



Intellectuals in Contemporary Society

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INDIA POLICY FOUNDATION

Foreword

The perpetual process of contemplation is a perennial characteristic of human life. It is a sojourn that does not carry a full stop. Societies and civilizations that have tried to curb or quench the tradition of thought have sooner or later, had to confront an existential crisis. The fate of Rome is the most prominent substantiation of this truth. Having attained the pinnacle of progress, Rome surrendered to uninhibited materialism and quickly fell, because it neglected the life-sustaining process of thought and contemplation. This is a truth that applies unfailingly to the individual, institutions, communities, societies and civilizations alike, without exception. Free, unfettered and unselfish thinking is the inescapable necessity of every age.

Every age in human societies has had a milieu of intellectualism. The extent to which this milieu is positive, progressive and truly liberal depends largely on two factors. One, the attitude of the denizens of that age towards differences in thought and opinion, alternative ideas and dissent and two, the extent of freedom and space available in the intellectual and academic institutions of that society namely, universities, social platforms and socio-political discourse, for disagreement, differing ideas, opinions and ideologies and the development of authentic intellectual ideas.

The measure of consequentiality of both these factors determines the efficacy of intellectual thought and heritage of any society. Any progressive and forward-looking society must therefore, distance itself from the overweening mentality of “only”, and imbibe the inclusive thought-paradigm of “too”. Of course, the approaches of “only me or us” and “we too” run parallel to each other, but while the former leads us to dissolution, the latter can lead us to progress. It is only through such a long voyage of agreement and disagreement that any society can keep resuscitating its socio-cultural traditions and also reinforce its political future. An example is highly relevant in this regard. The colonial period of India’s history was marked by debate, dissent and acute conflict on many issues and traditions of our society; the subject of widow remarriage was one such issue. Shri Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, one of the country’s foremost social reformers, was the leading proponent of remarriage of widows and submitted a memorandum to the then administration, which had only 987 signatures in its support, while a memorandum opposing widow remarriage, mustered by Radhakant Dev boasted of 36,787 signatures. Yet despite the apparent popular majority being arraigned against a progressive

social move, it was the process of healthy debate and acute but selfless conflict that inspired our society to finally accept the minority view. Yet another important feature of our nation's colonial period was the active concert of many political ideologies, often mutually conflicting; namely, those espoused by the nonviolent pacifism of Gandhi, the militaristic nationalism of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and Veer Savarkar, the communist ideology of Karl Marx, Indian variants of socialism, fortifying movements around casteism and those of social reform and equality. The plethora of social and political ideologies and movements points to the rich plurality of intellectual thought in that era of India's history.

Intellectual pluralism is an intrinsic part of Indian nature and ethos, clearly manifest in our spiritual as well as social life, and does not need any lengthy elucidation or justification. It was during this same colonial era that a host of political groups and ideological streams opposed to the Congress, like the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Hindu Mahasabha, Congress Socialist Party and the Muslim League were active and flourishing. The intellectual debate and template of those times was marked by severe difference of opinion and thought between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Justice Gopal Agarkar and other individuals. Dozens of such examples can be counted.

It was naturally expected therefore, that following independence from colonial rule, the academic, media and social platforms of the country would respect the need for free debate and exchange of ideas, in order to find answers to questions that have remained obscured. Apart from pressing economic issues, independent India felt the pressing need for honest, unhindered and unbiased on issues of social equality, Indian nationalism, the Indian tradition of secularism, and intellectual debate leading to real solutions to these issues in keeping with our nature, ethos and heritage.

How successful we have been in this direction is itself a matter of debate today. The weakening of intellectual honesty and liberal exchange unfailingly gives rise to reactionary forces, which sooner or later, appropriate the mantle of identity politics, forcing the sociological environment to give them acceptability and respectability, willingly or grudgingly. The debate on issues of social and national importance after independence, alas, has remained closeted around the ruling establishment and its favoured coterie, who remain dependent and beholden to the ruling class for favours and influence. The outcome has been that the country's academia, media and intelligentsia have been attempting to

justify theories and postulates that are far removed from social realities. This has been the prime reason for the manifestation of social realities in ways that are drastically at variance with what is propagated from the establishment citadels. Sociological understanding in India today still continues to grapple with the social realities of the country. In fact, sociological and intellectual debate in India, far from influencing social dynamics and social forces, is itself heavily influenced by them. This should naturally be a matter of concern for any society.

A prime reason for this is that continuing dominance of the ideology Marxist and its postulates among academicians and intellectuals in India, to the extent that they are badly reliant on a Marx or a Machiavelli to understand even local realities that inhabit the world around them. Little wonder that the otherwise huge army of Marxist and Westernized academicians, editors university chancellors and intellectuals, who have dominated the academia, media and intelligentsia for decades, are powerless when it comes to leading the process of social change. As a result, intellectual halos and academic status in India have been reduced to mere adornments dished out by the ruling establishment, to those who support it without question or criticism.

On the other hand, those individuals who strove to change Indian society for the better, and were successful in combating at least some of its contradictions, thereby generating hope among our people for positive change, were not confined to this charmed world of academia or intelligentsia. They were true experimenters; Acharya Vioba Bhawe, Jayprakash Narayan and Nanaji Deshmukh being prime examples of such genuine social reformists. It is genuine intellectualism born of such social attachment and committed ceaseless work, rooted in our ethos, which can reorient our social and national life towards positivism and meaningfulness.

The reason for the failure of India's universities and intellectual institutions lies in the attempts to control, regulate or even stifle discourse. The unwritten but very effective understanding between Nehruvian opportunism and Marxian totalitarianism has spawned a quasi-dictatorial regime that has Indian society in a cleft for over five decades, controlling and monitoring even ideological dissent and opposition. Such an assault on pluralism of thought was neither seen nor experienced by our society and nation, not even during the days of colonial rule. It has been nothing less than quasi-fascism. The odious practice of "conferring legitimacy" or "acceptability" in the fields of literature, sociological research and intellectual discourse has virtually destroyed genuine plurality of thought. Secularism, for instance, is a prime socio-political realm that springs to mind

immediately. The sustained “intellectual” assault of the Nehruvian-Marxian combine on true secularism rooted in Indian ethos and values has engendered an ideologically polluted social and political milieu and also sown the seeds of social conflict. Therefore, at a juncture when the failure of sociological academics and universities and educational institutions is becoming glaringly evident, fresh attempts to resuscitate true plural intellectualism must be quickened.

This booklet, which defines the contemporary intellectual environment, can prove to be an important endeavour in furthering this discourse. Shri Dattatreya Hosbale, Shri Ashutosh and Shri Venkatnarayanan had put forth their views on February 17, 2012, on the occasion of a seminar organized to mark the launch of the website of the India Policy Foundation. The seminar, “Intellectuals in Contemporary Society” was organized with a view to underline the role of intellectuals in the current national political, social and cultural environment. This booklet presents the views of these learned intellectuals on this subject, while attempting to provide a clearer understanding of the issue at hand.

Prof. Rakesh Sinha
Hony. Director
India Policy Foundation

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Intellectuals cannot be devoid of character



Shri R. Venkatanarayan, who has retired after distinguished service as a Secretary in the Government of India and is currently serving as Secretary, Acharya Dharma Sabha, is renowned for being both an able administrator and intellectual thinker. His intellectual orientation has inspired him to combat the prevailing pseudo-intellectual miasma in our society and polity. R. Venkatanarayanan is of the firm opinion that intellectuals are of two kinds — constructive and destructive. Whatever be the type of intellectual, he/she has to be imbued with a virtuous character. Shri Venkatanarayanan eloquently held forth on the desirable characteristics of any intellectual on a seminar on the topic “Intellectuals in Contemporary Society”, held on 17th February 2012.

1. For our purposes we may define an intellectual as one who is endowed with a sharp and capacious intellect (*buddhi*) and exercises it frequently for public good. Intellectuals can also be destructive but let us ignore that kind in our definition.
2. What are the salient characteristics of an Intellectual? He (she) must be widely read, not merely a narrow specialist in a single subject or topic or discipline, foraying into wider pastures using the ‘gift of the gab’ in the spoken or written word. He must be capable of

independent thinking and demonstrate originality in analysis and exposition. He should be a good communicator—not given to dense verbosity or bombast or portentous jargon. Personal integrity and feet securely on the ground realities are also important. I do not think a paid-editorial writer in a newspaper will pass muster in our definition. By definition there should be no inflexible rigidity or bigotry in him. Simply being an academic or a faculty member in a teaching institution does not entitle one to claim to be an Intellectual. A

couple of Masters' degrees or a PhD acquired in India or overseas by themselves do not make also an Intellectual; sharp intellect, a fresh and an open mind, ability to understand new facts and situations, practical experience on the ground and lucidity in expression are more important. Wide reading in the social sciences, particularly in history of different aspects of the society, country or the world, will add to the value of the output of an Intellectual. Lastly, to be treated seriously an intellectual must have familiarity with the cultural foundations and mores of the people for and about whom he/she writes or speaks. Cultural rootlessness is a serious and fatal blemish in an Intellectual.

3. Who is considered as an Intellectual in our present day context in our country?

a. Our countrymen and women are notorious for misinterpreting and misusing concepts. Even as we use the term 'secularism' to mean only and exclusively anything non-Hindu or anti-Hindu and treat any critique of

any religious minority as 'non-secular' ab-initio, we equate the term 'intellectual' invariably with an educated communist, or a vociferous anti-establishment critic. By the same token, if you are in the RSS or VHP or compliment them on any specifics, you cannot be an Intellectual. If you have a political agenda against the government of the day and if you are an activist in some cause, you can easily masquerade as an Intellectual in India. On that basis you would get respect and influence in the corridors of power (ironically occupied by the Establishment!) even if you do not have an in-depth knowledge in any subject or discipline.

b. In our country another hallmark of an Intellectual is to constantly speak about and for the poor and 'downtrodden', irrespective of whether or not one knows what it is to be poor, and what is likely to keep the poor

perennially poor. If you keep recommending that the poor fish-eater should be continually fed with one fish a day, and do not recommend teaching him how to fish and provide him a fishing net, you are likely to be a celebrated and feared Intellectual in our country.

- c. An Intellectual in our country is usually an expert in demonology; he is capable of demonizing any one or any group or a part of society. Such demonology experts are in great demand to head or participate in commissions and committees with the mandate to placate one or the other group on the basis of flawed or questionable social or economic statistics.
- d. In our country many people who are experts only in diagnosing and describing and hammering at what is bad or wrong in the society or in the State or in any public entity, pass off as Intellectuals. They are not expected to have any

viable or practical solutions nor do they need to have the window of their mind open for fresh information, facts or knowledge or views. For example if you keep on opposing nuclear power generation, or the continuance of AFPSA in Kashmir as an instrument to resist terrorism, or hydro power stations, or mining, or corruption, you are an Intellectual. If you are a skillful word-spinner in English and cast outrageous aspersions (example: the State in India is terrorist; all bureaucracy is corrupt; all politicians are rotten) in your periodic writings and speeches you are sure to pass off as an Intellectual. And you become an 'eminent intellectual' if you manage to garner some foreign award or the other-- a Booker prize, or a Magasaysay award, or Nuremberg award, Human Rights award and the like—invariably concocted in the West.

- e. In India today, to be considered a respectable Intellectual one should have double standards. What is good for the goose shall not be good for the gander. Salman Rushdie and Nazreen should be denounced eloquently and made despicable but not MF Hussain though religious sentiments were relevant in both cases.
- f. In writings there is another important marker to be considered an Intellectual in our country. It is to freely indulge in titillation or rank obscenity or anything offensive to the age old grace and social refinement to which the people of our country are accustomed from time immemorial. If a book specializes in such offending writing and is awarded a prize by some foreign entity the writer automatically becomes an eminent Intellectual, invited by the Prime Minister and the President when they need to entertain foreign dignitaries.
- g. In short, an intellect with a cause is an Intellectual. In our country the cause takes precedence over intellect. Recognition outside the country is an added advantage.
4. More seriously what is the importance and role of Intellectuals in society? The role of intellectuals is to energize the thinking process and power of the people at large, if they are to be useful to society. In a democracy public opinion is very important to policy-making. Political charlatans will tend to subvert public opinion by sloganizing and by appealing to baser instincts of jealousy, pettifogging and violence. The Intellectual has the responsibility to facilitate informed development of public opinion and counter public incitement by the charlatans. Public opinion in a huge country like ours is not ascertained from some populist platforms. It must be informed and moulded. Anna Referendums, with questionable questions to the vast mass of lay public should not decide public governance policy or procedure. Policy makers must seek the

considered views of Intellectuals who are well grounded in the social milieu; they must be chosen for their credentials and not connections or to subserve some chosen agenda. Independent Think Tanks are very important in this context.

5. Think Tanks serve the purpose of replacing passion and emotion with deep and wide study and well rounded oral and written presentation. They should not be merely reactive. They should initiate fresh streams of thought and generate thinking and questioning. They should welcome and encourage debate. Today in our country there are too few Think Tanks that serve the causes and concerns rooted in indigenous cultures and social milieu. Contemporarily relevant issues are no doubt important, such as social policy and political organization for harmony, just and balanced economic development for prosperity and good health. But there is also the whole range of world views and values –moral, ethical, aesthetic, scientific and spiritual—of our culture and civilization that is till to be mined and presented by Think Tanks for the benefit of our

society's knowledge, welfare, progress and self-esteem.

6. Financial support to the few Think Tanks we have in the country is a matter for concern. In the West historically religion inspired philanthropy and large donation from rich families have sustained formidable Think Tanks. There is also clandestine financing by State organs to generate and strengthen public support for predetermined public policy. In our country the Government has not been able to foster Think Tanks for want of either interest and awareness or financial capability. In such financing there is always the danger of the Think Tank becoming the pied piper. Adequate and independent financing are necessary for healthy Think Tanks. Poorly financed Think Tank is worse than no Think Tank. The charter of the Think Tank must be precise and have a sound legal footing. No doubt accountability is a must, both for expenditure and for quality output and its impact. But the environment must be such as to foster bold and original thinking and responsible debate. This means control must be at arms length. It is also an important

responsibility of the governing body and the current operating leadership of a Think Tank to develop a second line of leadership within the Think Tank and to foster continuity in output.

7. The measure of success and utility of Think Tanks is their

publications and appreciation of the intended audience—how well they are conceived and written, how they are critiqued or praised by those outside the Think Tanks and how much practical impact they have in influencing public policy.

Neglect of Indian Thought and Heritage is the Bane of our Society



IBN7's Managing Editor **Shri Ashutosh** is known for his sharp and incisive approach in journalism, and was educated at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Shri Ashutosh has clear and precise views on intellectualism and intellectual trends in our society, which he presented at the seminar held on 17th February 2012, on the topic "Intellectuals in Contemporary Society", in which he underlined the contribution of intellectuals, while also analyzing Anna Hazare's Jan Lokpal agitation. Shri Ashutosh is of the opinion that

popular movements must have a positive leadership. A popular leader must possess an understanding of the prevailing problems and likely solutions to those problems, which Anna Hazare seems to have in some measure. Therefore, attempting to summarily dismiss or discredit Anna Hazare and his movement smacks of intellectual arrogance. Shri Ashutosh also expresses concern over the overweening dependency of intellectuals in India on foreign intellectual thought and paradigms and their rejection of homegrown Indian intellect.

It perhaps needs to be reiterated rather assertively in the present context that the present debate about intellectualism, initiated by the India Policy Foundation is a highly welcome one. This is necessary in the light of the events of the past year and a half. Of course, one is all too aware that it will draw more than its share of criticism — more often than not, based on falsehood and slander — as has been our experience

throughout, as Prof. Rakesh Sinha and others will doubtlessly corroborate. Possibly, this may be due to the unfortunate fact that we as a society have stopped debating issues in an open, honest and incisive way and have degenerated into smugness over shallow sound-bites and polemics. Even more unfortunate is the fact that anyone who engages in honest debate is likely to be shouted down, derided and boycotted. Street-level attacks and

polemical assaults over the social media, e.g., Facebook, Twitter and the Net too are likely to ensue as a result.

Whilst I have been an advocate of self-examination among society, I would unhesitatingly accept that we as intellectuals must be the foremost to submit ourselves to such a test. There is a reason why I refer to the events of the last one year. This period has seen the springing of a new hope across the country. Of course the last year and a half will no doubt be remembered for the notorious 2G scam, the Commonwealth Games corruption, the public faces of corruption like Kalmadi and Ashok Chavan (former Maharashtra chief minister who was forced to resign following the exposure of his role in the Adarsh Housing Society scandal). These scandals and instances of monumental political corruption and the loot of national wealth have led to the perception gaining more currency that the country's roots have withered away so badly due to corruption that it is only a matter of time before it collapses.

Yet, at the same time, this very period has also seen a hitherto slumberous citizenry awaken in a big way. At least in my journalistic history, I have yet to witness such a big mass movement. Of course, there

are those who've witnessed the mass movements of (the late) Jayprakash Narayan, the Bofors agitation against Rajiv Gandhi, the Ayodhya and Mandal agitations, all of which were truly mass movements. But it is equally true such an open mass movement, bereft of the support or underpinning of a political party or organizational apparatus has not been seen before.

The JP mass agitation did draw the support of most political parties opposed to the Congress, at least in a superficial manner. Their respective political structures and organizations lent their heft to Jayprakash Narayan when he took on the dictatorial Congress regime at the centre, but the current agitation is different in certain respects, which should not escape our attention. The citizenry came out on the streets and converged in multitude at the capital's Ramlila grounds for 13 whole days, braving scorching heat, which is more than ample testimony of the people having been aroused. At least, citizens are no longer prepared to tolerate corruption silently.

The recent assembly elections across the country are another pointer to the directions winds are blowing. State polls in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Uttarakhand have seen the percentage of voting

go up by 10 to 15 per cent, which is proof of people's belief in the possibility of change. But there are less savoury aspects to this movement, which also demand our attention. Some of these aspects are truculent enough to raise one's hackles; indeed, I channeled my anger along these lines into a book that I wrote, called *Anna's 13 Days That Awakened India*. A friend of mine had a very pertinent query: I write my columns in Hindi and have been doing so for years. Why did I choose to write this particular book in English? I replied that this book is the outcome of my anger against those English-speaking intellectuals who have labeled Anna Hazare as "anti-parliamentary", "anti-democratic", "anti-constitutional" and even "violent", and have resorted to calling him names.

More telling was a quote that I happened to come across, by Ramchandra Guha, who more or less meanders along this trail. Guha too has joined this bandwagon of intellectuals, loudly questioning how a chap who is barely an eighth standard pass, unable to speak even his native Marathi fluently, can lead a nationwide agitation. In other words, Guha and his ilk of "eminent intellectuals" are questioning the "temerity" of an individual who does not wear a suit, cannot speak English

and can barely handle Marathi, certainly doesn't look like an intellectual, wears a Gandhi cap, isn't pleasing to the eye, and cannot make women swoon over him. In other words, these self-appointed "intellectuals" are questioning the "right" of someone to generate or sustain such a massive nationwide movement simply for the single reason that he doesn't belong to their charmed circle of intellectuals, though their antipathy may be couched in all sorts of sophistry. If that weren't sufficient, the fact that Hazare was only a sepoy in the army is surreptitiously mentioned in passing — along with the completely unsubstantiated insinuation of him being an army deserter — as if to disqualify him from the halo of being an "intellectual".

Let me clarify that I am no blind admirer of Anna Hazare, nor do I support him because of any personal reason. I am a supporter of the agitation he has kicked off and strongly object to such analysis of this phenomenon that seeks to delegitimize a people's movement only on the grounds of lack of hallowed academic credentials. This is the reason I chose to bring out this book in English, to answer the self-styled "intellectual" crowd, although I've been writing in Hindi throughout my life. I have seriously begun to

question this ideology of intellectualism. This is an ideological strain that has no qualms in making a hero out of a Binayak Sen, an individual who unambiguously believes in and espouses an ideology that has nothing but contempt for democracy, civil liberty and basic human freedom, is intrinsically anti-constitutional and anti-parliamentary and seeks to overthrow the Indian state and openly believes in, and practices violence. It is such an individual, who has been found guilty by the Indian judiciary no less, who fascinates these “intellectuals” with shrill cries of human rights violation being bandied about. One only has to contrast their outcry over a self-confessed believer in violent communism against the entirely peaceful Anna and his followers, who have not even cast a stone at the Ramlila grounds or elsewhere, and yet have accusations of being “anti-parliamentary” and “anti-constitutional” being hurled against them by the self-same “intellectuals” who have little hesitation in bestowing their supposedly hallowed status on Sen.

Even the JP agitation of 1974 was not entirely devoid of violent incidents. There was enough of disturbance in Gujarat, where it began and thereafter spread throughout the country. It is interesting that these

very intellectuals now purport to support JP’s movement (their take was of course, very different in those days), but are opposed to Anna Hazare, because in their eyes, a rustic from the remote hinterland of India, speaking in the people’s tongue, and is firmly rooted in the nation’s ethos, has no business leading a mighty nationwide movement, whereas the very anti-national Binayak Sen, whose core ideology is the negation of India and Indian ethos, is the supposed vanguard of their “intellectualism”.

One must understand this hypocrisy and double standards of the “intellectual elite” who inhabit the ivory towers. One cannot quote Adi Shankara or Ramanujam today to become an intellectual. We will therefore, find these so-called intellectuals quoting Voltaire, Kant, Hegel or Marx at the drop of a hat, but not Shankaracharya or any Indian saint or scholar. It is another matter that those who parrot the quotes of foreign scholars or philosophers are themselves bereft of any in-depth knowledge of their works or philosophies. For instance, our “intellectuals” who may be fond of quoting Immanuel Kant every now and then are completely ignorant of the fact that Kant’s Theory of Knowledge, which deals with the core ideas of Instinct, Intellect and

Intuition was exactly what Adi Shankara had explained centuries ago, when he propounded the three stages of wisdom, i.e., Instinct, Intellect and Intuition. The quest for the Ultimate Truth has to pass through various stages of negation, explained in the phrase “Neti, Neti” (this is not that), until one finally reaches the Truth. That indeed is also the path to Realization, of either God, or what one may call the Ultimate. Both Shankara and Kant have attempted to explain the same phenomenon, but “intellectuals” in India being what they are; they will quote Kant and shun Shankara, simply to pass off as modern and liberal.

In other words, it is the English-speaking elite, which is firmly ensconced in the citadels of power that seeks to delegitimize the current movement, which for all its shortcomings is a truly homegrown one. Prof. Rakesh Sinha has put it succinctly by stating that this so-called intellectualism is in fact, the very death of any true intellectual; when without any thought or reflection, they comprise with the powers that be and forsake their duty of speaking the truth, howsoever unpalatable it may be. Shri Venkatnarayanan has also highlighted the fact that intellectuals

in India talk a lot, but have no real solutions to offer.

The stratification of intellectuals into rightwing or leftwing is another limiting and ultimately, self-defeating approach. Ideologically imposed inhibitions also limit the development of one’s thought process. For instance, the ideology of the 1850s hardly holds any relevance in 2012. We have been witness to the phenomenon of a slew of ideological movements in the 1990s that bit the dust rather quickly. Trying to justify them even today is of no use. The reason why certain individuals, or ideologically disposed groups, still try to do so is because their ideological dogmas have made them virtually blind; worse, they’re unwilling to open their eyes. The freedom of thought is indispensable. If India is to progress, we have to eschew the narrow divisiveness of not only North and South, but also Communism — or Marxism — and Capitalism and many such artificial constructs. The enterprise to prove oneself right and others wrong, based upon the constraints of such ideologically predisposed thinking will lead us nowhere, a fact that every true intellectual has to realize.

One must critically examine Marxism and its claims. Marxism envisaged a particular kind of society and yes, a state to implement that dream

society, despite all its predictions of the state “withering away”. But what kind of a state or polity did it ultimately end up creating? An ideology that talked the most about human freedom was ultimately exposed to be a gargantuan monster that destroyed the basic human capacity to think and act free. The freedom to think or make decisions was vested in the hands of the elite few who strode the top of the power pyramid, reducing the ruled to nothing more than slaves or even animals. Marxism thus, is the enslavement of the human being in the name of human freedom. But if Marxism is the death of human society, its chief adversary, whose supposed triumph has been loudly celebrated, i.e., the capitalism of the West, is no better. Capitalism may not directly enslave individuals, but it reduces the human being to a mere commodity, while not diminishing the role of the state. The recent imbroglio in Norway, over the custody of an Indian child should serve to illustrate the truth of this proposition. An Indian couple was sought to be deprived the legitimate custody of their child on the contrived grounds that feeding one’s child by hand is a gross violation of its human rights! Any system that seeks to deprive parents of their basic filial rights must be recognized as a totalitarian one, irrespective of the

outward cloak it sports. In fact, in the West, parents so much as seeking to discipline their children are likely to find themselves in jail, as all children have to do is to dial a certain telephone number for the police and a host of other law-enforcing agencies to descend on the well-intentioned but hapless parents. The West, despite its liberal professions, is no less totalitarian, as its capitalists system is now attempting to define even core human relationships, such as those between the husband and wife, and parents and children. Clearly, Marxism and capitalism have much more in common than the adherents of either would dare to admit!

While this state of affairs may cause despair on one hand, it also should inspire us to shed the false cloaks of intellectual or ideological dogmas and develop an independent vision, as Prof. Rakesh Sinha has advocated. This holds all the more true for a nation like ours, whose diversity not only makes a mockery of all such dogmas, but is also our greatest strength. If we fail to address and respect our unique diversity, we may easily suffer the fate of the erstwhile USSR, which was once a superpower, but which is now history. We have to develop and sustain that resilience within us, whether at the level of intellect or the apparatus of the

state. A few privileged elite sitting in their comfortable ivory towers cannot decide what is good for the rest of the country. Such individuals cannot even fathom the needs, problems and aspirations of our people residing in our remotest regions, of the people of Telengana to the Bodos. But we cannot rubbish or bulldoze them, else we will have to contend with many more Telenganas and find ourselves unable to cope with them. The development of our ideas must extend to the arena of philosophy as well.

The urban-centric nature of the thinking of our intellectuals is something that ought to worry us, as this thought process by its very nature, tends to closet itself around English only, and more particularly, to the convent-educated English-speaking elite. There is absolutely no attempt to connect with India's rural reality. Of late, we see another fashionable trend among the intellectual crowd, which is of making impromptu visits to villagers or some rural spot, to address a few meetings, all of which is done with the none-too-concealed intent of presenting oneself as a "grassroots intellectual." But a pertinent question, which Shri Venkatnarayanan has raised, is whether such pretentious intellectual escapades really make any attempt to integrate our villages and the rural

citizens of our nation? The answer, alas, is no. Thus, the vast and limitless energy and capabilities of our rural citizenry remain untapped, often going to waste. The lack of original thinking can be acutely felt here.

We also cannot put off the serious issue of the rule of law any longer in our society and country. We complain loudly of corruption in India, though corruption exists in every society, from America to China. China witnessed over 70,000 petitions against public corruption in the year 2004 alone, a number that had risen to over two lakh by 2010. The practice of petitioning the monarch or emperor, against corrupt local officials, has been in vogue since the days of monarchic dynasties in ancient China, but continues to prevail in China's communist regime too. Instances of corrupt officials or party functionaries being executed in China are common; yet, corruption there has continued to grow, despite all the repressive measures of the totalitarian state. We can of course bemoan our cultural peculiarities or blame the democratic system for the monumental corruption that exists in India, but might ponder why there is less corruption in an affluent society like the US. The key difference is the rule of law, which rules in the US, but which is largely absent in India. A

politician indulging in blatantly corrupt practices is fawned over by the machinery of the state that is supposed to implement the law without partiality, something that is virtually unthinkable in the developed world. The absence of rule of law is the prime reason for corruption flourishing in our country, which we as a society shall have to confront seriously, for our own survival.

The phenomenon of the technology revolution is well-known and needs no reiteration. Shri Venkatnarayan has put it aptly when he says that if one casts a stone at random, one is bound to hit an IT professional. It is matter of legitimate pride that India has excelled at software, but let us not forget to ask ourselves whether we have developed any original software or computer systems. Our IT development has been strangely marked by a lack of any fundamental research in the world of computers, while we continue to lead the pack in the use of borrowed or adopted systems. In all the euphoria over India's software success story, we seem happy to ignore that fact during the last one hundred years, we

haven't created anything that can be called original.

Our intellectual crowd is also shockingly reticent when it comes to the question of value of life. The death of an individual in a road accident or even 50 human beings in a calamity does not even bother them. Contrast this with a tiny nation like Israel, where the death of even one of its lady citizens in a Delhi street provokes a reaction from no less than that nation's Prime Minister. In contrast, politicians in India are scarcely bothered, unless their own interests are attacked. Clearly, the value of life seems an alien concept in India. Perhaps we fell that in a nation of 1.21 billion, the value of life isn't worth much, but let us understand that unless we imbibe this value thoroughly, there will be no dignity for us in the civilized world. Those in India who call themselves intellectuals will have to shed their hypocrisy, which is possible only by embracing core Indian values and philosophy, and not by living on borrowed ideas and concepts, and by drawing up a manifesto of action that will force to polity to adhere to it.

Objectivity and a Pious Life are the Perennial Fundamentals of True Intellectualism



Shri Dattatreya Hosbale, who is the Sah-Sarkaryavaah of the Rashtriya Swamsewak Sangh (RSS), is also renowned as an incisive thinker. His unbending commitment to true democracy and freedom led to his incarceration under the notorious “Maintenance of Internal Security Act” (MISA) for 16 months during the infamous Emergency of 1975. On the occasion of the launch of the Website of India Policy Foundation (IPF) on 17th February 2012, Shri Dattatreya Hosbale was one of the speakers at the seminar held to mark the occasion, presenting his views on “Intellectuals” in Contemporary Society”. Shri Hosbale made a clear and significant distinction between genuine and pseudo-intellectualism and also stressed on the effective use of Information Technology in the process of meaningful dialogue. He is of the opinion that only a genuine intellectual realizes the truth and ultimately attains sainthood, for which a pious and truthful life is indispensable. Shri Hosbale has distinguished between the Indian and Western intellectual traditions and has also made a comparative study of both.

At the outset, I complement the India policy Foundation, and Prof. Rakesh Sinha and his entire team for their yeoman efforts in organizing a remarkable series of lectures that are a significant part of our national intellectual discourse.

The use of technology and its ever diversifying resources has become imperative in all walks of today’s life. The launch of this website for the purpose of widespread dissemination

of our ideas and message, was therefore, indeed timely, for which I congratulate everyone involved in the effort. I earnestly wish that this Net platform be out to judicious use to strengthen the process of discourse and dialogue and also that this website should not fall a prey to hacking. Hacking, though, isn’t limited to the field of software alone. It needs to be forcefully iterated that hacking is a menace that pervades

many aspects of our national life. Hackers abound not just in the virtual world, but in the real world too. The sorry tale of our national polity is also a reflection of the fact that the intellectual field has been virtually taken over by such hackers. The phenomenon of our nation's intellectual tradition having been captured and held hostage by a handful of individuals has been prevalent for the last 60 to 70 years. Clearly, the sordid culture of hacking has been around in our society for decades together.

As Prof. Rakesh Sinha and others have so aptly pointed out, being a part of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh ipso facto "disqualifies" me from being labeled an "intellectual", at least in the politically correct connotation of this term. I may presumably be dubbed a "non-intellectual" or even an "anti-intellectual", because in contemporary society, a privileged few have cornered the right to be called "intellectual" and issue certificates on who is an intellectual and who isn't. and in their view, those who aren't deemed worthy of being "intellectual" also don't possess the right to talk about "intellectuals". This attitude can also be seen in the reaction of this privileged few to the ongoing Lokpal agitation; people on the streets are

simply considered unworthy of drafting a Lokpal bill. How can those, who are outside this charmed circle of "intellectuals" even talk about this? No wonder the vast majority of us would be discarded from this charmed and closed world of intellectuals.

I don't wish to dwell too much upon this. But when an individual engaged in the relentless pursuit of truth ultimately realizes truth in its many manifestations, he/she truly becomes wise and enlightened and does not need any label or certificate of being an intellectual. The realization of the truth is a journey that is the realm of the heart more than the mind. An enlightened soul does not need mental acrobatics to convey the truth; the purity and loftiness of his heart is itself the real message. Thus, it is only those who are engaged in the relentless pursuit of truth who can be called true intellectuals. The power of such true intellectuals and the process of their intellectual pursuit enables them to attain the stage of sainthood. The ancient rishis and munis of our land belong to this category of truly enlightened beings.

The hypocrisy of today's so-called "intellectuals" needs to be called to question. Years ago, one of India's leading journalists, Janardan Thakur had this to say about the "intellectuals" inhabiting India's

political and social milieu: “They want to have the image of the Left, but enjoy the comforts of the Right”. His tart observation holds true even today, perhaps even more so than when he had made this observation. The double standards and hypocrisy of today’s intellectuals has plumbed such depths that most of them are more than willing to sell themselves for currying foreign favours too.

An anecdote in this context would serve to illustrate the point more succinctly. Once, in a bygone age, the ruler of Kashmir learnt that there resided an extremely learned and wise man in his kingdom, but lived in abject poverty. The king arrived at the wise man’s hut with plenty of wealth and beseeched him to accept the riches so that he might be relieved of his poverty. Upon hearing this, the wise one asked his wife to pack their meager belongings and prepare to move elsewhere, as their living in their present condition was causing great distress to their king! The king asked the wise man whether he had committed any wrongdoing for the latter to contemplate leaving the kingdom. The reply of the wise soul was telling: “I’m happy with my existence; be content with yours, else I shall quit this kingdom”.

Put briefly, this has been the real tradition of intellectuals in our land since time immemorial. Our rishis

and seers were never dependent on kingly or state power or authority, nor in awe of it. That is the primary reason why today, even after the passage of thousands of years, those rishis and munis continue to be revered by our people. Those who craved for, and obtained, the patronage of state power and authority have never had any esteem among the people of our society. Only those who remain truly independent, impartial and true are respected by our people.

It is my conviction that true intellectuals and scholars need the following:

1. **Environment and Freedom** — Shri Ashutosh and Shri Venkatnarayanan have spoken about the environment for intellectuals. Freedom entails the right to express one’s opinion freely, especially that of dissent. A true intellectual must enjoy both internal and external freedom, which a prerequisite.
2. **Character** — this is an indispensable trait of real intellectualism. An intellectual’s own character must be uncompromisingly honest, eschewing all shades of hypocrisy and falsehood. One who cannot affirm his postulate or principles through one’s

writing, words, intellect and intelligence, and above all honesty, cannot last long.

3. **Activism** — there is an ancient saying “यः क्रियावान् सः पण्डितः”, meaning he alone is learned who is truly active. Intellectuals must constantly be active, but for the sake of society and its constant betterment. They should always strive to keep their intellectual capabilities active. They should be intellectual activists.

Often, it is said of intellectuals that they describe problems in detail but fail to offer solutions to those problems. An incident about Napoleon Bonaparte is apt in this regard. Once, during a military campaign, some individuals professing to be intellectuals and experts began criticizing Napoleon’s strategic moves and offered unsolicited advice as to what was done wrong and what ought to have been done. The exasperated Napoleon invited those worthies to a banquet and asked them what his tactics should be for the next campaign he was planning. Nonplussed, those “experts” admitted that suggesting tactics or moves wasn’t their job. Only when things were implemented would they point out what was right or wrong.

One must admit that by and large, this holds true for most “intellectuals” today.

The aspect of contemporary urban thinking about the value of life also needs to be addressed. The honourable Dharmpal ji has mentioned how even the slightest alteration in thought process engenders drastic changes in the direction of thinking of intellectuals, of policies and of those who administer the country’s polity. The process of unbridled urbanization, of not only individuals and families, but also of an entire way of life has kicked off a process of detaching Indian-ness from India. He has further enunciated the state of our traditions; what they were and what they have degenerated into, the likely adverse effects of which we shall have to endure.

Some time back, I had the occasion to address a group of industrialists from Delhi at the Capital’s Constitution Club, wherein I had underscored the stark fact that more than one lakh farmers had committed suicide over the past 10 to 11 years, but this scarcely created even a murmur among the country’s supposedly educated class. One can imagine the upheaval had even a thousand IT professionals, businessmen or industrialists committed suicide. There would have

been nothing less than a revolution. Ponder over this. Over one lakh of those who feed us have had to take their own lives, and yet life in the country continues like “business as usual”. Even if four IT companies were to announce their decision to quit Bangalore, for whatever reason, imagine the uproar in the media and “intelligentsia”. But here, over one lakh farmers along with their families met their doom, and there was not even a ripple in Delhi nor in the rest of the country. This is a direct and damning comment on the urban thinking of the value of life. The sad truth is that we have mentally seceded from India, though we physically continue to live in it. The process of mental separation naturally produces such an outcome. When and why did this happen? Let us not befool ourselves into believing that this is an overnight or even a decade-old phenomenon. The seeds of this phenomenon were sown right from the time we forsook our ancient and homegrown model of governance and adopted the Nehruvian model, which is alien to us by its very nature. We began seceding from Bharat when we tried to run our institutions, academia and the media along Nehruvian lines. The results are there for all to see.

Bal Gangadhar, who has been a professor for over thirty years at the

_____ University, and is known to be among the more vociferous proponents of Marxism, and is an author of many books, has finally come around to admitting that he trod the wrong path for over three decades. He now openly admits before the educated gentry that we have become detached from India and its reality. Our minds have become colonized. Our social sciences and indeed, our very thought process have become a victim of colonization.

The process of decolonization is an onerous responsibility that awaits us all. It is pertinent to note that even those, who till recently had been protagonists of the Left, have now joined the process of decolonization. It is therefore, fatuous on our part to be still demarcating between Leftists and Rightists. A true intellectual is but an intellectual and does not require the cloak of a Leftist or a Rightist, nor material comforts or any contrived image to tread the path of truth. In fact a true intellectual does not belong to the Right, Left or political streams, nor should he do so. The tradition of our nation and society has been to seek and accept the truth, be it unpalatable. Debate and discourse has been the real tradition of this country.

There is much talk of social untouchability, whereas there has

been an equally odious practice of intellectual untouchability that has been practiced in our country for decades. I am of the firm opinion that it is the Eurocentric mind of the ruling establishment and elite that has completely colonized India, its intellect, intelligentsia, its academia and its models of governance. Decolonization clearly is the need of the hour, which alone can bring about far-reaching changes in the nation, its society and polity. It has to be preceded by a fierce intellectual exercise and battle, without which no meaningful change can take place. The likelihood of a new era dawning

for India as a nation, and its tradition of intellect which lays emphasis on a cultural-societal polity, is indeed strong. Though our country is beset with the ills of corruption, immorality and mutual political antagonism, there is also a silver lining visible. Indian intellectual traditions and its output are imperative not only for India, but for the entire humanity. The yeoman endeavours of India policy Foundation, its various publications and now this website are extremely important step in that intended direction, for which I express my sincere gratitude.