

'Developmental Democracy' through Education: Production of New-fangled Subjectivities and Corpulent Psychic Economies

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Education is ... the greatest and most difficult problem with which man can be confronted, since insight depends on education and education in its turn depends on insight. ... Two inventions of man must surely be viewed as the most difficult: the art of government and the art of education.

Immanuel Kant - 1963

Ansgewahlte Schriften zur Pädagogik und ihrer Begründung

Given the fact that education is one the greatest and most difficult problems with which (wo)man has been confronted, given the fact that we have tried to attend to this difficult problem by reducing more often than not the 'art of education' to the 'science of government' (such is the history of education, history of its reduction to governance-related concerns! Or is education all about aiding and creating subjective-conduits for the governance conditions of the period in question?), given the fact that the history of higher education in India is the history of the reduction of the art of education to the language, logic and needs of government(ality), more specifically to the needs of colonialism (and the civilizing mission), development and globalization, given the fact that the governance of 'developmental democracy' is organized *through* (higher) education (at least education constitutes a crucial node in governance), this paper will be a critical reflection on the history of such multiple histories of higher education in India. It is in terms of this history of multiple histories that we shall try to make sense of the contemporary. We shall see how (higher) education is becoming (or has been) the conduit for the production of fresh subjectivities and rotund psychic economies, if not, altogether new configurations of learning and being. Through an in-depth study of higher education institutions, field work in the corridors of policy formulations, analysis of government publications, review of public documents, interviews of leading scholars and ethnography of subjectivities-psychic economies produced through and in higher education centres this paper shall try to see how governance and education feed into one another (this paper would thus be trying to study "the processes of governing in Indian democracy" through higher education initiatives); as also how higher education generally becomes the condition for the production of the citizen-subject and more particularly the (1) subject of aesthetics (the *shikshito bhadralok*) (2) subject of empowerment in third world-ist backwaters as also (3) for the ushering in of the ethical and the just (we have in mind government sponsored social justice initiatives in higher education through affirmative action). Further, as governance goes through transition ('patriarchal benevolence' and 'welfare' gets supplemented by a "market-friendly state" and as 'people' become claimants of 'rights'), as 'policy explosion', 'securitisation' and 'illiberalism' emerge as nodal points of governance, and as "democratic governance introduces a new spatial divide" between spaces that are 'sacred' and spaces that are 'isolated', how is higher education (with its own organization of space – the space on the one hand of the IIM educated, efficient, globally competitive, digitally learning elite and on the other of the employment seekers coming out of undergraduate spaces and at times availing of the social justice measures put in place by the government) featuring in this process? How is the imagination of higher education contributing to governance? How is the imagination of governance contributing to higher education?

History of the Multiple Histories of Higher Education in India:

It is in terms of this history of multiple histories that this paper would attempt to understand the contemporary. This history has to it broadly three phases, each tied to concerns of governance. In the first phase it is the 'civilizing mission' sponsored by the colonizer; in the second it is 'state sponsored development'; and in the third, that is post-1989 it is the 'democracy of the market' and the 'marketing of democracy'.

Higher Education (HE) in India inherits the legacy of colonial legislations. In a 1797 paper on the need for the diffusion of Western knowledge in India, Charles Grant, an official of the East India Company, condemned the cultural practices of the Indians, arguing that only the propagation of Christianity would redeem them. Grant's proposal was not implemented at the time because of the Company's anxiety about tampering with the customs of its subjects. T. B. Macaulay's Minute of 1835 and William Bentinck's support of its recommendations caused a long drawn out controversy between those wanting the propagation of Oriental education and those arguing for Anglicization. From the 1830s on, the government instituted several enquiries into the practicability of introducing and strengthening vernacular language education, but time and again these initiatives failed to take root because of the deep ambivalence of officials about the purpose and mode of instruction. It is evident that the present-day Indian education system's inability to address the problem of regional language educational resources stems from this complicated history. Drawing from the educational concerns of Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1856 and the Education Despatch of 1854 stressed the necessity of imparting English education ("the improved arts, sciences, and literature of Europe") to the Indians; this would give the Indians access to the "moral and material blessings which flow from the general diffusion of useful knowledge". The Despatch also emphasized the importance of vernacular languages in the diffusion of European knowledge. In 1857, affiliating universities were established in Madras, Calcutta and Bombay on the model of the University of London, with a Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Fellows. Interestingly, *there was very little representation for teachers in this system of governance*. New career opportunities, especially in the government, compelled students to opt for English-medium instruction, so that contrary to the recommendation of the Education Despatch of 1854 vernacular language instruction was not easily available after middle school. The Indian Universities Act of 1905 appeared to consolidate the dominance of the British government in the field of higher education, and led to widespread disaffection amongst nationalists who had started many educational institutions of their own, and who now started a debate on what might be the content of a national education, including primary education.

Post-Independence, India set out to develop an education system that is massive (it is recognised by UNESCO as the second largest system in the world). This includes over 300 universities including deemed universities, and thousands of colleges. The colleges, which were often much older, were increasingly drawn into a formal relationship of "affiliation" with the universities, which were endowed with the authority to regulate teaching, set syllabi, conduct examinations, and give degrees. Although the affiliating system originated in England, it now survives only in South Asia. Elsewhere, varying degrees of autonomy for colleges has been necessitated by the enormous growth of the system. At present, universities sometimes have over a hundred affiliated colleges, which do the undergraduate teaching. The university usually does only PG teaching, apart from carrying out its regulatory functions. Although the university departments are supposed to combine research and teaching, with some scattered exceptions they tend to concentrate on teaching

(and supervising the research of PhD students) while the research institutes set up in the 1950s and after are supposed to concentrate solely on research.

The major challenge for the HE sector lies in crafting initiatives so as to forge a *vertical integration* of the three ends of the HE spectrum – (i) the Research Institution, (ii) the University and (iii) the UG college. One of the challenges for the sector is that much of what is happening at the UG college level does not impinge in a *bottom-up* manner upon research or pedagogy in the university; and much of what happens in research institutions and in universities does not reach the UG college. Further, UG colleges are no more elite institutions that cater to a few but have transformed themselves into public institutions; the UG College is both a social space that marks the rites of passage for the youth and a space of both education and knowledge production; the demographic profile of an undergraduate classroom has also changed over the past few decades making colleges a microcosm of contemporary Indian society; they represent the heterogeneous reality of the Indian society. They also bear the brunt of the global and local demands on the institutions of higher education, contend with the dire effects of neglecting and underpaying teachers, demonstrate the impact of stagnation in curriculum, reflect the urban and rural divide in educational practices and constitute the site where contests over knowledge, professional skills, access, cultural rights and political mobilization are periodically staged.

The Research Institutions by and large are not concerned with teaching, and the Universities with – remaining for the most part outside the inter-disciplinary debates that animate Research Institutions – have not been able to equip themselves to deal with curriculum revision. The other problem is that disciplines, cocooned as they are, have not tried to *speak with* each other to think innovative initiatives; in the process, critical *intra-disciplinarity* and *inter-disciplinarity* have both suffered.

Post-independence the report of the University Commission (1948) headed by the S. Radhakrishnan, proposed a distinction between facts (nature), events (society) and values (spirit) (which in turn would be the subject matter of the sciences, social sciences and humanities respectively). The goal of education was training for citizenship, according to the report, providing a definition of 'general education', which was supposed to include *theoretical contemplation, aesthetic enjoyment* and *practical activity*. The disciplines fell into place along this tripartite division. This tripartite division and this model of disciplinary compartmentalization have ruled the understanding of Higher Education in India.

However, Radhakrishnan's emphasis on 'general education' was soon replaced by an emphasis on education for 'development' of the nation, especially through the inclusion of 'science and technology' or 'area studies' which in turn would provide key inputs for state policy. During the 50s and the early 60s in India, most of the key educational institutions and statutory bodies for regulating higher education were set up, as well as institutions meant for the identification and recognition of artistic practice. The University Grants Commission, an autonomous body to control higher education, was formed through an Act of Parliament in 1956. Developmental aid from the Soviet Union, the USA and West Germany helped set up the first Indian Institutes of Technology, which were granted recognition as "institutions of national importance" through the IITs Act of 1961. The first management institutions or business schools were set up in Ahmedabad and Calcutta in 1961. The setting up of these specialized institutions further reinforced the *separation of skill-based learning from 'general education'*, that was already evident in the medical, architecture and engineering colleges from colonial times. The Kothari Commission (1964) also emphasized the need for vocational courses at all levels, including that of higher education. The *vocationalization* was intended to stem the inflow into arts courses which

were still based on the colonial model for creating lower-level government officials, and which thus attempted to provide only a broad 'general education'.

Even when there were revisions in education policies, as for example in the New Education Policy (1986), the tripartite division of disciplines based on *facts, events and values* found in the Radhakrishnan report did not change substantially. The NEP's main recommendation was indeed once again vocationalization, proposed as the antidote to the colonial emphasis on the liberal arts, which were supposed to equip graduates only for the civil services. Another aspect of the NEP relating to higher education was the recommendation to develop *autonomous colleges* and do away with the affiliating system.

Fifteen years after the NEP, and following on the heels of the Revised Programme for Action (1992) that endorsed the formulations of the NEP, the heads of two major industrial houses authored the Birla-Ambani report. The report renewed the plea for *vocationalization*, but now in the context of a rapidly globalizing economy: knowledge in this report came to be redefined as technical knowledge and managerial competence. The assertion was that "Education must shape adaptable, competitive workers". The report declares that India must invest in "Upgrading education content, delivery and processes – we have to change from seeing education as a component of social development to treating it as a means of creating a new information society". Here, however, we have a redefinition of vocationalization to mean professionalization in both its senses: focus on technical and managerial skills rather than on general education, and focus on "delivery of services" rather than on exploring forms of knowledge. The Birla-Ambani Committee points to the need to evaluate the utility of current Arts and Science courses, and link them to employment opportunities. "Economic value" is proposed as the measure rather than the "intrinsic merit" of education. The concern with "useful knowledge" – first expressed in the colonial period (the period of the 'civilizing mission'), then in the context of a developmentalist state, and now after the fall of the Soviet in the context of globalization (presumably with different referents) – resurfaces in the current critiques of higher education.

By the 1990s, we were witnessing a palpable sense of crisis in the developmental initiatives of the state. It was a crisis brought on by the large-scale transformations of the economy-polity, as well as by sustained political critiques of socially disadvantaged groups. The social and political crises were paralleled by disciplinary crises. While in areas such as English literary studies and history there was a re-thinking of the conceptual and methodological foundations of the disciplines, in some other instances, the disciplinary crisis manifested itself as an institutional crisis. Crisis in developmentalist institutions (often dominated by economists) lead to the imagination of 'new structural specifics' (in terms of new institutional designs). These non-conventional institutions (some of which were autonomous) usually had an activist-academic beginning – where one was redefining both activism and academics – where one was also critically working one's way in relation to both (global) capital and the State (the State too is acquiring new functions in the post-GATT period). Started by a close well-knit collective, research for most of these new institutions meant 'applied research'; it was research with a certain amount of accountability to the public at large; there was also a desire to intervene at the level of policy. New institutions often went hand in hand with new thematic specifics (new fields of research and teaching), and new thematic specifics have at times necessitated the founding of new institutions. Interdisciplinarity and Collaborative Institutional work was the strong point of most of the new institutions. Post 1989 these new institutions have brought into the field of Higher Education skills and attitudes hitherto not common in research centres and universities; they were as if 'living organisms' (and not just brick and mortar structures), learning and unlearning, mutating and metamorphosing. These institutions have ushered in different/new *products* (that is new knowledge pools; cultural studies being one; migration, film, media,

women's studies being others) and/or different/new *methods* of approaching knowledge production. These institutions offer a view of higher education beyond the mere narrative of decay and decline; they usher in the field of higher education a different philosophy of research and education.

We see in the University a series of significant new phenomena: the gender and caste composition of the student body is changing in the UG space, especially in regional universities; and with the changing student profile, social exclusion and social justice are emerging as issues. Elite students no longer enrol in the natural and social sciences, and the pattern of professional education as the most lucrative career option is only being reinforced. Non-elite students demand that the university still function as a source of accreditation. The linguistic problems caused by the discrepancy between the language of instruction and the social background of the students are growing. Simultaneously, one witnesses an emptying out of faculties, with social science and humanities teachers choosing to avail of new job opportunities abroad or new economy jobs in India.

Higher education could thus be seen as standing at a strange crossroad – the crossroad of (a) a classical Humboltian approach (the classical approach was however displaced by colonialism/'the civilizing mission'), (b) a reformed Developmentalist approach (at times 'Top-Down Statist', at other times even if rarely 'Bottom-Up people centric') and (c) what could provisionally be called an Efficiency approach (an approach modelled around (global) competition and productivity; and represented by the IT sector, and IIM and Business Schools). Given the crossroads, which way would the field of HE go now? What are problems that afflict the sector? What are the solutions? What are the promises, if any? How is the government responding to these questions? What is its philosophy of education? What is the relation of such a philosophy of education to its philosophy of governance? Is the philosophy of governance subsuming the philosophy of education? Or are they mutually constitutive?