system of caste had been affirmative action, or positive discrimination, as provided for in the Constitution. While there is a vast, voluminous literature and flourishing research on caste, Kothari[11] was the first political scientist to address the matter. Kothari's work was later revised and republished[12]. Kothari kept a lively interest in the problem of caste, as he later also published on the issue. Two important works that were published in this genre were Deshpande[13] and Pai.[14]

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[10] Jodhka, Surinder Singh (2012) *Caste*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. There is a vast literature on caste. We do not go into all the literature.

[11] Kothari, Rajni (1970) *Caste in Indian Politics*, Hyderabad: Orent Longman.

[12] Kothari, Rajni (2nd Ed.) (Revd. By JamesManor,) (2019) *Caste in Indian Politics*, Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan.

[13] Deshpande, Ashwini (2013), *Affirmative Action in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

[14] Pai, Sudha (2011) *Dalit Assertion*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Modernisation theory initially prognosticated that social structures such as caste would disappear with the progress of the economy and secularisation. Many studies were conducted in this mode to see how caste is adapting itself to the modernisation process. Marxists, on the other hand, have given less importance initially to caste, treating the same essentially as a superstructural phenomenon. The supposed disappearance of caste did not happen, however, in both the rural and urban areas. The social institution got perhaps diluted, but persisted. On the other hand, the blocked rural-urban transition made the reality much mixed; the transition from an earlier rigid system to a quasi-flexible one.

It is now more of a 'contextual casteism' to paraphrase Professor Bhargava. In contextual casteism, one may inter-dine but not intermarry. One may not inter-dine or inter-marry. One may do both or none according to the context. The maintenance of ritual purity now is far less common. On that account, there is much dilution of caste as a system. However, caste has seen a reinforced resilience when it comes to the societal resource allocation. The distribution of societal resources in terms of political leadership, educational and employment opportunities is now most contested in terms of caste. This is despite the 75 years of the affirmative action policy of the Indian state. Undoubtedly, caste has survived and perhaps, in the second sense described above, has even been strengthened. However, it has not become a chosen identity. Caste as an identity still happens to be an inherited and ascriptive one, and the hierarchy in society, however, loosened by the impact of the modernisation process, persists. As some have argued, caste has not become a less stringent *horizontal difference*. Still, there is a long way to go for that process to happen. Inter-caste marriages in rural as well as urban areas still happen to be contested affairs within the family and caste community, while at the same time, inter-dining may not face much resistance.

What mainly explains the persistence and the strengthening of caste as a social phenomenon is the incomplete agrarian transition and the ever-increasing rural-urban divide. The developmental process has substantially contributed not to the disappearance of caste, but rather to its persistence and strengthening, though it cannot be said to have the same tenacity as it did at the time of Independence. The one factor that would have hastened the further dilution of caste identities is the industrialisation process, which did not happen to the extent anticipated or planned.

Therefore, caste as a social institution cannot be seen in isolation from the economy and the polity. What accounts for the salience of caste is the mutual reinforcement of social, political and economic factors. Socially, the challenges from the so-called lower castes have regimented the upper castes; politically, affirmative action did not resolve the caste riddle and instead crystallised the identities seeking affirmative action or, in fact, expanded them. Economically, the incomplete agrarian to urban-industrial transition has left the problem of caste where it was.

The affirmative action for Dalits has been enshrined in the Constitution from the inception; however, it is the 27 per cent reservation in government educational and employment opportunities for the Other Backwards Classes in the early 1990s, following the recommendations of the B.P. Mandal Commission, which reinvented the debate on caste. Seen in a historical perspective, the 27 per cent reservations were entirely legitimate because they address the question of historical justice for other backward classes. In some states, such as Tamil Nadu, the reservation for all the castes combined had long exceeded the Supreme Court ruling of a 50 per cent cap on reservation. However, the question of

reservations for other backward classes was new in the north Indian states, which had historically not seen the OBC mobilisation as had been in the south, so there was a hue and cry over that reservation in the northern part of the country. The recommendations and the implementation were followed by the protests from the so-called upper castes, and ensued violence and mayhem. However, the recommendations were finally accepted by the Central government and implemented in letter and spirit, and the debate is now part of twentieth-century Indian history.

The second is the aspect of the Dalit assertion followed by the emergence of the movements by Dalit castes in different parts of the country, which met with various degrees of violence by both upper castes as well as, and more frequently, by the middle castes, or the backward classes, (who earlier fought for the Mandal Report based reservation) on the Dalits. This has been a much more difficult question to explain as well as understand. It is not only the so-called upper castes in the graded caste system, but it is also the backward, middle rung castes, who have resisted the rise of the Dalits. Often more strongly than did the older upper castes. This was sometimes met with further resistance from Dalits. There are many instances of this conflict in the country, from Karamchedu in the united Andhra Pradesh to Kharilanji in Maharashtra to the caste violence in many districts of Tamil Nadu, as well as in many other parts of the country. This has left the Dalits as the major victims of the violence in the end, and has perpetuated the atrocities on the Dalits.

The Indian modernity in terms of social equality thus entails struggles on the part of the historically marginalised. What the Marxists dismiss as a superstructural element has shown tremendous resilience even in the twenty-first century. As mentioned above, the more the caste is connected to social and political resources, the more resilient the institution becomes. Because the mobilisation will take the identity in terms of caste. And the achievement of modern social equality becomes equally difficult. Nevertheless, there has been progress on this front, and though the affirmative action has been contested, it has undoubtedly lifted many a marginalized from bondage. It has surely helped their material/ social betterment. To that extent the modernity is achieved, following the struggles of the marginalised to a limited extent.

Adivasis and Affirmative Action:

The second important social section of India for whom affirmative action is intended is the tribal or Adivasi community. They have been the most marginalised community among all the marginalised. They live in the forested remote areas of the country, which are also mineral-rich and rich with forest resources. The communities have been subject to exploitation and marginalisation by the development process of the country, which needs minerals and forest resources, as well as contractor lobbies and money lenders.

Land alienation in the tribal areas has been one of the most important problems. Internally, the Adivasi communities have been relatively less unequal than the caste communities, with their own cultures, identities and informal social organisation and power structures. The major attempt to address their grievances and provide them with self-governance was through the Bhuria committee, which recommended the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) that came into effect in 1996. Ever since then, the law has been implemented by the state governments concerned for the Adivasi local government. The question of Adivasis goes beyond the local government; the question concerns the very

identities of indigenous people, their cultures, and they should all be steamrolled under the juggernaut of modernity. The PESA law is only a first step in safeguarding the rights and interests of the Adivasi communities. Much more focused improvement is needed in the lives and livelihoods of the Adivasis to bring the benefits of modern medicine, science, technology and the development process. At least the processes of development and modernisation should not be extractive at their expense.

Thus, the questions of caste and tribe pose specific difficulties in explaining their trajectory in terms of modernity. Caste is of late strengthened owing to the state policy of affirmative action. However, the initial attempt by Kothari to explain caste in Indian politics was a Winchian one — we describe this as such following the philosopher of science, Peter Winch. That is to say, Kothari argued that Indian democracy retains its dynamism from the mobilisation of the social structures internal to it. This would seem to indicate that the social structures and processes internal to a society have their own logic and would belie any normative criteria imposed on politics from outside. For example, the concept of Universal Human Rights does not have application in such relativist circumstances. This was the Winchian[15] argument, which was later disavowed by Kothari himself, as he became more and more convinced of the dilemmas of caste-based politics and later espoused a Dalit movement critique of the caste system and politics.

On the other hand, the Adivasi identities have been more and more diluted owing to the encroachment of the non-Adivasi population into the lives and livelihoods of the Adivasis. It is interesting to see that the Hindu nationalists too aspire for a caste-less Hindu nation, into which the Adivasi communities are sought to be integrated through various means.

Industrial and Urban Modernity

Historically, modernity is characterised by industrialism and urbanism. The so-called first and second world nations have both emphasised in their respective development processes industrialisation and urbanisation. That path of modernity now appears problematic to many developing nations today. By the time the developing countries catch up with industrialisation and urbanisation, the ecological catastrophe is looming large. The Green Political Theory and Greens in India are particularly concerned about this ecological catastrophe (Ball:2010). Despite the discussions on industrialisation 4.0 (Maffettone:2022), the only hope for securing livelihoods beyond agriculture appears to be manufacturing and urban /industrial development. This section argues that countries like India are caught between the Scylla of agrarian backwardness, which reinforces pre-modern identities and loyalties and the Charybdis of environmental destruction and cataclysm.

The way out, as some tend to argue, is skill-based silicon capitalism and service sector-led development, which is anyway we are witnessing (Bhide *et al.*, 2021). This alternative, however, seems

[15] Winch, Peter (1987) 'Understanding A Primitive Society' in Michael T Gibbons (Ed) *Interpreting Politics*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp 32-63.

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to reinforce the same pre-modern caste and religious loyalties and identities that industrialism supposedly rids people of. This is the dark side of current Indian modernity that it is not 'industrial modernity' that we are witnessing but rather 'service-sector modernity' (Balasubramanyam and Balasubramanyam: 2021). This service sector, which defines Indian modernity, produces 58 per cent of Indian GDP (Gross Domestic Product) but employs only 30 per cent of the total employed population (Ramaswamy:2021). And that too, not all in a decent manner, nor is this employment going to expand with the growing demand for employment. Overall, the agriculture sector still employs about 65 per cent of the population. Therefore, the point to be noted at the outset is that we do not, as yet, have sufficient industrial development. The sequence of economic development as it has taken place in the UK and USA, wherein the agriculture, manufacturing industry and services sector grow sequentially, is simply not taking place in India. The Indian development process is not following the path described by Simon Kuznets (Balasubramanyam and Balasubramanyam, 2021). Therefore, it is certainly not the case that rapid industrialisation is taking place and is devastating the ecology. We are gradually developing as a 'back office of the globe' in terms of service sector development and not a 'manufacturing factory of the globe' as is the case with present-day China. Therefore, we should be clear at the very outset that we need more industry and industrialisation than what we have now.

The problem with agriculture-led employment and development is that a rural agrarian mode of production does not allow the inhabitants to think beyond caste and caste identities. The only way to move beyond the discourse of caste and caste based social relations is to move beyond agriculture and industrialise and urbanise. Both classical Marxian theory and Modernisation theory in developing country politics argue in favour of the orthodox modernist approaches, which today are inadequate in the context of ecological crisis and increasing inequalities. And not only that, for skill-intensive capitalism, a large section of people appears to be irrelevant. Thus, we have a development of service sector, skill-oriented industries, which exclude a major section from participating in economic growth. Or, they subsist on the fringes as informal, casual and contractual workers.

While global capitalism adapted itself to the changing conditions quickly with technological innovations and large-scale exclusion of people from the growth process and economic opportunities, those who are excluded face an acute dilemma as to whether to believe in modernist orthodox approaches of industrialisation and urbanisation, or to content themselves with fruitless post-modern micro-politics. The only solution to this dilemma lies in recognising the fact that it is capitalism as an industrial system that destroys ecology and livelihoods, not ordinary people.

Those who critique this dilemma should overcome the misconception that socialist modernism would be equally as bad as capitalist modernism, as the history of both in the Soviet past and Chinese present shows. Ecological disasters in both socialist countries remarkably point out that a third way has to be forged. And that cannot be Gandhian populism.

The path to ecological sustainability and social equality is through adopting a critical modernism that is both aware of modernity's past limitations and yet does not jeopardise its achievements, in India and elsewhere. The baby of industrial-urban modernity should not be thrown out with its bathwater.

Problems with Modernity

Capitalist modernity is well known for generating distributional inequalities and causing economic as well as ecological crises. Problems with socialist modernity are less well known. But they are equally significant. The Chernobyl disaster is one example. Both Russia and the erstwhile USSR, and China presently, have serious ecological issues to do with industrialism and urbanism. However, the socialist modernity had significant gains in terms of the social sector, i.e., health and education provision, housing provision and better distribution of resources. This is despite forced collectivisations, gulags and labour camps.

Therefore, the future development and public policy models have to keep in mind both the achievements and limitations of the previous socialist development models as much as they critique capitalist models of development and public policy.

Weber indicated the other problems of modernity, which are to do with hyper-bureaucratisation, development of modern offices and factories and the disciplinary routines and punitive mechanisms that they develop (Alexander:2013; Parkin:2013). This 'iron cage' bureaucratic organisation for the production of services and goods is indeed a very modern phenomenon. The agrarian societies, with all their seasons and cycles, do not have a bureaucratic cage. In fact, pre-modern agrarian life is largely bound to, and bound up with, nature. The break with nature and, in turn, making nature entirely instrumental for anthropocentric purposes is a uniquely modern phenomenon. The relationship between human beings and nature around them becomes entirely one-sided with the birth of industrial modernity. Industrial modernity is extractive of nature. Modern industrial production cannot help but have that characteristic.

The Indian economy is lopsided towards the service sector. This means that the much-needed industrial modernity is difficult to achieve. Service sector-led development means post-Fordist accumulation processes and flexible employment patterns, with contract and casual, and informal arrangements of the economy dominating.

Rural India still consists of nearly 60% percent of the population. By 2024, the urban population is 40 per cent.[16] Though the contribution by the agriculture sector to GDP is less than 16 per cent, 84 per cent of the contribution to GDP comes mainly from the service and industrial sectors, with industry contributing the lesser share. This configuration of the economy means more and more inequality and the burden of the social and political factors of caste and religion in rural and urban areas.

Table 1: Structure of the Indian Economy

	1950-51	1980-81	1990-91	2010-11
Services sector	30.26	38.07	42.67	57.49
Industrial sector	16.59	25.92	27.71	27.72
Agricultural sector	53.15	36.01	29.62	14.59

Source: Nitya Nanda (Nanda: 2021)

[16] Please see https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2042542 for details

Table 1 clearly shows India's service sector contributes about 58 per cent of GDP and employs only 30 per cent of the population. The Indian agriculture sector contributes only 15 per cent to the GDP but employs about 60-65 per cent of the population. The manufacturing industry contributes about 28 per cent to the GDP and employs less than 10 per cent of the population. Thus, the dark side of the Indian modernity today is that it is 'service-sector modernity' and not 'industrial modernity'. And the prospects for employment for job seekers in the service sector are not going to expand much in the near future (Ramaswamy, 2021). The social characteristics of the service-sector-led modernity are that they are heavily dependent on the traditional social characteristics of caste and caste based social mobility (Balasubramanyam and Balasubramanyam: 2021). Thus, what we are witnessing in India is far from industrialisation in the classical sense of the term.

The geographical characteristic of this service sector modernity is that it takes place largely in the metropolitan cities such as Bangalore, Hyderabad, Delhi, Chennai and Pune. These are the Information Technology and Information Technology Enabled Services hubs. These cities spawn the material basis for the service sector modernity, which also has the social characteristic of strengthening rather than diluting the traditional caste and class identities. The classical characteristics of class formation that Marx speaks of in Capital (Marx:1906), which stem from the nature of the industrial production process, do not apply to service-sector-led modernity. Here, the individuals do not develop their 'social' and 'universal' characteristics and humanity owing to the nature of work in the service sector enterprises. Instead, they retain the social baggage that comes from the past and the tradition.

Capital, Labour and Modernity

We have argued in the Introduction to this work that Indian modernity is constrained by both the nature of democratic mobilisation and the nature of the Indian political economy. In the following, we will consider three thinkers who have shed much light on the Indian political economy, including the Indian state. These are: Chatterjee (2008), Bardhan (2009), and Kaviraj (2010). Although these thinkers have not directly addressed the question of modernity (except for Kaviraj, who has addressed the question of modernity and politics in India), their theories on Indian political economy have enormous implications for Indian modernity.

However, before discussing these thinkers, I will discuss some propositions which I have stated in my earlier *EPW* article (Vaddiraju, 2021). I have argued in that article that a) unresolved agrarian question, b) slow pace of industrial development, by which I mean manufacturing industry, and c) the distorted development of the service sector. All these have combined to produce a thin economic basis for democracy. Since the economy in the above terms is lagging behind the democratic polity, which is empowered with a republican and progressive Constitution, there is a disjuncture between the laggard economy, which cannot serve as a solid basis, and the overwhelming democratic upsurges facilitated by the Constitution. In a nutshell, I have argued that when politics overwhelms, the economic basis puts the brakes on the politics, leading to calls for foreshortening the democratic processes. Thus, the fuller realisation of democracy requires the fuller development of the economy. This is a deterministic Marxian argument, which postulates a straightforward relationship between the economic basis and politics. And I am guilty of treating democratic politics as a superstructure in that article.

The point, however, is how the different sectors have fared since 2021. That is when I wrote the article? My view is that while the *dramatis personae* portrayed in that article remain the same, the *mise-en-scène* has changed. The agricultural sector growth has not seen the projected 4 per cent, but the state subsidisation of the agricultural sector has increased.

The state involvement in different provinces/states in terms of fertiliser, power, water subsidies, and doles through direct benefit transfers to farmers has resulted in the stopping of farmers' suicides. And when this was not sufficient, the farmers fought for their economic rights. For example, the three farm laws have been repealed owing to the farmers' protests in Northwest India. Agriculture has sought to be modernised through smart farming, butterfly farming, drone farming, etc. How far these modernised measures have improved the condition of the farmers is a totally different question. For a large part, and in a large number of backward states, the agricultural sector still consists of millions of small farmers who struggle day in and day out to make a living. The point I am making is in consonance with Chatterjee (2009) that state-sponsored programmes, anti-poverty and of economic-productivist orientation have kept the farming sector alive. Farmers have been, thereby, tremendously politicised, often challenging the state when the benefits threaten to slip away.

What is the condition of the slow development of the industrial sector? The manufacturing industry, which Hobsbawm hailed as the hallmark of modernity in any country, has not been shining brightly. The industry and the call for 'Make in India' do not seem to have taken off with great success. However, this is a conjecture. Industrial growth, and the growth of employment in the manufacturing industry, is limited to only some states, such as Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu; other states are trying to pick up from the bootstraps, but the process is at a beginning level.

What about the service sector? The service sector, by which we mean the IT and ITES sectors, the growth might experience high but at the cost of the employees. The layoffs in IT and ITES owing to technological developments, such as Artificial Intelligence, have been very high. And those who are retained are compelled to work extra hours each week. If they do not work, we are told, they receive choicest abuses at the workplace. This overwork in the service sector has led to some employees committing suicide. Thus, the IT and ITES sector, post-pandemic, has been completely oriented to squeezing maximum work from minimum labour.

In the last part of my article (Vaddiraju, 2021), I have also argued that the Indian state has given up its pretensions of Scientific temper and Enlightenment rationalism altogether. I have held that this may prove to be caused by backward socio-economic structures pulling democracy backward into the morass of backwards-looking nationalism. I have only been vindicated in this regard in the ensuing period.

There has been more concentration of capital (Bhaduri:2008), more loss of employment owing to layoffs for those employed earlier, and more jobless growth (Harriss,2023) for those seeking employment. The employment/ unemployment figures have been a major bone of contention between economists.

However, again, the Hindu Nationalist project is alert to this reality and the situation is rendered indeed very paradoxical with schemes such as the PM-Internship scheme, which can help garner jobs, etc., and there are other populist schemes for different sections, especially women, e.g., the *Ladki Bahini* scheme in Maharashtra. Thus, the Hindu Nationalist project is resilient, and that should make the

explanation of modernity sound paradoxical. Likewise, the Space programme of ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) and the science programme of the country have been getting the much-needed boost from the government. This phenomenon is thus Janus-faced. State involvement has been benign to some aspects of modernity, e.g. support to natural scientific establishments, women's rights, but has been exclusionary to labour rights, even that of women workers.

Bardhan (2009) argued that India's transition to capitalism will be a torturous one, underscored by resistance from democratic forces. This, he said, will be more complex than is usually the case with capitalist transitions. He posited a dialectic interaction between the logic of capital versus the logic of democracy. When Chatterjee (2008) highlighted the role of the state in transition with its anti-poverty measures and programmes, and when Bardhan (2009) spoke of torturous and complex, they were writing about the transition to the capitalist modern economy. Bhaduri (2008), however, dismissed the entire process of growth as a predatory one, leading to the emergence of billionaires on the one hand and the pauperised masses on the other. What implication does this debate have for Indian modernity?

As far as the class structures go, it is a well-known fact that by now after more than 25 years of reform, the agrarian rich class has lost much of its power in the dominant coalition underlying the Indian state (Bardhan,2009; 2023) The other two classes have, however, been strengthened: the industrial capitalist class and the professional middle class/ bureaucracy. Though the farmers' movement had been able to resist the farm laws, its power of veto on policy matters has become much less. As I have argued before, the transition to such a bourgeois revolution is compounded by the question of caste and the question of the nature of power relations under neo-liberalism. The labour relations, already marked by caste, have become like semi-feudal relations rather than fully modern capitalist relations. Bardhan (2009) has also argued that the process of transition is 'inexorable'. The process is extremely protracted and complex. Even if we achieve economic modernity, the democratic and electoral processes might still keep us in the darkness of the premodern period. The only writer who had made some conjecture regarding the trajectory of neo-liberal development turning into a developmental authoritarian state, like the East Asian developmental state, was Atul Kohli.

Conclusion: Indian Modernity and Democracy

In this work, I have tried to argue that Indian modernity is constricted by two factors: the Indian democracy and the Indian political economy. I have argued that democratic mobilisations of late have been based on non-modern, often religious appeals. This, I thought, works against modernity. Definitely, it often does. The communal conflagrations that take place owing to such mobilisations cost human lives and property. I, however, wonder whether the historical-empirical approach to modernity, as I have taken to examine this idea in the first place, is at all appropriate. Because though the mobilisation may be on the lines of religious appeal, the BJP and the NDA vouch for both industrialisation and urbanisation under fully capitalist premises. Therefore, religious mobilisation does not end up completely against such a historical definition of modernity. One needs to argue more carefully and in a nuanced manner.

The second plank of the argument has been that the Indian political economy works against the fuller realisation of modernity. This, I think, makes for a stronger argument than the first. The political economy in terms of the demographic predominance of the agriculture sector and a 'service sector

modernity' with casualised labour (at both ends—skilled workers as well as gig workers and informal labour) and a relatively weak industry and industrial population makes for a weak modernity. What is the product of this political economy is not industrial modernity, but the service sector, ragtag modernity.

Bardhan's argument that the transition to capitalist modernity is a torturous one, India merits attention. For example, the land acquisition for industrial purposes has been a very important issue from the side of the state as well as from the side of the protesting farmers. These are difficult questions that make the transition truly torturous.

The third phenomenon has been the persistence and revival of caste; this is owing to two reasons: because the material basis for the caste system to survive—the villages and the agriculture persist; second, because of the state policy of affirmative action, however legitimate, renders people identify with the caste. Now there is a clamour for the revival of caste. I have noted this contradictory and unintended consequence of state policy in the report. Often, what is practised is 'contextual casteism' and 'unprincipled distance' to paraphrase Professor Bhargava in the context of the caste problem.

In the end, who needs modernity? It is the most marginalised, socially, economically and politically, and those who are ill-treated and discriminated against in society need modernity. And does modernity of any practical help? Modernity in the form of science and its ever-progressing march reduces maternal mortality, infant mortality, the burden of disease in general and increases life expectancy. Modernity, in the form of technology, makes lives livable. The vast masses of people need the benefits of modern scientific and technological progress. Modernity can also save from the bigotry of irrationalism in a country where such bigotry has not ceased since Independence.

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