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This excellent study of Kerala modernity marks a significant contribution to the ongoing debates on modernity by interrogating the prevailing Eurocentric and nation-centric conceptualisations of modernity. By adding the adjective ‘other’ to modernity and thereby making it plural “modernities”, this volume invokes different counter-hegemonic cultural implications, calling for a re-visioned reading and understanding of Kerala modernity. Instead of looking for a homogenous ‘Malayalee modernity’, the volume engages itself with, as Prof. Gopal Guru puts in the forward, “alternative conduits of modernity.” Here, the idea of the region as “rhizomatic assemblage of diverse space-times” is conceived as a central discursive strategy to explore the project of Kerala modernity. Different essays in the volume elucidate how varying ideas, spaces and practices act as strands interweaving a region’s experiences of modernity. This review will outline the central arguments presented in *Kerala Modernity* and also the wider philosophical implications arising from the discussion.

Earlier theorists have always defined the arrival of modernity in Kerala around a set of events claimed to be central to its shaping such as the decline of nair joint families, matriliny, the advent of communism and so on. Gopal Guru in the forward elucidates how these were only the upper caste response to modernity. These prevailing responses have been questioned and challenged in the forward itself by offering a dalit critique of modernity. The polyvalent and complex nature of modernity is unravelled here by analysing events of a wide range such as the colonial spice trade in Malabar; engagement of Malabar intelligentsia with modernity; thinkers from the social margins like Narayana Guru and his social reformatory endeavours; harbour construction in Cochin and the consequent urban modernity; janapriya or painkili (popular) literature and the popular experience of modernity with a case study of two popular novels written by Muttathu Varkey; a critical reading of the cinematic text *Amma Ariyan* that elucidates the radical Left politics of the 1970s; women’s sexuality around the Suryanelli rape case and the emerging debates on the politics of sex and caste; the gendered constitution of public space in the context of attukal Pongala; piped water supply system in twentieth century Kerala and the developmental modernity that aroused with this institution building
and rationalisation of state power; Muziriz Heritage Project and the resulting commoditisation of ‘heritage’ in this age of global modernity. These diverse experiences of modernity have so far been obliterated in the making of a homogenous Malayalee modernity.

The study appears illuminating and at times inspirational. A highlight, the opening essay “The Routs of Pepper: Colonial Discourses around the Spice Trade in Malabar”, by Vinod Kottayil Kalidasan discusses how the colonial spice trade in Malabar and the consequent implementation of wage system altered the socio-cultural, and economic preconditions of the agricultural labourers from lower caste and adivasi communities and thereby led to the emergence of a nascent modernity. “Colonial Intellectuals, Public Sphere and the Promises of Modernity: Reading Parangodeeparinayam” by Shiju Sam Varughese analyses Malabar intelligentsia’s engagement with colonial modernity with a case study of two novels of that time, Indulekha and parangodiparinayam. The author elucidates how parangodiparinayam flashes the possibility of another modernity that is radically different from the aspirations of upper class that we encounter in Indulekha. The study shows how the dialogic prose employed in these novels exclud certain voices in the making of a nascent public sphere.

Satheesh Chandra Bose in “(Re)construction of ‘the Social’ for making a Modern Kerala” Reflections on Narayana Guru’s Social Philosophy” analyses the social reform movements initiated by the lower castes and how Narayana Guru interrogated the power structure inherent in the caste and sub-caste systems. Guru’s revised advaita marked the emergence of a new modern subjectivity rooted on the notion of humanity, human equivality and led to the emergence of a new modern subjectivity and a subaltern experience of modernity through the construction of a subaltern selfhood and identity.

Justin Mathew in “Port building and Urban Modernity: Cochin, 1920-45” analyses the tremendous impact that the construction of Cochin harbour had on the communal life of the region and the consequent emergence of urban modernity in Cochin. Thus by taking into consideration a region’s diverse experiences of modernity, the study critically examines how modernity is constituted differently in specific regions.

This collective venture by a group of young scholars is a remarkable attempt to wrest Kerala modernity away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. Kerala Modernity succeeds on many levels, beginning with a subaltern critique of the earlier theoretical practices, it considers the topic in the socio-religious, political and historical context. This sort of an attempt to explore ‘alternative modernities’ in Kerala, simultaneously through various lenses, rarely takes place. One noticeable set back is that the study does not make any reflection on
the individual response to modernity. The ways in which modernity has been conceived by one individual does not apply to another as people do not always share identical interests or cultural inclinations. Responses to modernity thereby changes from person to person. These individual responses to modernity certainly yield different modernities rather than that claimed for modernity as a regionally totalizing idea.

A true value of this work is the number of questions it raises and the avenues it raises for future research. These “other modernities” that Kerala Modernity discusses in relation to the discourses of marginality opens avenues for further research. As Gopal mentions in the forward, this volume contain chapters that throw light on what would be called a ‘low-intensity modernity’, represented by the people from the margins which has escaped the attention of the academia so far. Interdisciplinary in its approach, the volume will be of relevance to students and scholars in cultural studies, social sciences and humanities as well as the interested general reader.