

MODERNITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE : A POPULIST PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract: *Populism, as an ideology and as a movement, incorporates into their modernizing vision the mass organizations, enrolling millions of common working classes. Various types of socialist, radical, nationalist, populist movements build their modern systems on labour, peasant and other mass organizations. The populism took extraordinary strides toward making mass organizations of farmers and labourers as the mainspring of their vision of social reconstruction. The populists want an active government to ensure fair access to the benefits of modernity for them. They seek to reshape the government as an agency of the majority rather than of the corporate and wealthy minority. A federal income tax on high incomes was part of the populist goal of checking the concentration of wealth and spreading the abundance of farm and factory to those who produce it. This is the reason why so much of the populist imaginations focused on publicly owned and subsidized systems of postal delivery, telecommunication, railway and the perfection of the public system of education. Modern economic relations and modern sensibilities shape their imaginations and the quality of life. This article attempts to elaborate the modern conditions which shape the populist epistemology, ideology and struggle for a better quality of life.*

Key Words: *Populism, People, Modernity, Redistribution of wealth, Ideology*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Modernity arises out of the renaissance, the scientific revolution and the European events of the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries that marked a radical transformation of the artistic and literary world and the world of inquiry and knowledge respectively. It is the historical condition that characterizes modern societies, cultures and people with better quality of life. And also modernity refers to a period marked by a questioning or rejection of tradition; the prioritization of individualism, freedom and formal equality; faith in inevitable social, scientific and technological progress and human perfectibility, rationalization and professionalization; a movement from agrarianism towards populism and the market economy; a movement towards industrialization, urbanization and secularization; the development of the nation-state and its constituent institutions, like representative democracy, public education, modern bureaucracy.

The idea of modernity evokes the development of society and industrialisation, as well as the establishment of nation states and the growth of regional disparity in the world system. The period has witnessed a host of social and cultural transformation. Social and economic life patterns are changing the quality of life, education, structured dependencies or social exclusion resulting from policy decisions. Progress is reflected in the tendency to interpret economic, social and political change in terms of 'modernization' and 'development'. The political and social upheavals, through which advanced industrial societies came into existence, have, for instance, often been described as a process of modernization. To be 'modern' means not only being contemporary, being 'of the present', but also implies an advance in relation to the past, a movement away from the 'old fashioned' or 'out of date'. Political modernization is usually thought to involve the emergence of constitutional government, the safeguarding of civil liberties and the extension of democratic rights.

2. MODERNITY AND SOCIAL POLITICAL IDENTITY:

The rapid development of science and the technical application of scientific knowledge are the impressive indications of the progress of modern quality of life. The discovery of methods of preserving food, the invention of manifold implements of the chase and of tools for manufacture; of clothing, shelter, and utensils for everyday life; the discovery of agriculture and the association with animals that led to their domestication; the substitution of metals for stone, bone, and wood; all these are rungs on the long ladder that led to our modern inventions, which are now being added to life patterns overwhelmingly and rapidly. The crude observation of nature taught humans many simple facts – the forms and habits of animals and plants, the courses of the heavenly bodies, the changes of weather and the useful properties of materials, of fire and water. A long and difficult step was taken when the acquired knowledge was first systematized and conscious inquiry was attempted to expand the boundaries of knowledge. In early times, imagination was drawn upon to supply the causal links between the phenomena of nature, or to give teleological explanations that

satisfied the mind. Gradually the domain for the play of imagination has been restricted and the serious attempt is being made to subject imaginary and hypothesis to the close scrutiny of observation. We may recognize progress in a definite direction in the development of invention and knowledge. If we should value a society entirely on the basis of its technical and scientific achievements it would be easy to establish a line of progress, which although not uniform, leads from simplicity to complexity (Boas 1962: 202-245).

The modern society has emerged in the writings of social theorists and philosophers in the past several decades. Karl Marx and Max Weber are often identified as the fathers of the theory of modernity. Marx concerned himself with the new forms of political identity created by modernity and the possibility of forming a collective will. But according to Weber's understanding of the effects of modernity on the individual and the new forms of organization, modernity entails new possibilities for the expression of human subjectivity in the forms of social interaction that are not entirely a product of tradition. This new sense of freedom associated with modernity included awareness and a novel experience of time. For the modern individual, time involves process and duration. It also involves a sense of dynamic change that turns attention to the future rather than to the past. The modern individual is aware of himself not only as an individual who is a creator of self and society, but also as an individual with a future. This experience together with its ideological expression in social theories and political tracts varies according to social class. The concept of modernity used in social theory and the concept of modernism used to describe movements in the arts and literature have a common basis. Both focus on the new sense of individuality, future orientation, creative possibility and collective movement. The creation of a modern society is based on a new balance between the individual and the collective. The political parties and other voluntary organizations are important in mediating between the individual and the collective and the formation of mass movement. The modern nation-state, in which these political parties are organized, formed the framework and the object of this new modern political identity. The state was another term for the reorganization of political life. It constituted a new balance between individual freedom and collective responsibility and was the ultimate object of individual and collective political identity. Recognizing oneself as a member of a nation and having a sense of national identity is the highest form of political identity for the modern political socialization. It is also about the question of how to reconstitute the political identity of the modern individual into a national identity (Misa 2003: 40-50).

The central issue is the reorganization of modern political identity and the formation of political interests in modern society. Political identity is almost always associated with a group affiliation and describes the ways in which being a member of a group might express specific political opinions and attitudes. Unequal distribution of political resources also yields varying capacities to create and shape identities. Until quite recently, this inequality of political power was institutionally entrenched. In ancient times, political power was mostly held by monarchs or aristocrats who passed on the right of rules to their sons. With the rise of democracy, the opportunity to compete for political office became available to more people. In turn, the right to vote gave citizens a voice, albeit an indirect one, in the way laws and policies were crafted and hence in the way mores and identities came to be formed (Thiele 2002: 66-69).

3. MODERNITY AND POPULISM – QUALITY OF LIFE:

Populism is commonly defined as the political doctrine that supports the rights and powers of the common people in their struggle with the privileged elite. It is a claim for equality of political power and universal participation for the common people. It may promise widely –demand for food, housing, employment, basic social services and redistribution of wealth. Populism, as an ideology and as a movement, incorporated mass organizations of common working class people into their modernizing vision (Laclau 1977:144-145). Various types of socialist, radical, nationalist, populists built their modern systems on labour, peasant, and other mass organizations. The populists took extraordinary strides toward making mass organizations of farmers and labourers as the mainspring of their vision of social reconstruction. The populist movement contained too many diverse and contradictory elements to speak of a single populist social blueprint. The populist leaders counted among the high modernists of their day, they are of a special type. Unlike the urban movements of the early twentieth century, rural populism grew from rural roots. Populism embodied a remarkable intellectual enterprise. It is known as a reading party and as writing and talking party. These roots were evident in the network of men and women that sustained the movement through system of lectures and newspapers and brought a modernizing vision of farmers' homes and meeting lodges. Where the country life movement looked to improve the lot of others, the populist were modernizers from within. They spoke in the language of self-help and sought improvements on the principle of self-activation (Postal 2007: 4-5).

Modernity can be understood in a double sense: both as a condition or environment and as a disposition or striving. Modern economic relations shaped their lives and they express modern sensibilities, their imaginations and the quality of life. The starting point of the modern condition involved the rise of a world market, making production and consumption increasingly international and cosmopolitan. Populist country is a commercial environment, bound by global markets. It was an environment of boom and bust, which stretched across most of a continent of commodity farming, mining, railroads, and urban centres. Modernity also implied a particular kind of people with particular types of strivings. Modern men and women of all classes yearn for and demand change. They delight in mobility, thrive on renewal and look forward to future developments in their conditions of life and their relations with their fellow men.

The populist were just this kind of people. They sought to improve their domestic economic and their national government. People's basic needs would include food, shelter, health and safety as survival needs; education, employment and possible form of industrialization as development needs and wealth, security and growth as perceived needs (Postal 2007: 7-9).

The populist hoped to take the materials at hand – the latest technologies and organizational systems and use them to rationalize markets and regulate and centralize the channels of commerce and finance. Their vision involved a complex and dynamic combination of public and private, co-operative and corporate, municipal and nationalized property relations. The populist world was too commercially and intellectually dynamic to resemble a traditional society. The men and women of the populist movement were modern people. The term modern does not mean 'good'. Nor is it a value judgement across the political spectrum from right to left. Nor does it imply that all rural people shared the populist modern sensibility. On the contrary, the populist understands that the transformations they sought required the uprooting of ignorance, inertia, and force of habit. Across much of rural territory, populism formed a unique social movement that represented a distinctly modernizing impulse (Postal 2007: 9-10).

The populist wanted an active government to ensure fair access to the benefits of all modernity. Populist sought to reshape government as an agency of the majority rather than of the corporate and wealthy minority. A federal income tax on high incomes was part of the populist goal of checking the concentration of wealth and spreading the abundance of farm and factory to those who produce it. But there was a reason why so much of the populist imagination focused on publicly owned and subsidized systems of postal delivery, telecommunication, railways, and the perfection of the public system of education. Populist is actually aware of the new condition in which they live. Their conceptions of government and politics took inspiration from the new materials at hand, including the emerging possibilities offered by combination, centralization, bureaucracy, and state-centred economics. The populists pay homage to the democracy and to their political ancestors. But there is a new type of political ideal, a majoritarian vision shaped by and in service to the commercial, managerial, and antiparty requirements of business politics. The postal service is a model for the populist vision of government as business. The postal subsidy providing free delivery within county limits also played a role in rural politics by augmenting the influence of small newspapers in remote districts out of reach of the railways. The postal system served as a political and intellectual lifeline for modern life. Modern economic relations and modern sensibilities shape their imaginations and the quality of life. The starting point of the modern condition involved the rise of a world market, making production and consumption increasingly international and cosmopolitan (Postal 2007: 144-145).

According to Eric Foner, modernity "involves such basic changes in the structure of a society as rapid economic development, urbanization, industrialization, the creation of an integrated national economic and political structure, and generally, the spread of market-oriented capitalist economic relations and mental attitudes viewing continuous social change as natural and desirable" (Postal 2007: 293).

Economic development is the process by which a nation improves the economic, political, and social well-being of its people. It increases the application of technology to raise a nation's standard of living, to free its population from a life of subsistence agriculture, to improve health and health-care, and to effectively join the world commercial community that is driven by technology. Urbanization is inevitable due to technological advances and increasing population. Living in a rural area provides less job opportunities. Farming is one of the major forms of income in rural areas. The unpredictable nature of environmental factors, such as rain and drought, leads to fluctuating income. The standard of living is difficult to improve; therefore families opt to move to urban areas. There is a greater variety of jobs in cities. Lack of space in rural areas due to a growing population also leads to urbanization. Urbanization is a process that is occurring in every part of world inhabited by people. It has led to a greater quality of life for many, but it also has its challenges. It involves not only movement from villages to cities and change from agricultural occupation to business, trade, service and professional. It is a way of life. It reflects an organization of society in terms of a complex division of labour, high levels of technology, high mobility, interdependence of its members in fulfilling economic functions and impersonality in social relations (Ahuja 1997: 282-285). Industrialization is the period of social and economic change that transforms a human group from an agrarian society into an industrial one, involving the extensive reorganisation of an economy for the purpose of manufacturing. In modern period, the advantages of industrialization are employment opportunity, affordable price, development of skill, utilization of resources, and earning of foreign currency. Market is an important factor in modern society. The market has usually been regarded as the central feature of a capitalist economy.

4. MODERNITY AND DEMOCRACY – QUALITY OF LIFE

The democracy of the modern world is a representative democracy. It is also known as indirect democracy, where people through the process of elections elect their candidates who represent the view of their constituency for a constitutionally stipulated period of time. The representatives act as a link between the people and the government, and are considered as most suitable for mass democracy of today. Democracy means the participation by people generally in the control of the conditions under which they live. Democracy is part of the great process of men's

development from savagery to civilization and from lower to higher stages of civilization (Subrata Mukherjee 2005: 1-18).

Democracy means government by those who have the greatest concern for and the greatest awareness of the interest and rights of the people generally. The natural self-interest of people is the best security against political action that is oppressive or tolerant of oppression. All men just as they have equal rights to a voice in government because they have equal stakes in the justice and efficiency of government action. The utilitarian argument for democracy, that in so far as governments promote human welfare through the efficient and equitable discharge of the primary political functions – furnishing protection from internal and external enemies, settling disputes, providing the means of education, and supplying certain other essential and common needs of democratic government. It is also content that in certain function, as in alleviating poverty and removing traditional economic and social injustices, they have been more prompt and thorough going than other forms of government (Coker 1957: 291-294).

An industrial democracy should be set up within, or parallel to, political democracy. Workers should be enabled to acquire not merely a more adequate share in the products of the joint labours of their employers and themselves but also a more effective voice in managing the combined efforts. The familiar trade union tactics of strikes and collective bargaining accomplishes this end in some measure, but the workers should be brought into a more regular and positive participation in the control of industry. There are numerous plans for having the employees of an industry choose their representatives to meet with representatives of the employers for the purpose of settling grievance and discussing working conditions (Coker 1957: 295-301). Industrial democracy largely implies workers' involvement and participation in the decision-making process. It is argued that this policy infuses a sense of responsibility among workers, creates greater understanding between the management and workers, prevents industrial conflicts, and raises the productivity of labour.

In the 21st century, democracy has become such a popular method of reaching decisions that its application has gone beyond politics to other areas such as entertainment, food and fashion, consumerism, urban planning, education, art, literature, science and technology. The argument suggests that applying a populist or market-driven approach to art and literature means that innovative creative work does not go unpublished or unproduced. In education, the argument is that essential but more difficult studies are not undertaken. Science, as a truth based discipline, is particularly corrupted by the idea that the correct conclusion can be arrived at by popular vote. However, more recently, theorists have also advanced the concept of epistemic democracy to assert that democracy actually does a good job of tracking the truth.

5. CONCLUSION:

Modernity is thus, a process which helps a rapid change from of traditional notions and norms. It also helps the society to utilize all its resources for the purpose development and the society becomes modern from all points of view – social, economic, cultural, political, intellectual, religious, psychological and so on.

I have attempted to show how the development of modernity has created the grounds for the emergence of modern populist movements and how. They have been influenced by modernity. I have also tried to show how populist movements are a central part of what we mean by modernity and how they have influenced our understanding of modernity.

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