



Illustration by BINAY SINHA

# Macaulay's children redux

*'Modernisation without Westernisation' is the mantra of the refurbished Gandhian wing of Macaulay's children, says DEEPAK LAL*

**A**t a recent Engelsberg seminar organised by the Ax:son Johnson foundation in Sweden, I gave a paper on "The view of America from India", revisiting a theme I had written about in the late 1980s, in a paper entitled "Manners, Morals and Materialism: some Indian perceptions of America and Great Britain" for a seminar organised by Nathan and Lochi Glazer at Harvard (reprinted in my *Against Dirigisme*). I had then argued that the mutual perceptions of Indians and Americans were unflattering, if not openly hostile. I had ascribed this to the attitudes (in part) of the British-educated Indian elite, who echoed many of the British critiques of American manners, morals and materialism.

Today, however, there is evidence from the 2005 Pew Global Attitudes Survey in urban India, which found that 71 per cent of Indians have a favourable view of the US, which in the 17 countries polled is only matched by Americans with a more favourable view of their country. Moreover, the popularity of the US has increased in India (as compared with other countries) with Indians being "significantly more positive about the United States now than they were in the summer of 2002, when 54 per cent gave the US favourable marks". Indians also have a strongly positive impression of the American people —

71 per cent in 2005 as compared with 58 per cent in 2002 (2005 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org)).

In trying to explain this change in attitudes I harked back to two of my earliest columns ("Macaulay's Children" and "Modernisation and Westernisation", September 2007), in which I distinguished between the two wings of the nationalist elite who were children of Macaulay's famous 19th-century "Minute on Education", in which he sought to create an English-educated middle class. The central problem both wings faced was how to reconcile modernity with tradition.

The first one, led by Nehru (for whom English became their first language), sought the reconciliation through the purportedly middle way provided by Fabian socialism. The other (Gandhian wing for whom English was an instrumental second language) saw Westernisation as a grave threat to Indian traditions, and wanted no truck with it. They adopted the attitude of the clam. They eschewed modernisation to preserve the ancient Hindu equilibrium.

As it was the Nehruvian wing which inherited the new Indian state, it was their attitude and that of their children they succeeded in placing abroad, which determined the Indian attitudes to the US I had charted in my earlier essay. One of the major outcomes of the 1991 economic liberalisation was

that, these children of the Westernised castes now increasingly find it easier to make a living in India. But they, by and large, still retain the attitudes to the US of their parents.

**I**t is the changing attitudes of the Gandhian wing of Macaulay's children which is crucial in charting the changing course of the Indian view of America. Till recently they were against globalisation and the modernisation it implied, seeing it as a threat to their Hindu culture as embodied in the BJP's slogan of Hindutva. But as many of their progeny came to prosper in the new liberalised economy (particularly in the new IT and outsourcing industries), without any changes in their mores, this Gandhian wing of Macaulay's children came to realise that there was a third way out of the old dilemma posed by the Western onslaught on their civilisation. A route pioneered by the Japanese in the late 19th century: to modernise but not Westernise. The same BJP which was burning former GATT Director General Arthur Dunkel's effigy in Parliament Square in the late 1980s, by 2004 was fighting an election on a platform of the benefits to "India Shining" from globalisation.

They have come to appreciate a distinction familiar to readers of this column, between the material and cosmological beliefs of a civilisation. There

is considerable cross-cultural evidence that material beliefs are more malleable than cosmological ones. Material beliefs can alter rapidly with changes in the material environment. There is greater hysteresis in cosmological beliefs: on how, in Plato's words, "one should live." Moreover, the cross-cultural evidence shows that, rather than the environment, it is the language group which influences these world views. This is because linguistic affiliation is often good evidence that the particular society shares a common origin which in turn determines their world views which become part and parcel of the language.

Thus the cosmological beliefs of the fully fledged English-speaking Nehruvian wing of Macaulay's children mirror those of their Western cousins. For the Gandhian wing English has remained purely instrumental. So their cosmological beliefs continue to be based on ancient Hindu mores. With economic liberalisation, both wings of Macaulay's children have embraced the material beliefs associated with the processes of globalisation. This makes their former atavistic attitudes to America, decrying its materialism, redundant. As in the UK, with Thatcher's children, Macaulay's children in India no longer disdain American materialism and its pursuit of money. The growing embourgeoisement, with its accompanying erosion of aristocratic manners, has led to a more positive attitude towards America in both countries.

This has been strengthened in India by the large skilled migration to the US, so that there are strong educational and emotional links between "the best and the brightest" in the two countries. Also the earlier Indian perception, that the US was thwarting India's emergence as a superpower, has also been mitigated by the Indo-US strategic alliance and the Indo-US nuclear deal.

This also augurs well for the future of the Indian economy, and also explains the downfall of the Left in the recent elections. With the growing Indian middle class increasingly comprising the Gandhian wing of Macaulay's children, the anti-American and anti-globalisation rhetoric of the parties of the Left is going to become electorally unsustainable. The *bhadralok* are going to find themselves overthrown by the sons of the soil from the *mofussil* towns whose material values are at odds with the various forms of socialism espoused by the Left, and whose social mores are still traditional. This means that the young, self-confident refurbished Gandhian wing of Macaulay's children should be able to see India through to modernisation without Westernisation.