

Unit 5

Modernisation

Contents

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Understanding Modernisation
- 5.3 Giddens's Theory of Modernity
- 5.4 Decline of the Paradigm
- 5.5 Postmodernism
- 5.6 The Debate
- 5.7 Modernisation and Globalisation
- 5.8 Conclusion
- 5.9 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand the concept of modernisation;
- critically discuss the contemporary theories of modernity; and
- explain how modernity is cross-linked with development.

5.1 Introduction

Through the four units of Block 1 we have already acquired a basic understanding of the concept and process of development and other related concepts. We also understood that there are varied perceptions about the concepts and process of development and that these perceptions are not static but keep on changing. Although we did refer to some of these perceptions in Block 1, in the present Block (Block II), we will be dealing with them in greater detail. Let us start with modernisation.

The concept of modernisation emerged as the response of the western social science to the many challenges faced by the Third World. With the process of political decolonisation following the Second World War, the new nations were in a hurry to launch massive programmes of economic development and technical change. The need for developing new paradigms to shape and order their development programme was strongly felt. Modernisation was one such formulation which held out considerable promise.

In this unit, we explore the concept of development in the context of modernisation. At the outset we discuss the notion of modernisation as a paradigm in sociological literature, particularly in the writings of Giddens. The purpose here is to develop an understanding of modernisation theory and then go on to its criticism and emergence of postmodernism as a paradigm. In the course of tracing this trajectory we explore the many dimensions of development that acquire importance at different stages.

5.2 Understanding Modernisation

Modernity may be understood as the common behavioral system that is historically associated with the urban, industrial, and literate and participant societies of Western Europe and North America. It is characterised by a rational and scientific world-view, growth and the ever increasing application of science and technology, which is coupled with the continuous adaptation of the institutions of society to the imperatives of the world-view and the emerging technological ethos.

Box 5.1: Concept of Modernity

Modernity involves the rise of modern society (secularised societies with an institutional separation of the state from civil society, a much greater degree of social and technical division of labour, and the formation of nation-states uniting cultural and political borders), a rationalistic epistemology, and an individualistic and objectivistic ontology" (Torfing 1999: 303).

A series of societal changes are implicit in the process of modernisation. Agrarian societies are characterised by the predominance of ascriptive, particularistic and diffused patterns; they have stable local groups and limited spatial mobility. Occupational differentiation is relatively simple and stable; and the stratification system is deferential and has a diffused impact. The modern industrial society is characterised by the predominance of universalistic, specific and achievement norms; a high degree of mobility; a developed occupational system relatively insulated from other social structures; a class system often based on achievement; and the presence of functionally specific, non-ascriptive structures and associations. Historically evolved institutions continuously adapt themselves to the changes dictated by the phenomenal increase in the human knowledge that has resulted from the control humanity has over its environment. Modernisation theory does not clearly spell out its distributive objectives. The emergence of an implicit egalitarian and participative ethos does, however, indicate the narrowing of social gaps and promotion of greater equality as desirable ends.

Modernisation, as a form of cultural response, involves attributes which are basically universalistic and evolutionary; they are pan-humanistic, trans-ethnic and non-ideological (Singh 1961). The essential attribute of modernisation is rationality. Rationality transforms thought processes at the level of the individual and in the process permeates the entire institutional framework of society. Events and situations are understood in terms of cause and effects. Strategies of action are determined by careful means-ends calculations. Rationality begins to characterise all forms of human interaction and enters into people's vision of a new future as well as into their strivings for the attainment of the objectives they set for themselves. The concomitant structural changes and value shifts bring about fundamental changes in the entire cultural ethos.

Box 5.2: Meaning of Rationality

The term rationality denotes thought and action which are conscious in accord with the rules of logic and empirical knowledge, where objectives are coherent, mutually consistent and achieved by the most appropriate means.

The conviction that rationality, or reason, is the distinctive characteristic of human beings has made it a central theme in western philosophy for over two thousand years. In so far as this has led to an over-estimation of the place and power of reason in human society, it has been criticised as the doctrine of rationalism.

Max Weber, especially in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1921, has been responsible for the most extensive use of the term in sociology. He classifies all action into four types : purposively rational, ('Zweckrational') action, where means are correctly chosen to obtain ends; value rational ('Wertrational') where action is in accord with conscious value standards; affectual; and traditional; the last two types being regarded as deviations from rational action" (Albrow 1968: 154).

In his essay *The Change to Change: Modernisation, Development, and Politics* Huntington (1976: 30-31), has identified the following characteristics of the modernisation process.

- i) Modernisation, and by implication development, is a revolutionary process. Efforts are made to transform rural agrarian cultures into urban industrial

cultures. This is what Alvin Toffler (1980) would describe as the move from the first wave to the second wave.

- ii) The process of both modernisation and development are complex and multidimensional with a series of cognitive, behavioral and institutional modifications and restructuring.
- iii) Both are systemic processes since variation in one dimension produces important co-variations in other dimensions.
- iv) They are global processes.
- v) They are lengthy processes.
- vi) Movement towards the goals of modernisation and development takes place through identifiable phases and sub-phases.
- vii) They are homogenising processes.
- viii) Except temporary breakdowns, both are irreversible processes.
- ix) They are progressive processes. In the long run they contribute to human well-being, both culturally and materially.

Reflection and Action 5.1

What do you understand by modernisation?

Modernisation theory evolved from two ideas about social change: the conception of traditional vs. modern societies, and positivism that viewed development as societal evolution in progressive stages of growth (Deutsch 1961; Rostow 1960). Concern with development emerged in the 1940s as a fallout of the process of decolonisation and reconstruction after the Second World War against the backdrop of the Cold War. Developing countries could evolve the traditional society by rationalising them through a linear process in the course of which they could “evolve” into becoming a country in a modern and developed society. The evolutionary theory of development identified the different stages, variables and processes through which a society develops. Positivist evolution implied that all societies would pass through the same set of stages from traditional to modern society that the western society had passed. These stages were: (i) the traditional society; (ii) preconditions for take-off; (iii) take-off; (iv) the drive to maturity; and (v) the age of high mass consumption. The progression of society through these stages of modernisation is better known as Rostow’s stage theory (for more details refer unit 2 of this course).

Modernisation theory took development into a more inter-disciplinary realm. It advocated social and institutional change to facilitate economic transformation. It was through theorisation on modernity that sociologists made their first foray into development studies.

Discussion on modernity in the present day centers on “multiple modernities.” The notion of multiple modernity expounded by Eisenstadt explains that modernity in the West has brought up consequences that have a wide bearing across the world. These consequences, however, have not resulted from the global transplanting of the western mode of modernity, but are modern situations of various types and characteristics in various non – western countries. Eisenstadt, (1996: 1-2) one of the major advocates of this idea, said, “The actual developments in modernising societies have refuted the homogenising and hegemonic assumptions of this western programme of modernity. While a general trend towards structural differentiation developed across a wide range of institutions in most of these societies in family life, economic and political structures, urbanisation, modern education, mass communication and individualistic orientation – the ways in which these arenas were defined and organised varied greatly, in different periods of their

development, giving rise to multiple institutional and ideological patterns". He thought that the best way of explaining modern society and the history of modernity is to regard it as "a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs".

Through the notion of multiple modernities Eisenstadt, however, does not mean only to propose a new description or narrative of the history of modernity. He argues that modernity and westernisation are not identical. His notion of multiple modernity is not only descriptive but also normative, though in a negative sense. Diffused benefits which leave a large section of humankind untouched, homogenisation in the face of rising ethnicity and pluralities of culture consciousness, the social cost and cultural erosion implicit in the process pose serious concerns.

Following Parsons's well-known "pattern variables", modernisation assumes that status is determined by achievement rather than ascriptive criteria; patterns of interaction are governed by universalistic rather than particularistic norms; expectations and obligations in the system of role relationship acquire greater specificity and replace the diffuse system that characterised the traditional order. Units of society tend to be more specialised and self-sufficient. There is increasing evidence of role differentiation, solidarity and integration. Eisenstadt (1996) suggested that modern society emerges as a consensual mass society and crystallises as a nation-state. Modernised societies operate through institutional structures that are capable of continuously absorbing the changes that are inherent in the process of modernisation. A series of organisations that are complex and differentiated, relatively self-sufficient and functionally specific seek to discharge functions in diverse and disparate fields. Simultaneously, the roles of family and kinship based organisations get more narrowly defined. Government and associated units - the bureaucracy, economic and financial institutions, armed forces and organisations dealing with specific functional areas such as education, health, housing, public transport and recreation assume increasingly important roles.

Box 5.3: Role of the Government in Modernisation

By and large, the government is vested with an important role in modernising the country and planning the economy. In the words of Wilber and Jameson (1988: 9),

"The government must intervene in the economy to offset the anti-development impact of the two types of obstacles to development. On the side of non-rational behaviour, the government can attempt to convince its citizens of the need for 'modernisation' while, at the same time, substituting its own entrepreneurial ability and knowledge to fill that vacuum. On the side of markets, the government can again offset the difficulties through economic planning. By developing a coherent overview of the economy through the various means at its disposal, the orthodox result of growth in income can be attained".

5.3 Giddens's Theory of Modernity

Recent social changes have led to debates over the very nature of the contemporary social world. There is a debate between those who continue to see contemporary society as a modern world and those who argue that a substantial change has taken place in recent years and that we have moved into a new, postmodern world. Most of the classical sociologists were engaged in an analysis and critique of modern society which is clear in the works of Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel. As we move into the 21st century, it is obvious that today's world is a very different place. The issue is whether the changes in the world are modest and continuous with those associated with modernity or are so dramatic and discontinuous that the contemporary world is better described by a new term, "postmodern."

A host of social changes are fundamentally altering our world, and traditional “class politics” and faith in progress are being replaced by “identity politics” and “new” social movements such as feminism, gay liberation, ecologism, ethnic revivalism, religious neofundamentalism” (Tucker Jr 1998: 126). These changes have brought with them a challenge to the “philosophical discourse of modernity”. The conceptual framework of social science and the historical legacy of Enlightenment rationality have been challenged by new postmodern knowledge, of which contends that reason is a form of illegitimate power that marginalises and excludes cultural vocabularies that do not conform to its categories.

Giddens said that in order to understand and conceptualise contemporary society, we need a new sociological theory capable of grasping its complexity. He describes the modern world as a “juggernaut”. Modernity in the form of a juggernaut is extremely dynamic, it is a “runaway world” with great leaps in the pace, scope and profoundness of change over prior systems (Ritzer 2000 : 424). Giddens defines modernity in terms of four basic institutions. The first is capitalism, characterised by commodity production, private ownership of capital, propertyless wage labor and a class system derived from these characteristics. The second is industrialism, which involves the use of inanimate power sources and machinery to produce goods. Industrialism is not restricted to the workplace, and it affects an array of other settings, such as “transportation, communication and domestic life” (Giddens 1990: 56). The third, is surveillance capacities which is defined as “the supervision of the activities of subject populations (mainly, but not exclusively) in the political sphere” (Ibid 1990: 8). The fourth is military power, or the control of the means of violence, including the industrialisation of war. It should be noted that at the macro level, Giddens focuses on the nation-state (rather than the more conventional sociological focus on society), which he sees as radically different from the type of community characteristic of pre-modern society.

According to Giddens, modernity is given dynamism by three essential aspects:

- i) **Time-space separation:** With modernisation, time was standardised. In large part, social interaction does not take place at the same time and in the same place. Relationships with those who are physically absent and increasingly distant become more and more likely. New technological measures also call for expansion of our space which means that we can be in the same space though not necessarily in the same locale. The modern rational organisation, for example, has been able to connect the local and the global in new ways. A modern company can function because it has been possible to break the time-space connection.
- ii) **Disembedding of social systems:** Earlier the institutions and actions of society were embedded in the local community. The condition has changed because social relations are lifted out of the local interaction context by disembedding mechanisms. Giddens distinguishes between two types of disembedding mechanisms which contribute to the development of modern institutions: i) symbolic tokens; and (ii) expert systems. Together these are called abstract systems. Money is an example of a symbolic token. It places time in a bracket as it functions as a means of credit. It represents a value that can be later used to purchase new goods. The standardised value allows transactions to be carried out without actually meeting, thus fracturing the notion of space. New patterns of interaction are created across time and space.

Expert systems are defined as, “systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organise large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today” (Ibid: 27). The most obvious expert systems involve professionals like lawyers and physicians. Consider the following example. In travel by bus one enters a large network of expert

systems including the construction of the bus, roads and the traffic control system. The bus can be taken without possessing knowledge of how these systems are constructed. One only needs the money for the ticket (another expert system). The expert systems also help to move social relations from one given context to another. Such a disembedding mechanism requires a time-space separation.

- iii) **Reflexivity of Modern society:** According to Giddens, reflexivity, the third contributing factor in society's profound process of transformation, is of two forms. The first is a general feature of all human action. The second type of reflexivity is unique to modernity. Modern society is experiencing a reflexivity at both the institutional and personal levels, and this is decisive for the production and change of modern systems and modern forms of social organisation. Giddens defines reflexivity as institutions' and individuals' regular and constant use of knowledge as the conditions for society's organisation and change. The firm undertakes market surveys in order to establish sales strategies; the state conducts censuses in order to establish the tax base. This increased reflexivity is made possible by the development of the network of mass communication. With an expansion of the time-space dimension, the social practices are constantly investigated and changed on the basis of newly acquired information. Today we reflect on tradition and act in accordance with it only if it can be legitimised via reflexivity.

To sum up, Giddens states that modernity's culture of incessant reflexivity creates a post-traditional social world. As modernity spreads throughout the globe, it encourages the rise of expert, abstract systems of knowledge, represented by the social and natural sciences. These expert systems encourage constant change and reflexivity, which separates time and space from their particular context, re-embedding them in new ones. He also views new social movements, centered on a new life politics, as integral to the texture of modern life. He rejects the claim of surpassed modernity and rejects most, if not all, tenets associated with postmodernism.

Reflection and Action 5.2

What are the main features of Giddens's theory of Modernity?

5.4 Decline of the Paradigm

The modernisation approach dominated the social science domain in the West and in several parts of the Third World for a decade and developed most between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s. Towards the end of the 1960s, however, it began to lose appeal. The gap between promise and performance of modernisation was too wide to escape attention. The absence of results generated mass apathy and anger and left the modernising elite confused. In the process, the concept of modernisation got demystified.

It was observed that the paradigm of modernisation sought to transfer technology without effecting necessary institutional changes. Imaginative and systematic efforts were to be directed towards institution building for accomplishing the highly specialised and differentiated tasks implicit in the process of modernisation. The notion of rationality, which was the cornerstone of modernisation paradigm, was itself ambiguous. It is now recognised that rationality can be of different kinds operating at different levels and in different contexts. The explanatory power of the paradigm was limited and the guidelines for action embodied in it were somewhat obscure. It was evasive on the vital issue of the poverty of the masses, especially in the less developed countries. The formulation did not take into account the qualitative changes in the problems that humanity faces. The prospects of modernisation and development against the backdrop of the realities of the contemporary world order were

not clear. Thus the global context of modernity remained unexamined. The notion of ceaseless and limitless modernisation has been challenged powerfully from other quarters, especially by environmentalists and conservationists. Non-renewable natural resources, on which the edifice of modernisation is built, are being rapidly depleted; and adequate, efficient and economic substitutes are not yet in sight. The consequences of environmental pollution and ecological imbalance are dangerous. Many vital questions regarding the desirability and possibility of modernisation remain unanswered. This arrests the search for meaningful alternatives and inhibits reflection and action aimed at appropriate solutions.

5.5 Postmodernism

A major challenge to sociological theories of modernity came from the theoretical position of postmodernism. Postmodernism denies any meaningful continuity in history. It is a new historical epoch that is supposed to have succeeded the modern era or modernity. As Habermas states, postmodernism is akin to "the anarchist wish to explode the continuum of history", demolishing theories of modernity in doing so (Tucker Jr. 1998: 131).

Giddens distinguishes between postmodernism and post-modernity. Postmodernism refers to the recent changes in architecture, literature, art, poetry while post-modernity refers to recent institutional changes in the social world. He finds the latter more important but does not believe that post-modernity theoretically captures the meaning of these social changes. In his view, the contemporary pervasiveness of reflexivity makes useless the distinction between modern and postmodern eras.

For some theorists postmodernism means that we have entered a new, postindustrial world, which problematises old assumptions, including ideals of social progress, the importance of class as a source of social identity and the very idea of a unified self. A new social world requires new knowledge. Postmodernism destabilises contemporary social theory. It values difference, as there are no absolute values that command our allegiance. Postmodernism critiques all limiting assumptions in social and political life, especially those based on rationality that seek to exclude multiple perspectives on the world. It is suspicious of any evolutionary theory and all centralising tendencies and celebrates a diversity of approaches to social life and decentralised social movements.

5.6 The Debate

Giddens shares many of these themes with contemporary sociological theorists such as Habermas, Touraine and Melucci. These authors attempt to grasp the distinctive culture of late modernity that is fragile, ever-changing and different from that which preceded it. Due to the worldwide spread of capitalism, the mass media and industrialism, contemporary society is a global society. More and more people realise that their identities and moral systems can no longer rely on taken-for-granted traditions. With the decline in tradition hence, there has been a rise in reflexivity (Giddens 1990).

These theorists view modernity as an unfinished project and construct a narrative of modernity which culminates in a reformed vision of rationality, universality and evolutionary development. For Giddens, as for these theorists, in the late modern era of highly differentiated and specialised Western societies, conflicts arise in the areas of information and communication. The line between public and private issues becomes blurred. Reflexivity relates self with society in ever changing ways.

Critiquing postmodernism, Giddens and other contemporary sociological theorists reconstruct modernity viewing it as internally complex. Like Weber, they are especially aware of the problems created by a rationality which destroys meaning. Like the postmodernists, they recognise that a major problem of modern culture has been the destructive potential of a rationality that is not sensitive to social and natural contexts. Such a concept of rationality also undermines the conditions of self-government, largely by translating social questions into issues of technical, undemocratic policy.

Habermas is the strongest defender of the legacy of modernity against the postmodern criticisms of it. He sees in modernity tendencies towards rampant instrumental rationality that destroys alternative, more democratic visions of social life. Like Parsons, he states that a universalistic rationality is a major achievement of modernity, which must integrate an increasingly differentiated and complex modern society. Rise of different types of reasoning constitute the key feature of the modern world. Modernity cannot rely on traditional justifications of rule and action and must ground its criteria for evaluation within its own history. In the absence of tradition, communicative rationality takes on the ethical role of coordinating diverse social actions. He sees the culture of modernity embodied in communicative rationality as concerned with establishing autonomy and justice. For Habermas, this communicative context informs the acquisition of knowledge, the transmission of culture, the formation of personal identity and more general processes of social integration.

He further contends that new social movements provide avenues for the development of new values and identities. Arising in a post-traditional and post-industrial society, new social movements represent the main vehicle by which a non-instrumental, communicative rationality can be brought into public life. New social movements associated with late modernity, such as feminism and environmentalism, have fundamentally changed the nature of politics. In sum, Habermas contends that modernity establishes inseparable links between rationality and freedom as demonstrated in the great modernist accomplishments such as democracy and human rights. New social movements are expressing and attempting to implement these achievements in new ways. His championing of the legacy of modernity distances him from the postmodernists.

Like Touraine and Melucci, Giddens theorises a reformed view of modernity that is much more critical than that of Habermas. They argue that new social movements raise novel issues of cultural identity in a global context marked by rapid increases in communication technologies and recognition of the importance of cultural differences. Melucci and Touraine contend that modern societies exist in a post-industrial context, and cultural strife between diverse groups has replaced class struggles over the distribution of resources as central social conflicts. Modern societies are in chronic combat over the possession and very definition of cultural codes and information. New social movements are the primary agents and carriers of innovative discourses and practices in the struggles of the late modern era.

These theorists critically engage the postmodern persuasion, arguing that modernity has not been superseded but remains an unfinished project, as modernist beliefs and practices are still central to contemporary societies. They believe that rational reflexivity has replaced tradition as the main form of social solidarity in the modern world.

Giddens differs from these theorists in that he takes tradition more seriously. In the new distinctively modern-risk society, people draw on expertise, re-evaluate it in terms of their own particular cultural context and then utilise this knowledge to evaluate their everyday actions. He argues that modernity excludes and marginalises particular groups of people who do not fit into

these categories. He agrees with the postmodern claims that the foundations of knowledge are fragile and there is no inherent progress in history, and the new social movements are raising qualitatively new issues about social life. He believes that personal identity has also become less firm and more fragmented in the modern world. However Giddens disagrees with many postmodern tenets. He prefers the idea of late modernity to that of post-modernity. "People do not live in fragmented, unconnected lives; they still construct narratives about their selves, but they do so in 'post-traditional' conditions" (Tucker Jr. 1998: 143).

5.7 Modernisation and Globalisation

The intellectual portrayal of modernisation was, as a political and economic proposition, coming to the fore following World War II. It equated the intellectual, cultural and technological advance of victorious nations as something that needed to be emulated by the "poorer less civilised" people of the world. This is connected to the process of "modernity" which was a project of global conquest - originating in Europe. By Globalisation, we mean the profound reorganisation of manufacturing, trade and services within a globally encompassing system. It points to a phenomena identified interchangeably as a process, a historical event or the end result of shifting "ethno - techno, media - finance and ideo - scapes" (Appadurai 1996: 32). Accordingly, it replaces the unavailing verb, modernisation, because modernists and their opponents depended on model dualistic analysis such as "centre periphery", "north - south", "First World - Third World", "developed - developing", etc.

The concept of modernisation was very much tied to the idea of recreating the world in the image of America and Western European principles and culture. More recently, discussions on Globalisation describe a process by which the world is becoming increasingly interconnected and unified, subject to homogenous and uniform processes of cultural unification. Characters such as Michael Jackson or the corporate logos of McDonald and Nike are examples of global awareness.

5.8 Conclusion

The similarities between classical modernisation studies and new modernisation studies can be observed in the constancy of the research focus on Third world Development.

There are important distinctions between the classical studies and the new studies of the modernisation school. For example, in the classical approach, tradition is seen as an obstacle to development whereas in the new approach tradition is an additive factor of development. With regard to methodology, the classical approach applies a theoretical construction with a high level of abstraction; the new approach applies concrete case studies given in a historical context. Regarding the direction of development, the classical perspective uses a unidirectional path which tends towards the United States and European model, the new perspective prefers a multidirectional path of development. Finally, the classical perspective demonstrates a relative neglect of the external factors and conflict. This stands out in sharp contrast to the greater attention to the external factors and conflicts bestowed by the new approach. Development, in the changed context, poses a challenge and, at the same time, presents an opportunity.

This unit begins with an attempt to understand the process of modernisation and the evolution of modernisation theories. The unit goes on discussing how the theoretical position of post-modernism pose challenge to the sociological theories of modernity. We also saw how Giddens and other advocates of

modernisation theories defend their theories and why they preferred the idea of late-modernity to that of post-modernity. The unit sums up with an analysis of interrelationship between modernisation and globalisation.

5.9 Further Reading

Dube S.C. 1988. *Modernisation and Development*. Vistaar publications: New Delhi

Ritzer, George 2000. *Modern Sociological Theory*. 5th edition. McGraw Hill Higher Education

Singh, Y. 1977. *Modernisation of Indian Tradition*. Thomson. Faridabad