CHAPTER – V
CASTE, GENDER AND MODERNITY:
AN OVERLAPPING CONSENSUS

As we have approached the third millennium, we ask what we want to bring forward from the past and what we wish to develop a new. Like planning to begin human life on a new planet, this gives occasion to ask what is of truly essential value in our experiences of human life, what are its future possibilities and what are our resources for their realization.

The question is more complex than at first it might seem. If we were at the earlier stages of modernity we might simply take the characteristics of the times as defining human possibilities. In this case the question would be simply how to develop a modern pattern of life. In this light tradition would be at best a general resource to be used instrumentally where it could contribute, or to be discarded where it could not.

That simplistic age, however, has past: now we face the sobering truth that modernity itself has been of mixed value. It has brought not only great accomplishments, which must never be lost, but also a great reduction of the richness of human goals and self-understanding, not to mention great wars and massive atrocities. But the modernists base their arguments on the assumption that humanity is in progress. According to Gérard Delanty, modernity in socio-historical terms refers to “the major historical fact, which in the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, affected all forms of culture and all forms of existence in Europe. For European man, as opposed to mediaeval man and to man in general, modernity was the foundation for specific forms of living based on a new division of references to tradition. This was made possible through the build-up of a historical, philological and hermeneutic memory, and the reference to progress, which arises from the expansion of science and technology. Consequently, the scientific temper and the outlook have accelerated dynamics of productive forces working towards an unprecedented degree of control over natural processes. It was also made
possible by the political construction of the modern State and philosophical references to the values of humanism and reason”.¹

Alain Touraine² has summarily described the various philosophical and political elements making up such an understanding of modernity as enlightened humanity rebelling against tradition as well as the sacralization of society and the submission of reason to natural laws. Modernization as understood in the West is the work of reason itself, and therefore of science, technology and education in particular, and social policies for modernization should have no other aim than to clear the way for reason by removing rules and regulations, corporate defense mechanisms and customs barriers, by creating the security and foresight that entrepreneurs require and by training competent and conscientious managers and agents.

The West has thus experienced and conceived of modernity as a revolution. Nothing is established to reason: reason makes a clean sweep of every belief and form of social and political organization that is not based on scientific demonstration. Moreover, modernity, as a result of secularization, has engendered a new type of political thinking in which God is replaced by Society as the basis for moral judgments. The idea that society is a source of values, that what is good is useful to society and what is bad is harmful to its integration and efficacy is an essential component of the ideology of modernity. If one is to be no longer subject to the laws of the fathers, they have to be replaced by the interests of the fraternity that subordinates individual to group interests.

Finally, we may take cognizance of the claim that is advocated by modernists that human beings belong to a world that is governed by natural laws that are discovered through reason and to which reason itself is subordinated. In modernist thinking, the people and the nation are identified as one and the same social entity that also functions in accordance with natural laws and which has to shed irrational forms of organization and domination that, under false pretences, seek legitimacy in revelations or superhuman decisions.
Modernity: A Tool for Criticism

Modernity is first and foremost a tool for criticism. The swords of criticism thus become two-edged. G. Delanty describes modernity as “the age of the interpretation of interpretation”. (See analyses of Gadamer’s work on hermeneutics, Wittgenstein’s logical criticism of language, etc.) Many thinkers, the most radical being Nietzsche, have denounced the harm wrought by modernist ideology. Freud caused a radical reappraisal of the ideal of man as a reasonable being. Later came the Frankfurt School with Michel Foucault who, by underlining the processes of alienation engendered by modern societies, showed as to how far modernity has opposed progress in welfare.

The decline of modernist ideology and practice, especially in aesthetic creation, gave rise to the concept of postmodernism or post-modernity. Jean-François Lyotard fondly calls this as “hyper-modernity”, in the sense that avant-garde movements necessarily exhaust themselves in their incessant quest for modernity. Postmodernism mainly signifies the disappearance of any model of society, its members being turned in on themselves as they seek the satisfaction of their narcissistic desires, while their social identity is derived from what they consume rather than what they are. Postmodernism refers to a society that has no history, in the sense that it no longer has any major projects and that self-thinking, even self-derision, has become a substitute for any kind of history-building perspective.³

The above considerations suggest that modernity as well as modernization is an aspect of our facticity. Although we may remember our traditions more or less well, we are not operating in the traditional context. This is the radical difference; we are in a modern situation which sets different limits to our possibilities: modernization is a major aspect of our facticity.

Emergence of Modernity in the Indian Context

Gandhi’s views on caste and gender are significant in understanding the emergence of modernity in the Indian context. There is a deep-seated relation among the concepts of caste gender and modernity. One can have a better understanding on these issues when taken collectively. It seems that the questioning of caste and gender issues may be related to the emergence
of modernity in the Indian context because Gandhi advocates a different notion of modernity in critiquing the western civilization. In order to support on such a line of argument, let us take note of Marx and Ambedkar on the issue of caste.

If Lenin had thought that without the understanding of Hegel it was impossible to understand Marx in the context of the international proletariat revolution, then one can also say in the Indian context that without the understanding of caste it is impossible to understand India. In other words, the understanding of the dynamics of caste is the clue to the understanding of Indian society, its history and its dominant ideology. Marx elaborates this idea in the following way:

Idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of oriental despotism, that they had restrained the human mind within the smallest compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget that the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable piece of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetuation of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who designed to notice it at all. We must not forget that this passive sort of existence evoked on the one part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindustan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by caste and slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny.

How does one comprehend such a reading? Is Marx’s reading exemplifies an accurate reading of the structures of dominance in ‘Indian Feudalism’? That caste is the basis of Indian society is a fact examined by many thinkers as diverse as Herbart Risley, Emile Senart, Max Weber, Louis Dumont, D.D. Koshambi and M.S. Srinivas. That the social process of caste and all its appalling superstitions and ramifications expressed through the dialects of Varna-Jati is both the basis as well as the evil of Indian Society was not only acknowledged by Marx but also the stalwarts of the anti-caste
movement such as Jyotirao Phule and Ambedkar. For Phule and Ambedkar, the rebellion against the caste system is of central importance. The difference between former and Gandhi is evident from the fact that the former intended to rip the caste system from the root.

Gandhi had always contested the opprobrium by disagreeing that their occupations were no more demeaning than any other. To set an example, he insisted that every resident of Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad had to clean the toilets. His increasing concern with the fate of untouchables was testified by the many articles published on the subject in 1920-1 in the journal, *Young India*. Yet, Gandhi did not completely reject the caste system. Rather, he wanted to focus on the religious dimensions of Untouchability. His precincts regarding the untouchables can be explained more fundamentally by the attachment to the traditional Hindu social order. In other words, Gandhi defended certain aspects of caste system.

I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration. (...) But like every other institution it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better. (...) But I am certainly against any attempt at destroying the fundamental divisions. The caste system is not based on inequality, there is no question of inferiority, and so far as there is any such question arising, as in Madras, Maharashtra or elsewhere, the tendency should undoubtedly be checked. (...)

One of my correspondents suggests that we should abolish the caste (system) but adopt the class system of Europe—meaning thereby I suppose that the idea of heredity in caste should be rejected. I am inclined to think that the law of heredity is an eternal law and any attempt to alter that law must lead us, as it has before led, to utter confusion. I can see very great use in considering a Brahmin to be always a Brahmin throughout his life. If he does not behave himself like a Brahmin, he will naturally cease to command the respect that is due to the real Brahmin. It is easy to imagine the innumerable difficulties if one were to set up a court of punishments and rewards, degradation and promotion. If Hindu believes, as they must believe, in reincarnation, transmigration, they must know that nature will without any possibility of mistake, adjust the balance by degrading a Brahmin, if he misbehaves himself, by reincarnating him in a lower division, and translating one who
lives the life of a Brahmin in his present incarnation to Brahminhood in his next.

Inter drinking, inter dining, intermarrying, I hold, is not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy. I do not contemplate under a most democratic constitution a universality of manners and customs about eating, drinking and marrying. We shall ever have to seek unity in diversity, and I decline to consider it a sin for a man not to drink or eat with anybody and everybody.7

These above considerations reflect Gandhi’s adherence to certain mechanisms of caste system and even, to some extent, the spirit of the system itself: he refers to his belief in reincarnation; he presents the requirement that all members of the upper caste must preserve their rank in society as a positive element of social regulation; and while he rejects the idea of a rigid hierarchy, he views the distribution of men and women across various castes as contributing to social harmony and economic stability. His model is, in many ways that of the varnas, which he describes as forming a conflict-free society.8

Gandhi’s idea of modernity though rejects the western modernity of the industrialization where he thinks that it would lead to the exploitation of the working class yet his idea of modernity seems to be restricted and partial. His conception of modernity seems to be a romanticized ideal that suggests the reform in the society through self-regeneration of the individuals living there.

In practice, these ideals seems to contradict Gandhi’s vision of modernity as Gandhi nowhere gives space to the active participation of the downtrodden in their emancipation. Political freedom for Gandhi was a stepping-stone leading towards real Swaraj. (Self-rule) Swaraj is that condition in which people learn to rule themselves. In other words, the individual is the corner stone of the edifice of his Swaraj. But the question is: who is regarded as an individual or person? Normally, in the Indian social and cultural conditions, persons are those who are born as Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya. That is to say, a Sudra can never be recognized as a person. Therefore, the issue of caste and gender are inseparably linked with the notion of modern
Monopolization of Modernity

When modernity and its idiosyncrasies have its effects in India, the Indian traditional intellectual community had seen it as a threat to the Indian social structure. To protect the age-old Brahminical societal structure, the upholders of the tradition moved to keep the tradition intact. They started the process of monopolization of modernity by embracing the epistemologies of modernity such as the basic sciences and technical education. Initially, when modernity opened up new opportunities, with its inherent economic viability, the Brahmin intellectuals have given up traditional epistemologies and embraced modern epistemology purely for the material prosperity.

These writings reveal that Dalit relation to modernity is complex. It is also, in some sense critical about the general understanding of modernity, i.e., modern development, science and reason. Dalit politics refuses to get incorporated into the binaries of nationalism/colonialism and secularism/communalism. It also resists Universalism, the unmarked and abstract citizen as a centre of the emancipatory discourse of modernity. It is equally critical about the abstract ‘working class’. In other words, it constantly speaks with and against both the liberal and the radical conception of man and society.

There occurred a renaissance in India in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, which was otherwise a significant movement in Europe in fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. With changed socio-political situation, the liberal brahminical class who are regarded as the social elite started thinking critical about their religious and cultural traditions.

In India, this renaissance movement began with the realization that Hindu society was anachronistic that there was a need for its reform and reorganization to adjust obsolete social relationships. Such an impulse for reform did not come from the oppressed classes or lower castes, but from persons who belonged to the upper classes who have studied western science and literature and understood the needs of their contemporary world.

It was soon realized that without religious reform there could be no social reconstruction. The essence of the fundamental beliefs, which form the
core of Hinduism was identified, re-examined and reinterpreted. The social reformers such as Raja Ramohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Vidya Sagar, and Vivekananda identified as contemporary Indian philosophers in philosophy textbooks are classic examples.  

Re-inventing Modernity

In order to resist the hegemony of colonialism, the intellectuals of the Indian renaissance interpreted the past for their immediate demands. Accordingly, the rise of national consciousness coincided with the revival of interest in Indian philosophy. The nationalist intellectuals happen to be elites of the Brahminical class and reflected from their own social imagination in constructing the Indian philosophy. "In their search for internal principle of unity to the past, religion was given a foundational position by both orthodox and reformist Brahmin intellectuals". This can be seen in torchbearers of modern India like Rajarammohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Vivekananda, Tilak, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan etc. The outcome was that the Hindu nationalists started the tradition of dressing up the spirit centered metaphysics of orthodox Hinduism in modern scientific clothes.

The modern Hindu intellectuals are very much aware of the social contradictions of the Indian society, but they never attempted seriously to change the society. They responded to the situation indirectly in such a way that it does not effect their socially privileged position. To conceal the contradictions of the Indian society, the renaissance and nationalist intellectuals were clever enough to invent a new language that works well. One may find equality in spiritual realm and inequality in material world or social world. It promises equality in other world by negating affairs of this world or by projecting it as māya. The grand philosophies constructed on this line, ultimately helps in maintaining the status quo and hegemony of Brahminism.

Marginalization of Non-Brahmin Intellectuals

The vast majority of bourgeois scholars (Brahminical scholars) ignores the central place of the question of the relation between existence and thought, or between matter and consciousness as philosophical issues and
has decisive significance for characterizing the nature of every philosophical school. As a result, they are incapable of properly interpreting the history of Indian philosophy as the history of struggle between materialism and idealism, between atheism and religion. Bourgeois scholars either totally deny the conflict of ideas in Indian philosophy or admit such conflict only within the framework of idealism by viewing it as the struggle between the three major religions of India—Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.13

The main reason for distorted interpretation of Indian philosophy is the scholars’ idealistic bias in their outlook; they ignore the social significance of philosophy and do not comprehend the truth that philosophy is the product of concrete social environment. They tried to understand through textual and linguistic analysis of its sources.14 Contemporary Indian philosophy projected exclusively as idealistic. Almost the entire first generations of philosophers to come out of Indian universities were idealists influenced by Advaita Vedanta and some form of European idealism resulting from Kant and Hegel. Consequently, the older Indian academic philosophers were more or less favourable to religion and in the thought of every one of them there was a place either for the Absolute or God.15

The dominant idealistic outlook as most prominent philosophical view renders materialistic world as unreal and its metaphysical approach, which renders concept of change untenable. As they are blindfolded to look at the antagonistic social relations of contemporary India, it is obvious for non-development of moral, social and political philosophy in India. Philosophers have to reflect on the social and cultural practices in which they lived. In India, caste is the fundamental social reality that shapes and influences everyday life. It is the determining force in one’s perception of the world. As Pratima Bowes rightly observed, "...The philosophers in India failed in their task in as much as they did nothing towards developing political, social or moral philosophy in India. One reason for this non-development may be that philosophical thought was a monopoly of the Brahmin caste, whose privileges would have been under attack if questions were to be asked about the social system."16
The Brahminical philosophy consciously keeps away from the contemporary social situation and cleverly banks on classical past. The brahminical philosophy never internalizes the change. It tried to assimilate it as a part of its own tradition. Whether one accepts it or not, it is the struggles of the people that paved the way for new ideas and new thinking. It has been seen earlier that brahminical intellectuals have succeeded in caricaturing Indian philosophy as mainly idealistic, spiritualistic and religious through their writings. It is not astonishing that one may not find any thinker in their whole spectrum of contemporary Indian philosophy from outside this tradition.

One may argue that it failed to see the differences within this tradition in relation to its social and moral implications. But these intellectual elites never consider the other political currents both in colonial and post independent India. It is a pity that the brahminical elite has not accorded as pioneering social thinkers like Ambedkar, Jyothibha Phule, Narayana Guru and E.V. Ramaswamy Periyar. Though India is known for diverse social groups, languages and regions, nowhere we will find these markings in packaging Indian philosophy. This is same with the intellectuals of lower castes responded in literary and cultural fields with an alternative to brahminical knowledge system.

Modernity as a Threat

The Indian traditional intellectual community had visualized modernity as a threat to the Indian social structure. To protect the age-old Brahminical societal structure, the upholders of the tradition moved to keep the tradition intact. That is why people like M.G. Ranade aimed at renovating Indian social institutions to suit the requirements of time. His efforts to increase social intercourse between sub-castes and to use caste panchayats as a media of social reform have tended to strengthen caste and ushered in a new role for the caste panchayat.

The Brahmin intellectuals started the process of monopolization of modernity by embracing the epistemologies of modernity such as the basic sciences and technical education. Initially, when modernity opened up new opportunities with its inherent economic viability, the Brahmin intellectuals
have given up traditional epistemologies and embraced modern epistemology purely for the material prosperity. At this juncture, the whole process of embracing modernity by the intellectual community of the times raises very interesting questions. For instance, it asks why Brahmin community embraced modernity? What were the reasons for the monopolization of modernity? Did they allow modernity to transgress the basic structure of the society? If it was not the case, was it the fault of 'other's who were not able to absorb modernity?

If we assess the impact of modernity on Indian society, it is no overstatement of the case to argue that the under-privileged sections of the society hardly have benefited from it. The possible reasons for this failure may be regarded as the idea that the modernity project, in the nineteenth century, was monitored by the social elites of the time and engineered by the Brahmin community. Apart from monitoring and controlling the whole process of modernization, there were constant conscious interventions by this community to ensure that their interests are secured by not allowing the fruits of modernity into other sections of society. This resulted in the halting or postponing of societal transformations. To reserve the fruits of modernity for them, they constantly realized the price of modernity. Besides providing new avenues, modernity has its implications for social transformation too. The elites have to overcome their own traditions and cultural beliefs. To resolve this kind of a situation they had started defending their cultural traditions and simultaneously enjoying the material benefits of the modernity at colonial times.17

Dalits and the Modern State

The relationship of the Dalits to the modern State, both colonial and post colonial, is ambiguous. It is important to re-look at the political/cultural practices of Dalits to understand the Dalit response to State and modernity. If one emphasizes the discursive aspects of modernity, it offers enormous possibilities to converse about Dalit suffering/humiliation and oppression. It can also be said that Ambedkar's argument for creating a moral community is possible only if one emphasizes the discursive aspects of modern experience.
Ambedkar tried to overcome the tradition-modernity dichotomy. The critique of the tradition is accompanied in his refusal to accept ready-made alternatives manufactured in the west. His philosophy is essentially based on ethical and religious considerations, which made him to keep away from western contemplation. At the same time, he has his own philosophical and religious doubts about Hinduism and its claims as a religion. Thus he upholds the moral basis of life while allowing critical reason to operate. He considers Buddhism as the only religion, which can respond to the demands of modernity and culture. Buddhist teachings, according to him, appeal to reason and experience. In this sense, he is critical of modernity and highlighted that priority of social reconstruction cannot be achieved without taking into account the legacy of tradition. He further considers that legal and political institutions do not have a capacity to reconstruct social solidarity and therefore tries to provide a social basis for the liberal and political ethos which does not mean an uncritical acceptance of western modernity or indigenous traditionalism.18

Further, modernity as imposed on the third world countries has been attacked from many fronts. Modernity is unavoidably considered as a necessary extension of colonialism. Modernity in India came as a package with colonialism. There is an attack on the general philosophical beliefs of modernity such as notions of universalism and its truth claims. It is radically pointed to the very values of post-Enlightenment thought, on its conception of secularism and rights etc. As observed by Javeed Alam, people readily reject terms like secularism on the grounds that they are alien to and lack any affinity with 'Indian culture or traditions. However, other terms such as democracy or equality are readily acceptable.19

Modern is historically the embodied form of enlightenment. Whatever is entailed under enlightenment as values, beliefs, principles, ethics, morality and so on, has been thought of as universal, not just in an abstract sense but as something universalizable in thinking and practices of all human beings. Colonialism has a historical connection with capitalism and therefore also what we have referred to as entrenched modernity. Capitalism in the colonies have demonstrative with all the features of distorted consciousness, racial
superiority, arrogant cultural exclusiveness, and intellectual condescension over and above political control of those inferiors whom it has subjugated.

The trajectory of modernity in post-colonial India is a very complicated one. The engagement of Brahminical Hindu elite's modernist project is quite interesting. In its initial phase, Hindu nationalism started internal social reforms. The project of modernity pursued by these social elites of post-colonial India has ended up as anti-modern. The liberation of the self/nation is imagined in the spiritual and cultural domains. As Partha Chatterjee notes: '...the search for the post colonial has been tied, from its very birth, with its struggle against modernity’. The modernization process carried the tag of the tradition. This ultimately led to the confrontation of secular state and the Nehruvian ideal of modernity by the Hindutva forces in contemporary times. In Post-independent India, the Nehruvian project of ‘modernity’, ‘development’, and ' progress' through big dams, heavy industries and scientific institutions benefited the upper caste groups more than anybody else. This lead to the generation of capital in India but it did not develop a capitalist culture and its values. The upper caste groups didn't come out of their feudal mindset. On the other hand, Dalits are marginalized and dislocated. This situation often meets with conflicts and tensions in the nation. Any radical assertion of Dalits is suppressed by the State. The political institutions become oppressive. Secular democracy may become a farce. Further, the governability for ruling class becomes a serious problem until and unless it attends the situation in a real democratic spirit.20

On the other hand, the Dalit's involvement with the colonial-mediated modernity projects too as complex. In a feudal set up, where Dalits are degraded and humiliated in the name of caste and social norms, colonial modernity, to a certain extent, facilitated to become conscious of their objective condition. The institutions set by the colonialists promised political, legal and social equality at least theoretically, if not practically.

In this respect, Ambedkar is in favor of the active intervention of the State to bring Dalits into the modern sphere. In early days, Brahminical social elite too felt the need for modernizing Dalits. Toward this task, habits of 'purity' and the need for 'education' for Dalits were regarded as necessary tools.
When more Dalits are entering the public space, which were so far reserved for upper castes through State-sponsored developmental programmes, it creates antagonism and conflict.

With an increased assertion of Dalits and their struggles and the marked visibility of Dalits in post-independent India has frustrated the upper castes. They pick up a new liberal language to counter the Dalits against the spirit of liberalism. As for instance, when Dalits are fighting against the hegemony of caste, the upper castes dismiss this struggle as casteist. They consider Dalits’ talking about caste as parochial and anti-modern. Further, they argue for an economic basis for any emancipatory project of the State. In the anti-Mandal agitation, such an attitude was visibly witnessed. Upper castes find various strategies like this to maintain the status quo in society.

Casteism of the upper castes took modern incarnation in the public sphere and started articulating their interests in modernist discourse like, purity and pollution, 'hygiene', 'efficiency' and 'merit'. It is pertinent to quote a beautiful passage that explains the anguish of a dalit as the following: 'I don't know when I was born/but I was killed on this very soil thousand years ago/ 'dying again and again to be born again'/ I don't know the karma theory/I am being born again and again where I was dead.21

The point is that the Indians have an idea of an ideal society that should be mobile should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. But, unfortunately, we have the theological impediments like karma and samsara, which have been operating the Indian consciousness and subverted our ideals on an ideal society and have consciously debarred the ideals of a liberal democratic society. In simple terms, Ambedkar viewed that an ideal society would be based on liberty, equality and fraternity.22

Ambedkar favors for a democratic tradition that stand for reason rather than negating it. He felt that Hindu religious tradition need to undergo a radical reform. Caste is a natural outcome of certain religious belief, which is supposed to have the sanction of shastras. To abolish the sanctity and sacredness of caste, one has to destroy the authority of the shastras and
Vedas. For this, one has to destroy the religions of both Sruti and Smriti. To appropriate such a goal, Ambedkar proposed not only the indigenous tradition that stand for reason, but also tried to link up that tradition with the governing principle of politics.

Ambedkar’s writings on caste and genders enable us to relocate Gandhian ideas in the light of competing claims and complexities which one come across while understanding the two sets of theories about caste and gender. The first relates with statuesque ideology propagated by Gandhi and another where Gandhi’s ideas are being problematized and philosophically re-examined in the light of social and political contestations, which Indian society has been witnessing in the post independent India. To support this argument, we may look at the subaltern studies, Volume one to nine, where different scholars of the history, gender and modernity try to make a claim and counter claim towards the well being of marginalized sections of Indian society, who have been historically denied the basic dignity and consequently the fundamental freedom and sense of belonging to Indian nation state.23

Gandhi’s writings and life do provide a critique of untouchability. But his claim on the perseverance of the caste system raises questions on his biased attitude towards the emancipation of the dalits from the clutches of the caste hierarchy. A critique can suggest that Gandhi seems to be indifferent towards the active participation of dalits in their political struggle for dignity and equality. But, a philosophical re-look at the issue amply suggest that Gandhi wanted to reform and reorganize the society with the given tools. He was conscious of the fact that caste is artificial. Thus he knows that varnadharma is as unalterable as the law of gravitation. Varnadharma emphasizes duties against rights. It treats all occupations as equal and eliminates competition for profit. The concept of Svadharma rules out inter-varna mobility. Competition for occupational mobility cuts the root of equality. Holding the ideal of equality of occupations and a living wage, varna promotes more equality than even communism. The ideal of varna helps in the realization of unity in diversity and will ultimately free society from untouchability. Looked at from this perspective, Gandhi’s ideal of varnadharma combines a rationalization of the attributes of caste with the liberal tradition of the modern west.
The renaissance of modern India, thus, ideationally lies in a re- interpreted and reformed revival of traditional thought under the impact of the west. It mainly borders on varnadharma, pluralism, villagism, Puritanism and nativism. It created the ideational-social milieu for institutional continuity and change and also for the dilemma of synthesis which contemporary India faces.

This chapter was intended to figure out the philosophical and evaluative trajectories of caste, gender and modernity. We have tried to answer as to how these three concepts have been idealized by Gandhi, specifically in his wide range of writings. Needless to say that Gandhian ideas have received acknowledgement and critical appreciation in the domain of serious cognitive efforts both in Gandhian political philosophy as well as in the social and political philosophies of India.

We have also tried to evaluate the critical hermeneutics of caste, gender and modernity in the light of twentieth century contemporary sociology of knowledge that Indian nation state has confronted in both pre-colonial and post-colonial India. Interestingly enough, the scholarship that emerges from Gandhian set of ideas on the one hand and sociologist and political theorist of the caste and modernity on the other have created a terrain of dialogue in wading out the strength and weaknesses of Gandhian political philosophy.

It has been shown that the specific historical form of caste culture shaped by the ideas of varnadharma gives rise to problems of intelligibility and motivation as Enlightenment conceptions of reason and knowledge lose their credibility. Adoption of this rhetorical strategy by reformers such as Gandhi generated a different outlook on the normative standpoint itself. Maybe, that is the great contribution of Gandhi with regard to the notions of caste, gender and modernity. Following John Rawls, the overall methodology that we have used in this chapter intended to visualize a just society, which was indeed Gandhi’s Ramrajya.
Notes and References

9. Roy, Raja Ram Mohan, (1772-1833) considered father of modern Indian philosophy, at first concluded that Upanishadic teachings, rightly interpreted, contain eternal truth relevant to all ages. (xxix). Roy for the first time tried to show that only a correct interpretation of Upanishads could be true Hindu religion, and that only such religion could reconciled with modern world and science.
11. Rajaram Mohan Roy's Brahmasamaj (reformed Hinduism, and seeks reinterpretation of Upanishads) Dayanada Saraswati's 'going back to Vedas' Gandhi's religion as a source for interconnectivity and for community life.
12. 'Fusion between modern and tradition', 'Meeting East and West', 'Truth is one, the wise call it by different names', 'Truth is God' (Gandhi) 'Integral Consciousness' (Aurobindo) 'Holistic approach' and 'Religious revolution' (J.Krishnamurti) 'Unity in diversity' (Radhakrishnan) 'Inner and outer' 'tolerance', 'scientific spirit' etc. – the language used by the contemporary modern philosophers.


19. Alam, Javeed, India: Living with Modernity, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999. p.4


