Multiple Modernities: A Case Study of Indian and Hindu Modernity

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Abstract

In the article, the idea of multiple modernities is critically evaluated from the perspective of various civilizations. Concerning "traditional theories of modernization," the argument for "multiple modernities" contradicts the supposition of the convergence of industrial civilizations. It refers to the distinguishing expressions of progressive global modernity rather than merely to multiple societal structures. The main two premises are based on modernity, a multipolar notion that no longer depends on "Westernization," and that not all nations are uniformly modern because each civilization's cultural and historical settings impact how "modernity" is understood substantially. To follow through, the case study of Indian and Hindu Modernity confronts the pre-existing notion of modernity. At the same time, it draws a historical linkage from the ideas of Gandhi and his critique of the European concept of modernity to the current era, where modernity in India is viewed through the lens of the amalgamation of state and religion. The paper's first section highlights how multiple modernities challenge the assimilated idea of 'Eurocentrism' and the non-linearity of those convergence theories. The second section presents the theoretical perspective and literature on the contributions and challenges of multiple modernities, following which the third section scrutinizes the concept of alternatives to multiple modernities. In conclusion, it sums up the viewpoints of different ethnicities, asserting that there are many ways to be modern and acknowledging that not all modernities are necessarily secular.

Keywords: Multiple Modernities, Eurocentrism, Hindu modernity

Introduction

The concept of "multiple modernities" arose in sociology in the 1990s as a new paradigm for conceptualizing the modern world. This paradigm shift occurred throughout the modern era of globalization, altering our perceptions of the modern world. Perhaps the phenomenon of multiple modernities goes against the prevalent view of the traditional theories of convergence and emerges to challenge the primitive ideologies of classical theorists of 'modernization.' It challenges the assimilated idea of 'Eurocentrism' and the non-linearity of those convergence theories, ultimately leading to prolonged efforts to acknowledge the distinctive trajectories of political and social progression. The theory of multiple modernities argues for its irresistible impact worldwide. Nevertheless, with the radically different approaches, according to those societies' cultural and historical backgrounds, it encounters and gives it a sense of 'thinking plural' as multipolarity. An ambiguity is left in the implementation and formulation of this theory, as many scholars still argue that it fails to consistently set out the core and significant unit of analysis of modernity itself, thus failing to address the complexities of the modernization theory it evaluates. (Schmidt, 2006).

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Both protagonists and antagonists of this new rudimentary transformation critique this theory's characteristics and core values while emphasizing the diversity of these modern societies.

According to the critics, the pathway to modernity in each society varies according to their socio-cultural histories and backgrounds. Europe is the epitome of this cultural and institutional diversity, though it is from there that the notion of multiple modernities came into being. Nevertheless, the debate is not about the existence of heterogeneity but about the profoundness of its contemporary differences within modern societies and their future cognizance. It should not be disregarded that some modern societies share similar components that lead to transnational modernity. However, whether modernity is or not, a concrete set of processes still needs to be scrutinized. Moreover, the three fundamental aspects of the modern political process developed from the doctrines of the political aspect of modernity and the fundamental features of modern political institutions argue that the reconfiguration of center-periphery interactions as the primary focus of political dynamics in contemporary countries, a strong inclination toward politicizing the demands of various segments of society and the disputes between them, and an endless battle over the definition of the political's borders only became a significant focus of open political contestation and conflict with the advent of modernity (Fourie, 2012).

Since Modernity first emerged in West, it was dogged from the start by internal antinomies and contradictions, giving birth to ongoing critical debate and political contestations. Modernity's fundamental antinomies represented a profound shift of the traits of the axial civilizations. They demonstrated knowledge of a wide spectrum of transcendental visions and interpretations since they were focused on questions that were unknown at the time. I argue that the concept of modernity is not a homogenizing process and the existence of modernity still matters today in this contemporary world, however, it is not universally applicable to all societies (Domingues, 2009). Modernization theorists consider only western economies to be fully modern and consider other economies and societies to be primitive. These theories are accused of a 'Eurocentric' perspective which sheds light on the Era of 'Colonialism' and the concepts of 'Westernization and Capitalism'. The contention of this premise is based mainly on two counts; the former argues that modernity is a multipolar concept that is no longer conditioned on 'Westernization', and the latent argues, all societies are not equally modern since the cultural and historical contexts of each civilization tend to play a significant role in interpreting the concept of "Modernity (Eisenstadt, 2002).

There are the following questions will be analytically addressed in this paper that will further develop a more precise understanding and interpretation of this concept of multiple modernities:

Are all societies equally modern in our globalized world, and are societies more likely to sustain these social changes? How is the social-theoretical importance of society described?

So, to get concrete answers to these questions, a reasonable understanding of the critically debated concepts of modernity and modern societies ought to be established. After establishing supporting literature and background in the second section, a comprehensive view of interpreting a variety of modernities will be disclosed in the third section. The following section will discuss a case study and present a concluding thought on this analytical paper.

Theoretical Perspective

A sociologist named Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, who coined the term 'Multiple Modernities' in the late '90s, debates and goes against the other classical modernization theorists by rejecting the dynamics of convergence theories. He presumes the theory of

Multiple Modernity is not a closed-ended horizon but an open-ended one, which holds scope for various interpretations and changes from unidirectional trajectories of evolution and follows a single rationale towards multiple directions (Preyer, 2012). According to several authors, it is established that the concept of multiple modernities can be better illustrated and comprehended as a perpetual constitution and reconstitution of the multiplicity of cultural programs. A disparate understanding of this notion has been established within distinct nation-states and ethnic and cultural groups. One of the most imperative speculations about this phenomenon emphasizes that modernity and westernization are two distinct concepts that are confused as identical notions. These incessantly evolving modernities defy such problems, formulating modernity's common underpinning.

i. Contributions and Conflicts

Many scholars have argued regarding the goal of modernity while probing the center unit of modernity, which eventually came out as a creative adaptation and reweighed the idea of modernity by far-fetched social groups. Referring to the following idea, a theory of 'alternative modernities' by Gaonkar supports the idea as mentioned earlier, asserting that creative adaptation serves people in the transformation from the conventional to the modern state, thus constructing their conviction of modernity (Gaonkar, 2001). The prime contribution of 'multiple modernities' is pinpointing the cultural and historical backgrounds of societies that drive distinguished civilization. As a result, each civilization envisions its interpretation of modernity. Multiple Modernities is a cultural theory of modernity that relies on the comparative analysis of civilizations, making it provocative and noteworthy. To some extent, it overlooks the cross-cultural comparative historical analysis while corresponding with the concept of 'cultural turn.' China and East Asia have been under the intense scrutiny of such approaches where civilization is viewed as singular and, on the other side, as a plural substance (Fourie, 2012).

ii. Is Modernization, a homogenizing Process

Samuel Huntington put forth an opposing idea that contradicts a more considerable interpretation of Francis Fakuyuma regarding a sentiment of homogenization of the liberal worldview and the primordial theories of convergence. He signifies that modernization is a homogenizing process, and all societies, to some extent, retain those comparable factors in their civilization. However, a strong argument emanates from those who denounce this idea of homogeneity and declare that the pathway to developing one society economically, socially, and politically contrasts according to the varied background histories and traditional shifts from conventional to industrial societies (Eisenstadt, n.d.).

African modernity is another example of the collapse of modernity, which demonstrates that all societies are not uniformly modern because the cultural and political background of African civilization varies from those of European and even from the West. Consequently, an American economist, Walt Whitman Rostow, comes up with a doctrine that illustrates how the modernization process has to go through stages to procure certain growth (Chulu, 2006).

Cosmopolitanism and Alternatives to Multiple Modernities

The conviction of 'Alternatives to Multiple Modernities' belongs to the idea that modernity is inexorable in this period of the global world and that modernity is multiple but no longer conditioned on westernization, as backed by the theory of Modernization. It drives attention toward the significance of the reconciliation of cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity, which are of absolute importance. In today's age, where multiple modernities are

evolving, it no longer necessitates the West as a regulatory centre. The "alternatives to Multiple Modernities" theory in the post-modern era unrolls new cultures and civilizations, leading to a distinguished transition of modernism. Consequently, the outcomes of each modernity vary. The contributors now argue that the multiplicity of modernity is a highly embellished concept that has become inevitable. Ulrich Beck, a known German sociologist, rigorously probes a cosmopolitan turn in sociology that significantly assesses the dissipated social world through national or ethnic cultural boundaries and differentiates between the notions of globalization and cosmopolitanism (Shaykh, 2014).

Nevertheless, Gerard Delanty, a British sociologist, manifests another approach to the contemporary world while shadowing some light and allowing for the ideas of multiple modernity and cosmopolitanism (Vaughan, 2013). He defines *cosmopolitanism* as a multiplicity of distinctive modernities assembled in this social world. In Delanty's incongruous view, the goal is not to accompany universal principles. However, each society should be able to self-problematize, shift to a post-universalist perspective, and internally transform itself. Some other sociologists determine the thought of alternatives to multiple modernities as a reformulation of the modern colonial world system. It signifies that they see it from the observation of colonial diversity while relating to the alternative construction of a world where social life is no longer entirely restricted by the construct of rationality and that characteristic of autocratic Euro-modernity.

Case Study: Indian and Hindu Modernities

The case study of Indian modernities brings several questions regarding universality versus heterogeneity into the spotlight. It tends to scrutinize the Hindu civilization and its new-fangled manifestations. The concept of multiple modernities has gained prominence in modernity discourse, questioning the idea of a universal modernity. Within this context, Indian and Hindu modernity emerge as separate and lively entities demonstrating the intricate interplay between tradition and progress. The ability of Indian modernity to adjust and adapt is one of its most remarkable characteristics. India has shown an outstanding ability to absorb and assimilate ideas, technology, and ideologies from diverse sources while maintaining its distinct identity. An example is the cohabitation of old customs with advances in science, technology, and governance. Inclusion and social justice are essential aspects of Indian modernism. Despite the difficulties created by a deeply embedded caste system, efforts to elevate neglected people and promote equality have gained traction. The adoption of democracy, secularism, and human rights as basic concepts of Indian modernity has contributed to the development of a varied and inclusive society.

The current era is a shift towards a multipolar world, with powers such as China, India, and Brazil coming forward in East Asia, South Asia, and South America, respectively. With their rise in power have come forth the cultural values and norms of these powers and their approach towards modernization and progression. Chinese modernity came forward in the post-colonial period, when the cultural, political, and economic practices of ethnic Chinese filled the gap left by the leaving colonial powers (Pieterse, 2009). The rise of Indian and Hindu modernities followed the rise of the United States as the sole hegemon at the end of the Cold War and in the wake of the slow decay of its power in the current era. The exploration goes toward discovering if modernity still matters, which is the basic premise of this paper. The dive into the understanding of Indian and Hindu modernities is based on the insight brought forward by *Jan Nederveen Pieterse* in the paper, 'Multipolarity means thinking plural: Modernities.' The perception of the validity of multiple modernities is explored through the gaps in the existing macro-sociological theories that base modernity around convergence. The convergence theories revolve around the assumption that they are globally applicable, even though they can only reflect the ideas and concepts of the space and

time in which they were conceived. That is to state that these theories are one-directional, partial invalidity, time- and space-bound, selective, and ideological. The modernization theory, built upon the ideas of Max Weber and developed into a paradigm by Talcott Parsons, states that 'traditional' societies can be brought into the modern era with the assistance of developed countries (the U.S. and Europe). This reflects the convergence of all societies towards a singular Eurocentric modern.

However, the case of Indian modernity can be traced back to Gandhi's critique of modernity brought in under Western colonialization. Gandhi moves away to a certain degree from the concept brought in by the European Enlightenment that reason is above religion and, therefore, religion must be confined to a particular sphere, and logic must take over in the remaining sectors. Gandhi considered that all concepts emanate from a singular truth; therefore, all ideas of every religion, reason, and logic stem from cosmic truth. He argues that religions stemming from the truth are based on morality, and reason alone cannot provide a way toward modernity. This provides an ideological understanding of how modernity is multiple, not singular, and how various modernity concepts are based on the time and space in which they were conceived.

Gandhi's economic and political structure concepts also varied from Western ideas of capitalism and representative democracy. He propagated the concept of swaraj or self-rule, under which the concept of a government was considered detrimental to the people. People were conscious enough to enact rules and regulations for their communities and societies that best served the interests of the whole. Poverty may be a lifestyle choice of an individual based on their beliefs, but it is in no way a condition in which a human may have to live. His concept of modernity is economic freedom for all, not to have the freedom to accumulate as much wealth desired but freedom from the needs or, more precisely, their fulfillment for all. Moving forward with the concept of Indian modernity, in the era during the cold war, India progressed by adopting a non-aligned approach. It sided neither with communism completely nor capitalism. Keeping in consideration the political forces at work, they took the best from both concepts of modernization and, at the end of the cold war, band wagoned with the Western concept of modernization by presenting India as the world's largest democracy and a capitalist state (Kolge, 2009). However, Indian modernity in the current era does not reflect secularism nor does it follow the lead of the United States in respect to soft power.

Firstly, exploring the rise of the BJP to power in India alongside its policy of Hindutva shows that modern India is not the progression of secularism and democracy but the establishment of the hegemony of Hindus and Hinduism in India. This can be seen in the policies implemented in Kashmir, where a Muslim majority is assimilating into contiguous India by enacting laws that deprive them of the right to self-determination, which is a forebearer of democracy. More instability in modernity may result from the deterioration of political institutions, the emergence of regional nationalism, and increased societal demands on a collapsing core. According to (Eisenstadt, 2005), they also represent adaptation and increased power sharing. According to another theory, (Tambiah, 2005) contends that plural democracy gradually undermines India's propensity for tolerance and marginalizes minorities. Here, the potentially totalizing nature of the religious nationalism practiced by the BJP and its peers is again exposed.

Fundamentally, Indian modernity is based on Hindu modernity, in which the advancement of India is directly related to the progression of Hinduism as it takes roots in political, economic, cultural, and social spheres. On the economic front, modernization in India has taken a different route than Eurocentric modernization. The manifestation of European modernization reflects in the development of industry that has bettered the lives of ordinary people to a greater extent, providing more equal opportunities for all and, over time, reducing the economic disparity in the populous (the current situation in the U.S. is an

exception). However, it is not Eurocentric and holds its own concept of modernity. A case in point will be the farmer's laws recently enacted in India that will, for the country as a whole, have more generations from the agricultural sector yet will leave behind the small farmers that are in the majority and move forward with the wealthy farmers' oligarchy. In essence, this shows that modernity in the Indian context is a moving forward of the collective rather than of the individual, where the collective is contiguous to India and not its people as a whole.

The social theory of modernity in India revolves around how, unlike the West, India did not cut off the traditional aspects of its society when moving towards modernity. The emergence of modernity in India brought new concepts that challenged India's self-conceptions. According to Raghuramaraju, India nevertheless remains "largely a pre-modern society." However, this pre-modern view of self has resulted in a terrible conflict between these contending ideas about self-identity. He further argues that how modernity has been perceived and defined in one tradition or culture does not apply in another, with significant philosophical consequences (Brooks, 2012). While billionaires like Mukesh Ambani are among the top ten wealthiest people in the world, money, via capitalism, has not become the sole measure of success in society. The caste system is still alive, side by side with the move toward modernization. The technological and industrial advancements may have been brought in from the West. Regardless, their social, economic, and cultural application remains connected to their traditional Indian and Hindu roots. This is to say that the mobs will not follow Mukesh Ambani in the streets. In contrast, they will follow a religious leader, unlike in the West, where a preacher may not gather mobs to support a cause. However, billionaires like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg definitely can, as in the case of cryptocurrency and the metaverse. The divergence can also be seen and argued in urbanization, family life (the nucleus family in the West and the joint family in India), and education, among other spheres.

Anthony Gidden characterizes modernity as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that has various dimensions. It contends that if the multiplicity of modernity existed formerly, India ought to have a variant of modernity. Considering India is a land of diversified cultures and plural ethnicities, modernity is demonstrated in terms of the social divisions of the nation and the socio-cultural conditions of diverse regions. Modernization in India commenced in the colonial era of British rule since multiple far-reaching structural and other social changes were witnessed in Indian society during this epoch (Jemberie & Kumar, 2019). Despite this, there has been a rather prolonged debate on the permanence of modernity in India. (Shulman, 2005) argues that modernity in south India was evident several ages ago, before the intercommunication with the West and the advent of the modern age. He holds that it mutated organically from the existing local culture of South Indian society.

In this regard, most of the theorists of Indian modernity, notably Eisenstadt, debate and render that for centuries, India has been extensively performing under the complex operation of "fractured sovereignty." While pleading to the question of one crucial question that is above-mentioned, how society is interpreted as modern, an Indian sociologist, Dipankar, says several characteristics and segments must be present in Indian society to be known as a modernized society, which are: dignity and self-esteem of each living in a society, congruity to universalistic norms, culpability in civic life, and an anti-racist approach towards oneself in all aspects. According to this Indian sociologist, if the factors mentioned earlier are present in society, it does not matter whether it has aligned on the same page with the same speed in technological development, consumerism, or in any other aspect as Europe and Western societies. Dipankar defines "inter-subjectivity as a core of Indian modernity, which, in simpler terms, stands out as a quality of being emphatic to each other living in a society and a state of substantive citizenship (Jodhka, 2013). Eisenstadt combats the Indian

political horizon, assuming that to match a totalizing vision of political order, India has scarcely any endeavours at restoring these political demands to be as fit as a fiddle at a mystical sight. In other words, the fundamental ideological dimension did not make up the essence and core component of the legislative struggle. Consequently, the shift that occurred in Indian modernity was not a revolution but rather an outcome of perpetual bargaining and power-sharing.

Although pluralism was imperative for the formation of modernities in the West as well as in India. (Eisenstadt, 2003) contends that earlier centuries were marked by more significant prejudice and ideological turmoil. For example, the Church and State in Europe may have been fragmented, but each side craved ontological control. Each side often discussed unity (under the supremacy of its unique grouping) as an ideal. Hinduism less frequently views politics as a place where one might find salvation. As a result, India has yet to entirely restructure the political system to conform to transcendental, totalizing views. In other words, the moral and intellectual dimension "did not constitute a central component of the political process and struggle." A significant change has happened in India, but more frequently due to ongoing, intense bargaining and power-sharing than a revolution.

Conclusion

The theory of Multiple Modernities is auspicious but a little latent and embryonic. The theory critically dissects the comparative cultural and civilizational approach by taking an Indian civilization as a case study. This paper has reviewed the best possible aspects of this theory by addressing its principal components. The case of Indian and Hindu modernities reflects that modernity is still very relevant. Indian and Hindu modernity offers vital insights into the concept of multiple modernities, questioning the premise that modernity is a homogeneous and universal phenomenon. By embracing varied traditions, values, and goals, Indian and Hindu modernism accepts the difficulties of contemporary life while retaining the richness of cultural legacy. The inclusive character, adaptability, and striving for harmony displayed by these modernities exemplify the potential for cultural diversity and pluralism to thrive within a globalized society.

However, modernity is no longer, or never was, a singular but a plural subject. Multiple modernities are the way to understand how modernization will move around the globe in different regions. Chinese modernity came forward in the post-colonial period when the cultural, political, and economic practices of ethnic Chinese filled the gap left by the leaving colonial powers. This statement reflects that the Chinese concept of modernity existed but was overshadowed and suppressed by the colonial powers that had taken hold. A similar case existed in India, with the case study above showing an oscillation between convergence and divergence.

According to the critics, the trajectory of the modernities in each civilization modifies in compliance with their sociocultural histories and backgrounds. The evident differences among cultures, civilizations, and ethnicities cannot be revoked. However, these differences are less requisite than the disparity between the pre-modern and modernized epochs of social realities. On the one hand, the conviction of multiple modernities incites homogenization within a civilization; on the contrary, alternative modernity and varieties of modernity inflate doubts on this impression considering they chiefly support the institutions, which have been thoroughly scrutinized earlier in the paper. The theory of "alternatives to Multiple Modernities' is also profoundly examined. In the post-modern era, unrolled new cultures and civilizations led to a distinguished transition of modernism, consequently devising different outcomes for each modernity. Nevertheless, the theory of 'Multiple modernities" is not presumed to be a closed-ended horizon, but an open closed-ended, holding scopes for

multiple interpretations and switching from unidirectional trajectories of evolution, accompanies a single rationale towards multiple directions. Multiple modernities are assorted, and which, while declaring the actual multipolar realities of the twenty-first century, transcends idea-type modernity.

Modernity has been understood from a Eurocentric point of view mainly because of the prejudice of the 'white man' and his 'burden' to enlighten the rest of the world (Kipling, 1899). The Enlightenment came forward in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, propagating logic and reason and setting aside the hold of the Catholic Church in Europe. Alongside this, the rise of colonialism conquered the 'rest' and 'enlightened' them based on the epistemological realities of European thinkers and philosophers. Therefore, the modernization that has been seen over the last century has reflected a Western discourse since it was the Western pole that dominated the world. However, with the shifting currently seen towards multipolarity, as seen in the rise of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), there will be a multipolar rise in modernity, explained as multiple modernities. Thus, modernity still matters when seen through the lens of multiple as the rise of regions in their fashion: China with nationalism and cooperation or India centered around Hinduism.

In addition, one of the most significant elements in the discourse on modernity was the emphasis on the ongoing conflict between more "traditional" segments of society and the so-called modern centers or sectors that emerged within them. There was also an underlying contradiction between modernity's culture and the modern "rational" model of the Enlightenment, which emerged as dominant in some times and places while others were perceived as embodying the more "genuine" cultural traditions of particular societies. While modernity's cultural program, as it emerged in the West, served as the initial common denominator, more recent developments have seen a variety of cultural and social forms that go far beyond the very homogenizing elements of the original version. These events all point to the emergence of various modernities, or diverse interpretations of modernity, and, most importantly, to attempts to "de-Westernize," stripping the West of its hegemony over modernity.

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