

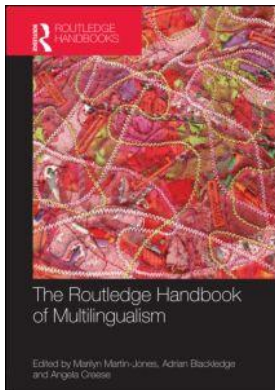
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Rethinking discourses around the 'English-cosmopolitan' correlation

Scenes from formal and informal multilingual educational contexts

Vaidehi Ramanathan

Where do our disciplinary concepts come from? What are the processes by which they begin to garner particular associations and take root? In what ways do language policies enforce and thicken associations (and by extension inequities) and why is it important that we educators seek contexts whereby our default understandings of concepts and their terms are challenged? These questions form the backdrop against which the present localized discussion about the 'English-cosmopolitanism' and 'vernacular-parochialism' correlations are to be understood. Drawing on different kinds of ethnography data gathered in divergent contexts (in the same general multilingual geographic space in India), I shall argue that connections between these concepts and languages need to be constantly rethought and challenged, as they have crucial implications for all language educators and researchers. Doing so allows us to bring in grounded explorations around English and the vernaculars, and laminates existing scholarship in multilingualism by bringing in the political issues of equities, communities and civic engagement.

Within the research space of bi- and multilingualism, there has been, in recent years, some debate about English and its globalizing surges (especially in ESL) and its impact on local languages, with scholars writing about neo-liberalism (Phillipson 2008), changing national language policies that make social inequities more apparent (or at least apparent in different ways, see Ramanathan 2005a, 2006; Ramanathan and Morgan 2009) and ways in which educators effectively teach English while also creating contexts for home languages (cf. Blackledge 2001, 2005; Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; Martin-Jones and Jones 2000; McCarty 2002, 2005; Hornberger and Johnson 2007; Canagarajah 1997, 2002; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Kramsch 2010). There appears to be, then, from some orientations at least, a split between other/home languages and English. The former is often associated with terms such as 'nativism', 'fundamentalism', 'chauvinism', 'homegrown-ness', 'parochialism', all of which connote to varying degrees, insularity and backwardness. English, on the other hand, given our globalizing surges, connotes 'Westernization', 'worldliness', 'liberalism', 'sophistication' and 'cosmopolitanism'. I draw on these connotations so as to counter and rethink them. When contextualized in grounded, multilingual realities, these concepts and their accompanying associations

(Delueze and Guattari 1994), find articulation in enactments around particular multilingual language policies that through reproduction perpetuate a host of inequities, thus adding to our accumulating sense of how particular concepts (and their realities) go together. As this chapter points out, we educators need to not only openly address the various associations that cluster around the concepts we use – the journeying these concepts and their associations do – but need constantly to find contexts whereby our collective assumptions about these terms are challenged, as it is only by doing so that we remain vigilant about not reproducing the very caveats we are also trying to counter (see Blackledge and Creese 2008 for an excellent discussion about contesting meanings around the term 'heritage').

Early developments in the field

Anchored as they are in various research domains in applied sociolinguistics, the key arguments in this essay seek to both contribute to domains of established scholarship while also pushing at their borders. Situated as the discussion is in a post-colonial space, namely, India, the essay builds on post-colonial scholarship that has addressed issues of the role of English and vernacular languages in formerly colonized, multilingual locales (Canagarajah 1997; Higgins 2009; Ramanathan 2005a), where English is the language of the elite, with tensions around the vernaculars emerging in a variety of contexts. This body of work, however, has thus far not adequately probed ways in which issues in non-formal, community domains laminate concerns in formal learning contexts. Addressing formal and non-formal learning concerns together allows us to also understand multilingualism in terms of local, vernacular, lived realities with sharp political edges. Such an orientation to multilingualism contributes to existing research on it, which has already alerted us to concerns around language removal (e.g. Pavlenko 2008), its impact in education-related contexts (e.g. Jessner 2006; Blackledge 2005; Creese *et al.* 2008; Creese and Martin 2003), and ways in which some languages get strategically used as lingua francas in domains in big cities (e.g. Block 2007). The essay also situates itself in the area of English and globalization (e.g. Blommaert and Omoniyi 2006; Seargeant 2009), which has focused on ideologies around English and internationalization, and ways in which an awareness of world Englishes is prodding us to rethink our language standards (Milroy and Milroy 1985), assessments (McNamara and Roever 2006) and tests (Shohamy 2006).

Issues of data and method

I will ground these terms – parochialism and cosmopolitanism – in relation to two points: (1) tracking issues in formal educational contexts, and (2) community issues in non-formal educational domains, with a view to probing the possibility that this breakdown – overscripted as it is becoming in several applied linguistics debates – is perhaps more bogus than we are willing to concede. My overall point here is a straightforward one: if we shift our gazes away from classrooms and tracking policies towards ways in which communities begin to heal themselves in the wake of traumatic events, this polarity more than falls apart; it actually gets turned on its head. And it is this reversal to which I intend to call our attention. Both domains of enquiry are based on my ongoing work, ethnographic research in India – indeed in the very city I was raised and schooled in (Ahmedabad in Gujarat), with Gujarati-medium (GM) and English-medium (EM) teachers in the city (Ramanathan 2006, 2005a, 2005b, 2004). Although my focus is localized, its implications, as I hope to point out, concern all scholars, regardless of discipline and our geographic positionings in the world.

My data – accumulated over a decade – comprise a range of materials gathered in Ahmedabad and with a variety of people in different institutions. Ahmedabad’s population is approximately 4.5 million, and almost everybody speaks at least two languages. The official languages in the state and city are Gujarati, Hindi and English (although there are sizeable pockets of the population speaking a variety of other Indian languages), and all three languages are taught at the K-12 level (more on K-12 language policies presently). In the space of formal learning, my work has been based on three institutional sites: (1) a middle-class, EM Jesuit liberal arts institution (where I attended college) that has in the last decade been making changes to its institutional policies to accommodate vernacular-medium (VM) students of Dalit background, and where teachers freely intersperse the vernacular when teaching English in the language classes; (2) an upper-class, EM business college that encourages only English language use in its classes; and (3) a very poor, VM women’s college where instruction is dominantly in Gujarati, including the teaching of English literature. Data from these institutions included extensive interviews with students, faculty and administrators, copies of pedagogic materials, texts, exams, student responses, and countless hours of classroom observations and field notes. Also part of this project are occasional individual and group meetings with both EM and VM teachers to discuss concerns about curriculum, especially the adapting of Western-based ELT materials partially made available by the British Council, and some of which I supply (when asked) in the Indian setting.

My data from the non-formal domain come from two sites, both of which embody Gandhian notions of ‘non-cooperation’: (1) an extracurricular programme run out of the women’s college (mentioned above) that caters to addressing concerns of civic change; and (2) the Gandhi Ashram (which was historically Gandhi’s home/office and continues to engage in Gandhian projects and be a source of Gandhianism in the state). Although my involvement with concerns in the women’s college has been extensive, my involvement with the Gandhi Ashram is more recent. Whereas Gandhi’s ideologies and ways in which they impact VM education in Gujarat are issues I have written about (see Ramanathan 2004, 2005a), it has only been in the last four years that I have begun to attend and participate in some of their workshops that are directly oriented to addressing community issues. Data from this space include three-hour interviews with key people running various civic projects in the city, field notes on workshops and a variety of historical materials written by and to Gandhi (letters, memos, bulletins) that are available in the Ashram and at the Rhodes House library in Oxford University (see Ramanathan 2009 for a discussion of some of this correspondence).

My seeking out of people at the Ashram has been intentional, and is propelled in part by the increasingly rabid Hindu nationalistic rhetoric emanating from the Gujarat state government (and until recently the central government as well).¹ My sustained engagement with one of the VM teachers (discussed here) prompted me to seek other pockets of practice that countered some of the dangerous political ideologies threatening secularism, and the workshops at the Gandhi Ashram seemed, in many ways, ideal. Not only do they have Gandhi’s larger philosophy of non-cooperation against political hegemonies at their core (more on this presently) but they also opened up for me a way of understanding both how Gandhianism is situated and how particular dimensions of the identities of participants (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004) get laminated. What I write about here, then, are skeins of Gandhianism that are echoed and enacted.

Policies around maintaining multilingualism: English and vernacular language learning in the formal K-12 domain

Most K-12 students in India get slotted into what are called VM (Gujarati in the present case) and EM tracks of schooling (see Ramanathan 2005a for a detailed discussion of inequities

perpetuated by such tracking). Constitutionally, the Indian government promises the availability of an education in the mother tongue (in the 21 official languages) as well as an education in English (where English is the medium of instruction). In Gujarat, English is introduced as a foreign language in grade 5 in the GM classes, and Gujarati is introduced at the same grade level in EM classes. Hindi is introduced in grade 4 and Sanskrit in grade 7 in both mediums, and all EM and VM students learn these till grade 12. If policies existed in vacuums, this scene might be regarded as reasonably egalitarian; after all, students in both streams are becoming literate in several languages, with multilingualism being institutionally validated and legitimized.

But, as we know, educational policies and enactments of and around them, have rings of divisiveness and exclusionism around them (King 2001; Shohamy 2006; Hornberger 1988; McCarty 2005). Equity in this context, as indeed in many parts of the world, is directly tied to the selection of students for entry to college. Colleges in India, for the most part (except for a few liberal arts colleges), are in the EM, which of course means that students with VM backgrounds (where they have had access to a few hours of English instruction a week) have to compete with their EM counterparts (for whom English is almost a first language) in colleges and beyond. And given our globalizing world, inequities relating to who has access to English and how access to it opens other communal doors (jobs, interviews) play themselves out in differentiated ways, and fall directly into the 'parochiality-cosmopolitan' trap with which I began. In what follows, I show how English and the local vernacular (Gujarati) assume connotations and associations that contribute to cosmopolitanism and parochialism as composite singularities.

To underscore how the two tracks of education produce two very different 'literate in English' candidates, I offer Table 3.1 and Table 3.2, which lay out the 'minimal levels of learning' (MLL) (somewhat comparable to what in the California context is referred to as K-12 'standards') for English language learning in the two mediums. (I do need to note here that there has been a concerted effort to change state-wide educational policies so that English might now be introduced in the first grade instead of the fifth). For now, though, the present policies are still in place.

Two noticeable writing-related differences above are: (1) writing for VM students is presented as a discrete skill and is addressed separately from reading, a feature that contrasts with writing and reading being presented as conjoined entities for EM students; and (2) that writing for EM students is essayist in orientation from early on: 'writing paragraphs on given topics' (vs 'gaining the basic mechanics of English writing ... with proper spacing' for the VM student), or writing essays based on texts (vs learning to write words and sentences neatly for the VM student).

These unequal levels of literacy across the two mediums are evident in the very divergent kinds of English language readings for the two tracks for students. Table 3.2 offers a partial list of topics addressed in the English language textbooks used in each track.

Several interesting features emerge from a close comparison of the partial list of contents in the two sets of textbooks. VM texts with their general focus on survival English emphasize how language is used in particular Indian contexts (at the park, at the zoo or sending a telegram). The readings in EM texts, in contrast, are more cosmopolitan, drawing as they do from a variety of texts, including essays and short readings on Abraham Lincoln in grade 6, to those by Stephen Leacock and Tolstoy in grade 8, to those by Hemingway and Tagore in grade 10. Poetry, a genre that draws heavily on metaphorical use of language, is relegated to the 'optional' category in VM texts (indeed, prefaces to the textbooks say that poetry for VM students is to be regarded as 'supplementary reading'). Poetry is part of the mandated EM curriculum.

At a somewhat superficial level the two tables could be read as snippets of 'evidence'. However, it is their positioning in larger cultural and political interlocking chains (which include snobberies, pedagogies, ideologies) that contributes to sedimenting these inequities in

Table 3.1 Divergent MLLs for Gujarati-medium and English-medium students

| | <i>Excerpts from MLL from English textbooks used in the Gujarati medium</i> | <i>Excerpts from MLL from English textbooks used in the English medium</i> |
|---------|---|---|
| Grade 5 | <p>Writing: Gains control of the basic mechanics of writing in English like capital letters, small letters, punctuation, writing neatly on a line with proper spacing</p> <p>Transcribes words, phrases and sentences in English</p> <p>Produces words and spells them correctly</p> <p>Writes numbers up to 50, telephone numbers, road signs</p> | <p>Reading and writing: Reading textual material and writing answers to questions based on and related to the text</p> <p>Reading and interpreting and offering comments on maps and charts</p> <p>Reading children's literature and talking about it</p> <p>Writing paragraphs on given topics</p> <p>Reading and writing simple recipes</p> |
| Grade 6 | <p>Reading: Reads aloud simple sentences, poems, dialogues and short passages with proper pauses</p> <p>Reads and follows given directions</p> <p>Reads numbers up to 100</p> <p>Writing: Writes with proper punctuation marks</p> <p>Writes words and sentences neatly on a line with proper spacing, punctuation marks and capitalization</p> <p>Writes answers to questions based on text material</p> | <p>Reading and writing: Reading textual material and writing answers to questions based on the text</p> <p>Reading and interpreting simple abbreviations</p> <p>Reading narrative prose and adventure stories and talking about them</p> <p>Writing/building stories based on given questions/points</p> <p>Reading and using the telephone directory</p> |
| Grade 7 | <p>Reading: Reads aloud simple sentences</p> <p>Finds key words and phrases from a text</p> <p>Writing: Writes words and sentences and paragraphs dictated with correct spellings, proper punctuation marks</p> <p>Learns to write words and sentences neatly on a line with proper spacing and punctuation</p> <p>Writes answers to questions based on the text</p> | <p>Reading and writing: Reading textual material and writing answers based on the text</p> <p>Writing essays based on the text</p> <p>Reading literary stories and prose lessons</p> <p>Reading simple passages of reflective prose</p> <p>Reading and interpreting common instructions such as railway timetables</p> |

Sources: *Excerpts from MLL from English textbooks used in the Gujarati medium*, Purani, Salat, Soni and Joshi 1998: 1–3 (for grades 5, 6 and 7, respectively). *Excerpts from MLL from English textbooks used in the English medium*, Purani, Nityanandan and Patel 1998: 2 (for grades 5, 6 and 7, respectively).

the formal realm. When reified in textbooks (crucial tools through which much of pedagogy takes shape, although by no means the only tool), it becomes quite obvious which set of students are becoming more 'cosmopolitan'. If, as Gunesch (2004) maintains, cosmopolitanism involves among other things, becoming a world citizen, becoming and viewing oneself as intercultural and breaking down national borders, then one could conceivably believe that the VM student is clearly not being given an adequate chance.

Shifting our gazes to non-formal domains

From a pedagogical standpoint, in a formal setting, we can see marked inequities contributing to a particular constellation of meanings summed up by the term 'cosmopolitan', a point that I, as researcher, reify when I openly say that the EM curriculum can be characterized in this way. It is precisely this extension of associations, though, that needs to be stopped in its tracks, both

Table 3.2 A partial list of contents for grades 6, 8 and 10

| | <i>VM list of contents</i> | <i>EM list of contents</i> |
|----------|--|--|
| Grade 6 | Welcome, Friends A Fancy Dress Show A Seashore A Park A Village Fair In the School Compound What Time is it Now? The Environment Day (From: Nataraj <i>et al.</i> 1998: 3) | A Voyage to Lilliput Farewell to the Farm The Changing World Abraham Lincoln (Parts 1 and 2) Don Quixote Meets a Company of Actors The Poet's House Woodman, Spare that Tree! City Streets and Country Roads (From: Jadeja <i>et al.</i> 1999: 2) |
| Grade 8 | GM (no authors provided) Poetry: (optional) Rhyme Rhyme Rhyme Only One Mother The Picnic Two Birds Prose: Let's Begin Hello! I am Vipul A Railway Station At the Zoo On the Farm Good Manners In the Kitchen (From: Kotak <i>et al.</i> 1999) | Poetry: Under the Greenwood Tree: William Shakespeare She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways: William Wordsworth To a Child Dancing in the Wind: W. B. Yeats The Listeners: Walter de la Mare Coming: Philip Larkin A Blackbird Singing: R. S. Thomas Prose: Little Children Wiser than Men: Leo Tolstoy Do you know?: Clifford Parker My Financial Career: Stephen Leacock The Lady is an Engineer: Patricia Strauss The Judgment Seat of Vikramaditya: Sister Nivedita (From: Thaker 1999: 2) |
| Grade 10 | Poetry (optional) Laughing Song: Blake In the Night: Naidu Wander Thirst: Gerald Gould The Secret of the Machines: Rudyard Kipling Prose (no authors provided) An Act of Service Strange but True Have you Heard this One? Vaishali at the Police Station Prevention of Cruelty to Animals The Indian Village—Then and Now (From Kotak <i>et al.</i> 1998) | Poetry: Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind: Shakespeare London: Blake Upon Westminster Bridge: Wordsworth To—: Shelley La Belle Dame Sans Merci: Keats The Professor: Nissim Ezekiel The Fountain: Lowell Prose: Ramanujam: C. P. Snow On Saying Please: A. G. Gardener The Homecoming: Tagore Andrew Carnegie: E. H. Carter A Day's Wait: Hemingway After Twenty Years: O' Henry Vikram Sarabhai: M. G. K. Menon (From: Vamdatta <i>et al.</i> 2000: 44) |

in our larger discipline and indeed, in my own thinking and texting. With a view towards reversing this polarity, I turn now to issues outside the four walls of the classroom. If we consider non-formal domains, then a completely different sense of the vernacular and cosmopolitanism arises. Although it may seem as if I am taking a major detour, I need

to address some background in order to make the larger points about the concepts of English-cosmopolitanism and vernacular-parochialism, and their associations.

In 2001 and 2002 there were two devastating events that impacted the city of Ahmedabad in traumatic ways.² The first was an earthquake in 2001, the second, Hindu–Muslim riots in 2002. The earthquake of 2001 occurred around 9.00 am on 26 January (about the time that most educational institutions in the city were holding Republic Day celebrations) and measured 7.7 on the Richter scale, and although the epicentre of the quake was in the small town of Bhuj, about 200 miles from Ahmedabad, its tremors were felt for many miles around. An estimated 17,000 bodies were recovered, more than 30,000 people were reported dead or missing, 166,000 or more were injured and over a million homes were destroyed. The devastation in Ahmedabad, needless to say, was extensive, with school buildings crushing little children, flats and apartments coming down on families getting ready to start their day and businesses being decimated.

As if this were not enough, the following year, on 27 February 2002, the worst Hindu–Muslim riots in recent years broke out in the city. The events allegedly unfolded as follows (there is a lot of room for debate here about how planned or accidental the whole scenario was. Indeed, the case is still pending in the courts): 58 Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya (a Hindu holy site) had their train cabin set ablaze outside Ahmedabad. The train had made a scheduled stop, during which a scuffle between some of the pilgrims and a tea vendor began, started to escalate and eventually culminated in the train compartment going up in flames and the pilgrims being burnt to death (allegedly by a group of Muslims). This led to a vicious collective anger on the part of hard-line Hindus that resulted in a horrendous week of rioting where Muslim homes were burnt, businesses looted, women raped and children killed. More than 1,000 Muslims died.

Although I cannot come close to accounting for the numerous local ways in which various groups in the city of Ahmedabad leapt into action, including the group of teachers I work with, I shall devote myself to explaining in some detail the work of two endeavours committed to communal and educational change in very different ways (see Ramanathan 2006 for a detailed discussion).³ My point here is to underscore how vernacular resources – often seen as ‘backward, rabid, fundamentalist, nativist’, at least by the EM press in India – become a most valuable well of resources for the reconstruction of lives and communities. Learning and teaching in these contexts assume very different hues that complicate our collective notions of cosmopolitanism and of English.

A conceptual background for the two non-formal domains: Gandhian views on non-formal education, community service and non-cooperation

Because both providers of non-formal education echo Gandhian views in a variety of direct and indirect ways, I would like to provide in this section a brief and interconnected understanding of those aspects of non-cooperation that are most relevant to the issues at hand. Although world history documents non-cooperation in terms of civil disobedience, Satyagraha and non-violence, there are a host of details in this philosophy that are pertinent to the present discussion, including: (1) the value of harnessing the vernaculars (including those of promoting vernacular – medium education); (2) the importance of community service being an integral part of a basic education; and (3) promoting non-formal education that encourages a healthy development of civic citizenship.

Each of these ideals gets encased in the larger rhetorical strain of non-cooperation, which Gandhi advocated during his struggles for Indian Independence (see Ramanathan 2006 for a detailed discussion), and which people at the two institutions interpret and enact differently. The following are some excerpts from his writings on this topic.

Box 3.1 Gandhi's views on language and on non-formal and basic education

On vernacular (and English) education:

- 1 I hold it to be as necessary for the urban child as for the rural to have the foundation of his development laid on the solid work of the mother-tongue. It is only in unfortunate India that such an obvious proposition needs to be proved (Gandhi in *Harijan*, 9-9-'39, edited by Kumarappa 1954 (Gandhi 1954)).
- 2 The only education we receive is English education. Surely we must show something for it. But suppose we had been receiving during the past fifty years education through our vernaculars, what should we have today? We should have a free India, we should have our educated people, not as if they were foreigners in their own land, but speaking to the heart of the nation; they would be working amongst the poorest of the poor, and whatever they would have gained during the past fifty years would be a heritage for the nation (Gandhi, cited in Kumarappa 1954: 13) (Gandhi 1954).

On (non-)formal education:

- 3 But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lop-sided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. A proper and all-around development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds *pari passu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. According to this theory, therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another (*Harijan*, 8-5-'37, in Prasad 1950).
- 4 By education I mean all-round drawing out of the best in children—body, mind, and spirit. [Formal] Literacy is not the end of education nor the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby men and women can be educated (Gandhi, *Harijan*, 31-7-'37, in Prasad 1950).
- 5 [Non-formal education] will check the progressive decay of our villages and lay the foundation for a juster social order in which there is no unnatural division between the 'haves' and the 'havenots' and everybody is assured a living wage and the rights to freedom...It will provide a healthy and a moral basis of relationship between the city and village and will go a long way towards eradicating some of the worst evils of the present social insecurity and poisoned relationship between the classes (*Harijan*, 9-10-'37, in Prasad 1950).

6 Fundamentals of basic education:

- 1 All education to be true must be self-supporting, that is it will pay its expenses excepting the capital.
- 2 In it the cunning of the hand will be utilized even up to the final stage, that is to say, hands of pupils will be skillfully working at some industry for some period during the day.
- 3 All education must be imparted through the medium of the provincial language.
- 4 In this there is no room for giving sectional religious training. Fundamental universal ethics will have full scope.

- 5 This education whether it is confined to children or adults, male or female, will find its way to the homes of the pupils.
- 6 Since millions of students receiving this education will consider themselves as of the whole of the India, they must learn an interprovincial language. This common inter-provincial speech can only be Hindustani written in Nagari or Urdu script. Therefore, pupils will have to master both scripts. (Harijan, 1-11-'47, in Prasad 1950).

Gandhi's views (see above) have to be interpreted in the political context in which they were made. From approximately 1920–47, Gandhi's views were decidedly nationalistic, as he and his allies were trying to rally the country towards destabilizing the Raj, and towards gaining Indian independence. Because his views on the above issues were directly anti-English – as he felt that the language divided the country – his championing of the vernaculars sits in a polarized position (somewhat simplistic by today's standards) vis-à-vis English. As I have pointed out in detail elsewhere, although the surge towards EM education is ever present, it is accompanied by pockets of deep ambiguities and tensions (Ramanathan 2005a), and one of my overall roles in this larger endeavour has been to actively carve out research and textual space – both in India and in the West – whereby these alternative voices are heard. Although Gandhi's message of non-violence seems to be ironically completely forgotten in Gujarat, given the horrific riots of 2002, the larger strain of non-cooperation still resonates. As we will see, non-cooperation in the two endeavours discussed presently is directed against perceived social forces that preserve inequities. The quiet way in which both projects work at bridging perceived gulfs is reminiscent of Gandhi's insistence on being 'civil' and of responding to tyranny by searching for non-violent, quiet alternatives. They also contest a host of associations around the vernacular and parochialism, thus permitting us to rethink the English-cosmopolitan set of relations.

The two endeavours: drawing on non-cooperation to expand 'education' and civic engagement

The National Social Service Scheme at the Women's College

Located in the inner-city, the Women's College is a low-income GM liberal arts college in downtown Ahmedabad where much of the rioting of 2002 occurred. In my previous writing (Ramanathan 2006) regarding this college, I have discussed ways in which the National Social Service (NSS) – a nation-wide, Gandhian, social service organization – a chapter of which is in this school, engages many of the institution's female students in extracurricular activities that directly target community needs. Begun in commemoration of Gandhi's centennial year in 1969, the organization encourages students to volunteer time towards social projects, including those relating to literacy, health, sanitation, women and children's welfare, AIDS awareness, drug addiction awareness, human rights and national integration.⁴ Added to this list is the recent work by this school to address the needs of families most affected by the two events. Although I have addressed ways in which this extracurricular project harnesses vernacular resources in some detail elsewhere (Ramanathan 2006), I will for the purposes of the present discussion draw primarily on interview data with the key person that runs this project, namely Mr. P.

Although he teaches English literature, particularly nineteenth-century British literature, in Gujarati at the college, Mr. P. began this project more than 15 years ago with a commitment

to translating the best of Gandhi's ideals – of service, self-respect, valuing the vernacular backgrounds of his students – to specific contexts of practice. Realizing that he operates in a space where speaking openly of sociopolitical issues is most incendiary – in downtown Ahmedabad where much of the rioting occurred, in a very poor, diverse college with students from both Hindu and Muslim (as well as other) backgrounds – this man works towards expanding his view of education by connecting it to issues of 'citizenship', taking pride in being 'Gujarati', and relying on what is currently within one's reach to ply instruments of change. When asked about why the classroom was not a viable sphere for his message, he said:

The classroom is the most incendiary place to raise community issues. ... you see, the students come from such different backgrounds, with such divergent points of view, how can I bring up political and community issues, especially now when everyone, but everyone is reeling from the riots? Some of my students have lost their homes, some family members. *But I will say this: I know that I want to address these issues somehow; I want them to know that education is not only about what they learn and what we teach in classes about Dryden and Congreve, it is about participating in the community.* It is about taking the best of literary values – connecting to other humans – and living them. So rather than be overtly political about it, I channel their and my energy in my projects where the focus is on the community, regardless of who the members of the community are, and I have both Muslim and Hindu students working in these projects.

(FI: 2: 2, 2 June 2004)⁵

When the earthquake hit, he organized his students into groups that went out and worked in the community: in communal kitchens for people who were left homeless, in contacting municipal authorities for clean drinking water, and in getting blankets and warm clothes because it was winter. Because the riots occurred around the time when many of the students were to take their final university exams, and because the exam centres were far away and there was a curfew in town, he organized buses that would take students from riot-affected areas to the exam centres.

As he explains in the excerpt above, 'education' for him is more about 'connecting to other humans' than it is about what is taught and learned in the classroom, and moving toward this end, without engaging in divisive political rhetoric, is instrumental in his mission, as his focus is on 'what needs to get done, what the reality in front of me is like' (FI 2: 5). One way in which he works toward this goal is by emphasizing in his workshops (for NSS volunteers) what being 'Gujarati' means: its diversity (that fact that it is a native language for a diverse set of people including Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Jews) the fact that it is home to other migrant Indians (like my family who are originally Tamilian but who have settled in Gujarat); the fact that it is the birthplace of Gandhi who represented the last word on community service, non-formal education and above all Hindu–Muslim unity. As he says,

My job is to create a space whereby such sentiments and values about community participation can flourish. The last 3 or 4 years have been so painful for so many people in this state. I want to be able to say that when my students graduate they do so with some pride and awareness of the ties that bind them to their fellow citizens. That the riots should have happened here in Gandhi's home state, when his life's actions centred around Hindu–Muslim unity – how do I not get my Gujarati students to see that irony? My problem is: how do I get them to realize this inductively? How can I make that realization happen quietly, without dogma, without saying too much?

(FI 2: 7)

One way in which he communicates his message indirectly is by not speaking about NSS issues in the classroom, or in corridors where students abound, but by relying on his NSS student volunteers to ‘spread the word’ as indeed they do. As he explains:

It is crucial that this work not become a dogma ... given my position, my speaking of it directly runs that risk. I speak of it in workshops, I organize their camps, I attend the training sessions with them; I want to do all that, but I will not seek students out by speaking of it directly. They have to want to do this work. The value of non-formal education is that it remain non-formal. You take it into the classroom and it is gone. Pfff ... like that! They have to hear of this community work from other involved students; they have to see their classmates being fulfilled by this.

(FI 2: 13)

Echoes of Gandhi’s views on non-formal education are obvious here, as indeed is the Gandhian insistence on proceeding with such work quietly and indirectly. Although non-formal education has traditionally been conceived of as an educational alternative operating outside the constraints of the classroom, the changes that such education seems to seek eventually make their way to classrooms.⁶

Education and community at the Gandhi Ashram

This theme of quietly working on community problems is most resonant in the Gandhi Ashram, as well, which houses a programme called *Manav Sadhna* (MS—*Human Improvement*). The Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad is the largest of Gandhi’s ashrams, as this particular one served as his headquarters during the struggle for independence. On the banks of the river Sabarmati, the ashram is located on spacious grounds. One side holds his library and archival materials about him, and on the doorway to this section is a huge tribute to Martin Luther King. The other side of the ashram has what used to be his living quarters: his spinning wheel, his desk, rooms of his closest allies. The ashram, even today, is a place that welcomes the poorest of the poor and offers a haven and rehabilitation for those seeking it.

All work that goes on in the Gandhi Ashram seems to embody the quintessential ‘Gandhian’ ideals of self-reliance, cross-religious unities, non-formal and basic education, coupled with a thick strain of quiet non-cooperation. Begun by three people – Jayesh Patel, Anar Patel and Viren Joshi – in 1991, *Manav Sadhna* today runs more than 20 well-developed community-oriented programmes. Born and raised in the ashram because his father was a staunch Gandhian follower, the first of the three has Gandhi ‘in his bones’, so to speak and much of what follows in this section is drawn from my interviews with him, from participating in workshops he has led and from interviews with other people at the ashram with whom he has put me in touch.

Although there are several similarities between the NSS work of Mr. P. and the projects of MS – both have strong Gandhian strains, both enhance the vernaculars, both are community-oriented – there are interesting differences. Unlike the project run by Mr. P. where civic engagement is parallel to formal, classroom-based learning, the focus of the projects at the Gandhi Ashram is on interpreting all education as ‘civic education’ and on attending to the most basic of human needs (food, clothing, shelter) before addressing any issues related to formal learning. Also, unlike the NSS project, the children that the ashram caters to are the extremely poor. When I spent time at the ashram in May and June 2004, Jayesh recalled how the three of them began their programme with the explicit aim of working with the poorest persons they could find. Although he narrated this to me in Gujarati, I am presenting it below in

translation. (I need to note here that I am deliberately choosing to present extensive, fuller quotes to mitigate the loss already encountered in translation, a process that necessitates the adding of more layers of 'distance' from the very first layer of the narrator's recounting and my interpreting in Gujarati, to my then presenting and interpreting this narrative in academic English.)

[T]he three of us had noticed that a lot of village people, because of a scarcity of resources in villages – equipment, money, water – migrate to the cities and they live in slums. And we found that mothers work as cleaners/maids in peoples' homes, fathers work in pulling handcarts and they send their children out to pick rags. The childhoods of these children are completely lost. Middle-class children have all they could possibly want but these others have no opportunities and we decided we wanted to work with these children. Think globally, act locally ... so the three of us started our work. The three of us took along biscuits, chocolates, some clothes and we set out in a rickshaw and went to the Naranpura crossroads. I still remember this and there we saw two children working in a tea stall, making tea, and serving it to customers. We asked the tea-stall owner if we could sit with the children and chat with them. Hope you don't mind. We started talking to the children who were clearly suspicious of us. 'Who are these people who are asking me all these questions', they thought. We told the children, 'We came to be friends with you. Will you share a meal with us?' The children said yes. ... and when we got to know them, we gave them clothes, cut their nails, shampooed their hair, got them shoes. We went again in a few days, and by then, these children had talked about what we had done for them with their friends and before long they would wait for us to come, calling 'Jayeshbhai Virenbhai' ... We soon realized it was getting very difficult for us to cater to all the children there and so asked, 'Will you come to the Gandhi Ashram? We have a campus there and we can introduce you to people there. Can you come once a week?' Our very first programme was 'Back to childhood' in '91. While we had each done work with children before this, this was our first *Manav Sadhna* project. Soon thereafter, the children started coming, first 10, then 15 ... they seemed to enjoy coming here. We used to give them baths, clothes and then began helping them with their homework. You'll see some of them today ... they've grown but are still here. They were dirty, unbathed, with unwashed clothes ... we showered them with care, told them stories, prayed with them, showed them films and sang songs with them. We did a lot through play and then would eat together with them.

(Jayesh Patel, *Gandhi Ashram*: 2, 3 June 2004)

As Jayesh explained to me: 'for us education is community work; if schooling does not teach you to connect with your fellow humans, then what good is it?' (3 June 2004).

Like the NSS-related work at the Women's College, MS is committed to working with and around social stratifications, including Hindu–Muslim tensions, some of which were exacerbated during the quake (and very definitely during the riots; indeed, there had been reports that particular groups of peoples, including Muslims, did not get the aid they needed, cf. Engineer 2003). Jayesh, Viren, Anar and the MS volunteers began working with some very poor destitute villages in a corner of Kutch (not far from the epicentre), where 80 per cent of the population are Muslim, and which have a high proportion of Hindu migrants. Almost all the homes had been decimated. As Jayesh explains:

There was almost nothing left there. We wanted to do something about this. *We did an initial analysis and educated ourselves of their needs*: broken down homes, no resources, no

fodder or water for livestock, the general geographical conditions of the place (frequent cyclones and hurricanes). Over the last few years we have reached a point where it is self-sufficient, stopped migration, worked out Hindu–Muslim tensions to where during the recent riots, not one of these 47 villages reported anti-Hindu, anti-Muslim incidents.

(Jayesh Patel, *Gandhi Ashram: 4, 3 June 2004*)

This close attention to ‘educating oneself’, of figuring out and questioning one’s own default assumptions has echoes of Gandhi’s non-cooperation, and finds interesting articulation in the idea that we each need to ‘not cooperate’ with our default views but attempt to step outside them by ‘educating ourselves’ by learning from others. A point that illustrates this best has to do with MS’s work in a set of villages after the massive earthquake and ways in which they went about rehabilitating the lives of the villagers after paying close attention to the needs of the local people, and by drawing extensively on their valued, vernacular ways of living. Robin Sukhadia with whom I have been in email contact, and who has worked with MS, in some of these villages, explains on his website the conflicts many of the villagers experienced between the modern kinds of houses that were being built for them after the quake and the ‘traditional’ homes they were used to and wanted:

There has been tremendous financial and infrastructural support pouring into Kutchh after the earthquake, and so many NGOs and international agencies and religious organizations have come here to build homes and rebuild this area ... new hospitals have been built, new roads, new homes, but sadly, it seems to me, that many of these projects (which are funded mainly from abroad) have very insensitively proceeded with building living ‘communities’ without much thought as to the traditional way of life here ... and it seems that many of the villagers and farmers who lost everything here, do not wish to live in homes that resemble city homes and pre-fabricated enclaves ... the villagers, who have lived off the land for generations, have nowhere to put their cattle, to grow their crops, or to stay connected to the land in these new homes ... sadly many of the homes are empty because the villagers have decided it is better to be homeless than succumb to these imposed forms of living which are being built in the name of service to the poor but ... MS’s approach here, thankfully, has been very different. They have, instead of imposing designs and architects, rather empowered the local communities to design their own homes in their traditional methods ... they have built *Bhungas*, beautiful, mud-based round buildings that have been in use for hundreds of years here ... not surprisingly, these structures were the only ones that survived the earthquake ... they are very practical and make sense for this environment. So, *Manav Sadhna* provided the guidance for the reconstruction of their homes, and the community ... [look at] what happens in the name of service.

(Robin Sukhadia, www.bigcirclemedia.com/ahimsaarchives/000147.php)

The idea of drawing on, listening to and documenting what a community needs permeates all aspects of MS’s projects and is a key issue in the orientation workshops for MS volunteers in which I participated. Not only are the volunteers – all of whom are Gujarati – reminded of and educated in Gandhi’s ideals in the workshops, but they are encouraged to make connections between the work they do and the specific Gandhian ideals they are enacting. So, whether it is working in a very poor Urdu-medium Muslim school (that municipal authorities have largely ignored) or finding clothes and food supplies for a very poor farmer who is suffering the consequences of a bad crop and little rain, or organizing the celebrations of a key religious

holiday (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Parsi), among others, the volunteers are provided platforms and contexts whereby both their conceptual understanding of Gandhi and their practice are extended and looped into each other. As one of the volunteers tells me: 'these workshops are not just about educating ourselves about Gandhi, but about bringing our work back to Gandhi ... we go out and do Gandhi's work, but we each have to come back to Gandhi' (Volunteer 2: 2, 11 June 2004).

Interestingly, politically and community-oriented as all of this work by MS is, there is little or no reference to political events, and ways in which they have exacerbated social/religious stratifications in the city. When discussing the work done by MS volunteers after the riots, no overt mention was made of Gujarat's chief minister (who has been accused of not doing enough to protect the Muslims) or of the incendiary rhetoric of the ruling BJP state government. The ideas that 'there is a job to be done' and 'I have to do it' (Jayesh Patel: 5, 10 June 2004) seem to be a dominant theme, and non-cooperation during this time was and still is enacted in terms of quietly engaging in the opposite of all riot-related acts: of making shelter, finding lost relatives, distributing food and clothes, finding employment for the numerous widowed women and providing a haven for orphaned children. Although all of the volunteers at MS are engaged in various riot-related projects, it is with the children that they are most concerned. As Jayesh explains:

If we wish to reach the parents, we have to start with children. It is only through our work that we pass on our message. We cannot formally teach anybody anything; we can only do. In the end, everything we learn goes back to the community. Why not start with the community in the first place? Why not start with children?

(Jayesh Patel, Gandhi Ashram: 6, 3 June 2004)

Clearly, distinctions between 'civic engagement' and 'education' have blurred here; they are in this context almost synonymous.

Coming back to parochialism and cosmopolitanism

Leaving this local context of Ahmedabad aside now, I'd like to move back to the topic of parochialism and cosmopolitanism within multilingualism, with which I began. If cosmopolitanism is about extending oneself to the other, about bringing worldliness into the local, about reflecting the heterogeneity of the universe in the small spaces we occupy (teaching, learning, communal) then, how can the efforts of Mr. P. and of *Manav Sadhna* not be read as such? Steeped as they are in the vernacular – Gujarati in the present case – all their efforts are about engaging the other in the most humane and hospitable of terms. The boundaries we have to contend with in formal education in multilingual spaces (tracking, grading, judging students' language proficiencies and basing evaluations of 'intelligence' on them) breed the very insularity that I was talking about regarding VM education in Ahmedabad and that we can recognize in different forms in various parts of our planet. It is here, though, where we educators come in, where we seek spaces outside the formal realm of education, in non-formal spaces, so as to contest a chain of concepts and associations that emerge from our formal domains: where we hear in Mr. P.'s words that being identified as 'Gujarati' is not about being in the VM stream, as much as it is also about civic engagement in communities, and where we recognize in Jayesh Patel's endeavours the value of all education leading eventually to community developments and of drawing on the most local of resources to extend ourselves to others.

What these conceptual binarisms in multilingualism (parochialism/cosmopolitanism, vernacular/English, formal/non-formal) also open up are issues around the presumed staticity of these associations in discourses about multilingualism. A key issue here is that components of concepts and their associations are not constants or simple variations (that presume a core/ideal), but clusters of ordinates that emerge at particular times in certain contexts that we then imbue with a set of meanings (through concepts). These ‘meanings’ move along particular paths, changing hues as they proceed and we researchers need to be ever mindful of our proclivities to see them as repeated enactments and iterabilities. Thus, it may not be a simple case of turning the English-cosmopolitan or vernacular-parochialism correlations on their head – the premise with which I began – but may be more that our concepts and the associations we garner around them are in constant flux, forever being modified and transformed (Blackledge and Creese 2008). From this point of view, English then is a vernacular, just as a language other than English is cosmopolitan.

Related topics

Multilingualism in education in post-colonial contexts; multilingualism and religion; discourses about linguistic diversity; global English and bilingual education.

Notes

- 1 There has been much discussion (in newspapers, among people, in schools and in the group of teachers I work with) about the state having ‘forgotten Gandhi’ and his teachings in the wake of the recent Hindu–Muslim violence in the city. Gandhi’s views on Hindu–Muslim unity have generally been viewed as anathema by some factions of the right wing Hindu BJP party in the state, as he was seen as supporting Muslims too much, and for espousing a view of Hinduism that was generally deemed ‘effeminate’.
- 2 Some of what follows has appeared in Ramanathan 2005a and 2006.
- 3 Some activist groups in Ahmedabad include:
 - (a) Janvikas: an organization that focuses on the empowerment and development of NGOs in Gujarat;
 - (b) Janpath Citizens Initiative: a coalition of over 200 local grass-roots NGOs coming together in the days following the Gujarat quake;
 - (c) Navasarjan Trust: led by Martin Macwan: an organization representing Dalit rights in India;
 - (d) Rishta: a Gujarat Jesuit writers’ cell: engaged in a series of workshops for the development of vernacular media, especially for Christian and Muslim youth;
 - (e) Manav Sadhna: run out of the Gandhi Ashram.
- 4 Yearly camps and training are offered for all volunteers for a minimal fee as well as extended camps for college-going youth. Themes of some camps in the last few years have been ‘Youth for sustainable development’, ‘Youth for wasteland development’ and Youth for greenery’.
- 5 FI refers to Faculty interview; GA to Gandhi Ashram.
- 6 This is certainly evident with the NSS-related work that student volunteers present. I was able to observe at least three or four such instances where NSS student volunteers would speak of their work before Mr. P. arrived in class. In several instances, students of their own accord also made connections between what they were learning in their classes with issues they were wrestling with in the field. In an Economics class, for instance, I heard several of these NSS student volunteers make valuable connections between how issues related to the state and national budget had direct connections to allowances for the farming women they worked with (*yeh j BJP ka budget hain na, usme to kheti-vaadi ke liye itna jagah nahin hain—the BJP’s budget does not really have much room for farming-related issues*); how economic theories of rural development in Africa

resonated with issues in rural Gujarati (*Africa ki jo developmental economics ki baate ki, na, voh to hamaara Gujarat mein bahut relevant hain—the developmental economics of Africa that we have been studying is relevant to Gujarat*), how connections between the monsoon and agrarian economics percolated down to water purification projects they were involved in (*yeh agricultural economics aur baarish ka season hain, na, uska bahut sambandh hain hamaare water purification projects mein—there are many co-relations between the rainy season and agrarian economics on the one hand and the water purification projects we have been involved in, on the other*). Thus, although Mr. P. does not directly use the classroom as a site for promoting community change, his work eventually makes its way back to classrooms, a fact that seems to fill him with quiet pride.

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