



▲ The architects of modern India

Has Western Modernity Touched India?

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BY LANCY LOBO

In the light of BJP becoming the dominant party one is constrained to ask the questions, "Has the western modernity project affected India in the last 70 years of Independence"? Has the indigenous and the modern interacted at all? If so where and how?

Before Independence there were three Presidencies under the British, viz., Madras Presidency, Calcutta Presidency, and Bombay Presidency. In these presidencies the impact of the British was seen through architecture, colleges and schools, railways, telegraphs, administrative service and so on. The architecture of government buildings, railway stations, General Post offices, hospitals, courts, colleges, cantonments, hill stations etc. was remarkably alien. One comes across for instance in the Bombay Presidency, the Gateway of India, Victoria Terminus, Churchgate, so also in Madras Presidency and Calcutta Presidency one finds similar buildings. There were Presidency colleges in each Presidency.

It is in these three Presidencies that the impact of modernity was greatest as compared to the rest of India. Macaulayism has been defined as “the conscious policy of liquidating indigenous culture through the planned substitution of the alien culture of a colonizing power via the education system. The term is derived from the name of British politician Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859), an individual who was instrumental in the introduction of English as the medium of instruction for higher education in India”.

Incidentally the RSS and Hindutva has Macaulayism in the list of five of its enemies, the others being Marxism, Materialism, Missionaries, and Muslims, all beginning with Ms. Education was the singular means of ushering western modernity in these Presidencies. In the rest of India a few princes replicated western English education such as Baroda.

Impact of Western Modernity in India

The architects of modern India, we may single out three, Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar had differing views, attitudes and approaches to western modernity. Gandhi was not so enamoured of western modernity. He went in for glorifying and reviving village republics, village industries; while Ambedkar was a product of western modernity which he used to fight caste discrimination and equality of rights; it was Nehru who could be attributed to imposing western modernity on independent India. Nehru

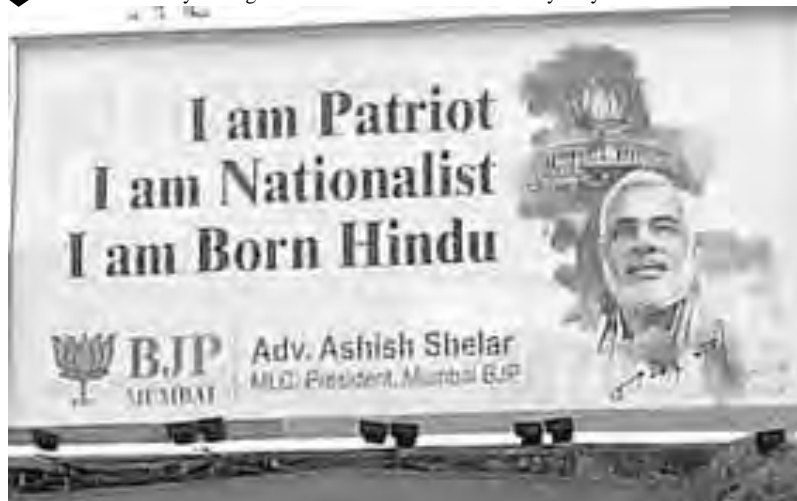
ruled for over 17 years as prime minister of the country.

Nehruvian vision of modernity for India consisted of seven features: National unity, Parliamentary democracy, Industrialization, Socialism, Cultivating scientific temper, Secularism and Non-alignment. One may say the Nehruvian paradigm for the idea of India he strove to create consisted of inclusivism; introducing democratic institutions such as a fair judiciary; growth of economy through large-scale industrialization in a predominantly agricultural country knowing that agriculture alone would not support the millions; socialism meaning welfare of all rather than a few elite; cultivating scientific temper through modern education and scientific research; secularism i.e., equal respect to all religions; and finally non-alignment, viz., neutrality from super powers.

Now to what extent have Nehru’s efforts and those of his Congress Party or its different versions under leaders after him succeeded in realizing the seven features in India? Has the Nehruvian paradigm remained successful with a few Indians as mentioned earlier in the three Presidencies and had little or least impact on the rest of India?

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The answer to that apparently is western modernity has had a superficial impact on the whole of India. These 70 years of post-independent experiment in secularism, in cultivating a scientific temper, socialism, industrialization, parliamentary democracy and national unity has been largely a mirage. The rise of BJP proves it.

In the Freedom movement of India there were two strands interwoven, the Hindu nationalism and Indian nationalism. Indian nationalism

gained prominence and the enlightened members of the Constituent Assembly firmly side-tracked Hindu nationalism. Though it was suppressed it had remained underground and operated in subtle ways and today it is known as full blown Hindutva.

Under the BJP buttressed by the Sangh Parivar cadre (RSS the brain, VHP the religious wing; Bajrang Dal its muscle and a host of organisations trying to cater to all social and economic categories) have

under Modi been successful in selling an idea of India that is exclusive (only for Hindus); disregarding or distorting the parliamentary institutions; emphasis on the private or corporate sector; not welfare of all (merely a rhetoric) but of a few; selling myth as science or history; calling back primordial relations rather than modern citizenship; and doing away with non-alignment.

Situation in 1947 and in 2017

The situation today is as it was in 1947. Should this country go the way Pakistan did? Pakistan for Muslims and India only for Hindus. That even after 70 years of this modernity experiment we should go back to square one shows that Macaulayism has a limited impact. It has not succeeded in uprooting indigenous culture or its categories of space and time. Independence and modern institutions had little impact on India as a whole.

One may ask, with the rule of law (giving the mob lynching powers), which at the moment prevails in India is everyone equal before the law; does law take its course; what about the planned communal riots for electoral gains, vandalizing sacred symbols of religions, discrediting those that uplift the downtrodden attributing the conversion motive to them; exclusion of minorities and their rights; don't all these create an ambience of fear?

Isn't all this merely glorifying the past and reintroducing select religious knowledge to be real knowledge in

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Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: Old wine in a new bottle



educational institutions; rather than investing on fundamental science, focus on applied skill based sciences; rounding up Macaulay and replacing him with Vedic knowledge.

Market Driven Modernity

One can also argue against the above saying India is modern from the way educated Indians are going abroad, Indian origin guys doing very well in western countries and defeating them in their own games, all this is because of how modern we are.

However this modernity appears to be only a market driven modernity. Our infrastructures are modern but not our use of them. There is little civic sense in maintaining cleanliness, orderliness despite Swachh Bharat! We look modern in diet, dress and in some cases demeanour. We have multispecialty hospitals, air conditioned schools and colleges. Privatization of education and health is nothing but how the market has captured these two important spheres that catered to the masses. The ordinary folks cannot afford these schools or hospitals any longer. Education mafias and health mafias are proliferating these days. The government health and education system has broken down.

There seems to be a conspiracy to replace the Constitution with Manusmriti. Restore upper castes or elites of other social categories to the upper rungs of the vertical ladder with power and privileges taking advantage of market driven modernity.



However, India is far too varied, geographically, economically, culturally, religiously and in a linguistic manner. Hindutva has certainly gained since 2002. To a small extent the reason may be the failure of left and secular parties and to generate and distribute national wealth. Yet one cannot fault the left and secular parties, as wealth distribution in a highly unequal society takes time.

Conclusion

The rise of Dalit consciousness, combined with the gains made by the Mandal castes and of the Muslim and Christian communities, has produced a strong reactionary current in the upper castes. This has been aided by the large presence of the rich Hindu diaspora in Western countries. Most non-resident Indians tend to be highly biased against Muslims and Christians. This seems odd as most have achieved wealth in Christian countries and many

have been educated in Christian schools in India.

Yet one can be optimistic that the India of Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar and a whole host of extra ordinary liberal revolutionaries and patriots will survive. Muslims, Christians and Dalits may constitute at least one third of India's population. Their political consciousness is high. Their leadership is attuned to the world outside. The RSS just cannot put these communities to the bottom of the social structure. More important can the RSS ignore the reactions of the Christian and Muslim countries? See the way Myanmar has become an untouchable, even though it is headed by a Nobel Peace prize winner. The world just cannot stand their treatment of Rohingyas. Muslims, Dalits and Christians must focus on quality education, wealth generation and social uplift of the poorest among their communities. That is the best way to fight the RSS hatred.

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