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MIZORAM

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS

Edited :- Dr. Girindra Kumar



URBANIZATION IN MIZORAM

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS



Edited By

DR. GIRINDRA KUMAR

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URBANIZATION AND MODERNIZATION : A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THEIR INTERRELATIONSHIP

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(ABSTRACT :- Urbanization, it is believed, inevitably leads to structural and cultural modernization. This supposition has necessarily precluded a critical study by social scientists. The present paper seeks to question so called positive relationship between urbanization and modernization and to argue that whether the former leads to latter or not. It would eventually depend upon the historical and contextual factors. An uncritical assertion would, therefore, have to be resisted.

In this context the highly urbanized Mizo society can not be considered an adequately modernized society in the sense modernization is generally understood. For the purpose multitudinous definition of modernization has been avoided and the notion that the process of rationalization constitutes an essential element of modernity is employed. Therefore, economic and social aspects of urbanization rather than the demographic aspects have been considered in this paper. Moreover, mere existence of formal structure of modernity is a necessity but not a sufficient condition. Their functioning has to be characterized by rational behaviour.)

As Emile Durkheim, an eminent French sociologist, contended long ago that an adequate appreciation of any phenomenon would have to be preceded by a proper definition of the phenomenon in question. Taking a cue from him, one should first refer to the commonly accepted definition of urbanization, of modernization on the general level and finally make a few tentative propositions about the situation that obtains in Mizoram.

At the very outset, therefore, it must be made clear that the present paper is more of a hypothesis than a definitive theoretical assertion on

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the relationship between urbanization and modernization both on general and specific levels.

URBANIZATION

One of the most significant social phenomena of the twentieth century is urbanization which first took place in the developed world and is now occurring in the developing world. Scholars, it must be admitted, are a little late in appreciating the monumental significance of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, having realized the same, they have begun to understand the nature, patterns and consequences of urbanization in their totality.

It would not be totally out of context to mention here that once it has become clear that urbanization has been making inexorable entry into world civilization, people not bogged down with the value question, have expressed considerable apprehensions. Gandhi was one of the first to strike a discordant note on unbridled urbanization. To quote him : "I regard the growth of the cities as an evil thing, unfortunate for mankind and the world, unfortunate for England and certainly unfortunate for India. The British have exploited India through its cities. The latter have exploited the villages. The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is build".¹

As far as the meaning of urbanization is concerned, it, in the demographic sense, refers to an increase in the proportion of the urban population (U) to the total population (T) over a period of time². As long as U/T increases there is urbanization. One could visualize a situation in which even though there is no movement of people from rural areas to urban the proportion remains constant because of identical growth rates between urban and rural population. This kind of situation leads to urban growth without urbanization.

It is with urbanization, in the social and economic sense, however, that one should be immediately concerned from the viewpoint of analytical purpose. Urbanization in this sense is supposed to lead to the emergence of certain modern structural and cultural attributes. Some of them include formalization, atomization, lack of familism and kin-bound groupings, predominance of secular ideologies, occupational shift from agricultural to non-agricultural activities, etc.³

MODERNIZATION

Modernization is considered a theoretically unsound and methodologically inappropriate term. There does not exist any commonly accepted definition of modernization among scholars. In fact, there is a considerable amount of debate about the very components that are supposed to constitute modernization. However, such a debate need not be detrimental to understand the relationship between urbanization and modernization.

*For the purpose, the process of rationalization is considered as the central component in modernization. This is the awareness of the possibility to seek a rational explanation of physical and social phenomena which are presumed to be law-governed.*⁴

Many scholars have suggested that the starting point of any definition of modernization is not the character of society, but the character of its individuals. It is highly doubtful if any economy could be productive or any political or administrative institutions effective unless the people who work in the economy and staff the institutions have imbibed certain degree of rationality.

With this preliminary understanding of concepts of urbanization and modernization, the issue of the relationship between urbanization and modernization should be grappled with.

URBANIZATION AND MODERNIZATION

The symbiosis between urbanization and modernization has been taken for granted and this has necessarily precluded a serious critical study by social scientists. It is assumed that urbanization would inevitably lead to structural and cultural modernization.

It must, however, be recognized that whether urbanization would lead to modernizing influences and if so, to what extent, essentially depends upon specific historical and contextual factors operating in different societies. For instance, a rudimentary understanding of the history of the Indian society would tell us that the principle of hierarchy played a significant role in determining the extent to which more or less favourable

sites or neighbourhood could be allotted to a family. The king or the chief's fort was located on the most favourable site. Then came that of priests and merchants. Then the lower and the untouchable castes used to live at the outer fringes of the city. Thus, traditional form of urbanization consolidated the established cultural pattern which was heirarchical, cast-oriented and pre-industrial.⁵

Thus one would have to be a little circumspect in establishing a straight equation between urbanization and modernization. Many studies conducted on urban India clearly show that urban areas continue to be dominated by features characteristic of rural areas. Features which are supposed to be typical of a city such as absence of familism and kinbound groupings, formalization and presence of secular ideologies are not found to be existent to a significant degree in urban India. The rural-urban dichotomy is said to be irrelevant in the Indian context. Many persons are found to be engaged in primary industries. Joint families are conspicuous by their presence and the neighbourhood pattern of some cities is organized on caste and kinship lines similar to the villages. In fact, the migratory pattern is strongly influenced by ties of kinship, a fact which has made Lambert categorize the migration as 'family-centred associational migration'.⁶ Similarly, D.R. Gadgil's study of the Poona city revealed an increased strengthening of caste and communal associations for management of educational and other cultural resources and opportunities offered by the contemporary changes in outlook and communal identities.⁷ On the basis of his study of some cities, Milton Singer has concluded that modern media of communication are being used for the spread of traditional culture. It can be asserted with a reasonable degree of certainty that urbanization does not always necessarily lead to modernizing influences. If at all it does so in the context of predisposing historical and contextual factors. More often than not it is seen as reinforcing tradition.

URBANIZATION AND MODERNIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF MIZORAM

It has been acknowledged by scholars that urbanization not preceded by industrialization has serious implications for the society. On the one hand, it would lead to shrinkage of civic amenities and on the



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other, it could entail explosion of social and political tensions as there are far greater number of people trying to secure limited resources.

Such a situation, it is believed, already obtains in Mizoram. Mizoram is one of the most urbanized states in India. It is well-recognised that administrative and political factors contributed significantly to urbanization. Economic factors played only a marginal role in accentuating the process of urbanization.⁸ Due to various factors Mizoram is not endowed with any appreciable industrial infrastructure.

As far as the relationship between urbanization and modernization is concerned, the general theoretical position that there is no necessary positive relationship between these two would appear to be vindicated in Mizoram too. The social and political institutions that go with modernity do exist but their functioning is highly conditioned by tradition. Religion continues to play an enormously important role in the lives of people. The real process of secularization, an important concomitant feature of modernity, understood in terms of the differentiation of the religious from the social, the economic, and the political has not taken place. Every aspect of social life is so much conditioned by religion that even a casual observer would not fail to notice this. Historically, it would be correct to say that the christianity which came into existence in 1893 in Mizoram has had a profound modernizing impact on the Mizo Society. The introduction of formal education, modern methods of medicines and the removal of archaic social practices are associated with christianity. But modernity, it is essential to recognize, does not consist merely of formal structures. Scientific and rational outlook, as emphasized in the definition of modernity, is supposed to characterize the functioning of formal institutions. That is what precisely appears to be missing, a fact which would be evident to any perceptive observer. This probably partly explains the unsatisfactory growth of mathematical and physical sciences in Mizoram. There is definite historicity beyond this and needless to repeat, it is deeply conditioned by the tremendous religious atmosphere that prevails.

Modernising society has to constantly look ahead and concern itself with. Similarly, the constant susceptibility of the society to ethnic mobilization by the elite to consolidate and perpetuate their own interests reflects on the incomplete modernization of the society. Any broader issues

instead of being excessively preoccupied with itself. The "collective narcissism" is a real stumbling block in any modernizing society.

The transformation of a primordial society into a civil one which shows due respect for pluralism and diversity is an important feature that goes with modernization. Primordial values need to be supplanted if not completely displaced by modern values such as democracy, secularism and humanism.

The absence of any indigenous leadership which is capable of enhancing critical consciousness of the people and providing a clear vision and direction to them can also be taken as one important indication of incomplete modernization in the Mizo society. Why such leadership is absent, that is a question that needs to be addressed to separately. It is beyond the scope of this paper. It should, however, be clear that any modernizing society atleast in the initial stages depends to a great extent upon its enlightened leadership to guide it. Francis Bacon and Descartes are considered to be the philosophical founder of modernity and they played an important role in diffusing the modern values such as scientific and rational outlook. The Enlightenment Project (18th Century) would not have received the intellectual respectability it did but for a favourable congruences of subjective ideas and objective conditions prevailing then in Europe.

To conclude, any emphatic theoretical assertion on the positive relationship between urbanization and modernization has to be examined critically. Whether the former leads to the latter or not and if yes, to what extent depends to a great extent on the historical and contextual factors.

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