



# Department of Humanities & Social Sciences IISER BHOPAL

## Two Uses of Modernity: As an Enabler in the West & as an Oppressor in British India

Modernity is often defined by its characteristics like rationality, objectivity, and rights. However, to distinguish different uses of modernity, this presentation discusses its disciplines, especially modern science, technology, industry, and radical political ideals. Modernity in the West liberated society from orthodoxy. Interestingly and intriguingly, the use of modernity in British India by the East India Company first and the Empire later was to oppress India. The former used technology and industry, including railways, communication, and other instruments, to exploit India. The latter, in addition, made limited and often contradictory use of modernity to justify their rule of India, thus leading to Imperial liberalism, which, though a reality remained a contradiction. For instance, the British used the formula, "If modernity, then colonialism". This both defended colonialism and deprived India of its right to its own nationalism and representative government.

Subsequently, the presentation discusses how Indian national leaders, in their writings, faced the indomitable problem and were forced to explore other formulas of nationalism. In contrast to Western nationalism, which disinherited the past and built its nationalism on the firm foundation of modernity, Indian nationalism, on the other hand, recalled the past. Recalling the past pervaded the writings of many Indian nationalists, starting from Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya to Dr B.R. Ambedkar. The presentation discusses the diversity, critical engagement, and adoption of the past in the writings of national leaders. The conclusion raises the question of whether this alternative formula broadens, enriches, dilutes, or even subverts the original ideals of nationalism.

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**L6 (LHC)**

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A. Raghuramaraju teaches philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology, Tirupati. He has a Ph.D. in philosophy from IIT Kanpur and taught at Goa University and the University of Hyderabad. He is offered 'Mahatma Gandhi Prestigious Chair' by the Punjab University, Chandigarh during 2024-2025. His publications in Oxford University Press include *Debates in Indian Philosophy: Classical, Colonial and Contemporary*; *Debating Gandhi: A Reader*, editor; *Enduring Colonialism: Classical Presences and Modern Absences in Indian Philosophy*; *Modernity in Indian Social Theory*; *Philosophy and India: Ancestors, Outsiders and Predecessors*; *Debating Vivekananda: A Reader*, editor; *Desire and Liberation: Biography of a Text by Vaddera Chandidas*, an editor. Routledge has published his books *Modern Frames and Premodern Themes in Indian Philosophy: Border, Self and Other* and *Calibrating Western Philosophy for India: Rousseau, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, and Vaddera Chandidas*. His edited volume titled *Seven Sages: Selected Essays of Ramchandra Gandhi* is published by Penguin. He wrote monthly columns from October 2019 to February 2024 for the English daily *The Telegraph*.

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