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DEVELOPMENTAL MODERNITY:
Man-nature separation in the discourse of wealth

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The combination of human habit and human creativity influenced the nature of human interaction with Nature. This in turn influenced relations among human beings, individual subjectivity and the manner in which human energy gets expended. The world-making of Man had distinguished human beings from non-humans. Man and Nature were distinguished, but not put to extreme separation. With such separation, rational Man welcomed the birth of Individual Man and attempted to bade farewell to Nature/god/past.

This exploratory paper begins by highlighting some of the ideas that bear and project this fundamental separation between Man and Nature. Further, the arsenal of concepts employed in the discussions on development and modernisation/social reform-as they have taken place in the State of Kerala-is elaborated in this paper. Only those discussions inscribed within the locales where the separation had material repeatability and which engaged with the existed and anticipated orders of preferences are taken up. Diverse other voices that differed and contested the concepts, that we are going to engage with, are left out; this omission is not because they are less important but because our focus is not so much on them. The sort of 'self-reflexivity' that spurs deferment and pessimism appears in this paper only marginally.¹ As the past is recognisable through traces left in language, a statement promulgated in one of the Princely States of India namely Travancore may be interesting to begin with.

To Man, Man remains separated from Nature

It is this very luxuriance of nature which has, in very deep in measure, stunted the spirit of progressive enterprise and industry in India. I said that India may be regarded as an epitome of the world. If it will not be *reductio ad absurdum*, I may, with equal confidence, say that Travancore is an epitome of India. (Rama Varma, 1874: 2)

¹ Some of the perspectives of Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour on human conditions have influenced this paper.

The quality of nature to make man 'passive' stands accused here. The conviction is something like this: It is 'you' who is responsible for stunting Progress, not 'we people/Man'. It was the year 1874 and the author was yet to succeed to the throne of the state. He was representing a nation, a society, and a country: it was at the same time a nation and a Princely State; it was a nation for the citizens² and a Princely State for the British administration in India. The British Paramountcy system enabled close surveillance and governance by the British resident in Travancore. The 'author' was a subject of such a system developed during the prevalence of colonial conditions and an example for the ardent 'modernisers'³; there were many others who patriotically marched with him on the newly trodden path towards ruptures and social reformulations (*Parishkaranam*).

In the above quote, Nature stands accused for the present human condition; the allegation is that Nature's luxuriance stunted the spirit of progress.⁴ The Assumptions are that Nature is capable of seducing the spirit of human beings with its luxuriance and the temptations of Man are such that he sees incapable of resisting the tactility of luxuriant nature. These two assumptions are implicit in the above excerpt. Nature is an active subject working on the passive people.

Progress stands here as something indispensable to the nation as if it is its destiny. And further, the judgement is founded on the understanding that the spirit of progress is reducible to growth of enterprise and industry and the progress of India was equated with growth in material extraction. Progress here is the growth of the mundane.

² The population was not viewed as a unified body of citizen during the period under reference.

³ Although the author represent the 'modernisers', he might as well represented the 'traditionalists' elsewhere. But, this is a different problem that I do not venture to tackle here.

⁴ This should be red against the contemporary view regarding progress and nature. Today, it is 'progress' that stunts the natural growth nature.

People always cherished the luxuriance of Nature. It did not matter who the culprit was; it did not matter whether it was the people who embraced the luxuriance or the luxuriance seduced people. The reproach also relocates luxuriance and labour through productivity. Nature and labour were also put in opposition. May be that, such a relocation is resonation of the dichotomy between pleasure and rationality principles. Life is equated with work, it is judged not for anything other than the sweat that worker/labourer sheds.

It is well known that within the project of development, the state was expected to convince the society about the need for development and act as an agency in developmental activities. Notions like 'Progress', 'Industry', 'Wealth', 'Production', 'Labour' etc. were some of the universalised and universalising jargons which gained material repeatability in the discourse of development by the turn of the nineteenth century itself.⁵ The project of progress through 'industry' was identified, equated with development and placed within the representations in which Nature stands separated from Man. Or, still better, the equation was well fitted to the ambience of a relationship of separateness between an imagined monolithic 'Human being' and a homogenised 'non-human world'.

The separation between Nature and Humans came out of despair and from a feeling of 'lack'; a sense of lack of 'enterprise and industry', rather than progress, churned the mindsets. The project of development was imported as a treatment for the existing disabilities/sickness so that the society could take the path of 'growth' after getting cured. This feeling emanated from the referential coupling established with nations where these were found to exist—say, Britain or any Other Nation which were identified as precursors and bearers of the universalising force of Progress. This sense of lack and

⁵ Developmental discourse started to function and operate and influence this region much before the turn of nineteenth century. But, it was not a project that functionalised 'inclusion' principle by making everyone in the society as subjects and objects of this discourse. Till then there were specialised agents who intervened into the society to execute the project of production based wealth creation.

longing for cure in turn geared up the desire to be like those successful in industrial development, to mimic⁶ the idealised 'Other' that has already achieved 'progressive enterprise and industry'.

But unlike in the history of the Other, it was thought that Nature, by working on the people of Travancore, stunted the desire for enterprise and industry. The 'lack' was thought to be the result of 'excess of Nature' in the world in which they lived. The positing of the 'Other', the industrious, within the 'self' as the ideal worthy of imitation influenced this sense of lack. The separation between Man and the world in which Men live paralleled separation within which the Other is influential and significant. The visibility of a separated non-human world enabled the identification and consolidation of a 'we' comprising of the humans--the non-enterprising and the non-industrious; it also engulfed the differentiation between 'we' in the nation of Travancore and the 'others' in the developed nations. In short, Nature was not merely distinguished from Man but separated from him. It was accused as well.

The specificity of this separation needs to be elaborated. It takes place not only when Nature is represented in its relation with Man but also when the Nature (*prakrutham*) of human beings is represented. A long passage that follows the accusing of Nature for its misdeeds can be quoted.⁷

...I can safely assert that it will be difficult to name another land which, within so narrow limits, combines so many, so varied, and so precious natural blessings. At the same time, I am strongly tempted to explain in the words of the immortal Scotch novelist;-- "Look at these barren hills, Mary, and at that deep winding vale by which the cattle are even now returning from their scanty browse. The hand of the industrious Fleming would cover these mountains with wood, and

⁶ Here I am not referring to the way postcolonial theory employs it.

⁷ The above author's statements are repeatedly recalled not because I find truth in them but because they are emblematic of the kind of thinking emerging as dominant.

raise corn where we now see a starved and scanty sward of health and
ling. It grieves me, Mary, when I look on that land, and think what
benefit it might receive from such men as I have lately seen." The
reason why of this is that *we are not sufficiently industrious*. (Rama
Varma, 1874: 2; *emphasis added*)

Here, the human being is accused for not being sufficiently industrious and
causing 'lack' of wealth and progress of the nation; the population of the
nation stands accused for not imbibing industriousness, as if this quality was
something that could be acquired. Not only are wealth and enterprise to be
acquired, but also achievement of this newly found capability of
industriousness is projected as a prerequisite. Here, 'we' are responsible for
the common fate, not so much Nature. The celebration of Nature's
endowments foregrounds the self-accusation and conceives Nature as less
effective.

Unlike in the first quote, the laudatory comments on Nature are not
tinged by accusations; Man is posited as the defendant in this one. Here
Nature is seen as an endowment for Man to use according to his 'free will' of
the Humanist kind and the fecundity of soil is celebrated as a resource.⁸
Everything 'out there' slowly began to be treated as 'resource' or as
something to be converted as 'natural resource' and the separation is implicit
in this. In this instance, Nature is not projected as inhibiting but as enabling; it
is not the luxuriance or beauty of Nature which is projected but its
endowments and resourcefulness. Irrespective of this difference, once again,
the separation is so well-cut. Whether Nature is viewed as good or evil, they
stand separated.

⁸ At this point it will be worth linking this discussion with what Heidegger has to say
about 'setting-in-order', challenging the nature and 'standing reserve'. For details see.
(Heidegger, M, 1977:15-17).

The Nature/Man separations, the tone of accusation in representations of Nature and Man, and their mutual relations foreground the imagination of a particular future encouraged by the reason of state. When Nature and Man are represented, they are accused yet hallowed for some of their qualities, whether dormant or realised. Both Nature and Human beings are anchored to wealth, and their mutual relation began to depend on how much value can be expended and gained. A new separation was formulated in which expenditure and gain were incommensurable. Nature is seen simultaneously as impeding and providing; Man is seen to be both passive receiver and active agent. Such accusations and separations by incorporating within the ambit of selfhood both the good and bad of the Other and the Self leads to hybridisation.

Longing for 'wealth of the nation' provided a wider umbrella to the constructions of Nature and Man and their separateness.

The hand of the industrious heapeth wealth", is the saying of one of the wisest of men, and is as true to-day as when it was said. The happiness, prosperity, power, and glory of a society or nation may always be measured by its well-directed, well-conserved, and progressive industry. Natural gifts are undoubtedly very important in the advancement of these, but unutilised by human industry, they are of little service. (Rama Varma, 1874: 2)

Wealth creation was presented as economic, political and ethical responsibility of each and every individual citizen, a collective activity of patriotic citizens. Spotless patriotism is an attribute of any King who speaks for his 'society' or 'nation' and citizens, this is what these sovereignty models, which interpret wealth creation as nation building, and their derivatives legitimise. There is a dream of the 'happiness, prosperity, power, and glory of the society and nation' in the statement. In the dream, they are not the state of affairs enabled by the mercy of the divine, chance or fate but accomplished solely by the hands of the industrious, human hands, are considered as the source of wealth of nations. Neither divine law nor natural

law matters the statement as it anticipates a future for the nation by holding faith in the capacity of Man and his wealth. He prescribes the course of action to reach the Eldorado where 'utilisation of human industry' takes place endlessly and progressively.

Wealth creation stands universalised as a general practice by linking it to nation and thereby applicable to entire population.⁹ It was never privileged so much and given secular status before such linking; wealth creation became everyone's space. Before such linkage, if it was privileged, then it was tantamount to *durmoham* or 'bad desire'. The word *artham* in Malayalam language denote both wealth and meaning/knowledge. The common opposition thus was between one's inclination towards knowledge and wealth. There were every day debates in which the question of what should be prioritised, wealth of knowledge, by an individual in the present world. The debate in general prioritised knowledge over wealth creation. And the epochal character Thunjan Nambiyar created the most effective propagation of it through his sarcastic verses that were part of confabulations till the last quarter of twentieth century. In fact, there are several literary articulations which ridicule and desecrate individual craving for material wealth humorously ever since Kerala came in touch with the European monopoly mercantilism since sixteenth century. But the idea of 'wealth of nations' detached wealth creation from personal/individual preference and the directives of customs and coupled it with social or national preference and interest. Within the coupling between wealth and nation, individual desire for accumulation of wealth no more foist inferior status to the bearers of such desire or the 'enterprising hands'. Thereafter participation in wealth creation becomes the sign of patriotism and commitment to the national/social future. It was no more a question of subjective interest, but a collective desire, the collective being 'society and state'; the light shed on individual preference

⁹ The Eurocentric-notion of nation assumed a given population consisting of patriotic citizens sharing common concerns for the nation.

was dim as the nation was too brightly illuminated. Collectivity for the betterment of the present/future got prioritised over the custom/tradition.

Whatever be one's caste, class, creed, religion etc., everyone was expected to participate in the process of transforming nature's gifts, because, the progress of the nation was equated with the progress of the people. History and personal preference were to be set aside for the social and national priorities of the progressive industry. Progressive change meant never-ending accretion of wealth by the hands of the industrious that is the wealth of nation. The present situation is recognised as one of insufficiency of wealth accumulation. It is the centrality projected on to the 'industrial situation' in judging the stage of the progress of the nation which nurtured the separation of Man from Nature and posited the Human being's future in relation to the mastery of the Other that is Nature. The ideology of 'society' and 'nation' and their development/modernisation concretised the reduction of human happiness to human will to material wealth. Natural gifts were recognised as "standing reserve", as Heidegger puts it, for the exclusive use of the nation/Man. Once Nature began to be viewed as a usable resource, Man had to master it, prune its growth and prevent its loss.

To be Man, Man has to Master Nature

There was incredible optimism about the powers of human hands in changing the face of Mother Earth. It was thought that Man had to master Nature and that he was capable of doing it. Several human attitudes and articulations have given material repeatability to the separation.

Again we see, how the Netherlands, situated, in parts, below the level of the sea, and having a comparatively sterile soil, has not only effectually debarred Neptune's encroachments and carried agriculture to great perfection, but turned out one of the first class maritime power of Europe, and acquired territorial possessions in Africa, Asia, and the Eastern seas. (Rama Varma, 1874: 1)