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**Four Emblematic Figures and the Making  
of a 'New India'**

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## Four Emblematic Figures and the Making of a ‘New India’\*

A.R.Vasavi\*\*

### Abstract

*In the articulations between a fast globalising urban economy and a residual but eroded agricultural economy are trends and conditions in which lives, rights, identities, and institutions are being reformulated in the ‘new India’. Such trends and their significance can be represented by four figures who are emblematic of these times: the agriculturist, the Information Technology professional (or techie), the school teacher and the child, to indicate the different ways in which new boundaries, affiliations and orientations are being forged among them, between them, and between them and the nation state. Drawing on data, discourses, and representations (from field research, review of policies, programmes and analyses of popular media and wider literature) for the period 1997-2013, this study will call attention to the multiple ways in which national and global agendas foster new identities, subjectivities, socialities, collectivities and alterities among a set or group of people and what implications these have for altering society and the nation. The study will contribute towards developing a social and cultural biography of globalising India and place the study of India into an international comparative framework.*

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\* The lecture is an outline of my book proposal for the NMML fellowship.

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In various descriptions and theories related to the denouement of modernity, globalisation, and neoliberal capital in non-western world cultures, scholars<sup>1</sup> have invoked imageries of ‘malcontents’, ‘friction’, ‘social suffering’, ‘alternative modernities’, and ‘abjection’. And, social anthropology has successfully identified and represented the ‘scapes’ of globalisation that have resulted not in expected homogeneity but in forms of hybridity and mimicry.<sup>2</sup> More recent literature has emphasized the new trajectories by which emerging new lead nations and their societies are engaging with modernity and the new global economy, thereby spinning new cultural forms.<sup>3</sup> These results have been represented through the experiences, voices, and lives of those caught in a range of political-economic and cultural interlocutions, which in turn have become signifiers of emergent societies. But most studies have not captured or represented the forms or refractions through which specific groups of people or social configurations are appropriated, altered or disposed as strategies in the reconstitution and reconfiguration of a nation in a phase of emergent globalization. More specifically, there are little details of how altering political-economic agendas and structures redefine and relocate different societies, classes and or groups of people within the nations. As Coronil<sup>4</sup> has noted in his seminal study of Veneuela, subjects are socially and historically constituted through social institutions that render them into social actors on history’s stage. As a result the collective actions of social actors has implications for re-making nations and the deliberate re-making of nations has implications for constituting social actors and groups and for realigning their relationships. In addition, paying attention to the relationships between these various social actors is to note the resulting relational positionalities,<sup>5</sup> i.e. the fluidity and shifts of individual and group identities at the crossroads of power, between these key figures and the nation, the market, and civil society institutions. Such a perspective will enable one to provide both a sociological commentary on the socio-cultural canvas of the nation and raise issues for further understanding the restructuring of societal forms, actors and relationships.

Key questions that this brief essay raises include: in the face of current globalization how are the boundaries between communities and societies within nation states being altered? What new structures,



identities, subjectivities, and collectivities come to the fore as contestations over local, national, and global priorities take stage? Whose agency is privileged and what are the interlocutions between differently placed actors? Which institutions become 'structuring structures'<sup>6</sup> and what discourses do they deploy in reconstituting new identities and subjectivities in the new global agendas?

Trends since the initiation of 'globalising India', especially since 1997<sup>7</sup>, provide grounds on which to answer these questions. In the formation and articulation of new narratives relating to groups and the nation and its key figures the relations between the nation and people have also altered. As Partho Chatterjee<sup>8</sup> has observed, "...the relations between the people and the nation, the nation and the State, relations which nationalism claims to have resolved once and for all, are relations which continue to be contested and are therefore open to negotiation all once again." Hence, what negotiations and strategies are in place, in this context of expedited globalization, between the various actors, the nation state, capital, market, civil society, and media? In such a context, there is need to review and understand the new narratives by which the nation and its constituent elements and key actors are being reconstituted.

### **Methodology:**

In attempting to do this work, that is to comment on and understand the emergence of various new national identities and subjectivities and the new contouring of relationships among them and to situate them on a larger canvas of the nation, I attempt to go beyond the typical and standard approach of social anthropology, that is the ethnographic method and the world of immediate, close, interpersonal relations, of directly observed and bound social and cultural entities to observing and documenting macro and larger groups and social phenomena. The feasibility and validity of drawing on indirect relationships for study are elaborated by Craig Calhoun who points out that, "...the study of indirect relationships is all the more challenging as it requires us to understand how social relationships between groups are mediated through complex organizations, such as the state or economy; impersonal markets, or through communications technology<sup>9</sup>". In

drawing on data generated from various research studies and projects<sup>10</sup>, I seek to combine multiple sources of data: observations drawn from the field which include ethnographic work, case studies, interviews, and macro data, reports, details of matrix events, media reports etc related to the four key figures. In combining these data sources, I also attempt to engage with and provide what Marshall Sahlins<sup>11</sup> identifies as ‘structural relays’, that is the links between macro and micro structures, events and processes, and the resulting shifts in both structures and symbolic orders.

### **Contextualising the Nation: Elements of an Emergent Global Economy**

The backdrop or national political-economic canvas on which the lives of these four emblematic figures is played out relates to the opening up of the economy since 1991 and the subsequent boost to private sector industries to enhance economic growth and the simultaneous reordering of the roles, positions, and relations of various other actors/citizens and their livelihoods (esp agriculture). In this context, the strengthening of the IT industry as a flagship industry and its role as a catalyst to India’s new global economy forms a central theme. Associated with this new economy are the growth of booming metropolises, spread of consumer goods and retail marketing and their impact on lifestyles. More particularly, the rise of a new middle class associated with high incomes, the pervasive presence of media, through satellite and cables channels, and the spread of a speculative economy especially in land are trends that have implications for the remaking of societal structures and boundaries.

A resurgent India—a future global power, a nation transforming from a predominantly agricultural to a knowledge economy—these have been the government and industry disseminated images and discourse that have led to popular constructions and representations of the new, economically liberalised India. And few groups best represent the ‘new India’ as that of IT professionals who are seen and represented as being the catalysts and harbingers of the new economy and nation. Assigned and associated with them are the range of new constructions such as the rise of the ‘knowledge economy’, the global



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professionals and entrepreneurs who have led India into becoming a potential 'superpower'. Linked to them are new cultural forms that are not in consonance with a simplistic adherence to global cultures. Instead, what are discernable are complex cultural forms in which global lifestyles are amalgamated with re-traditionalisation and have led to the emergence of hybrid social structures that facilitate new socialities and identities.

In the shadow of these celebratory representations and posturing of the new globalizing, 'resurgent' India is the issue of livelihoods, manifested particularly in the epidemic of suicides by agriculturists and the agrarian crisis, and in which demands for 'right to food', the 'right to employment', and 'right to information' have gained currency.<sup>12</sup> Here the agriculturist and the agrarian economy, which are in conditions of economic 'deceleration', stand in contrast to the resurgent urban, global economy. Far from being the once celebrated mascot of India, the agriculturist is now a figure of distress that needs to be either rescued or subject to agendas of alteration. In the context of such sharp alterations, which include the complex web of new risks, the 'individualisation of agriculture', 'advanced marginalisation' of the rural<sup>13</sup>, and the absence of collective mobilization among them have significance for the economy, polity and society.

Similarly, based on international pressure and the need to concede to international standards, India has belatedly sought to introduce compulsory elementary education. And, contradictory to normative expectations of neo-liberalism's withdrawal of the state, the expansion of the elementary system has seen the growth of cadres of teachers, who now form one of the largest bodies of government employees. Teachers then represent not only the contradictory growth of the bureaucracy in an age of expanding markets but are also emblematic of the new intermediate class of persons who are both dominant and dominated and whose agency in the world of bureaucratic-political configuration of power and politics is complex. In addition, their subjectivities are not merely that of being minions in a large State apparatus but also that of being bullies in the predominantly rural, non-literate societies in which they function. Embricated in a religious-caste complex but expected to be carriers of the State's agenda of modernity,

democracy and development, the role and position of the teacher is representative of the new tensions that the nation faces as a whole.

The expansion of the state elementary education system and the growth of the population have also resulted in a new focus on children as citizens of a new India in which their voices, lives, and rights are issues over which non-governmental organizations, the State and international bodies contest and seek to redefine. Once recognized as the 'citizen of tomorrow' and for whom a national holiday (Children's Day on Nehru's birthday) is celebrated, children are new vulnerable citizens over whom issues of rights to education, access to resources, rules of safety etc are being formulated. Yet, their own conditions are constant reminders of the changing nature of families, communities, and the nation. Ranging from issues such as foeticide, the prevention of child labour and child trafficking, debates on the age of marriage to that of the formation of a National Children's Commission (2006), the child has become a new national figure over whom multiple national and international agendas are sought to be realised.

What can be discerned through the representative lives of these four figures are the key refractions, forms and strategies through which they are sought to be re-constituted by different institutions (eg. the planning commission, commissions for children), policies (eg. education, agriculture, Information Technology), programmes (eg. NREGS, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), and discourses. The resulting 'emergent'<sup>14</sup> forms of societies represent the conditions of disarticulated development in India and are themselves emblematic of several new contradictions; of the consolidation of primordial identities in the face of a globalizing market; the expansion of bureaucratic structures but the shrinking agency of key actors; of the availability of new occupations but the erosion of hereditary livelihoods; of the spread of the language of constitutional 'rights' but the erosion of plural forms of livelihoods and the cultural legitimacy of differences.

### **Agriculturists: Towards Conditions of Marginality**

Once seen, represented and related to as a key national figure, the food provider or *anna data*, in independent India, the agriculturist or



*kisan* now occupies an ambiguous position in the national stage. As the rural agrarian economy has decelerated, the position of the agriculturist has concomitantly declined. Although representing 70 percent of the population and 52 percent of the working population, agriculturists are a heterogenous group with the marginal cultivator (owning or cultivating only 1.33 hectares of land) accounting for 79 percent of the cultivators. With most in conditions of marginalization, and subject to a range of risks, the life of the average cultivator is marked by processes of pauperization. While the overall conditions of distress were sharply represented by the epidemic of suicides<sup>15</sup>, continuing trends such as the abandonment of agriculture, the declining rural population and the multiple problems associated with agriculture as a livelihood indicate the further shifts that are underway in agriculture.

In the neo-liberal phase, economic planning has demoted the agriculturist seeing them as redundant to the new global economy. Reports, programmes, policies and plans have subsequently discussed ways of decreasing the burden of a large population in agriculture, its lack of growth, and its continued low productivity as key reasons for the persistence of poverty and underdevelopment. Seeking to address these deficits, policies, think-tank recommendations and missions/commissions have recommended the shifting of the large rural population to an urban base, and identified ways to generate non-farm livelihoods and occupations as new pathways to move out of underdevelopment. Such rhetoric has largely led to disinvestment in the rural and agrarian sectors and to constructing the rural in what Cameron and Palan (2004) identify as an 'anti-economy' attitude and approach. Such an 'anti-economy' stance not only disregards the potential of a region or people but also deliberately places the sector and its citizens under conditions of negative implications. While such policies and planning placed the rural on the backburner of the nation state, the resulting crisis (most explicit in terms of the epidemic of suicides by agriculturists) was sought to be addressed through a range of palliative programs. Programmes such as the moratorium on loans and the promulgation of a nationwide employment guarantee scheme (NREGS) seek to rescue agriculturists from the dire conditions that they had been placed in.

In most policy documents and pronouncements, agriculturists are

considered to be redundant and are treated as subjects to be pacified and normalized or are subject to new regimes of policies and programmes in which their livelihood, ways of life, knowledge and identity are to be reshaped significantly. The dominant image of the agriculturist is of one who is indebted, inefficient, but who, given their numerical size and potential voting power, must be mollified and or curtailed with populist policies. In the displacement of the agriculturist from the national stage, lies the rise of new actors as catalytic citizens.

### **IT Professional or ‘Techies’: The Catalytic Role?**

Although established since 1960s, and expedited since 1987, the opening of the economy provided a special boost to the IT and ITES economy. Confined largely to metropolis clusters in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Mumbai and the NOIDA belt, the IT industry has become the signal industry credited with gaining India the recognition of being able to engage with high technology and the new global economy. While in 1998 the IT and ITES industry accounted for only 1.2 percent of GDP, by 2007 it accounted for about 5.2 percent of GDP, and by 2012 for about 7.5 percent of GDP and about 25 percent of exports worth US 100 billions<sup>16</sup>. Although the industry employs only about 1.3 million people directly and about 3 million people indirectly, it is the visibility of the new industry, the high pay scales and its association with being a global industry that bucked the ‘Hindu Growth Rate’ that accounts for its significance.

With repeated emphasis and celebration of the IT industry’s role as an economic catalyst in the new India, media representations have reinforced popular constructions of the IT industry; as a socially important career path, where men become much sought after grooms and as an acceptable and legitimate choice of career for even women. Its overnight success as a sunshine industry also led to the emergence of its leaders, CEOs, and founders becoming national figures, advising the government on matters related not merely to economic issues but to a range of policies. Even as the industry and its leaders received iconic positions, the mass of IT professionals became barometers for the new life-styles and cultures that emerged in the leading metropolises



of the nation. As the volume of entrants and their presence grew not only in India but in the development of a globally circulating set of techies, the linkage between the global economies and the presence of these new mediators has grown<sup>17</sup>. So significant has their presence become that they have been referred to as the 'New Argonauts' (Saxenian<sup>18</sup>), traversing international terrains and as mascots in the newly globalizing India.

### **School Teachers: Forms of New Subjection**

Submitting to national and international pressure and the need to concede to international parameters of development and progress, the Indian state had to invest more in elementary education. The expansion of the elementary system has seen a growth in the volume of the cadres of teachers, who now form one of the largest bodies of government employees. If in 1991 there were about 19 lakhs of primary school teachers, then their numbers have risen to about 45 lakhs in 2005-06.<sup>19</sup> Teachers then represent not only the contradictory growth of the bureaucracy at a time of neo-liberal economic policies and of expanding markets but are also emblematic of the new intermediate class of persons who are both dominant and dominated and whose agency in the world of the bureaucratic-political configuration of power and politics is complex. Largely confined to rural areas, where most of the government schools are, their subjectivities are not merely that of being minions in a large state apparatus but also that of being bullies in the predominantly rural, non-literate societies in which they function. Embricated in their own religious-caste complex but expected to be carriers of the state's agenda of modernity, democracy and development, the role and position of the teacher is emblematic of the new tensions that the nation faces as a whole.

Growing significantly in volumes over the years, school teachers occupy very ambiguous positions. They are expected to be bearers of the new ambitions of a nation in the path of being remade, but are often also victims of the larger dysfunctionality of a growing but poorly administered bureaucracy. Given their growing numbers and the increasing attention to schools and elementary education, the

assessment of teachers has almost always pointed to multiple problems in which teachers are represented as faltering or failing in their responsibilities. The problems of rampant absenteeism, as high as 50 percent of the time in which they are expected to be teaching, and of ‘ghost teachers’ – that is, teachers who are on the payrolls of the state but do little or nothing—frequent reporting of their corporal punishment of children, and their overall dereliction of duties make headlines and human interest stories. Efforts to enhance their accountability have meant the initiation of various measures such as the introduction of decentralized accountability, biometric attendance measures, and in some cases incentive schemes including that of cash.

Teachers are therefore increasingly represented as truants and are treated as key targets who must be re-taught, re-trained, and subject to a range of strategies of governmentality. Teacher training, over the years, has become the key site in which notions of the teacher as a carrier of the nation’s agenda of development, modernity and preparation for a new global future and the training of a new body of citizens for a new economy is being deployed. But the end result of the processes of training, re-training and orientation is the onset of ‘training fatigue’ among teachers. Subsequently, located within a growing bureaucracy and subject to both processes of cognitive reorientation and to forms of governmentality, the average government school teacher has lost her/his agency and is increasingly an embittered member of the state’s bureaucratic apparatus.

### **Children: Citizens to be Protected**

Once recognized as the ‘citizen of tomorrow’ and for whom a national holiday (Children’s Day on Nehru’s birthday) is celebrated, children are newly recognised citizens over whom issues of labour, rights to education, access to resources, rules of safety etc are being formulated. Yet, the conditions of children are constant reminders of the changing nature of families, communities, and the nation and its economies. Despite the size and presence of children, approximately about 430 million between the ages of 0-18 years, and their cultural value as subjects of emotional affect, children have until recently lacked



a political constituency and their conditions in the nation have been issues of concern. Reports and studies detail the abysmal conditions of children, much of it worse than sub-saharan Africa, and the range of problems that include rampant malnourishment, conditions of child labour, unsafe living and working condition, and denial of access to health and education. Debates and discussions including a wide range of reports and studies have highlighted these as indicating the neglect of children by the state and the society at large.

Since the mid 1990s, with the publication of Myron Weiner's book, *'The Child and the State in India'*, which called attention to the neglect of children by the state and the problem of rampant child labour and the absence of adequate schooling facilities, many NGOs and international aid agencies have mobilized around improving the lives of India's children. Recent efforts, especially since 2000, have resulted in a slew of commissions, reports, and missions which have focused on improving the conditions of children thereby bringing children into the ambit of state care and provisioning. From revamping the earliest scheme, the Integrated Child Development Scheme, to making it more effective to the latest, the National Policy for Children 2013, the child's condition is sought to be improved thereby making associations between the child and the development parameters of the nation. The establishment of the National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights (NCPCR) and its branches in all the states, and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment of 2012 have all been key legislative measures which in reality are yet to be realized in full implementation.

The promulgation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) was a significant step, heralding a new protective regime for children, for most of whom the rights to education and therefore to a freedom from labour was central. Schooling itself has become a key indicator of the condition of children and current data indicates that although nearly 83 percent of them are enrolled in schools only 59 percent make it up to Std. V<sup>20</sup>. Such high drop-out rates are then linked to the fact that a large proportion of children is integrated into the working/labour force, thereby making child labour a contentious issue.

The child in school is a new site for state-led regulations and assertion of 'rights'. While a range of programmes such as the mid-day meal scheme, free uniforms and books etc seek to address the community and family-based disadvantages of children, concern over the 'quality' of education have led to new orientations such as 'child centred learning', 'activity based classrooms etc. Drawn primarily from a number of inputs and advice from international agencies and civil society organizations, many of these legislative and policy measures are resulting in the location of children within the framework of international childhood. The subsequent new programmes and schemes represent the new governmentality of children and have significance for the ways in which the average child in India (from an economically and socially disadvantaged family and society) is represented, related to and affected by the state and its policies. Relocating the child from the domain of the family and community into that of the school and government institutions and placing the child within the 'rights' framework results in a shift in the links between the child and its protectors and or caretakers. Family and parents have obligations to provide the child with love and care, while 'rights' relating to living conditions, access to health and education etc are reinforced by the state and its apparatus. But the very disembedding economy and the violation of the rights to minimum wages/just wages, to employment and livelihood, and the growing erosion of customary work that is extant in the nation leads to the continued capability decline of households and families. While it is these trends that are reasons for the abysmal conditions of children, the placing of the care of children into the formal structures of child care centres (*anganwadis*), the school, and the hospital make the life-worlds of children representative of the contradictions of the macro-structuring of India.

What can be discerned through the representative lives of these four figures are the key refractions, forms and strategies through which they are sought to be re-constituted by different 'structuring structures' which are then incorporated into the registers of the nation and its cultures. Subsequently, how each of these figures engages with, negotiates and relates to the altering conditions and structures will highlight the variations in the nation's political, economic and social fabric.



### **Relational Positionality of the Emblematic Figures:**

Each of these emblematic figures is represented and treated by the state, market, civil society and media in different ways. The agriculturist as problem, a supplicant and political liability who must be refitted to become a global player (through contract farming or in becoming an 'agri-technician'/engineer); the urban IT professional celebrated, who in lending her or himself to the flexible labour regimes of global time, capital, technology, and work culture is the new hero and who must be emulated<sup>21</sup>; the teacher as a problematic and defiant government employee who must be tamed and subject to stringent rules and regulation so as to become an efficient carrier of the agenda of modernity and development; and the child who must be protected and whose lives are increasingly sought to be located within a framework of a global childhood.

IT professionals have been successfully represented by their trade organization (the NASSCOM), and have found renewed strength in the growing clout of IT leaders on the national scene. Acting now as experts in a range of fields, the voice and inputs of many IT leaders are seen as sage and pertinent advice to remaking the nation. A contrast to this is that of the representation of, for, and by agriculturists. Despite the onset of a decelerating economy and inadequate state support, agriculturists have largely failed to mobilize around their interests. The fragmentation of agricultural movements, the problem of legitimacy of leadership and the alienation of rural political representatives from agricultural interests account for this. Although teachers have recently gained a political constituency and are increasingly enveloped into political processes, their focus primarily on issues of salaries and promotions have narrowed the scope of their collective strength. State attempts have also been made to coopt them into the larger political machinery and in the case of one state, Madhya Pradesh, the renaming of teachers as 'Rashtra Rishis', so as to integrate them into the circuit of the RSS-BJP politics, is one such example. While children remain vulnerable, subject to the vicissitudes of altering economies and the state's interest in them, the concern and presence of international bodies have strengthened programmes to better their lives. A result of such endeavours has been the recognition of children's rights in a wide variety

of contexts and the attempts to address the most egregious ways in which they are exploited, abused or neglected.

The representation and relationality of the market to these emblematic figures is also varied. IT professionals are celebrated and are seen as beacons and barometers of consumer choice, they also provide the test grounds for the promotion of new goods and services. A range of market services cater to their requirements (from hotels and bars, housing, recreation, new schools etc) and reproduce what is constructed as a global life-style and choice. While agriculturists until recently remained neglected, the deployment of NREGA into the vast rural hinterland was seen as a market opportunity and has since 2007 driven the rural economy. Recognised now as those at the 'bottom of the pyramid'<sup>22</sup> entrepreneurs and salespersons now seek to integrate agriculturists into the market and capital by deploying goods and credit services that suit their interests and needs. Teachers are now emerging as new entrepreneurs in rural areas drawing on their new, increased salaries, which are often circulated as forms of usury. As the new middle class in rural belts they also occupy important roles as bearers and users of a range of new goods. Reflecting their increasing integration into a global childhood, children have emerged as key in the marketing of goods, and markets increasingly play on the representation of children's well-being, health, and growth (intellectual and physical) to sell goods and services.

The concern over children and their well-being is also represented and reproduced in the dominant media in multiple ways. Films such as *Taare Zameen Par* (about a child with dyslexia), *Iqbal*, *Sikandar*, *Slum Dog Millionaire*, *Care of Footpath* (film made by a nine year old) all focus on the different but vulnerable and degrading lives of disadvantaged children. Media attention to abused children has also grown with periodic reports and news stories of various children. The child as victim in various contexts (from children who have fallen into open wells, to missing children, sexually abused children etc) has become the reason for public outcry that leads to media and activists to seek readdressal.

In perhaps what is the social loop among these emblematic figures are the varied ways in which these figures relate to each other. Drawing





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on their new position and clout as key figures in national policies, IT leaders and professionals have identified education, especially school education, as a site in which they can make an impact. Several IT companies and their foundations and private philanthropy wings<sup>23</sup> identified schools as new sites to extend their competencies and abilities and funds. As a result, schooling and education have become sites for the production of new workers who must be made suitable to the new global economy and the computer is constructed as a magic wand with which to address all structural problems and the challenges of access and quality of education. Although until recently agriculturists were distanced and largely invisible and had little interest for the IT techies, there is now new-found interest in organic agriculture and the rural as an escape from the city.

The lives, experiences and the ways in which these four emblematic figures are located in the national discourse highlight in many ways the new orientations and directions of nation-making and of the nation state's priorities. The contestations between them and the resulting tensions in them also bring to light the multiple contradictions which are emerging in the nation. These include the tensions between the urban and rural economies and societies, the contradictory role of the state and market, and the large gap between policy and legislative pronouncements and the failure to implement these. On and over this template of contradictions the nation becomes witness to several movements, demands, policies, programmes, and processes that articulate, reproduce and or contest these contradictions in the private and public sphere. The results of such reconstitutions are the creation of new boundaries and relationships between groups within a nation state which are manifested in the range of tensions and contestations in the private and public sphere.

Despite its economic success and celebration and the support it has garnered from the state, media and society, the IT industry is not without tensions relating to its overall relationship to the nation. Demands to open the industry to policies of caste-based reservations in jobs and for greater transparency in their access to land etc have highlighted the ways in which there is an uneasy tension between its success and its abilities to cater to the demands for more inclusive

development and growth. Similarly, the promulgation of the Right to Education Act and the legalizing of access to private schools for economically disadvantaged students also make schools a site of contestation. Explicit here are the tensions between the narratives of neo-liberal economics and the narratives of inclusive growth and the contradictions of a global economy and the societies of a nation. Some of these tensions encapsulate the differences between the rural Vs the urban, the local Vs the global, the past Vs the future, the collective Vs the individual, the State Vs the market, secularism Vs religious fundamentalism, citizens Vs consumers, and the supplicant Vs the celebrated.

Focusing on these key figures and their constitution, relational identities, positions and conditions will enable one to discern and represent the certitudes of the times and provide a critical commentary to the remaking of the nation in the past two decades. The discourse related to them and to the remaking of the nation draw on and articulate certitudes that have become central ideological motifs of the time. These include the emphasis on ‘Knowledge Economy’, drawn from the prominence of the IT industry, which has then spilled over into the larger economy, influencing policy and programmes which reiterate the centrality of a technology and science-based knowledge economy. Even as the rhetoric of a ‘knowledge economy’ seeks to legitimize the growing global technology-led service economy, there is the oversight and neglect of the plural knowledge economies of the agrarian and rural sectors. Similarly, the ideas of ‘quality’, which refer to notions of improvement in industrial production especially in the domain of the software industry and its competitive parameters, now find resonance in educational circles and have become legitimizing parameters with which the work of teachers and the learning of children are assessed. Yet such learning and training become the processes of new forms of subjectivation. Even as the tensions and contradictions between a fast globalizing urban, service economy versus that of a decelerating rural, agricultural economy become blatant, the idea of ‘inclusive growth’ is disseminated by the state to defray its own role in reproducing the structures of inequality and to legitimize the new forms of economy and its associated political regime. The certitudes of ‘rights’ drawn from the international regime marks not only the lives of children who



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are sought to be enveloped within the new ambit of educational rights but also that of agriculturists who are now marked by the new right to employment (as in the NREGA) and right to information. As the rights discourse gains currency and a range of Acts are promulgated, there is a failure to translate these into what Michael Ignatieff has identified as the 'moral vernacular'<sup>24</sup> of the larger society, and hence violations rather than implementation become the rule. The lives of these four emblematic figures then represents these varied processes, contradictions, and contestations over the lives, livelihoods, rights, citizenship, and the logics of a globalizing economy and the pressures of a highly differentiated society. Common to all these certitudes and forming a core theme is the contested idea of citizenship and its discursive relationship to the nation. How ideas of the citizen articulate the links between the state and certain groups of people and the relationship between different groups will highlight some of the contentious issues and events that represent the lives of these emblematic figures.

In this brief outline of the larger study that I propose to undertake, I have sought to highlight how the lives of these four emblematic figures are representative of the contouring of societies and groups by altering economic and political agendas and the varied relationships between them and the state and the nation. From the privileged and iconic position of the IT professional to the dislodged and increasingly marginalized position of the agriculturist; the contradictory role and position of the school teacher to the culturally idealized but politically neglected position of the child, the trajectories of the nation state and key societies within the nation are evident. In their different positions as subjects and as citizens, the variations in their agency and their collective strength, the representations and legitimacy accorded to them, these emblematic figures and their lives represent the complex, contested and contradictory trajectories of a nation.

Even as a range of certitudes mark the lives of the four emblematic figures, and gain currency in the discourse of the making of a 'new India', they encapsulate the discursive terms by which the nation is being reimagined and reconstituted. While such shifts may not signal 'epochal transformations'<sup>25</sup> it would be pertinent to identify what



structures have been retained, altered, or transformed. Each emblematic figure represents not only the fractured reality of a new India but also the processes of image and identity formation, incorporation, and exclusion and inclusion. In all of these the varying grammars of the State, market, civil society, and media are transposed and embodied in each of these emblematic figures. Engaging in such an exercise will also enable me to develop a body of contemporary anthropology<sup>26</sup> that focuses not primarily on an assemblage of capital, technology, and culture, but also on the complexities of livelihoods, rights, identities and cultures.

## End Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> Key social anthropological literature on the denouements of colonialism, modernity, and globalization are those by: Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff. 1993. *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Its Power in Postcolonial Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Appadurai, Arjun. 1991. "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology" In *Recapturing Anthropology*: R. Fox ed., Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press; Tsing, Anna. 2004. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connections*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Ferguson, James. 1999. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Chatterjee, Partha. 1997. "On Modernity" (A Sephis-Codeseria; [sephis.org/pdf/partha1/pdf](http://sephis.org/pdf/partha1/pdf)); Shivramakrishnan, K and A. Aggarwal, 2003. *Regional Modernities: Cultural Politics of Development*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; Das, Veena et al 2001, *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*. Berkeley: University of California; and the recent work by Farmer, Paul. 2005. *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>2</sup> The new literature on globalization that this study will draw on are those represented by Saskia Sassen, 2006. *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press; Cameron, Angus and Ronen Palan. 2004. *The Imagined Economies of Globalisation*. London: Sage.; Kirsh, Max. ed. 2006. *Inclusion and Exclusion in the Global Arena*. New York: Routledge; Smith, Neill. 1997. 'The Satanic Geographies of Development: Uneven Development in the 1990s.' *Public Culture* 10, no. 1: 169-189; Rose, Nikolas. 2007. *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-first century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Studies and work by Arlie Hochschild 2001. *Time Bind*. Holt Paperbacks, that explicate the reworkings of private domains such as the family, gender and social relations.

<sup>3</sup> For literature that focuses on perspectives from China see the works by Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini. 1996. *The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> Coronil, Fernando. 1997. *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Veneuela*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>5</sup> For details on 'relational' sociology see Mustafa Emirbayer, 1997, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology", *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol 103 (2). For details on 'relational positionality' see Susan Stanford

Friedman, "Beyond White and Other: Relationality and Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol 21 (1).

<sup>6</sup> In explicating the processes and ways in which 'structuring structures' emerge and their impact on society, cultures and nation, this study will draw on the works of Anthony Giddens, 1986. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Bourdieu, Pierre (with Loic Wacquant) 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Archer, Margaret. 2003. *Structure, Agency and Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>7</sup> I use 1997 as the cut off year as it marks the time of the consolidation of the new economy in India and is represented by the entry of the IT companies into the international stock markets (NASDAQ) and also the start of suicides by agriculturists.

<sup>8</sup> Chatterjee, Partho. 1995. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 154-155.

<sup>9</sup> Calhoun, Craig. 1991. "Indirect Relationships and Imagined Communities: Large-Scale Social Integration and the Transformation of Everyday Life", In *Social Theory for a Changing Society*. Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman ed., Boulder: Westview Press.

<sup>10</sup> This study draws on data from various projects conducted between the periods of 1997 to 2010 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. These include two national level studies on elementary education, a project on the IT industry (conducted with Carol Upadhyya), a large, action research project which focused on enhancing elementary education in Chamarajnagar district, Karnataka, and a research study on the state of rural India.

<sup>11</sup> Sahlins, Marshall. 2005. 'Structural Work: How Microhistories become Macrohistories and vice versa', *Anthropological Theory*, Vol 5 (1).

<sup>12</sup> A wide body of literature and debates exist but some of the key and representative ones are: Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen, 1999. *Economic Development and Social Opportunity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Patnaik, Utsa. 2005. *Republic of Hunger*. New Delhi: Three Essays Collective; Suri, K.C. 2006. "The Political Economy of Agrarian Distress", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLI (16) 1523-1529; Toxics Link, 2002. *Farmer Deaths due to exposure to pesticides in Warangal District*. New Delhi: Toxics Links; Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2005. Causes

of Farmer Suicides in Maharashtra: An Enquiry. Mumbai: TISS; Vakulabharanam, Vamsi, 2005. 'Growth and Distress in a South Indian Peasant Economy During the Era of Economic Liberalisation', *The Journal of Development Studies*, Vol 41 (6) 971-997. Vasavi, A.R, 1999. "Agrarian Distress in Bidar' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 34 (32) 43-65; Vasavi, A. R. 2007. MS. *Suicides and the Making of India's Agrarian Crisis* 2008; Three Essays Collective).

<sup>13</sup> These ideas and concepts are elaborated in my work, *Shadow Space: Suicides and the Predicament of Rural India*. Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective.

<sup>14</sup> The reference to the emergent and to the residual draws on the notions developed by Raymond Williams, 1983 *Keywords*. New York: Oxford University Press; and the recent work by Michael Fischer 2003, *Emergent Forms of Life and the Anthropological Voice*. Durham: Duke University Press, which recognizes the importance of the new life and cultural forms as constituted by bio-technologies.

<sup>15</sup> There have been a number of reports and studies on the suicides by agriculturists. For a sociological perspective see my study (Vasavi 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Data are sourced from the NASSCOM website ([www.nasscom.com](http://www.nasscom.com))

<sup>17</sup> For a comprehensive study of these developments see Carol Upadhyia's essay, 'A New Transnational Capitalist Class? Capital Flows, Business Networks and Entrepreneurs in the Indian Software Industry', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 34 (48). 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Saxenian, Annalee. 2006. *The New Argonauts: Regional Advantage in a Global Economy*. Camb, Mass: Harvard University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Data on school teachers from the Ministry of Human Resource Development ([www.mhrd.nic.in](http://www.mhrd.nic.in)).

<sup>20</sup> Data from the MHRD ([www.mhrd.nic.in](http://www.mhrd.nic.in)).

<sup>21</sup> Some details of the constructions and representations of the new global knowledge workforce and its celebrations are in Upadhyia, Carol and A.R. Vasavi. eds. 2008. *In an Outpost of the Global Economy: Work and Workers in India's Information Technology Industries*. New Delhi: Routledge.

<sup>22</sup> The term is drawn from C.K. Prahlad's best selling marketing book, *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid* (2004) which focuses on marketing goods and services to the poor.



<sup>23</sup> The foundations and philanthropy wings of several leading IT companies include those such as the Infosys Foundation (provides national level awards and also funds a range of programs and institutions), the Azim Premji Foundation and Azim Premji University (of WIPRO technologies), Tech Mahindra Foundation (of Tech Mahindra), and the Shiv Nadar Foundation and Shiv Nadar University (of HCL). Several other companies have education as a key arena of interest in their corporate social responsibility.

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Paul Rabinow, 2002, in 'Midst Anthropology's Problems', *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol 17 (2).

<sup>25</sup> Sassen, Saskia. *ibid.*; p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive review of ideas related to contemporary anthropology see Paul Rabinow et al 2008. *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*. Durham: Duke University Press.