

Globalization, Modernity and Sustainable Development : Conceptual Issues

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Abstract

Development, as a concept, has been associated with diverse meanings, interpretations and theories from various scholars. In classical sociology, development was viewed as an evolutionary process and was related with the notions of growth and progress. However, this type of theories were almost rejected and in post-world war period, a three-fold classification of societies was adopted; traditional society, transitional society and modern industrial society. The goal of development was to achieve the condition/status of modern industrial society by the traditional societies which were also called developing societies or transitional societies. The “modernity” was set as a goal to achieve and this approach was termed as “modernization approach” to development. However, this approach was criticized on various grounds and an alternative approach based on Latin American countries experiences was formulated by neo-Marxist thinkers like A. G. Frank and Wallerstein, popularly known as school of underdevelopment and dependency theories. In 1980s modernization theory was criticized for not taking into account human development perspective regarding freedoms and self-esteem. Ecological critique of industrialization led to a new approach, namely, sustainable development which is a dominant paradigm of development for last four decades. The rise of global economy and communication revolution had initiated the process of transformation of the “modern industrial societies”. This process was termed as “globalization” which is transforming earlier modernity into a state of ‘high modernity’ (Giddens). This formulation of globalization is multidimensional and included environmental dimension of development. The present paper is aimed to discuss the interrelationship between globalization, modernity and sustainable development by taking into account the views of two basic thinkers of globalization on these issues at conceptual level.

Key words: globalization, sustainable development, high modernity, modernization, underdevelopment, dependency.

Development, as a concept, has been associated with diverse meanings, interpretations and theories from various scholars. In classical sociology, development was viewed as an evolutionary process and was related with the notions of growth and progress. The focus of analysis was on the interpretation of changes taking place in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres. The notion of modernity was a central concept in this kind of conceptualization and society which emerged as a result of social transformation was called “modern industrial society”. However, this type of evolutionary theories was almost rejected and in post-world war period, a three-fold classification of societies was adopted; traditional society, transitional society and modern industrial society. The goal of development was to achieve the condition/status of modern industrial society by the traditional societies which were also called developing societies or transitional societies. The “modernity” was set as a goal to achieve and this approach was termed as “modernization approach” to development. However, this approach was criticized on various grounds and an alternative approach based on Latin American countries experiences was formulated by neo-Marxist thinkers like A. G. Frank and Wallerstein, popularly known as school of underdevelopment and dependency theories. In 1980s modernization theory was criticized for not taking into account human development perspective regarding freedoms and self-esteem. There were three major critiques of industrialization, namely, populist rural socialism, ecological critique, and alternative technology (Webster 1989). However, here we shall focus on the ecological critique of industrialization.

Ecological critique of industrialization:

There are three major themes of environmental critiques of industrialization:

The *first theme* is that the world cannot physically sustain present rate of economic growth and industrial development since the resources this requires are simply not available. It has been argued that further industrial development, wherever it may be, brings the world closer to that point at which economic expansion means global ecological disaster, unrestrained growth bringing a sudden ecological collapse in the capacity of the planet to sustain humanity. The message here is that the ecological system cannot tolerate increasing growth: there must therefore be “limits to growth”.

The *second theme* that figures in the environmentalist literature is that world cannot tolerate the levels of pollution now associates with large scale industrial production. The pollution in air is an important form of pollution created as a result of heavy industrialization and its products in the form the increasingly harmful levels carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide, the latter falling as ‘acid rain’, polluting land vegetation, lakes and rivers. It also appears that the ‘clear blue sky’ has a large and growing ‘hole’ in it located over the Antarctic region, as the ozone layer is rapidly depleted there due to the impact of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in the stratosphere. The incidence of skin cancer are also due to these changes as more ultraviolet rays penetrates the thinner

ozone. Pollution is also found in modern agriculture with the increasing use of herbicides and pesticides on intensive farming affecting the food chain, threatening other animals including humankind. In the production of herbicides highly toxic by-product like dioxin waste are produced.

The *third theme* found in environmentalist critique is that industrial critique is that industrial development has spawned a type of technology that has a dehumanizing effect, in the workplace and beyond. The critiques argue that the technology of productive system is indifferent or even callous with regards to people's needs, destructive of the human spirit and alienates people from their work and each other.

The ecological critique of industrialization, thus, highlighted the problems of declining resources, environmental destruction and cultural alienation. These issues were addressed by the World Commission on Environment and Development also known as Brundtland Commission. The report of the Commission was published in 1987 under the title "*Our Common Future*". The commission emphasized on the adoption of a new strategy of development that is known today as *sustainable development* which is a dominant paradigm of development for last four decades.

Globalization is today's dominant theoretical paradigm. The rise of global economy and communication revolution had initiated the process of transformation of the "modern industrial societies". This process was termed as "globalization" which is transforming earlier modernity into a state of 'high modernity' (Giddens). This formulation of globalization is multidimensional-social, economic, political, cultural and *also includes environmental dimension of development*. The present paper is aimed to discuss the interrelationship between globalization, modernity and sustainable development. Sustainable development emphasizes on the progress of the society with an approach in which environmental issues also have important place. In contemporary literature on globalization environmental issues constitute and important. Therefore, in the present paper, I shall take into account the views of two basic thinkers of globalization at conceptual level. These are, namely, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens.

Ulrich Beck

Ulrich Beck in his seminal work *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1992) takes 'reflexive modernization' as a key concept in explaining the transformations in today's society. He makes a distinction between classical industrial society (modern/industrial society) and contemporary risk society. In his view, in the *earlier classical industrial society the 'logic' of wealth production dominates the 'logic' of risk production*. While in the risk society this *relationship is reversed. The production forces have lost their innocence in the reflexivity of modernization process*. The gain in power from techno-economic 'progress' is being increasingly overshadowed by the production of risks. This "logic" of risk production and distribution, is developed by Beck in comparison to the 'logic' of the distribution of wealth.

At the center, in a risk society, lie the *risks and consequences of modernization*, which are revealed as *irreversible threats to the life of plants, animals, and human beings*. Unlike the factory-related occupational hazards of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, *these can no longer be limited to certain localities and or groups, but rather exhibit a tendency to globalization which spans production and reproduction as much as national borders*, and in this sense brings into being *supra-national and non-class specific global hazards* with a new type of social and political dynamism.

These social hazards and their cultural and political potentials, are however, only one side of the risk society. The other side comes into view when one places the *immanent contradictions between modernity and counter-modernity* within industrial society at the center of discussion. The risk society differs from classical industrial society in many respects, in terms of class structure, family bonds and relation of production and reproduction, working conditions, increasing skepticism in science and parliamentary democracy.

In a risk society,

1. classes remain reliant on the validity of social class cultures and traditions, which in the course of post-war development are in the process of losing their traditional character.
2. As far as the social life within the framework of nuclear family is concerned, ascribed and feudal sex roles for men and women of early phase of modernization, crumble with the continuation of modernization process indicated with the phenomena like *inclusion of women in work process, increasing frequency of divorce, and so on*. But with that the relationships of production and reproduction begins to shift, like everything else connected to industrial 'tradition of the nuclear family': marriage. Parenthood, sexuality, love, and the like.
3. As far as work situation is concerned, there are important differences between classical industrial society and the risk society. The reflexive modernization transforms the work relations and conditions in a new form. This is reflected in the form of flexibilization of work time and places which blurs the boundaries between work and non-work. Microelectronics permits a new networking of department, plants and consumers over and above the production sectors. But with that the previous legal and social promises of the employment system 'modernized away'. Mass unemployment is integrated into the occupation system in new forms of pluralized unemployment, with all the associated hazards and opportunities.
4. On the one hand, the claims and the form of parliamentary democracy are established along with industrial society. On the other, *the scope of validity of these principles is truncated*. Sub-political innovations institutionalized as 'progress' remains

under the jurisdiction of business, science and technology, for whom democratic procedures are invalid. This becomes problematic in the continuity of reflexive modernization processes where in the face of increased or hazardous productive forces the sub-politics has taken over the leading role from politics in shaping society.

5. Finally, Beck discussed at length the nature of scientization in classical industrial society and in the risk society. In the industrial society, science and methodical skepticism are institutionalized. This skepticism is (at first) limited to the external, the objects of research, while the foundations and consequences of scientific work remain shielded against internally fomented skepticism. *The continuity of scientific-technical developments, Beck explains, runs through a discontinuity in its internal and external relations. Thus, reflexive modernization here means that "skepticism is extended to the foundations and hazards of scientific work and science is thus generalized and demystified.*
6. *This is very true in case of environmental movements which questions the scientific technology used in industrial society to produce wealth and luxurious life style. But this kind of modernization also produce high risks for ecosystem, plants, animals and nature. The reflexive modernization, on the other hand, includes these issues and argues to produce eco-friendly technologies for development in both the developed industrial societies and also in developing societies.*

Anthony Giddens

According to Giddens, today we are living in a period of high modernity. In his pioneer work, *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), he attempted to attach a definite meaning to the concept of concept of modernity and post-modernity, which may throw a light on the relationship between modernity and sustainable development.

This paradigmatic analysis of modernity on the one hand, classified prevailing confusions regarding post-modernity, particularly those, that emphasize on the end of modernity and beginning of a new era of post-modernity, and explained various dimensions of globalization by applying the above conceptual framework to the analysis of globalization and contested the claim of 'hyper-globalizers', that *globalization is the beginning of a new epoch in the history of mankind*. Giddens takes a firm stand that *the 'project of modernity' is not over but we are today living in a state of 'high modernity'*.

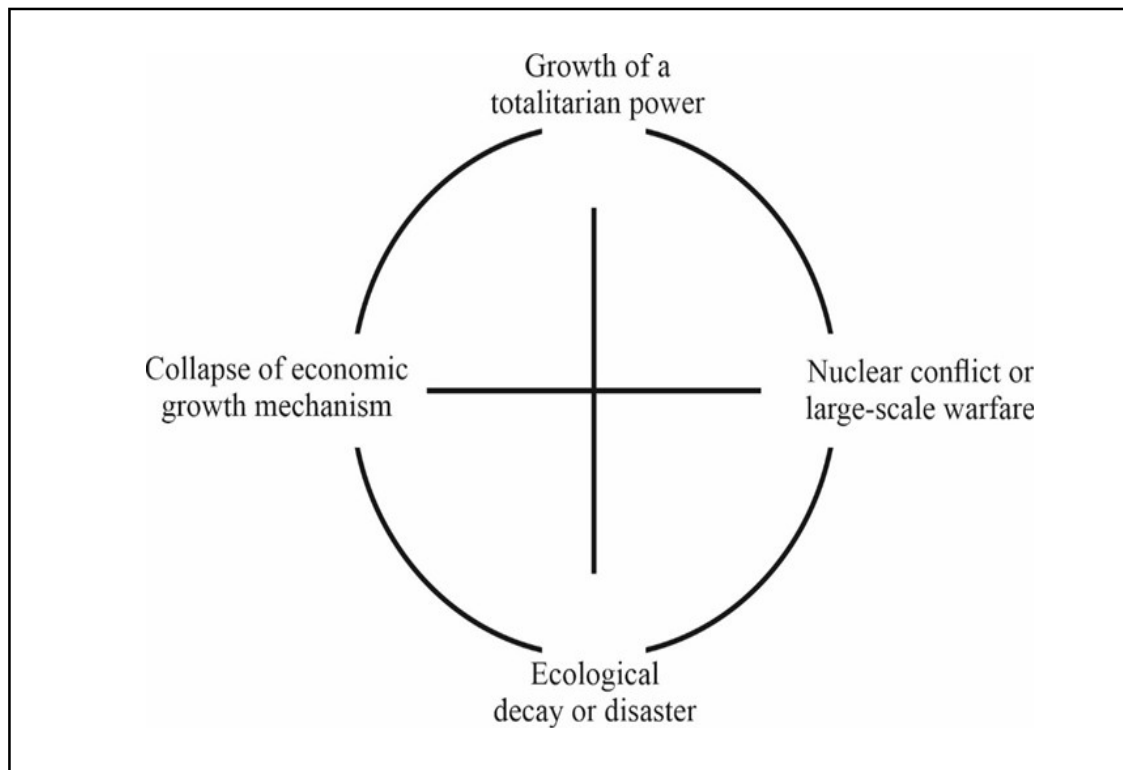
Giddens' this early work on globalization presents a far reaching, detailed and ambitious theoretical framework not only for analyzing the problematics but it also laid a solid foundation for his analysis of the prevailing discussion on globalization. For him, globalization and modernity are inseparable phenomenon and for a proper understanding of globalization, it is must to have a proper understanding of the notion of modernity as it is developed in the context of European society and later its expansion all over the world. *Like Habermas, modernity for Giddens is an*

unfinished project and it is transforming itself into a higher stage. He sets out a *conceptual framework of modernity in terms of time-space-distanciation, disembedding and reembedding of social relations, trust and risk and reflexivity of modernity* with many associated concepts. His ideas on the risk, reflexivity and environmental issues can be briefly presented as follows:

1. Giddens attempted to discuss about the direction of changes which are taking place in the contemporary society. He points out that although *one can assume that the world events will move in the direction outlined by various utopian, considerations like post-scarcity system (a society in which there would not be scarcity of anything, a globally coordinated order, socialist global, a decline in instruments of war, system of planetary care.*, But it cannot be said firmly that in what direction society will move. The interim period, is large and full of high consequence risks. The events which are happening in one institutional dimension can adversely affect others and may pose life threat for many millions of human beings.
2. Here he develops a model called *-High Consequence Risk of Modernity. Which must have four important issues in discussion:*
 1. *The new technological developments which are occurring today although may be very beneficial for capitalist productivity but they might produce dangerous consequences for the safety of environment or military security.* Therefore, we can't continue with unlimited global capitalist accumulation. The markets can cope with some kind of increasing scarcity for a considerable period of time as there are certain bounds and self-adjusting mechanism in economic institutions but there are certain limits to the availability of the resources for indefinite accumulation which may result into fastly increasing global inequalities which may have socially explosive implication.¹¹⁵ This can be termed as 'collapse of economic growth mechanism' – a high risk associated with high modernity.
 2. *The second-high risk of modernity is related with the growth of totalitarianism.* Increasing democratic involvement have a negative side also in the form of possibilities of creation of totalitarian power. With an increase in democratic involvement surveillance operations are also intensified. This type of developments may lead to sectional control of political power supported by monopolistic access to means of violence. This may be an instrument of terror. *Totalitarianism and modernity are not just incidentally connected, but they are essentially connected with each other.* There are many other terms of oppressive rule depending upon the social conditions prevailing at particular period in a given society. They may not be fully totalitarian in character but may express oppressive tendencies.

3. *Third issue, Giddens has discussed is related to the chances of nuclear conflict as warfare. The industrialized warfare is dangerous for the humanity. The race of nuclear weapons may lead to nuclear conflict which may be of disastrous consequences not only for humanity but also for the environment.*
4. *Fourth issue is related to the ecological consequences of the continued fusion of science and weapons technology which might produce others forms of armament as deadly as nuclear arms. Such as chemical weapons and bio-weapons (like viruses like: - COVID-19 as assumed by some of scientists today). Although the chances of ecological catastrophe are not of very immediate nature than the risk of major warfare but it is very disturbing in its consequences. The planet earth and its environmental damage is not only very serious but also irreversible due to industrialism in last few centuries. It involves a number of phenomena of which we are yet unaware. On the other side of modernity, according to Giddens, may be a situation in which “there could be nothing but a ‘republic of insects and grass’, or a cluster of damaged and traumatized human social communities”. No theoretical framework or providential forces will inevitably intervene to save us from this second version of post-modernity*

Figure 3 : High consequence risk of modernity (Source: Giddens 1991:164)



which poses highest risk for the whole humanity.

Thus, The imperatives of capital accumulation and military considerations have dynamism of its own and provide an impetus to constant development of technology. The advancements in the field of biotechnology, according to Giddens, “affect our very physical make up as human beings, as well as natural environment in which we live.”⁴ In the recent past there have been a number of environmental movements focusing on environmental damage to attract the attention of the governments at the global level. As most consequential ecological issues are global in their very nature, the strategies and interventions to minimize the environmental risks will also be necessarily global. Thus, there is need to take measures or planetary care as it is done in case of the health of a person or living creature.

From the above discussion we can draw some conclusions.

- i. In classical analysis of industrialization/modernity there is no much talk of environmental issues except some criticism by the Marx *about the bad conditions of workers in factories. Industrialization was considered as a boon for the transformation of the feudal society of Europe. Science and scientization seen as an important vehicle of wealth development and the progress in all the spheres of social life. Its negative impacts were either neglected or argued that human mind in general is positive rather than negative. Thus, a skeptical tendency was adopted on negative consequences of scientific innovations. The thinkers of globalization are well aware of these limitations of industrialization and incorporated these issues in their models and theoretical analysis discussed the notion of high risk in their analysis of contemporary society.*
- ii. *Both the thinkers are well aware of the environmental issues but also highlighted risks and hazards in other dimensions of the social system, like in sphere of family, marriage, sexuality, self-identity, politics, communication and cultural phenomena.*
- iii. *They also agreed that today's modernity is very different from the early modernity and used different terminology to express this difference like risk society, late modernity, high modernity. They also introduced a battery of new sociological concepts in their analysis.*
- iv. *Both the thinkers, arrived on almost similar conclusion that present day society is highly uncertain/risky and it is very difficult to say that in which direction present day society will move.*

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