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Tapas Majumdar Memorabilia

In commemoration
of the Second Death Anniversary of
Late Professor Tapas Majumdar
(6 January1929 – 15 October 2010)
Founder of Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies
and
Formerly Emeritus Professor, School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
15 October, 2012

International Migration and Diaspora Studies Project
Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies
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Tapas: A Picture Gallery

Tapas among colleagues and students (2004), being honoured (2007), and at work (2005)

Young Tapas (1957), with wife Gauri (1961), and with mother Snehlata (1956)

Tapas with wife Gauri and daughter Srinayana (1971-1979)

Tapas with wife Gauri (1979), and daughter Srinayana (1996), picking pebbles at Brighton beach (1985), and teaching young children of the campus (1992)

Contents

Editorial

It took us time to come to terms with the void left by the sad demise, on 15th October, 2010, of Professor Tapas Majumdar, a friend, philosopher and guide to many generations of his students and colleagues, both inside and outside the academic fraternity.

"Tapas Majumdar Memorabilia" is a humble attempt of the IMDS, a project at Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, that has benefitted immensely from his vision and support, in paying our tribute to Prof. Majumdar who used to be and would continue to remain a great source of inspiration to us for years to come. A number of obituaries and articles were written in newspapers, magazines and journals to pay homage to this great visionary. We thought of dedicating this special issue of the IMDS Working Paper Series as a Tapas Majumdar Memorabilia on the auspicious occasion of his second death anniversary today. Seven such pieces written by his former students and colleagues are included here, viz. by Dipankar Dasgupta, Asis Kumar Banerjee, Amartya Sen, Abhijit Banerjee, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Prabhat Patnaik and Binod Khadria. These obituaries contain glimpses of Professor Majumdar's life and times as a teacher, a scholar, an administrator, a friend and, above all, a kind and humane being.

A select bibliography of Professor Majumdar's works has also been presented. In addition, a short biography and write – up about the Centre of which he was the founder have been put together. Apart from these, we are happy that we could collate a large number of his small pieces of writings, most of which he published as op-ed page articles in the national daily, the *Telegraph* during the last two decades of his life – the two transition decades between the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. These he wrote mainly following his retirement and after becoming the Emeritus Professor of Economics at the School of Social Sciences, JNU. These articles reflect his continuing concerns on contemporary issues of educational and social relevance. Despite being limited in number and scope, these articles are a testimony to the range of his reflections, his concerns for the education of the masses and his dedication to the welfare of the people. I put on record my gratitude to the publishers of these obituaries and tributes as well as of the articles for granting us permission to reproduce them in this collection, to be released on the occasion of the one-day seminar we have organized on "Remembering Tapas Majumdar: A Colloquium on Discourses across Boundaries".

The topic for the colloquium has been chosen keeping in mind the fact it was a subject closest to Professor Majumdar as a thinker, teacher and policy adviser. In fact, it was because of his erudition in practising multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research that he was entrusted with the challenging task of establishing a centre for 'educational studies' in a school of social sciences, a novel idea in the early 1970s that did not have many takers. However, it was Professor Majumdar's unflinching faith in the blending of knowledge from across academic domains and his dedication that the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, School of Social Sciences, JNU, could earn a distinction of being recognized as a place of advanced study for students and researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds to come together for in-depth understanding and analysis.

Binod Khadria
15 October, 2012

About the Colloquium

Education is one of the most crucial determinants of development. Educational issues and problems have travelled from periphery to the centre of the social science psyche and thought in the last few decades. There are now tendencies within the social science discourses to accommodate the dynamics of educational change and development in a significant way. In addition, in view of the diversity and complexity of educational issues, the relevance of inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary quest for knowledge has become increasingly high in the last couple of decades. The colloquium is mainly aimed at reigniting such discourses in the realms of knowledge, education and research. Professor Tapas Majumdar, in whose memory the colloquium is organized, was one of the pioneers who had initiated and advanced multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary social science approaches towards understanding educational problems and guiding policy making in the country.

Social scientists across social science disciplines like economics, history, psychology, sociology, political science, geography, international relations, law and governance and so on have come to a realization that the best way to tackle educational problems across the world is to provide the space for constructive dialogue and interaction across the disciplinary boundaries. It is expected that the participants in the colloquium, grappling with the state of education in the country today, would both contribute to and benefit from the discourses reflecting newer insights and ideas.

Since the colloquium is being organized to commemorate the second death anniversary of Late Professor Tapas Majumdar, who was a visionary and who could foresee the complexity of educational issues and the need to cross the disciplinary boundaries in educational research, special efforts have been made to invite his former students, colleagues and associates to deliberate on this platform.

About Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies

Drawing inspiration from observations made by the Education Commission (1964-66) on the quality of educational research in the country, JNU had constituted a working group in 1970, comprising, among others, J. P. Naik, M.V. Mathur, K. Sachidanand Murthy, Amartya Sen, M. S. Gore, and S. K. Mitra to investigate into the possibility of setting up a multidisciplinary centre for educational studies. As per the recommendations of the Group, the Centre for Educational Studies was established, and subsequently named after the educationist, freedom fighter and the late President of India Zakir Husain in 1972.

The most obvious point of departure in the set- up envisaged by JNU along the lines recommended by the Working Group was the assumption that educational problems could be better addressed through multidisciplinary approaches by experts who were competent in handling the tools of their own disciplines, at the same time were capable of crossing the boundaries defined by those disciplines. For this it was necessary to put together a team of persons, preferably belonging to different disciplines, with a high level of basic competence in their own fields but open to evincing interest across subjects, disciplines and faculties. This was a radical departure from the traditional structure of a university department of education which was generally endowed with a curriculum and expertise in the techniques of teacher education. Thus, the centre was expected to view educational issues through multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives in education and the social sciences. .

The Zakir Husain Centre has a stream of students coming with a variety of backgrounds in social sciences, as well as in education and the sciences to pursue educational research through the multiple lenses of economics, history, psychology and sociology, for graduating with M.Phil and Ph.D. degrees. The Centre was privileged to have the continued association of Professor Tapas Majumdar as its founder chairperson. Since inception till the demise of Professor Majumdar as an Emeritus Professor, the Centre has seen growth and change over time. As its first-generation faculty retired one by one, in their place have come both former students of the Centre and academics from other institutions and universities. We are confident that the original aims that the Working Group had set for the Centre have remained the same for us, only widened with time in response to the perceived demands of the present century.

A Biography of Late Professor Tapas Majumdar

Tapas Majumdar came from a family with a strong academic culture. His father Nani Gopal Majumdar, the noted archaeologist, who got killed while leading an expedition in Sind in 1938 at a young age; mother Snehlata Majumdar, who, after her husband's death, went to college with her elder daughter only to be able to bring up her children well, and graduated with; and maternal grandfather Professor Nalini Mohan Sastri, who attained fame as one of the foremost educationists of his time in undivided Assam had all greatly influenced Tapas Majumdar through his early years. His wife, Gauri Majumdar, has been a dedicated educationist and social worker herself, and Srinayana, their worthy daughter, had also taken to teaching.

Tapas Majumdar had his education at Mitra Institution, Bhowanipore, Calcutta and at Presidency College, Calcutta. He started his professional career as a research apprentice to P. C. Mahalanobis at the Indian Statistical Institute in 1950, and soon after in the same year he joined the Presidency College as Assistant Professor of Economics. In 1955, he went to London School of Economics (LSE) and returned in 1957 after completing his doctorate in economic theory under Lionel Robbins. He went to the LSE again for a year in 1962 as Rockefeller Foundation Fellow and Visiting Member of the Senior Common Room. He held the chair of Professor of Economics at Presidency College from 1958 till 1972 when he was invited by Jawaharlal Nehru University to be the founder chair of the newly set up Centre for Educational Studies in the School of Social Sciences. He retired in 1994 and had since been an Emeritus Professor in Economics at the School of Social Sciences till his death.

Apart from being the founder Chairperson of the Centre, Professor Majumdar has later been Dean of the School of Social Sciences. He was also Member, University Grants Commission, Member of the ICSSR, Member of the Punnaiya Committee on Financing of Higher Education, and the Chairman of the MHRD Expert Committee on Costing of Elementary Education as a Fundamental Right. He was a Visiting Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, and Cornell Visiting Professor at Swarthmore College, Philadelphia. Other than the many pioneering articles published in international academic journals like the *Econometrica, Journal of Political Economy*, *Economic Journal, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Economica, Analyse & Kritik* and chapters or papers in several edited volumes, he was the author of *The Measurement of Utility (1958)* by Macmillan, the widely acclaimed textbook, later republished by Greenwood Press for being placed amongst rare collections of libraries around the world. His later book, *Investment in Education and Social Choice* (1983) by Cambridge University Press provoked sharp criticism from the establishment of practising economists of education of the time for questioning their paradigms, but who later nevertheless agreed with the theoretical arguments put forth by Tapas Majumdar. The book was reprinted in India by the Orient Longman a year later. Professor Majumdar had also edited *Growth and Choice* (1968), and *Nature, Man and the Indian Economy* (1993), both by Oxford University press. In the last two decades of his life, particularly after retiring from active teaching at JNU in 1994, he was continuing writing for the *Telegraph*. Published as the op-ed page articles in this national daily, some of these pieces are included in this Memorabilia of Tapas Majumdar.

OBITUARIES

Obituary–Tapas Majumdar (1929-2010)

Dipankar Dasgupta
Formerly Professor of Economics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata
The Telegraph, October 19, 2010.

It is hard to recount memories surrounding Tapas Majumdar, who died on October 15, without recalling the reasonably large, but not bedizened, first-floor living room of his Dover Lane residence in Calcutta. This room will remain etched in the minds of his students and colleagues from the days when he taught in the Economics Department of Presidency College, not because of its simple decor, but for the purpose to which Tapas Majumdar put it during the turmoil-ridden year, 1967. The siege laid to the college had forced the authorities to suspend classes. The economics honours classes, however, did not come to a halt, for Tapas Majumdar, who was departmental head, had converted his living room into a makeshift classroom where teachers were assigned class hours on a regular basis. A timetable had been drawn up, and even tutorial classes were not ignored.

Tutorial homes had not yet invaded us, and teachers like Tapas Majumdar treated education as a public good that was not for sale. It was no wonder, therefore, that his colleagues and he dreamt of converting the Economics Department into an institution of excellence. The result was the founding of the UGC-sponsored Centre for Economic Studies, located inside the departmental premises and dedicated to advanced research. The Centre exists even today.

Tapas Majumdar was the son of the archaeologist, Nani Gopal Majumdar, who was closely associated with Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay and has been credited with discoveries related to the Early Indus period. He was mistaken as a policeman and shot dead by robbers near the foothills of Kirthar of the Sind region of Punjab on November 11, 1938. His wife heard the news by coincidence over the radio and Tapas Majumdar, born January 6, 1929, had to bear with this tragedy at a very tender age. His performance at school (Mitra Institution) and college (Presidency College) was nonetheless exemplary. He joined Presidency College as an assistant professor of economics at 21 and had none other than Amartya Sen and Sukhamoy Chakravarty as students in the early part of his career. He completed his PhD at the London School of Economics under Lionel Robbins. His dissertation was published as a well-known book, *The Measurement of Utility*, and he continued to work and publish in the theoretically sophisticated area of demand and choice theory.

After completing his PhD in 1957, he joined Presidency College as a professor and taught there till he moved to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi as professor of economics and head of the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies. He contributed extensively to the area of education since then and served as a member of distinguished organizations such as the UGC, NCERT, ICSSR and the Justice Punnayya Committee on UGC Funding of Institutions of Higher Education. After retirement from JNU, he remained associated with the university as emeritus professor at the Zakir Husain Centre.

Throughout his life, he encouraged students to carry out empirical research as well as research on the abstract foundations of a subject, and would have understood the word 'elite' to mean 'excellent minds' rather than 'enemies of society' as is often the practice now. One vividly recalls his effort in reading the monograph, *Theory of Value*, by Gérard Debreu (who

won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1983) soon after it was published in the late 1950s. The book has remained a mathematically daunting piece of writing. It is a fair guess that few teachers in postgraduate institutions in India, leave alone undergraduate colleges, would be attracted to this work. Tapas Majumdar was successful in assembling a group of young colleagues and students interested in the enterprise and used his living room to deliver special lectures on the subject. He ended up writing to Debreu about a point that his group was unable to resolve. Debreu replied by sending him a letter that contained little more than a small hand-drawn diagram that settled the issue completely. Tapas Majumdar was delighted to hear back from Debreu and often spoke humourously about the might of supreme brevity.

Tapas Majumdar will reside in the hearts of his students and colleagues as a pleasant yet firm personality, always ready to extend a helping hand for the cause of education. It is unlikely that he ever confused quantity (examination scores) with quality (a genuine appetite for learning) in judging his students

Tapas Majumdar (1929-2010)

Asis Kumar Banerjee
Institute of Development Studies Kolkata
Economic & Political Weekly. Vol XLV, No 46, November 13, 2010.

Tapas Majumdar will be remembered by posterity not only for his contributions to the disciplines that he chose to specialise in (viz, economics and education studies) but also as an inspiring teacher and as an extraordinarily compassionate human being.

As head of the Department of Economics in Presidency College during the 1960s, Majumdar played the pivotal role in recruiting a galaxy of bright economists. Under his guidance this brilliant group not only continued the great teaching tradition of the college but also transformed the Economics Department into a place for doing advanced research. The Centre for Economic Studies at Presidency College was born out of these efforts.

In 1973, Majumdar moved to Delhi to accept an offer of professorship at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). At this stage he was drawn to the field of education studies. At JNU he founded the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies. As is often the case with institution-builders, Majumdar's own scholarly work has tended to be overshadowed in the public perception by his roles in setting up centres of excellence and by his contributions to policy debates. The fact is that he made seminal contributions to economic theory. He wrote two well-known books, about a dozen research papers, and edited two volumes.

During his initial stint at teaching at the Presidency College he developed an abiding interest in the theory of choice and preferences. At this stage he published a paper ("Choice and Revealed Preference", 1956) in which he pointed out that although standard game theoretic models inevitably take the cardinal view of utility, it is not always necessary to do so. There exist situations in which it is possible to find out the game theoretic equilibria on the basis of ordinal reasoning alone. This was his first paper, and the fact that it was published in Econometrica shows the level of excellence that Majumdar set for himself at the very beginning of his academic career.

It was this interest in choice and preferences that he decided to pursue at the London School of Economics. His PhD thesis, written under the supervision of Lionel Robbins, was published as a book The Measurement of Utility (1958), a slim volume of 149 pages. It instantly commanded attention and, over time, attained the status of a classic in the field. Of the many important points made by Majumdar in the book, a few are worth recounting even now. He started with the premises that economic welfare is inseparable from general welfare and that each individual is the best judge of his or her welfare. Therefore, while social intervention is not ruled out, whether or not it is called for in a particular situation is to be judged in terms of the preference patterns of the individuals.

After returning to India, Majumdar continued to work on various aspects of choice theory. Two of the papers written in this phase contained particularly novel extensions of the standard theory. In "Revealed Preference and the Demand Theorem in a Not Necessarily Competitive Market", *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (1969), he extended revealed preference theory by relaxing the assumption of competitive markets. In "The Rationality of Changing Choice", *Analyse & Kritik* (1980) he attempted to extend the theory of revealed preference in an even more challenging direction.

He noted that preference patterns change over time. In fact, the process of development may be considered to be a process in which people's preferences change for the "better" in some sense. He suggested that one way of modelling this process would be to imagine a directed sequence of preference rankings of an individual (in which each ranking in the sequence is "better" than its predecessor) and to suppose that the individual can educate himself or herself and can move along the sequence. He posed the question whether consistency conditions such as the axioms of standard revealed preference theory can be reformulated for this framework and threw some potent hints. A number of other papers also contained important insights and fresh perspectives on old issues.

It was from around 1973 when he shifted to Delhi that Majumdar was increasingly interested in issues connected to education. It should be noted, however, that his interest in these matters was not unrelated to his earlier interest in choice theory. This would be evident from the title of his book, *Investment in Education and Social Choice*, published in 1983. One of the basic messages of the book was that while the decision to invest in a child's education may be an individual (or a family) decision, it must be matched by a social decision to provide that education. Perhaps his most important work after he retired from JNU was as chairman of the expert group on education (popularly known as the Tapas Majumdar Committee) appointed by the Government of India in 1997. The Supreme Court had, in a judgment, declared universal elementary education as a responsibility of the State. The government entrusted the expert group with the task of examining how, or even whether at all, the responsibility can be carried out. In its report (submitted in 1999) the expert group not only emphasised the importance of taking on the responsibility but also provided estimates of the amount of public investment in education that would be required for the purpose. Today, more than a decade after the Report was made public, these estimates continue to provide the benchmark figures quoted in almost every discussion of the matter, whether academic or otherwise.

In the Report as well as in academic contributions, Majumdar took the firm position that universalisation of elementary education under the aegis of the State was both feasible and socially desirable. He was aware of the existence of other opinions (some of which were quite hostile to his) but did not mince words while presenting his own views.

Remembering Tapas Majumdar

Binod Khadria
Jawaharlal Nehru University
Economic & Political Weekly Vol XLV, No 46, November 13, 2010.

I had the privilege of being closely associated with Tapas Majumdar right from the time I first set foot in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in 1976, initially as his young graduate student at the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies (ZHCES), and later as a colleague till the last day of his life on 15 October 2010 when he left us all for his solitary last journey.

In trying to sketch Majumdar's personality one would be reminded of a polite, soft-spoken, kind person, a man of few words who paid particular attention to those with a disadvantage of any kind. Behind the veil of a polite and restrained demeanour, however, he was a firm rebel in his own way, extremely rare to come across. His intrinsic intellectual rebellion was evident in his initiative to set up the multidisciplinary ZHCES in the School of Social Sciences of the JNU in 1972. In this he took a conscious step away from the established norm, that of characterizing education departments in Indian universities as primarily teacher training entities. It was similarly evident with the publication of his book *Investment in Education and Social Choice* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), provoking the proponents of the "rate of return approach" which dominated the existing literature on the economics of education. Both these endeavours of Tapas Majumdar had drawn severe criticism from established practitioners, to which he reacted only with silence.

A Novel Approach

The critiques challenging his approach in situating educational studies and research in the midst of social science disciplines such as economics, sociology, psychology and history, however, did not stand the test of time. The ZHCES was given an entirely novel direction by Majumdar, to be emulated in other institutions in different parts of the world, and the graduates of the Centre found themselves placed at the forefront of mainstream educational studies. The critics of his 1983 book, some of them flag-bearers in the area of economics of education, too had taken refuge in an impromptu explanation that the rate of return approach to educational investment decisions had not after all inflicted any far-reaching damage to the developing countries that Majumdar cautioned about because none of them had yet seriously implemented its prescriptions. The debate attracted mainstream economists towards understanding the unique features of educational investment decision-making identified by him – its fundamental characteristics, namely, the domain distinction, the micro-macro distinction, and the collective and social choice dilemmas. It also compelled leading international organisations and donor agencies to introspect on their propositions and eventually to retract from aggressively propagating a misplaced conflict of interest between primary and higher education for macro-level investments in developing countries across the world. The genesis of the present Indian reversal of priority from a one-sided emphasis on primary education to a holistic, more balanced one across primary-secondary-higher education would thus be attributed to Majumdar's sustained but peaceful and silent crusade.

In this spirit of his peaceful crusade one may see the profound influence of personalities like Mother Teresa, whom both he and his wife Gauri held in high reverence. It was perhaps

an extension of this connection that had inspired them to undertake a trip to Kolkata recently, specifically to donate a substantial endowment for instituting fellowships at the Ramakrishna Mission for the education of underprivileged children. This reminds me of his not so widely known writings on "rationality of changing choice" and his many informal conversations with me on the consistency of stark contradictions between judgments on the one hand and preferences on the other of the one-in-a-million "rational fool" that we sometimes come across in the simple "man in the street", who happens to be a startlingly better human being than the celebrated "rational man". In fact, he introduced MITS as an acronym for the "man in the street" in a paper on the changing requirements of literacy in a hi-tech society, which was published as a special article in the EPW in 1989 ("Investment in Literacy for a High-Technology Society", Volume 24, Number 30, 29 July, pp. 1711-1715).

In the academic world, Tapas Majumdar will be remembered for his seminal PhD thesis under the supervision of Lionel Robbins, and later published as *The Measurement of Utility* (Macmillan, 1958). It was perhaps during his association with Robbins, who happened to be the Chair of the Committee on Higher Education in the UK when Majumdar was a Rockefeller Fellow at the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1962 (an unusual affiliation outside the United States), that the seeds of his transition to the broader field of education were sown. This eventually led him to encourage a small number of students of economics to undertake research in diverse multidisciplinary areas like the crisis of ecology, international migration, and pedagogy of the fundamentals of applied socio-economics. On several occasions he had to face disappointments too when social scientists showed reluctance to come out of their straitjacket frames of mind and accept an interdisciplinary approach in teaching and guiding research. This remained his prime concern till the very last which unfortunately could not get clearly communicated due to his failing health.

Multidisciplinary Ideals

Tapas Majumdar was born on 6 January 1929 in a family with a strong academic culture. When his father Nani Gopal Majumdar, a noted archaeologist, was killed while leading an expedition in Sind in 1938 at a young age, his mother Snehalata Majumdar went to college and graduated with her elder daughter only to be able to bring up her children well. He had his education at Mitra Institution, Bhowanipore, and at Presidency College, Calcutta. He started his professional career as a research apprentice to P. C. Mahalanobis at the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta in 1950, and soon after, in the same year, he joined the Presidency College as Assistant Professor of Economics. In 1955, he went to the LSE and returned in 1957 after completing his doctorate. He went to the LSE again for a year in 1962 as Rockefeller Foundation Fellow and Visiting Member of the Senior Common Room. He held the chair of Professor and Head of Economics at Presidency College from 1958 till 1972, when he was invited by JNU to chair the newly set up ZHCES in the School of Social Sciences. His decision to come to JNU was a part of his silent mission to give shape to the mandate of the Report of the National Commission on Higher Education (1968) and his multidisciplinary ideals that he shared with its Chairman D. S. Kothari and Member-Secretary J. P. Naik, both very close to him.

Apart from being the founder chairperson of the ZHCES, Tapas Majumdar had later been the Dean of the School of Social Sciences. He was Member, University Grants Commission, Member of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Member of

the Punnaiya Committee on Financing of Higher Education (1993), and Chairman of the Human Resource Development Ministry's Expert Committee on Costing of Elementary Education as a Fundamental Right (1999) – the first cornerstone for the eventual enactment of the Right to Education Bill in 2009. He had also been a Visiting Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, and Cornell Visiting Professor at Swarthmore College, Philadelphia. He retired from JNU in 1994 and had since been an Emeritus Professor of the University. In 2007, the Calcutta University honoured him with the degree of DLit (honoris causa), and the Asiatic Society with the Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Gold Plaque for 2006. The *Asiatic Society Journal* also carried an article on education by Majumdar, but what made him happier was a pleasant surprise that the same issue carried a reprint of his archaeologist father Nani Gopal Majumdar's early writing on the interpretation of Kharoshthi.

Other than publishing many pioneering articles in international academic journals like the *Econometrica, Journal of Political Economy, Economic Journal, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Economica,* and *Analyse* & *Kritik*, Tapas Majumdar published chapters and papers in several edited volumes. *The Measurement of Utility* (Macmillan 1958), his widely acclaimed textbook, was later republished by Greenwood Press for being placed amongst rare collections of libraries around the world. His later book, *Investment in Education and Social Choice* (1983) was reprinted in India by Orient Longman a year later. He also edited *Growth and Choice* (1968), and *Nature, Man and the Indian Economy* (1993), both published by Oxford University Press, the former a collection of mainstream articles in theoretical economics and the latter in applied empirics on various facets of the country's economy by many eminent and a few promising authors of the time.

A Beautiful Soul

Tapas Majumdar was a humanist par excellence. A very rare couple, he and Gauri, herself a dedicated educationist and social worker, widely loved and respected, always had their doors open for all at any time of day. Be it the young faculty members seeking advice on personal issues, students seeking guidance on career choice, administrative staff of the university seeking help in resolving day-to-day problems or the economically depressed needing financial support and educational guidance for their children, they welcomed all with warmest regard. My first meeting with Majumdar was at the time when I was denied admission into the MPhil/PhD programme in JNU. Despite a good academic record, I was competed out for scoring low on the "socio-economic" criterion in the JNU admission process, and had communicated my disappointment to him at having to go back to take up a lectureship instead of pursuing research. He was full of compassion and encouraged me to publish at least two good papers and come back the following year for direct admission to PhD under his own supervision. But I did not have to wait for another year: The very moment I was reporting to the principal of a college in Shillong to join as lecturer, a telegram from JNU and a telephone communication from Majumdar brought me the news that not only was I offered admission in JNU as a result of some vacancy, but my application for an ICSSR research fellowship was also successful.

That was a very significant turning point in my life, and the most precious to my heart, as it was the beginning of a lifelong association with a beautiful mind and an equally beautiful soul. At another crucial time in my career when I was faced with a dilemma whether to opt

for civil services or academics, he had patiently pointed out to me the positive and negative aspects of each and advised me to think deeply before taking an informed decision independently. He was, of course, happy that I finally chose academics over others, but warned me of the roughs along with the smooth in the profession. Those words have continued to sustain me through difficult times and provide tremendous inspiration to overcome the difficulties.

The ZHCES had felicitated Tapas Majumdar on his 75th birth anniversary in 2004 by hosting an international conference on "Education and the Social Science Paradigms". That was also the year Europe was celebrating the 75th birth anniversary of an immortal cartoon character Tintin and we soon realised the reason why Tintin was a favourite character of Majumdar – they both shared the same year of birth! On the day of the closing plenary of the conference a closely contested cricket match between India and Pakistan was being concluded, but it did not stop cricket enthusiasts from attending the session, as was observed by Madhavan Palat, the Dean of the School of Social Sciences to the valedictory speaker, the former Governor of Reserve Bank of India, Bimal Jalan, also a former student of Majumdar. The packed auditorium of the School of Arts and Aesthetics on that day was a reiteration of the warm respect with which Tapas Majumdar (himself a cricket fan!) was regarded.

His captivating smile, honesty, straightforwardness and simplicity would always be there with his students, colleagues, and his fellow academicians. Despite serious illness, Tapas Majumdar continued writing for *The Telegraph* till the last days of his life, expressing his concerns over wide ranging issues, mainly focusing on the probity of public administration and social accountability of the government in various fields. His last words were a message that he had started dictating to his wife with an address, "My dear fellow academicians", which could not be completed because the visiting hours in the hospital were over and the attending team of doctors and nurses were already on their rounds. It should not be difficult for those who knew him to conjecture the message he wanted to leave behind.

Commitment of a Scholar and Teacher: A Personal Tribute

Amiya Kumar Bagchi
Institute of Development Studies Kolkata
Economic & Political Weekly Vol XLV, No 46, November 13, 2010

Tapas Majumdar, who passed away on 15 October 2010, had an apparently paradoxical personality. He was a very private person, but intensely committed to the public purpose of eradicating illiteracy and promoting rigorous research in the arena of higher education. All his life, he also followed certain norms of treatment of students and colleagues that are unfortunately too often breached in academia, in India and abroad. As far as I know, he was closest to a T. H. Green-style liberal in his political beliefs. So while he accepted the necessity of a market mechanism, he refused to allow the necessary elements of a fully human being to become mere matters of profit-seeking exchange in the marketplace.

I had the good fortune of having been taught by him at the undergraduate level, becoming a colleague of his when I joined the teaching profession and enjoying his affection even when he moved away from Kolkata and settled down in Delhi. My account may be biased by the glow of warmth I felt in his company and correspondence, but I believe that most of his students felt a similar glow when they came into contact with him. When I joined the third year economics (honours) class in Presidency College, Calcutta, Bhabatosh Datta and Tapas Majumdar shared the teaching of microeconomics. After Bhabatosh Datta's departure to join the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as head of the South-East Division, Tapas Majumdar and Dhiresh Bhattacharya shared the teaching of economic theory. Majumdar also briefly lectured on Indian economic problems. This will show that even in a supposedly elite institution like Presidency College, teachers were expected to teach almost any subject that was included in the honours syllabus. (At that time, economics and political science were combined in the same honours course. I have always thought that the bifurcation has harmed the students of both economics and political theory.)

Systematic Method

Tapas Majumdar followed a systematic method in his microeconomic theory course, eschewing unnecessary verbiage in his exposition, and insisting on logical development of every step of the argument. He introduced us to John Hicks' Value and Capital, and William Baumol's Economic Dynamics. Through his teaching and contact with a senior student, Sukhamoy Chakravarty, we also acquired a nodding familiarity with Paul Samuelson's Foundations of Economic Analysis. When he taught macroeconomics, he relied more on Keynes' General Theory than on simplified accounts such as Dudley Dillard's text, or Alvin Hansen's Guide to Keynes. I remember that he pointed out that poor Hansen, an early Keynesian but by then getting rather muddled, had made an elementary mistake when he thought that the Keynesian system had a problem of circularity, since income influenced the rate of interest, and the rate of interest entered as a determinant of the income level! In his few lectures on Indian economic problems he stressed the incoherence of policy decisions which often ran counter to the proclaimed objectives of planning, an incoherence we are plagued with even more than in the mid-1950s.

By the time I had completed my MA from Calcutta University, Majumdar had come back and rejoined Presidency College, after completing a brilliant PhD from the London School of Economics, which soon came out as his first book, *The Measurement of Utility*. I was informally offered a lectureship in Calcutta University by S. N. Sen, the then head of the economics department of Calcutta University. Simultaneously, I was also offered the post of an assistant professor in Presidency College. Tapas Majumdar spent almost an hour convincing me that I should join Presidency College. The point about this small anecdote is not how highly he thought of my potential but that when he (and other committed teachers like him) thought that a student had the promise of being a good teacher or scholar, they tried their best to guide them along the best tracks.

When I joined Presidency College in April 1958, there was another small surprise waiting for me. I was invited to a meeting with the other three members of the economics department – Bhabatosh Datta, who had come back after completing his stint at the IMF, U. N. Ghosal, the head of the department, and Tapas Majumdar – all of them my teachers. I was asked what I would like to teach. I had assumed that I would simply be assigned to teach what the other senior members of the department were not teaching. When I was asked to actually choose the subject, I was taken aback. I knew that with Dhiresh Bhattacharya's departure from the college, there was a vacuum in the teaching of Indian economic problems. So I said diffidently that I can teach that particular paper. But then Datta and Majumdar almost simultaneously asked, "Don't you want to teach theory?" Now, in Calcutta in those days, "theory" was considered to be the Holy Grail of economics. How dare I offer to teach it with Datta and Majumdar both taking theory classes in the department? Noticing my embarrassment and having some idea of my ideological bent, Bhabatosh Datta said, "OK, you will teach the theory of income distribution". I narrate this to show the norm of collegiality followed by Majumdar and other teachers of an even older generation. You encourage young colleagues by letting them choose the area which is close to their hearts.

Seminar on Economics

Soon after I joined Presidency College, a seminar on economics was started in which Datta, Majumdar, and teachers of the postgraduate department of economics also participated. I was also invited to join the seminar. It was held in the spacious drawing room of the Majumdar household. Apart from the intellectual feast, another major attraction was the delicious repast provided to the participants by Tapas Majumdar's mother and his wife (Gauri, née Banerjee). Majumdar had got married soon after his return from Britain, and Gauri-di has since then remained as much an affectionate older sister (or aunt to younger students) as Majumdar was an affectionate guide to his students.

I went to Trinity College, Cambridge, on a state scholarship awarded by the West Bengal government to earn a PhD in economics. Because of various factors, including what might be called an ungoverned interest in many areas outside my chosen dissertation topic, the scholarship ran out before I had completed my thesis. When Tapas Majumdar learned about my difficulties, he persuaded the West Bengal government to extend the scholarship by one year, and I was able to get my PhD. I came back and joined Presidency College as professor of economics. My appointment had to be validated by the State Public Service Commission. Apparently, the mandarins had asked Tapas Majumdar, who had by then become head of the economics department of the college, to recommend where in the scale of pay of a professor

they should place me. I found out that he had recommended a pay that was higher than his own. When I expostulated him about this – how could he, the head, and my teacher to boot, recommend a higher salary than his own? – his reply was, "They may be cheating me, but why should I allow them to cheat you as well?" That was his ethic: he was too proud to complain publicly about some injustice being meted out to him, but he would fight hard to redress a similar injustice inflicted on somebody else, if he had any means of doing so. Fortunately for my comfort, the government ignored his suggestion, but still placed me just one rung below him in the scale of pay.

Support for Leave

After a time, I began to fret because I was not getting enough time and bibliographical materials to write a book on the patterns and determinants of private investment in India in the late colonial period. This problem had begun to grip me while I was completing my PhD thesis on the behavior of private investment during the first two five-year plan periods. Then one day, Tapas Majumdar brought to my notice an advertisement for a post in the faculty of economics and politics of Cambridge University. The necessary qualification was that the applicant must have conducted research in the economics of developing countries. With Majumdar's encouragement and with trepidation I wrote a letter to the faculty secretary inquiring whether I was eligible for the post. To my great good fortune (we are after all ruled largely by unseen throws of dice), I was informed almost by return of post that I had got the job. But there was still the question of leave from Presidency College. As a state scholar, I was still bound to serve it for another three years. But Majumdar thought that it is more important that I write something worthwhile if I am given the opportunity rather than be bound by rules that could be slightly modified without gross illegality. Bhabatosh Datta as the then Secretary of Education of the government of West Bengal endorsed his opinion and leave was granted to me. I promised that I would come back after finishing my book. I had no problem in giving that promise because neither my wife nor I wanted to live abroad. I know that some senior professors of Presidency College severely condemned what they considered to be a case of indulgence, if not something worse. All I can say that I did write the book, and I did come back, and served out the extra three years of my contract.[1] But as an academic administrator, I have followed the generous (and wise) policy of my teachers. When I have thought that a young scholar was promising and would do good work if s(he) was granted leave, I have tried to smooth her (his) way.

I rejoined Presidency College in 1969 in the middle of a turbulent period for the college. Many of the rebellious students were boycotting classes from time to time because it was a part of the state apparatus they wanted to get rid of. But those students never misbehaved in the classes that were held. On at least two occasions, my colleague, the late Dipak Banerjee and I scolded some of these radical students because they had misbehaved with the so-called reactionary students. But the students did not resent that. Under Dipak Banerjee's leadership, all of us held classes in our homes, and many of the rebels attended those classes, on the ground that their protest was against an official institution, and not against the subject of economics as such. During that period, with Bhabatosh Datta as Education Secretary to the West Bengal government, the police were not allowed to enter the college, for arresting students. His view was that the police had every right to enforce the law, but an educational

[1] It is a sign of bureaucratic laxity combined with the severity of closing the stable door after the horse had bolted but had voluntarily returned, that I was made to sign the requisite contract only after my return from Cambridge in 1969.

institution is not the place for search-and-arrest operations, unless the police had concrete evidence that the college was a repository of arms or ammunition. I wish that more officials of the education department and principals and vice chancellors would follow his example.

Shift to Delhi

Tapas Majumdar moved to New Delhi in 1973 to take charge of the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies. From then on, my contact with him became more infrequent. But he continued to teach students and even more importantly, played a prominent part in pushing the cause of universalizing elementary education. The report of the committee appointed by the Supreme Court under his chairmanship (1999) has become a landmark in the ongoing struggle for universalizing elementary education under the auspices of the state.

After the foundation of the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK), he was kind enough to accept an invitation to give a lecture there on 4 February 2005 on "Elementary Education Policy in India". In that lecture, he condemned the situation under which much of the elementary education was being inequitably, and often criminally badly, provided by private parties seeking to make money. He also deplored the underpayment of part-time teachers by state governments which had been badly strapped for funds under the fiscal dispensation of the union government. He thought that the provision of education by low-paid teachers could be only a stop-gap arrangement and was not only inequitable but also built up incentive problems for all teachers. On 24 July 2006, at the IDSK, we celebrated the birth centenary of Panchanan Chakraborty, one of the great teachers of economics in Bengal, from the 1930s to the 1960s, and had also taught Tapas Majumdar.[2] The title of his talk at the seminar was "Current Market Demand for Human Capital vs Long-Term Academic and Societal Needs". In that lecture, Majumdar pointed out that if the supply of education was guided only by current market demand for particular professional skills, such as IT or management, then real academic needs such as providing education for the poor or research in unfashionable but long-gestation areas, with fruits to be garnered only in the long run, would suffer badly. On top of that, where would even good teachers for management courses or IT to be found? Because surely, if market earnings are the sole criterion, then good economists or finance specialists would find it more profitable to run management firms or investment companies themselves, or good doctors would give up doctoring and run for-profit hospitals instead. Majumdar's real skills as an economist as well as his commitment to a public purpose transcending blinkered motives of self-interest shone brightly through that lecture.

I should record that Tapas-da (as he was to me from the time I became his colleague) and Gauri-di took educating other people as also a very private mission. They helped quite a few very needy students through school up to the university level. They will probably tell their own stories later. But again, the Majumdar couple did all that not as charity but as a duty they owed to society. May that sense of duty willingly assumed and carefully performed be suffused through this highly unjust society.

[2] For an appreciation of Panchanan Chakraborty, see Tapas Majumdar: "Upon the Centenary of Panchanan Chakraborty: Memories of a Professor", The Telegraph, 22 August 2006.

On Tapas Majumdar

Prabhat Patnaik
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Social Scientist, Sep-Dec 2010, Vol. 38, No. 9-12

Tapas Majumdar who passed away on the 15th of October was an outstanding economist and teacher. A person of extraordinary dignity and integrity, he was never one to thrust himself into the limelight, but he had a profound influence on several generations of students, first at Presidency College, Calcutta (where he taught, among others, Amartya Sen, Sukhamoy Chakravarty and Amiya Bagchi) and later at Jawaharlal Nehru University, where he founded the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, becoming Emeritus Professor after retirement.

After early education in Calcutta, Tapas Majumdar went to the London School of Economics where he completed his Ph.D. under the supervision of Lionel Robbins on "The Measurement of Utility". This was subsequently published as a book and went on to become a classic. With impeccable clarity and logical precision, it negotiated what was then a new and complex field, utility theory, with such mastery, that for numerous students it remained, for years to come, the best exposition on the subject. I certainly remember that for me it was The *Measurement of Utility*, on which I had to do a tutorial at the Delhi School of Economics, that first brought some clarity on the subject with its distinctions between Introspective Cardinalism, Introspective Ordinalism, Behavioral Cardinalism and Behavioral Ordinalism.

He returned from LSE to teach at Presidency College, Calcutta, where, after the retirement of Professor Bhabatosh Datta, he became the Head of the Department. As Head he presided over a galaxy of remarkable economists, including Dipak Banerji, Mihir Rakshit, Amiya Bagchi and Nabendu Sen, who constituted at that time the Economics faculty of Presidency College. My first meeting with Professor Majumdar was in 1969, when he was sitting as the head of a table around which sat this illustrious group. I had just been selected for a faculty position at Cambridge and was visiting Calcutta and in particular Amiya Bagchi, my predecessor in that post at Cambridge. Professor Bagchi took me along to Presidency College to which he had returned. Professor Majumdar made some polite inquiries about me and gave me a cup of tea. The respectful affection with which he was regarded by his illustrious colleagues, was obvious to me even at this first meeting.

Of course I had seen Tapas Majumdar once before this. In the early sixties he was giving a lecture at the Delhi School of Economics. He was so famous at the time that just to get a glimpse of him, several of us undergraduate students had gone along to the lecture. The Lecture theatre was jam-packed, with scores of people standing in the aisles. We also stood without following a word of what he was saying. After he had spoken, somebody got up from the audience and, to everyone's irritation, asked him an extremely long-winded and ponderous question. Professor Majumdar, who had a mischievous sense of humour (about which his classmate from college days, Ashok Mitra, would tell me later) simply said: "could you repeat that please?" After the question which had begun with "Do you think…" was ponderously repeated, he just said: "No".

Professor Majumdar who had begun his career as a theorist in Calcutta (he had developed an alternative proof of Amartya Sen's "A Possibility Theorem on Majority Decisions"), made

a twofold switch at the beginning of the seventies. At the suggestion of his friend J. P. Naik he moved to Delhi to occupy a chair at JNU and devoted himself to Education Studies, in which he had developed an interest earlier. The Zakir Husain Centre was the product of this double switch.

When the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning was started by Krishna Bharadwaj at JNU, he was already in the university and helped greatly in the setting up of the new Centre. Until the Centre acquired adequate faculty strength he regularly taught a compulsory course in the M.A. programme. He was an awe-inspiring but avuncular figure for younger faculty members like myself (he was in fact the uncle of my colleague, the eminent economic theorist, Anjan Mukherji). It was people like Professor Majumdar who built JNU into the unique institution it has become.

Professor Majumdar had an honest and progressive liberalism which has become rare these days. His days in Presidency College had coincided with the Naxalite movement of the late sixties and early seventies which had drawn many students. Despite his political views being completely different from the Naxalite students', Professor Majumdar was one of the extremely few teachers (Professor Sibatosh Mukherji, also later of JNU, was another) who defended the students and came to their personal assistance, even while making no secret of his political differences with them.

At JNU in the early seventies there was a strike called by the Students Union, then headed by Prakash Karat, on the demand that the students should have the right to get their examination scripts re-evaluated if they so wished. In response to the strike the authorities closed down the university and shut the Hostel Mess. As the situation deteriorated, the Students Union informally agreed to call off the strike, provided a group of about 30 teachers appealed to them to do so, and it was left to younger teachers like me to see if this was feasible. The general mood among teachers was hostile to students, since the demand on which the strike had been called appeared to them to question their integrity. So, we were in a quandary. Taking courage in both hands we approached Professor Majumdar, who took one look at the appeal and signed it without a word. With such a senior Professor being the first signatory, it was easy to get signatures from other teachers, and the crisis was averted. All his life Professor Majumdar lived up to the courage of his liberal convictions.

This is also evident in the excellent report that the Committee on Education headed by him produced in January 1999, for which the country will remember him with gratitude. The report stated unambiguously that as a consequence of the Unnikrishnan judgement of the Supreme Court, universalization of elementary education had become a "justiciable entitlement" of every Indian child. Hence, the "State has to make the necessary reallocation of resources, by superseding other important claims if necessary, in a manner that the justiciable entitlement becomes a reality." At a time when neo-liberalism had become dominant in official circles, with the government looking for ways to wriggle out of its Constitutional commitment to universalize elementary education, and keen instead on privatizing education, Professor Majumdar's report was a sharp and uncompromising document. His integrity did not bow to power.

Honest to the core, an inspiring figure for generations of students and colleagues, Professor Majumdar was a role model. It is people like him who constitute the moral core of a society.

A Different Dividend

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Hindustan Times, November 30, 2010

On a recent trip somewhere, a Uruguayan economist I just met asked me if I was a Bengali: "Aren't all Indian economists Bengali and all Indian mathematicians south Indian?" I demurred, pointing to that great triad of non-Bengali economists, Bhagwati, Dixit and Srinivasan, but like many stereotypes there is a kernel of truth in it; it's still not possible to open an issue of certain journals without noticing a Bengali name or two.

How did this come about? Amartya Sen notwithstanding, it is not because of something in the Bengali genes. If I had to guess it has much more to do with a couple of generations of outstanding teacher-scholars in Kolkata who, implausibly (remember the old joke: "an accountant is an economist with charisma") managed to turn economics into the sexiest thing that you could study. Those wonderful teachers are now, alas, mostly all gone. We lost one of last remaining of them, Tapas Majumdar, in the middle of October.

I never had a chance to study with him. He moved to Jawaharlal Nehru University a few years before I started college to lead what quickly became one of India's leading centres for education research. But my parents and the Majumdars were close friends, and I have been fortunate to have them as a second set of parents looking out for me all my life.

Tapas*babu*, as the whole world knew him, was the first person to ask me to comment on a serious manuscript — he was writing his 1985 book, *Investment in Education and Social Choice*, when I was starting graduate school. I don't remember what my comments were — I cannot imagine they were worth anything — but I will confess now that I struggled to find anything useful to say. I was young then, and entranced by the idea that economics should be an all-encompassing narrative about the world, and thinking about the economics and politics of education, seemed to me, pretty small potatoes, compared to all the big questions ("capitalism or socialism", "growth or the environment") that animated me. Why was someone as obviously brilliant as he so involved with the nitty-gritty aspects of education?

Over the years as I became more and more immersed in the economics of education, I went to back to Tapasbabu's book many times, every time with a deepening understanding of what he was trying to achieve. What is clear to me now is how far ahead of the entire field he was back then and probably indeed now. I certainly keep discovering new things that I need to worry about: and many of them are in his book.

The economics of education in circa 1985 was built around one simple idea: education is an investment like any other. Families invest to maximise returns on their investment but may not have enough resources to invest enough. Which is why the government has to step in and invest in areas that are not getting enough private investment. This is nice and simple, but also reductionist in a way that makes it not very useful as a guide to policy. Tapasbabu's book is all about why.

To see why the pure investment frame is not very useful, think of the family investing to maximise returns: what returns? Where does a poor family in rural Jharkhand know the actual

returns on educational investment for children from families like theirs, where parents cannot provide homework help. What matters therefore, as Tapasbabu emphasised, is their beliefs about the returns, true or false.

Recent evidence confirms that many parents severely underestimate the benefits from education for their children and when efforts are made to convince them of this, their children do much better in school. Moreover even those parents who believe in education tend to think that it's all-or-nothing: either the child clears the school-leaving exam and gets a government job, or the entire education is wasted.

In Madagascar parents think that 70% of those who matriculate get a government job. The truth is just 33%. On the other hand, even those who do not clear the exam benefit — the evidence suggests that every year of education increases earning in the same proportion.

The government might know that parents have the wrong beliefs, but what can it do? Should a government strapped for resources ignore the demand for high schools because it knows that primary schooling is more valuable than people think? But then would people send their children to primary school, if they know that there is no high school to transition into, given that they believe that passing high school is all important. And if they will not send their children, what's the primary school for? It does not make sense, as Tapas*babu* emphasised, for the government to act without taking account of what people want or believe.

The book has many other arguments about why it is not useful to think of education as a generic investment, like building or a factory. And many other essential insights for anyone who is interested in education.

Tapas*babu* was also a tireless campaigner for better education for everyone; he wrote textbooks, chaired commissions and kept the middle pages of the *Telegraph* animated by his engaging op-ds. Yet, as one of his most prominent protégés said the other day, he did not have the impact on policy that someone of his stature should have had. In part because he was too gentle and straightforward for the world of politics; in part because his message was too subtle for those habituated to think of education policy in terms of buildings and jobs, as we still seem to be.

*The views expressed by the author are personal

Remarkable Moments of Real Education

Amartya Sen
Harvard University
The Telegraph, December 19, 2010

I am extremely sad to miss this memorial meeting for a person of the greatest importance in my life. I see Tapas*da* as a truly remarkable *guru* from whom I have learned so much. He led me into critical understanding of economic theory, and his affection and encouragement always gave me strength, courage and determination. I would like to say a few words through this communication, which I hope could be read at the memorial meeting, on one particular quality of Tapas Majumdar which I was in a specially good position to observe as a student who felt very close to him.

Tapas*babu* was not only a magically good teacher, he was also superb in nurturing the intellectual self-confidence of his students, the absence of which qualities could — and often do — limit the development of whatever creativity we may have. Tapas*da* did, of course, address difficult problems with breathtaking lucidity, but at the same time, he would suggest original ideas on them and encourage his students also to think for themselves even as they grappled with "received" theories. That encouragement was a very special feature of Tapas*da* — very rare in the academic world of his time.

Need to Question

When I, along with my classmates (such as Sukhamay Chakravarty and others), encountered Tapas*da* first, he was a very young teacher who had just completed his own studies. I think some of Tapas*da*'s concentration on clear-headed lucidity came from a tradition that Presidency College powerfully cultivated in those days, led by that remarkable professor, Bhabatosh Datta, who was probably the best communicator I have ever encountered anywhere in the world. Tapas*da* shared the same priority, and must have to some extent learned from Bhabatosh*babu* how to practise the art of transparent lecturing. Where Tapas*da* went beyond the established Presidency College tradition was in his insistence that even as we try to understand what a received theory was saying, we — even young undergraduates like us — must ask the question: what are the limitations of this theory? In a remarkable moment of real education, Tapas*da* once told me (I was still in my first year at Presidency College): "If some analytical idea you read about appears to you to be erroneous, it could be that you have not followed the reasoning, but it could also be — don't dismiss the possibility — that the received reasoning is simply incorrect!" That was, of course, a heady moment, but also a hugely creative one.

Tapas*da* was a superb theorist himself, who offered new ideas to the profession on utility theory, educational theory, social choice theory, and other areas of active interest in the contemporary world of economics and social studies. He questioned, often enough, what he found in books and journals, and he wanted his students to do the same. This was not only thrilling for many of us, it was also deeply inspirational. The distinguished department of economics of Presidency College was then moving — these were the early years of the 1950s — from education as exquisite learning to education as critical reasoning, and Tapas*da* was one of the leading figures in that momentous transition.

Extra Focus

Tapas Majumdar was remarkable in many different ways. He was a powerful economist, a great educationist, a wonderful human being, and a very warm and affectionate friend. He will be remembered as a major figure in the world of education and economic study. To those widely admired qualities, which made Tapas*da* such a major figure in the contemporary intellectual world, I wanted to add an extra focus on another exceptional feature of his: his ability to inspire and to generate self-confidence that is essential for creativity. I know my own intellectual life would have gone very differently but for Tapas*da*, and this must be true of many of his other students as well. There have been very few people like him.

“MEMORIES”: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS BY TAPAS MAJUMDAR

Memories: Personal Reflections
by Tapas Majumdar

'Bandāyinō sun, kamandē pirgōsun
Dostē tirōsun
Didār karōsun, khalmish marōsun, galiyā tamōsun
Lagatē sagāsun
Piral Fakirē, Shir jan Amirē
Nēkir Jayirē.'

To the field shall I go, and gather *kamand* (sugar cane)
For you my beloved friend!
My eyes shall be fixed on you, as I become stone and
earth, and drop down on the door step.
Others will tread over my body.
Piral Fakir, Shir jan Amir
Grieves for you!

(from a Brāhūī pastoral song collected by Nani Gopal Majumdar at Mohenjo-daro, October 1928; translation reconstructed from his notes)

I do not know why the haunting refrain of the old Brāhūī song that father had collected from one Mohammed Rafique of Nichar, Kalat (Baluchistan), comes to mind persistently as I sit down desperately trying to recall his presence of nearly sixty years ago. Father had written out the lines neatly and carefully in the Bengali script in one corner of his field notebook and then tried out the English translations. I surmise that the song had a plaintive tune (Mohammed Rafique would probably have sung it to him) that had moved father strongly enough and had somewhere struck a chord. Perhaps he had felt that he too had travelled to those distant fields to gather the *kamands* of his dreams and his mind had turned for a moment to thoughts of mortality. Anyway that old notebook became, as I was to discover many years later, my mother's diary in which she decided to record what was to be her own private expedition, a 'first' of a kind, when she chose to accompany father to Sind in the cold season of 1929-30 with all her three children. She was then not yet 23. Her first two were daughters. I was the youngest, then just turning one.

I do not recall, naturally, the camp life of that 1929-30 expedition. But my mother's diary records the details of some of our adventures and misadventures that used to be told and retold to friends and relatives in our childhood days. I avidly listened to these tales in which I often figured, unfortunately, not always with great distinction. Reading that diary again, I now realize how father must have been worried almost to death that time having to cope simultaneously with so many things. His very determined young wife's daily household needs were frugal, but always difficult to meet because even the village shops were a civilization away. My own frequent attacks of high fever with convulsions, without medical help in sight, were unnerving. On top of everything, of course, were his daily excursions mainly on camel and horseback, endlessly prospecting for archaeological sites among the many mounds that abounded the sandy country around our camp at Kharo. Only a few of these mounds would prove to be really ancient, others being merely history's decoys, as it were. So at the end of a long day's outing father would usually return empty-handed and crestfallen to his make-shift

home that was ready to boil over with the problems of the day. He had to sort them out as best he could. In the event, I find he would often turn into a part-time homoeopath for the night. For this he would draw on his own past experience as assistant to his father. My grandfather had been a rising homceopathic practitioner of Calcutta. But he had died in his prime, one day, leaving a large and wholly unprepared family to the sole care of his eldest son, my father, who was then himself a very young man. Father obviously had to learn to cope with life (and death) early.

It is always difficult for a son to judge objectively his father's life even when over half a century has passed. It is even more difficult in my case because not only was he my childhood hero but also he was a very complex person quite unlike the people I was apt to meet in Calcutta's everyday middle-class life.

In fact, looking back now I feel that father had almost systematically acquired the capacity of living two or possibly three completely different lives without making basic compromises in any. For one thing, the pace and direction of his almost unremitting professional exertions did not seem to change at all on account of his domestic worries— which I now know had been always quite a handful. As for my own little contributions to these worries, my mother's diary shows that I must have tried my best (in all innocence, of course) during the 1929-30 explorations in Sind to be the kill-joy of the family! I find in these pages that my two elder sisters—themselves little children—are praying plaintively for a miracle cure for me; father spending sleepless nights pouring over *materia medica* in candle light to seek a remedy; mother suddenly becoming desperately homesick on my account, regretting her 'foolhardy' decision to travel with father. But any of this apparently does not disturb the routine of father's meticulous surveys of the mounds day after day. And in the end, there is joy in the camp— the search is rewarded with the discovery of Amri, which father predicts might prove to be the most significant link discovered in the Harappa-Mohenjo-daro chain. 'When I saw Amri,' father told my mother, 'I felt I had at last found *Amrita* (the mythical nectar that gave immortality to the gods).'

My early memory of Sind, as I have said, is that of an infant and the memory was fed and nourished by what I could take in sitting in my mother's lap. Only later did I have the benefit of my mother's diary which I discovered one day quite accidentally, and my father's memoirs, *Exploration in Sind*. Sometimes I imagine I can clearly remember the milk-white asses grazing by the hills and the sunny sand, the cumbrous camel that would start moaning from the moment that it was made to sit down and would not stop until allowed to stand up again with us at its back, the brilliant green flights of parrots to whom I would call out incessantly in sheer delight: but all this may as well be only memory implanted by tales of the kind that the children in our times were kept on being told through their waking hours until they thought they had seen it all themselves!

But I do recall fairly clearly life with father from 1935 onwards until that fateful autumn of 1938 when he went away, this time without us, for the terrain by the Kirthar Hills that he had planned to cover was known to be difficult and camp life not only austere as usual but also hazardous. How hazardous it could be was known fully only on that tragic morning of the 11th November, 1938. As his favourite orderly (and my childhood friend and guide) Sadardin was to report to us later, father was just finishing breakfast when he heard gunshots. In fact the bandits, a marauding band from the nearby 'native' State of Kalat in Baluchistan, had opened a fusillade of fire-arms on the tents from a hilltop. The bullets were coming

through and had already hit the surveyor of the party Mr. Chatterji on one arm and the photographer Mr. Gupta on the palm of the hand. To digress here a little on how some things were done those days—the same tents were later to be lent to a Calcutta University archaeological expedition, as the archaeologist Kunja Govinda Goswami recorded, with the bullet holes that had not been mended and even the blood stains that had never been washed off! However, to go back to Sadardin's account, the gunshots merely infuriated my father for he never had a sense of physical fear. 'They are making a big mistake,' he told Sadardin and rushed out to tell them so. They were indeed making a big mistake thinking that this was a treasury party with a good stock of guns and cash. As he came out in the open he was cut down by bullets hitting him from all sides before anyone knew what was happening. Then the firing suddenly stopped and they swarmed down from the hills. Sadardin, faithful as ever, rushed out to his side but his eyes were already closed. He only murmured what Sadardin thought was my name once or twice: father had gathered his last *kamand* from the field. 'It was a bad mistake. I never knew that it was a learned scholar camping out like that!', the leader of the bandits had said later in court. They had been caught after a plane sent out by the Government searched them out in the hills, and were extradited from Kalat to British territory. The arm of Imperial Law was long.

I was left, in a way alone, to cherish my other memories of brief days spent with father. I can still recall the rigours of life in tents at Lauriya-Nandangarh in Bihar near the Nepal border. Father loved that life. I mostly only pretended to love it too as I accompanied him to the excavation site, to Aśoka's Pillar, to the *triveni* confluence. Actually, what I liked was his company. I had taken some books with me but the only one I remember to have read was a children's *Mahabharata* in Bengali. Every night I had to tell a story from it; my parents kept assuring me it was all new to them. Father said that he was learning the names of the epic characters from me; in exchange, I remember, I had to learn difficult English words like 'literature' and 'antiquities'. I remember, too an earlier visit to Bhubaneswar in Orissa in 1935 and the picnic near the mysterious caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri. One memory of Bhubaneswar stands out. We had gone to the famous temple and the equally famous spring at Gauri Kunda. There was an ancient tank adjacent to it into which the spring water was allowed to flow and people bathed in it. It looked large and deep and pretty dangerous to me but father jumped in with me at once—he would teach me to swim then and there to my consternation! Forty years later when I had to visit Utkal University, I would insist on being taken to the spot. It had not changed a bit and I could recognise every detail of it, including the gargoyle spout through which the spring water was flowing into the tank—except that, funnily, it was a very small tank—I did not think the water was more than four feet at its deepest!

I suspect that father found it comparatively easier than most people to switch lives, and move from one cultural mode to another. He loved the great outdoors. He was certainly one of India's most brilliant field archaeologists as Stuart Piggot had remarked. But after each of his periodic excursions mostly to the world of nature (because many of the prehistoric sites in India had been abandoned by man in recent times), he would come back quietly to the sedate social existence of the middle-class babu Calcutta of the late thirties and fit in snugly, as if he had never been away. The switch would be so complete that I do not remember him ever to have spent a minute on such a normal outdoor activity as taking a walk in the Maidan—dear to the Calcuttans of the time—not to speak of the more vigorous outdoor sports that many of his friends loved to indulge in. In Calcutta society he played the part of a highly cultivated

Bengalee Brahmin gentleman keeping himself glued to his study the year round. He had quite a full life in this incarnation too as some of his closest friends would remark half-teasingly to my hearing. As Curator of the Indian Museum he would be busy reorganising the Gandhara collection, writing his definitive guide to the Museum's sculptures; as the youngest Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal he would be very much a committee man; he would be meticulously translating, editing and annotating the Sanchi inscriptions for the monumental Marshall and Foucher volumes (that eventually were to come out only after his death); occasionally, as mother told me later, he would also worry about not pursuing his old love, the epigraphy of eastern India and bemoan the fate of *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Volumes I and II which nobody produced, father having done only Volume III in his early youth. And I can still recall father happily spending his spare hours at home in his study as well as his bedroom, reading blackened prints on coarse paper taken off ancient inscriptions (on copper plates, I suppose), through a handy mirror that he always carried around. He clearly loved this life too.

I, nevertheless, suspect (as did my mother) that my father was not completely happy with the life style of the scholarly Bengalee Bhadralok which he could bear only up to a point. Come every autumn we would see indications of this as he would betray a strange restlessness that mother would openly comment on and I would secretly notice. He would wait impatiently for word from Delhi hoping against hopes that Government would relax the austerity of the post-depression years and let him fit out an expedition to the Indus Valley again. Almost each year the news would come that the resumption of the explorations in Sind was postponed by yet another season. He would be so disappointed that mother would not have the heart to show even a bit of her elation.

In the midst of all this, I remember there was talk (in 1938) of his going to England on study leave. He began to look forward to it as did the old protagonist of his cause, John Marshall, who had once inducted him into the Archaeological Survey. But as Kashinath Narayan Dikshit, the Director General of the Survey, was to tell mother in my presence later, as he openly wept, it was he who had scotched that move. He had known that Government had finally relented, the Sind explorations were on and, father was going to be asked to lead the expedition as Officer on special duty. Naturally father had known this too or anticipated this, and had probably decided to pretend his great disappointment to mother when the study leave was not granted. Mr. Dikshit blamed himself (quite unnecessarily), for he thought that father would have been spared only if he had been granted that leave first. I on my part hold a different view. I think probably father would not have taken the boat to England given half a chance to be back in Sind again! But of this we will never know.

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LAST TWO DECADES OF TAPAS MAJUMDAR'S WRITINGS:

Equality's Equations

The Telegraph, March 4, 1994

When Amartya Sen's On *Economic Inequality* came to hand about 20 years ago I had encountered for the first time what I still consider to be the most clear headed account of the concept of deprivation yet rendered by an economist. But if it had still left me a little cold and unsatisfied, it was precisely because Sen's treatment was — not unabashedly but unconcealably — essentially an economist's account, even if it was being given by one of the cleverest economists of our time.

One has to remember that Sen had not by then responded satisfactorily to one of his main philosophical stimulants: the theory of *justice as fairness* propounded by John Rawls especially in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971). More important, Rawls himself had not yet time to come to terms with his critics or react to Sen's parallel concept, eventually somewhat modifying his own. An account of the interactions of those fascinating intervening years, I am certain, will someday be written about by historians of philosophy.

Sen revisits inequality in this book. Predictably, he has shed the qualifying adjective of the earlier title. Predictably too, his concern now is on two different planes around two central questions: inequality of precisely what, in terms of which desirable thing? And how exactly is equality in respect of that desirable thing related to the available set of social arrangements? The second question is complex, for Sen sees equality in terms of one's *capability* to attain it effectively and functionally rather than only formally.

The first question Sen calls methodological, the second substantive. This is because first we make sure what equality we are talking about and, next, where exactly we are empirically on a given equality map. The distinction is important but I think it can be misleading too because the answer to a methodological question also can imply a substantive decision.

For example, if I decide to talk about only economic inequality or only equality in the eye of the law or only universal suffrage or any particular combination of these, then I have already decided what I mean by social reality and thereby all substantive questions that arise in consequence are predisposed.

Let us try to understand the point of departure of: Sen's capability approach in terms of two alternative situations. For both, let us accept — as Sen does — a basic postulate of Rawls that justice is fairness in a distributive sense: justice is social justice between persons.

Consider now the case of two persons who have exactly equal shares of what Rawls calls "the primary goods," meaning thereby the basic things of life that matter, whichever way you wish to define them. Now take situations A and B. In situation A the two persons do not have the same capability of making the most of their respective endowments because one of them suffers from social disabilities imposed on her, given her gender, caste or class. Situation A satisfies Rawls' equality but not Sen's.

In situation B, the two persons still have equality in the Rawls sense in that they have the same initial endowments of the primary goods. But, alas, their achievements are not equal— this time because one of them is lazy or does not care for achievement any way (being a person after my heart!). Sen would find their inequality in achievement less disturbing and

their equality in capabilities more meaningful from the point of view of judging the merits of the existing social arrangements.

I think this is a very sensible way of looking at the equality question. It would have relevance for many of the vexing questions that have today raised their heads in our troubled society. Sen has done well to hint at them on several occasions in the book.

Sen has also made an important point about the relationship that might exist between the question of inequality and that of systemic efficiency. Briefly, he suggests that we take the load off the neck of the equality question. The albatross of efficiency should be more closely examined, though nobody doubts that efficiency in social arrangements including recruitment procedures in public services would be a very fine thing. Sen refers to the muddle we have chosen to be in about reservations and all that in this country, but one wishes he had met the question head on and in specific terms with his capability approach. He has given us a number of clues though, and I hope someone would soon follow them up.

Inequality Reexamined is an important book, for Sen continues to teach us how to formulate the right questions on difficult social policy as he goes about making the simple distinctions in his characteristic way. This ability to define new shades of grey that later catch everybody's eyes has been Sen's great strength over all these years since his classic *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (1970).

I have, however, one reservation about the present book. I have not understood Sen's choice of the target set of readership which seems to me to be very mixed indeed. As a result, one encounters too much of the public lecture mode here and too little of that compactness that his early work had so familiarized us with. But perhaps readers have less use now for the rigorous prose in which Sen can write, so who am I to complain?

Wrong Number Games–There is more to Promoting Education than Government Spending

The Telegraph, March 25, 1994

Our politicians, whether in power or out of it, follow a simple rule : when you want to do good, make a promise — a small promise if you hope to honour it yourself, a big promise if you want others, preferably your successors, to carry the burden for you.

So it has happened that we have "promises to keep" piled up over the decades, enshrined in our Constitution, parliamentary resolutions, prime ministerial announcements, annual budget speeches — all of which people still take very seriously as they should — as well our election manifestos which people have learnt to take otherwise.

All this came to mind as one listened to the finance minister, Mr Manmohan Singh, adlibbing, departing frequently from his prepared budget text. He was obviously feeling happy at being able to keep at least one of his promises as he announced the abolition of the 12 percent surcharge on the income tax.

One might complain that Mr Singh was unnecessarily trivialising good poetry with his "promises to keep" line. But I could empathise with him. It could not have been an easy decision even if the promise was a small one.

But, perhaps somewhat irrationally considering the budget's horrendous deficit this year, I did rather expect to see at least a small extra step or two being taken towards keeping some of the bigger promises. These could include basic education, health, employment opportunities for all; in a word, end of discrimination for all.

In fact, so far as education is concerned, the prime minister, Mr P.V. Narasimha Rao, himself had fuelled our expectations. Shortly before the budget he had made an announcement, somewhat dramatically, that very soon six percent of the gross national product would be devoted to investment in education in India. The present figure is 3.5 percent.

Eventually it was let known that this magic six percent would actually be achieved by the turn of the century. Then, just two days after the budget, the Central Advisory Body of Education, which is the highest advisory body for education and consists of chief ministers and other eminent personages, was told by the minister of human resource development, Mr Arjun Singh, that the six percent would be achieved during the ninth five year plan beginning in 1997-98.

It is curious therefore that Mr Singh gave us no inkling of this target in this year's budget. His allocation for education has increased by about 17 percent which is the same as the increase in the budget as a whole. In other words, not one step has been taken to reallocate resources in favour of education.

When one remembers that expenditure on education, as of now, is only around 3.5 percent of the GNP and has been more or less the same for the last 10 years or so, one wonders why the prime minister had to load his conscience with yet another promise to keep. And anyway, why six percent?

It was nearly 30 years ago that D.S Kothari and J.P Naik's education commission had first thought up the magic number of six percent as education's appropriate share in the GNP for every civilised country. It must be understood that the number did not emerge as the end product of any optimisation exercise carried out by economists or econometricians of the time. Such an attempt was not made for the good reason that it could not be done then.

Even the economists of education, more imaginative than their mainline cousins in the calculation of rates of return, happily did not attempt the impossible.

So, as one looked at the numbers across countries one went mostly by what caught the eye. And what caught the eye in 1965 was the following: the expenditure on education as a proportion of GNP was six percent in developed countries and less than three percent in developing countries. It was 1.3 percent in Bangladesh, 1.8, in Pakistan and 2.5 in India.

The education commission did not have to rely on sophisticated investigations to be able to advocate against what they saw as a gross disparity in the priorities accorded to education by the developed and developing countries. They believed the positive "symbiotic" relationship between education and national development to be self evident. In a developing country the share of education in the GNP should be rather more than in a developed country. It was shocking to find that, in fact, it was less than half.

The commission's or, rather, the first generation human capital theorists' assumption of a simple symbiotic relation between education and development has long since been found inadequate.

The spectre of graduate unemployment soon put paid to many such simplistic notions that the early followers of Mr. T.W. Schultz held dear. But the commission's perception of the coming decades was so full of optimism and based on such sincere idealism that what they said went to the heart of the nation.

Even today, and even after one knows through hindsight that almost all these numbers have proved to be only wishful thinking, it is difficult not to be swayed by them: "The figure of six percent of GNP invested in education by 1986 may seem to be an ambitious target. We do not quite hold this view. It is only in recent years that nations, realising the deep and symbiotic link between education and national prosperity, have been increasing rapidly their investments in education and this trend is likely to continue."

"At the beginning of this century even "advanced" countries such as the United States spent no more than a small fraction of their GNP on education. By 1986, it is likely that a figure of 10 percent of GNP invested in education will become commonplace in most countries. If total and comprehensive disarmament is achieved by then, as we all hope it will be, the figure for the developing countries may even exceed 10 percent; and it is only through some such action that the dismal and dangerous gap between the poor and rich countries can be reduced to tolerable dimensions" — the education commission, 1964-66.

In the event, the share of education in the GNP did not rise in the Western countries by 1986. It had stayed put at six percent and by 1990, in fact, it fell to about five percent. In India, the share of education crept up from 2.5 percent of the GNP in 1965 to 3.3 in 1986 and 3.5 in 1990. It has stayed in that region since — a far cry indeed from the promised target of six percent.

But educationists, ever since the education commission's plea, have wanted the six percent to be achieved. Prime ministers have promised it. Even back in 1968 Parliament had accepted it along with the other recommendations of the commission.

Only finance ministers have never taken steps to allocate substantially more resources to education compared to the other strong claimants. Their doing otherwise alone could have proved the government's earnestness in this matter. The question remains whether the government can mend matters now or in the near future.

At the risk of proving both unpopular and unpopulist, I must confess to fears that perhaps the people have been barking up the wrong tree all these years. To reach the target, which is almost double the present share, is probably impossible in any case. To reach it quickly may even be undesirable. And possibly budgetary inputs are not the crucial ones in this context, though these are almost the only ones the government can provide.

There are at least three reasons for harbouring such fears and none of these can be easily brushed under the carpet.

First, is it possible to quickly raise education's share in, say the central budget? The share of expenditure on rural development has been recently increased drastically. The prime minister has promised that it would be raised three fold in the ninth plan. The share of defence expenditure is likely to rise even further. It is unlikely that the share of any of these provisions will fall enabling that of education to go up.

Moreover, in the background of the unprecedented budgetary deficit this year, the prospect for the education sector as a whole to get substantially more than its present share in the near future is almost unthinkable. For a responsible government to promise, or a responsible opposition to demand it in the year of such a crunch will call for amazing insensitivity to reality.

Second, it may not be even desirable to try the battery chicken technique of reproducing human capital. In educational processes the hatching time is more or less given in the short run. The fundamental theory to learn here is that increased spending on education is not automatically increased investment in education.

The proposition is, of course, true for the production of physical capital too. But with physical capital, the penalty for producing misshape and useless stock is fortunately immediate and drastic which make misadventures self terminating. But there is no penalty yet prescribed for producing useless human capital even though the outcome here is more tragic.

The fact is, investment in education in the real sense means producing more teachers, providing better training opportunities for teachers, bringing forth more motivated students, providing more infrastructural facilities to education to research and so on. Each of the involves sub-processes that require time, effort and dedication on the part of the concerned agents. *Mere* spending on education or *more* spending on the same cannot be the substitute of any of these other necessary inputs.

Finally, even supposing the increasing education's share in the GNP is a highly desirable thing quite befitting a civilised country like ours, there seems to be no knowledge link between government budget and this share.

Let me end by citing a few facts leaving the readers to puzzle this out. Of the total government expenditure in India the proportions that can be attributed to education were 1980, 1985 and 1990 respectively 10 percent, nine percent and 11 percent approximately.

The corresponding proportions of the share of education in the GNP for the same three years were respectively 2.8 percent, 3.3 percent and 3.5 percent. How confidently can you then rely on government effort alone to have a significant impact on the share of education in the GNP?

If the reader would be comfortable by the thought, I do not know the answer myself. But I would certainly suspect anybody who makes confident promises on this count.

Marking up a Price–Consumer Courts being out of Bounds, Examinees need a Forum for Redressal

The Telegraph, April 12, 1994

Are public examinations a service sold for a price? The answer to this complex question may be simple. But it is not very easy to understand the price one is talking about here.

Examination results are not goods in themselves. A result is what economists call an intermediate good, an input for a final good which in this case is a career. The generally small fee charged by the examination authority is only one, unimportant, part of the price the examinee has to or is prepared to pay, considering the returns in terms of career prospects. Sometimes the examinee gets a result that is grossly unfair, either because of examiner's misjudgment or clerical error, and it actually damages his career. Then the price to be paid by him is incalculably high.

That the examination was conducted for only a small fee or even free of charge does not undo the damage. All this needs to be considered when deciding whether or not examinees have any rights when seeking redressal or are not satisfied with the compensation provided by the examining authority.

Recently, the national consumer redressal commission held that examinations conducted by a public body such as a university or a school board cannot be described as a service rendered for a consideration. Hence students cannot seek redressal under the Consumer Protection Act. The NCRC ruling sets aside several judgments on examination complaints, adverse for universities, that were given by state level consumer courts set up under the CPA. Some of the universities involved were Bangalore, Bombay, Karnataka and Kurukshetra.

Clarifying the ruling, the presiding judge, Mr E.B. Eradie, has since said the benefit of the ruling will not automatically be extended to private colleges and schools that charge high fees.

Perhaps taking a cue from this clarification, the Kolhapur district forum in a landmark judgment ordered a homoeopathic college run by a charitable trust to refund the larger part of the high fees it had collected. The fees were thought to be excessive by the forum. To add insult to injury, the college was ordered to pay interest at a rate of 18 percent on the excess fees it had collected.

One detects a collective sigh of relief that universities and school boards of secondary education in the country have been spared by the NCRC for the time being. The members of the Association of Indian Universities last December discussed with some concern the growing trend of consumer courts dealing with the grievances of students and parents. It was feared most universities would completely deplete their funds and lose their autonomy if the trend continued. Many were therefore reassured by Mr Eradie's ruling and the subsequent clarification.

One can sympathise with the plight of Indian universities and central and state boards of secondary education. These have stolidly remained nonprofit organisations over the years. But all this does not mitigate the high cost to the examinee of a low score he does not

deserve. The NCRC ruling does not answer the question where examinees with grievances should go for relief.

To understand the dimension of the problem certain basic facts have to be borne in mind. So far as university examinations are concerned, these are still fairly small scale affairs particularly in non-affiliated universities. In these institutions students are supposed to be graded by their own teachers.

In large affiliated universities such as Calcutta and Delhi, the teaching departments themselves grade their students at the master's level. In both situations the autonomy of the teachers should be preserved and even strengthened. Outside influence should be checked.

Genuine grievances among students do arise even in the best run and most prestigious universities of the world. But internal grievance redressal mechanisms that are fairly strict are usually sufficient to deal with the most serious problems in cases when teachers grade their own students. The students in such situations should go to their teachers.

However, of the several million college students — over six million in the last count in 1985—under affiliated universities in India, hardly anyone is graded by the teachers he or she has known. The anonymity of the examiner and the examinee within the public examination system is an important requirement. But this anonymity breeds both irresponsibility on the part of examiners and lack of confidence in his probity on the part of the examinees.

The situation is bad in the case of the larger examinations conducted at the bachelor's level in the big affiliated universities. Yet it is still not nearly as grave as the state of secondary examinations at the class X and XII levels. There are nearly 30 million high school students in India. They feel helpless when facing the vast bureaucracy of a board that heads a large and unknown army of characters who determine their fates. As the years pass instances of senseless errors and gross misjudgments in the examinations multiply.

In the process the confidence of students, parents, even conscientious teachers, keep falling. The NCRC decision to rule out public examinations from its purview represents a vacuum for all of them. It urgently needs to be filled if the system is to be reformed.

This is not to say the doors of the conventional courts are barred to the examinees. The victims of the examination system can always seek redress here. By and large, Indian youths still have considerable respect for the judiciary and faith in its impartiality. But there are two obstacles to seeking conventional legal redress for wronged examinees that deter all but the most determined.

First, young examinees need to have justice done quickly in weeks, not years. But judges, assisted by lawyers on both sides, take so long to decide on cases it is no longer of use to the students of a given year. Second, courts all over take into consideration the wisdom and experience of institutions such as universities and examination boards. This of course goes to the credit of the judges.

Unfortunately trust in specialists can also be misplaced. If a top university or educational board official goes on oath saying an examinee's complaint has been looked into sympathetically and carefully, the judge often lets it go at that. It is true judges often admonish the authorities concerned if there is an obvious lapse. A recent example is the case of *Parents' Forum for Meaningful Education vs the Central Board of Education* that came up before the Delhi high court after last year's higher secondary examination.

But the court has to let the public body off the hook on the grounds of expediency alone. No one would want to hold up an examination process involving the future of thousands of young people. There is no option for a judge but to trust the specialist public authority in such cases.

If on the one hand the consumer courts withdraw totally from examination related cases and, one the other, the normal courts cannot be rushed or are afraid to tread on matters beyond their professional experience, then the victim of the system truly have no place to go. Extreme solutions come to mind in such a situation.

There exists a middle way if lessons are drawn from the experiences of other countries. India has a large number of examinees to deal with but the school sectors of some of the Western countries are pretty large too. They send much larger numbers of the relevant age groups to school than India does. The examination system in many of these countries are facing the wrath of victimised students and justifiably so. India should consider inducting some of the institutions in these countries to deal with academic grievances just as it thought of going to the consumer courts.

In the United Kingdom an independent appeals authority for school examinations was set up us 1990. The IAASE was first meant for the general certificate of secondary education and the advanced—A level and A/S level—general certificate of education examinations. Since 1993 its role has been extended to cover all qualifications used far statutory assessment at the end of compulsory schooling.

The IAASE considers only those appeals which fail to be resolved by the existing appeals procedures- of the examining bodies. The authority has been given powers to publish its conclusions and reasons, obliging, any examining body to publish its response.

Some might think an IAASE like body would prove too weak. It would not be able to actually force a board to change its unfair decisions or awards. Keep in mind transparency is a great weapon in a democracy. It has not been tried often enough.

Teach your Children well–India should set Realistic Goals in its Education for All Campaigns

The Telegraph, May 3, 1994

The heads of government of the nine most populous countries of the developing world met in December 1993 for the "education for all" summit at New Delhi. The main purpose of the summit was to discuss suitable strategies for making EFA a sustainable programme for the highly populated but resource poor countries. The attention of the participating governments turned naturally to the possible ways of mobilising resources for financing EFA, both internally and through external aid agencies.

The New Delhi summit was a logical follow up to the world conference on education for all held at Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990. Jomtien heralded a new epoch in international cooperation in linking basic education to development. It called upon all countries and the international aid agencies to take effective steps towards achieving the goal of education for all by the end of the century.

A recent United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation study shows the Jomtien conference call did have a fairly wide impact on at least the formulations of the national educational policies of a large number of governments. Of the 121 countries for which information was available, 90 countries had specified their EFA goals. By 1993, 34 countries had meetings with international donor organisations for help in their EFA programmes. However, where the countries' own efforts were concerned, the UNESCO study found rather less promptitude. Only 13 countries had actually increased their EFA budgets.

India had been an active participant at Jomtien. The human resource development minister's presentation of the revised version of the national policy of education before Parliament in 1992 reflected the new spirit. It emphasised three key objectives of the basic education policy. First, universal access to education and universal enrolment in schools. Second, retention of all children in school upto 14 years of age. Third, substantial improvement in the quality of basic school education. Universal elementary education of a satisfactory quality was seen as the main plank on which education for all would rest.

Jomtien has a special significance for India. It also helped India's policy makers to shift their emphasis a little from universal literacy to education for all. This might seem like a small change in nomenclature, particularly in a country where the goal of universal literacy itself is rather distant. But the change was necessary.

For India, the goal of education for all reaffirmed its faith in the holistic view of education held by the founding fathers. Article 45 of the Constitution contains the directive principle that the state shall strive to provide free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14. It is important to remember Article 45 did not imply literacy was the only component of basic education that had to be provided free to the children of India. Nor did it suggest such education could be provided only as nonformal education outside the school system. Article 45 was meant to hold good equally for all.

One is inclined to think the unwillingness or inability to stand uncompromisingly by Article 45 was an aberration of the national education policy of independent India. Whereas all the principal educational efforts depending on public expenditure should have been made subservient to the goal of regular schooling for all of India's children, India's education policy was led astray by the temptations of too many other goals. As a result, non-formal education, adult education and literacy all appeared as movements for alternative education and not as essential components of the mainstream.

The main business of the schools, colleges and universities of India remained largely untouched by the ideals of these movements. The wide gap between the schooled and the unschooled, beginning right at the elementary level, continued to grow with the ageing of each generation. This effectively sapped the strength of the movements for adult or lifelong education, reducing these virtually to literacy campaigns.

If India responds seriously to the call of Jomtien it would only be going back to its own constitutional roots. This would be a very welcome move. If this happens we would see the beginnings of an integration of the formal and nonformal modes of education at the school level. This integration would use both conventional and non-conventional methods and new educational technologies.

But this can happen only if India is ready for a significant switch of human capital, not just budget allocations, to the elementary sector. This is not impossible if we know exactly what to do and are ready to do it.

The fifth all India educational survey showed there were 152,000 single teacher primary schools in India in 1986. The central government wisely decided to make budgetary provisions to provide one more teacher to each of these schools. Doing this would make the quality of education imparted by these schools reach an acceptable standard. However, of the 152,000 positions created, only 70,000 could be filled. This would not have happened if primary teachers were not so poorly paid and equal pay and recognition had existed for all teachers in India.

Education for all will need to remove the many distinctions that create barriers between teachers and researchers in the different sectors of education. These distinctions have done India no good at all over the years.

Apart from the distinctions between different cadres of teachers, there exist many barriers between regular teachers and workers in the literacy and adult education programmes. These persist even when the latter are inducted into universities and colleges and given faculty salaries. Only those who have worked both as regular teachers and on the staff of extension programmes of the universities know what such barriers can do to one's motivation and professional efficiency.

There can be no question about the validity of the goal of education for all. But how realistic is the target of achieving it by the end of the century? Particularly for countries with high populations and poor international resources?

It is estimated the total population of the age group 5 to 14 in the nine countries that met at New Delhi will be 709 million in the year 2000. India's population for this age group is expected to be 232 million in 2000 against 230 million for China. The total world population for this age group is estimated to reach 1.26 billion in AD 2000. In other words, 56.5 percent

of the world's children in the age group 5 to 14 will belong to these nine countries by the turn of the century.

To provide basic educational facilities for them will be a backbreaking task for nine of the world's poorest nations. India's burden will be the heaviest. The question is how conscious India's policy makers are of the near impossibility of achieving the goal of education for all by AD 2000.

Indian leaders have this curious habit of understating, if not underestimating, the obstacles on the way to achieving laudable national objectives. In 1949, as the Constitution was being adopted, the leaders of all parties had thought 1960 was a good deadline for achieving the objective of Article 45. The education commission of 1964-66 was barely more pragmatic when it said,"*all* the areas of the country should be able to provide five years of good and effective education to *all* the children by 1975-76 and seven years of such education by 1985-86."

The national policy of education of 1986 had envisaged that all children upto the age of 14 would be provided free and compulsory education by 1995. The revised policy formulation of 1992, two years after the Jomtien conference, piously declared "free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality should be provided to all children upto 14 years of age before the commencement of the 21st century by launching a national mission."

While we should welcome the national mission on basic education when it starts functioning, we should not forget the ground realities. To consider only two of the major states, Uttar Pradesh will have to wait until AD 2016 and Bihar until AD 2033 before achieving universal elementary education, given their current rates of progress. This is only in terms of enrolment and does not take into account the additional burden of providing the promised "satisfactory quality" of education.

It is difficult to be absolutely certain about these numbers. Nevertheless, it will require enormous amounts of extra resources, both financial and human, to achieve education for all in any genuine sense within the next few decades. It is both pointless and reckless to go on making revised promises until the auspicious date can be more convincingly forecast.

Getting Back to Basics–Drastic Measures have to be taken to Achieve Universal Elementary Education

The Telegraph, May 20, 1994

The connotation given to the term "basic education" in pre-independence India differs radically from its current usage. That basic education was the upshot of Gandhian protest against the school system set up by the British *raj*. Though the people of India venerated M.K. Gandhi they did not seem to think much of his ideas on education.

The Gandhian connotations of the term have died a natural death except perhaps in the memories of oldtimers who still remember the educational philosophies of Gandhi and Zakir Husain. In contemporary usage, basic education is not alternative education as envisaged by Gandhi but simply good mainstream elementary education.

The task of providing basic education to all the world's children falls in the same category as providing them with immunisation against diseases, protection against famines and safeguards against manmade and natural calamities. How the sordid disparities in these matters between the children of different nations and regions arose and kept on widening is a subject of research.

The emerging answers continue to provide the points of departure for differing ideologies. But no country, developed or developing, can afford to dispute the proposition that these basic tasks have to be tackled jointly.

In these fast changing and dangerous times, fragmenting the efforts to protect the basic rights of the world's children will prove disastrous. Globalisation at this level is not only more transparent, but also less dubious than the globalisation of productive and distributive processes of nations through the operations of the market and international trading agreements.

The national policy on education, 1986, updated in 1992, and the programme of action of 1992 reaffirmed India's constitutional commitment to the universalising of elementary education. The Indian government is proceeding on the basis that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality has to be provided to all children up to 14 years of age before India enters the 21st century.

It is likely the goal will prove elusive for some more years regardless of the usual enthusiastic promises made by governments. But now there seems to be a candid realisation the target dates cannot even be approached unless fairly drastic steps are taken.

The new district primary education programme has been formulated in this context. While the DPEP continues the tradition of wishful thinking in fixing target dates, it does differ from earlier attempts to universalise primary education in two important respects.

The programme has tried to be pragmatic, but mere pragmatism is not sufficient for social acceptance and doubts about the DPEP are already being voiced by respected experts in the field of education.

The first important feature of the DPEP is the attempt to move away from central or state level planning and put the emphasis at the district level. It was admitted that even in Kerala, where elementary education is near-universal, a great deal has to be done about the quality of education available and achieve equality of access between different regions and social strata.

Contextually entails district level decentralised planning and management of a kind not attempted before. To do this it is necessary to prepare the people in the district, train the district and state bureaucracy and set the district planning mechanism in place after going through the necessary constitutional amendments.

All this was foreseen but the criticism the DPEP now faces is that it started the race before the track was laid. The programme is underway in 43 districts in Assam, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. The programme will start in other states depending on the availability of resources. In the states where the DPEP has started, expansion will be related to the pace and quality of implementation in the selected districts.

The success of the DPEP is intrinsically related to the successful operation of the new constitutional provisions relating to the *panchayats* and municipalities made in the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992. With these amendments, Article 243 of the Constitution now provides for district and metropolitan planning committees.

It also defines the powers and responsibilities of the panchayats and municipalities. The new 11th schedule lists education, including primary and secondary schools, as an item that may be given to the panchayats.

The criticism of the DPEP in Madhya Pradesh, where it has begun on a massive scale in 19 districts, is that the crucial preparatory exercises have not been gone through at all. It has once again been a case of planning from above. What then are the prospects of successful universalisation of primary education this time round?

The second striking feature of the DPEP is its explicit and almost complete dependence on foreign assistance. This revives a question that many thought had been disposed of in the Sixties. Should India finance a major programme like universal basic education, to which it is committed by its Constitution, by taking the help of international aid agencies?

The answer to this question three decades back was in the negative. It was then felt it would be demoralising to accept aid to do a job to which India had given top priority and which could be done by diverting resources from other, less important national goals.

Foreign aid, it was felt, should only be used to import scarce capital essential goods and technology not available domestically. Fear was expressed about the possibility of hidden conditionalities attached to foreign aid that could undermine India's social priorities and create cultural dependency.

The strategists of the DPEP see things differently. India's recent experiences with multilateral external assistance in various basic education programmes has not been all that bad. The DPEP outline specifically mentions the programmes financed by the United Nations Children's Fund, the Swedish International Development Agency, the International Development Association, the Overseas Development Administration and Dutch agencies

where there were no complaints about the way assistance was channelled and outcomes were positive.

If the hard decisions to divert domestic resources to the basic education sector could not be taken for so long, it is unlikely the central government will be able to do so in the next few years.

The best bet, keeping in view the frequently announced deadline, is to go for external resources and operate on as massive a scale as possible. On the basis of these considerations, the central government decided to start the DPEP in at least 110 districts in the eighth five year plan with an estimated outlay of Rs 19.5 billion, of which Rs 17.2 billion would come from external sources.

This reverses India's once dearly held, some would say unjustifiably puritanical, position with respect to the relation between foreign aid and self-reliance. With all due respect to nationalist sentiments, I venture to suggest it is not the overt or covert interference through foreign assistance that needs to be feared in the process of achieving universal elementary education. In fact, global exposure and international comparisons may even do India's elementary education system some good.

What is to be feared is the implicit and often unexamined assumption that financial resources, with a minimum of sensible management, are the primary necessity for developing human capital. Just *spending* Rs 19.5 billion in less than six years in 110 districts will be difficult without inviting large scale corruption. Actually *investing* Rs 19.5 billion in that period in basic education — in the sense of providing genuine teachers to genuine students in genuine classrooms — will be a truly mind-boggling feat.

Charter of Three Rs—Recent Court Battles suggest a Need for a Code of Education Rights

The Telegraph, June 28, 1994

The ministry of consumer affairs is reported to be examining the possibility of preparing a draft charter of rights for the consumers of health and civic services in the country. A charter of rights for the consumers of the educational services should be considered as well. This would not be a new idea in any case. It might even work.

Several activist groups have been fighting for the rights of students in the high courts and different consumer redressal fora in states all over India for at least the last couple of years.

Their minimal success can be attributed to two main reasons: First, the ordinary law courts take a long time to come to a decision. When they do they address general principles rather than specific individual grievances almost as a matter of rule. There is, of course, a pragmatic sense in their doing so. A late decision does not help examinees very much.

Second, so far as the cases before the consumer courts are concerned, most of these now stand dismissed. This because the National Consumer Redressal Commission appointed under the Consumer Protection Act has ruled that relatively low cost public examinations are outside the purview of the consumer courts.

It only goes to show the persistence of public interest litigation activists that they have not given up the cause of the examinees. One group, the Parent's Forum for Meaningful Education, had gone before the Delhi high court last year complaining against the alleged high handedness of the Central Board of Secondary Education in the conduct of their class XII examination.

The group, however, had practically lost the case by then. The high court did not wish to go beyond generally criticising the CBSE's ways and directing the board to review the methodology of their examinations after consulting experts in the field. In the event CBSE's responses were slow and unsatisfactory. But nothing could be done about it.

This year the parent's forum went to the Delhi high court again after considerable adverse publicity had been generated in the media over aspects of the 1994 class XII examination. The forum alleged this year's mathematics question paper was both incorrectly set in part and also unmanageably lengthy. It also claimed the CBSE had flouted its own examination bylaws in the conduct of the 1994 examination.

Once again, the judges refrained from addressing individual grievances. This incidentally highlights the urgency of bringing in legislation for setting up specialist courts for education along die lines of the consumer courts. But this year the forum registered a victory of sorts.

The high court did not leave it entirely to the CBSE to decide what was needed to be done. They agreed with the petitioners that the class XII examination affected the future of a vast number of students, perhaps the most critical one they would ever have to face. The judges directed the CBSE to make a number of specific amendments to their examination guidelines and bylaws.

This time the CBSE's response was a little prompter. Their spokesman admitted, though somewhat mystifyingly, "It was understood through newspaper reports that a comprehensive review of the CBSE examination bylaws had been ordered". The spokesman added the reassurance that "time consuming as it was, the court's direction would be carried out". The fall out of the forum's venture may hopefully be more positive than the outcome of last year's efforts.

The rights of citizens, however, cannot be protected by good judgements alone. Codification lies at the heart of dispensing justice. Transparency of regulatory rules and their applications can be achieved only by that means. If the Indian government is persuaded to bring in legislation on the lines of the Consumer Protection Act and frame charters of rights for health and civic services, it should also carefully examine the special needs of the education sector.

A charter of rights for education would have to cover, in the first place, the process of providing education in the high schools, colleges and universities. It would also have to deal with examinations. It is not necessary and it might not even be possible to frame one consolidated charter for all purposes, for all levels and for all sections of society that have an involvement in the education system. But some things are necessary and possibly achievable. First, that every concerned group is told more or less exactly what it can expect of the system. Second, that the rights spelt out for any one group are clearly shown as related to certain specific duties.

Conceivably several charters may have to be framed for different levels of the education system. For practical purposes of grievance redressal it may also be convenient to deal with the two otherwise interdependent processes of education and examination separately, though compatibly. And each through a somewhat different institutional arrangement.

When one goes for a course of studies or for the examinations that follow, one obviously needs to be told what rights one has, if any, in these transactions. It is necessary to know to what extent these rights are enforceable and within what timeframe the system of dispensation of justice would operate. However, students alone cannot have these rights nor can there be only rights and no duties.

In other words, a charter for education must cover both rights and duties. It should address, apart from the students, the other sections of society involved. This means the parents, teachers, the educational institutions, the examining bodies and, of course, the public that subsidises the cost of education. Even industry and government, as prospective employers of the system's output, have a legitimate stake in the processes involved and should have a place in a charter of education.

Several countries in the West are experimenting with some of these new ideas. There is no reason why India or some of its states should not do so too. Scotland's higher education system, more so than England's, resembles most closely the one India has inherited. Scotland recently launched a "further and higher education charter" in September 1993.

This complements, so far as the rights of the General Certificate Examination examinees are concerned, the provisions of the independent appeals authority. This was set up for all of Britain in 1990 to settle the unresolved grievances of high school students who are at the point of entry to the higher education sector or the job market for the technically qualified young people. The jurisdiction of the independent appeals authority was further extended in

1993 to cover the assessment of all examinations statutorily taken after the period of compulsory education.

The further and higher education charter was based on prolonged consultations with current and potential students, parents and the general public. It was also the subject of discussion with colleges and universities, associations and other bodies with an interest in education.

The charter states categorically that students, employers and the members of the local community have a right to expect high management standards and openness from every educational institution. It states these standards depend on efficient and appropriate assessment procedures and the recognition of a right to have any formal complaint investigated thoroughly and without delay.

There is a large and regional spread of high school and higher education in India involving vast numbers. The relatively straightforward structures contemplated for the education system of Scotland and Britain may be too simplistic for this country. It is here the experiences being acquired through the working of the three tier system under the Consumer Protection Act comprising the national commission, the state consumer courts and the district fora for consumer redressal could be extremely relevant.

Since the national consumer redressal commission did rule that the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 applied only to grievances in respect of services rendered for a "consideration", the legal position must remain as ruled, at least for the time being. But the logical position is not necessarily the same.

There is little basic difference between the concern of the consumer as an ordinary purchaser of goods or a service and that of student or any beneficiary of the educational system. It is true the nominal cost of the service rendered to a beneficiary in the social sector is very low in many cases. The cost of tuition in educational institutions and the cost of taking a public examination are obvious examples.

But costing such services in this simplistic way has little economic validity. The important cost involved in all this is the irreparable damage a defective or inefficient system of education can inflict on the process of human capital formation, both at the individual or at the social level. A charter of rights for education makes, therefore, as much good economic sense as any charter of rights framed for the protection of the consumer engaged in "the ordinary business of life" as Alfred Marshall had described the everyday purchase and sale of goods and services.

Learning by Degrees from Below

The Telegraph, October 17, 1994

The United Nations' Educational Social and Cultural Organisation's International Institute of Educational Planning at Paris and India's National Institute of Educational Planning, which is an autonomous organisation of the ministry of human resource development, had jointly organised an important workshop this August in New Delhi. Its purpose was to finalise the implementation strategy of district level planning in India.

As is well known by now, the Indian government had embarked upon its ambitious district primary education programme last year beginning trial runs in 43 districts of India in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Assam, Haryana, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It was thought expedient to take stock of the year's experience before embarking on the full programme covering all the 110 districts that had been selected for inclusion under it for the eighth plan period.

This was clearly the right thing to do. Except that the experience that was gained could not relate, for obvious reasons, to some of the basic questions that have to be addressed first. In saying this I do not wish to belittle the importance of what has been achieved, which came out clearly at the workshop. Almost for the first time, district education plans were made after detailed discussions and consultations at the local level and a fairly dependable feedback system between the grassroots primary schools, the district authorities and the DPEP headquarters was in the process of emerging. For the first time also one noticed dedicated professionals of the NEEP and not only ministry bureaucrats being involved in this entire process.

But the basic questions still arise because two entirely new parameters have been introduced in the Central government's education for all, while their full political and social implications remain yet to be worked out through public debate. The first parameter is the role to be played by *panchayati raj* in educational planning and administration including recruitment, deployment and control of teachers and deciding on curriculum at the district, sub-district and village, levels.

The second parameter is the quantum of foreign assistance being inducted into the basic including primary education sector on a massive scale for the first time in the history of independent India. While we are entirely in a hurry to reach the 21st century ahead of other developing countries, there should have been time also to ponder whether rushing into decentralised planning of education with our negligible internal resources and without the necessary political and societal preparation, we are not going to compound in the present decade the hazards of the coming ones.

The first and more important of the two new parameters is possibly going to change the character of the Indian Constitution itself in a very significant way by adding another layer of democratic government to the functioning of the polity. The new third level of constitutional authority in the shape of the *panchayati raj* bodies is virtually created by the Constitution (73rd Amendment) and Constitution (74th Amendment) Acts of 1992. These now enable Article 243 of the Constitution to provide for bodies like the district planning committees and the metropolitan planning committees to deal with, besides certain other subjects, the planning

and administration of education. Education thus becomes now a concurrent subject at three levels of democratically elected government—the Centre, the state and the districts.

The second new parameter — that of external assistance to India's basic education projects — is arguably temporary. But its sheer dimension both in absolute terms and in terms of the proportion of contribution it provides to a project should not go unnoticed. The total estimated outlay on the seven new projects in the basic education sector is Rs 29.26 billion for the eighth plan period. The expected flow of external resources for the support of this outlay is Rs 24.51 billion, which is about 84 percent of the total. The DPEP alone claims Rs 19.50 billion of the total outlay of which the expected external assistance is to the tune of Rs 17.20 billion or over 88 percent of the outlay on the project.

Surely such a degree of dependence on foreign aid for providing the basic educational needs of the masses would have been quite unthinkable even a few years back. While one need not be hysterical about the possible danger of such dependence in a vital sector of society, there can be no doubt that there should be only humiliation in store for us if we are unable to use this money in a way that makes the outcomes both desirable and transparent to all.

As one finds out at the end of every financial year, even spending a large amount of money honestly is a fairly difficult exercise. Spending it wisely as well may be doubly difficult for people in the *panchayati raj* institutions that are going to be entrusted with this responsibility. There is no doubt that they alone can take it on, but not without much initial preparation — both technical and mental.

The IIEP-NIEPA workshop turned out to be quite a special occasion. It was inaugurated by the minister of human resources development, Arjun Singh, himself. An announcement was made, then and there without much further ado, that DPEP was now ready to enter its crucial implementation phase, having taken the necessary lessons from the experiences during its one year trial.

The speed and enthusiasm demonstrated by the Central ministry in this respect were obviously meant to be exemplary and expected to be infectious. One was, however, most able to make out what the large body of the state education secretaries really thought of this part of the strategy of implementation. Particularly considering it would be they who would have to do the implementing even before the *panchayati raj* bodies and the district and sub-district planning committees to be organised have been placed in motion.

Another feature was the large and diverse international presence at the workshop. Apart from the specialists from the IIEP headed by its director, there were representatives and professional experts from the donor agencies like the World Bank, the United Nations International Childrens' Emergency Fund, the UNESCO, the European Community, the Overseas Development Agency of the United Kingdom and the embassies of Sweden, the Netherlands and France. This is quite an impressive array of experts, though the significance of their presence on this scale was apparently lost, at least on the reporters covering the event, judging from what one read in the newspaper accounts subsequently.

The DPEP is rightly seen by the international funding agencies as the flagship of India's new education policy. But they have put some of their eggs in other baskets too. The DPEP is, of course, the major response to Jomtien 1990 but at least some of the other six projects

are not only more compact but also more directly targetted in terms of the Jomtien call for education for all.

One example is Mahila Samakhya, a project on education for women's equality through organisation of women's collectives. It covers 20 districts and has a total outlay of Rs 513 million, the whole of which is being covered by external assistance. Adoption of such projects show, as a member of the IIEP pointed out, that it is for the first time the international community and hopefully the government of India too were taking an integrated view of the challenge of education for all, embracing formal schooling and education for specially targetted sectors of the population *together* and thereby also for the first time emphasising the need for attaining a satisfactory quality of education in all its delivery systems.

It may be remarked that this is exactly what our Constitution had also demanded. But to use a fine distinction that Amartya Sen has made us familiar with, this is not necessarily what our society has demanded. The social will is the prerequisite of the political will in a democracy. Because it was wanting many of our solemn political promises have remained only our pious wishes.

There can be no doubt that the goal of education for all can then be pursued only by the eventual decentralisation of the decision making processes in the education sector. But this is not the same thing as only having a good district plan. We have to relate such a plan and its implementation to the various target groups. For that one must have a completely reliable system of democratically installing the *panchayati raj* apparatus, and then keeping its *governmental* components in place all the time, just as it happens at the Central or state levels.

The recent postponement of the panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh, for example, may raise reasonable fears that the third tier of democracy introduces a new level of uncertainty at the district level. Decentralised planning and its implementation cannot obviously thrive on such fears.

It is entirely possible that at least some of these fears might prove to be exaggerated. At the end of the day, the main default of the DPEP might turn out to be no more than a simple time overrun.

There would still remain one basic danger that has to be faced in a large and fragmented society, more at the local municipal or village levels than at the aggregative state or national ones. This is the danger of society being forced to permit local obscurantist or casteist politicians to hijack education and use it for a blunt instrument of disintegration rather than a fine tool for the integration of Indian culture.

Not to have at least some doubts on that score, as *panchayati raj* begins to run education for all in this country, one has to be a very firm believer in the liberal myth that education always liberates the mind.

Living Life Tech-Size

The Telegraph, November 15, 1994

Consistency cannot be made a requirement of social policy in a democracy, as Kenneth Arrow's famous theorem has taught several generations of graduate students at the world's best universities. One wonders why Indian students in particular have managed to excel more than others in working out the dozens of variants of this exercise in social choice theory.

Could the reason be that Indian policies have been so routinely inconsistent that Arrow's impossibility theorem did not seem so counter-intuitive after all. Take the curious case of the national literacy mission on whose performance an expert committee chaired by Arun Ghosh has now reported.

Even as late as 1992, the central advisory board of education had endorsed the position that the national literacy campaign targeted to persons between 15 to 35 constituted the main plank of the literacy movement. The campaign had spread out to 275 districts of India covering an estimated population of 88 million. The approved expenditure till this day on the over 330 projects of the NLM is about Rs 5.6 billion.

An innovative and almost universally welcome feature of the project was the involvement of more than five million volunteers in the projects. They included social and political workers of many persuasions, not all of them necessarily belonging to the ruling parties.

All in all, the NLM has been a impressive new venture. But if one accepts the expert committee's report, it may not still have been a success story. This is not necessarily due to careless handling of the programme or the insensitivity to criticism that the NLM is now being accused of.

The NLM was bound to face problems in any case because presumably some persons in charge did not do their homework in 1992. It was in that year itself that India had also adopted the programme of education for all as part of its national education policy. EFA, of course, is more holistic, logical and in line with the mandate of the Constitution.

Plain economics suggests that there may not be enough money in the kitty for both the NLM and the EFA. Ever since the Jomtien world conference of 1990, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation and other international aid agencies have begun to favour education for all programmes. Thus it no longer makes sense, either ideologically or pragmatically, to think in terms of investment in education for literacy alone.

It seems that in the battle of ideas between the total literacy and the EFA programmes it is the philosophy of the latter that is going to prevail. The NLM might even change to make it indistinguishable from the wider EFA movement. This will however not necessarily end the inconsistency syndrome in the national education policy.

One question that is seldom raised in India's education policy confabulation is what form of literacy or basic education must Indians have to be able to live in a high technology society.

Literacy since the invention of paper had implied two kinds of ability. First, the ability to write by hand. Second, the ability to read the handwritten word. If this idea of literacy had persisted, many graduate students studying in the United States universities would have failed the first test, and some of their teachers the second. That they still thrive in the world of

letters is because the typewriter and its sucessor, the word processor, in due course have ousted writing by hand almost completely in the American campuses. Literacy there now implies familiarity only with the printed word.

But this remarkable change has so far not proved crucially significant for an obvious reason. The Indian literate, defined by the census as having the ability to read a postcard, is not particularly disadvantaged vis a vis the US graduate. The printed word is easier to read for nearly everybody anyway. Moreover, the education for which literacy is supposed to be the foundation can, in principle at least, be the same for both kinds of literates. India might be behind the West in the literacy-education race, but not out of it.

The "new literacy" that the hi-tech society demands, however, is a different creature altogether. There is no getting away from the global dispensation that even a moderate rate of human development in 21st century India will depend on.

Having failed to impart the old kind of literacy to all for the last 50 years, India's basic education movement may now be poised for the big leap forward.

But it is probably once again shying away from the question about the form of education India would need for the kind of society it covets. If the question remains unasked and unanswered, chances are, all the hard work, organisation and resources notwithstanding, the country will end up on the wrong track.

It is difficult to say in which way new literacy is going to be radically different from the old. But the distinctive feature of high technology unfolding despite India's sluggish economic growth might provide a clue.

This is the almost endless capacity of technology to produce simple as well as complicated devices that have "information" embedded in them. These can be gadgets owned only by the relatively affluent to enrich their quality of life and used to provide the modern infrastructure for transport, communication and education. These can also be brought to the use of Everyman man provided Everyman is taught to read the new symbols.

Hi-tech life of the 21st century probably will not require the average citizen to store human capital in the form of information in memory cells, or even books and tapes. To an extent, it will live and grow in machines. Some might find it repulsive that the ability to read machines will have precedence over the ability to read sentences written or printed paper. That however seems be the most plausible fate that lies ahead of most countries including India. Literacy missions in the country must keep the future in mind.

Let me end this with a personal anecdote. A fellow countryman had walked upto me at a Paris railway station looking rather lost. He was plainly illiterate — or so I thought —and needed some help to fill out Indian government form of some kind. He told me indignantly that one did need to fill such difficult forms in France any longer and soon would not need to sign even cheques.

I smiled politely as I listened but did not quite believe him. Soon, I found it was my turn to ask for help. I had to confess to my own illiteracy of another kind. I did not know how to coax a journey ticket out of one of those fully computer vending machines installed on some of the Paris railway platforms.

The man promptly showed me how to use one. He kept on asking me questions about destination, preferred class travel and the approximate time I wanted to leave. He almost simultaneously kept pressing buttons, gracious to the end to the country bumpkin. The right ticket slid before my incredulous eyes in a moment. Soon I was on my train, leaving my "new literate" friend the distinct feeling that I had just been a character in a latter day Leo Tolstoy story.

Teaching Troubles–
A Recent Report on the Decentralisation of Education Management falls into some Old Traps

The Telegraph, December 27, 1994

The national policy on education, as revised in 1992, had set forth several "guiding considerations" for overhauling the system of planning and management of education in India. Among these, one important consideration was decentralisation and the creation of a spirit of autonomy for educational institutions. District and local level decentralisation was seen as a necessary step in this direction.

The Central Advisory Board of Education had constituted a committee on decentralised management of education following the 1992 revision of the national policy. The chief minister of Karnataka was appointed the chairman of the CABE committee and the education ministers of Assam, Gujarat, Kerala, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal were among the members. The committee has recently submitted its report. Considering the high political level of its membership there is no doubt that most state governments would consider its recommendations very seriously.

The CABE committee's deliberations were guided by the provisions of the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, 1992, as well as the revised NPE and the consequent programme of action.

The 73rd amendment makes the establishment of *panchayats* at the village, intermediate and district levels mandatory for each state. The CABE committee has interpreted this to mean that the structure of educational management also has to be three tier, from the district downwards. Consequently, it has recommended a hierarchical structure of control including the powers of raising revenue for the educational programmes and institutions operating at the school level whether within or outside the formal system of schooling. This the committee apparently felt would also be a step in the direction of fulfilling the promise of village self government which was implicit in Article 40 of the Constitution as a directive principle.

Village self government of one sort or another is known to have functioned reasonably in most parts of India until the advent of the British, almost regardless of the various rulers who held sway over the state polity. In fact, *panchayati raj* possibly stood for centuries as a buffer — often the only buffer — for the people against the arbitrariness of despots and the excesses of social or economic exploiters. It was perhaps only at this level that the Indian people had seen democracy function.

It is not surprising, therefore, that one finds in the beginning of Article 40, the directive principle that "the state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self employment." What is surprising is that it took over four decades after the adoption of the Constitution to pass the amendment acts.

Not that the states had not experimented with *panchayati raj* legislation in the past. The Balwantrai Mehta committee, set up in 1957, had recommended the establishment of a three

tier organisational structure of democratic decentralisation at the village, block and district levels and the *Panchayati raj* Acts were passed in most of the states in the Fifties. But the interest in the *panchayati raj* experiment did not last long.

In many states the panchayat elections were postponed indefinitely and the flow of the funds dried up after the end of the intensive phase of community development programmes. Without being empowered by mandatory provisions of the Constitution and without enjoying delegated powers of taxation, the *panchayati raj* institutions languished at the will of the state and Central governments.

If one looks at the schedules included in the Constitution, listing the subjects within the purview of the Centre or the states, or both concurrently, it will be found that many of them were not essential. Education for a population as vast and varied as India's however is indisputably a subject that needs decentralisation of management and financial autonomy as far down the line as possible, even to the level of individual institutions in suitable cases.

Education now appears in the Constitution, for all practical purposes, as a subject of governance at three levels: the Centre, the state and the *panchayati raj* (and municipal) institutions of self government. Moreover, *panchayati raj* itself has three tiers, the district, the intermediate and the village. For very small states the intermediate tier may be omitted. The CABE committee on decentralised management of education has proposed an elaborate and clear cut three tier structure.

Briefly, the first tier will consist of the village level education committee. The village, for the purpose of the *panchayati raj* legislation may be defined as a group of villages as notified under the concerned state act. The village education committee will be a subcommittee of the panchayat. It will have supervisory powers over adult education, preschool education, nonformal education and primary education. It will also recommend annual budgets of schools to the concerned authority.

The second tier will consist of the intermediate level — usually the block level. Its powers will include the academic supervision of all primary and upper primary schools including those that are privately run. It will also have, more importantly, the power to appoint staff in schools, prepare the budget and sanction plans. It may also be given powers of taxation.

The third and the topmost tier will be at the district level. It will consist of the *zilla parishad* standing committee on education which will have the powers of supervising all educational programmes in the district up to the secondary level. It will also enjoy powers to establish and maintain schools, recruit, appoint and transfer staff, pay salaries and exercise control over the staff subject to government guidelines. It will, additionally, have powers of taxation.

The resources of the education budgets at the three levels would consist of Central and state government grants, and other funds from donor agencies channelised through the state government.

It is difficult to see how a system of school education that has not seen even a district level decentralisation of management can be managed efficiently with a three tier management structure in the immediate future. One can forsee several sources of trouble that the CABE committee's scheme might run into at the stage of implementation. In fact, one cannot

predict a smooth sailing even if the state *panchayati raj* follows these recommendations obediently.

One source of trouble lies in the confusion that the constitutional amendments themselves might have created with regard to the working of the panchayats and their subcommittees. There appears to be no distinction made at this level between the functions of a legislative kind such as the imposition of taxes, those of an elected government, and those of a bureaucracy.

A second source of danger is the over structuring advocated for the system of management of education. Apart from the Central and state governments, the individual educational institution now will have *three* more authorities to look up to at three different levels. Such a prospect could seriously affect the autonomy of the institutions that the whole exercise is supposed to promote.

Obscurantist political forces, constantly emerging at the village level, impeding the progress of education is a possibility that has become likelier, though every state has made progress in terms of percentage points of literacy and enrollment. Perhaps politicians feel this way too, but are afraid to say so. That would explain some of the policy consistencies.

In Search of the Clean Slate

The Telegraph, February 14, 1995

One perception of higher education institutions in India that seems to find ready acceptance by many is that they are heavily over populated. Colleges and universities always appear to be rivers in spate and, come admission time each year, the influx of aspirants into the campuses is a little larger and more desperate than the year before.

It is as if the spectre of Malthus haunting the Indian economic landscape also regularly visits the academic one. This brings to naught every effort the higher education institutions could possibly make to catch up with the rest of the civilised world. Therefore, the only plausible, even if unpalatable, remedy seems to be the restriction of the number of new entrants.

However, speaking proportionately, the number of students going into higher education and research in India is ridiculously low for a country aspiring to be a regional technological power like South Korea or China in the coming decades. In India, no more than five percent of the population in the relevant age group goes for formal higher education. By contrast, over 60 percent of the population of the United States, of the corresponding age group goes to college. Very soon the US hopes to reach the target of universal higher education.

That is the implicit target for all countries in the process of industrialisation for the 21st century. All, except India and a few other unlucky aspirants.

It is important for the policymakers hoping to take the technological leap forward in a decade or two, to ponder over the implications of this contrast. The country's continued poor showing in elementary education makes it obvious the target of free and compulsory primary education is an illusion. In fact, the contrast between India's achievements and those of the developed world is far less startling here than at the level of higher education.

The fact remains, however, the perception of overpopulation in institutions of higher education in India is clearly untenable. The higher education sector, regardless of its actual size, will continue to display all the known symptoms of "overpopulation" if the institutions are not run in an efficient manner, with an eye to the future. Even a fairly small number of students will appear too large if the infrastructural quality of educational institutions is below standards.

Poor infrastructure, inadequate, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, human capital and the absence of a vibrant information system mar the education system through the country.

The remedy to the overpopulation problem does not, however, lie in restricting the size of the student body. Questions of social equity apart, this could offset the natural advantages of a large population. India could provide south Asia, if not the global market, with manpower of diverse capabilities. Since the chances of tapping people with exceptional qualities are low, a large population base is the only guarantee for success.

One ideally should not link India's large population with the question of quality human resource development. This makes the country's problem even more formidable. As it is, India does not have the economic health to impart a decent college education to even five

percent of the population. In the absence of a good information system, the authorities too are at a loss to come up with effective remedies to make qualitative improvements.

The only thing that is certain is the existing system cannot cope with the existing number of institutions and students. And yet India needs to cope with these increasing numbers if it is to catch up with the developed world, at least in terms of human capital. Is high quality education, therefore, a pie in the sky for India? One need not be charged with being overly optimistic to answer in the negative.

Resources though limited can be found if there is a strong and sustained social demand for them. But the difficulty here is that the drift in the higher education sector is so demoralising, it is not easy to come by a strong social assertion in its favour. But people have to overcome their hesitation and unequivocally declare higher education is valuable only if it is of a high quality.

This also means goodbye to the notion that institutions of higher learning can substitute each other. Those that impart education of a higher quality than others will be preferred by users of the system. Such institutions, obviously relate costs better to the purpose for which they exist.

The University Grants Commission had to ensure higher education setups maintained a certain standard in their functioning. But it has not been successful. The UGC should have long confined its duties to building a transparent and acceptable academic evaluation system. The larger task of maintaining or improving standards should have been left to the pressures brought upon educational institutions by the public, who are consumers in the "market."

The number of institutions has become too large for the UGC to handle. At the time of independence, there were 263 colleges and 16 universities. In 1993, the respective figures were 5334 and 217. In spite of the so called resource crunch, the numbers are still increasing. Moreover, the number of autonomously run colleges — with or without state or Central assistance — is expected to touch the 500 mark. With the influx of private capital in the higher education sector, the figure could cross the 1,000 mark by the turn of the century.

To be globally competitive in terms of skilled manpower, India will perhaps require a larger number of institutions, not necessarily of the same kind. Hence, it is imperative to devise reliable mechanisms of quality assurance for the benefit of the users of the higher education system. Such users include prospective investors in the sector.

Fortunately, Indian universities have long been accustomed to peer group evaluation by external experts by way of the "visiting committee method." This has been adopted by all principal funding agencies of the country. Thus, unlike his courter part abroad, there are no psychological problems for the Indian academic in being subjected to evaluation by outsiders. But, of course, what has largely been *ad hoc* in nature should be transformed into a set of credible and contestable measures.

It is not as if the need for independent quality assessment as a feature of the social accountability of universities has arisen in recent times in the case of weaker educational systems alone. On the contrary, the global demand for high quality manpower occurs more in the case of stronger systems. Manpower that is globally traded needs to be globally appraised too. Thus, even the most self confident and hitherto insular universities are accepting mechanisms that ensure quality.

The United Kingdom established its Higher Education Quality Council in 1992. The HEQC's credibility has never been questioned, mainly because it has been funded from the very beginning by subscriptions from individual universities and colleges in the country. The council can, thus, send audit parties to the most formidable of the UK's universities without causing any disaffection.

The Indian system too is trying to respond to the need. But it is doing so in the usual bureaucratic fashion. When India's first Accreditation and Assessment Council was set up for monitoring the standards of the higher education system a few months ago, very few knew about it. The press, too, ignore the event.

This is indeed unfortunate. Though the council may not achieve much, the issue it addresses is of paramount importance. The proposal for such a council to be set up by the UGC was in fact included in the national policy on education in 1986. Perhaps the council's official statement of intent was too weakly worded to cut ice among members of parliament: "It (the council) will not be enforcing any given norms and standards. It will analyse and evaluate institutions and their performance to facilitate self improvement."

Such a statement is a far cry from the one made later for social accountability. All things considered, the council, though belated, has to prove it is a statutory body with a difference.

What Price Victory–The Budget should aim to Fight Inflation through a Revamped PDS and Well Planned Imports

The Telegraph, February 27, 1995

The budget Session is imminent. The pun is poor but unavoidable. More so because the budget session has had to be trifurcated this year, which, according to the government, has nothing to do with the chief election commissioner's homilies.

Be that as it may, Manmohan Singh has been surely taken off the hook for once. With the annual inflation rate at a menacing 11.5 percent — and slowly creeping up — it is quite unthinkable that the budget would have not contained at least a few palliatives. If it did, they would have possibly been, a red rag to a T.N. Seshan intent on bulldozing his way to fair and free assembly elections.

Nevertheless, preventing Singh from performing the annual ritual of throwing the customary crumbs to the people is rather unfair. Surely, one should be able to distinguish between the ruling party making a promise to the electorate without the necessary financial or political authority to do so, and reliefs—populist or otherwise — announced in the form of provisions of an act of Parliament to alleviate the people's distress. There is nothing objectionable in the ruling party's trying to curry favour with the people with an eye to the elections, as long as the proposed measures are brought before and passed by the legislature and not withdrawn or forgotten as soon as the elections results are announced.

The other parties always have the right to either agree or raise hell over the rashness or irresponsibility of the ruling party in frittering away national resources. After all, it is the business of every political party in a democracy to try and woo the electorate. If election manifestoes that cannot possibly be implemented are not unfair propaganda, neither are measures actually implemented in full glare of parliamentary publicity. Besides, it is by now fairly well established that people, even unempowered ones, are not the suckers politicians and bureaucrats sometimes believe them to be.

This is not to say the hardline "market freedom" fighters have already won the battle of the budget this year. True, preelection speculations help, as nothing else does, to instill the fear of god in politicians. But certain post-election scenarios can be helpful too. As political science pundits have observed, democracy thrives when governments live under the shadow of imminent defeat. Fortunately for Indian democracy, if not also for the government, the shadow would probably linger rather than lift when all the state assembly results are in. Which would put Singh back to square one on budget day. One wonders what could be passing through his mind now.

According to a macroeconomics cliche, there is no substitute for increased production except decreased consumption when it comes to fighting inflation. Singh's budget will have to operate within the ambit of this simple rule. Whether the budget is made to lean on unmitigated market economics again or is allowed to be cushioned by a little welfare

economics, it would fall flat on its face if the rule is flouted in the year of double digit inflation.

If Singh wishes to follow certain welfare economic goals — such as providing a quantum of relief to hard-pressed citizens — but in doing so also wishes to use only market economic means under the present inflationary conditions, he has to find quick answers to two questions. First, whether the consumer can be induced, not coerced, to consume less. Second, whether the supply of goods available in the market can be expanded substantially in the very short run. To the extent he succeeds in answering these, he will also succeed in presenting a credible budget for 1995-96. The more ambitious agenda of carrying on with long run structural adjustments, to prepare the economy for a more open global presence, would probably take a back seat for a while, in practice, if not in theory.

The portents of the nation's propensity to consume, or rather its inverse, the propensity to save, are ominous. The saving ratio in the national income had remained at about 24 percent in recent years. Assuming the figure is approximately right, it was a satisfactory feature of the Indian economy. Poor countries usually do not have such a relatively high saving ratio to fuel their rate of growth and take off by themselves. Some recent studies on the Indian economy seem to have come upon the alarming trend that might fritter away this potential advantage. The saving ratio has probably fallen to 20 percent and the experts are apparently at a loss to explain why.

It is easy to misread or oversimplify macroeconomic data. They are also not always very accurate. But if the pressure at the margin of one's income to spend is very high over a number of years while the government does not provide any incentive to save — the Centre has actually reduced incentives—at least for individual household incomes the saving ratio is likely to fall.

Whether a high consumption low saving ethos generated in the household sector can directly or indirectly affect the spending propensities in the other sectors cannot be ascertained. But in the present context, psychologically if not strictly logically, people as well as institutions—particularly government departments — should be rewarded for spending less on consumption.

The leading public finance experts argue against too many saving incentives in the tax system, which should be simple and straightforward. A tax devised after due deliberation should ideally be unavoidable. The experts have a point, the incentives have not amounted to much so far. But they were fun. The multiplicity of opportunities added spice to an otherwise boring taxpayer's life. They promoted a socially useful habit at the same time. Not only should they be restored but more interesting ones formulated.

Can the budget can do something for increasing the domestic supply of goods in the very short run? India has had successive bumper harvests and industrial output may rise significantly. But any dramatic rise in the rate of growth of the gross domestic product must await drastic changes in other spheres — technological, managerial and governmental.

For his answer to the riddle of increasing supply, Singh may look in two other directions on budget day. First, India's public distribution and second, almost inevitably, the prospects of imports. And thereby India may again try a bit of socialism in the spirit of free enterprise.

The first course would involve making a massive investment in restructuring and expanding the system of fair price outlets, which is already large. There are great prospects for thoroughly computerising the public distribution system in which private enterprise can play a leading part. The government's role in the PDS should be small, and the public's big and crucial. Seeing how people respond to even a hint of such a system in the rather naive garb of rice at two rupees a kilogram, one feels the finance minister's best bet lies in this direction.

Let him put all his efforts and all the subsidies he can lay his hands on into this one basket and brood on it with the anxiety of a mother hen. In the process, he will have to throw good housekeeping to the wind, face World Bank tantrums and, what is more, probably annoy Seshan. But in the end Singh will win the war. Remember, this is practically what John Maynard Keynes had advised in *How to Pay for the War*. The World Bank can be reminded that Keynes was no socialist.

Finally, Singh has the option of coupling his PDS with a policy of buying essential commodities from the world's cheapest markets, not in a panic but systematically. With the current level of foreign exchange at around $ 20 billion, India has the wherewithal for the operation.

However, this is a dangerous ground to travel upon with plenty of landmines abounding. The large dollar reserve is not quite as innocuous as the great sterling reserve India had inherited after World War II—and had happily frittered away leaving posterity to rue the mindless profligacy. This time, right from the start, about five billion dollars, 25 percent of the reserve, have to be treated with great circumspection and watched carefully. These are the inflows from the foreign institutional investors coming in largely for what may be called predatory portfolio investments. These come and go as the portfolio managers please, attracted by the lure of playing the world's stock market, and not for earning differential rates of interest.

In contrast, the more genuine inflow of foreign direct investment—the regular investment in industry that can help the country attain economic stability, obtain new technologies and expand the output base—is still a trickle. Even the great optimists in the ministry of finance do not except this trickle to increase to more than two billion dollars in two years.

The finance minister must keep the foreign portfolio investors under continuous vigil. When they play the market in unison they can lead it by the nose. When they do not play at all the effect is that of the curious incident at night when the dog did not bark in the Sherlock Holmes story. That is, Indian investors are worried and the market goes into a slump.

Even after taking due note of all these ifs and buts, one has to admit India does have a really comfortable foreign exchange reserve position this time. This is a far cry from the trap Mexico fell neatly into. This may yet give Singh his real trump card.

Selling Dream Merchandise–The Budget Fails to Define the Institutional Ways, Hopes may be Turned into Economic Realities

The Telegraph, March 25, 1995

The best thing about this year's Union budget is that Manmohan Singh could finally present it. Thankfully, the chief election commissioner had not stopped him from doing so after rescheduling the Bihar elections. The worst thing, of course, has been that the Congress debacles in Gujarat and Maharashtra have undoubtedly cramped the finance minister's style—a style that had endeared him over the last three years in many unexpected quarters in the household and industrial sectors of the Indian economy.

The result, unfortunately, is that we have seen an uncharacteristically timid budget presented this year. The added torment is that this budget tends to go delightfully vague in some of its operative parts, which makes it indicative rather than definitive. It is difficult, nevertheless, to agree entirely with commentators such as Nani Palkhivala who see it as a politician's budget, if only because it is unlikely to serve the politician's purpose which should be to win elections.

To say that this year's budget is timid is not to imply that it does not take risks. What it implies is that the finance minister is afraid to follow his premises to their logical conclusions. The budget of 1998-96 provides us with at least two such instances where the cost of not taking preemptive action where the problem has been clearly identified may prove to be very high in the end. In which case the timid budget would turn out to be a high risk budget too.

First, take Singh's treatment of inflation. He acknowledges that inflation has surfaced again as a serious problem and that the rate of inflation has accelerated since the middle of 1993. "One reason is the sharp increase in procurement prices," he says, "in the previous three years. Another factor is the shortfall in production in critical sectors such as sugar, cotton and oilseeds. The persistence of fiscal deficits at levels higher than they should be has also contributed to inflationary pressure. Recognising these problems, we will tackle inflation on a priority basis in the year ahead."

Inflation is arguably the biggest problem the finance minister is now confronted with. All his hopes for a high rate of real growth to continue and all his efforts towards alleviating mass poverty in real terms could be dashed against this one rock. What drastic actions does he contemplate in the budget to solve this mega-problem? It does not seem that he pro-poses to go much beyond raising bank interest rates a bit, thereby trying to contain the growth of money supply, allowing imports of essential commodities and industrial inputs with zero or low duties, and taking certain unspecified steps towards strengthening the public distribution system and the consumer movement. These are all welcome steps but not nearly good enough. A two digit inflation is a serious condition and needs to be viewed almost as a state of war.

One of the finance minister's many interviewers after the presentation of the budget asked him why the government was not unloading stocks of foodgrain in the market in quantities large enough to drive the prices down. His reply seemed to imply he did not

consider it advisable to fritter away the stocks that had been rebuilt at a considerable cost over three years. This was a rather surprising statement given the stocks have been built up from 14.7 million tonnes three years ago to a record level of 31 million tonnes on January 1, 1995, for what he himself described in the budget speech as an "invaluable insurance against bad weather and other contingencies."

Similarly, the finance minister clearly refuses to do anything about the sharp increase in procurement prices which he says has been a very important factor in fuelling the inflation. In fact, he argues elsewhere contradictorily like a true academic by saying, "Our farmers have clearly benefited from the policy of offering remunerative prices and have returned a strong production performance." In this case, he was referring to the remarkable rise in India's food grain production which had fallen to 168 million tonnes in 1991-92 but will be reaching an all time record of 185 million tonnes this year. Next take another instance of the finance minister not following his own premise to its conclusion. He has acknowledged in Parliament and elsewhere the government's worries about the foreign portfolio investment funds that now constitute a quarter of India's foreign exchange reserves. Unlike foreign direct investment in industry that brings in modern technology and helps expand the capital base of the industrial sector, the portfolio investments come and go looking for quick returns. In the process they can create serious disturbances in the stock market. As inflows unmatched by output they add to the inflationary pressure and thereby push up domestic prices too.

China, another third world country opening up to the world and that also has to cope with foreign portfolio investment inflows has now decided to cap them by a fixed ceiling. It is surprising that India sees the problem but fails to take the necessary measures.

Apart from the timidity shown in the budget which seems to have served no purpose, the finance minister is apt also to face the charge of making his presentation almost deliberately obscure in places. This is rather unfortunate, because over the last three years Singh had earned the admiration even of people who did not necessarily agree with him. This was often precisely because of the transparency of his budgets. He had been successful in a large measure in avoiding the common politician's habit of trying to befuddle all and promising everybody the moon for the asking. This year, however, is another story.

If there is a charge of vagueness or even a deliberate attempt at obfuscation levelled against this year's budget, it would be on two grounds.

First, the budget is unclear and unconvincing about the reasons it advances for explaining why some of the economic variables have gone the way they have in the recent past. To be only a little unfair, one can say that it has taken a generally comforting line: all the good things that have happened must have happened because Singh's economic policy was right. The other things were beyond anybody's control. For example, the business sector boomed. Industrial growth was high at nearly 9 percent in April-November, 1994. It was about half of one percent in the grim year of 1991-92. The capital goods sector, in particular, is growing now at the fantastic rate of nearly 25 percent.

The economy as a whole is growing at more than 5 percent compared to less than one percent in 1991-92. All this the budget attributes to the soundness of the government's new industrial and trade policy. The direct tax revenues have substantially increased. This has happened, the budget claims, because the tax rates were lowered and, therefore, there was greater compliance. If all this is to be accepted as entirely valid, then why is it that the

beneficiaries also do not seem to think so? Why is industry upset about the budget recipe for industrial prosperity? Is it only play acting?

One of the captains of industry, brought face to face with the finance minister courtesy Doordarshan, asked him the obvious question why last year's recipe of lowering direct taxes was not tried this year. The intriguing reply was that this was basically a matter of judgment. Even when one's sympathies and prejudices are all on the side of the reply, one has to wince because this is surely not what transparency in economic liberalisation is all about.

The second source of vagueness in the Union budget lies in its avoidance of conventional calculations. The parameters of the budget are mostly hopes rather than cold facts. But these are not wild hopes and the most important of them are certainly worth recounting. The finance minister hopes that the industrial sector, now growing at the high rate of nearly nine percent, will grow at an even faster rate in the next few years. He hopes that the gross domestic product will also grow at a rate faster than the current 5.3 percent. He hopes that the foreign exchange reserve, now at the peak of $ 20 billion, will stay at that level. He hopes that the rogue component of that reserve, the inflow of foreign portfolio investment would cause no further trouble. He hopes that food production will continue to rise responding to the government's pro-farmer procurement and subsidised input policies.

He hopes that the new loans now proposed to be injected into the rural economy through the banking system will be productive and not inflationary. He hopes that the increased monetary investments in the social sector in health and education will imply corresponding human resource development in the real sense and immediately increase productivity. He hopes that because of all these things the inflation rate itself will be brought back in a few years to a one digit figure. In other words, he basically hopes that nothing will go wrong.

Contrary to what many of the critics of Singh's budget might be saying, not one of the hopes listed above can be called implausible. In fact, some of them — such as the hope the industrial sector will continue to enjoy a relatively high rate of growth in the coming years or the hope for a comfortable balance of payments situation over the same period — are even highly plausible. Even the inflation rate may go down if supply increases or demand falls.

But the difference between a plausible dream merchant and a credible finance minister ought to be that the latter is required to devise instruments and institutions that will help hopes turn into actualities. This year's budget appears to be somewhat uncertain about the exact role of the government machinery in this process. So it does not spell out what exactly the government will do to make its dream come true — at least not this year.

Yes and Know–Oneupmanship, Overburdened School Curricula and a Misdirected Education System leave Students Floundering

The Telegraph, April 28, 1995

Almost two years ago, the Yash Pal committee—the national advisory committee on improving the quality of learning while reducing the burden on school students — submitted its report. In keeping with its terms of reference, the committee's report ran to less than 30 printed pages. Which should, by itself, earn the report a place in the record books though perhaps unintentionally.

The Yash Pal committee proffered a number of basic propositions that it saw as central to its body of recommendations. Arguably, some of these were also controversial. But this did not matter at that stage because the committee basically saw itself as initiating an important debate rather than adjudicating on it. The questions raised needed wider discussion because, as the report pointed out, "they were centrally connected with the images of our civilisation, self esteem and societal goals." Which was a welcome departure from the usual practice of many such past reports that tended to preempt debates rather than provoke them.

The committee had then expressed the hope that the issues and controversies its report raised would be considered urgently in seminars and other such fora organised by both the academic community and other segments of society, thereby attracting wider publicity in the national and regional media. Two years since, it is becoming quite evident such a hope is unlikely to be fulfilled. Neither the concerned teachers and parents nor the media seem to be ready to play the role the committee had visualised for them.

To assume the major flaw of overburdening the curriculum for school pupils had been discovered only by specialists is fallacious. This, since the lay public has been equally in the know. Speaking of this burden, the Yash Pal committee report observed: "The most common and striking manifestation is the size of the school bag that the children can be seen carrying from home to school and back to home everyday. A survey conducted in Delhi revealed that the weight of the school bag, on an average, in the primary classes in public schools, is more than four kilograms, while it is around one kg in municipal corporation of Delhi schools!"

Even one kg can be a backbreaking load for a five year old, particularly if the child is undernourished, as is very often the case with Delhi's municipal school children. But one is still intrigued by the discovery that, for once, the poorer children in Delhi— and presumably also those in other cities — get off relatively lightly. What could the reason for this be? Perhaps, the poorer parents cannot afford to buy stronger and more expensive school bags. Or perhaps, the system automatically sets only minimal academic goals for these children. One can only hope that this apparent neglect of the poorer children's education in India, leaves them less physically and psychologically injured at the end of the day than they could otherwise have been.

Those who have the dubious privilege of observing the increase in the curricular load of Indian school children over the last 50 years would probably recall a common pattern of growth at every stage: subject was added to subject; to each subject topic, was added another

topic; for each topic, the facts to remember kept piling up. All this was revealed through the coordinated effort of educators and administrators, engaged for the purpose of initiating a modern system of education, comparable to the best in the world. But their enterprise was underlined by one fatal law: they never stopped thinking how the system could be made to cope with then ongoing exponential growth of knowledge without *panicking*.

The consequence has been the building up of the "catching up syndrome" the Yash Pal committee rightly diagnosed as the root cause of the abnormal curricular load. The others are merely aggravating factors: "over enthusiastic curriculum designers, or poorly equipped teachers, or school administrators, or book publishers, or district, state or central education authorities." But to recover from the syndrome itself, there has to be a long term strategy to meet the current knowledge explosion, which appears to be a continuing phenomenon — not just a passing phase.

Under the category of "first aid", one may count such obvious redemptive devices for lowering the load on the school children as, first, chopping off relatively unimportant portions of the curriculum in all subjects across the board. Second, putting ceilings on the number of pages that prescribed textbooks have. Third, reducing the daily hours of study at school. Fourth, but by no means last in a potentially long list, removing the more draconian features of examinations. Each one of these steps can be useful and, in the short run, even imperative. But the long term strategy must address the two basic questions which follow one on the plane of value judgments and the second about defining what school level education is in a given discipline.

The first question involves the desired level of competitiveness in the school education system. It was Bertrand Russell, one may recall, who had rejected the ideal of competition in education because it taught the wrong values, both to the average teacher and the average student. "The first thing the average educator sets to work to kill the young," Russell said, "is imagination". This is because "imagination is lawless, undisciplined, individual and neither correct nor incorrect; in all these respects, it is inconvenient to the teacher, especially when competition requires a rigid order of merit". So far as the average student was concerned, the ideal of competition instilled in him, primarily, a fear of cooperation with fellow human beings, first, in the world of education and, later, in real life.

One was tempted to quote what Russell wrote on education 70 years ago because it gives an almost prophetic vision of what is basically wrong with the system of Indian education today, particularly at the school level. The Yash Pal committee report refers to the adverse effects as Russell did of the increasingly competition based social ethos. It also laments the fact this spirit is fast becoming a way of life, particularly in the urban areas.

"Unfortunately, instead of resisting the pressure of the competitive spirit prevalent in the society," the report says, "or directing it to appropriate channels, our educational system has succumbed to it." Overloading of the syllabi at every level is the inevitable consequence of the spirit of oneupmanship so prevalent in the educational sphere in India. As the committee points out, the rising aspirations of people in all sections of society and the growing realisation that education is an important instrument to fulfill them, only make parents and students alike willing victims of the catching up syndrome.

The Yash Pal committee raises a fundamental question of value judgment here. But, clearly, it would be pointless to abandon the competitive model in the school education

system today. As that would only render the student population even more vulnerable in an increasingly competitive world. But, surely, some of the tension and frustration of individual competition can be alleviated by insisting on judging merit in a way that would take into account team achievements. What can be done in the cricket fields of India can be also reproduced in its classrooms.

The other basic question is of a different kind: what exactly should be taught at the school level in a given subject? The answer can obviously vary from "nothing" to "a great deal". But surely what *should* be taught has to be only a subset of what *can* be taught. Also, the role of the school teacher in either preparing the syllabus or writing the textbook has to be clearly defined. In India, the school teacher merits scant involvement in these areas. Rather, established stalwarts in the field of pedagogy, affiliated with institutions like the National Council for Education Research and Training, are invited to do the job. The result of which is all too evident.

The role of the experts, on the other hand, should not be minimised as mere "critics and auditors of the curriculum". It would be unwise to forget Russell's warning against the tendency of the average teacher to kill the students' imagination. The cardinal rule therefore lies in doing everything to inspire the students into asking questions beginning with a "why" or a "how" and in avoiding giving information not relevant to such questions.

When talking about extraneous information, one is reminded of a parlour game based on having to answer the most queer of quizzes covering all aspects of life: science, arts, sports and culture. Many children and adults too play this game, the brighter ones excelling at it. Fortunately, however, nobody has yet thought of incorporating this game into the school syllabus. Perhaps the name that its creators had thoughtfully given it had saved the children of the world. It is called "Trivial Pursuit". Which is a good name, one might say, for the Indian system of school education.

Schooling the Alternative–The Open School Movement must learn from the Mistakes made by the Formal Education System

The Telegraph, May 29, 1995

The open school movement has entered a critical phase in its growth path. An increasing number of states are expressing their intent to go in for separate open schools systems of their own. These systems would supplement the programmes of the National Open School established in 1989 by the government of India as an autonomous institution of the ministry of human resources development.

The National Open School now dispenses its academic programmes to over 60,000 students through about 350 affiliated study centres located all over the country. The study centres have been chosen from among established schools operating in the formal system. The teachers or tutors attached to the centres are accredited ones from the formal system.

The National Open School has so far been using either Hindi or English as the medium of instruction, except for about half the number of centres in West Bengal, where Bengali has been introduced as the medium. The state open schools, hopefully, are going to choose their own regional languages for their programmes.

Compared to the formal system, the open school caters to a much smaller number of students. But the situation is likely to change in about 10 years. This is because the open school has the potential to absorb the brunt of the conjectured rise in the demand for secondary education. This demand is about to arise due to the moderate level of success achieved towards universalising primary education in India. The formal school system, considering its current resources, would not be able to handle the demand individually.

The main reason for accepting the open school as an important component of the secondary education system is that, unlike most other systems of alternative education, it is not just a poor offshoot of the formal school. The open school is a fairly sturdy system — almost completely self supporting in a way that the adult education or non-formal education movements or the national literacy mission cannot hope to be. Not, at least, in the foreseeable future.

The economics involved in the open school have one built in advantage: it can utilise the excess capacities that may exist in the formal schools, either in terms of building use or other infra-structural faculties. So long as this advantage is retained, the Indian open school students would remain relatively inexpensive.

At present, the average student has to spend less than Rs 400 for a secondary or higher secondary course (allowing for the partial exemptions granted to women and scheduled caste and tribe students). Which must be considered remarkably low when compared to even the admittedly low fee structures in the formal schools.

The reason for the popularity the open school has come to enjoy in many parts of the developing world, is, however, not only because it costs less. The secondary or the higher

secondary courses of the open school sell mainly because this system adopts a pragmatic approach to certification. It does not scoff at the "diploma disease", but uses it to motivate those going in for secondary education. A student, who has not been to school or has been thrown out of one, is not only granted a second chance by the open school but is also given an equal opportunity to obtain a secondary education certificate. Such a certificate, in principle, can secure entry to colleges or used for getting a job. This is indeed the open school's main attraction. And the experience of the five year old National Open School seems to corroborate such a factor.

Both the Association of Indian Universities and the University Grants Commission recognise the legitimacy of the National Open School certificates. As of now, as many as 73 universities in India including those under the Delhi, Viswa Bharati board, and 12 school boards including the Central Board of Secondary Education and the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations have recognised the National Open School examinations. Clearly, no other alternative education movement has had the privilege of starting under more propitious conditions.

The open school enjoys greater freedom in a couple of areas denied to the formal system. First, it can devise its learning and examinations system targeting specially underprivileged sections. Second, it can virtually redefine the curriculum.

Both are important advantages. But, unfortunately, the pursuit of the aforesaid freedom can sometimes lead to the open school working at cross purposes. It is important to remember that in designing an open school system in a developing society that is also inequitably fragmented, the freedom to try out innovative curricula must be given lower priority to the freedom to devise the learning process in a way that would be specially suited to the needs of the deprived or the divergent.

The twin tasks of devising the open school system for the underprivileged and of restructuring or even redefining the curriculum for a select group are complementary upto a point. It is for the architects of the system to gauge the point from where these two purposes run the risk of going in two different directions.

Some recent exercises attempted in India by academics who are accredited specialists from the formal system tend to demonstrate the advantage that the open school has over the traditional one in devising innovative curricula. The advantage lies mainly in its not being subject to the accumulated pressures of the rigid disciplines and the mindset of millions of students, parents and teachers who are willing to remain chained to the traditionally accepted format.

It is because of these compulsions that experiments with inter-disciplinary teaching in social studies, for example, invariably lead to compartmentalisation into the familiar but highly compressed sections of economics, geography, history and civics. This makes learning even more difficult. It is interesting to note that our specialists often find they can produce a desirable syllabus for the open school — the sort they would like to introduce in the regular system. The performance of the open school system all over the world has indeed reassured the formal system that a flexible curriculum does lead to qualitative improvements for the education structure in general.

Experimentation in devising interesting modules of learning should not, however, divert the open school from its central purpose which is to give the hitherto unschooled young

people fresh opportunities. Improving the quality of secondary education as a whole may well be an exciting pursuit for the open school, but its main focus has to be facilitating the needs and interests of the large majority of young people who have not had the benefits of normal schooling.

Moreover, the open school must also concentrate more on the needs of those who are not willing to pursue their scholastic duties beyond the secondary level. Such students constitute at the present the vast majority of those attached to this mode of learning in India — almost 90 percent. Many experts fear that unless the interests of this majority are prioritised, the open school curriculum and learning methods will soon reflect the orientations of the formal system.

The excess capacities of the formal system, though welcome, must at the same time be utilised by the open schools in a manner different from where these facilities are derived from. The vast network of the national and state level open schools has to be built through the induction of teachers, who have been trained with a different orientation in the formal system. They must specialise in teaching at the secondary and higher secondary level, since most of the students in this flexible format would not be opting for higher education thereafter.

Even within the span of its brief existence, the open school appears to have been intruded by forces of two types. The first set belongs to the affluent middle class which seems to find the open school an extremely profitable mode of providing an educational certification to its truant children. The second set is drawn from all classes of society that are being criminalised at the margin in increasing numbers. This set finds all modes of distance education attractive because of the ease with which one can obtain certification through impersonation both at the level of entry as students and that of passing, courtesy proxy examinees.

Needless to say, the open school in India, would, perhaps, lose much of its authenticity — just as many formal school systems already have — unless it is able to guard against the two established intruders.

Easing Peer Pressures–The Logic of the Supreme Court's Judgment on Academic Seniority cannot be denied

The Telegraph, June 22, 1995

A two member judicial bench of the Supreme Court of India recently delivered what may well become a landmark judgment on the subject of the seniority of university teachers. The judgment, in any case, seems to have thoroughly shaken a section of the professional fraternity. Many have taken it to be of more than academic interest to the teaching community. Some have even expressed the fear that this might provide a handle to those who may want to drive a wedge between two sections of professors — those who were recruited to vacant posts through open competition and those who have been given "personal promotion" in recognition of their meritorious service.

The latter form a relatively new category created by a merit promotion scheme of the University Grants Commission in 1983 and later by a similar scheme of career advancement initiated in 1987. Till now the professors in the first category — recruited to vacant posts through open competition and those in the second category —given personal promotion and rank-had by and large been taken as belonging to the same professional cadre. But no longer, after the apex court judgment.

The Supreme Court litigation was in response to two civil appeals against a common judgment rendered by the high court of Madhya Pradesh in 1994. The high court had allowed two writ petitions made by certain directly recruited teachers of Vikram University against the university and its "merit promote" teachers. The appellants before the Supreme Court were some of the promotee readers and professors. The question involved was whether they could claim seniority over the directly recruited readers and professors on the basis of duration of service.

The appeals to the Supreme Court attracted nationwide attention when it became clear that the court's judgment was going to affect the service conditions in all university faculties in the country, not merely that of the teachers of Vikram University. In fact, many promotee professors of Jawaharlal Nehru University and Delhi University were also represented in this case through counsel before the apex court.

Briefly, the Supreme Court stipulates once a lecturer is promoted on merit as a reader, or a reader as professor, he can continue to work as promotee reader or professor till he retires or otherwise ceases to be an employee of the university, or till he is reverted for some valid reason. There can be no question of a merit promotee being reverted otherwise to the lower cadre from which he came. Consequently, such a merit promotee would be considered a reader or a professor insofar as his pay, work and status are concerned. However, he cannot be fitted in an inter se seniority list of all professors and readers. He remains outside the "cadre" of readers or professors as the case may be.

How would then the seniority of the merit promotee be reckoned even though he is an ex-cadre reader or professor? The Supreme Court believes the answer is obvious. It states,

"Among persons forming the same class to which he belongs inter se seniority has to be fixed on the basis of continuous officiation". As a consequence, "a separate seniority list of merit promotee readers and professors has to be prepared and acted upon for purposes other than seniority in and promotion to the posts available to those in the cadre". "In short", the judgment adds, "there have to be two seniority lists, one of the cadre of readers and professors who are direct recruits, and the other of the merit promotee readers and professors".

In coming to this conclusion, the Supreme Court bench relied on the two crucial features that distinguish the internally merit promoted teachers from the ones recruited through open competition. First, Indian universities in general, do not include in their legislation a dual system of filling up posts in the faculty by direct recruitment as well as by internal promotion. They have provision only for direct recruitment. Merit promotion has been a subsequent development. This child of expediency has not, in most cases, been legitimised yet by making appropriate changes in the relevant acts and statutes.

Second, even as an ad hoc experiment, neither the merit promotion scheme nor the career advancement scheme of the UGC had provided for the creation of new posts for the promotees — whether by making net additions to the cadre strength or by upgrading the lower posts. In the event, the Supreme Court judgment appears to provide the only logical conclusion.

That the university system headed by the UGC itself had shown complete lack of wisdom in the way the ad hoc schemes of faculty promotion were introduced cannot be doubted any longer. Had it been the intention to protect the interests of the internal promotees and keep them absolutely at par with the direct recruits — and there is no reason to doubt this — there can be no possible justification for not taking the obvious steps implicitly indicated by the apex court judgment. These would have been, first, making the necessary changes in the acts and statutes and, second, restructuring or expanding the cadre posts.

Not that taking such steps required great ingenuity. For a contrast, though on a much reduced scale, one may recall that even during the present financial crunch the Central government seems to be contending with, it has been possible recently to create seven or eight new posts of full secretaries to the government of India. This, while at the same time abolishing a number of posts of additional secretaries, thereby not disturbing the aggregate cadre strength.

The restructuring was made ostensibly to give a greater thrust to poverty alleviation programmes. Actually, it is understood, these higher posts were badly needed in order to give a certain batch of the Indian Administrative Service its expected promotions to the level of secretaries. Considering the fact both the finance and the education secretaries sit on the UGC and an abundance of administrative wisdom is always available to the commission in any case, is it not regrettable that no one could find the right set of solutions for the professors?

That the Supreme Court judgment has been taken as an adverse verdict on the merit promotees by the promotees themselves is now fairly well known. A head of department in the School of Social Sciences in JNU — one of the most eminent social scientists of the country and a promotee professor himself — has handed in his resignation on the ground he now finds himself junior to the young direct recruits to the professorial ranks. A number of

Delhi professors are also known to have asked the minister for human resources development to take steps urgently so that such absurd and anomalous situations are averted.

Were these responses made by the professors based on a correct or reasonable reading of what the apex court judgment actually states or implies? The answer to this in all likeliness is in the negative.

The Supreme Court judgment states unambiguously that the merit promotee professor will enjoy the same status as one directly recruited. But the two cannot be placed in a common seniority list. What the judgment does not say and could not possibly have meant is that the directly recruited professor can be placed above the merit promotee. Non-comparability is a symmetric relation. Aggrieved professors would be making a mistake in presuming that the Supreme Courts or even the academic community at large, would want to use the relation inconsistently in the matter of fixing the seniority of two non-comparable type of teachers.

But that would be making a small mistake. It would, however, be a big mistake not to realise that a bureaucratically defined concept of seniority in academics is, and ought to be, an operationally meaningless concept.

One does not know what perquisites Indian universities can offer today on the basis of considering seniority construed by themselves or even by the Supreme Court. The real perquisites of academic life come mainly acquiring distinctions of other kinds. Even when the attribute is a handle to use, it is seniority as perceived by the peers in the profession that counts not seniority that may be shown in official listing.

Again, in the case of filling up such overrated positions as those of dean and head of department, the principle of rotation has long since undermined the principle of seniority in most of our better universities. At JNU the vice-chancellor is not enjoined in any manner by the act or any of the statutes to appoint only the seniormost professors available whether as dean of a school or as head of a centre. In a single professor centre an associate professor would be routinely appointed the head after the professor's term of two years is over. The rectors of the university, who discharge their functions at the level of vice chancellor, are also not invariably the senior most professors.

All this is not to say the power hierarchy has necessarily changed for the better in those universities where the seniority factor has not been allowed to be the overriding one. But one did wish that the Supreme Court was given the opportunity to take note of the facts of life in a modern university; even more that the counsel representing the teachers of some of these very universities had known enough to bring these facts to the notice of that august body.

One may even conjecture that the knowledge would perhaps have led to a more realistic and forward looking judgment from the apex court. That would have shown up the increasing vacuousness of the old bureaucratic concept of seniority when applied to the situations obtaining in many of India's universities today.

Slow Poisoning–The Indian Economy still lacks the Dynamism Necessary for Successful Market Reforms

The Telegraph, July 29, 1995

Remember the questions budget watchers have to ask at the beginning of each year? How is the economy doing? What should the government do? What is on Manmohan Singh's mind? Finally, what are the portents for the future, that is, for the next financial year?

These are important questions, no doubt. But to be operationally meaningful, some questions have to be asked several times, and questions about the health of the economy are among them.

There was, if one cares to remember, a broad consensus at the beginning of the year among the experts to the effect that India's economic performance could be quickly judged by three indicators: (a) the balance of payments, particularly the size and character of capital inflows; (b) the state of inflation - the question being whether the economy is being successfully weaned away from the danger zone of a double digit rate of inflation; and (c) the extent to which the newly "liberated" economy is able to handle market forces: can it clear more efficiently, and more, promptly, excess demand and excess supply both internally and through imports and exports?

So far as the balance of payments are concerned, one can certainly feel more comfortable, today than at the beginning, of the year. The provisional official statistics covering the period April-December 1994 have come in and show, for example, India's foreign exchange reserves actually rose to $23.4 billion (rather than $20 billion) at the end of the year from $19.3 billion at the end of March 1994. This means in terms of foreign exchange assets, the rule of thumb index of how many, months of import bills are covered rose from 7.5 months to 7.7 months at the end of the period.

However, the net capital inflow totaling four billion dollars during this period is still small. Of this inflow, foreign direct investments — this is the kind of inflow we look forward to— only amounted to $ 0.8 billion against investments from institutional investors, and offshore India-specific funds, which amounted to $ 1.5 billion. It other words, there is no immediate hope that the "good cholesterol" of foreign direct investment would in the near future be able to cancel out the bad effects of the speculative foreign portfolio, investments.

It is generally accepted the spurt in the rate of inflation, in India in recent years had been at least partly triggered off by the bullish purchases by foreign institutional buyers in the stock market. The subsequent lull in the stock market — and the slump — was also attributed partly to their concerted show of disinterestedness in Indian stocks. The more recent revival too has come in the wake of the renewed interest shown by the foreign institutional buyers.

Obviously, investors who can destabilise the stock market —by concerted buying of shares or even by refraining from taking part in the market after having entered it — have to be watched very carefully. But it does not seem that India's economic policy after

liberalisation contemplates any controls in this sphere at all. In contrast, China routinely caps foreign portfolio investment whenever it thinks fit. Incidentally, China's practising of such "illiberal" policy did not seem to frighten away the foreign investors. In 1994, for example, realised direct, foreign investment into China is known to have been about $ 35 billion compared to India's two billion dollars.

Coming to the current state of inflation, are we safely out of the double digit danger zone yet? The answer is somewhat uncertain. It is true that the rate is mercifully declining over the weeks. The official rate has reached its lowest point yet for the year at 7.7 percent for the week ended July 8, 1995. But the official rate is a little deceptive for several reasons.

First the published inflation rate is based on the movements of the provisional wholesale price index (WPI) for all commodities over preceding final estimates of WPI. Curiously, the provisional WPI has developed the habit of consistently and substantially underestimating the actual prices. For example, the annual rate of inflation computed on the basis of the movement of the final estimates of WPI for all commodities for the week ended May 6 this year turns out to be as high as 9.8 percent, 1.3 percentage points higher than the figure earlier published on the basis of the movement of the provisional WPI. The difference, in fact, widened to 1.5 percentage points when the final estimate of WPI could be calculated for the week ended May 13. In other words, even in terms of the WPI for all commodities we are hardly out of the double digit zone yet.

Second, it is not the inflation rate based on the movement of the WPI that directly hurts the customer, but that in retail prices. The retail prices customers pay are hardly ever those that are published — they are not only higher, they will rise faster and steeper, as any housewife knows.

Third, it is not the prices of "all commodities" but those relevant for the cost of living index that really matter. It is a reasonable conjecture the rate of inflation computed on the basis of price movements Indian housewives face will be higher than the one based on the WPI for all commodities. It should not be very difficult to calculate the former for different regions.

It therefore seems prudent to assume we are not out of the woods yet. Though the assumption both the cosmetically treated rate of inflation and the actual rate are falling — which possibly is the case — should bring some sense of relief. There is however absolutely no room for complacency here. The state of the economy does not justify the sudden spending sprees that government may be contemplating, though the programmes are otherwise laudable.

It is in this context that one views with some concern the Central government's deciding to go in for very substantial salary increases in the government and public sectors in the immediate future, following the recommendations expected to come in from the fifth pay commission and other boards constituted for the public sector enterprises, the universities and colleges and so forth. The salary increases that are being talked about seem to be fully justified on all microeconomic grounds. Yet they may have a disastrous effect on the housewife's rate of price inflation.

Finally, whether it is the balance of payments situation or the current rate of inflation, the question that one must keep on asking is: what benefits has the system been able to derive from economic liberalisation? Specifically, are the government's responses to changes in

market conditions any freer or prompter? Does private enterprise, on the other side, show signs of reading the market forces correctly and quickly, making the necessary course corrections to take advantage of a favorable wind? After all, India's ability to survive in the competitive world market, that now encompasses the Indian market too, will depend more on getting positive answers to these two questions than on introducing any great and spectacular technological innovations in the productive processes of the economy.

Do the answers to these questions look positive? Two short items appearing in the Indian press in the past few weeks might well make one wonder.

The first item concerns 9,500 tonnes of wheat produced last season in Punjab and Haryana lying practically uncovered in the open. Only the uncommon and unannounced delay in the arrival of the monsoon may have saved some of the stock from rotting away by now. The Food Corporation of India's storage facilities was full to the brim and therefore this wheat could not be accommodated. Remember, how after this year's Budget, high level government spokesmen had scoffed at the simple minded idea of making massive sales of foodgrains in stock to drive the prices down? That was obviously considered very bad economics.

The second story is also from the food front. This one has to do with India's export capability and, therefore, with the balance of payments situation. The commerce ministry had hoped India would be able to take advantage of the extra demand for foodgrains in the rest of the world arising out of adverse weather conditions over China and the dislocation of wheat production in many parts of the former Soviet Union. It was confidently expected almost overnight India would become a "major player" in the world market for foodgrains by exporting 4.5 million tonnes of wheat and rice.

So far not even 0.5 million tonnes have been exported. Apparently the government had not thought of the possibility that private enterprise might not be able to take quick advantage of the situation. There were not enough cranes to load the food grains on to the ships at India's major ports; and there were not enough surface transport facilities to move the stocks to less crowded ports; and finally, there was no institutional mechanism to find an organisational way out of the predicament. One hears that because of this a good part of our contract for supply of rice to neighbouring Bangladesh may have to be cancelled.

Briefly, therefore, business has continued to be as usual and as before. The spirit of free enterprise — which basically is the "animal spirit" of capitalism that Keynes had talked about — has not yet entered the old body of the Indian economy. But perhaps, these are still early days for real repair?

Kidding about the Idiot Box–Children are more Discriminating about Television Programmes than Adults believe

The Telegraph, September 8, 1995

How important is it for adults to know exactly how their children relate to television? Ask any adult and you are likely to be told that it must be extremely important. But how much do they ever find out or even try to? Very little, going by the evidence accumulated over the last 40 years from researches in the Western countries. Almost nothing, except by hearsay, in our own country.

But parents, even in a poor and low television density region like south Asia, doubtless realise today that their society is in the presence of an awesome power which it must come to terms with. Recently, a student seeking admission to the M.Phil course in a university was asked: "What medium of instruction do you use in your state?" The prompt answer was "Television." That raised a laugh. Yet, why not? Surely, compared to die claims of television, those of a mere language as the "medium of instruction" in any Indian state must be getting feebler by the day.

That such claims, whether for English or for a state language, continue to be made by Indian politicians is only because their tribe will never know when a battle is lost. Perhaps television has already become the medium of instruction for all of India. Being audiovisual, it has no particular barrier to overcome before entering the child's mind — not the usual barriers of education, of illiteracy, nor even, it seems, of language!

In contemporary society, the magic box has proved to be the most successful hypnotist since the comic book magician, Mandrake. Long before technology invented virtual reality, which appeared to transport one physically to another world, television had managed to create something similar — at least in some young addicts' minds. For good or evil, the new medium's power of total invasiveness is truly awe inspiring.

Of course, adults — particularly Indian men — like to believe themselves to be impervious. Though the hard evidence available is most uncertain on this count, this belief can be allowed to rest for some time. What is most urgent, however, is the case of the children. Particularly so in a society where television as the dominant medium is a newly emerging phenomenon and where the real battle for the child's mind is still to be joined.

The first studies had appeared, nearly 40 years ago, in the United Kingdom. "Television and the Child" was the pioneering work of a group of social scientists, led by Hilde Himmelweit, at the London School of Economics. Since then, a spate of research over the years has brought into light many facts bearing on the effects of television on young children. These concerns, along with the television itself, eventually spread to the developing world. But the results of the studies, which focused on industrialised economies functioning in altogether different societal contexts, were not necessarily applicable everywhere.

Moreover, even in the West, the studies could not go much beyond what most parents would have suspected in any case, because of a basic methodological flaw. As some recent investigations carried out at the LSE would suggest, the basic flaw in the adult approach to the study of television's influences on the child is the adult approach itself.

The important question is not so much how grownups view television and the child but, instead, how the child views television and the grownups. In other words, it is the worm's eye view of the bird that largely needs to be explored. Without knowing something about this we can never know for certain how impressionable or gullible children really are before the small screen.

However different the social context in India might have been when the technology arrived some decades ago, two recently emerging trends appear to be restoring part of the "comparability" with Western countries in two different ways. Which would make the studies carried out mainly in the context of Western societies no longer totally inapplicable here.

The first trend is one of social or community viewing of privately owned as well as community owned television sets. In the early years of television in this country, the ownership of sets was confined to the urban sector and to people with largely westernised lifestyles. For these years it can be said that the number of televisions owned, which was obviously very small, represented roughly the number of households that watched television.

Compared to any Western country, the density of televisions owned in India is still very low in relation to the population. But the number of people watching per set would be much higher. One would have thought relative modernisation would reduce the incidence of community viewing, but indications are that it has had quite the opposite effect.

The increase in the trend of community viewing implies that child viewers are no longer only from the affluent sections of society. They come from all segments and the majority of them, arguably, are from relatively poor backgrounds. Therefore, some of the uses that children are able to make of television in countries like the UK, particularly in the fields of education and mass entertainment, can also be made by children here. To this extent, the lessons of the studies in Western countries have become applicable in India too — for children will be children everywhere much more than adults will be adults.

Beaming satellite channels through cable television is the other trend on the rise. Just as helicopters came before the automobile in many African villages in the Fifties, satellite television has come before the telephone in many Indian villages in the Nineties. This one fact may have opened up Indian urban and rural life in unanticipated ways. What parents have got for their children out of the magic box elsewhere in the world is roughly known or at least surmised. It seems some of their experiences would now be of relevance for Indian parents too.

Some of the experiences in Western countries about the effects of television on children are, of course, very positive. For example, the optimism of educationists, who had looked upon television as the "final solution" in the field of distance learning, seems not to have been wholly misplaced. Education for all cannot be provided in the foreseeable future in a country of India's size without using television in a massive way. There will never be enough human capital, for one thing, to provide quality education for everybody by any other means.

Perhaps the same could be said of providing general access to the best music and theatre. If we learn well from the Western experience, television will certainly be able to provide a quality of life for our children that we could never afford for them in our own lifetime in any other way.

But some other experiences recorded in Western countries have been quite alarming and we must learn from these too. And it is here that we need to listen to the children's voices carefully and not repeat the blunders of an earlier generation which listened only to the parents. We must know how the children view television before we can decide on what they should view.

The two most serious problems here that seem to alarm parents in every country are the scenes of explicit sex and of extraordinary violence depicted on the television screen. Some adults attribute much of the juvenile delinquency and violent crime in contemporary society specifically to the effect of such scenes on young and impressionable minds. The recent LSE studies, however, seem to indicate that the source of parental anxiety for general moral degradation should perhaps be looked for elsewhere. Children seem to be looking at television more sturdily, and more positively than the adults would give them credit for!

Children, one learns from these new, generation studies, are by and large plain bored by the depiction of explicit sex once their initial curiosity is satisfied. Implicit sex, of course, they generally tend to miss — except perhaps the very bright children.

They do, however, like action. If they are found to prefer scenes of violence to scenes of unending dialogue, it is mainly for this simple reason. Incidentally, scenes showing two adults engaged in what is purported to be mortal combat and then the same two walking away none the worse for wear, do not ever deceive the children. They can detect play acting and also participate in it much more than adults. So, it seems, parents have less reason to be worried than they usually think.

Children, the adults may be pleasantly surprised to know, usually have clear ideas about what they think is good television. It will have action adventure and excitement. It will also be informative. "Green" issues, environmental disasters, catching criminals, stopping wars and relieving suffering are all considered by youngsters as the right ingredients for good television.

A bad television programme is one that is dull, has poor photographic qualities or has too much violence. News bulletins and programmes about politics are also in the bad category. So are some of the programmes that children find only grownups seem to like, such as "adult films"!

Jan Stockdale, who led the latest round of studies at the LSE, includes a letter from a small child in her report published in the LSE magazine. The letter was addressed to "Dear TV programmer". One can end no better than by quoting its concluding lines: "I would like you to create a channel just for children. And please, more seriousness and honesty on TV. And do it — not just promises and talk. Do it. Goodbye."

Nation as an Open Book–Education for All could be achieved via a Decentralised and Modernised Open School System

The Telegraph, September 25, 1995

The National Open School was set up in 1989. After an initial period of slow growth, the open school movement appears to be catching on and is now spreading to the states. Last month, the educational administrators of about half a dozen states met at a workshop to formulate ideas about curriculum building for state open schools. What emerged was that many more state governments were expected to join the movement.

It can be seen that over the last few years the concept of the open school has been crystallising out of the earlier — and somewhat less interesting — idea of school education being imparted through correspondence courses. Such courses had been available since the mid-Sixties to prepare students for the regular secondary and higher secondary examinations of several state boards. But there was never any question of considering the students subscribing to the correspondence course to be at par with those of the formal schools. Education through correspondence has always been considered inferior to that obtained in accredited institutions.

The transition to the open school concept marks a change that may prove, some optimists feel, to be a turning point in the history of Indian education. It may indicate that a qualitative change has at long last taken place in our understanding and acceptance of India's societal commitment to the education of all its people.

If education for all is genuinely accepted as a basic right, the fundamental right to schooling, too, merits the same status. This is the main point of the transition. Sadly, many people tend to forget this — educational administrators are no exception.

How exactly does one distinguish schooling from the delivery system of correspondence courses? There are, of course, many physical and locational differences. There is also a vast difference between the two modes in terms of the traditional teacher-student relationship that develops — or used to develop — in the formal school. As also the old school tie, which is seemingly unbreakable. But there also lies another crucial difference: the two modes serve two related but clearly distinguishable purposes. Society seems to have uses for both.

Schooling is expected to prepare the student for eventually leading the life of an educated person who has an advantage over the unlettered — be it as a professional, a consumer or a citizen.

A correspondence course will not have to carry out what the school is expected to. It will, instead, concentrate wholly on preparing the student for passing an important examination in order to qualify for some valuable certificate that the student needs.

A good correspondence course, which again is not easy to come by, would perform its specified tasks rather well — in fact, often better than an established formal institution. The

immense popularity and profitability of some of the newly famous teaching shops is reflective of their efficacy.

Schooling addresses a wider, and, in some respect different need of society. Examinations leading to certification it is expected to take en passant, almost incidentally. But the main purpose is to provide a holistic and basic education at the initial stages, gradually leading to more specialised streams. The core of this kind of education cannot always be immediately tested for certification. It is a pity that good teachers, even those affiliated to the best schools, are often tempted to imitate the teaching shops and pursue their kind of success.

But the question is whether the open schools can provide healthy schooling to their potentially vast clientele during the next decade, especially in the light of the politicians' promises of providing education for all by the turn of the century. It might also be asked whether open schools would achieve anything concrete in cases of failures and drop outs when formal schools are unable to do much for similarly inclined students.

The task is daunting, but not impossible. A clean slate, high motivation, technological support and clarity of purpose can work wonders. Fifty years of dithering and a lack of commitment have managed to transform education into an idle dream and a receding mirage for the average citizen. A lot of politicians in high places, one realises, may be looking at the launching of basic education programmes via national and state open schools as just another electoral gambit. The professionals involved in such an enterprise need not be overly disheartened. History may have chosen them to play a more important role than that envisaged for the politicians.

The dimension of the problem faced by the open schools is simply enormous. The formal schools in India today cater to nearly 145 million students in the elementary stage from classes I to VII. This, of course, is a giant stride forward, considering that a paltry 23 million were enrolled in these classes during the early Fifties. But the number still awaiting absorption, including neo-literates of all ages, amounts to nearly 40 million. This number will continue to increase in proportion to the population growth, as also with the rise in adult literacy in the country. With the formal school system nearing saturation point, these are the numbers the open school might soon have to accommodate.

Apart from the problem of accommodating a vast number of students, the open school will also have to learn to deal with its remarkable heterogeneity. A recently prepared study paper of the National Open School identified four different groups of prospective students. The four categories listed were school dropouts (9-14 years), non-participating youth, particularly pre-marriage girls (15-20 years), working adults, inclusive of mothers engaged in domestic duties (20-35 years) and all adult neo-literates (26 years and above).

Various other equally sensible categories could be thought of, depending on the special conditions peculiar to certain states or regions. Also, schooling, in the genuine sense of the term, would require devising curricula and meeting the special needs identified in each case. This is a complex task in view of the fact there exists a homogeneity of the student population vis a vis its age composition in the case of formal school going children.

The open school has two potential sources of strength to counter the aforementioned problems. First, the stock of highly qualified manpower. No other developing country — not even China — has the kind of captive but unutilised human capital within its education sector as India does.

To tap this source, the open school system must be decentralised. Setting up state open schools has been a move in the right direction. But, eventually, such institutions must be set up at the district level too. It is only at this level that the system can identify and interact with skilled teachers in neighbouring colleges and universities as also with those in the local schools. It would be good economics, besides anything else, to induct such teachers into the system.

The pooling of teaching talent from all sections of the formal system would, one hopes, eventually break the unnatural barrier between teachers, a factor Indian society has mindlessly created over the 20th century.

The other source of strength, of course, is television. Very few countries in the developing world have the television network that exists in India, though it needs to spread still further. Moreover, no other country in the world — the first world included — has had the task of broadcasting programmes which cater to diverse peoples and cultures.

The National Open School and the new state open schools can win the battle if they use their own television channels, with interesting educational programmes — including regional ones. The state open schools, in particular, will possibly have the greatest responsibility and opportunity. By spreading the concept of decentralised open schooling, the state's promises of "education for all" might look like a manageable reality.

When State Plays Truant–Nowhere is the Gap between Official Talk and Action greater than in Compulsory Education

The Telegraph, January 8, 1996

Article 45 of the Constitution lays down a directive principle of state policy that relates to the state's responsibility for providing basic education to the children of India. It says "the state shall strive to provide free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14 years".

How binding is this directive principle? More important, how binding are the directive principles of state policy as a class?

Students of the Constitution are usually taught early in life to distinguish carefully between the directive principles of state policy and the fundamental rights of the Indian people.

The conventional wisdom is that while the fundamental rights are justifiable, the directive principles are not. In other words, apparently not much can be done; by the way of seeking a judicial remedy in case the state is sloth in following the directive principles.

A number of decisions and comments made by the Supreme Court of India in recent years seem to suggest however the last word is yet to be said on the subject.

About two years ago the Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment on the writ petition of Unni Krishnan against, the state of Andhra Pradesh pronouncing a definitive verdict on the people's right to education as implicit in the Constitution.

Briefly, the court decided the right to education did exist, since it naturally followed from the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. But the right was not absolute. It was circumscribed by what the court called the parameters of Article 45 which limited the right to the provision of free and compulsory education of the children of India up to the age of 14 years.

The crucial question that then arose was the following — did the direction to "strive" under Article 45 not provide an obvious escape route for the state?

The Supreme Court, it seems, decided it did not. Not that it was disputed that a directive principle was not justiciable. It was only that the court now seemed to have taken the position the contention the state was "striving" could not be stretched indefinitely in time. In other words, it was open for the higher judiciary to step in at an appropriate point of time and say enough was enough.

The Supreme Court, some government functionaries may well have been relieved to find, does not seem to be ready to go beyond making only warning noises — at least not yet. But there is a lesson to be drawn from the increasingly frequent — and sometimes dramatic but effective — use, or the implicit threat of use, by the higher courts of the provisions of the contempt of court act against various authorities, including the constitutionally protected ones.

Could it be that making provenly untenable promises time and again, thereby committing the government to impossible deadlines might in the future entail certain hitherto unforeseen hazards for the people in power?

In other words, can a directive principle of state policy, innocuous and unjustifiable to start with, cease to be so with the passage of time?

The problem obviously is not only about defining the exact legal status of the fundamental rights or of the directive principles of state policy as enunciated in the Constitution. It is also about the credibility of governments in these uncertain times. Basically, it is public confidence in the ability of the government to keep its promises that has systematically been eroded over the last 50 years.

Article 45 provides the most glaring instance of what has happened to several of the directive principles. Which may be why it seems to have caught the attention of the Supreme Court and the public at large.

India's political leaders, regardless of their ideological moorings, have always been prone to making spectacular commitments without a thought to their practicability.

Thus back in 1949, when the Constitution was in the making, the leaders of all the parties were convinced 1960 was a reasonable target date to choose for the attainment of universal primary education. This, as is recognised today, was an absurdly early date to choose. As it happened, 1960 came and went without much to show in terms of India's progress towards the goal. But over optimism, instead of being curbed by the discomfiture, actually spread to even people who ought to have known better.

The education commission 1964-66, on which sat some of India's ablest and most dedicated educationists like its chairman, D.S. Kothari, and member secretary, J.P. Naik, did not show much caution in making public its considered opinion. "All the areas of the country should be able to provide five years of good and effective education to all the children by 1975-76 and seven years of such education by 1985-86."

The commission's high hopes, of course, were not to be realized. In 1986, when the new national policy on education was announced some observers were hopeful. This time there would be some narrowing of the wide gap between desperate hope and the ground reality that had been a feature of India's educational policy statements.

In the event, however, the NPE went on to announce that all the children of India would be provided free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years by 1995.

To no one's surprise a revised version of the NPE had to be presented to Parliament in 1992. It admitted, implicitly, that the 1995 deadline could not now be met by any conceivable means. But governments do not learn their lesson in a hurry.

The revised 1992 formulation of the NPE boldly made the commitment that now stands: "Free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality would be provided to all children up to 14 years of age before the commencement of the 21st century by launching a national mission".

The new deadline gives the Centre and the states about four years from now. How realistic does it seem against some known trends?

Experts estimate that at the present rate of progress — actually assuming certain obvious cases of administrative and managerial bottlenecks can be cleared — universal basic education for children upto the age of 14 years as contemplated in Article 45 will take about 40 years to come to Bihar, about 20 years to Uttar Pradesh and somewhat shorter periods in most other cases.

As for education of a "satisfactory" quality, that must remain a distant dream in most of the country and for at least the first half of the next century. Unless something more drastic than the launching of another national mission be considered.

What kind of drastic steps?

The clues lie in Article 45. No country in the world has crossed the first barrier to universalisation of education without making primary school education both free and compulsory. Both need a relentless commitment of resources.

The number of Indian children in the age group 5-14 years is estimated to reach 232 million against China's 230 million in the year 2000. To have to cater to the world's largest population in the relevant age group is by itself a mind-boggling affair.

Compared to China's, India's problem is further compounded by the fact the cost to be calculated must be for the whole of tins population because it had not provided for free education on any substantial scale so far. Even the government schools, one discovers, are not free at the primary stage, as a study has pointed out. Are state and Central governments ready to find such enormous resources?

The only possible solution to the cost problem appears to be the massive use of the open school system and new technology. But judging by the almost insignificant sums governments have allocated so far to the National Open School and the State Open Schools one does not feel greatly relieved on this count.

The other big problem, probably more intractable, is that of selling the idea of compulsory education for children. One often misses the point that here pitted against the macroeconomic logic for what is good for society is not the individual family's ignorance but rather its clearheaded microeconomic calculation. What the family cannot easily be made to forget is that child labour pays.

So long as a child is performing an economic task — at home or at the workplace, providing support that the family just cannot do without, intimidating the parents with punitive action will not bring that child to school. As J.P. Naik said long ago, that will fill the jails with parents but not the classrooms with children.

Fourteen Indian states and four union territories already have compulsory education acts. How many of us even know about its existence?

The only way compulsory education will work is the hard way: society or government must pay the family for the lost opportunity cost of child labour and not just condemn the practice. Fortunately, perhaps, there may not be any other option left to governments if Article 45, at long last, is held to be binding to them.

Tongue Tied before Teachers– Universal Primary Education is Possible by Implementing Policies at the Local Level

The Telegraph, February 15, 1996

India will remain the world's largest cultural conglomeration in existence as a nation state at the beginning of the 21st century. For that reason it will face one big challenge: how to conduct its vast interculturally spread educational agenda.

The Indian Constitution came into force in 1950. It guaranteed six fundamental rights. Articles 25 to 28, on freedom of religion, guarantee every citizen the right to practise and propagate the religion of his or her choice. Citizens can also form religious bodies or institutions and run them for their own educational purposes.

Fundamental rights also include the cultural and educational rights of religious or linguistic minority communities in every state — Articles 29-30. A minority community has the right to keep its own language, script, literature and culture.

But the Supreme Court decided the right to education can be exercised only within parameters set by the Constitution's directive principles of state policy. Article 45 specifies, "The state shall strive to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years."

This implies intercultural education policy must emphasise, first and foremost, the education of children and that the latter must be both free and compulsory. Concentrating on children's rights has another implication.

What concerns children has to be more binding than what may be demanded by adults. For example, the cultural divides that should matter for policy would be linguistic rather than, say, religious. This is because, at the level of children's education, the primary issue is choosing an appropriate medium of instruction.

The medium of instruction should be the mother tongue of the child. This is often not the case in India. In many cases the problem of providing a intercultural education package to the child simply means transmitting the same, or academically equivalent, curricular content in as many languages and scripts as possible. This needs centralised effort and large resources only New Delhi can mobilise.

Within each linguistic group, however, religious subgroups often require special treatment. The effective way to handle this is a more localised approach at the state or district level.

Under the Constitution's distribution of powers, education — particularly at the school level — was a state subject for many years. Though education is on the concurrent list, areas Centre and state share authority, since the mid-Seventies, the bulk of government expenditure on schools comes from state budgets.

Recently, the federal structure of the Indian polity has been extended by the 73rd and the 74th amendments of the Constitution. These have put school education on the list of village and municipal-local governments.

School education is constitutionally the responsibility of the government at all three levels — Centre, state and district. District level government is again broken up into three levels— village at the base, then a group of villages or block, and the district at top.

Linguistic barriers are the major obstacles to the presentation of an academically equivalent curriculum to Indian schoolchildren. His language question makes things astonishingly difficult for India's school system.

For the Centre, the macroeconomic implications of providing free and compulsory education for children could be the crucial consideration. Similarly, making provisions for minority institutions and the use of local languages in teaching may be of far greater concern at the state or the district levels. For the same reason, the linguistic divide separating Indian schoolchildren does not appear the same when seen separately at the Central and local levels.

The first problem in listing the languages of India is defining one's language and one's mother tongue. In India the difference is erroneous.

The most "respected" list of Indian languages is, of course, the one provided in the eighth schedule of the Constitution. To make it to the eighth schedule is an important measure of success for any Indian language. Its speakers can then claim Central protection as a separate cultural community. Minorities can enjoy the benefits of the Constitution's fundamental cultural and educational rights.

There is also a political aspect to the question. Ever since the boundaries of the states had been redrawn on linguistic lines, many new states were carved out of the old provinces and the native states of British India. Understandably, constitutional recognition of a language almost invariably raises hopes of a separate state — Sindhi and classical Sanskrit being the obvious exceptions.

By contrast, the idea of a separate mother tongue unrecognised by the eighth schedule carries no political overtones on the national level.

In the 1971 census informant households recorded more than 3,000 mother tongues. This number is somewhat misleading. Many households were citing the same language but using different names for it. Moreover, a large number of "mother tongues" were found to have only a handful of speakers each.

Even then, the number of mother tongues spoken is enormous. In 1971, the census listed 33 Indian languages which were mother tongues to more than one million people. Though many have rich literatures of their own, less than half are on die eighth schedule.

There are 15 languages currently on the schedule. Of these, Hindi is actually the common name given to a rather imaginative collection of several affine languages of North India. They share only the Hindi script. A few of these — Magadhi and Maithili, for instance — have independent literately traditions. They are populous enough to have been included in the 1971 census language list.

Hindi is the official language of the country. English is an associate official language and is the additional medium of instruction in most states. Among the many Indian languages, there are tribal languages which are not dialects.

These are not among the 33 most populous, but are locally important enough to be recognised as official languages in many states. The Santhals, for instance, live in a tribal belt

stretching over West Bengal and Bihar. With a 1971 population of 3.7 million their language, Santhali, has been officially recognised and will be used in schools in these two states.

In some of the smaller states — all situated in eastern India — not a single eighth schedule language is either spoken or accepted as an official language of the state. These states are Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim. In addition to English, the official languages in these states are Nissi/Dafla, Adi and Wancho (Arunachal Pradesh); Manipuri (Manipur); Mizo (Mizoram); Ao, Konyak, Angami and Sema (Nagaland); Bhutia, Lepcha, Limboo and Nepali (Sikkim).

Basic children's education in these parts of the country is often inconceivable unless imparted through these languages. Against this stunningly variegated linguistic background it is surprising to find the eighth schedule listing a mere 15 languages.

Whatever might have been the political compulsions behind the national consensus to keep the eighth schedule relatively small, there are at least two other considerations which favour its present size and composition.

The first consideration is that the eighth schedule covers nearly 96 percent of the Indian population. There is, however, always an ominous ring about the "overwhelming numbers argument" in a multicultural democracy.

Whatever may be the political connotations, the economics of managing the sheer number of languages involved would seem to be on the side of restricting the size of the eighth schedule.

Surely, if more than twice the number already on the list had to be taken into account, then each time a large enough Central scheme was implemented, it would simply breakdown.

The second consideration is the greater relevance and effectiveness of state and district level initiatives in educational organisation in an intercultural setting.

The true Gandhian advocate of decentralisation of the state may want the government to be downsized and structured down to the village level. India's amazing cultural and linguistic diversity, however, makes that mode of democracy seem not merely desirable by imperative.

Forgotten Amendments

The Telegraph, December 19, 2001

The new Constitution (93rd amendment) bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha a fortnight back and passed unanimously the same day after only a couple of hours' discussion. How many would have noticed that this was a re-incarnation of the old 83rd amendment bill that had been introduced in Rajya Sabha as far back as July, 1997? The objective in either case was to incorporate the right to education in the list of fundamental rights.

As to why the original 83rd amendment bill — which had to go through considerable processing in Parliament and was subjected to lengthy public debate — had to languish at the hands of the same political players in Parliament for such a long time, and why ten other amendments of the Constitution would had to go through the mill, the 83rd amendment bill withdrawn and the new bill introduced remains a bit of a mystery. It was even rumoured in the capital that the bill would perhaps take just another day in the Rajya Sabha and be passed unanimously there too, and in a few more days receive the president's consent to become part of our Constitution.

If there was a riddle here as some of my friends think, I would not try to solve it — for, frankly, I do not have a clue. In any case, not wishing to look the gift horse too closely in the mouth, I would rather take this as a welcome seasonal gift and a very pleasant surprise for us all. To be sure, our political parties too, both in power and in opposition, can jointly claim due credit for what has been a truly amazing performance on their part. When one remembers that such shows of solidarity have not been at all conspicuous in the nation's parliamentary life in these troubled times, the urgency and solidarity shown by them in the case of the 93rd amendment, for once, has been quite remarkable.

It is important to recall, in this context, the famous judicial decisions of the Supreme Court (mainly those of 1992 and 1993 and later, consequentially, also one of 1997) that have given us the definitive interpretation of the directive principle of state policy contained in article 45 of the Constitution, which said, "The state shall endeavour to provide for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." This interpretation had laid down that the right to education was indeed justiciable as a fundamental right flowing from the fundamental right to life. Article 45 was only meant to indicate the "parameters" (0-14 years of age) within which the right may be confined for the present.

The judgement of 1973 on the Unnikrishnan writ petition, in effect forced government into action. It led to the formation of the Saikia committee of Union and state ministers; and then on the basis of its report advocating explicit inclusion of the fundamental right to education in the Constitution, an Expert Group was set up to look at the costs involved. That group (referred to in the media as the Tapas Majumdar committee) reported in 1999 that no more than one percent of the gross domestic product was needed annually for the additional expenses to achieve the objective of universal elementary education. But in real and physical terms the task was difficult, particularly because a sustainable and universal elementary schooling system would need recruitment and training of a vast number of regular teachers in thousands of new schools. To achieve this, not merely legislation and budget allocations, but

also strong social prioritization in favour of regular schooling of all children (particularly every girl child in the hitherto deprived sections of the people) had to be adamantly pursued.

There has already been an important Supreme Court case that may be more talked about in the coming years — the writ petition, Satya Pal Anand (1997). Under the Supreme Court's direction, the Union government as well as the governments of the states and Union Territories had to submit their progress on the areas of "energization" agreed upon for promoting the fundamental right to education defined by the court's 1993 judgment. Some of these areas were the establishment of primary schools in every revenue village, upgrading primary schools to the upper primary level by lowering their present 4:1 ratio, providing free textbooks in all government and aided primary schools, and converting all single-teacher schools into dual teacher primary schools.

Let me quote now from the new 93rd amendment bill. First, the bill addresses the list of fundamental rights: "After article 21 of the Constitution the following article shall be inserted, namely, 21A, the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine. Consequentially, the amendment seeks to change the directive principle in article 45.

"For article 45 of the Constitution, the following shall be substituted: '45. The state shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years."

Second, the bill also adds a fundamental duty: "In the article 51A of the Constitution, after clause (j) the following clause shall be added, namely: '(k) who is a parent or guardian to provide opportunities child or as the case may be, ward, between the age of six and fourteen years."

Both features have proved strongly controversial, at least in public. What would be their impact? Those who helped in introducing these two features, and many more who are now fighting to remove them, seem to agree that the amendment would do what it was intended to do: remove a good part of the weight of the burden of universal elementary education off the chest of the government.

For my own part, however, I would think differently. First, the proposed amendment does not directly address the fundamental right of life included in article 21 at all. It, therefore, cannot extinguish any right of the people inferred by the Supreme Court in the decisions referred to above. Second, as for the fundamental duty of the parents, particularly parents in poverty-stricken families, I would only recall the past experiences of more than a dozen Indian States which had coercive laws of the same kind only on their books that could never be exercised. As J.P. Naik once said, it would be easier to fill the jails with erring parents than to fill the classes with truant children. In any case, the absence of demand for education from the parents (which is often only conjectured and now being less and less reported) would absolve the state from its own fundamental duty to provide the supply of education for all.

One cannot be quite sure how strongly the members actually had felt about these two features in the Lok Sabha, where amendments to the bill could have been, but actually were not moved by any party, whether of the left, the centre or the right. However, one hears that some of the opposition parties are actually "mulling over" the exercise of that option in the Rajya Sabha, if the media reports were to be believed. But the reports also suggested that no

party wants to throw the first stone in Parliament, figuratively speaking, over what was seen as such a consensual issue and then rue the indiscretion afterwards when the amendment fails.

I do hope that the Rajya Sabha members would finally recover from the trauma they have just faced and soon take up the 93rd amendment bill defiantly as part of "business as usual". In all humility, I would beseech our elders not to let go of this opportunity, and give a little more time than usual to what could be, arguably for India, this century's most momentous issue.

Balancing Needs–India needs a Vision with Common Sense

The Telegraph, May 1, 2007

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was addressing the "CII Steel Summit: Vision 2020" when, with his characteristic gentleness, he managed to make several telling points, beginning with: "I want the Mittals and the Tatas, and all others who are eyeing global opportunities, to also invest more at home. India is a land of opportunity."

The prime minister possibly had in mind two recent feats — the acquisition of Arcelor Steel by Mittal and of Corus by Tata Steel — when he added, "While I commend our business leaders for their global vision and reach, I urge them to pay equal attention to market opportunities at home." He went on, presumably thinking of what had happened (and was still happening) in Nandigram and Singur "There has been some controversy in the recent past on industrial policy, but I am sure the people of India want to see industrial progress. In a country where the average size of landholding is so small, there are limitations to what you can do to improve agricultural productivity... The long-term solution to the problem of agrarian distress has to be to take people away from agriculture, to manufacturing, to services and other non-agricultural pursuits."

Finally, the prime minister entered a caveat to the vision. This was so contrary to the rest that it made me wonder whether what preceded was Manmohan Singh's own vision. But I will come to this remarkable parting shot, appropriately, only at the end.

I am not writing this just to express my admiration for the way the economist Manmohan Singh chose to present this clear and seemingly sensible vision of economic development. My main purpose is to argue rather to the contrary. I would suggest here that the clarity of the prime minister's mind actually allows us to see more clearly how the vision of development, plausible in the outline, is basically fractured. It throws up serious social choice anomalies when one tries to spell it out.

Is there anything special about a development vision? I think there is, as a social choice specialist will tell you, if pressed. To put it briefly, your development vision, almost definitionally, cannot be a monolith if you live in a democracy: typically, one vision would offer quite different vistas of social opportunities and economic futures to different individuals and different categories of people.

An important task before the nation's policy-makers is therefore to look for the unequal consequences of a given development process and for possible ways of reducing the iniquities that such consequences may imply. Equally important is the state's duty to caution people honestly about the small print that always goes with the bold outline. Governments, whether Central or state, cannot but presume in a democracy that the people, more than governments and political parties, have the inherent right of making the basic decisions to the extent feasible, and governments and parties have to abide by these decisions in good grace.

The options in the choice set contain, apart from the alternatives we are familiar with in everyday economics, what Nobel Laureate Kenneth Arrow — Amartya Sen's precursor —

named "alternative social states". The choice of a social state (say, "secular democracy with a socialistic pattern") often implies the exercise of value judgments more basic (to use Sen's terminology) than the ones used for everyday decisions. These graver judgments can be about structures of governance, methods of voting, exercise of other crucial social options. These are not options that come up every day. But when they come, people will expect the institution of democracy to accommodate them.

Let me go back to the prime minister's speech. First take this sentence: "In a country where the average size of landholding is so small, there are limitations to what you can do to improve agricultural productivity". Even in summary it is too harsh on our cherished dream of battle tanks of yesterday becoming tractors and harvesters of tomorrow. It is harsh on dreamers of another kind too — Tolstoy, Gandhi, Tagore! Finally this: "The long-term solution to the problem of agrarian distress has to be to take people away from agriculture, to manufacturing, to services and other non-agricultural pursuits". This should make you count how many people you can save this way. And how do you propose to take away even a small number? To make you understand I must tell you a story first. I cannot help it; as time ebbs out, memories crowd in.

That fantastically clear-minded economist, Joan Robinson, was visiting Jawaharlal Nehru University in the winter of 1972-73, when I got myself introduced to her by one of my old students, Amit Bhaduri, I think. We were discussing in a group *Introduction to Modern Economics,* that brilliant little book she and John Eatwell had just finished writing. At one point, someone asked why there didn't seem to be any place for the theory of individual or collective choice in their book? She promptly said something like (I forget the exact words) "Because nobody has a choice in a poor agrarian economy". We all laughed, but she had said this not in her usual crisp manner of a General's daughter that she actually was, but gently, almost with a touch of sadness! I did see the point then as I see it now, but even after all these years, I cannot quite accept it except as a quip. But it is true that when people frustrated in agriculture move to other vocations, we still cannot believe they do so by choice. As if they will never venture into another enterprise (like trade, transport or construction) independently.

So our development policy presumed that taking away people from agriculture was the job of the biggest industrial entrepreneurs from the cities and beyond. They had to be tempted with special incentives (relaxations in taxes and duties, some freedom from the regulatory bodies, some relief from trade union pressures). Special economic zones had to be carved out of village land for them. International giants like Mittal and Tata already know that both land and labour are enormously cheap in India. The scent of incentives makes the fare more appetizing. Big industry would now happily provide employment for the rural poor! India indeed was a land of opportunity.

Who can deny that the policies proposed by the Centre (also eagerly grabbed by the state governments) can quicken the birth of modern urban life in the carefully chosen patches of rural India. For some hitherto poor villagers, life in the SEZs may be better in every way — easier access to health and education, higher incomes, a more humane civic existence. For *some*, constituting a minuscule fraction of *all*. Remember we made promises to *all*. What about the rest? Would you fix their compensation claims by the low prices their infertile land fetches, as is being suggested, and not by counting a bit of the value of the various opportunities and rights you had promised for *all*, but will now deliver only to some? Did you

expect people left out to till their infertile little acres for the rest of their lives to leave you in peace, not raise hell?

Even with favourable outcomes, I am not sure our policy-makers would not be pilloried by history for espousing causes that prospered only by letting a few lucky ones jump the queue and live happily ever after. If the outcomes are not favourable, we may not even have to wait for history to tell us that.

Good and rounded economist that Manmohan Singh is, he understandably had his small print ready for the "CII Steel Summit: Vision 2020" too. As I hinted at the beginning, it may yet provide the alibi: "The steel industry has a huge requirement for land ... These needs must be balanced against larger social concerns with respect to equitable development and inclusive growth". This perhaps saves the economist. But the prime minister?

Waste Not, Want Not–To make the Reduction in the Cost of Education Meaningful

The Telegraph, June 11, 2007

For more than forty years now — actually ever since the Kothari commission (1964-66) broached the idea — people in India have been living with a contradiction of their own making. On the one hand we, at every level of our political life, including that of even prime ministers and ministers of education, have always expressed our simply unshakeable determination to devote to public spending on education precisely six percent of our national income. To tell the whole truth, nowadays an even more important-sounding number is being canvassed at the higher echelons of government — it is six percent of the GDP. In the case of a large domestic economy and only a small foreign transactions sector like India's, the distinction, of course, is still important though it makes no difference, as one of Shakespeare's characters wisely commented on stage in a somewhat dissimilar scene.

On the other hand, our Central and state governments, particularly the Planning Commission and the down-to-earth finance ministries, no matter which party ruled the roost and where, always and equally steadfastly pleaded that there was no money with the government anywhere near six percent of the GDP to spend on education. Fortunately, I hear, the Planning Commission is now also telling other contenders that after having to allocate such fantastic amounts to the social sector and for very good reasons, they will soon have no money left for the others.

Let me first place my problem in its proper and current context. Thanks to India shining and the GDP growing much faster than what sensible economists had expected, the current share of public spending on education — that never rose to even 4 percent in its history — keeps steadily falling, and has now fallen to around probably 2.7 percent of the GDP. By the time you digest this piece of information, the percentage might have gone further down. I hear that people at the very highest level are now openly wondering why anyone had to think up that entirely imaginary six percent in the first place. An interesting question. A long answer to the question will make an essay that would not interest you. But the short answer should be sufficient.

There were two government of India committees on the cost of education that I had the opportunity of chairing in recent years. The first was the 1999 expert group on the cost of universal elementary education implicit in the impending constitutional amendment to make the right to education a fundamental right. The second committee was the one of 2005 to discuss alternative cost scenarios, following the national common minimum programme's commitment of six percent of the GDP to education. In both, we actually tried not to concentrate on the percentage of the GDP needed but on the country's minimum requirements spelt out in real terms, given the parameters of the objectives in each case.

We had tried to list the minimum requirements that we saw were still not available — such as at least two classrooms in every elementary school, with two full-time teachers, and the provision of such schools for all children with similar basic facilities. In the case of higher education, we stressed on facilities such as good laboratories and libraries in college or

university departments along with competent and reasonably well-paid faculty, comparable to the minimum provided at any good university (not necessarily the best) in other parts of the world.

Our findings were, briefly, the following. The state's existing commitment of six percent of the GDP for the entire education sector, and thus the allocation of roughly one-third of that to elementary education, looked sufficient since the economy as a whole was growing. For the higher education sector, however, especially for subjects in which our students were, or could be, internationally competitive, more was needed. But, in both cases, good housekeeping and husbanding of resources were imperative and we tried to indicate a few ways and a few ways out.

I may point out here that the target of six percent was thought of in the Indian context forty years ago, after looking around the table and noting what the state spent on education in each of the world's educationally-advanced countries. Analogy is not logic. Nevertheless, let me complete this particular analogy. Six percent of the GDP is many times larger per capita in a rich country with a small population than in a poor country thinking of educating a billion people. The case for India's education sector, thanks to past neglect, has therefore become manifold stronger today.

But I should also add the statutory warning. In any sane scenario, the share of allocation for education goes up steady year after year, not all at once, for this process cannot be rushed without inviting horrendous scandals. Investment in education builds human capital. Like Rome, the human capital of any country was not built in a day.

I was reviewing all this in my mind as I listened to the experts on yet another advisory committee, called recently to find ways of reducing our projected costs of education. There was some relief expressed because of an unexpected, and still little understood, demographic projection. Simplifying it a bit, for the year 2004-05, India's children in the age group 6 to 13 years is estimated by the Census commissioner to be 194.6 million. But for 2014-15, this estimate unexpectedly falls to 189.0 million. That will be 5.6 million school children less to care for! If this is a natural trend reflecting rational parental choice, then it may well be good news at last. But could it be the growing gender disparity that was affecting child birth rates? Not being a demographer, I didn't know what to think.

I would, however, like you to think of not just this but of a more meaningful reduction in the cost of education. Remember the Central bill to activate the fundamental right to education that had to be shelved? Suppose it were revived? Suppose also the revision allowed a fast-tracking of students that let the most talented or the most hardworking to skip a couple of years on their way up in the educational ladder? Any successful fast-tracking would automatically cut costs all the way.

The types fit for fast-tracking that come to mind immediately are: (a)brilliant academic achievers who could reach their chosen professions faster if they wanted to; (b)serious students who might be glad to work harder to go through school (and college) and pass out as fast as they can, and join the workforce securing early openings and seniority in the administrative or other civil, military and management services; and (c) the equally serious students of average merit who might be induced to put in extra hard work for joining the workforce at the middle levels quickly to meet an economic constraint.

If pursued fairly, the provision of fast-tracking could not only encourage quality and hard work in teaching and learning, but also help India to be more competitive in the global knowledge market. Funnily, this would not be such a new thing for us either. Those of my students who graduated in the early Fifties made their mark in all fields years earlier than their equivalents coming up fifty years later, although for no fault or deficiency of the latter. All our students start now at Class I as five-plus or six-year olds and would be routinely disqualified, however talented, if, as "underage", they tried for a degree or admission at any point higher up — unless an imaginative high court cries foul, as Delhi thankfully has done recently, invoking the 86th Amendment and the new Article 21(A) of the Constitution.

Stumbling in their Tracks–Who will take Charge of the Right to Education?

The Telegraph, December 5, 2007

Around five ago, the Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 was enacted, and it said, "It shall come into force on such date as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint." From that appointed date a new Article 21A of the Constitution would come into force, decreeing that "the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine". Article 21A recognizes the fundamental right to education of the age-group 6 to 14 years in place of the age-group 0 to 14 years in the old Article 45 enunciated as a directive principle of state policy. What has happened to the new fundamental right? The short answer is that it is alive but not kicking.

These last five years seem to have passed quickly and eventfully for us in many ways. To put it in one word, we have started thinking of "prosperity". The sensitive index has risen to dizzy heights that were never scaled before; the gross domestic product has started rising at a faster rate and is now reportedly around 10 percent a year and expected to stay thereabouts over the next few years. Our richest capitalists have gone global in a spectacular way and are now counted among the richest in the whole world.

On top of all this there is also great enthusiasm for education in the market. There is talk of huge private investment helping to finance many of the 900 brand new universities that the Knowledge Commission wanted instituted to do justice to India's perceived predominance as the new knowledge power. Manmohan Singh, usually down-to-earth, seems to have had his imagination tiled to the extent that he got the brave Knowledge Commission's figure of 900 clipped only by one digit and put 90 new universities in his own wish-list. The Planning Commission, too, has played ball to an extent, for it has started talking of 30 new universities.

In such highly propitious circumstances, surely one could have thought that fair winds were blowing at last for India's long and difficult voyage towards universal elementary education? But though these are indeed good signs that gladden the heart, there are ominous clouds too. First the good news. Until as late as the middle of July, the prime minister had stood firmly by the framework for the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which said "the assistance to the States will be on an 85:15 sharing arrangement during the IX Plan, 75:25 during the X Plan and 50:50 thereafter". This meant that from now on it would be 50:50 until the successful completion of SSA. Since many states were in no position to sustain the movement at this ratio, it appeared to many of us that the mission was going to be choked to death and the long history of public spending on elementary education in India was coming to an ignominious end.

Fortunately, Manmohan Singh heard the voices of protest and it is practically owing to his intervention that the cabinet has changed the framework and fixed the ratios at 65:35 for the two years 2007-08, 2008-09, tapering down to 50:50 only in 2011-12. Simultaneously, at the last full meeting of the Planning Commission a very substantial increase in the allocation for SSA has been announced. This is a bigger boost than what one may immediately see. The

child population of the age group 6-13 years is now estimated for 2011-12 to be about 18 crore, which is 6.33 crore less than the original census estimate. Perhaps, at long last, the population size too has started responding to relative prosperity to a perceivable extent. So the amount we need now for universal elementary education is smaller than what we had anticipated.

Now the bad news, incongruously, is about the new fundamental right itself. The Central Advisory Board of Education sub-committee on right to education (2004), chaired by Kapil Sibal, had produced a piece of draft legislation that was discussed extensively by CABE through 2005 and a comprehensive draft was sent thereafter to the Central ministries and state governments for comment. The prime minister constituted a high level group under the chairmanship of the minister of human resource development to consider the legal and financial implications of the proposed act. The other members of the HLG are the finance minister, the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission and chairman, prime minister's economic advisory council.

Again, until at least the middle of July, the prime minister had stood firm on the question and had said, "The Centre will adopt a Model Bill on Right to Education and will take steps to persuade States to adopt such legislation." It is now understood that the HLG has not yet been able to decide on the need, or even the feasibility, of a Central legislation acceptable to the states that would, at the same time, put the onus of financial and constitutional responsibility implied in the fundamental right to education largely on the states.

What makes the Central government dither over notifying a constitutional amendment that was passed unanimously in each House five long years ago without a single dissenting voice heard from any of the members or the parties they belonged to? Why are so many of the same people in government and the opposition hemming and hawing now? The answer that comes to mind should be worrying for a democracy.

Our political leaders had often been mesmerized by their own hype and the habit cultivated through many decades of making any number of positive-sounding promises in parliament and in election manifestos without a thought for the morrow. The habit persisted because of the singular distinction made in our Constitution between fundamental rights and the directive principles of state policy. The government at the Centre or the states did not have to answer for having made a promise they knew they would not keep, unless not keeping it violated a fundamental right. Fortunately, the government's confidence in interpreting the Constitution of India can sometimes be badly shaken, as it demonstrably was by a number of Supreme Court judgments in the Nineties, notably in the case of the right to education — the famous judgment on the writ petition of J.P. Unnikrishnan and others against the State of Andhra Pradesh in 1993.

In that case, the Supreme Court for the first time read Article 45 (directive principles of state policy) along with Article 21 (fundamental rights). The court decreed that the right to education was to be construed as a fundamental right flowing from the right to life itself and Article 45 defining the relevant age-group (0 to 14 years as it then was) had to be seen only as providing the parameters within which the right to education was being defined. This judgment stays put as the law of the land at least until the 86th amendment is notified.

So the dilemma before the HLG is real, though perhaps not yet fully understood in all its ramifications. You may try to pass a Central Act and notify the 86th amendment. You

probably then will face revolt in parliament. Ministers, along with the members from different parties and states, joyfully and unanimously voted for the amendment, "innocently" thinking it "may" not be, therefore cannot be, activated by Central legislation — as a very senior politician lucidly explained to his listeners. Or you may prefer masterly inactivity. Then someone fighting for an aggrieved person may happily start a public interest litigation against the Centre or a state, claiming that the fundamental right in question already existed courtesy the Supreme Court of India and was being violated. The poor HLG, despite its formidable brain power, may not find a winning combination for Manmohan Singh in any way.

Strength of Simple Truths–Umberto Eco against Intolerance

The Telegraph, July 7, 2008

An important essay by Umberto Eco was recently carried in the opinion section of this paper. Hoping this was not just one-shot, I thought this gave me an opportunity to share with you some thoughts on Eco.

It was some years back that I first saw the small quote from the *Los Angeles Times* displayed along a few others as "Praise for Eco's *Five Moral Pieces*". Of the five short essays — all praiseworthy—to me the most memorable was the last one: "Migration, Tolerance and the Intolerable". This I later had the opportunity of placing before a committee of the University of Delhi for making it a part of the compulsory readings that were being contemplated for all the undergraduate students of the university. I will briefly come back to this piece below. Incidentally, I hope some of the new universities that are expected to come up as also some of the more venerable ones would also pay attention to Delhi University's bold initiative in selecting some important compulsory readings for all would–be-graduates irrespective of their specialized courses of study.

The quote I referred to said: "The spirit of enlightenment breathes through the writings of Umberto Eco... an urbane genial writer who brings calmness and clarity to every subject he treats." I was a little taken aback by the part of the praise showered on Eco that lauded his "calmness". Obviously, the poor *Los Angeles* critic had completely missed the main point about Eco — the zero tolerance of volcanic dimensions that his calm surface covers. But I would let it go for now, for there is no disputing the immense clarity of Eco's logical mind and his ability to handle complex structures in terms of principles stated with the utmost simplicity of a Tolstoy or a Gandhi. If you disagree with his contention, or any of the derivations that he draws from it, you will find his openness and clarity let you see why almost at once.

For example, Eco reveals a distinct preference for external humanitarian interventions over mere internal moral protests when the civil society within a country comes under an unbearable stress. I would not go along with that. At least not in cases where the only available intervening power has a very large material interest in things such as the minerals or oil reserves in the affected area. Perhaps most people of my generation who have seen the cataclysms caused by the gutsy adventurers of the West into lands that once were revered as the seats of the three great religions of the world, and the meeting ground of the best of Eastern and Western civilizations, would not agree with it either.

Eco, in fact, is even in favour of supporting external intervention to cure internal social maladies to the extent of supporting an external power even in its inflicting the harshest punishments available or conceivable, including the death penalty for the planners and perpetrators of mass tragedies and their menial accomplices in government and police — though it is here that he falters a bit. Eco confesses to be a non-believer in actually taking a human life which is the capital punishment a civil society can inflict. In which case, Eco's use

of the term "hanging" with approval has to be understood, as Dickens would have said, "only in the Pickwickian sense".

The strength of Umberto Eco's spirit lies, I think, not in actual prescriptions for what to do but in his reassertion of simple truths as explanations of most of the mischief that surrounds us, we suffer from, and are baffled by. Along with this he has, as anyone who read *The Name of the Rose* would have noticed, the ability of crime fiction writers of several genres — a Conan Doyle, an Edgar Allan Poe or even a homely Agatha Christie — to see through the webs of complicated lies that people like to believe in or rather make other people believe in as alibis.

In short, Eco is a natural disbeliever in all conspiracy theories. I would like to be on his side. But I have a difficulty in accepting this as a determining principle because modern macro-conspiracies are known to exist in real life. But I do also think simple truth is an amulet of the kind Gandhi used, that works, though not always without fail.

Eco does not look at large, even catastrophic, influxes of humanity fleeing from repressive regimes into your country as a problem to be necessarily dealt with sternly. For example, in strict accordance with your existing immigration laws. With all my heart going out to refugees who are mostly victims of circumstances beyond their control, I however also feel strong sympathy for countries like India desperately trying to make economic progress at great cost and trying to guard its own economic frontiers peacefully.

Funnily, contrary to perhaps what one would have expected of him, Umberto Eco, unlike a Gandhi or a Tolstoy, moved in a more complex universe. As a result, he was drawn to the tantalizing and mysterious world of detective fiction like moths to light. But Eco's has been an interesting inversion, since Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple and their kind have made their name and fame through believing that the obvious could not be true. Eco, a disbeliever in mysterious global conspiracies, points out that the immediate answer to "Whodunit?" is generally also the true one, which fact most of the time is either played down or just discarded in the best of detective fiction because it provides a less spectacular solution to the mystery.

To get to the root of an intolerable social malady—the continuing cruelties of the dowry system, the communal riots and the unending acts of cross-border terrorism immediately come to mind in the Indian context — Umberto Eco finds the existing legal processes unacceptable for long if you are honestly interested in the immediate dispensation of justice. To look around for mitigating circumstances only denies justice of any kind, so forget it, Eco would say. We shall not get out of this circularity, he writes in one place, "until it is decided when exceptional events occur, humanity cannot afford to apply the laws currently in force".

What is intolerable, Eco points out, is uncontrolled intolerance that intellectuals cannot really fight "because when faced with pure unthinking animality, thought finds itself defenceless". It is already too late for the intellectuals when intolerance has been transformed into doctrine. I end here with the lines from the "moral piece" that stirred me purely as an educationist — I don't pretend to be a certified intellectual: "Yet it is here that the challenge lies. To inculcate tolerance in adults who shoot at one another for ethnic and religious reasons is a waste of time. Too late. Therefore uncontrolled intolerance has to be beaten at the roots, through constant education that starts from earliest infancy, before it is written down in a book, and before it becomes a behavioural skin that is too thick and too tough."

Forgotten Storyteller–The Many Dimensions of T.N. Mukherjee

The Telegraph, October 1, 2009

I have said this before and am saying it again. We are a remarkably forgetful nation. Some of our greats we remember on their birthdays. Tagore is very special in our lives, so we remember the poet twice a year on his birthday and death anniversary. And, of course, since he almost created the modern Bengali language, we find ourselves using his words several times in a day. But many of the rest will be forgotten— those who could also make us feel proud if we only remembered them.

All this possibly gives us a guilt complex of a special kind, and we compensate by renaming streets and lanes after people. However, the important point is not that we still continue to use the old names for a long long time, as one of The Telegraph's correspondents has rightly pointed out. There is a more tragic fate awaiting the new names. Very soon some of the persons we honour today will be forgotten. After all, what's in a name? Who remembers today who Choku Khansama or Kalidas Patitundi were?

All this crossed my mind when I saw that at long last, Trailokyanath Mukherjee's *A Visit to Europe*, published in 1889 and translated into Bengali by Parimal Goswami only eighty years later, has been republished this year in Bengali with annotations. My heart leapt for joy and I am eagerly waiting to see the Bengali edition but, frankly, I also feel a bit apprehensive, for the words of approbation in the publisher's notice are as follows, in my translation, "The readers will surely taste the flavour of traveling in Europe in the late 19th century, looking at it through the sharp eyes of Trailokyanath." I have not read the book, but the notice did not bear any testimony to the original purpose of Mukherjee's travels in Europe.

Did they know who this man was? He was not only the creator of a new genre of Bengali literature, he was also a pioneer in the study of India's "industrial evolution" in the 19th century, as D.R. Gadgil had described the phenomenon in his book of 1920. T.N. Mukherjee — that is the name by which the Western world knew him — was, of course, much more than that. It would be sufficient to say here that he organized the famous international exhibition of Indian industrial products in Calcutta in 1883 where he was reportedly awarded a medal by the visiting Russian tsarevich. Mukherjee also created a descriptive catalogue of Indian produce contributed to the Amsterdam exhibition of 1883. He was quite possibly responsible for organizing the Indian portion of the 1886 colonial and Indian exhibition in London at the height of Queen Victoria's reign.

Trailokyanath was nothing if not versatile. Many years later, he would be giving evidence before the International Opium Commission on the different kinds of addiction to opium and the consequences. He was considered by the English to be their expert on narcotics. One has to remember that Mukherjee was considered an authority on India's trade channels, both open and clandestine, with the rest of the world. At that time, of course, India was the largest supplier of opium and opium products to the world.

In the course of his duties, Mukherjee must have travelled through Europe not once, but several times. Apart from the travelogue that was translated into Bengali and has now been annotated, Mukherjee wrote two highly valued books in English on Indian industrial products

in the 19th century In 1883, came *A Handbook of Indian Products* and in 1888, *Art Manufactures of India.*

But this was not all. Apart from Trailokyanath, the fantastic storyteller in Bengali, and T.N. Mukherjee, the Westernized scholar renowned in an area that today would have overlapped with economics, geography and commerce, there was a third dimension to the man that could easily be missed if one did not look for it in his most abiding writing of all, *Kankabati*. I am talking here of the social aspect of the Kankabati story that comes out clearly, but fortunately falls just short of spoiling the 'children's tale' aspect of it. Rabindranath Tagore, whose 1892 review of the book has now been republished from *Sadhana* as a foreword to *Kankabati*, obviously did not want to emphasize the former aspect.

I have to admit here I had remained sold to both Kankabati and her creator from my childhood. I was told stories alongside vivid commentaries on Trailokyanath's habits and character by one who had been his dear little cousin and who always fought for "Trailokya-*dada*" in familial confabulations. She was herself brought up in a very orthodox family and in the conservative way that was usual then. Many of the idiosyncrasies of her heavily Westernized but anti-*sahib dada* she just hated. But I always felt she understood him and his cavalier ways of attacking family customs, purposeless obeisance to a *sahib* wherever and whenever one was found, and the meaningless village superstitions that abounded rather better than most of his other relatives and friends. She would share all this with her own son who was then growing up and, much later, with me when she was in her eighties. Her son was my maternal grandfather. I must warn you that the rest of my tale is only hearsay. My great grandmother told me all this, always finishing with her beautiful, toothless smile and laughter.

First story. Trailokyanath, who was tall, fair and handsome, appears in military khaki and helmet with only a big brown moustache worn as an extra piece of disguise, and an afterthought, at their ancestral house in the village of Rauto, near Kolkata (I think). He shouts in deep-throated English for every male member to come out and answer questions. Quickly a procession of shaken, half-dressed gentlemen trickles out with joined palms. "Why have you come out?" he shouts to them and then, to add to his authority, pulls at his moustache, which comes off. Before he could reverse the mistake, one of his uncles rushes up to him and starts thrashing the fallen hero mercilessly.

Second story. Trailokyonath gathers a dozen sturdy but sheepish young men of the village to drive out ghosts from the trees where they supposedly come to haunt innocent people by night. Taking unfair advantage, thieves also came every night and made off with whatever goodies they could lay their hands on. Three ghosts were spotted on the first night, but on being accosted, they uttered mantras and vanished. The *chowkidar* assured the young men next morning that this was what all good ghosts would do. There was one consolation though — thieves had also not appeared. On the next night, everything ditto. Three ghosts duly appeared up on a tree and, hell being raised, two held on to the branches, while one jumped down naked and was caught. It was the *chowkidar*! The other two could not, or would not, shed their *dhotis*, all three *dhotis* sticking firmly to a heavy glue that had been thickly spread on the branches under Trailokyonath's able guidance.

Trying to look up Mukherjee on the internet, I could locate most of the facts. The fiction part, however, is understandably missing. But to my mind, that fiction is most of the truth about T.N. Mukherjee, the social reformer. I also found somebody on the internet describing Trailokyanath as an important reformer belonging to the Brahmo Samaj — I cannot vouch for the truth of that either.

A Shift in Horizons–The Agenda may be changing for the Nobel Prize in Economics

The Telegraph, October 22, 2009

I have just finished reading, in this column of *The Telegraph*, Bhaskar Dutta's most helpful introduction to the works of the two new Nobel laureates in economics. I want to make a small comment myself, flowing from Dutta's thoughtful observations. But before that I must tell you about another reaction to the event that I have seen with a certain degree of amazement. It is doing the rounds (through emails) from the day after the prizes were announced — many of my readers must have seen it too.... It goes in the name of Steven Levitt.

Steven D. Levitt is the William B. Ogden Distinguished Service Professor of economics at the University of Chicago, where he directs the Becker Center on Chicago Price Theory. Levitt received his PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1994. He has been teaching at Chicago since 1997.

In 2004, Levitt was awarded the John Bates Clark Medal, awarded to the most influential economist under the age of 40. In 2006, he was named one of *Time Magazine's* "100 people who shape our world". Without a question, young Levitt is Nobel class himself, apart from being the principal author of *Freakonomics*, which has sold over three million copies in all the principal languages of the Western world. Let us look first at what Levitt has to say about this year's prize. His note is entitled, "What this year's Nobel prize in economics says about the Nobel prize in economics", which, I must admit, is a very winning title by itself. It follows partly like this:

"Earlier today, Elinor Ostrom and Oliver Williamson were awarded the Nobel Prize in economics for their work on the role of institutions. If you had done a poll of academic economists yesterday and asked who Elinor Ostrom was, or what she worked on, I doubt that more than one in five economists could have given you an answer. I personally would have failed the test. I have no recollection of ever seeing or hearing her name mentioned by an economist. She is a political scientist, both by training and her career — one of the most decorated political scientists around…

"Economists want this to be an economists' prize. This award demonstrates, in a way that no previous prize has, that the prize is moving toward a Nobel in Social Science, not a Nobel in economics."

Levitt is a bit kinder to Oliver Williamson, I noticed. The only negative point of his about Williamson was that he had not been cited or talked about by other economists over the last 15 years. But the older economists, it is conceded, might feel rather happy about this award.

Bhaskar Dutta, happily, did not go into the question of the social ordering of the relative merits of highly merited people — which question at one time he or his mentor, Prasanta Pattanaik, might surely have been delighted to take up. He has done a more prosaic but far more important work. He has introduced us to one area of economic administration of activity where markets do not exist: the individually unowned commons that belong to

nobody, but belong to all. And thankfully, he is not distressed by the presence of non-economists as participants in the question and sometimes as the leading contributors to its delineation — leading to at least the first stages of its solution.

Dutta has not called Ostrom, I am glad to see, a *political scientist*. He has pointed out that Ostrom's claim to fame is her work on the classes of problems labelled the "tragedy of the commons", a term incidentally coined by the biologist, Garrett Hardin, for situations where individual property rights over a resource are not well-defined — the "resource" could be the stock of fish in the ocean, or groundwater, or forests on public land.

Nobel prizes are always chancy. Joan Robinson was voted into the shortlist year after year after year but she never made it. Amartya Sen was on the list several times but missed it repeatedly. He got it, I think, the third time. As usual, every time we had heard he was in the shortlist we hoped for the best. I remember an amusing story we heard about this that I may share with the readers — I am sure Amartya will not mind. Every time he was shortlisted and then got to the very last lap, he would tell only his mother (whom we all adored). She would look forward to it only to be disappointed. Then came the happy ending and Amartya rang her up at night to say that he had got it. Mashima replied, "You poor boy, go to sleep" — thinking this was some prank played on him by somebody. One reason for my telling you this is that Amartya too was perhaps not quite the economist the Chicago market-economics monetary-economics school wanted to see taking the prize in the end. I may be entirely wrong. But the passion with which the great Professor Levitt has written about the prize being captured by the wrong people makes me wonder.

Whatever it is, Chicago seems to have taken it rather badly. And they are partly justified too. After all, fully trained, high-calibre economists had been reading, writing, researching and talking about the cyclical movements of the economy and how to deal with these efficiently and quickly with enlightened market management techniques. This had gone on over all of the last 70 years, more or less to their entire satisfaction. They are entitled to be a little baffled by the sights at the battlefield. The welfare economists, too, did not know exactly what to say. It is time, therefore, for changing horizons, changing agenda, changing paradigms, as Thomas Kuhn might have visualized it: a time of revolutionary change in social science disciplines.

A final comment. Dutta reports that both the prize-winners were rank outsiders with the betting firms. Ladbrokes offered odds of 50-1 on either of them getting the prize. "At least two of my colleagues in the economics department in Warwick, as well as a very well-known economist visiting us from the United States of America, had not heard of Elinor Ostrom." The Ladbrokes judgment was understandable and so the odds showed what they did: very low probability of either candidate winning. But the betting firm knew a little better: the two candidates had exactly the same probability of winning. For the economics prize, Ladbrokes made no distinction between economics and political science. Someone guessed right: Elinor Ostrom, political scientist, and Oliver Williamson, a slightly backdated economist, each had a small, but absolutely equal, chance of winning the Nobel and they did. Ladbrokes knew better than the large crowd of up-to-the-minute economists observing the race.

Lessons yet Unlearnt–To be a Good University, Presidency must recapture its Prime

The Telegraph, December 7, 2009

As I heard the long-awaited good news that a bill to make Presidency College into Presidency University was in the offing, what came to mind was my 20 years at Presidency as teacher in the Fifties and Sixties and then barely keeping in touch from distant Delhi in the decades following. The Fifties to the Seventies was when Presidency's economics department was in full bloom. I was recently going through (with some self-satisfaction and pride too) what some of our students spreading over almost 30 years — not all Economics honours students—have been writing about us. They, in many cases, have been attributing the undeniable good health of the department over that period to a body of good teachers who were bunched together and stayed together in the economics department. To set the record absolutely right I must add here one rider to an implicit proposition that went with such an assessment. Presidency in my time had several highly distinguished professors in physics and other science departments. There were great teachers in the other Arts departments too. I am talking here only of my own experience in the department of economics (or rather economics and political science).

Those of our teachers found bunched together were assembled more by accident than design, and they were bunched, at least in economics, together with students of astonishingly high academic ability and great academic ambition. They contrived their own self-teaching plans sometimes taking the teacher into confidence. Our credit, as Bhabatosh Datta often used to warn me, lay not so much in teaching them high theory but in not leading them astray. In course of my rather longish life in teaching youngsters I have learnt that what Bhabatoshbabu said was absolutely right but it was a very tall order to follow.

I deny nothing to the participants of those exceptionally successful teacher-student joint ventures. But had that phenomenon in the case of economics and the cases of several other departments just happened, without premeditation? My answer would be yes, but with the rider I have already hinted at. The undeniable success stories were not necessarily destined to be one-off cases: there was a method to what was happening over that period which we have not fully worked out. We the professors, and the students who came out and rose to be professors in their turn, somehow, somewhere, failed to carry on business as usual when we found, as the Americans say, it was too hot in the kitchen. To change the metaphor, we simply missed the bus. But I like to think it may not be too late to recapture the habit of producing students like yesterday again. In any case, even the lessons not learnt should be interesting to the builders of today.

All this is mere prolegomena to what I really wanted to say. Some of us at the Presidency of that period had been trying to say this to the rest of the world over a period of at least three decades. How and when does a good college with good teachers become a good university? The answer to the question has to be uncompromisingly unequivocal. A good college is not necessarily in the same state in all its departments. The teachers of some of its

departments might be accepted by the academic fraternity as equals of well-known university teachers. But this is a recognition that cannot be doled out officially by any designated authority even of universities or recommended to the government by the University Grants Commission (whatever its act might say under Section 3).

Great teachers like a Susobhan Sarkar or a Bhabatosh Datta were accepted as great by their students first. Then the good news spread and they were talked about within the teaching communities that some of their students had joined as teachers after college. Else they migrated to other universities in the country or abroad. Their reputations within the international academic community were mostly gained not only through publications, citations and so on. The legend grew with the passage of time.

We have to remember that authentication by students and fellow academics did not always depend on the publication of books and papers — important as these are. In our own department, I remember Nabendu Sen was universally regarded as one of the very best in the area we called Indian economics — without his publishing many significant papers. He was shy and also not a great orator. But some of our students who had travelled to MIT or Harvard or other centres of academic distinction and were, in my perception, choosy and even highbrow, reported again and again that they had met none better than Nabendu Sen in his field. I also remember how very firmly Bhabatosh Datta had to speak in front of the Public Service Commission before they conceded and Nabendu was selected as an assistant professor at Presidency. I do not blame the government for this. I only blame the system that set down that a government or a commission composed mostly of non-experts was best suited as an agency to dispose of academic matters and decide who should be given a university teacher's status and who should be left out.

There is a second question involved that has to be squarely faced. If Presidency does not want to shift gear and turn from being a very good undergraduate college (remember once it was India's best) into another easy-going and indifferent university, it will have to introspect and take a number of hard steps — otherwise the whole point of the exercise and of our dreams will be lost. I will end by mentioning one step that I consider to be absolutely crucial. Presidency must use its autonomy and whatever money it can lay its hands on to revive undergraduate teaching and take it to the highest level possible. To be a world-class university at the postgraduate level in all subjects will remain a distant dream for a long time. To be one of the world's better universities with a very strong undergraduate section engaged in basic studies and laying the foundations of basic research in the arts and sciences for the country as a whole is not an impossible task for Presidency.

There is no reason why Presidency cannot be as good as Trinity or King's or the London School of Economics in its undergraduate programmes under the best and the highest-paid professors it can recruit. Postgraduate studies and research will come as a consequence and gain attention from the rest of the world in its own good time. The fame of LSE, Cambridge and Oxford is still basically, built on undergraduate teaching in their BA or BSc programmes.

I will end by another of my usual anecdotes. Professor Dipak Banerjee was noted for championing the "Presidency University" cause. It was also he who pointed out to me once that we wrongly thought our system of university education was based on the British pattern: we never followed the pattern of Oxford, Cambridge or London with their great colleges. I

remember when I was a member of the UGC I too had strongly advocated university status for Presidency. One day, I heard him say quietly, "I hope you and I are not fighting for turning the best college in the country into its worst university." He had been talking, of course, before the days of the hundreds of "deemed" universities.

Journey's End–Paul A. Samuelson and the New Economics

The Telegraph, December 16, 2009

Paul A. Samuelson (May 15, 1915 — December 13, 2009) has often been described as the foremost academic economist of the 20th century. Randall E. Parker, the economic historian, has called him the "Father of Modern Economics".

All this may be hotly disputed in Chicago, but in any case, Samuelson was the first American to receive the Nobel prize in economic sciences. The Swedish Royal Academy's citation stated that he "has done more than any other contemporary economist to raise the level of scientific analysis in economic theory".

Probably this was a correct summing up of his magnificent set of contributions to many parts of economics, fluently using the language of mathematics. I first came across the statement, "Mathematics is a language," in his *Foundations of Economic Analysis*, which had exhilarated me 60 years ago. I have to admit, though somewhat shamefacedly, I myself never learnt enough of that language to use it beyond a rudimentary level in my own papers.

Even more important perhaps than his use of mathematics was his use of logic that would place him, in my personal opinion, among the very best economists of all time. Samuelson began his conquest of the theoretical economist's mind, first, by stating the basic requirement of all economic theorems. It was the necessity of formulating, step by step, what he called "operationally meaningful" propositions, which had to satisfy the criterion of "refutability". A proposition in economics he would call "meaningless" if it was not patently refutable, if wrong. In fact, Samuelson's exposition of the logic of this requirement, even as early as in his doctoral dissertation (if I remember correctly), was the first extension to the social sciences (and *probably independently visualized* too) of Karl Popper's similar requirement of *falsifiability* of propositions in science as the prime criterion in his famous *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Thus came into being Samuelson's concept of "revealed preference" in consumer behaviour theory replacing the indifference curves of J.R. Hicks (also to be a Nobel laureate) and R.G.D. Allen.

I have spoken of only one dimension of Samuelson's many-dimensional work. I have done so only because I had once developed an interest in, and a little firsthand knowledge of, this dimension. Samuelson had many dimensions and I am sure my readers would come to hear of some of these from other more accomplished economists. It is my personal surmise that it was his fascination with refutability as the main criterion of economic propositions that held him back from writing on the later social choice theorems of Kenneth Arrow and Amartya Sen, though I am told he was very much aware and appreciative of their algebra of logic too.

Let me talk a little of Samuelson's astonishing ability in talent scouting and, of course, his ability to get along with widely different characters. When one hears of the resolve of some ministers, bureaucrats and educational experts in Delhi to turn out world-class universities in India by the dozen, I cannot but think of my own subject and of Samuelson turning the Massachusetts Institute of Technology into a world-class centre for economics. He had joined

MIT as assistant professor after his PhD at Harvard because, I had once heard, he had not seen much prospect there since — wait a minute — he was Jewish. This, of course, was more than 60 years back. Harvard is obviously quite a different place now.

At MIT, Samuelson was instrumental in turning a mere economics department of an institute of technology into a world-renowned institution by itself. He was able to attract an unbelievably gifted set of economists and persuade them to join the faculty at MIT. The list included Robert Solow, Paul Krugman, Franco Modigliani, Robert Merton and Joseph Stiglitz. All of them had gone on to win their Nobel prizes. I have not heard of any other success story in talent scouting like this.

Samuelson wrote a weekly column for *Newsweek* magazine along with the famous Chicago school economist, Milton Friedman, who remained his friend and adversary, the two representing opposing sides of the tradition of modern economics: Samuelson took the liberal, Keynesian perspective, and Friedman represented the free-market libertarian view. They carried on with their lively debate in *Newsweek*. I thought that in these, Samuelson showed his gentle side and his friend the opposite one. I was lucky to watch on television a long debate between the two which was absolutely fascinating. I was, of course, on Samuelson's side as a listener. I must admit I was a little disappointed to hear Samuelson arguing that one has to respect social conscience even if it is outside the economist's world of discourse. Later I heard (or perhaps read), Amartya saying something like this. I thought both of them were giving ground unnecessarily because both, in their own ways, had actually expanded the horizon of the science of economics itself. Both had thereby legitimately widened the universe of discourse in economics. Modern economics need not be apologetic about this.

In this context, I wish to pay small tribute to the memory of Samuelson and try to speak of how once he had gone out of his way to help me organize my own thoughts as a young researcher in the 1950s. I never had the opportunity of knowing him in person. But one of best friends, the late Ajit Biswas, was his student at MIT. Ajit was in the first batch of Smith Mundt and Fulbright scholars selected by the United States Educational Foundation in India and was admitted to MIT for his graduate studies. He had come close to Samuelson — in those days it was still possible for young graduate students to be close to great professors.

I was still only a young teacher at Presidency trying to find my way and had just written a short paper. But it looked to me as if it was outside the purview of economics, although I could not figure out what exactly it was. I had recently read Arrow's famous book on social choice and the idea of writing that paper had come out of this. Since I did not know whom to ask — Bhabatosh Datta had already gone to the International Monetary Fund in Washington DC — I sent the paper to Ajit to find out. He took it straight to his professor for his opinion. Samuelson wrote a longish letter to me on this paper and gave his advice in detail. I regret to have lost that letter. It said that he thought my exercise was in what he called "political arithmetic" and he had liked it and wanted me to send it to *Econometrica* for publication. It came out in early 1956, when I had just joined London School of Economics as a PhD student myself. I had, of course, acknowledged Samuelson's contribution in that paper. His advice helped change my career by telling me what I vaguely had known — that the horizon of modern economics itself was changing. After Samuelson, Arrow and then, of course, Amartya Sen, economists need not have been diffident about including social questions in formal economics and in a wider format.

Paul Samuelson died at the age of 94—a ripe old age even by modern standards of life expectancy. But he would be missed by those who knew him well enough, and even by people whose lives he touched and influenced without ever knowing it.

Spell of a Different Kind

The telegraph, February 11, 2010

"Minds in thrall" (January 19) brought back memories of my own youth and its surrounding political world — memories of the late 1940s and early 1950s, when I would spend time moving to and fro between Presidency College, the always cramped university, and the Coffee House (which had become our common room for lack of space in more authentic academic surroundings).

I can also remember those enchanting moments that I spent looking at, and sometimes gently turning the pages of, the old, discarded books enterprising small-time booksellers used to put up on the railings of our campus in College Street. Those were the days when we at Presidency thought we were the people, or at least had the right to think it all out on their behalf. Communism came easily to mind without the guidance of Rajani Palme Dutt. I remember Dutt came to Calcutta once and, on his insistence, was led to the ancestral house where R.C. Dutt had lived. But he-probably did not visit Presidency College.

Bhabatosh Datta once said to me jokingly: "Anyone under 22 in our times who was not thrilled or even enthralled by communist ideas and ideals had to be a fool. Anyone older remaining a full-fledged communist would have to be mad — whether one had remained actively in the party or not." Jyoti Basu was not mad. He was human. He was also humane. He tried in all his political actions to think of *manush,* the current version of *janagan* or people. His fault was that of nearly all political personalities. They thought — Marxists, Leninists, Trotskyites, Stalinists, Maoists, grassroot Didi-ites, or people climbing the great banyan tree that was the Congress — that all *manush* were equal but some *manush* were more manush than others. It is nothing new — the Greeks had thought democracy (they called the better version of democracy "the polity") belonged to all good people provided they were well-born, male and Greek.

As Rudrangshu Mukherjee said in "Minds in thrall", Basu had once been called a *sahib* communist. That epithet referred to those sons of affluent Calcutta families who had been drawn to communism in the 1930s in England. Many of them went to one of the Oxbridge universities. Others, perhaps equally endowed in financial resources and brain power, but less inclined towards academics, were drawn to one of the Inns of Court. For them, the option of radicalism led to one of middle-class Calcutta's age-old dreams: life at one of the Inns and return to Calcutta as barrister. Radicalism usually meant joining the London Majlis and similar bodies. Sometimes there was an overlap of the hunting grounds of the two radical groups at the London School of Economics, particularly around Harold Laski, a mesmerizing professor of political science who later became the non-conformist (and non-performing) chairman of the Labour Party.

Indian political leaders, including communists, did not always live a simple life. P.C. Joshi was one the few communist leaders who lived simply, almost at the level of the working class or, later at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, at the level of ordinarily paid teachers. There were also those like K.C. George, who lived almost in the Gandhian style in Kerala. Then there was Indrajit Gupta, who lived in a two-room apartment at the Western Court, and walked to the Lok Sabha until he became a minister. Subsequently he too shunned many of the facilities he was entitled to. When he was minister, he never allowed the official car to enter the airport

tarmac and used the airline bus to reach the terminal. But even the number of old-time communists who opted for a simple lifestyle was not large.

The revolutionaries of the 1950s did not carry their political egos about all the time. In my first year at university, we heard a funny story, perhaps exaggerated, about Gupta, who was then underground at the orders of the Communist Party of India secretary, B.T. Ranadive. His alias was Surya. At the same time, his elder brother was very high up in the civil service hierarchy as the home secretary or perhaps even the chief secretary of West Bengal. "Surya" had to remain underground, but he surfaced from time to time at his father's bidding, and the two brothers would be forced to have dinner together. How our secret police managed to keep their sleuths away we never found out. While this may have been a concocted story, many of even my CPI-oriented classmates found it endearing.

An account given by Amartya Sen on receiving the Nobel honour is about his days at Cambridge with three professors with very different political identities. Sen found the peaceful — indeed warm — coexistence of the brilliant but theoretically unaccommodating Maurice Dobb, D.H. Robertson and Pierre Srafa quite remarkable and wrote: "Srafa told me a nice anecdote about Dobb's joining of Trinity, on the invitation of Robertson. When asked by Robertson whether he would like to teach at Trinity, Dobb said yes enthusiastically, but he suffered later from a deep sense of guilt in not having given Robertson 'the full facts'. So he wrote a letter to Robertson apologizing for not having mentioned earlier that he was a card-holding member of the Communist Party. Robertson wrote a one-sentence reply: 'Dear Dobb, so long as you give us a fortnight's notice before blowing up the Chapel, it will be all right.'"

The perception of the communist binding himself hand and foot had limitations, because of the nature of the Social Man. Even revolutionaries had kept some things hidden in their hearts. I knew of many who secretly fretted and some eventually broke the mental shackles they were meant to carry by the Communist Party of Great Britain or, rather, that mighty dictatorship which stood behind its meddling in the Indian subcontinent—the Third International or Comintern. I often think it was this meddling that was largely responsible for the communists' blunders of disowning Gandhi's Quit India call and Netaji's "Delhi *chalo"* call.

In Calcutta, we have had many communist parties. Once a friend counted a dozen of them, all infallible, all swearing by Marx and Lenin, some adding Trotsky or Stalin and finally Mao Zedong to their list. I do not think ideological differences had everything to do with this. The CPI's split, for example, never could be explained ideologically without counting the personal preferences of strong-willed leaders. If you tried, you would end up with a puzzle: Gupta and Hiren Mukherjee in one segment and Basu in another. All our political leaders had been bothered by their egos — only a few knew what good behaviour was and what was unacceptable. It was West Bengal's good fortune that Basu was one of those few. The profusion of tributes at his passing, I think, was Calcutta's way of saying goodbye to the *bhadraloks* of a bygone century.

The Oldest Routes–An Annual Report on Migration in the Past, Present and Future

The Telegraph, March 15, 2010

I want to tell you today about a well-researched report on the migration question that has just been produced. While delineating the future contours of a policy-making base on migration through engagements within the academia, a plan had been mooted by the ministry of overseas Indian affairs for starting the publication of an annual migration report. This was to be on the basis of ongoing research along the lines preferred by the annual world development or human development reports. It was suggested that each such annual volume may focus on a particular theme. It is in keeping with this idea that the first in the series, *India Migration Report 2009*, has been produced under the general editorship of Binod Khadria, professor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University. The first year's theme is understandably comprehensive: "Past, Present and the Future Outlook" on Indian migration.

Perhaps as far back in history as the times of the ascendancy of Greek, Roman and Egyptian civilizations in Mediterranean Europe — or even earlier times — Indians went on foreign voyages or travelled along the famous land routes joining India and Central Asia. On these journeys, the principal European markets had once depended and thrived. We went to them and they came to us. Almost unknowingly, cultural interfaces between the East and the West grew or were explored. We jointly created cultures that would thrive through the ages. The Gandhara and other civilizations in Asia came into existence and created art and cultures that lasted for centuries despite occasional ravages by fanatical marauders. That inheritance was treasured even when the original actors had long since left the scene. In some parts of the world, the task of intermingling of civilizations was left mainly to the seasonal curiosity of the casual tourist. But there always were more important interactions, with the conquistadors, between traders and with scholars who had gone abroad and occasionally had stayed back.

I have begun by saying all this because I had been recently listening to the Greek minister for—I think — tourism, addressing an external affairs ministry seminar on the subject of the growing importance of tourism between countries. I happened to be chairing that session.

The minister from Greece did not seem to care much about the Gandhara sculpture and architecture, not to speak of Greece's own share in that famous joint venture. Imagine my discomfort when the minister told me he was most gratified to meet one in far-off India who thought so highly of ancient Greece's cultural links. He perhaps expected governments to stick to current realities and encourage academics to do the same.

It was the Ptolemaic dynasty, historians tell us, that had initiated Graeco-Roman maritime trade contact with India, using the Red Sea ports. The historian, Strabo, interestingly, once noted a vast increase in trade following the Roman annexation of Egypt. His account indicates that the hazards of the Indian monsoon were well known in Athens, Rome and Alexandria. These place-names are still familiar to the modern world. Unfortunately, those of the three or four Indian ports also mentioned by the old Roman and Greek historians are not discernible, at least to me. I very much wonder if even our historians would be able to identify these places with certainty because even the port sites might not have remained. But this does

not mean trade between India and the hub of the European civilization was not as important and as flourishing then as it is today.

The sea-trade routes of old had to be cleverly devised to make them cost-effective and also protected from both the pirates of the sea and the havocs of nature in the season the monsoon winds and rains came. Similarly, the famous trade routes by land — the spice route and the silk route — had to be as carefully maintained and properly guarded against marauders on roads spreading from what is modern Afghanistan through Central Asia. The sea and land trade routes were used then, as in modern times, for transporting physical capital and merchandise. But they must have been carrying human capital too. Indian enclaves were present in Alexandria. Christian and Jewish settlers from Rome lived in India in settlements during and even after the fall of the Roman Empire.

I had once seen an Egyptian mummy lying in its coffin. Parts of the body seemed covered in a delicate fabric that I was told came from India. That mummy probably was a few thousand years old. The covering fabric looked suspiciously like fine cotton that could well have come all the way from East India where the famous muslin would one day become world-renowned. I would not be surprised if some Indian merchants or even technicians were around when the mummy's dressing was being put on. The use of Indian products might well have needed accompanying experts. Perhaps some of the Indian settlers living in Alexandria and elsewhere in the Old World were only welcome high-quality manpower. They would have been among the original non-resident Indians who had endowed themselves with India-made human capital but were stationed abroad for servicing their country's wares when needed.

The path into the future for researchers has many steps to tread. Migration of people from India, particularly over the last two centuries, led them to many parts of the world, which now constitute a sizable minority community in many countries. The presence of Indian migrants in more than a hundred countries and their contributions in social, cultural, economic and political spheres have made them important not only in their adopted countries but for India as well. It is only towards the closing two decades of the 20th century that migration has started catching greater attention from policymakers, the academia and civil society. There are a small number of academics involved in pursuing research at different universities and institutions in the country and a few civil society organizations voicing their concern about international migration. Nonetheless, these are still scattered and need further consolidation.

The Khadria group report has been produced by a team of experts. It is based on research taking stock of the trajectories of Indian migration we have seen in the recent past and speculating on what seems to lie ahead. The report covers several issues relating to international migration, primarily *from* but also *to* India. It covers concerns that have been on our minds for years, for example, remittances, gender, migration of health professionals and so on. At the same time, there are issues which are of more recent vintage, like terrorism, security and climate change. The report also discusses various policy perspectives across countries.

The final chapter of the report is on the outlook for migration. Research here is difficult because information on many important aspects of migration is not easily available. It is also difficult because one has to link up data collected on apparently unrelated aspects, such as stocks and flows of people moving from India to other countries and into India, remittances and their utilization, temporary and permanent migration, issues related to integration, gender,

illegal migration, terrorism, security, climate change and soon. This list can be extended *ad infinitum* and one can be sure there will be other issues that will make the question of human migration even trickier. It was good to find that the researchers — if not governments — were fully aware of that, being unencumbered with the compulsions of current policy.

Small Change, Big move–Repeating truisms will not make Education World-class

The Telegraph, July 5, 2010

Recently we have had some excellent common-sense suggestions on education emanating from within the academia. I hope these are not voices in the wilderness, though there is also a surrounding cacophony that may drown these voices. The noise comes from experts who seem to think it is necessary to go on reiterating a few indisputable (and undisputed) propositions as parts of education policy.

Nobody can have a dispute with truisms. What may be disputable, however, lies around the question of their relevance for deciding what needs to be done now and in the immediate future, and how feasible the projected outcomes are within the promised time span. The usually allowed truisms of the kind 'two plus two make four' by themselves will not take us far: factual projections have to go a little further and examine the feasibility of what is being targeted within a projected time frame. To give an example, what I call only a truism is currently in vogue. It has caught the attention of the policymakers mainly because it is simple to remember and easy to repeat without any fear of contradiction. It goes as follows: a large number of richly endowed national universities (all world-class) will serve India's needs in the higher education sector better than a small number of meagrely endowed universities that we have now got.

Who has ever disputed that? If a very large number of new world-class universities (say 30—the suggested number goes on swinging around it) have to be set up in India — most of them from scratch—covering every state of our republic, as has been promised, then that would be an excellent thing. If, moreover, these could be run from places (like Noida, for example) hitherto unsuspected of the capability of running institutions of postgraduate teaching (not to speak of postdoctoral research), the new world-class universities would be nonpareil in the whole world. If these could be fully functioning even in five decades and also be given credible world-class leadership (with vice-chancellors of the standing that one associates with world-class universities and professors, some of whom would be their academic equals or even better, as it happens in Oxford, Cambridge or London), then that indeed would be wonderful and beyond all praise. But how wise would it be to chase wild geese with the kind of human resources we have? Let me tell you a funny little story I had once heard to embellish this.

The president (the American version of the vice-chancellor) of a well-known American university was being taken round a famous Oxbridge college. The president was particularly impressed by the beautiful college lawns that appeared to be laid out regularly in two tints of green apparently out of the same grass. How was this done? The president was eager to know. Only the head gardener knew, he was told. So the head gardener was called. He came and explained how easy it was. You just had to mow the grass in one direction from one side and in the opposite direction from the other side and go on mowing like this. The president was amazed. He wanted to buy off the gardener and hire him on the spot. "And how long will this take?" he asked. "About a hundred years, I reckon," replied the head gardener.

Going by my own past experience, the only example I have been fortunate enough to witness in my lifetime was one conglomeration of vice-chancellor/director and nearly a dozen 'world-class' professors engaged in building truly world-class institution. The latter assembled at the Delhi School of Economics at the University of Delhi. Many of them had been persuaded to join the DSE mainly by V.K.R.V. Rao. Even this effort had to fail after a period of what may be called the DSE's golden age. The reasons for that failure will have to be completely sorted out one day.

The only other venture of this kind that I have heard of was at Calcutta University much earlier — around the 1920s. This one had covered a much larger canvas over a number of disciplines in the arts and sciences. The most illustrious of the Calcutta University professors then were hand-picked from all over India (and in the case of Arabic and fine arts from outside India). Moreover, the induction of C.V. Raman from the Indian finance service itself was another courageous venture without which the world probably would have gone without at least one other Nobel laureate. Those moves had been made under the leadership of Ashutosh Mookerjee. I still remember Hiren Mukerji (no relation) once gently exhorting some of his comrades at the Jawaharlal Nehru University to follow this example of building a truly national university. This was at one of the earliest sessions of the JNU academic council (or perhaps the court) about 40 years ago. Some of the listeners looked startled, for they had possibly been expecting a harangue from Hiren Mukerji decrying the rightist elitism of our great universities. But Calcutta University's glorious years too began to fade away soon after the death of Sir Ashutosh. The dream finally had to end. Even the glimmer has now gone.

Let me move away from grand national policies. Far less spectacular than the grandiose plans, there are some genuinely useful ideas, though somewhat less breathtaking. We owe these to some of our better-known academics (like Sukanta Chaudhuri, April 1, 2010, Dipankar Dasgupta, April 13, 2010 and André Béteille, April 22, 2010 in this column and many others elsewhere).

To one's relief, our thinkers are ready to think 'out of the box' and are obviously not prepared to go by the normally unquestioned and predetermined official agenda. The contents of that box in official hands are, of course, routinely rehashed, but seldom re-examined or changed with change of government or of important ministers. We are always in such great hurry for big things that we are left with little time for small ones.

I will now end with another of my stories. And this is a true one. I wanted to sell a cost-saving idea to the then minister of human resource development. I failed. I had already sent my idea to an even higher authority who had responded kindly and sent me a long, gracious, and friendly reply But again, as the English put it, "No joy."

What was my idea? It was a childishly simple one. I pleaded and am still pleading for a small change. This was to reintroduce a practice that was not only prevalent in India in our schooldays but is also seen today in many schools, colleges and universities in many countries. This was pleading for 'fast track' routes. Everybody should join the education system down at the bottom. But anybody (a) found working significantly harder to join the workforce ahead of others or (b) found to be of extraordinary talent should be given the opportunity of short cuts like double promotion (even treble promotion) to reach the top earlier than the rest. Instead of being allowed to go faster, even our best students are forced now to wait for at least three or four years and earn a couple of extra degrees to be allowed to start being 'world-class'. Those like Amartya Sen and Sukhamoy Chakravarty now are losing those vital years.

Nobody is gaining anything by this. India, in fact, the world, is losing out. To my mind fast-tracking was a real cost-saving device in education. However, it promised no five-yearly dividend to any political party for advocating it.

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Select Bibliography of Tapas Majumdar

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On the Second Death Anniversary of
Late Professor Tapas Majumdar
Founder of Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, and
Formerly Emeritus Professor, School of Social Sciences
at
Auditorium I, Convention Centre
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
on
Monday, 15 October, 2012 from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm

Remembering Tapas Majumdar:
A Colloquium on Discourses across Boundaries

Colloquium Programme:

Opening Plenary (9:00 - 10:30)
Welcome : **Mridula Mukherjee**, Dean SSS, JNU
Introduction: **Binod Khadria**, Chairperson ZHCES, SSS, JNU

Release and Dedication of the Tapas Majumdar Memorabilia and the India Migration Report, and Presentations by Prof. C.P. Bhambri to the Guest of Honour Smt. Gauri Majumdar

Keynote Address: **Sabyasachi Bhattacharya**
Formerly VC Visva-Bharati and Chairman ICHR
Remarks from the Chair: **Sudhir K. Sopory**, Vice-Chancellor JNU
Vote of Thanks: **Binod Khadria**, Chairperson ZHCES, SSS, JNU

Tea : 10:30 - 11:00
Second Plenary Session (11:00 - 1:00)
Chair: **Anjan Mukherji**, formerly Professor at Centre for Economic Studies & Planning, SSS, JNU
Speakers: **Shantha Sinha**, Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
Arjun Dev, formerly Professor at National Council of Educational Research and Training
Pulin Nayak, Professor, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi
Ashok Guha, formerly Professor at Centre for International Trade & Development, SIS, JNU

Lunch: 1:00 - 2:00

Third Plenary Session (2:00 - 3:30)
Chair: **K. Srinath Reddy**, President, Public Health Foundation of India
Speakers: **Ajit K. Mohanty,** formerly Professor at ZHCES, SSS, JNU
Sanjoy Hazarika, Senior Journalist & Director, Centre for North East Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia
Deepak Kumar, Professor, ZHCES, SSS, JNU

Tea: 3:30 - 4:00
Fourth Plenary Session (4:00 - 5:00)
Chair: **Sudha Pai**, Rector JNU
Speakers: **B. S. Chimni**, Professor, Centre for International Legal Studies, SIS, JNU
Aditya Mukherjee, Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, SSS & Director, JNIAS, JNU

Closing Plenary (5:00 - 6:00)
Tributes and Reflections from the Audience

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International Migration and Diaspora Studies (IMDS) Project is a research facility at the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies (ZHCES), School of Social Sciences (SSS), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). The project also hosts the *Research Programme in International Migration* instituted at the Centre by an agreement between Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), Government of India. The project aims to conduct and facilitate research on major migration themes of significance in Indian as well as global contexts. The focus is to undertake research on various economic, social, political, cultural, and educational aspects of globalisation and migration; and to initiate collaborative interactions with other academic institutions and international organisations on major migration issues. The emphasis of these initiatives is on creating an interface between academia and policy making through workshops, conferences, teaching modules, publications, hosting of visiting scholars and other interactive pursuits.