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**EDUCATION, MODERNISATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT**

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*Eminent Historian*

Maulana Azad Memorial Lecture  
(10<sup>th</sup> November, 2010)

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## EDUCATION, MODERNISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Let me begin by thanking the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Govinda, Prof. S. Irfan Habib and members of the faculty for inviting me to be with you this evening. For a variety of reasons it is an honour and privilege to speak in memory of Abul Kalam Azad, whose contribution to the making of India as a nation very few have excelled. Foremost among them is the role he had played in leading the country in the struggle for its transformation from a colony to an independent modern state. He was a key player in the national movement, a champion of secularism, a profound scholar of religion and an outstanding educationist. Any one of these achievements is sufficient to earn him a place in the national pantheon. But he had left a mark in all these fields and enriched their quality at a time when Indian public life had men of great distinction. Recalling his contribution is to remind ourselves about an era in which service and sacrifice were the qualities of public life.

Azad drew his core values from three sources: anti-imperialism, nationalism and secularism. Having to deal with two evils - fascism

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and imperialism at the same time, Azad had shown remarkable clarity in a long and powerful speech, delivered as the President of the Indian National Congress at Ramgarh in 1940, to analyse their implications for humanity in general and India in particular. In his reckoning imperialism was fundamentally unjust and oppressive and it would be unrealistic to expect it to respect the aspirations of the subjected. A successful conclusion of the War with the help of Indians, he believed, would not bring about any change in the attitude of the British. Clarifying his opinion he said, 'The members of the British Cabinet have tried to make the world believe that the old order of British imperialism has ended, and that today the British nation has no other aim except those of peace and justice. Which country could have more warmly acclaimed such a declaration than India? But the fact is that in spite of these declarations, British imperialism stands in the way of peace and justice today as it did before the war. The Indian demand was the touchstone for all such claims. They were so tested and found to be counterfeit and untrue.'<sup>1</sup>

Azad was among the few leaders of his generation who transgressed religious sectarian

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<sup>1</sup> K.N. Panikkar (ed), *Towards Freedom*, 1940, New Delhi, 2009, p. 220.

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attitude to politics and conceptualised the relationship between the majority and the minority from a national point of view. He was an uncompromising nationalist who subscribed to the view that minorities are not given but constructed and their formation occurs only when they start believing in their minority status or when the majority treats them so. At a time when religious politics commanded great influence among the Muslims, Azad upheld secularism as the only foundation on which Muslims can chart out their political destiny. He believed in the cultural unity of the sub-continent and therefore, was vehemently opposed to partition. In his controversial book, *India Wins Freedom*, he has expressed his anguish over partition as follows: 'Partition was a tragedy for India and the only thing that could be said in its favour was that we had done our best to avoid division but we had failed... We must not however forget that nation is one and its cultural life is and will remain one.'<sup>2</sup> Being a profound scholar of religion in general and Islam in particular, Azad was quite conscious of the importance and, indeed, of differing roles of religion in personal and social life. He placed great importance on the knowledge of religion, and therefore, championed education of

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<sup>2</sup> Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, New Delhi, 1988, p. 214.

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all religions, but not religious education. While remaining a staunch Muslim he kept religion out of politics and consistently and without compromise, defended and promoted secular nationalism which alone could make the nation truly democratic.

In formulating and implementing the educational policy of independent India, as the education minister, Azad had a very challenging task of conceiving and developing a national system, at a time when the government was preoccupied with problems of economic recovery and rehabilitation of those displaced by the partition. In such conditions it was natural that education and other such areas received lesser attention. Even then Azad tried to resolve the complexities involved in conceptualising a system of 'national' education. In doing so he emphasised the need to depart from the system inherited from colonialism by rejecting its content and language of communication. He employed an interesting formulation to describe the then prevalent system: 'A system shaped by non-nationals in non-national interest'.<sup>3</sup> 'The main charge', he argued, 'against the present system of education is that it has not led to the development of a national mind'. The importance of this critique was not only its

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<sup>3</sup> 'Education and National Reconstruction' in *Speeches of Abul Kalam Azad*, New Delhi, 1959, p.1

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sensitivity to the colonial character of education, which the Indian intellectuals were aware of from nineteenth century itself. What was important was its implications for intellectual decolonisation without losing sight of the advances in knowledge that colonial system represented. He recognised that the colonial system 'opened a new world of science and modern technology. It inculcated a progressive spirit and brought Indian educational standards in line with the standards obtaining elsewhere. It led to a reawakening of the national spirit and a growth of modern and progressive outlook in all affairs of the world.'<sup>4</sup> He found chinks in both the colonial modern and the native-traditional systems and tried to evolve an alternative which incorporated the elements of both western and traditional, emancipating the former from its colonial content and ideology and the latter from its unscientific and irrational outlook. It, however, did not mean that he was not alive to the intellectual possibilities which might accrue from the colonial system. What was advocated by Azad as an alternative was a system of 'liberal and humanitarian education' which would transform the outlook of the people and set the nation on the path of progress and prosperity. The path thus envisioned by Azad was neither a

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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continuation of the 'colonial' modern nor a restoration of the 'native' traditional. Education being an integral component of modernity, the policy enunciated by Azad had the potential for creating the foundations of a modern society which would be different from what colonialism had tried to generate. Such an alternative had its roots in the legacy of a rather limited strand within the renaissance and nationalism which tried to conceptualise *modernity in terms of universal values*. The gigantic and challenging task of creating a national system based on such a foundation, however, has remained unrealised so far. This is partially because the cultural and intellectual make up of the Indian middle class was firmly rooted in the colonial-modern. An elite oriented reform of education currently being undertaken has the unmistakable stamp of the interests and aspirations of the middle class.

### **Antecedents of Alternative modernity in Education**

The initiatives taken by colonial rule to educate a small section of its subjects, intended to create a social strata imbued with its culture and ideology, led to the spread of a thin veneer of 'modernity' transmitted through the colonial administrative apparatuses. The new system was attractive to the



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burgeoning middle class because of its liberal character, which marked a perceptible difference from the traditional-feudal. The opinion of Ram Mohan Roy expressed rightly in his famous letter to Lord Amherst in 1824 is the earliest example of what shaped the perspective of the middle class and gave it a direction. He had perceived in the new system a liberal and enlightened scheme combined with science education of the West, which scored over the Indian traditional system obsessed with 'the grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions'.<sup>5</sup> However, the content alone was not the defining factor. Equally important was the openness in practice. The social history of India from the time of Eklavya to the twenty-first century is replete with examples of discrimination on the basis of caste and religion. The new system opened the possibility of rising above such restrictions. In the schools run by government support and by the missionaries, any one regardless of caste and creed, could seek and obtain admission. As a result, despite opposition from the upper castes the traditionally excluded groups became beneficiaries of education, leading to some element of social mobility, even among the lower castes in a limited way. The early novels in

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<sup>5</sup> *The English Works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy*, Allahabad, 1906, pp. 471-74.

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almost all Indian languages, either directly or indirectly, comprehended this process of social transformation. For instance, the nineteenth century Malayalam novel, *Saraswati Vijayam*, contrasts the oppressive conditions in the traditional order with the emancipative potential of education open to the lower castes through the agency of colonialism.<sup>6</sup> Potheri Kunhambu, the author of the novel, who himself belonged to a lower caste, highlights the role of both missionaries and government institutions in opening up a new world for the dalits. The author demonstrates that a new situation has come into being in which the traditional power equation based on control over land was being eroded. The achievements and discomfitures of Kunhambu's characters indicate this change. Marathan, a young dalit, was assaulted and left for dead because he indulged in singing a song in public which lower castes were not permitted to do. The boy was helped by a missionary to get education and enter the service of the British and becomes a judge. The landlord accused of killing the *dalit* boy was brought before the judge who pardons him by declaring his own

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<sup>6</sup> Potheri Kunhambu, *Saraswati Vijayam*, First published in 1892, Kannur. For the latest edition with introduction see George Irumbayam (ed), *Nalu Novalukal Trissur*, 1985. For a study of the novel see Dilip Menon, *The Blindness of Insight : Essays on Caste in Colonial India*, Chennai, 2006

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identity. Not only the intellectual world of the middle class was shaped by the influence of the new system, the other segments of society were also drawn to it in due course. As a result colonial education was perceived by the marginalised sections as an instrument of their possible emancipation. The contrast between the social experience of the marginalised in the traditional system and the 'non-discrimination' of the colonial institutions, led many of them to look upon colonialism as a source of emancipation. So much so today some dalit intellectuals consider colonial rule as far more just than the upper caste dominated contemporary system.

One of the consequences of this change was that, both the members of the middle class as well as the traditionally excluded and oppressed' attributed 'modernity', however differently conceived, to the new system. More importantly they interpreted the change as the destiny of their own future. This occurred mainly because of two reasons. In a society in which educational opportunities were dependent upon the location of birth in the caste hierarchy, the public character of colonial education which in principle permitted open access was an exciting departure. Secondly, the new curriculum incorporated scientific knowledge, unavailable in the traditional system,

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opened up a hitherto unfamiliar world. Above all, it provided the opportunity to learn the language of the coloniser, which promised the prospects of social mobility.

However alluring this transformation was to some sections of the population, it did not fully comprehend the complete reality of the colonial system. The education imparted by the colonial state had, what James Scott calls a 'hidden transcript', of domination.<sup>7</sup> Being very restricted in social reach, modernity that colonialism brought about through education touched the life only of a miniscule section of society. However, the survey of indigenous education in different parts of the country shows that access to traditional education, despite its caste and religious restrictions was much larger than the colonial system could ever achieve.<sup>8</sup>

A major attraction of Western education to the middle class was its scientific content. But in actual practice it stopped short of expectations as

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<sup>7</sup> If the weak have obvious and compelling reasons to seek refuge behind a mask when in the presence of power, the powerful have their own compelling reasons for adopting a mask in the presence of subordinates. Thus, for the powerful as well there is typically a disparity between the public transcript deployed in the open exercise of power and hidden transcript expressed safely only offstage', James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, London, 1990, p.10.

<sup>8</sup> William Adam, *Report on the State of Education in Bengal*, Edited by A.N.Basu, Ccutta, 1941.

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the government did not take much interest in its pursuit, except the incorporation of elementary knowledge of science in the curriculum. What the Indian intelligentsia expected from the new system was facilities for the higher pursuit of science, which was not a priority of the colonial administration. Mahendralal Sircar, the founder of the *Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science* in Kolkata put it pithily: What we need is 'men of science and not men whom accident has placed in the era of science'.<sup>9</sup> Since the colonial government was neither interested in encouraging higher pursuit neither of scientific knowledge nor in its general dissemination such a possibility was very remote.

Notwithstanding the early enthusiastic reception of the new system by the intelligentsia, they soon realised that it is no substitute for a modern system which is also national. Out of this realisation emerged a critique of colonial modernity of which an early expression was in the field of education.<sup>10</sup> The conception of a national system of education and the attempt to implement it through private initiatives emerged out of the dissatisfaction with the colonial system. From

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<sup>9</sup> Mahendralal Sircar, *projected Science Association for the Natives of India*, Calcutta, 1872, p.XVI

<sup>10</sup> See K.N. Panikkar, *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007

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Akshay Kumar Dutt in the early part of the nineteenth century to Mahatma Gandhi in the twentieth century the quest for an alternative system continued to agitate the Indian mind. Gandhi said that if people 'understand what is truly National Education and cultivate a taste for it, the Government schools will be empty; and there will be no return thereto until the character of education in Government institutions is so radically altered as to accord with national ideals.'<sup>11</sup> As a consequence institutions were set up to pursue national education, ranging from primary schools to universities, which sought to provide an education different from the colonial.

The assumption of the critique was that the colonial system was denationalising in its effect, creating a social strata alienated from their 'national' culture and socially distanced from their own countrymen.<sup>12</sup> Bankim Chandra's caricature of a Bengali Babu, conversing with a monkey in English and the monkey kicking him in retaliation may be an overdrawn picture, but the message was certainly not lost on a generation obsessed with the imitation of the colonial master.

The chief characteristic of the alternative system was mass education imparted through the

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<sup>11</sup> Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 14, New Delhi, 1976, p. 319

<sup>12</sup> *Tatwabhodini Patrika*, Shrawan, Saka 1768, No.36, pp 309-11.

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mother tongue, with knowledge of science as an integral part. Indian intellectuals during the colonial period, even when participating in the colonial system, were engaged in elaborating an alternative which would help restore the cultural and intellectual personality of the nation. Even the members of Anglophil Young Bengal who were critical of traditional practices insisted that 'oriental classics or vernaculars were not to be excluded from any system of Indian education'.<sup>13</sup> The overwhelming opinion was that unless rooted in the national culture and language modernity would remain superficial. The educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi was based on the cultural <sup>14</sup>peculiarities of Indian society. So was that of Rabindranath Tagore who realised it in practice in Shanti Niketan. Azad expressed it in a very forceful manner: 'No Indian language but English which was foreign to us was made the medium of instruction. The result was that modern education in India began to be imparted in an un-Indian way. The Indians had to shape their minds in artificial and not in natural moulds. Not only had they had to change their language but also their minds. Their whole approach to different

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<sup>13</sup> Krishna Mohan Bannerji, *A Lecture on the Peculiar Responsibility of Indians*, n.d,p.4

<sup>14</sup> *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.14, New Delhi, 1976, pp 18-36; 37-42

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branches of learning was through the medium of a foreign tongue. Now it became necessary for every Indian child to shape an artificial mind and to tackle every aspect of learning from an unnatural angle of vision. He could not enter the sacred precincts of learning with a natural mind'.<sup>15</sup> This is a concern India appears to have progressively lost due to an uncritical acceptance of capitalist modernisation.

The task of nation building in post-independence India under the leadership of political and intellectual stalwarts like Jawaharlal Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad was quite sensitive to the urgency of decolonisation. In the field of education, almost all policy statements during the early days of the Republic gave expression to this perspective in varying degrees. The National Policy on Education adopted in 1966 as a sequel to the Report of the Education Commission headed by Prof. D.S.Kothari related education to the problems of development and social transformation and drew up a broad scheme for future implementation. The Report charted out an excellent road map for future, which given its comprehensive character, it is not surprising that it still remains largely unimplemented. The Report argued that nothing short of a revolution is

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<sup>15</sup> Abul Kalam Azad, Op.cit. p.13



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necessary, if the system established by colonial administration within the limitations set by a feudal and traditional society has to be changed to meet the purposes of a modern democratic and socialist society.<sup>16</sup> The development of human resources through education was given priority by the Commission, as 'the development of physical resources is a means to an end, that of human resources is an end in itself and without it, even the adequate development of physical resources is not possible'.<sup>17</sup> In doing so, the nation should 'strive to maintain the valuable elements in their own traditional culture while accepting all that is good in the West'.<sup>18</sup> Such a syncretic approach, which informed the official policy till the Indian ruling classes embraced neo-liberal policies, was based on liberal, secular and universal outlook. The departure from it occurred in two different ways. The first during the rule of the Hindu rightwing forces under the leadership of Bharatiya Janata Party and the second, under the United Progressive Alliance led by the Congress Party. While the former emphasised the importance of traditional knowledge and tried to remould the system accordingly, the latter was enamoured of the achievements of the West. Both of them, not only

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<sup>16</sup> *Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66*, New Delhi, 1970, p.9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.7

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29

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departed from the tradition of struggle - anti-colonial and anti-traditional - developed during the renaissance and freedom movements, but also respectively indulged in either romanticisation of the past or the uncritical borrowing of modernity of the West. Since the former has lost much of its political clout, the policy of the latter is currently being implemented is in ascendance. As evident from the open door policy India is now looking beyond its borders for renovation and rejuvenation of education.

### **Modernisation and Open Door Policy**

The rationale for the open door policy which the Indian state embraced a few decades back was the logic of capitalist modernisation. The ruling classes hold the view that it is not possible to mobilise resources necessary for modernisation, particularly for a 'non-merit good' like higher education. The government, therefore, advocated and pursued the policy of progressively withdrawing from social sectors, thus paving the way for the entry of international capital and for increasing freedom to private national entrepreneurs. It was hoped that India would be able to modernize its system with the support of the capital so attracted. The support from the MNCs, however, was conditional : wide ranging structural changes in economy and

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administration in order to facilitate foreign investment, subjection of national policies of international trade and other operations to the prescriptions of world organisations and the acceptance of the much abused 'most favoured nation' theory. The series of agreements, thus came into being, set the clock back, leading the country towards a process of recolonisation of an entirely new genre, different from the colonisation of the nineteenth century based on territorial conquest. The process of contemporary colonisation is through 'equal' treaties, political partnership and cultural-intellectual co-operation. Not only to the ruling classes but also to the bulk of the middle classes, the modern benefits of neo-colonialism are quite attractive. In fact they celebrate and revel in the 'modern' conditions which were denied to them earlier in the name of equality, social justice and socialism. The operation of footloose capitalism has created visible islands of prosperity and modernity - world class airports, air conditioned malls with food courts, world class universities, crorepatis present in TV studios and in Parliament and so on. The consumers and supporters of this modernity are the middle class who initially emerged out of colonial education and later nourished by the highly privileged nature of higher education in independent India. The

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volume of the middle class which has swelled after the onset of globalisation is now in a position to influence the educational policy to its advantage. The current changes in higher education reflect their aspirations to the extent that they mark a fundamental departure from the character and orientation envisioned by Azad, Kothari and others in the early days of independent India.

There is consensus among educationists today that the existing system of education calls for immediate change. Although the country has considerably advanced from the colonial days, neither the access has reached desirable level to meet the needs of society nor has the quality kept pace with the advances in knowledge. An all embracing modernisation of the system - physical infra-structure, intellectual resources, quality of teachers and pedagogical practices etc. - for ushering in a knowledge society is the immediate goal set by the State. A series of reports and proposed legislations well articulate this intention. The National Knowledge Commission set up by the government to formulate a plan of reform suggested an unprecedented expansion of higher educational institutions and pegged its target to a rather unrealisable number of 1500 universities.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Letter of Sam Pitroda, Chairman, National Knowledge Commission to the Prime Minister, 29 November, 2006.

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The objective of systematic overhaul proposed by the commission was 'expansion, excellence and inclusion' which would drive economic development and social progress.<sup>20</sup> The focus of the report prepared by the committee headed by Prof. Yaspal was more academic in nature and put forward valuable suggestions for the renovation and regeneration of higher education.<sup>21</sup>

Following these recommendations the educational policy the government has enunciated, as evident from various legislations before the Parliament, has three distinct features - centralization, privatisation and entry of foreign educational providers. The proposed National Council for Higher Education and Research is an example of the first; Planning Commission document on Public-Private participation of the second; and the Bill permitting the entry of Foreign Private Educational Providers of the third. These steps are in tune with the economic reforms initiated about two decades ago. The main motivation behind the new policy is modernisation which is a necessary condition for effective participation in the global educational and intellectual transactions. Consequently, the target of modernisation primarily became the upper level

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Report of the Committee on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education. 2009.

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of higher education with a view to achieve excellence. The priority, therefore, has been accorded to the expansion and improvement of institutions which would maintain internationally comparable standards. The expansion of Indian Institutes of Technologies and Indian Institutes of Managements, Inter-University Research Centres, several new central universities and above all a set of world class universities, now renamed as Innovation Universities, are planned. These are obviously very welcome initiatives, but the lack of comparable steps at the lower levels, at the undergraduate and post-graduate teaching, would strengthen the already existing elite character of the beneficiaries of specialised knowledge. If the question of equity and justice are not adequately addressed, the social implications of this *enclavised modernisation* would be to perpetuate the social and political power of the privileged. The modernisation then would be a highly distorted and oppressive phenomenon. Such a possibility is already evident in the early steps undertaken for implementation of the new policy.

The provision for higher education in the XI Five Year Plan encapsulates the essence of the new policy and also underlines the interconnection between the various strands of the modernisation project. The Plan has accorded unprecedented

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importance to higher education, possibly because of its importance in the emerging knowledge society. From the X Plan, the allocation marks a nine fold increase.<sup>22</sup> This increase, however, is not sufficient for institutional development to ensure the targeted increase of the General Enrolment Ratio to Fifteen per cent. The estimated resource gap is about 2.52 lakh crores. The suggested solution to meet this deficit is private-public partnership by 'attracting enlightened and value-based educational entrepreneurship both within the country and from abroad.'<sup>23</sup> The policy implication of this confession is that, given the resource crunch, modernisation can be successfully pursued only with the participation of private capital. But then 'the enlightened and value-based entrepreneurship' is a scarce commodity in the era of advanced capitalism.

Both internal and foreign capital is likely to be interested in higher education only as a field of investment. The former has been present for a long time and manages a large number of institutions in the country. But their motives in the beginning have been mainly philanthropic and not commercial. But now, unlike in the past, private

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<sup>22</sup> Agenda Note on the New Initiatives for the XI Plan in Higher Education.

<sup>23</sup> Planning Commission, Draft Consultation Paper on Public-Private Partnership in Higher and Technical Education, p.2.

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educational enterprise is primarily a field of investment for profit. The private education, therefore, has become a synonym for commercialisation. The private-public participation can be a remedy, provided the public is able to exercise control over the private. The present notion of private-public participation is a prescription for unbridled privatisation.

If a system of large scale privatisation towards which higher education appears to be moving becomes a reality, social justice is likely to be the first casualty, as it would deprive an overwhelming majority of eligible students access to education. Education is an instrument of power, particularly in present conditions in which knowledge has emerged as a crucial factor, for perpetuating the existing unequal relationship in society. The ideological structure that the private system of education constructs and disseminates contributes to the continuous exclusion of the marginalised and preserves the power of the privileged. Since the majority of public institutions are in deplorably poor conditions, the overwhelming majority of students are put through sub-standard instruction. The current educational reforms are likely to widen this gap.

The second face of privatisation is represented by 'foreign educational providers' who



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are being allowed to set up their campuses in the country. This is in the context of several foreign universities already establishing their centres in collaboration with internal educational agencies. In the absence of any mechanism for the control of their entry and operation, their quality and accountability is suspect. The purpose of the legislation is the regulation of the entry and operation of foreign universities, but its real implication is that higher education will no more be a matter of national concern alone, but outside agencies also would be given freedom to shape it.<sup>24</sup> Many welcome it at its face value, with the expectation that relatively better quality of education would be available. The conditions stipulated by the government for the entry of foreign educational providers tend to satisfy the liberal-nationalist opinion, as these conditions for entry are expected to discourage the fly by night operators to take advantage of open policy. They are: first, the foreign educational providers have to maintain a corpus fund of five crores of rupees; second, no part of the surplus generated in India by a foreign educational provider shall be invested for any other purpose other than for the growth and development of the educational institutions

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<sup>24</sup> For a Critique of the Bill see Jandhyala BG Tilak, 'The Foreign Educational Institutions Bill: A Critique, Economic and Political Weekly, May 8, 2010, Vol.XLV.No.19

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established by it in India; and the third and most important of all is about the quality. It says: 'A foreign education provider shall ensure that the course or programme of study offered and imparted by it in India is in conformity with the standards laid down by the statutory authority, as is of quality comparable, as to the curriculum, methods of imparting education and the faculty employed or engaged to impart education, to those offered by it to students enrolled in its main campus in the country in which such institution is established or incorporated'.<sup>25</sup> It sounds a laudable aim, as there would be no dilution of standards, in the unlikely event of Oxford or Harvard universities deciding to open their campuses in India.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the actual operational part of this clause is that all such institutions would remain 'foreign' in character. What is most crucial for a country like India is the cultural implication of the replication of the curriculum and syllabi developed to suit the genius and socio-cultural requirements of another society. A university is not only meant for the production and dissemination

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<sup>25</sup> The Foreign Educational Institutions( Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010, Clause 5.1

<sup>26</sup> According to Philip G. Altbach and shared by many other scholars, 'Global experience shows that the large majority of higher education institutions entering a foreign market are not prestigious universities but low-end institutions seeking market access and income'. The Hindu, 8 April 2010.

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of knowledge, it is also the terrain in which the identity of a nation is constructed. The operation of multi-national capital, euphemistically termed globalisation, has already eaten into the cultural identity of the people. The changes now being heralded in the education system through open door policy is likely to create conditions conducive for the cultural and intellectual hegemony of advanced capitalist countries. The distance traversed by the nation from the days of Abul Kalam Azad is so long that return is almost impossible. As a result the character of Indian society has changed during the last sixty years: it is no more a post-colonial society. It is rather a neo-colony, increasingly re-ordering its policy and developmental strategies in accordance with the interests of the global capitalist players. In this process of subordination, education is a crucial influencing factor, providing intellectual justification for its uncritical acceptance. The affluent Indian middle classes revel in this new found condition, without any sense of guilt, under the pretext that it is the creation of global forces. In the process, the alternative system of education envisioned as a part of anti-colonial struggle and conceived as an integral part of alternative modernity, has been dumped in the dustbin. It is alarming but not surprising, because that in fact is

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the logic of contemporary capitalism, which is resilient enough to function according to the exigencies of the situation.

The new ambience of higher education, represented by the package of interconnected and complimentary bills being considered by the Parliament, is likely to create an intellectual substratum and cultural taste to compliment the elite-oriented social and cultural transformation. The *dalits* and *adivasis* and those who are below the poverty line are likely to remain outside the 'revolution' the state hopes to achieve. Till the benefits of the new policy of modernisation continuing to accrue to a small stratum of rich and privileged, education will not be able to harness the human resources for national development. The justification for the new initiatives in education is the compelling need for excellence. In a country like India with vast human capital at its command, the only way for achieving excellence is only through equity and social justice. After all development can be inclusive only if it is organic.

Independent India had begun its career with a commitment to intellectual de-colonisation of which an alternative system of education was an inevitable component. History has now gone through a full circle. Yet again, the Indian ruling elite has embarked upon the easier route of

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adopting a *borrowed* modernity. Only time will tell what is in store for the future. At any rate, the national alternative is dead. The nation, however is not mourning the death, but, in fact, is celebrating the loss. The unbridled intrusion and domination of cultural and intellectual imperialism is likely to encourage religious fundamentalism. At this juncture, it is pertinent to recall the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad about a system of education which would unleash the intellectual energy of Indian civilisation. But the obsession with and equation of capitalist development as modernisation is likely to consign their dreams into oblivion.