Rethinking Nai Talim
What Roles Can Universities Play?   97

Sujit Sinha, APU

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Rethinking Nai Talim: What Roles Can Universities Play?
Sujit Sinha, Azim Premji University, Bangalore

I am a faculty at the infant Azim Premji University (APU) set up in 2010 at Bangalore. APU has a specific developmental goal – to be at the forefront of attempts in tackling the growing educational crisis confronting modern civilization. Some of us at the APU believe that we need to critically examine Gandhi and Tagore's ideas and experiments and reinterpret some of them today's context. In order try and understand the activities and thinking of current practitioners, we along with some students participated in the 75th anniversary Nai Talim celebrations in Sevagram (near Wardha, Maharashtra) recently.

In this essay, after a brief introduction to the history of Nai Talim and similar experiments by Tagore, I will talk about some of the recent school level initiatives and also include a significant work done at the undergraduate level which we heard at Sevagram. I will talk about some possible college level initiatives which one can classify as Nai Talim for today. The question is ----How do we build on this and should we at all do so?

Secondly I will share the new architecture, new ideas and new ways of doing things, and some of the stumbling blocks with which the infant Azim Premji University is grappling in order to become an explicitly "developmental" university. How will likeminded institutions collaborate to take this agenda forward?

Nai Talim: Historical Overview

Krishna Kumar (1993) describes the context and the core ideas of Nai Talim which Gandhi proposed: "Rejection of the colonial education system, which the British administration had established in the early nineteenth century in India, was an important feature of the intellectual ferment generated by the struggle for freedom. Many eminent Indians, political leaders, social reformers and writers voiced this rejection. But no one rejected colonial education as sharply and as completely as Gandhi neither did, nor did anyone else put forward an alternative as radical as the one he proposed. Gandhi's critique of colonial education was part of his overall critique of Western civilization.

"The core of Gandhi's proposal was the introduction of productive handicrafts in the school curriculum. **The idea was not simply to introduce handicrafts as a compulsory school subject, but to make the learning of a craft the axis of the entire teaching programme**. It implied a radical restructuring of the sociology of school knowledge in India, where productive handicrafts had been associated with the lowest groups in the hierarchy of castes. Knowledge of the production processes involved in crafts, such as spinning, weaving, leatherwork, pottery, metal-work, basket-making and book-binding, had been the monopoly of specific caste groups in the lowest stratum of the traditional social hierarchy. Many of them belonged to the category of 'untouchables'. India's indigenous tradition of education as well as the colonial education system had emphasized the skills (such as literacy) and knowledge of which the upper castes had a monopoly. In terms of its epistemology, Gandhi's proposal intended to stand the education system on its head. The social philosophy and the curriculum of 'basic education' thus favoured the child belonging to the lowest stratum of society. This is how it implied a programme of social transformation. It sought to alter the symbolic meaning of 'education' and thereby to change the established structure of opportunities for education.

"Basic education was an embodiment of Gandhi's perception of an ideal society as one consisting of small, self-reliant communities. To him, Indian villages were capable of becoming such communities; indeed, he believed that Indian villages were historically self-reliant, and the great task now was to restore their autonomy and to create the conditions necessary for economic self-sufficiency and political dignity in villages."

Krishna Kumar also chronicles the early opposition to Gandhi's Nai Talim:
"The basic education proposal coincided with the setting up of the National Planning Committee (NPC) by the Congress Party. The specific aim of the NPC was to formulate a plan for India's industrialization with the aim of 'economic regeneration' after independence. Its chairman, Jawaharlal Nehru, had believed for a long time that large-scale industrialization alone could solve India's problems of poverty and unemployment. But apart from Nehru's own beliefs, the NPC's reports on different spheres of development reflected the vision of a powerful and growing class of industrialists, their supporters in politics and intellectuals with high qualifications in different areas, including science and technology.

"The NPC's sub-committee on general and technical education saw serious problems in the Wardha scheme of basic education. The sub-committee's argument against this was that 'too much stress on vocation at such [an] age is spiritually harmful and teaching of general subjects through such [a] single narrow-down medium makes the knowledge of subject superficial and defective'.. 'To a certain extent such a system will mean [the] existence of child labour in schools', the report said.

"Many Indian intellectuals who were committed to rapid modernization found Gandhi's educational plan unacceptable. One of them was the well-known novelist Mulk Raj Anand, who wrote in his book "On education" published at the time of independence: ' The dream of perfecting good little minds on the basis of *Khadi* and non-violence, so that these morons vegetate within the limits of their self-sufficient communities, is not only impossible in an India where every village is already inundated with cheap machine-made goods produced by foreign and indigenous capitalists, but is likely to bring about the very opposite of all those qualities which the Mahatma seeks to create in the average Indian'."

In spite of such strong reservations, attempts to put this daring philosophy into practice picked up momentum in many of the Congress governed states from 1938. The practitioners met every year to compare notes and report on what had been achieved. Subsequently this idea of Nai Talim was also extended and conceptualized at the post-school higher education level. Marjorie Sykes writes in "The Story of Nai Talim" (1988) : "From 1952 onwards a lot of thought had been given by the Talimi Sangh to what they called *Uttam Buniyadi Talim*, mature and original study and research into the needs and problems of rural India such as might be developed in a rural university. In 1955 this "university" work had formally begun at Sevagram, with a few young men who had graduated from the post basic stage.

The school level experiments fizzled out by late 1950s.   One way of looking at this collapse of Nai Talim is that this was inevitable. The Gandhian vision of ideal society required Nai Talim kind of education system for its fulfillment. However the vision of the dominant society was in many senses exactly the opposite. It proposed an urban- industrial- unlimited material growth- nature conquering mega S&T- centralized nation state. Agriculture too started mimicking standardized industry dwindling traditional rural existence.

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Tagore's "Work and Education"

Many development practitioners today are unaware that Tagore started his rural reconstruction work in 1890s in Silaidah (Bangladesh) even before the establishment of his Santiniketan School in 1901 or his rural work around Santiniketan 1910 onwards. And that his 15 point charter of rural reconstruction read out in 1906 Pabna regional conference of Congress anticipated most of the work being done by rural development NGOs from 1970 onwards. Similarly most educationists know about the famous Patha Bhavan School and Viswabharati in Santiniketan; but few details are known about the other school Sikshasatra. This was started when Tagore was frustrated with Patha Bhavan heading towards becoming a "normal mainstream" school. This is not the place to go into the details .But it is worthwhile quoting from Sandip Bandopadhyay's book "Sriniketan" (2001)

"Sikshasatra was founded on July 1, 1924 near Santiniketan. Each boy was given a small plot of land and encouraged to treat it as a playground and experimental farm. He was also at liberty to choose a craft according to his interest and aptitude. Only one hour daily was devoted to the learning of the three 'R's. Each craft was treated as a project and a source of non formal learning. The 1928 report categorically stated that craft should be of 'definite economic value' and the products should be of 'real use at home and should command ready sale outside'. Sikshasatra thus anticipated Gandhi's 'Basic Education scheme' in more than one respect."

Whither Nai Talim

What actually happened with the idea of Nai Talim in schools, both at policy and practice level? The National Focus Group on "Work and Education" of NCF[1]-2005 chaired by Anil Sadgopal (NCF -2005) puts it down to continuing practice of confusing vocational education with the pedagogic role of work in curriculum. The latter, the report say, "was time and again either marginalised or trivialised in the school curriculum. This critique applies to both 'work experience' and SUPW as recommended by the Education Commission (1964-66) and Ishwarbhai Patel Committee (1977) respectively". The report says that the "1986 policy itself is responsible for promoting such a confusion as well as for proposing an artificial division between vocational and the so-called academic streams."

From the 1970s and increasingly in the last 10 years it is being recognized in various ways by many people that unlimited material growth model is no longer viable. As the sense of crisis increases, more and more people, civil society organizations, governments, and even corporates are grappling with what to do and how to do things differently . Clearly it is extremely difficult to re-orient technologies, production systems, political systems, economic arrangements, social mores, social institutions, and individual and collective aspirations. There are also powerful vested interests and massive inertia at various levels which create pressure towards continuing, more or less, what has been done in the last 200 odd years. Thus a majority of educationists, institutions and governments have their feet planted on two boats which, it appears, will become progressively more and more difficult. Meanwhile there is renewed interest in Gandhi's ideas, who was one of the most forceful voices for an alternate vision of human civilization. For us, one of the important issues is ---how do we re-interpret the Gandhian idea of education or Nai Talim in today's context and make it relevant for the future?

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[1] National Curriculum Framework 2005

Nai Talim Today

The 75th anniversary of Nai Talim was celebrated in Sevagram, Maharashtra on November 17-18, 2012 at Wardha, where 75 years ago, a group of people from across India had assembled to argue and discuss with Gandhiji's proposal of making "useful productive manual work" the main pedagogic tool for imparting school education right from Class I.

75 years on, this is what they had to say...

Sevagram School Today

The pioneering Nai Talim school 'Ananda Niketan' was started in 1937 at Sevagram by Mirabehn and others. Later, they were guided by the Aryanayakams , who had worked in Sikshasatra for some time before moving from Santiniketan to Wardha. The school[2] closed down in 1960s like most of the other Basic or Buniyadi or Nai Talim schools all over India. A plucky Sushama Sharma backed by Talimi Sangh restarted it in 2005. One of APU students Ankit (MA Education 2011-13,) who is currently working with the school describes "each child has an agriculture plot and as they plant and nurture and water their crops , they learn all the concepts in NCERT Maths books of class V-VI-VII like counting , measurements , shapes, angles , data gathering , organizing data , fractions, decimals and ratio-proportions. They are having so much fun that those who had to go away after Class VII wish that they could have continued in this school. Ananda Niketan does not have government approval as Maharashtra is not "recognizing" any fresh Marathi medium schools beyond Class VII!

So Gandhi and Tagore's dream have a precarious existence in Sevagram and in the meantime some children are having fun combining "work and education".

 Dr. T Karunakaran, ex VC of Gandhigram University says that much before Gandhi Navaji Bhat pioneered Nai Talim and introduced agriculture and animal husbandry as the main productive activity for schools in 1920. Today, with official state recognition, Nai Talim network involves 1300 institutions (schools and teacher education). These schools have 250 hours of activity in an academic year. Dr Karunakaran said that the only other state which made a big effort was Bihar. The first four Gandhi inspired schools in India started in Champaran. Between 1935 and 1955 they opened a large number of Basic schools. But it probably was the case of doing too much too fast and "preparation of teachers" did not keep pace at all. The effort collapsed. He also cited the apparent success of Panna district (MP) in coming up with a district level curriculum which would be worth investigating.

Dr. Karunakaran however recounted how Nai Talim in Tamil Nadu was scuttled early in 1950s when DMK movement strongly opposed Rajaji's plan of introducing hands on activities by 2 days in a week in own family studying the parental profession. This was construed as trying to perpetuate caste based injustices and inequities. He mentioned that the *Guntri* system of schooling of Denmark was a successful example of "work and education" which would be worth studying.

The Vidyodaya School for Tribals in Gudalur, Tamil Nadu uses agriculture, arts and craft as some of the main activities. The activities draw from tribal culture where exclusion even of retarded and disabled children is absent and there are no winners and losers in their games.

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[2] This school has been beautifully described by Marjorie Sykes in her "The Story of Nai Talim".

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The Majihira School of Purulia, West Bengal, which was started in 1940, gone through several ups and down as have most basic education schools. In the last few years there is a new push towards activity based teaching.

Haritha, Khammam district, Andhra Pradesh It has taken both teachers and students a long time to fully accept that hands on activity as the central axis of teaching and learning. They have generated a fair amount of innovative technology with emphasis on renewable/ green energy. A key learning is that it is better to have focus on few activities in the form of ongoing micro enterprises rather than many experimental activities.

Vigyan Ashram, Pabal, Maharashtra which was started in 1987 is one of the more successful ventures with several collaborations and innovations. One of their programmes which covers 3 years duration from class VIII to class X has been recognized by the Maharashtra state , and consists of various activities in four broad areas of (i) Engineering (ii) Energy – Environment (iii) Agriculture-Animal husbandry (iv) Food processing - Home and health. It has now spread to 155 schools. There is also a one year residential intensive version of this program at Vigyan Ashram which is recognized by National Institute of Open Schooling.

Yantra Vidyalaya, Bardoli, Gujarat: was set up in 1956 to do research and manufacture hand tools for marginal farmers. It is currently working intensively with village blacksmiths. They have made better tools using scientific knowledge but they cost substantially higher than existing tools and therefore are not easily sold. . They have a good syllabus which covers training in making tools. However those who so the course prefer taking salaries jobs which do not make use of their creative potential. The school requires knowledge support to take their course forward, but regular academic institutions like IIT are not able to provide such support.

Vidyabhavan , Udaipur , Rajasthan: is one of the earlier Nai Talim schools which has been revived in the last 12 years, when activities such as food processing, carpentry, electrical repairs etc. have been introduced.

The "perpetual" issues which plague these schools are (i) disconnect between activity and subjects (ii) teacher capacity building (iii) burden of state books.

Field Placement of various sorts
We know that some of the better B.SW and M.SW programs have students engaging with a "field" throughout the program and there is an attempt to link what they have learnt in their classrooms with actual field situation or interventions. Courses in rural management or rural development also try to do this. Some of the private institutions like the MBA programs of S.P. Jain Institute and Bachelors in IT of DAIICT (Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology) have made it mandatory for students to do internships with development NGOs. Some Agricultural universities have also had such fairly intense engagement with the field as part of their Bachelors degree .To do this; often academic institutions forge various kinds of partnerships with government programs and NGOs. NSS is probably the largest program where a substantial number of undergraduates get to spend some time in the "field". It seems that the quality of such field engagements can be improved a lot so that the benefit to the community and learning of the student is more substantial.

Potential at the Undergraduate level
Mr.Vivek Sawant, the Managing Director of Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation narrated his experiences during the severe drought in Maharashtra when he persuaded the Pune University Vice

Chancellor to allow a programme in which students from 100 undergraduate colleges got involved in making contour ditches and tree planting in barren hills around the drought affected villages .The students who were mainly from were mostly from villages and small towns, were taken through an orientation process and taught how to use a simple device for contour marking. The students and some of the expenses were paid through various government schemes. The work has been quite spectacular and successful. In the concluding meeting between the Principals and the VC, the principals remarked that during the orientation, the students raised very pertinent, technical and social questions, which they never did in classrooms. One principal said that a village did *pranam* saying that his village was saved. This is in stark contrast to the situation where there was hardly any interaction between these colleges and surrounding villages. Other principals opined that they could consider closing the college for some time and have all students do such crucial tasks that would transform the whole area. The principal agreed that the effect on students was amazing. Some parents reported that the students, who earlier were only thinking about leaving the villages, have started reflecting on the problems and possibilities in their own villages. Some students from Pune got so excited that they voluntarily joined drought relief work. While Mr. Sawant admitted that similar work are being planned in subsequent droughts , he was in no position to take this further in terms of integrating such work into college curriculum, he said that. Clearly this is something which would ideally be Nai Talim in today's context.

Can Subjects in Colleges be Taught through "Productive" Work?

We have seen how the development context can throw up interesting areas of engagement n productive work. The question is whether these can be linked to study of the subject itself. Here are some examples of such possibilities.

Geography: During the relief and rehabilitation work following the 2000 floods in West Bengal, they found that the Gram Panchayats did not have relevant maps. Every block in the area has at least one college where Geography is taught. When a well known expert on rivers and floods of West Bengal, who also happened to be a Geography professor in one of those colleges, was asked, "Why can't students actually make detailed maps of surrounding Panchayats", he replied that it is "not a part of their curriculum". This begs the question as to why shouldn't it be a part of the curriculum? What better way to understand the concepts of map making than learning the actual skills involved in map making; and in the process gets excited as their output is of direct use? It might lead to many questions and new knowledge!

Chemistry: In the 1990s, some districts of West Bengal reported arsenic in the ground-water. Lakhs of people were affected and there were quite a few deaths. In such a situation it is important to test the drinking and cooking water sources on a regular basis. Most undergraduate colleges have a rudimentary laboratory and the basic approximate tests for detecting arsenic using such equipment can easily be determined. It would have been great if Chemistry students had learnt not only how to do the test, but the chemistry behind the advent of arsenic, the chemistry of the tests etc. The students could be organized in groups, which would take charge of testing 10-20 drinking water sources on a regular basis and inform the people using these wells.

Political Science: Last year, we found that students of political science in Dhamtari district of Chattisgarh, who had Panchayat Raj in their course, were not able to answer questions about the working of the Panchayats in the surrounding areas where they came from. This means that the students are not able to relate what they have studied to the actual situation. The question there is

why this is an integral part of the study? Can the study include assisting these weak local government institutions in various ways, be part of the curriculum?

So whether it is Geography, Chemistry, Political Science, Sociology, History, Economics, Physics, Engineering, Agriculture, and Commerce ---one can come up with ideas and ways of engaging with the surrounding villages and urban areas. It is likely that the topics and issues will be different in different places and would require a fair degree of fresh and original thinking and exploring. What better way to learn their own subjects with proper understanding ,do something useful ,have fun , in many cases learn some practical and potentially vocational skills , and raise questions and create new knowledge ? The important thing to note is that I am proposing that these engagements should not be extra-curricular. But such engagement should be intrinsic part of the curriculum and should be one of the important pedagogic tools to learn their chosen subjects. It is worth reminding ourselves of this main revolutionary principle of Nai Talim.

Azim Premji University: A Private University with a Public Purpose

History and Genesis
The APU is part of a larger effort in the Azim Premji Foundation to improve the quality of government school system in rural areas. The foundation has been working at the ground level for over ten years with several state governments. It realizes that   (a) there were not enough talented and competent people for all "levels" so necessary to bring about significant quality improvements in the whole public school system; (b) there was a dearth of grounded knowledge on many aspects of school education and necessary linkages; (c) in the poorest areas and for the most vulnerable groups, only improving school education system will not work unless other crucial development domains are also taken care of and; (d) this is not something which can be achieved through 3-5 year projects or programs but would require long term and almost permanent and continuous engagement.

Therefore from 2009 the Foundation embarked on creating a set of institutions which will work closely with each other with the overall goal of producing a "just, equitable, sustainable, humane society". These were: (i) A university catering to the whole nation (ii) Field Institutes of two types in 8 states ---one in the state capitals, and six to seven in the poorest districts in each of those states totaling 50 such district institutes by 2015; (iii) Two "demonstration" schools in each of these 50 districts, one primary and another at the K12 level; (iv) An Institute for Assessment and Accreditation for the school system.

The Azim Premji University was setup in April 2010, with the objective of producing knowledge and capable and motivated people who will actively engage in bringing about desirable transformation in India's school education system. Equal emphasis was to be given to allied development areas of livelihoods, health-nutrition, environment, and governance which directly affect school education outcomes. In a sense Azim Premji University is designed to be a unique higher education institution with direct links and outreach institutions in 50 of the poorest districts of India.

The issues and conflicts and some attempts
Some of the issues and questions which the University has been grappling with include: (i) Who should be the faculty? ; (ii) What kind of students should we try to get? ; (iii) What kind of teaching and research programs should we have? (iv) How do we resolve the perpetual conflict between "theory and practice' 'classroom vs. field'   in the design of degree programs and in the actual courses within these programs? (v) What do we do to "solve" the language issue as there will be many students with

inadequate English? (vi) How do we cater to huge number of "practitioners" who are already engaged, and who cannot come for "full time" courses?

Faculty issues: Should all faculty be necessarily "social scientists" or have PhDs? Does the University consider their foray into "development" as basically "a social science and humanities venture" or they are also going to engage significantly with "science- technology- ecology- environment"? If the first set of faculty are well heeled "academic social scientists" and will play a significant role in hiring the next set, how do we ensure that we get a balance of all kinds of faculty?

This author has a M.Sc from IIT and a PhD in Chemistry, and after a short career in science, became a full time rural development practitioner working with NGOs for over 25 years. While this was not considered "appropriate degree' for a faculty position in the "Development Studies" programme of a recently formed Central University, Azim Premji University considered the author as a "thoughtful development practitioner". The plurality in faculty has led to intense debates and turf wars on what courses to teach in a M.A. Development programme; and what should be the content within these courses. Most good social scientists want students to grapple with "original texts" and have a sound theoretical understanding. They are unhappy with the limited "time" allotted to them. Practitioners are unhappy that the space for "practical knowledge and skills" is not acknowledged by social scientists in an MA program. As the debate and rethinking continued, changes have been made just after a year of classes. In a sense things are as it should be and it will take a few years of experimentation and actual "placement" of students, their performance and feedback, and feedback of other actors on the field which will lead to more clarity and consensus. Currently even the name of the program is contested with some faculty referring to this as "Development Studies" whereas others as "Development Action" But overall the University is committed to have both academic and non-academic practitioners as faculty.

Students: What do we want our students to do and therefore how do we source our students? The University started with the hope that most M.A. students of Development and Education would spend a substantial part of their initial career at the district, sub-district, and village levels. Initially it was also assumed that one way of ensuring this was to target small towns and non metropolitan undergraduate colleges for students. But there was some evidence to show that this was not necessarily true and that students from middle class metropolitan background, if already so motivated for whatever reasons, and if equipped properly by the masters' program, were as likely to locate to non metropolitan and rural jobs. Nevertheless Azim Premji Foundation has held "Student Interaction Programs" in hundreds of undergraduate colleges all over the country in the last two years. This has become a part of the Foundation's work throughout the year. The idea is to engage students into deeper development discussions, motivate more and more of them to think of active development career, apply in larger numbers for development courses in Azim Premji University or other institutions offering similar courses, and generally expand the pool of motivated youngsters coming into the development sector. In the two batches so far (2011-13 and 2012-14) consisting of ~ 220 students in M.A. Education and M.A. Development, there are students from all over the country, metropolitan and small towns and villages, fresh out of college and a substantial number who have worked for a few years, with all kinds of college education ---science- arts – engineering – commerce – management, many not so comfortable with English, most not prepared for a lot of reading and original writing. So the faculty have struggled on "what to teach" in let us say Sociology , Political Science , Economics, Law, Ecology etc to a group where some might have done foundation courses in undergraduate and many might have absolutely no background. This is compounded by the fact that the program can accommodate only one or at the most two courses on any discipline. The issue of "how to teach" has been equally troubling and low reading and low English proficiency has added to the complexity.

Since these were anticipated, various attempts have already been made, with not so satisfactory results so far. Apart from the classroom, full time counseling facility was started early and this has been very beneficial as there are substantial amount of cases of stresses of all sorts. For both batches some kind of "Orientation" in the beginning has been tried which was a mix of skill building (for anticipated gaps in language, reading-writing, computer etc), motivation, group dynamics, challenging commonly held beliefs etc. The results have been mixed and more thinking and planning is going on.

Field engagement: What should be the extent and objectives of field engagement? There has been some fairly intense debates and enquiry in existing models within India. And predictably there is a lot of churning and uncertainty. Right now in December 2012 , the first batch is undergoing its first 6-8 week internship (currently the longest duration field placement during a 2 year programme) after the end of their 3rd semester and in many cases there is a certain amount of disconnect between what was planned and what is actually happening in the field .

Courses: The classic challenge remains. To many social scientists, mentioning the word "management" is like showing a red rag to a bull. Some are uncomfortable with 'inter-disciplinary", or courses on the border of several disciplines. Many still see a Masters level development program as either M.A. or M.Sc. or M.Tech or MBA. They consider these as more or less mutually exclusive entities. For example some were initially unhappy that Ecology or Environment should be a course in an MA development program. From 2013-15 the University is going to start offering specializations within these two broad programs. In MA Development it would be on "Livelihoods" and "Health & Nutrition". A proposed course on "Value Chain" which would be part of Livelihoods has been rejected as not being "conceptual" enough and apparently more suited for a B.BA program rather than a Masters course. So the University will have to start engaging with others like TISS, Ambedkar University to see how they are handling such courses.

Continuing Education: Azim Premji University has an extension wing which is referred to as University Resource Centre (URC). Its mandate is to design and deliver short term training programs for development practitioners. It is significant that unlike other Universities, where often the Extension or Continuing Education wing is a small peripheral entity , here URC is planned to be as significant a part of the University as its full time degree programs. This is a deliberate plan arising from the realization that the number of practitioners who are already engaged in development work at various levels is huge, and they have all kinds of capacity building needs. Therefore the URC's mandate is to design and deliver high quality, need specific, short term, multiple mode (full contact, part contact and part distant, full distant) courses. Currently the URC is engaged mostly in providing such trainings for the "internal" staff of various wings of Azim Premji Foundation itself. But soon it will start offering such courses for others.

Language: The other related fact is that some of these internal courses have been delivered in the vernacular. But creating appropriate courses and materials in the vernacular remains a challenge. One of the future aims of the University is to start delivering high quality undergraduate courses and also short term URC courses, in vernacular, from the District Institutes. The challenge will be the quality and relevance of the courses, the creation of good vernacular materials, and the gradual evolution of high quality faculty.

A further challenging task could be to try and improve the quality and "effectiveness" of non metropolitan undergraduate colleges catering to students from small towns and villages by incorporating the basic principles of Nai Talim as stated in the first part of the essay.

Relationship with immediate environment: While gearing up for playing this grand- national "developmental" role, what will the University do in its immediate vicinity in the outskirts of Bangalore? Currently the University is located in rented premises. In 2015 it is expected that it will move to its own 70 acre campus which is surrounded by villages. It is clear that villages closer to the city will be absorbed by Bangalore over the next 20 years. The University has already taken some steps to start engaging with these villages so that it (faculty and students) plays an active role in transforming and trying out its vision of "just, equitable, sustainable, humane" society in this mix of rural, semi-urban, rapidly urbanizing landscape. This will hopefully result is learnings which would be applicable to large parts of India.

For this overall ambitious developmental role, Azim Premji University has already started forming partnerships with (a) civil society organizations which have done significant practical work for many years (b) with other academic institutions who have similar goals and strategies. This pooling or networking of human and knowledge resources is likely to increase.

I have shared the dilemmas faced by the Azim Premji University in some detail as I feel that all such universities and other academic institutions are facing or are going to face similar challenges. Therefore a forum of and exchanges between developmental academic institutions is essential. A forum of students who are studying "development", such as the one of Environmental Science students from all over India would also be desirable.

Way Ahead

I believe that we should target undergraduate colleges in non metropolitan areas which are present all over the country and where a progressively larger number of students from villages and small towns are getting enrolled. At the moment they are generally written off as useless institutions where no "learning" takes place. A rejuvenated Nai Talim, I believe, is one way to convert these colleges into powerful change agents. But that would require a lot of hard work by the better endowed universities. Each of them needs to take responsibility for a few colleges and start pilot experiments and build the capacities of the faculty in these colleges.

If we look at the trend in terms of numbers too, the emphasis becomes imperative. We have roughly 8 M student's finishing school every year. A small percentage of them is actually interested in academics and pursues higher education because of that. A vast majority of them and their families, aspire to a "job" in the "organized" sector. But the number of openings in this sector in a year is less than 2 M and so in order to better their chances; they would go in for a college education. One of the responses to this explosive situation by the government is the emphasis on "skill development" as a result of which the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) was formed. Corporates are also being encouraged to take up skills training.

However, whether it is skills development or post school education it is essentially an "urban-global" oriented education. There is a lack of consideration to the "rural" question. The school and post school curriculum today have almost nothing for those who are going to stay back or will be "forced" to stay back in the villages. In 2011 census the rural population is 800M. Even as rural growth rate decreases, with migration and villages converted into towns, for the foreseeable future rural population will be close to 1 billion. It is reasonable to assume that we, as a nation, do not envisioned ourselves to be a "urban-industrial" complex , where, as in the west, the population associated with

natural resource management would rapidly become less than 5%. Yet our education system seems to be entirely geared towards the urban-industrial dream. If the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the RMSA becomes successful, we would have 25M instead of the current 7-8 M finishing this standard urban industrial High School?

It is in this context that there is a growing discomfort in delivering a single urban quality standardized school curriculum. This, along with the increasingly urgent quest for alternatives to industrialism, is perhaps the reason for the renewed interest in Nai Talim. This is evident in the regional and national Nai Talim conferences that have been held over the last few years.

Let me finish this essay with some suggestions on what higher education institutions can do regarding Nai Talim. This is apart from the two things that I have stated in the beginning of this section.

i) Academic institutions need to engage with and give a lot of thought to local issues in order to come up with locally relevant meaningful activities.

ii) Disciplinary and well as multi disciplinary efforts need to be put into Integrating "useful productive work" with the teaching of classroom "subjects" in school and college level . Current experimenters are already asking for such support.

iii) Research in universities should critically examine and document past and present "work and education", in India as well as in other countries. Practitioners are unable to do this and are asking for such inputs.

iv) Higher education institutions , government, NGOs need to work on together in order to improve the quality of "field work" of various sorts done by college students

v) A consortium of resource persons from various institutions need to support state governments or organizations like KSSP of Kerala who are willing to try out experiments in a certain number of schools. .

vi) There has been quite a lot of work and success in coming up with area specific rural livelihoods, mainly by NGOs, in various parts of India. With NRLM, the documenting of this work has gained some urgency. To see how much of this can be incorporated in school curriculum in a practical way would itself be a very rewarding work.

vii) There are "theoretical" issues which have to be grappled with when thinking of rejuvenating Nai Talim. Some of them are --- a) the caste issue b) parent's and children's aspirations c) a decent grasp of what kind of rural – urban mix we are going to get in the next 10-30 years d) an integrated education system which gives genuine choice and mix of the academic and vocational, multiple exit and re-entry possibilities.

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Discussion

Rajni: It is heartening. This approach of incorporating work in school curriculum will help redefine success. There exists in society an utter contempt of manual work. The more important the work like say garbage collection, the more we look down upon it and the APF experiment gives tangible hope for changing that outlook.

Dhruv: Tagore had resigned from the National Council for Education, which led to the founding of Jadavpur University on the ground that there was no value education in technology education. He felt that this would lead up to the creation of a rapacious civilization. He doesn't reject industrialism. He was a critique of a certain kind of industrialization. Also, there is this erroneous dichotomy portrayed between Gandhi and Nehru. One is portrayed as this increasingly complex figure and Nehru as the reductive votary of modernity. But as Ram Guha has pointed out both of them have really worked together. The point that I am trying to make is that Gandhi doesn't have a philosophy of technology. Gandhi,like a lawyer, uses case based reasoning: on each issue he sees which side stands to benefit the most from that particular technological option. So, rather than see him as a ludite, one should see luditism as a way in which a society responds to appropriating technology.

Shambu: Raja Mohanty has been trying to bring potters to IIT-Bombay. Milind Sohani has been trying to get students to experiment with pieces of land. The kinds of questions APU raises is valid today as it asks where the Universities stand today in terms of engaging with the informal sector.

Urban-Rural

Gopal: The urban-rural or private-public gap is sought to be addressed by the bridge school concept but we have never really succeeded in bridging that gap. When we talk of alternatives will Nai Talim address these problems?

Dhruv: We need to rethink this equation. Even what we call the rural in India has changed. There is a tendency by those who look through "gandhian spectacles", to romanticize a certain notion of the rural as an option to the urban, while much of the "rural" is more or less urban living in the rural area.

Amalan: Indian Institute for Human settlements (IIHS) also focuses on challenges and opportunities of India's urbanization. Some of what Sujit speaks about has resonance in some of the challenges that IIHS is facing if its vision has to be more than just set up a factory of people who get fancy jobs. Our particular challenge is on the theory-practice point. The idea of an Indian urbanization as different from say a North American one or an East Asian one is an epistemic project and that requires knowledge production in its own right. We propose to have a degree called Master of Urban Practice to emphasis the practice of urban development and not just theory. At the same time we have this issue of having our own understanding of what is urban for us. India is going through a very peculiar kind of urban transformation -- 31% population living in urban areas, the rural itself is showing urban characteristics, the census towns have gone up significantly over the last ten years, which says something about large villages changing and what is going on in the peri-urban margins as well. The urban has its own public good problems – sanitation, public transport, livelihoods. So the exotic ideas of the rural as being the main site of doing rural development, and the urban being the beast produced by industrialization need to be examined.

Sujit: This has been debated at length and recognized among the faculty at APU. For the first decade at least the focus will be on the rural areas. But we are also aware that the rural context is changing rapidly and needs to be studied. The idea of implementing Nai Talim today is also to rethink and reinterpret it in this changing context.

Anup: The historical denigration of the rural and the overvaluation of the urban is an epistemic project in itself. We need to develop an alternate philosophy of the urban and the rural which is not what is handed down to us within the ambit of modernity. What are alternative urbanities? What are cultural

forms and experiences of urbanity which are not Manchester and Liverpool? Is Urbanity tied to a certain kind of industrialization/manufacturing economy.

Anup: Is there any example at all of theory and practice being done in a manner which incentivizes both. Is it possible at all?

Sujit: At APU, the entire faculty is required to engage in the field.

Gopal:There is another issue. A FICCI study has shown that the comprehension ability levels have been going down, and in the last twelve years the comprehension of class 12 students has come down to class seven level. So we seem to be under-graduating ourselves. Is this being addressed by Nai Talim? We need a roadmap which not only looks promising but also looks into the future.