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Historicizing Development Discourse & Higher Education Policy in India

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1. Introduction

Invoked by colonial intellectuals since the late nineteenth century as a way of envisaging their rightful place within world history, by the late 1940s, the idea of economic development became a world-wide framing rubric to think about unequal relationships in the era of decolonization. In the early 1950s, development theory presented itself as a radical discourse about coming to grips with prospects and dangers of the post-World War II scenario that, on the one hand, helped think of social change on a far wider/international scale, and on the other, to bring together interventionist policies and metropolitan finance; thus development became simultaneously an international and state concern.¹ With poverty reduction and modernization as twin objectives, social sectors of education, child welfare, health emerged, in addition to agricultural productivity, as key components and targets of early development aid, world-wide. The adoption of these agendas at national and international levels opened up unprecedented avenues for the linking of trained expertise to aid organisations, government and business sectors. Inevitably, this impacted significantly on the discipline of economics as had been practiced hitherto. The emergence of the sub-field of development economics as the dominant face of the discipline not only radically redefined orientations and agendas within the discipline but, more broadly, changed the way economic thinking had worked until then with possibilities of societal transformation.

Political Modernity, Development Discourse, Social Transformation

Echoing these trajectories, in post-1947 India, planned development and industrialization were envisaged as the primary paths through which the 'imagined economy' would propel the requisite social change to catapult the nation out of poverty and its low agricultural productivity². However, due skepticism over the tenability of 1947 as an inaugural marker is handy as we recall that the acceptance of development agendas as national

¹Ravi Kanbur, 'The Development of Development Thinking, lecture delivered at ISEC, Bangalore, July 2005, accessed on 04062017, <http://www.arts.cornell.edu/poverty/kanbur/ISECLecture.pdf>; see also Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

²Echoing Anderson's notion of the nation as imagined community, it has been argued that the political upheavals of 1992-93 in India were a critical watershed that saw a reversal of the articulation of the nation with an idea of the economy as a community of producers, Satish Deshpande, 'Imagined Economies: Styles of Nation-building in Twentieth century India', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, Nos 25-26, 1993.

mission had a well-known pre-history going back at least to the 1870s³. The discourse of economic drain put forth through the concerted efforts of public intellectuals such as Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), M.G. Ranade (1842-1901), R.C. Dutt (1848-1909) and others had been an important foundational tenet of the Indian National Congress. Through an elaborate use of facts and figures, drain theory had made an unequivocal case for economic control and self-government by linking the destruction of manufactures, the ruin of the peasantry, and the ensuing impoverishment of India to economic enslavement advanced through colonial policy. After provisions for provincial autonomy through the Government of India Act 1935 led to the formation of Congress governments in eight provinces, in August 1937, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution proposing an inter-provincial committee of experts to consider urgent and vital problems, the solution of which is necessary to any scheme of national reconstruction and social planning. The National Planning Committee was the precursor of the Planning Commission. And yet, partly as a self-aggrandizing gesture, theories and narratives of Indian development, within which policy discussions are embedded, prefer to treat these well-known historical facts as of little more than picturesque consequence.

Further, however, in tracking this conflation between the emerging nation and the redemptive logic of development, we note a significant sequence: the embracing of developmental agendas within the freedom movement in the 1930s was prefaced by full, formal political acquiescence, 1920 onwards, to the logic of linguistic territorialisation within constitutional debates, political discourse and Congress organizational structure. However, actual linguistic reorganization of states had to wait till 1960, a whole decade after economic planning became the centre-piece of the national mission. While further work is needed to unpack the full range of implications of the conceptual-political shifts noted above, the broad timeline and sequence establish: i) the late colonial period saw territorial reorganization being rapidly linked to the possibility of linguistic provinces, and ii) this somewhat incongruous imaginary of monolingual territorial entities within a polyglot setting rapidly lent itself to being discursively recast as target of an ahistorical developmental vision. This linking of territorial demarcations within the federal structure to the logic of monolingual units had major implications for the nature and meanings of Indian democracy.⁴ Furthermore, the simultaneity of its elaboration with the adoption of the developmental vision created conditions for a strong

³For initial work in this field, see Ben Zachariah, *Developing India: A Social and Intellectual History 1930-1950*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005. See also C.A. Bayly, 'Indigenous And Colonial Origins Of Comparative Economic Development: The Case Of Colonial India And Africa' in C.A. Bayly, Simon Szreter, Vijayendra Rao eds., *History, Historians and Development Policy: A Necessary Dialogue*, Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2011.

⁴ See Veena Naregal and Madhav Prasad, Introduction, *Language Movements and the Democratic Imagination in India*, Orient Blackswan, Delhi, 2017, forthcoming.

identification of development, first with the emerging nation, and soon, its simultaneous use as key legitimizing principle of the nation-state. This strong overlap between narratives of the nation and its development in the Indian context thus that they worked in mutually self-reinforcing -- and legitimizing fashion -have rendered it difficult to discuss and debate what either concept of development or post-colonial nation have meant. The great prestige and visibility of that accrued to development economics as the primary face of the discipline since the 1950s, no doubt contributed to the making of this tautological scenario.

For our purposes here, one outcome of this intellectual impasse has been that discussions of national policy in India have largely remained almost strictly circumscribed along sectoral lines, and within the terms of its 'home-ground', development economics. Thus while other disciplines such as history, anthropology and political science have offered perspectives on the development project in terms of its ideas, genesis, claims, experience and outcomes, these perspectives and critiques have been largely regarded as beyond the purview of policy analysis or design. While our public discourse 'commonsensically' acknowledges the links between politics and electoral prospects, on the one hand, and policy priorities, announcements of welfare schemes and such like, on the other, these links remain acknowledged at the level of realpolitik, while policy design and analysis proceed about their business treating such details as peripheral or, at best, as information that can be noted in preliminary fashion purely for contextual value. Somewhat belatedly, political analysis at the level of electoral outcomes has recently been seen as worthy of attention for an understanding of macro-economic priorities⁵. And yet, despite the perspectives of social and intellectual history on early development thought, colonial social reform and state policy, development economics in India remains quite strongly ensconced in its pursuit of 'hard economic facts' that are apparently impervious not just to historical change but also apparently transcend 'non-objective' nationalist/culturalist perspectives tied to specific geographical locations.

2. Contemporary History and Social Policy

Beyond the Indian context, there seem to be significant signs of change. Even as the logic of economic austerity comes under question and the positing of a 'pure' depoliticized economic rationality seems increasingly unsustainable, questions of social policy have acquire renewed visibility on academic and political agendas, with respect to both developed countries and the developing world. With this, on the one hand, the discipline of economics is being called upon to renegotiate its relationships, internally, with the sub-field of development economics, and

⁵ Kunal Sen and Sabyasachi Kar, *The Political Economy of India's Growth Episodes*, 2017.

with respect to the other human sciences, on the other⁶. In comparable vein, recent discussions of social policy in East Asian contexts too have borne out these trends in very interesting ways :alongside studies that highlight the new visibility of welfare and social policy agendas, interesting work from within departments of economics to historicize modern economic ideas in those contexts has emerged.⁷ Simultaneously an initial willingness to look beyond the neo-classical orthodoxy of mainstream economics may be discernible in the Indian context. ⁸However, it is reasonable to say such moves are yet to methodologically challenge the tautological scenario arising from the identification between nation and development as self-evidently reinforcing categories, which as noted above, has made for a peculiar and persistent un-criticality surrounding public engagements with policy.

Against this, building upon valuable accounts that political economists have offered, this essay is an effort to argue for an urgent need to historicise discussions on social policy in India as a way of questioning their continued and exclusive embedding within the parameters of development discourse. Rather, it needs to be emphasized that linkages between modern economic thought and efforts to re-inscribe the social imaginary through institutional interventions and/or notions of collective good tied to representative sanction go back at least to the mid nineteenth century. Importantly, these efforts towards social re-inscription, forging of representative discourses and advancing transformative agendas all went hand-in-hand, even as they centrally drew upon the framing of new social categories such as upper-caste, middle-class, Hindu, Muslim, non-brahmin shudra/ati-shudra, that pointed to the consolidation of identities and new

⁶An important body of work in this direction has been the contribution of A.W Coats, see his *Collected Papers: Volume 1: The History of Economic Thought*, Routledge, 2005; *Volume 2 :The Sociology and Professionalization of Economics: British and American Economic Essays*, Routledge 2005; *Volume 3: The Historiography of Economics: British and American Economic Essays* , Routledge 2015.

⁷See Karen Baehler and Douglas J. Behler, 'Introduction', *Chinese Social Policy in A Time of Transition*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013; Cheng-Chung Lai ed., *Adam Smith Across Nations: Translations and Reception of Wealth of Nations*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000; Susumu Takenaga ed., *Ricardo and the History of Japanese Economic Thought: A Selection of Ricardo Studies in Japan During the Interwar Period*, Routledge, 2016.

⁸S. M Ravi Kanbur, ed., *Q-squared, Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Poverty Appraisal*, Orient Blackswan 2003; Bardhan and Isha Ray eds., *The Contested Commons: Conversations between Economists and Anthropologists*, Wiley, 2008; Kaushik Basu et al eds., *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Literacy and Development*, Routledge, 2013; Simon Szreter, Vijayendra Rao eds., *History, Historians and Development Policy : A Necessary Dialogue*, Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2011.

vectors of social belonging being wrought through colonial modernity.

Highlighting this, my arguments towards a reopening of policy discussions beyond the terrain of development economics rests critically upon a brief initial account here to show how, even for the 1947 period, core arguments around Indian development have implicitly hinged upon changing meanings of social categories such as 'backward', labor, poor, peasant and minority. While intuitively we know the meanings of these terms have been far from constant, it seems evident we lack the analytical frameworks and tools to factor in their mutations into the design or assessments of policy agendas and formulations. At one level, that public or official discourses can maintain a seemingly safe distance from factoring in these mutations seems tied to the hegemonisation of certain analytical and social categories within certain disciplines – such as economics - labour; sociology - caste, history - minority/identity and so on. In other words, a persistent motif here is to argue that examining the underpinnings of our public/official discourses points *equally* towards questioning their repercussions on the formulation, design and evaluation of social and economic policy interrogating the limits of our disciplinary formations as to, post-1947.

Proceeding from here, the last section of the essay is a brief effort to 'apply' these reflections to the field of higher education policy, towards a framework for a possible delinking of its discussion from an exclusive embedding within the field of development economics. Here, my arguments will show that the trajectories of institutionalization within the field of Indian higher education since the late colonial period have acritical bearing on contemporary challenges. Clearly, these linkages are not highlighted out of any opportunistic or limited intention of resting blame for our present ills on the colonial past, but rather to seriously reorient policy discussions towards historically-driven understandings of trajectories exclusion and marginalization.

3. Historicising Development and Key Social Categories

Importantly, even as we acknowledge that development still retains its status as a dominant state-society interface, evidently its meanings and core arguments have hardly remained static. However, both state and civil society discourse implicitly, and sometimes explicitly recognize that the peasant, the worker, the Muslim or the backward caste of today is not the same peasant, worker et al of fifty years ago. To take one example, if the three major initiatives of the early 2000s, the Sachar Committee Report [2006], the NCEUS Reports [2006-07] and NREG Act [2005] and ongoing scheme, alongside the simultaneous re-opening of the questions of reservation and affirmative action since then, have been anything to go by, recent decades have thrown up several indications that deep changes have occurred in the structure, logic and idiom of domination, exclusion

and resistance in India.⁹ Alongside, the Nehruvian imagination of social change propelled through planning, development and industrialisation has given way to new understandings of the links between political and social equality and developmental benefits. Arguably, the earlier logic that development and economic opportunities would eventually lead to social and political equality has been now reversed, so that 1990s onwards, assertions of political and democratic equality have appeared as the precondition to groups eventually being able to access the fruits of development and growth. The earlier use of meta-categories such as labour, peasant, poor etc. was implicitly based upon a feudalism to capitalism to socialism narrative. Since the 1990s, however, the language of politics has changed, and this narrative has been inflected and transformed by a plethora of seemingly identarian categories such as dalit, OBC, Muslim, Christian, women, adivasi and so on. The latter narrative is no longer that of economic transition, but rather of a political transition to an ostensibly perfect democracy of the future - that is a narrative of ever-expanding and ever-deepening democratisation, which encourages and then accommodates/incorporates competing claims upon the polity and government. The 1980s rhetoric of sustainable development, of human rather than economic development, of gendered development and so on may be plotted as intermediate moments of this transformation. Against these developments, the montage-like account below analytically highlights, the mutations in meanings of core categories around which both policy discussions and our wider social science discourse are premised. Such an account must perforce proceed by drawing on conceptual frameworks beyond those mobilised through the foundational tool kit of development discourse and mainstream economics, and their claims to work outside of 'non-objective' cultural or specific historical and geographical coordinates. The discussion below is also an attempt to address the unproductive 'division' of academic labour alluded to above via the exclusive 'allocation' of certain key categories to specific disciplines, in order to simultaneously emphasize the need to historically thematise continuities and linkages between the domains of policy-design and social science discourse.

Consider, firstly, how the figure of the peasant within policy/academic discourse. Originally linked to notions of property relations (as in post-1947 questions of zamindari abolition, land-reform, usury, cooperativisation etc), when do categories such as the 'peasant' become absolute economic/income categories, placed in relation to a universal poverty-line and other absolute criteria of 'backwardness'? What were the implications of this 1950s-60s transformation in the story of the peasant

⁹This account draws upon ideas discussed at an ICSSR-funded workshop, The 2000s: Rethinking Social Categories and the Contemporary, collaboratively organized at the Institute of Economic Growth in March 2009 by myself and Prathama Banerjee.

and what happens by the 1970s, in relation to both Naxalbari kind of peasant movements and the late 1970s rise to power of 'backward castes'? How do we rewrite the story of the peasant today in light of the earlier narrative: from the Gandhi/Kumarappa imagination of the Indian peasant as civilisational core to the Nehruvian and the early communist imagination of peasant as pre-proletarian to the 1960s reinstatement of the peasant as Maoist revolutionary vanguard to the Green Revolution imagination of peasantry as rural entrepreneur to the 1980s onward imagination of peasant as primarily the urban migrant and/or the backward caste/dominant peasant of India's 'passive revolution' to 1990s imagination of the peasant as suicide-prone, besieged by the colonising imperative of SEZs, big-dams, global markets, etc a la Narmada, Nandigram, Singur and Lalgarh to the eruption of the angry 'demonetized' target deprived of support and minimum procurement price for her/his labour? How do we revisit our sociological tradition with its caste mobility and kinship studies, or our historical tradition and its hallowed stories of peasant resistance, or our economic traditions housed centrally within the transition debate or development narratives?

Similarly, apropos the category of labour: how can we thematise its trajectories, caught between disparate referents such as artisan vis-à-vis factory worker, peasant vis-à-vis proletariat, proletariat vis-à-vis unorganised/informal labour, labour vis-à-vis urban poor, free vis-à-vis unfree labour? How do we rethink our history of earlier industrialising and now globalising efforts, our early nationalist import-substitution mode and later export-oriented mode, our earlier imagination as a manufacturing economy and later imagination of service economy alongside the related histories of imagining productivity, labour and service? How have public discourses changed from questions of unemployment to questions of 'right' to work, from agitational labour movements to bargaining/negotiating modes? How have legal and juridical notions of contract evolved in the light of debates about labour laws and unemployment and now 'self-employment'? How do we revisit the 1960s, the 1970s, the JP movement and the Emergency in terms of urban politics and the labour question? How do we rethink our presumptions about the urban-rural divide today, in the light of questions of large-scale migration, seasonal and otherwise, and question the earlier reduction of the countryside to pure agriculture and cities to industry? How do we reconnect questions of menial and manual work and unfree, untouchable labour to labour history and labour economics in the light of say, anti-slavery movements undertaken by the untouchables of Kerala in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? What are the implications of the contemporary realisation that capitalism does not necessarily 'free' labour but indeed creates new forms of unfree, devalued and cheapened labour in most parts of the world? How do we rethink the growth of managerial discourses in tandem with governmentality discourses today?

Moving on, how has the category of 'minority' changed from the time of the Constituent Assembly debates to now? How has the earlier position on secularism as disentangling politics from religion changed into the later statist position of equal respect and 'protection' of religious 'rights', reduced to primarily the question of personal laws? What are the implications of dealing with what is called 'religious' violence through parameters of 'criminal' law and evidence? Is there a possibility of thinking of other constitutional, civil or juridical parameters in our engagement with violence against minorities? How has the category of minority been implicated in and reshaped by the history of development in India, as shown by the Sachar Report, which amply documents the economic introversion, ghettoisation, and informalisation of most Muslims in India? How does this put the minority question beyond the standard 'communalism' historiography and sociology of religion? What are the implications of the economic invisibility of the Muslim in India vis-à-vis the political hypervisibility that the Muslim is burdened with? How do we rewrite the history of representation of Muslims - both cultural and political representation - in the light of the apparently closed debates about federalism? How has the Muslim emerged as a kind of nationalised, united category of analysis, defying all evidence of Muslims being regionally differentiated and quite in contrast to the caste category, which has been consistently disaggregated, regionalized, and which has emerged as the basis of the post-1989 coalition era?

And lastly, how did the deployment of caste as category change, again from the time of the Constituent Assembly debates to today? What were the implications of Ambedkar's seeing the caste question as linked to the minority question, as well to the question of family and marriage reform? How did the SC/ST category become a stand-alone category while the 'backward classes' question, despite an early Backward Classes Commission, get deferred as a moment till the late 1970s and the coming to power of the backward caste/middle peasantry? What were the implications of the fact that while Ambedkar saw the dalit question as deeply conditioned by the question of Hinduism and majority rule, the caste question and the communal question came to be seen as distinct problematics in the Indian social sciences? How do we revisit the connections between the caste, communal and language questions of the late 1920s -60s? How did this history reconfigure post-Mandal as the question of regional politics? How do we rethink the question of urban politics vis-à-vis dalit movements - say, through the Shiv Sena-Dalit Panther encounters? How has the question of violence per se been thought through legal categories such as atrocity and social scientific categories such as exploitation, exclusion, subalterneity etc? How has the question of labour and culture been recast through the question of caste? How do we narrativise the changing history of categories such as 'depressed', 'untouchable', harijan, scheduled caste, dalit, dalit-bahujan and so on? What are the implications of recent efforts at

generalising/universalising the dalit moment through categories such as the bahujan in terms of the earlier histories of particularising caste identities?

In the light of these analytical 'snapshots', the continuing use of these labels [of peasant, labour, minority, caste] in seemingly stable ways within policy discourse and/or the social science can only hide the deep changes that have already occurred through the ways planning and the exigencies of electoral democracy have simultaneously contained and complicated the contours of deprivation, discrimination and exclusion in the post-1947 period. In other words, if indeed policy discourse and the social sciences must rise to the challenge of being responsive to the complexities of the contemporary, we need to also ask how far our social/analytical categories within knowledge-forms were adequate to grasping the deep transformations in the contemporary that have already occurred in the structure, logic and idiom of domination, exclusion and resistance in India.

4. Policy Analysis beyond Development Economics?

The demarcation of analytical categories, disciplinary agendas and boundaries have been key motifs in the foregoing discussion. In the same vein, we note that despite the emergence of new sub-disciplines and research fields within the Indian social sciences since the late 1980s, as a whole, policy studies in India remain a strangely neglected, even stigmatized field. Valued efforts by political economists notwithstanding, this neglectful distance between the Indian social sciences and policy studies as a whole has allowed the links between politics, contemporary histories of marginalization and policy assumptions to remain un-thematized and poorly grasped. Further, these trends are clearly compounded by the fact that, despite their centrality to the exercises of nation-building in the Nehruvian era, and (or because of) their subsumption under rational choice paradigms/human capital perspectives, 'soft' sectors such as education, culture and labor have remained under-analyzed fields both within policy studies and the social sciences. Allowing the sub-discipline of development economics to assert a hegemonic hold over policy discussions has meant that these have been premised on indicators of economic growth, and have proceeded in piecemeal fashion along sectoral lines. Conformity with such antecedents, I argue, has only served to seriously limit the methodological canvas and analytical tools available to delineate and critically evaluate links between processes of marginalization in the contemporary moment and the formulation/analysis of public policy priorities and outcomes. Additionally as policy-making apparatuses themselves have become the object of neo-liberal deregulation, the challenge then is to seek frameworks that enable policy analysis and social science to jointly move beyond the use of social and analytical categories in seemingly stable ways that are at odds with trajectories of contemporary change and exclusion. Against these shifts in

political and conceptual contexts within which evolving policy imperatives are defined, how indeed may we reorient discussions of public policy beyond their primary allegiance to the terrain of development economics?

Working from the vantage points of several disciplinary perspectives, there is an urgent need to explore agendas and outcomes of public policy in the contemporary against a wider canvas of institutional, economic and political histories and disciplinary genealogies in ways that are mindful of processes of exclusion and changing structures of marginalization since the colonial period. Recognizing that social policy initiatives in the Indian context predate the development project, through a final focus in the final section on some key features of Indian higher education policy discussions between 1950 and the early 2000s, I argue for a greater investment in positing alternative frames of reference drawing on the larger domain of the human sciences to explore aspects of post-1947 social policy. Against these contours, and in keeping with the larger argument here, the cumulative emphasis in the last section will be on drawing linkages between the figuring of policy questions, public debates and the shape of disciplinary agendas with respect to the Indian social sciences.

An important field within official and development discourses until recently, simultaneously education has been seen as the road to empowerment by many excluded groups and caste movements. Hinging upon the exclusion and inclusion of peoples in educational and professional institutions, clearly such demands echo the ways in which colonial education functioned to structure access to proximity to opportunities for social mobility. Since the 1980s, the relative popularity of the human development index compared to poverty measures also put the question of education back at the centre of economic thinking. However, echoing emphases within development aid parameters, research in education studies in the Indian context have been largely slanted towards elementary/school education. Stemming from this, until recently, discussions on higher education were often dismissed outright for showing an elitist bias.

5. Human Capital Theory, Historical Imperatives, Institutional Perspectives

Not surprisingly, then, in the face of the feverish pace of change since the early 2000s, comprising a slew of parliamentary Bills, Commissions, Committees, and a rapidly changing landscape in university education, the neglect of higher education policy as a field proved particularly disabling. As one commentator put it, caught off guard, as producers of knowledge, it was strange to find that the “very institutions we inhabit and reproduce have hardly figured in our research agendas.”¹⁰How

¹⁰Mary John and Janaki Nair, “Commissions, Reports and the Difference they Make”, *Seminar* 694 August 2011, pp. 24-28.

indeed may we regard this seeming blind spot? Ironically, many of these institutions alluded to here had been established through the post-1950s phase, when modernization agendas were led by the top intellectual brass of the country, channeled through major state agencies and endorsed at various levels via higher-education institutions. Alongside, through these decades, the 1960s and 70s saw Indian university campuses swept by huge ferment and widespread, radical student mobilisations. While cinema and literature registered these mobilisations quite prominently, at best, the academic response to these developments was fragmentary and desultory. It is only on the last decade or so, after a second round of OBC quotas were introduced in 2006 (popularly dubbed as Mandal II), that a space for preliminary academic interrogation of the processes of social marginalization via the institutional frameworks of higher education seems to have been opened up. Given the core value placed on education within development discourse, particularly, as a measure to alleviate poverty and inequality, it is important to ask how do we grapple, firstly, with the paucity of studies that thematise marginalization with respect to Indian higher education, post-1947, and how we move beyond these glaring gaps.¹¹

Within development theory, education policy discussions have focused around the key term, human capital – defined as the stock of knowledge addition of education, skill and training¹² -- as a significant vector in contributing to aggregate economic growth and to mobility of households/individuals. In itself, the linking of economic growth to the development of talent and education was not new, and could be traced back to the emergence of modern political economy and the writings of Adam Smith. What was new and unprecedented, however, was the ubiquitous currency the terminology of human capital gained since the early 1960s, described in the words of another renowned economist, Fritz Machlup, writing in 1970, and who observed how even though ‘the literature on the subject of education and economic growth is some two hundred years old, but only in the last ten years has the flow of publications taken on the aspects of a flood.’¹³ An important contributor to this perspective, and writing of the hegemonising presence that his own work along with the that of his colleagues acquired, Gary Becker recalls in his 2012 foreword to *The Oxford Handbook of Human Capital*:

¹¹A small body of work that looks either directly or indirectly at education as site of discrimination and reproducing social and economic disparity, see Ashwini Deshpande, *The Grammar of Caste : Economic Discrimination in Contemporary India*, OUP, 2011; Satish Deshpande and Usha Zachariah, *Beyond Inclusion: The Practice of Equal Access in Indian Higher Education*, Routledge, 2013; Samson K. Ovichagan, *Faces of Discrimination in Higher Education in India: Quota policy, Social justice and the Dalits*, Routledge, 2015.

¹² Alan Burton-Jones and J. C. Spender, *The Oxford Handbook of Human Capital*, OUP, 2012.

¹³Fritz Machlup, *Education and Economic Growth*, University of Nebraska Press, 1970, p. 1.

The human capital 'revolution' began in the 1950s and early 1960s with the research of Theodore W Schultz, Jacob Mincer and myself. Schultz's most influential piece among others on human capital is his presidential address to the American Economic Association (Schultz 1961). Mincer's pioneering work was his dissertation published in the *Journal of Political Economy* in 1958 (Mincer 1958)...Becker's most famous human capital studies are the various editions of his book *Human Capital* (Becker 1964, 1975, 1993).¹⁴

Further, however, their influence was not limited to influencing educational discourse. Just as importantly, theories about the economic importance of human capital were instrumental in legitimizing the claims of efficacy in applying rational choice theory to all aspects of life by purportedly upholding correlations between rational choice investments in human capital and improvements in labour productivity, economic growth, health and the overall betterment of life. Continuing, Becker writes:

I do not use the word 'revolution' casually because the emphasis on investments in education, training and other human capital radically changed the way economists and others interpreted many economic, social and policy issues. In this foreword, I discuss three of the most important fields affected by the human capital approach : the analysis of labor markets, explanations of the determinants of economic growth and evaluations of the benefits from improved health and of the determinants of longer life and a better quality of life.¹⁵

Significantly, one index of the dominance of human capital paradigms has been that both demands from hitherto excluded groups, and the literature on the capabilities approach, have cast education largely as a question of appropriation, or of adequate dissemination of knowledge. Neither has necessarily led to a critique of knowledge-forms per se, primarily because knowledge-production has been discussed within the framework of expertise and skill, related to questions of upgrading human capital through increased access as way of supposedly reducing poverty and inequality, rather than to questions of self-reflexivity, critique and transformation of how issues relating to knowledge and marginalization have been thematised within the social sciences.¹⁶ Clearly, the connections between emerging forces and

¹⁴Gary Becker, 'Foreword', *The Oxford Handbook of Human Capital*, p 1.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Initiatives like the Dalit Intellectual Collective have begun to rethink questions of alternative epistemologies and local knowledges etc; other efforts to map the politics of knowledge in relation to the politics of exclusion have also emerged, including two recent workshops held at the Institute of Economic Growth on Indian Social Sciences and the Vernacular/s: Disciplinary Histories and the Politics of Knowledge, [ICSSR-funded, February 2017]; ICAS-IEG workshop on Language, Region, Knowledge: Colonial Disciplines to Indian Social Sciences [May 4-5 2017].

structures of marginalization, and the evolving trajectories of higher education policy urgently require to be thematised and thought through, but these linkages can be plotted in tandem only by moving beyond the frames of reference of development theory. It is useful to underline here that the above-noted trends also point to overlaps between the ways issues around higher education have figured within policy discourse and the Indian social sciences. Raising questions around policy discussions is thus in equal measure to examine how the politics of marginalization may relate to the framing of agendas within political science, economics, sociology and social anthropology, the disciplines meant to grapple with the contemporary. How then do we rethink our location as policy-makers, intellectual and academics today in the light of all this? Clearly, there is room for both domains of policy-making and the social sciences to open themselves to a range of questions: how can we develop a self-reflexive and self-critical mode of historicising the politics of knowledge-forms such as economics or sociology or history and policy agendas in India? How do we make visible the complicity of knowledge norms, techniques, modes of subjectivity, genres of writing, forms of pedagogy/training, deployed with respect to the social sciences and policy formulation, to post-independent India's history of exclusions and resistances?

Commentators both in India and elsewhere have noted that the human capital 'revolution' of the early 1960s mainly oversaw a mounting campaign for the laissez-faire finance of education, the imposition of direct charges and the establishment of private institutions.¹⁷ Rigor in manpower planning and returns on education became a concern with US policymakers in the face of post-World War II anxieties over whether their country had the resources to compete in the military-technological race with the Soviet Union, particularly, after the launch of the Sputnik in 1957. Simultaneously, this juncture saw an unprecedented expansion of higher education on a mass level across developed societies and the developing world. A pioneering and influential voice for a laissez-faire policy in education was put forth in 1962 by Milton Friedman, who proposed not only that 'individuals should bear the costs of investments in themselves', but also that the existing state schools should be denationalised, with a view to reaping potential benefits (eg, optimum allocation of resources, competition between educational institutions, and parents' freedom of choice for school/college) purportedly contingent upon free-play of market mechanism. In the parlance of mainstream economics, education since the early 1960s thus began to be increasingly seen as a private good, calling for private investment expenditures by parents and thereby weakening its existence hitherto as a state-funded public good or service. Seen in this

¹⁷ Arup Maharatna, [2014]. "Invasion of Educational Universe by Neo-liberal Thinking: A Civilisational Calamity?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 13, 2014 Vol XLIX (37): 61-70; Joel Spring, *Economization of Education: Human Capital, Global Corporations, Skills-Based Schooling*, Routledge, 2015.

vein, the casting of educational discourse into the terms of human capital theory was already to clear space for the invasion of the educational universe by neo-liberal ideals that in recent years have been instrumental in reshaping the norms and procedures governing academic life almost globally.

Seen thus, and making due allowance for its unprecedented dimensions, neither the assumptions nor consequences of human capital theory come as the slightest surprise to anyone who has studied the discourse of colonial education policy. As is well known, the project of colonial education sought to mould social aspirations, cognitive perspectives and ideological preferences towards laissez-faire ideas through the promise of a tightly regulated access to an elitist and alienating educational structure, financed through outlays that included significant contributions through private subscriptions from wealthy natives and colonial officials. In all these respects, colonial education needs to be acknowledged as the pre-eminent precursor and template for the financialisation and economization of educational thinking, elaborated more than a hundred years before the human capital paradigm was advanced by the Chicago school economists.

Surely then, our inquiries into post-1947 educational policy in India must be built around a range of core questions that need to include the following: in what relations of discontinuity and continuities may we thematise the trajectories and agendas of higher education policy after 1947 to the project of colonial education, the creation of colonial-modern intelligentsias, and nationalist resistance to colonial education policies? What role did the beginnings of private investment in creating 'independent' higher education institutions since the late nineteenth century have in the creation of regional elites and structures of domination, and the imagination of regional universities and knowledges, through the late colonial period? How did this pre-1947 history influence the resistance to transfer of education to the Union List, after 1947, for administrative purposes, or the corresponding stand-off between the Vice-Chancellors Conference [staffed by regional elites] and the Central Government over the latter's attempts to create the University Grants Commission as an overarching centralized regulatory authority?

Similarly, what insights would a reading, in tandem, of key documents, such as the Calcutta University Commission Report [1917]; the various provincial-level Reports towards expanding the university network in the 1920s; the University Education Commission Report [1948]; Kothari Commission Report [1964-66] hold for a discussion of subsequent agendas in higher education? We know of the beginnings of state support for social science research, post-1947, via the setting up of the Research Programmes Committee, within the Planning Commission, and the subsequent setting up of the Indian Council for Social Science Research,

with the economist D.R. Gadgil as its first Chairman, after he had fallen out of favour at the Planning Commission: how do we map the direct and definitive, and yet complicated and fluid links through all these instances, between planning objectives, institutional arenas and research agendas? And indeed, what light will such a re-thematisation of policy initiatives and priorities in the decades following Independence, throw upon the seemingly contradictory implications of the National Knowledge Commission discussions [2005-10] and the Yashpal Committee Report [2011], in the lead up to the radical restructuring of higher education scenario envisaged through the XII Plan period [2012-17]