Gandhi's Challenge to Modernization Theories

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In the previous chapter, we have discussed how the theories of nationalism have been slowly incorporated into the theories of modernization and nation-building. We have seen the inter-relation between nationalism and modernization, and, how in the process of nation-building, the political community undergoes radical changes. Over and above, it has been pointed out that, in the third world countries, the attainment of national sovereignty at once places on the nationalist leaders the responsibility of rapid modernizatin of their societies. As a result, the nation building and modernizing tasks have to be borne con-currently. In so far as the nationalist movements and nationalist leadership are able to face the responsibility, and in so far as their ideologies and goals are congruent with the needs of modernization, there is rapid development. But if the nationalist leaders miss this message of history they often act as impediments both to nationalism and modernization. Thus the real test of third world nationalism and nationalist leadership and ideologies lies not only on charismatic or mobilizing potential of leadership and ideology but on their ability to provide an adequate programme for modernization. This is so because in the third world mobilized during the nationalist movements. Nationalist movements, at one point or another, lead to very fast politicization. And the heightening of political activities often strengthens backward looking and obscurantist ideologies which try to resist the modernizing forces. The solidarity that is built during the national struggle thus breaks down in the face of diametrically opposite currents. Thus the roots of the tension in the post-independence period lie often in the ideologies of nationalist movements and orientations of the dominant leaders. Academicians interested in the study of modernization have, therefore, been interested also in the study of

nationalist movements and leadership. And as we shall see, references to Gandhi and Indian national movement are quite frequent in the literature on modernization and nation building.

The interest in Gandhi in the modernizing literature springs from his long involvement in the freedom movement, and the apparently contradictory nature of his leadership. Two sets of questions are generally posed. What was Gandhi's role in the Indian national movement as a modernizing movement? And, does he have any continuing relevance in Indian modernization, or, for that matter, in modernizing movements in the colonial countries in general? As regards the first question, there are ample opportunities for perfecting one's understanding by closely following Gandhian Movements and action programmes. As regards the second, there are some difficulties in following the same approach. For Gandhi did not live long after Indian independence. Thus, it is only a matter of conjecture how Gandhi would have visualized the problems of Indian modernization led and controlled by an indigenous political authority. But generally it has been felt that the corpus of ideas that Gandhi has left behind, and which slowly developed and crystallized during his involvement in the freedom movement, provide enough material for the construction of his philosophical and sociological attitude towards Indian modernization.

However, Gandhi's assessment from the point of view of modernization is characterised by a high degree of disagreement. The origin of this disagreement is more conceptual than factual. Here we propose to make a close scrutiny of these writings because while they provide an insight into the complexities of Indian modernization they also in a way highlight the inadequacy of the different models of modernization which inform these studies.

Let us first take up a liberal modernizing assessment which assumes a dichotomous classification of tradition and modernity and transitional phase connecting the two. It is best illustrated in the writings of S.P. Aiyar. Aiyar holds Gandhi and his movements responsible for the confusions generated during the closing period of Indian freedom movement. He also makes Gandhi responsible for most of the malaise in the Indian society and polity today. He accepts Gandhi';s remarkable role in Indian politics but does not find any novelty in his techniques.' Aiyar pins his faith on liberal constitutionalism as the correct path of Indian political modernization. Gandhi deviated from this path, and only after his death could the values of liberalism be enshrined in the

Indian constitution. According to him, the limitations of Gandhi's views are more apparent now that India has to modernize and modernize fast.

Ajyar views Gandhi as the representation of the backlash of the traditional forces. Not either a political thinker, or a philosopher, Gandhi was concerned more with the immediate social and political problems of the day than with the long term reconstruction of Indian society. "Modernization-the crux of development so far as India and the underdeveloped world is concerned-enters nowhere in his social thinking." He was skeptical about the rational and productive use of wealth. He failed to understand the silent revolution that industrialization was bringing into India. He was never at peace with the machine and contradicted himself time and again about the necessary of introducing machines in India. He held very queer ideas about those modern facilities without which there can be no modern civilization.

Gandhi's relation to Indian tradition seems amenable to two alternative assessments. Thus while Kothari views Gandhi as an 'outsider', Yogendra Singh finds Gandhi's link with a long tradition of orthogenetic response to the need of Hindu social reforms. While Subrahmanian identifies in Gandhi another split westernized personality, Kothari views Gandhi as one completely at ease with himself- a position to which Rudolphs would have their sympathies.

Again Gandhi's approach to politics has generally been identified as a version of 'populism', but as regards its implications there is not much unanimity. Matossian finds in it a reaction of the assaulted individual against the disturbing process of modernization initiated by the West-a tension between archaism and futurism, and an utopianism originating in the ideology of delayed industrialization. Worsely and Wertheim find in it the characteristic reaction of a social situation where small peasant economy still exists and where rural class antagonisms are not yet open and sharp, but at the same time where all the classes bear a deep resentment against foreign oppression. Worsely, however, points out that though Gandhi involved the masses in the freedom struggle, he also restrained them from realizing their goal. The structural contradictions that came as consequence of British imperialist penetration in Indian economy which led to a peculiar coexistence of pre-capitalism and highly developed capitalism, as Wertheim has put it, should also

be taken into consideraiton. The Indian situation may not be adeuately explained in terms of India's own culture and tradition alone.

To open hese questions is to look for a new approach towards third-world modernization. Lately, attention has been drawn towards Marxism in this respect. And indeed Marx not only analysed the process of social transformation in Europe but also tied to understand the impact of colonialism on pre capitalist social formations like India. Lenin took a lively interest in developing a strategy towards anti-colonial nationalism. It would therefore, be worthwhile to explore the Marxist tradition of thinking in this respect. In doing so we shall follow the same procedure as we have done with respect to theories of modernization in western sociology and political science. First we shall work out a Marxist perspective towards the question of modernization and nationalism and then proceed to see how it has been applied with regard to Indian national movement and Gandhi.

References:

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