

# In defence of modernization

*Culture*

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*Dawn*  
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IT IS almost a commonplace in developing countries, especially the ones that are Muslim, that while modernization is welcome, westernization is not. Some of their intellectuals have argued that western prescriptions for reversing their political and social decay have failed, and that one should look to one's native sources of wisdom for effecting improvement. To date nativity has been rather unyielding in offering solutions.

In any case, the proposition that modernization and westernization are two distinct processes so that we can adopt one and discard the other is, for the larger part, invalid. For one thing, many of the ideas and practices that we call "modern" originated and then flourished in the West. In that respect, then, modernization and westernization are the same.

Modernity is not to be placed in opposition to that which we regard as "ancient". Rediscovery of many of the modes of thought and action associated with ancient Greece and Rome stimulated the emergence of modernity and its subsequent advance. It is much better understood as a departure from that which was medieval. First and foremost, it signifies a new way of generating knowledge, commonly known as the scientific method. A proposition is valid not because conventional wisdom says so. It is valid if observation and analysis of relevant facts, with interpretations or conclusions tested and validated in the laboratory or out in the field, confirm it. This methodology has enabled the West to master science and technology and achieve economic and political predominance. In this regard, modernization and westernization are coterminous, and cannot imagine that Muslim intellectuals will want to reject

and well-organized bureaucracy had already existed in the Catholic church at the Vatican, and in a rudimentary form in kingdoms, but now the modern state acquired a large, elaborate, and complex bureaucracy.

Accepting the modern state, but worrying about its tendency to centralization and excessive bureaucratization, the more influential political theorists (notably John Locke in England and Thomas Jefferson in America) asserted the primacy of the individual and the sovereignty of the people in politics. The former idea invested the individual with "reason", and with the right to choose his beliefs, opinions, occupation (within bounds of law) and modes of participation in politics, among other things. It required limitations upon the state's authority to regulate the individual's behaviour. This is not to ignore the opposition, that is, the advocates of a highly centralized and active state — for instance, Thomas Hobbes in England and Alexander Hamilton in America. The point to be emphasized here is that they were not as influential in the making of the western democratic culture.

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In the realm of societal organization, modernization has not entirely abolished class divisions but it has certainly blunted them. It espouses equality before law, and promotes that of opportunity, political participation and civil rights.

Christian, secularism has had fairly good receptivity. A few sects — for instance, Calvinists in Geneva and Puritans in Massachusetts in America — did call upon the state to enforce the divine law, but their advocacy did not gain many adherents.

Initially, secularism became a preferred political doctrine to put an end to wars of religion, mainly between Catholics and Protestants in England and France. Subsequently, it became the ground for discouraging governmental discrimination against religious minorities. But note that its progress has been slow and uneven.

In the United States, the Constitution of 1787 ordained the separation of church and state, but it took public officials and the society at large nearly two hundred years to become secular-minded. Even now a degree of bias against religious minorities persists. The United Kingdom is secular for most practical purposes, but not so formally. Elizabeth is Queen by the Grace of God, defender of the faith, and head of the Church of England, and the Lords Spiritual (bishops) sit alongside the Lords Temporal in the House of Lords.

Formally and officially, Pakistan is an Islamic, not a secular, state. However, many of its political and intellectual elite are secular-minded. They are so inclined not because they are under the spell of the West, but because an essentially secular disposition, concurrent with respect for religion, has been a part of our native tradition and historical experience. Outlawry of secularism may be an urgent issue for the country's Islamic parties, but for the "silent majority" it would appear to be a "non-issue".

There are aspects of western culture — food, clothing, entertainment arrangements of personal appearance, notions of friendship, love and marriage, family structures and affiliations, forms of artistic expression, among many others — which have little, if anything, to do with modernization as described above,

are coterminous, and I cannot imagine that Muslim intellectuals will want to reject them.

Beyond science and technology, the most radical departures from medieval practice are the demise of feudalism, as a system of holding landed property and wielding political power, and passage from inherited status to contract as the determinant of reciprocal rights and obligations among persons. Feudalism gave way gradually to the pressures of an alliance between kings (who wanted to be rid of the autonomous and often rebellious feudal lords and their shifting and opportunistic allegiances) and the rising commercial property holders, who wanted political influence and freedom for their commerce from tolls, taxes, and regulation imposed by a multiplicity of fiefdoms.

Feudalism was followed by several other systems of thought and rule. Of these, absolute monarchy, communism, socialism, fascism, and the harsher types of authoritarianism have been in decline for periods of time. Varieties of capitalism and democracy appear to be the currently dominant western ideologies.

In a related dimension of modernity, a centralized state, whose writ reached all parts of its territory, replaced the earlier dispersal of political authority among the feudal lords. The process of integrating the king's territory into a state required the extension of the individual's loyalty beyond his family and immediate surroundings to larger entities, such as country and nation, which in their entirety he would never see. Thus arose the ideas of nationhood, nationalism, and the nation state. And extensive

All of this is at once modernization and westernization. Apart from secularism, certain issues relating to sexual behaviour, and some concerning the status of women, what is here to which Muslim intellectuals or politicians will want to object?

We now enter the rocky terrain of secularism. In common parlance the term means separation of church and state which, in turn, means that the state itself professes no religion, favours none over others, and takes no responsibility for enforcing law and rules of morality that believers in one or another religion may regard as divine. The state in the West has incorporated much of the Judeo-Christian law and morality into its own laws, but it requires obedience to them because they are its laws, not because they are the laws of God. The rest of the divine law and morality is left to the individual to follow, or ignore, as he may wish.

This position is easier for Christians to accept than it is for the Jews and the Muslims. Jesus brought no new law, but Moses and Muhammad (peace be on them) did. For the Christians law is the same as the Judaic law, but they have found ways out of the obligation to enforce it. First, Saint Paul held that the law was not all that important. If a man objected to circumcision, which the law required, or liked to eat pork, which the law forbade, he might do as he wished and still be a Christian.

Second, having died on the cross, Jesus had already paid for the sins of his followers. For good measure, if they are Catholics, they might confess their sins to a priest and ask for the Lord's forgiveness, which would be forthcoming. Since the West is mostly

and which people in developing countries may or may not adopt. If a Pakistani likes to hear Bach or Beethoven, let him, but if western classical music is "noise" to his ears, he can stick with Ghulam Ali and Iqbal Bano. There is nothing wrong with broadening one's awareness of beauty, but it is foolish to downgrade or ignore one's own culture.

Women all over the world have been striving for equality with men in various spheres. They have achieved some successes but their work is not quite done yet even in the West. I intend to address myself to their struggle in Pakistan in a subsequent article. Suffice it to say now that discrimination against them does not issue from public policy but from the traditional outlook of certain segments of society. Nevertheless, they are going forward. Even as more of them wear the "hejab", education, commerce, banking, professions (including politics), and the public services are opening up to them as never before. In this area, the tension between our native/Muslim tradition and modernization or westernization appears to be subsiding.

Sex out of wedlock has gone on in all societies since times immemorial. The issue is not whether it will continue. It is whether government and society may accord it overt acceptance or tolerance. This has been happening in the West during the last fifty years or so. This is then a part of western civilization we ought to reject. Certainly, we should not legalize it. If we cannot eradicate it, which most probably we can't, let us keep it covert as our ancestors over the last many centuries had done.