Globalisation, Societies and Education

Liberalisation, privatisation, modernisation, and schooling in India: an interview with Krishna Kumar

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Liberalisation, privatisation, modernisation, and schooling in India: an interview with Krishna Kumar

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In 2004, India's Congress Party wrested control of parliament from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. I present below an interview conducted with Professor Krishna Kumar, Delhi University, the new Government's choice for Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training. Professor Kumar discusses the ways that liberalisation, privatisation and modernisation complexly interact in late twentieth and early twenty-first century India, paying special attention to their relevance for schooling. Professor Kumar thus links education to some of the themes most salient in the social sciences.

Introduction

It was announced on 2 September 2004 that Krishna Kumar, Professor in the Central Institute of Education at Delhi University, was appointed Director of India's National Council of Educational Research and Training. Among other activities, the NCERT promotes research on educational initiatives, advises the national and state Governments on curricular policy, and publishes textbooks and teacher training materials for consideration by state Governments for use in schools.

Liberalisation, I believed, provided a means for Professor Kumar and I to marry a discussion of the growing work on the Indian Government's adoption of liberal economic policies (see Gupta, 1998; Mankekar, 1999, Mazzarella, 2003) with growing scholarly interest in states' adoption of liberal policies around the world. Once the interview started, Professor Kumar pushed us to be bolder in our scope and suggested that we incorporate two other concepts, privatisation and modernisation, explaining

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that they must be considered with liberalisation in order to explore the massive social and political–economic changes in India during the past few decades. As for privatisation, social scientists are becoming increasingly aware of the ways in which resources and institutions owned and/or managed by the state come into focus as potential sources of profit for private interests, often as part of the stipulations of an agreement between the nation-state and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Singh *et al.*, 2005, p. 16). One of the most fascinating aspects of Professor Kumar's discussion of privatisation is his notion that the socially and political–economically salient contours of education in India have shifted. He traces involvements of privatisation in the increasingly difficult empirical distinction between publicly and privately owned and managed schools, and in a radical shift in the ways that the private school resonates with other sociocultural phenomena like class, life aspirations, and more ephemeral issues of subjectivity. If privatising initiatives are not already operating in the field context of a scholar of education, there is the possibility that they will in the future, and scholars will want to ponder the ways they resonate or might resonate with the shifts explored by Professor Kumar.

Bradley Levinson notes, 'throughout the word, schools have come to form part of our common sense, the normal way of "growing up modern"' (2000, p. 5). Professor Kumar brackets the completeness of the notion of modernisation and, at the same time, introduces notions about death, health and causality to explain why education might be increasingly sought after in India. Especially intriguing to scholars of education will be Professor Kumar's discussion of, on the one hand, the complex, shifting resonations of schooling with multiply situated dispositions toward the state, and, on the other hand, the state's changing role in inspiring models of lifeways for youths.

While different points of the interview might grab the attention of scholars oriented toward different disciplines, what is sure to intrigue any scholar interested in education is the way that Professor Kumar calls for the concomitant exploration of liberalisation, privatisation, and modernisation, and, in their brief exploration within the confines of the interview, demonstrates that the introduction of each of the concepts informs—and points to the incompleteness of—the others.

The interview

Interviewer: Many people have talked about liberalisation of the Indian economy that has happened over the last 20 years or so. For example, the media presented people in the US with the scenario that one reason the last election went the way that it did is that liberalisation had somehow failed the rural poor. On a more personal level, just yesterday I was talking to a rikshawalla about his worries that the electricity provision in his neighborhood was being sold to a private company, and so he was worried about the provision of electricity as well as changing rates. In your opinion, how have processes of liberalisation affected education, from the social value that different groups in society draw on when they envision education, to pedagogical techniques of the classroom?

Kumar: I feel that the processes that were initiated in the early 90s, or, maybe we should go a little further back to the late 80s, cannot be addressed with a single term. Although we use the term liberalisation as a policy measure, I think we need to take into account a larger set of processes that were triggered by things happening in different spheres of life from the mid 80s onwards, both in India and the world as a whole. I think liberalisation needs to be made a little more encompassing by being bracketed with two other terms, privatisation and modernisation. I think if you put this set together, then we have a slightly more representative spectrum of ideas or concepts which appear to have shaped state policies as well as responses to state policies in India during this period of the last 15, or, if you stretch it to 20, years or so.

And I think at the heart of what we are calling liberalisation today is a continuation and maturation of political experimentation. This political experimentation manifests itself at the level of very different relationships between center and states than what you might have seen in the 50s and 60s. Also, a different level of relationship between small and big parties, regional parties and national parties, small local lobby groups and larger national-level lobbies, and a different kind of relationship between, you could say, regional or local elites and the more lasting national elites, or national-level elites whose inheritance goes back to the colonial, and, in some cases, to the pre-colonial period. It is a fact that democracy is no more simply a system of governance in India. In that context, I think liberalisation takes on a much wider meaning of a liberal way of looking at tradition, at power, at the role of the individual. But in the economic sphere, I think the big change of course is that liberalisation has brought much greater room for privatisation. And this is where, I think, education becomes a significant arena to study liberalisation. Because in this period privatisation has become a major force, you could say, in the context of education.

Interviewer: This period meaning the last 20 years?

Kumar: The last 20 years, yes. Earlier, up until the late-70s or mid-80s, yes, there were private initiatives in education, but they were quite insignificant. Private schooling, private college education was available to a very small minority, and the discourse of education did not permit that kind of education to become a public issue. It was truly a private issue. Whereas today private education is a public issue, and it is a major issue, on which we actually don't have full-blown concepts to take a view. It's not easy today to take a view on whether we deride privatisation of education or whether we see it as a resource.

I think the issue has become further cluttered by the rise of non-Government organisations, or, in some cases, the conversion of private organisations into non-Government organisations, when it comes to educational initiative. It's very difficult today to clearly distinguish

philanthropic private activity in education from NGO activity. And purely commercial activity in education is also widely rampant. The situation is far more complex than one could have seen in the early 80s when the state was definitely the main player in education, certainly in school education, and even in higher education. Universities were entirely in the state sector. Nobody could think of a private university. Today a private university bill is waiting in the parliament to be approved. And even before the bill has been approved, there are already several private universities which have managed to get approval in the states. Similarly, at the school level, privatisation is now so wide-spread that it cannot be easily linked with any specific class of society. All earlier studies would suggest that private schools were a monopoly of the richest section of society. Now, that continues to be true, but there are many kinds of private schools today, and, right up to the village level, now one can see a hankering after private schooling. This hankering after is expressed not only by the richer sections of the rural society, but even that section of society which is not rich, but is some-how making ends meet. But for the sake of an educational experience for their child which promises to be even slightly more efficient than what the state is offering, they are willing to make sacrifices. So private education in popular perception today is seen as an escape from inefficient, bad, neglected state schools.

Now these are all various meanings which liberalisation has thrown into public space, and, as I said to you earlier, we don't have the clarity today to sort out these meanings on the basis of either empirical knowl-edge about the field on a vast enough scale, or on the basis of philo-sophical thinking about how we might associate words like "quality" with education today in this new context which liberalisation has created. So in that sense, to conclude this part of my response, I would say that liberalisation has greatly liberalised our conception of what the problems of Indian education are today.

Interviewer: You've talked about privatisation. How do you think modernisation has played its part in this tripartite scheme?

Kumar: I think if you throw in modernisation as a category then the picture becomes more interesting to look at. I think the idea that you are responsible for what happens to you … if we agree that this is an impor-tant aspect of modernity, this notion of the individuation of destiny, then I think it does have a bearing on what's happening to the demand for education in India. You know for a long time the absence of literacy or universal schooling was interpreted or explained away by research-ers by saying that the poor are not aware of the importance of educa-tion so, instead, they put their children at work or they don't insist that they should go to school.

Interviewer: Perhaps not even needing education…

Kumar: That's right. Now, a huge change that you can see coming in the literature from the 90s is that the demand for education among the poorer sections of society has greatly shot up, very radically. The PROBE report (*Public report on basic education in India*, 1999) which was a very major initiative outside the state sector to probe education, to investigate education, proved this through its extensive surveys, that the point about awareness cannot be made any more. The poorer sections of society are now aware of the importance of education and are willing to make sacrifices for it. The idea that I can shape, if not my, then at least my children's, social destiny, I think that's a very important idea which seems to have made a certain progress, not over just this period, but it's gotten further crystallized in this period.

This is a reflection of certain empirically verifiable realities and also a reflection of certain ideational realities. In the empirical context I think the studies of social mobility in India have shown that even though caste, class, community, ethnicity are very important factors in mobility, even though this is true and continues to be true, the fact has also emerged that there is room at the top for those who didn't belong there. People from different lower social economic strata of society have experienced individuals from amidst their groupings moving up into roles and statuses which they associated earlier with elites or with sections of society which were completely different from them. Now this has happened more for the middle chunks in the caste spectrum than for the lowest, but even at the lowest rungs of the caste hierarchy the experience has occurred, partly because of the reservation policy, but also in general senses. If it's possible to move up, if it's possible to overcome the status that you have because of birth in a hierarchy like the caste system, or overcome the shackles or limitations that poverty puts on you or your place of birth puts on you, then education is among the prime means, or prime perceived means, of implementing this possibility or trying out this possibility. So it's not surprising today when you go to villages in UP [Uttar Pradesh] or MP [Madhya Pradesh] to see that school conditions are very poor but schools are full to the brim with large numbers of children whose parents are uneducated, whose enrollment would have posed a problem hardly 15 years ago. And today the problem is not to retain them or not to enroll them, but the problem is to do something with them because the school is not equipped to deal with such large numbers, doesn't have enough teachers, doesn't have enough classrooms, doesn't have enough pedagogic resources to deal with them. But the children are there, and that's a dramatic change.

For instance, I saw in east UP, one of the poorest parts of India, a primary school in a village which has 467 children enrolled out of whom 430 were present on the day that I was visiting unannounced.

And the school has only two classrooms. The school has only two teachers and one parateacher who have no clue what to do. But the children are there. Now that's a very, very major change from a time when schools were bare. The teacher had to go to people, to people's houses, to persuade them for the sake of Government records to at least get their names enrolled, because that was a drive, a Government drive. Now that day is definitely over. And where the parent has absolutely any capacity to give the child a better deal, the child is put in a private school in the village. But the word 'private' doesn't mean a good school, but something on which the parent has some control. Because on the state school, the parent obviously thinks he has no control. If it's bad, it's going to remain bad. But on the private school he has some control. That perception leads to this phenomenon of paying a modest small fee and giving the child a chance.

So in that sense, I think if you put modernisation back into this discussion, I think modernity is an intrinsic desire to see life in secular terms, life being governed by life itself and not by parameters outside of human life which have to do with belief systems that have to do with the divine, with notions of destiny, with ideas of rebirth, that substratum of human consciousness from which one derives a lot of inspiration but one also derives a lot of reconciliation, you might say.

Interviewer: Which is a bit of an ironic comment given our taken for granted ideas about Indian Government of the past which has always been a secular sort of drive, and now it seems that the Government school is not the conduit of what you are talking about in terms of secularisation or imagining a secular society.

Kumar: I would distinguish between these two meanings of secularism. See, the Indian Government or Indian political discourse in general, has traditionally treated the word secular in the binary of religious *vs.* secular, or sacred *vs.* secular.

Interviewer: And this has gotten a lot of usage lately.

Kumar: Yeah, that's right. Whereas, I am using the word secular in the context of this-worldliness, and, in that sense, a rationalistic world order. That what happens in this life is on account of things that have to do with this life rather than elsewhere.

Interviewer: Beyond the binary of religious versus Nehruvian politics.

Kumar: That's right. It's not a question of whether Government is fair to Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism on an equal basis. Here we are talking about whether people believe that it's not God who is driving their destiny, that, if a child has died of a minor disease, [we might imagine people asking] is this a reflection of bad governance or bad fate? I think that one could say that 40 years ago one could have found a very large number of people who would not have associated a small child's death from diarrhea with bad governance. But today you would find a large

number of people, even in rural areas, who would not accept death by diarrhea in early childhood as a reflection of fate, who would see it as a sign of bad politics, bad governance, who may still feel helpless because they cannot control bad governance, and who may not link it up with liberalisation which has led to privatisation of healthcare.

In that sense I think that education has proved a secularising process. Its use by ideologically committed Hindu revivalist forces to use it for indoctrination and propaganda is a much more, you can say, surface text, but this is a deeper text where education is associated with thinking, with rationalism and so on. I'm not saying that the two are unrelated. If you get a long enough chance to indoctrinate people to education then this link between education and rationality or reason could well dry up. But we are certainly not at that point as you have seen in this election, even the rudimentary gains which the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] had made have been, in a way, offset quite vigorously. It shows that, as far as the indoctrinating capacities of education are concerned, those capacities were not mobilised to great efficiency by the BJP. They don't get a good grade for their goals.

Interviewer: If we could go back just for a minute. I liked very much the image that you used, a ripple, meaning both transition and, at the same time, one might also read in a ripple the potential for some kind of danger, or anxiety, or even progress. Do you have any thoughts about where is the child and where is the parent or the sponsor in these kinds of transitions? Do you think that these kinds of transitions are posing new anxieties for people, or providing perhaps new sorts of ideas? You've talked about the disposition of rationality.

Kumar: I think this is a very good moment in our discussion to bring in globalisation as well. Because when you talk of the child, this ripple that we are talking about quite distinctly influences the notion of childhood. I think the concept of the child is undergoing stress and change everywhere, and India in that sense is merely an example rather than an exception. And I would of course like to specify more about India. But, I think it's a global process. The child as a protected individual, or the child as somebody who deserves to be protected is a notion which got linked with democracy and enlightenment and rationality in the long European history of these terms over a period of almost 2–300 years. In India this has been a very incipient development, and it hasn't matured at all to a point, but there is a longer cultural history of the child being recognised as a vulnerable entity, the child receiving care and protection. Of course there are contradictions within that history, if you put in the gender issue. Is it the son or is it the daughter or are they both involved in certain perceptions? But I won't go into that for the moment. In the construction of childhood, I think this modern period in India has shown how slow is the transition to the acceptance

of one's responsibility and the responsibility to secular arrangements of life for what happens to the child. India has been a land of very large scale infant morbidity. Early childhood deaths have accounted for, up to about the 1970s, to something like 50% of all deaths.

It was a major issue for people in the social sciences to wonder how society copes with the extent of death, this extent of death in childhood. And the answer till then was that society copes with it by invoking belief systems which have to do with rebirth, which have to do with fate, which have to do with death as a reified arbiter of justice, and so on. And these explanations permit society to stay in some sort of sanity or mental health despite witnessing such large numbers of children's deaths. Now infant mortality has gradually come down, and the possibility of a child's surviving to adulthood has increased. There is no question that today's Indian parent, if such a generalisation can be made, has greater faith in the possibility that a child can survive up to adulthood if enough care is taken. It is the adult who is an authority. And when I say the adult, it means not the individual adult alone, but adult society. And in this construction, then, we can ask about the role of the adult as a boundary maker who determines what is good for the child, what is not good for the child, who filters the not-good away, who keeps it at bay so that, in the process of growing up, what is disapproved comes to the child at a pace which is regulated by the adult. Now in European history of course it is the knowledge of sexual good and evil, it's a very major knowledge which the adult and adult institutions were supposed to regulate.

Interviewer: And that's all linked to privacy.

Kumar: That's right, these are all very important developments of European social history. Now, in India, this is a relatively more complex phenomenon because sexual good and evil did not develop as such a major taboo area of knowledge on account of many cultural differences in India. But nevertheless, the need to protect the child from knowledge of the world, including sexual knowledge, but including other forms of knowledge as well, knowledge of violence, for example, or knowledge of evil, defined and articulated in different ways in different parts of India … I mean India is a very culturally diverse place so we cannot attribute any one meaning to these words like 'evil', for example. But what I am talking about is the role of the adult to set the boundaries of what the child will be exposed to and taking responsibility for it. I think liberalisation, globalisation, and processes associated with them have made this boundary maintenance role of the adult extremely precarious, difficult to sustain, and it's not true of India, it's true of the whole world. Now already, of course, the rise of television had made it difficult for the adult to maintain boundaries of what comes to the child and what doesn't come to the child. That's a long debate. It has had

40 years to unfold. But I think with the new technology of communication, with the internet, the mobile, and with much greater access to privacy, which is also another part of the game of modernisation, the adult's ability to exercise judgment is greatly reduced. I'm not trying to isolate technology, but I think if we look at this in the context of a more generalised understanding of market forces, then we are looking at changes in parental roles, of family roles in general, which are actually quite subtle and minute, which we haven't figured out yet how they really affect or how they manifest themselves in adult–child relations.

These may be very tentative thoughts which you may reject, but I've often wondered, for example, when I'm studying family relations even on a small scale—quite a few of my students have done this sort of work studying adult relations in a small number of cases of, let's say, 15 families in a community—I've had the occasion to wonder with them how much the father today is able to convey to the child the image of being a worthwhile adult. We find that in the case of quite a few families where the television is on all the time, and television today has 64 channels, many of which have extremely smart male anchors who are very good at asking questions, answering them, holding on to their position, eliciting responses from a crowd, maintaining control.

Interviewer: Smartly dressed.

Kumar: Yes, with whom an ordinary father will find it very difficult to compete. And, in that competition, the father's defeat is predestined to be insulting. What kind of father are you compared to X, Y, or Z whom I have seen on television is a valid question for a 7-year-old to have in mind. And for an 11-year-old, the father might become an object of deserved opprobrium compared to a male anchor who has all the attributes of a covetable personality, not just clothing and gestures, but intellectual or behavioral characteristics. And the extent to which this larger world of role models, of glamorous people, has entered the household is a very major change in the architecture of the household.

The adult parent's inability to filter information is already very clear, and it's clear probably all over the world, but it's certainly very clear in India now. The adult parent's inability to intervene, I think, changes many structures of authority in the family and in the world related to the family, in the community. I think these are changes which are associated with the much stronger role of the competitive ideology of the market when expressed in the media than with any specific policy changes, you might say, in education, etc. But they have an impact on education, they have an impact on how children perceive adults. At a superficial level, this is of course mentioned in saying that today's children are so clever that they ask so many questions that the teacher can't answer them. But it's not just that. I think the child's

perception of the adult is being colored by a new ideology of the desired adult, the desirable adult. I think that's where we have to look very carefully at state-market relations, particularly in the media, and ownership of the media, its regulation by the state, and so on. And in India I think this process has not even begun, this process of examining state–market relations in India. Liberalisation, in that sense, is relatively new, and the state still doesn't know how to deal with it when it comes to public broadcasting, and you can see that the state is actually quite helpless in some contexts. Things like pay channels which took years or decades in many western countries like Canada and England to get debated came about here before there was any policy. Every little town in India today has pay channels. So the state actually is doing some repair work post facto, and is unable to do it. The owners of different television channels are very strong players now in the dissemination of symbols of a desirable life, and the state is responding as best as it can, but is unable to cope with that reality.

Interviewer: And, again, do you think that within the school Government schoolteachers might suffer from these disseminated images?

Kumar: I would think not just Government schoolteachers. I would think teachers as a whole. I think this whole pedagogic relation between teacher and child is under stress and is being reshaped in ways which we are not fully aware of, and which may be difficult to pinpoint, partly because many other processes are affecting the teacher's role in the classroom. For instance, look at the fact that the spirit of liberalisation has meant a decline in the real incomes of teachers at most levels of Indian education. At the primary level it is certainly true. In this period a lot had happened in primary education which was partly donor driven by organisations like World Bank, etc, which lead to some good in the system, but also a lot which is highly questionable, about which these agencies have not been able to do much rational policy guidance. This was partly a response to, you can say, the structural adjustment in the Indian economy toward capitalism which brought these players into decision making. One of the things about which they have just not been able to do much is the rise of a very huge number of badly paid, permanently insecure parateachers, which are known by different names in different parts of the country. Their number now is in the hundreds of thousands. And in the classroom, or in the school context, the issue that we were dealing with earlier, whether the teacher has pedagogic authority, or moral authority, which comes to the Indian teacher from tradition, but also came because of his or her professional status, training, etc … all of those kinds of sources of authority are being eroded right now by this policy of teacher on contract who is permanently insecure and is in any case getting much less income than would be the case hardly 10 years ago.

At the moment, as I suppose in many other parts of the world too, India is responding to liberalisation, globalisation, and this whole package of changes as if it's responding to an avalanche. We have to protect ourselves first, stay alive, then we will worry about how to rationally reorder our system. This staying alive urge has become almost an obsession which leads to saying that there's no time to think, it's a time to do. And if this kind of binary between thinking and doing becomes a policy guideline even in academia then you are looking at a very serious redefinition of academic life. We had a vice-chancellor here who used to say that an emergency should have no place in a university. A university is an institution for contemplation. It maintains a certain distance from not just the state, but also from society and its changes, and that's how it serves best its role as a university. Now I feel although that vice-chancellor was here hardly 12 years ago, I feel the changes in this period have been so tumultuous that he looks like an ancestor from another century.

Interviewer: Changes including …

Kumar: Yes, these changes. Cutbacks, non-recruitment of teachers, cutting out of areas in humanities and social science which have no apparent use for the new culture of marketable knowledge. It feels that a very serious redefinition is already taking place which we are not able to sort out because there's no time to think, there's only time to do. And you are seen as lucky if you have the time to do something. So this notion of globalisation as some kind of an emergency with which we have to cope I think is very detrimental to the very concept of education. And, if universities can't cope with it, you can imagine how a primary school teacher in a village is coping with it. Probably with much less awareness of what is at stake.

And the state is also responding to a crisis. A crisis which is at one level of a fiscal nature, but at another level is of an ideological nature in the sense that the state is being told by quite powerful players in the game of international development, in the game of inter-Governmental kinds of work, the state is being told to shed its responsibilities, to privatise, cut back, and go for less deficits. Now education was always a long-term investment and the idea of a valid deficit is built into it. But if you say that education is a huge source of deficit and, therefore, you must cut educational spending so that your overall deficit looks less, this is an invitation to privatisation, which is happening.

In education, you were asking me earlier, and now I remember, one very major issue of this kind that has to do with what schools need, and is a good example of what you were saying, is the issue of computers. Do primary school children need computers? Add to it, do primary school children need distance learning by satellite television? Now market ideologues read computer lobbies and say of course they need

it. If computers are good for adults, they are good for children as well. If computers alter our conceptions of knowledge and learning, earlier the better should they be introduced in childhood. So they make a case for selling computers to schools which are otherwise bare, which don't even have crayons, or paper to draw on, let alone good quality textbooks or children's literature. They are able to argue with the Government that the Government should spend money on buying computers for schools, for primary schools. And the debate doesn't take off at all because you are looking at an ideology, not a debate. Nobody has proved that if a child has never been exposed to a computer that the child would not learn to work on a computer at age 17 or 18, or would become a less efficient computer user in the rest of his life. But those kinds of debates just don't arise. Similarly, the question, if children's time is spent on the computer instead of on making things with clay, or on painting, or on playing in the sand, is that time valuable or is it being wasted? Computer lobbies don't allow the question to be raised. As far as they are concerned, they are the best occupants of children's time, and anybody who argues for the opposite is blocking the progress of modernity, is impeding the era of efficiency and prosperity for all. Now I think this ideological rhetoric is criminally destructive of educational discourses and development. At a time in India when, for the first time, the poor are sending children to schools in large numbers, a time that people have seen as a time to celebrate, is certainly turning into a time when you feel traumatised by the anxiety that these children might well be turned into morons, not by Hindu or Islamic revivalism, but by the computer lobby. They will have no space, no time, to work on things. Hands-on experience is being seen as a sign of an obsolete pedagogic progressivism which has no place in the twenty-first century.

Interviewer: Sorry to interrupt, but a computer that will be outdated itself.

Kumar: Within a few years, yes. And the quality of the software that it's offering to the child is anybody's guess. If you compare it with television, 64 channels don't have a single decent program for children. If you look at the software available for teaching mathematics, forget about other areas like language, even in areas like mathematics or sciences, the quality of software available is abysmally poor. And yet because it's mechanical, because it generates a kind of a magical feeling, it is peddled as high-quality stuff, which deserves to substitute the living teacher, or which deserves to show the teacher in bad light because he cannot create that kind of magical glamour in the class. Therefore, he doesn't need to be paid properly, he doesn't need to be seen as a career teacher, he doesn't need to be seen as a professional. The professionals are in the software industry. That's the kind of ideological claim that they are able to make. So what I'm saying to you is that it is actually a very dangerous time.

Interviewer: It seems that the computer would lend itself to a very different trace of success than the teacher would.

Kumar: Absolutely. And how we will judge that success? On what kind of criteria? Will they be derived from educational theory or will they be derived from the market? That question is just not being asked. Because I think theory in general is perceived as a waste of time at all levels in education, certainly, where very few people are even aware that there is theory. But even in areas where theory has been respected, like say economics, or in political theory, even in those areas, academia is learning the message that what works in the market is true. Forget about theory. There's no need to theorise. There's no time to theorise in any case.

Conclusion

One of the most valuable lessons that Krishna Kumar teaches scholars of education in his interview is that the relationship between one's disposition to politics and one's scholarly voice can have profound effects on one's ability to conceptualise the very possibilities of and constraints on 'new forms of nationalism and concepts of citizenship' in any given society implicated in 'new world orders of capital, work, communication and knowledge' (Hautman, 2004, p. 18). For example, one of the most salient constructions of the nation and citizen in India in the last few decades has been the essential 'Hinduness' (*Hindutva*) of India. Many scholars have investigated the rise of Hindu nationalism, and some have pointed to the ways that processes of liberalisation, privatisation and modernisation have worked in complex, sometimes ironic, ways to its political benefit (McKean, 1996; Jaffrelot, 1998; Hansen, 1999; Rajagopal, 2001; among many others). These authors show that one of the most insidious ways that Hindu nationalism has shaped political discourse in India is by molding subject positions into a dichotomy of pseudo-secularists who, like the founding Government of India, make special efforts for minority groups like Muslims versus those, like themselves, who are willing to reclaim the nation for an 'indigenous' Hinduism.

Education has become a site for imagining and extending the contest between the stances of secularism and Hindu nationalism. During the period of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party's rule (1998–2004), for example, concerns about the 'saffronisation' (invoking the color of the religion and party) of education took center stage in policy debates as well as in media coverage of educational shifts. A set of volumes of newspaper editorials and academic papers from the period show a common resistance to the 'communal' (religious) nature of Government decisions to present the state education boards with books with anti-Muslim (and Christian) and pro-Hindu slants. The various authors call for the state education boards to reject the communal options with which they have been presented (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, 2001, 2002a, b).

Professor Kumar resists the subject position that would pit him as a scholar 'secular' in orientation against one 'communal' in orientation (for a similar move vis-à-vis

US education, see Apple, 2001). This is not to say, of course, that Professor Kumar is unaware of Hindu fundamentalism's salience in contemporary Indian society—its potential to shape education policy (or to lead to violent death). He belies such a view in his interview, and, elsewhere, he has published on the ways that the rise of Hindu nationalism constrained the usage of Hindi in places like schools, in turn, constraining the resonance of schooling in the lives of Indian children of various class and caste levels (1990, 1993).

Yet, perhaps the most important feature of the interview for a scholar of education working anywhere is that Professor Kumar presents a more complex rendering of transitions in education than a 'secular' stance, oriented in opposition to a fundamentalist one, could afford. For example, halfway through the interview, Professor Kumar introduces the notion of globalisation, perhaps the term used in the interview that has been most frequently invoked in recent publication in the social sciences. Daniel Yon claims that 'Globalisation signals the internationalisation of capitalism and the rapid circulation and flow of information, commodities, and visual images around the world' (2000, p. 15). Professor Kumar introduces the term in order to complicate the context in which schooling (and parenting) occurs by pointing out that the medium of television, in particular, presents children with models of adulthood based on disparate 'models of how one becomes a fully "knowledgeable" person, a person endowed with maximum "cultural capital"' (Levinson & Holland, 1996, p. 21). Social scientists will be left wanting more ethnographic specificity, of course, than can be presented in the interview. But what is certainly a lesson for scholars is that by holding at bay an opposition between secular and communal persons, thoughts, and policies that has come to have incredible salience in Indian society, Professor Kumar is able to consider shifts in subjectivities for which the opposition has no convincing approach. Scholars should, of course, investigate the subject positions, often polarised, that are available to persons in the field, but they should beware of treating such subject positions as the sole units of analysis.

A final lesson to be learned in the interview is that not only are such crucial topics as changing notions of hierarchy, responsibility, and forms of cultural capital poorly served by dichotomised subject positions offered by debates based on alternatives like secularism and communalism, but some societal shifts occur in the shadows of such debates such that their importance to pedagogy can go unrecognised. Professor Kumar's example is the increasingly taken for granted idea in India that computers are a necessity in the lives of children. He argues that the ideology by which the computer is a modernising and globalising vehicle for the child and the nation has gained such momentum that the possibility of alternatives is not raised. In the process, the goals of pedagogy and the best means of achieving them are monopolised by lobbying on behalf of private interests.

One might rightly complain that Professor Kumar and I have focused on 'dominant relations' to the exclusion of 'counterhegemonic possibilities' emergent within shifts in Indian political–economic policy, society, and education (Apple *et al*., 2003, p. 15). Indeed, one might ask such questions as: Are teachers powerless to change their erosion of security, authority, or livelihood? In asking the question, might we need to

change the scale of our approach? Might changing notions of the control of minors bring about possibilities, however, limited, of democratic action at younger ages? Could computers facilitate communicative possibilities (even for children) that might reshape the modes in which and domains of experience about which they communicate? While he nor I addresses such concerns in the interview, one might say that Professor Kumar registers a 'counterhegemonic possibility' by resisting the pervasive discourse of secular versus communal dispositions, and thereby expands the realm in which we might conceptualise linkages between changes in political economy, subjectivity, and the institutions, personae, and ideologies of education.

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Krishna Kumar was named Director of the Government of India's highest post in education in September 2004. Professor Kumar has been a pioneer in thinking about links between colonial and independent India's education system. His scholarly work is represented in his landmark publication, *Political agenda of education: a study of colonialist and nationalist ideas*, among many others. He has most recently published *Battle for peace*.

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