Democracy, Plurality and Indian University

The politics of knowledge and the discourse of culture as politics today is enclosed in a hypertextual circle that lacks the suppleness of the embedded quarrels of the university of the 1960s. This prompts the location of debates on diversity, plurality and the university in a longer 'duree' ranging across the colonial and post-colonial era and framing a wide range of issues. This paper first deals with the concept of the university and its relationship to the liberal imagination and then explores the nationalist debate on how the modern university was conceived. A third section deals with the issue of language and educational policy focusing on the battles triggered by the Mandal Report. The concluding section examines the immediate question of nuclearisation of India and Pakistan and the possible role of the university in this context, outlining a critical role for it.

I

The recent debates on multiculturalism and ethnicity have acquired an almost epidemic quality. Wading through the undergrowth of these works, one tries to understand what culture actually means in these texts. Of the various aphorisms I collect three in particular convey a sense of the problematic. One begins with the best known and the most blatantly philistine reaction, that of Goebbels. The Nazi minister of propaganda claimed that when he heard the word culture, he reached for his gun. Goebbels obviously does not belong to the sorority of ideas. The best reaction to Goebbels comes in fact from a university don, the economic historian, Alexander Gerschenkron. In a seminar at Princeton, Gerschenkron is supposed to have said "When I hear the guns, I reach for my Gerschenkron. In a seminar at Princeton, Gerschenkron is supposed to have said when he heard the word culture, he reached for his gun. Goebbels obviously does not belong to the sorority of ideas. The best reaction to Goebbels comes in fact from a university don, the economic historian, Alexander Gerschenkron. In a seminar at Princeton, Gerschenkron is supposed to have said "When I hear the guns, I reach for my gun."

When one moves up to the postmodern period and plays Homo Seminaricus, one feels a certain lack of clarity about culture. Now when I hear discussions on culture, I reach for my dictionary. The politics of knowledge and the discourse of culture as politics is enclosed in a hypertextual circle that I find alien. It lacks a sense of the suppleness of the embedded quarrels of the university of the 1960s. It impels one to locate the debates on diversity, plurality and the university in a longer duree ranging across the colonial and post-colonial era and framing a wide range of issues.

This paper is divided into six parts. The first deals with the concept of the university and its relationship to the liberal imagination. We create a quick frame to look at diversity within the triangular goals of the French Revolution viz liberty, equality and fraternity. It also analyses the Radhakrishnan report on education in this context. The second section explores one fragment of the nationalist debate to describe how it conceived the modern university. It focuses on the writings of the Scottish biologist and the first professor of sociology in India, Patrick Geddes and his conversations with the poet, Rabindranath Tagore. The third sections deals with the issue of language and examines the problem of unity and diversity in relation to educational policy. It focuses particularly around the battles triggered by the Mandal Report. The fourth section examines the issue of fraternity in relation to knowledge systems. The fifth part of the essay moves to the more immediate question of the nuclearisation of India and Pakistan and examines the possible role of the university in this context. This sets the stage to ask whether the current paradigms of the nation state and its pursuit of development homogenise the other. This section also outlines a critical role for the university in this context.

II

One must begin by stating that the university is an outrageous hypothesis, and its survival a miracle. Yet one also feels that if it did not exist, it would have to be invented. It is the almost anthropological peculiarity of the university I want to emphasise. It is a perpetually liminal institutional continually in conflict with society. Yet the structure of this socio-drama is such that the tensions are never solved completely. The university becomes a miniaturised embodiment of the dualisms of a society, a creative machine for the playing out of its tensions. The gauntlet of oppositions ranges from excellence versus relevance, assimilation versus diversity, town versus country, elitism versus equality, individual versus community, freedom versus social responsibility. I must emphasise that such a model of the university cannot be cast in a standard problem-solving mode, where an issue is solved and a solution is tabled. There is a sense of Penelope's robe to many of these plots.

The university is a futuristic institution that makes innovative uses of the past. It is one of the last surviving medieval institutions, the only one of the guilds to adapt and survive in modern society. It is a microcosm of the walled city. Today the walls may not exist but the separation between the university and society is real. It is a source of tension and creativity. Paul Goodman in his Community of Scholars observes that "the wall, the
separateness is inevitable for the culture of scholars is inevitably foreign. The scholars come from all parts and do not easily abide by local prejudices. They cannot always fly the national flag." A university thus has a cosmopolitanism that trade schools and parochial seminaries lack. "It is this foreignness, this humanism that makes the university" [Goodman 1966:170]. It is part of its institutional methodology, its unspoken social contract with society.

This community of scholars, despite intrusions of the state, constitutes one of the longest surviving democracies in the world. Paul Goodman adds that the university is also a meditation on the modern city and the best realisation of its corporate and architectural ideal [Goodman 1966:184]. In fact, it is the universities of Oxford, Bologna, Sorbonne, Heidelberg or Cambridge which constitute the real city-states of modern times.

In this democracy of scholars, the citizen is a man of knowledge, not a buyer, seller or consumer. If the market was a collection of individuals committed to the idea of property and the rules of the money economy, the university is a corporate entity which sees knowledge primarily as a gift and which has resisted the commodification of knowledge. It is this reciprocity and difference between the two entities that has given liberal democracy its creative power.

The university is both text and pretext for this paper. One senses underneath it a deeper question of the future of democracy at the end of the 20th century. Particularly one needs to explore the relation between the university and liberal democracy. Our decade is an ambivalent time for it marks the victory of liberal democracy over 'people's democracies' and also its paradigmatic crisis.

The modern university along with the market has anchored the liberal imagination. Yet meditations on liberalism ignore the theoretical centrality of the university. Despite the nostalgia of the New Left or even the tragedy of Tianamen Square, university politics is seen as adolescent, evanescent or merely disruptive. The work of master liberals from Mill and Hayek to Rawls and Walzer ignores the university. But if the market acts out the pecuniary vision of the bourgeois man, the university dramatises the life of reason without which the myth of liberalism would become dessicated. More importantly it is the university which eventually reveals the paradigmatic inadequacy of the liberal theory of culture.

**Radhakrishnan Report**

One of the best meditations on the Indian university is the Radhakrishnan Report on education [Radhakrishnan 1950]. One must emphasise that Indian reports on education are never parochial documents. They are cosmopolitan to the core both in time and space and in that sense they mimic the university as an imagination. Here Shakespeare and Cervantes, Ghulib and Kalidas, Newton and Panini, Lenin and Manu rub shoulders in easy ambiéncence. The Radhakrishnan Report also avoids the colonial pathos of educational sociology. It does not begin with the usual cry that university education in India was a colonial creation. The Report handles this matter-of-factly by stating "The universities of modern India owe little to our ancient and medieval centres of learning but one must not forget the existence of such centres since early times" [Radhakrishnan: 6] and it also states "The universities as the makers of the future cannot persist in the old patterns, however valid they may have been in their own day" [Radhakrishnan: 7]. This matter of factness is, I think important, because we attribute all too quickly the ills of today to the colonial era. It was the economist Sukhamoy Chakravarty, who emphasised the importance of this.

"The description of university education as an 'alien implantation' strikes me as very inadequate and even somewhat a misleading presentation of what is lacking in university education. The post-Galilean development of human thought is largely a product of the west, especially of Europe. That the typical post-Galilean epistemological position leaves out many areas of enquiry which have been considered relevant in India and the East cannot be doubted. But that it has represented a tremendous advance in our understanding especially of nature and society is beyond any question. Even if India were not a colony of the British, it should be absolutely relevant to introduce from outside the 'new sciences' in our curricula. Hence the important thing is not that higher education in the contemporary sense was first introduced in India by the colonising power, but that it has largely remained encrusted within the late 19th and early 20th century mould that was characteristically British" [Chakravarty 1973:29].

The Radhakrishnan Report saw the university as an attempt to realise the goals of the Indian constitution which was primarily justice. The university was a hermeneutic institution that read and reread and reinvented justice through the three axes of liberty, equality and fraternity (Diagram 1). The Indian university thus becomes an attempt to internalise and meditate upon the slogans of the French Revolution. The structure of the discourse can be seen as a triangle through which are read the range of oppositions mentioned above. It is in handling these oppositions that the report also goes beyond the standard notions of a liberal university.

In terms of liberty, the Report reiterates the standard liberal view. Individual freedom becomes the 'idle curiosity' of the scholar and liberty, the autonomy of the university to pursue knowledge without external interference. "We must resist in the interest of our own democracy the trend towards governmental domination of the educational process. Higher education is undoubtedly an obligation of the state but state aid should not be confused with State control" [Radhakrishnan 1950:48]. Standard liberal stuff. But it is in its handling of religion that the report goes beyond the conventional ideas of tolerance.

Tolerance as absolute neutrality is both necessary and inadequate. Mere tolerance becomes the lazy man's pluralism where indifference replaces dialogue. It is in this context that the Report observes that while the absolute neutrality of the State should be maintained the university need not maintain such a stance. It sees secularism as an enabling device but it is not "an irreligious or anti-religious policy; it does not belittle the importance of religion as such" [Radhakrishnan 1950:300]. It holds, as does the later Kothari Report that "it is necessary for a multi-religious state to promote a tolerant study of religions so that citizens can understand each other better and live amicably together". The
Radhakrishnan Report advocated that “it is in the detached atmosphere of an academic institution that we can study, analyse and eliminate the prejudices and misunderstanding which disfigure inter-religious relations” [Radhakrishnan 1950:303]. The Commission recommended:

1. that all educational institutions start with a few minutes of silent meditation. (Here the Commission is differentiating between religion and spirituality);
2. that in the first year of the degree course the lives of great religious leaders be taught;
3. the Report added that this should be followed by studies in the universalist character of all religious and discussions in the philosophy of religion [Radhakrishnan 1950:303].

Here liberalism as tolerance moves towards a dialogic notion of plurality. Radhakrishnan invokes as precedent the University of Nalanda “which was the meeting ground of different sects and creeds with their possible and impossible doctrines” [Radhakrishnan 1950:302]. It is the university as a life of dialogue that leads Radhakrishnan to insist “That to be secular is not to be religiously illiterate” [Radhakrishnan 1950:300]. It is the slow but repeated encounter with culture and with the issues of culture as politics that the university reworks its notion of democracy.

The Indian theory of the university was not the standard monadic variant. Its encounter with diversity begins with its attempt to confront differences within and beyond itself. Unlike the liberal theory of the university which talks of autonomy in the abstract and unconsciously posits a homogeneous or potentially homogeneous community, the Indian variant argued against isolation or even the notion of assimilation.

The university as a formalised ecology of knowledges sees a tension, a dualism between the sciences and the humanities and also a dialectic between itself and external other, the dissenting academy. Probably the finest exponent of the dissenting academy within the Indian tradition was our first professor of sociology, the Scottish polymath and university militant, Patrick Geddes (1854-1932).

III

Geddes was a known planner who saw the university as a microcosm of the city. In his innumerable town plans, especially in his vision of a new university at Indore, Geddes argued that no university was complete without its dissenting academies. He counterposes an ecological to a liberal view of the universities to argue that the career of the western university as an organism reflected a frequent and often violent dialogue with the competing notions of knowledge and pedagogy residing in its environment. Its success lay in its ability to provide a working synthesis.

“The Medieval University itself arose out of an attempt to reconcile the doctrines of the Christian church with the recovery of Aristotle.” Paralleling this tussle was the dialogue of the medical systems, where physicians of many faiths were comparing not only their drugs but also their doctrines. This medieval university became the Renaissance university by imbuing the “new learning from the fugitive Greeks, the new astronomy from the persecuted heretics and the results of the new art of printing from wandering scholars and craftsmen.” The Renaissance university grew into the contemporary German university system. Geddes claimed that like many German innovations, it was basically French. The Germans translated with great originality the culture of the French philosophes.”

The Grand Encyclopedia of Diderot and Voltaire was broken up, so to speak, into its constituent articles, e.g., algebra, anthropology, architecture and so on right down, and chairs were created for the exposition and elaboration of each.” The ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity were displaced from the political to the intellectual sphere and acclaimed as the new freedom of teaching and learning. “This modern revival of independent specialised research with its increasingly minute division of labour was the glory of the Berlin and German universities.” Its danger lay in the loss of intellectual unity and also a moral purpose, especially vis-a-vis the state. Geddes added that whereas the Germans innovated upon Napoleon’s ideas with great originality, the latter had a devastating impact on England. After the Napoleonic Wars, the ideas of the French Revolution functioned as a leaven on English liberalism, serving as a model for the new University of London. However what London borrowed from France was not the enlightened research of the philosophes, but the Napoleonic idea of the encyclopedia as a well-digested summary and the possibility of constructing an examination system around it. Thus what India inherited was basically a sub-Germanic university [Visvanathan 1998].

For Geddes, then, the Indian university was already a decultured entity. During the nationalist movement Geddes and the poet Tagore (1864-1941) discussed the possibilities of a post-Germanic university. Tagore believed that the modern university as a collective representation embodied the essential world-view of western civilisation. Thus a student from another land had no difficulty in obtaining a grasp of the western mind because it was captured synoptically in the university. Tagore felt that the East had no equivalent institution. He sought at Shantiniketan to build such a centre. Tagore was not content with a swadeshism that settled for a voyeuristic variant of the western university. He argued that before the dialogue between east and west could begin, there had to be an intellectual centre which embodied the spirit of knowledge in the east, reflecting each of its great civilisations. Only with the existence of such an institution could the interaction of east and west be one of equality, of dialogic reciprocity exploring difference.

Tagore argued that each university was an embodiment of an archetypal set. The western university as the microcosm of the civitas reflected the mind of the city. In India, however, civilisation was associated with the forest “taking on its distinctive character from its origin and environment”. Its intellect sought spiritual harmony with nature, while the mind of the city sought its subjugation, extending its boundary walls around its acquisitions. The sage in the forest hermitage was not interested in acquiring and dominating, but in realising and enlarging his consciousness by growing with and into his surroundings. Even when the primeval forest gave way to the farm and the city, “the heart of India looked back with adoration upon the great ideal of strenuous self-realisation and the simple dignity of the forest hermitage.” The west, on the contrary, took pride in subduing nature. As a result, the American wilderness, unlike the Indian forest, lacked a cosmic power. For the west, nature belonged to the category of the inanimate and western thought posited a disjunction between nature and human nature. But the Indian mind freely acknowledged its kinship with nature, positing an unbroken relationship with all. Thus, while a city science sought to subdue nature, in India “a whole people who were once meat-eaters gave up taking animal
food to cultivate the sentiment of universal sympathy for life, an event unique in history". For Tagore, the dialogue between the two universities would be between a city science and a forest science, between a mode of being that sought harmony with nature and a way of doing that sought possession of it.

Tagore did not deny the power of western science or the dynamism of the western university. He felt, however, that the dialogue of knowledges could only begin when differences were understood and recognised. Unfortunately, even Tagore's dreams of a new university were not fully realised at Shantiniketan. For all practical purposes despite its attempts to propound an aesthetic view of the university, Shantiniketan also remains a sub-Germanic university [Visvanathan 1987].

But I hope the importance and dialogicity of the dissenting academy is clear. One must add that there has been a failure of dissenting academies in the west and in India recently.

The first sign of failure to adapt was the French and American student revolts of the 1960s. David Caute remarks "In the vanguard of the rebellion were students scornful of representative democracy and distrustful of capitalist technocracy. They marched, demonstrated, occupied universities, courted police repression, during university presidents, deans, vice-chancellors, rectors and directors to distraction and not infrequently to premature retirement" [Caute 1988:ix]. But by the end of the 1970s the universities had returned to normalcy. The institutionalised response of modern liberalism to these revolts was not creative. What it produced was an expanded version of the multiversity and its sibling multi-culturalism.

The multiversity was the standard university department with its epidemic of epicycles. It reflected an over-response of the western university to the demands of society. The university became a collage of subjects. Allan Bloom observes that word itself was coined by an administrator who had to provide for a mob of disciplines [Bloom 1990:363]. The sheer increase in the number of subjects did not add to the structure of the whole. The American university became a supermarket of subjects. One wonders whether the addition of gender studies, peace studies, Afro-American studies, et al has added to the notion of the university. A mere multiplication of subjects adds little to the pluralisation of the university. The number by itself does not add to democracy or the ecotacy of the university. In fact to an outsider it appears to be an impoverishment of alternatives and their banalisation. If the multiversity, the gargantuan administrative monster of liberalism had a response to culture, it was the belated notion of multiculturalism.

Liberalism has no theory of cultural differences except in a negative sense. Liberalism is based on the axiometics of homogeneity. The liberal capitalist state sought a theory of citizenship which had no place or only a ghettoised place for the tribal, the Jew, the hobo, the gypsy. In terms of a theory of culture it offered only the options of ghettoisation, museumisation or assimilation. The unstated option was genocide.

But, when in the 1960s, the liberal felt that liberalism itself was threatened by homogeneity, multiculturalism was born. Multiculturalism is a bad subalternism, a hegemonic culture's idea of how to treat the marginal and the defeated. As John Gray remarks "the liberal enthusiasm for policies of positive discrimination (is) a belated recognition of the desolation which liberal policies of social engineering have wreaked on our societies." Gray describes it as "that fashionable form of paternalism which aims to embalm the dead and dying vestiges of submerged or occluded traditions and preserve their remains as public spectacles" [Gray 1961:261]. Yet there are tremendous possibilities in multiculturalism especially as it becomes a subaltern discourse. It can inject the dissenting academy into the heart of the university. However it can also become a part of the segmentalised margin if it does not continually challenge the western canon.

Coming to India, the years of independence failed to produce any dissenting academies in a real sense. The traditional educational institutions lacked the power, confidence and even the vitality to challenge the exploding juggernaut called the Indian university. The Gandhian notions of education failed to scratch even the epidermis of Nehruvian modernism. But by the 1970s two kinds of critique of the university existed outside it. Both forms were in strange complementarity to it.

The university in its British incarnation was seen by many a student as an alien thing. In a fundamental sense it was based on the Macaulayite axiom that a shelf of books in an Occidental library was worth more than all the culture of the Orient. The Indian response to such hegemony was not open resistance but subversion through mimicry. We understood Macaulay literally and reduced western civilisation to a shelf of books and proceeded to memorise it. Thus was born the tutorial college and the bowdlerised textbook-the 'guide'. The tutorial college was unerring in its understanding of the modern Indian university. It was an examination machine. What it did was to abbreviate, miniaturise, the official syllabus of western culture. It is Charles Lamb rather than William Shakespeare who is the real hero of the Indian university.

If the tutorial college propagated western culture and science through mimicry, the science movements whether the Bharatiya-Gyan-Vigyan Samiti (BGVS) or the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) became attempts to diffuse western knowledge, particularly science. These were not movements that critiqued science but took science to the villages. Their radicalism consisted in the act of diffusion. Established and innovated by university teachers, these experiments eventually helped legitimise the system of higher education by diffusing its contents. But neither the tutorial college or the science movement functioned as radical critiques of knowledge, its epistemology, its pedagogy or its use. In that sense the structure of higher education remained inviolate and intact.

The more interesting debate in India was the controversy, particularly between the arts and the sciences. The most forceful polemicist of the dangers of this divide was the anthropologist of religion and science, J P S Uberoi (1985). For Uberoi, the university is structured around the difference and the reciprocity between the arts and the sciences. There might be frequent asymmetry between them but there is always exchange and reciprocity. The university departments were a 'kula' ring of such reciprocities which bound them into a whole. For Uberoi, the current attempt to disrupt the ecological balance of the university goes back to Ram Mohan Roy, one of India's leading modernists, particularly to his advocacy of western science. Uberoi sees in one sweep a repetition between Roy's move to privilege the western sciences over the traditional forms of 'Vyakaran' and the current moves to emasculate the universities either by building scientific institutes outside or by creating science cities by fiat. Such a physical segregation of the sciences from the university is justified on grounds of...
economy and governance. There is a general view that science departments slave away like worker bees and arts departments play the drones. But to eliminate the possibility of exchange between the two disrupts the university as a knowledge system. One must add, to disrupt by fiat from outside also questions the universities system of self-rule. Uberoi emphasises the importance of reciprocal traffic for science. He remarks that people forget that "mathematics, the queen of sciences is not itself a science but it is always either a branch of the faculty of arts or it may rightly be on its own." Citing an example of negative reciprocity Uberoi observes "that every scientist may have to know mathematics but every mathematician need not and must not be a scientist." Unlike science of science that is knowledge of the growth of science "is of course a science, but creativity or innovation in science, like improvisation in technology, is an art; that literature, of course is an art, but the teaching of language as an instrumentality can be a science; and that in fact pedagogy in the school and the university is both science and art, i.e., a craft" [Uberoi 1985:1782].

I am emphasising the inner debates of the university in detail because issues of democracy and diversity often ignore the intellectual anatomy of the university. As a result we often tend to get an externalist as opposed to an internalist theory of plurality. It is the complementarity of the two that provides an adequate framework.

IV

We have so far concentrated on the question of liberty, difference and the university. We will now examine the axis of equality in relation to the university. The question of culture mediates the two as cultural politics is not only about access to education but the question of the language within which education takes place. The history of the language question in India, like language itself, has to be seen in a diversity of frames. In fact as Radhakrishnan remarks, it is in language that the problem of reconciling "the claims of diversity with those of unity" becomes perplexing. There is first the problem of number and the complexity of diversity. Take the simple question of percentages. As one leading educationist remarked, "In terms of sheer numbers every language is a major language. To speak in terms of percentages is to shut out the truth." English might be spoken by 1 percent of our people but in terms of numbers, the English-speaking population of India is equivalent of half the population of England. Second, one must differentiate between a "search for a common language for India and the question of a medium of instruction." There is also a question of political frames because many of the issues of language planning are resolved not as problems of pedagogy but as the unravelling of wider democratic issues. Questions of language thus become not mere questions of instruction or identity, but markers of interest group politics. "Language promotional activities tend to become facades for the promotion of group interests." In this context, one must quickly differentiate between the Nehruvian era of language management and the later era of regional politics embodied in the style of Mulayam Singh Yadav. Finally we must add that while language is a great source of angst and violence, it is no longer as threatening and as divisive as it promised to be. India has bypassed the Selig Harrison Syndrome which predicted its breakdown by the end of the first decade.

There is a final point that needs to be made. Sometimes politics whittles down the alternatives available in culture as a result in a battle to retain a pool of alternatives one hegemony merely replaces another. I must emphasise that the ordinary Indian is a polyglot or at least a bilingual creature. Prabodh Pandit in his Dev Raj Chanana Lectures captures this.

Consider the language routines of a Gujarati businessman, a spice merchant, 50 years ago, settled in Bombay, how many languages would he use in the course of the day and in what contexts? Our Gujarati businessman, who was more likely to have hailed from the Saurashtra coast, spoke his variety of Gujarati at home. He probably lived in Ghakopar, a suburb of North Bombay; when he went out in the morning to buy vegetables, since the vegetable vendors spoke colloquial Marathi (spoken in the coastal district of Colaba), he spoke colloquial Marathi with them; he caught the 9:35 suburban train to the city. To buy his ticket or transact any business with the officers of the railway, who were more likely to be Anglo-Indians rather than speakers of Gujarati or Marathi, he spoke in colloquial Hindustani. As a spice merchant his sphere of activity was in the spice market around Masjid Bunder; because the merchants in the spice trade were mainly speakers of Gujarati, Kacchi and Konkani, our merchant spent his business hours speaking and listening to these three languages. If he was educated in English, say up to matriculation, he might occasionally read an English newspaper; he might also see a Hindustani film with his family. The number of languages he used in a day's routine was about six; but note that he used them in limited and specific contexts only [Pandit 1977:4-5].

Pandit adds that one consequence of such contacts is a continuous convergence of diverse linguistic structures. His competence was restricted to maybe two languages but he extrudes its grammar on to the other languages so that his Marathi or his Kacchi has a Gujarati flavour. Pandit observes that "these languages are not acquired through any formal channel of education, they are not a load on any curriculum nor are they a burden on the speaker" [Pandit 1977:5]. Such competence in fact is the norm in India but official discourses tend to be less playful.

Both the Kothari and the Radhakrishnan reports partake in what might be called a Nehruvian perspective. They belonged to an elite world which equated modernity with English, and English was the language and value frame of modernity. They also celebrated English as language and it is the children educated in that era that dominate the English language novels that we are so proud of. And yet as pedagogues they realised they were creating a split level world, a cultural schizophrenia. The Report is sensitive to the fact that, it is educationally unsound to make a foreign tongue the means of acquiring knowledge. Their minds become split into two water-tight compartments, one for ordinary things and actions expressed in their mother tongue and another for school subjects and the world of ideas expressed in a foreign language. As a result they are unable to speak of their home affairs in the school language and about learned subjects in their mother tongue [Radhakrishnan 1950:317].

But the report also realises clearly "to choose the language of the Indian federation is not tantamount to the solution of the problem of higher education." Each solution opens its own Pandora's box of problems. One can understand the fears of the Nehru era as a twofold problem. The staggering cost of partition still lurked in every one's mind. Nehru was not easily going to allow language to be a source of divisiveness or secession. There was also an ambivalence about Hindi. Nehru's openness to Urdu contrasts with his sharpness towards Hindi enthusiasts [King 1997].
This view was echoed by the Radhakrishnan Report. It claimed that “Hindi does not enjoy in India such natural ascendency over other provincial languages as to incline the inhabitants to accept a secondary position for their own language.” It claimed that “Hindi is the language of the minority, although a large minority. Unfortunately it does not possess any advantages, literary or historical over other modern languages. Tamil, for instance, is hallowed with age or historical over other modern languages. That “Hindi is the language of the minority, position for their own language.” It claimed the inhabitants to accept a secondary

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b) the official language of the union; (3) a modern Indian of foreign language not covered by one and two.

Prabodh Pandit points out that the three-language formula was not a celebration of heteroglossia. It was more what he calls a ‘handicap’ model, i.e., if students in one region learn three languages, formally, then the students in other regions must formally learn three languages even if they are dysfunctional [Pandit 1977:36]. Pedagogically, one needs to differentiate between the role of different languages and the uses to which each of them are put. In fact Pandit talks of the crippling burden of language education, contending that a BA (Pass) student spends half his time in college in language studies and yet all he learns is a few embellishments [Pandit 1977:32]. It would have been better if the student had learnt the language as a subject course rather than as a language course. Interestingly the first Review of Education (1866) had a linguistically more competent solution.

In Punjab a pupil received instruction in the vernacular up to the middle standards and thereafter in English. The object to enable those who had stopped their education with the middle school standard to gain some knowledge in the various subjects. Those who continued their education in the high school and prepared for the university entrance examination had to go over the same portions in English. The Review reports: “In Punjab no objection has been raised to this practice; nor is it alleged that a student suffers from being compelled to learn history, science, or Euclid first in the vernacular and then by means of English textbooks for the Entrance Examination. Indeed, if he has been well grounded in these subjects through the vernacular, his subsequent study of them in English textbooks would partake, partly in the character of an easy revision of matter already known and partly of a new series of lessons in English.”

It is such imaginative pedagogy that the Nehruvian approach to education lacked. Eventually it was failure both in a pedagogic and a political sense. The new regional elites that arose in the 1970s and 1980s altered the terms of discourse. For them there was none of the niceties of pedagogy. They had not even read about the elite equation between English and modernity. They attacked the problem not through the university but through a wider politics. Archetypal of them was Mulayam Singh Yadav. Mulayam, as D L Sheth notes, was not a hesitant liberal [Sheth 1995]. He did not rest content with pious pronouncements about Hindi which secretly protected the role of English. He introduced Hindi across the board insisting on Hindi both as a language of education and as a language of administration. He eliminated English even in interstate communication by insisting translations be done directly from one regional language to another. With this set of radical moves, Mulayam removed the question of Hindi from being a problem of pedagogy [Sheth 1995:188]. It was no longer a question of how Hindi is taught or when it would get more official but a more Laswellian politics of who gets what and how in politics. It now becomes, as Sheth points out, a battle between the pan-Indian English educated elite and the new regional elites moving on the national scene. The latter, to state the obvious, lack the trappings of English education. If the Radhakrishnan and Kothari report reflects the discourse of the English language elite, the Mulayam era probably does not bother about the trappings of a report. Unlike the former it is not interested in the veneer of a scientific temper, but is easily open to the new practices of scientific agriculture. What it did break was the easy equation between English, modernity, progress and Hindi as obscurantist, revivisal. The large frames of adult franchise and democracy solved instrumentally what the universities had failed to do. It eliminates for one the invidiousness, the desperation of these groups making pathetic efforts to join English language classes or the derision they meet in charmed English elite circles [Sheth 1995:196]. While democracy has opened certain spaces in terms of entry, the nature of pedagogy still remains archaic. The mix between pedagogy and politics that plurality needs is still not there. One can recite this same story in a different way through the debates on the Mandal Report.

Mandal Report

The Mandal Report was published over a decade ago. Its three detailed volumes gathered dust on government shelves till it was retrieved and dusted by the V P Singh government keen to consolidate the constituency of the other backward castes (OBCs) for his National Front government. The decision to enforce Mandal unleashed an orgy of violence in the universities which demands a response. No report has united the elite as much as this one. Yet, no report has unwittingly exposed it as much as this one. It has questioned our radical and academic pretensions, our models of social change, our involvement in social justice. It has shown us what we are, nervous, pretentious, deeply intolerant, mouthing radicalisms as long as they are gloriously abstract and romantic.

For years a whole generation of sociologists talked of caste as a fundamental reality. We talked of the vitality of the caste system and how it adapted to industry and the city. We boasted about the modernity of tradition. The literature of this generation provide the framework of many reports and many of those luminaries apparently served as consultants to commissions on reservation. One remembers some of them declaiming along with an informant, “When I go to office I put on my shirt, when I come home I put on my caste.” Instead of condemning it as a parochial structure, they spent hours portraying it as a Protean system quite at home in office and the city. They celebrated the grammar of purity and pollution, heralding the sheer geometry
behind it. It was the basic stuff of the IAS course and candidates forgot it at their peril.

In all these perspectives, radicalism and the idea of social justice was of an abstract kind. And it is this abstractness we must understand. It is an abstractness based on models of social change like the plan and the revolution. Both operated not in terms of the humanely concrete and the particular, but the general, the historical and the universal. What is also lost in the current controversy is any real defence of the autonomy and quality of the university. The fact is that our pedagogues have not asked once about the quality of education. What the university OBCs and scheduled castes wanted to ‘break and enter’ into was the club, including the gymkhanas called Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. What worried the radicals, the yuppies on their way to the banks, the services, UN or World Bank was this threatened invasion. So our radicals talked about the dangers of populism. What drawing-room radicalism feared most was populism, or even democracy by which they meant the entry of the more rustic or mofussil brethren into the university. These new groups saw the university not as a seat of culture but as a ticket to a government job. These new entrants, we feel, reduce the cosmopolitan character of the university turning Delhi University into a mofussil ‘akhada’. The backward as a servant, ‘subziwala’, ‘dhobi’ or cobbler is all right, but god forbid if his children were to rub shoulders with you. Teaching agricultural economics is relevant but heaven forbid if you have to teach it to the lesser Devi Lals of the world. Populism is the fear that our hearts instead of being larger than lifeboat India. The biologist Garret Hardin used the picture of the lifeboat to convey a basic idea in sociobiology. Picture an ocean where a lifeboat full of people is floating. Swimming around them are the poor. The question is, should one go to the aid of the poor and backward or let them drown? Hardin argues that the poor are irredeemable and going to their aid may sink the boat. Only our elite does not use the language of sociobiology. We talk the language of merit as justice assuming that life is a race without handicaps. We feel that radicalism is only an extension of our privileges. Yet the bare fact remains that our hearts instead of being larger than the Constitution are smaller than it.

**Post-Mandal Pedagogy**

The post-Mandal years, rather than being a period of breath-beating at the wailing wall of excellence, can still be a creative phase. One should not deny the call to social justice. But social justice is not a quick ticket handed out by a machine. There is a possibility here for different kinds of creativity, especially for radical innovations in pedagogy. But first the Mandal Commission should be seen within the overall context of the regime. If one thing characterises the present regime, it is an attack on higher education. Having burnt its ‘Janata’ fingers, it is not openly attacking science but social sciences and humanities are being subject to benign neglect. Here the university should take a critical and creative role.

The university must recover some notion of the craft community, the guild from which it grew. Thus even if it admits students on the basis of a ‘backwardness’ index, there is no reason why they should leave as half-competent people. I think we must accept the responsibility and anticipate the human consequences of such a reform. The causal link often made in elite conversations between increasing recruitment of backward castes and rail accidents or even a fall in production is neither necessary nor inevitable. We must be strong enough to contend that once a student enters the university, he must accept the disciplinary evaluation of the university. Done with compassion, allowing for flexibility and time, the university can insist on higher levels of competence on grounds of ethics, autonomy and justice, not merely from the arrogance of formal competence. No competence means no certification. The university should have the courage to say this to the government. To prevent the travesty of the university, pass percentages should be raised to at least 50 per cent. If the government insists on recruiting students with less than 50 per cent, let it be forced to justify it.

To respond creatively to Mandal, the university must insist on a series of innovative reforms. It must revive the old proposal of delinking jobs from university degrees. This should not sound like a clinical decoupling of two trains but an experiment in the true sense of the term. Proposed as early as the great debates around the Indian Industrial Commission of 1916, there is no reason why basic jobs in banks, the lower cadres of the various governmental services need degrees. Anyone with a school certificate should be able to study for it.

The paradigmatic subject of the Indian university is not law, economics, physics, biology or medicine. It is commerce, that everyman’s MBA to the modern world. Here is the real subject of the Indian university, that produces PhDs like confetti. Commerce is not a subject in the classical sense of the term. It is a melange of recipes drawn from other disciplines. There are a series of such vocational subjects in the university – home science, social work, business administration. Viewed critically, these are fabricated disciplines welded by political will rather than inner logic. Is it possible to first tell the government that these ‘disciplines’ may need a different form of ordering?

Once the university recovers its core of law, physical and natural sciences, medicine, social sciences and humanities, the next series of reforms could be introduced. The ‘pass course’ as a category should be abandoned. A diluted concoction of education just won’t do. It can’t be a niche for rich tribals, boys dreaming of plantation jobs, sports people and politicians’ sons serving time for three years. It is a waste and a colossal subsidy on the part of the state that needs to be questioned. With this, the policy that subjects taught as subsidiaries need only a 40 per cent pass grade should be abandoned. We should stop devaluing education at every level of pedagogy. In fact, the pass course could be worked out as a good liberal arts course, parallel to but as challenging as the honours course. At least this way those who opt for this acquire a sensibility that might affect their later choices as consumers. The target is quality. Period.

In addition, the university needs a graded series of experiments, without unnecessarily hierarchising them. I mean the model of honours course for brahmans, ‘pass’ for football playing kshatriyas, polytechnics for vaishyas, and correspondence courses for the outcastes should be abandoned. Instead we need a pluralised model of the educational system. To the land grant agricultural universities and the revitalised polytechnics, we add a model of service through the community college. Here we have a college for workers, housewives, which operates in a less alien environment. The idea of dumping students in a standardised fashion down the university chute Mandal-style is crude.
Community participation in these boards, not just of political goons, will help. This model is different from the model of extension lectures or the pretence about socially useful and productive work (SUPW). Here we embed the college in a community and take the excitement of education to the community.

The debate between the axis of liberty and equality has already vitiated the sense of fraternity within the university. That much Mandal has cost us. But there is a second kind of fraternity which needs to be emphasised and this is the fraternity between forms of knowledge. This becomes particularly important in this age of professional expertise when the craftsmen, the tribal, the working woman are not seen as part of the citizenship of knowledge. One must not assume that the history of knowledge begins with one’s entry into the university. It was the political scientist and dalit activist Kancha Illaiah who captured this poignantly:

When I talk about our illiterate parents I am not even for a moment suggesting they are unskilled people... For example, my mother was an expert wool thread maker, she was an expert seedier; she was an expert planter. My father was an expert sheep breeder. Each caste group acquired lot of skills in its own sphere... Many of our farmers have scientific skills. They know when it will rain. They can tell us what natural signals would bring forth certain climatic changes. They know where a bridge should be built...’ [quoted from Manusi 1991:25].

It is this sense of local knowledge that the university tends to ignore. I think this problem also receives an ironic twist with the new hysteria around patenting life forms. The Hindu recently reported that scientists were busy patenting bits of knowledge which have been a part of the local knowledges, tribal knowledges, into ghettoes or by treating them as occult or oriental superstition. Traditional forms of knowledge had helped in the survival of our people. One thinks in particular of the variety of medical systems in India. But the debate on medical systems reveals the hierarchisations of knowledge endemic to the structure of the university.

The finest case study of this was the debate around the fate of medical systems in India in the 1920s embodied in the Usman Committee Report. It was the minute of dissent by the secretary Captain Srinivasmurthi that made it a memorable document.

Srinivasmurthi was trained in allopathy, but was also a great authority on Sanskrit. His was a biculturalism not only of languages but of medical systems. Srinivasmurthi wanted a dialogue of medical systems similar to the dialogue of religions. His was an invitation to grapple with systems and systemic differences, without stripping indigenous system to the procurstean bed of western medicine. The Srinivasmurthi report emphasises the most important criteria of the fraternity of knowledge, cognitive justice, the right of different forms of knowledge to survive and survive creatively. Srinivasmurthi’s appeal to create a plurality of medical systems for India did not work. It survived only as a hierarchical system. The official medicine in India is western medicine. It is the medicine of the university system. Traditional medicine is taught separately and is seen as a lesser form of expertise. Folk medicine belongs to the desperate and the superstitious. An experiment in cognitive justice can turn this hierarchy into circle. But it is not only a search for equality but a method of dialogue. Only with a methodology for exploring difference, and providing for a reciprocity and an empathy is fraternity at the cognitive level born. It is not just respect for the knowledge system. It is understanding for the other as a life form, a livelihood and a way of life. It is fraternity at the epistemological and ontological level that the university needs. A theory of the university must be theoretical. Fraternity cannot be reduced to community hostel programmes or summer visits. Without this mix of theory, the communities of knowledge one is searching for might be stillborn. It is in this search for cognitive justice as a fraternal act that the future of the university lies. Local knowledges, tribal knowledges, gendered knowledges, civilisational knowledges, dying knowledges all need a site, a theatre of encounter which is not patronising, not preservationist, not fundamentalist but open and playful. For me it is this that is the lifeblood of the future university. In the next section we discuss how the university encounters the other beyond national borders.

VI

A theory of the university must encompass not merely dissent and diversity but the question of violence relating to the other beyond the border. If the nation state constructs the other as an object of hate, extermination or violence, education must be the dialogue with the other. The Indian subcontinent is a neighbourhood of others—not just the immediate otherness of Pakistan, but the otherness of Bhutan, Nepal, Burma, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Some of them also constitute a part of the civilisational identity called India and yet short of Pakistan, these are countries that exist by absence. There is nothing in the Indian educational system that provides an understanding of these countries. The great experiments in Nepalese democracy, the Burmese struggles against militarism or even the Sri Lanka attempt towards ethnic normalcy is ignored. India is a country born out of genocide and yet studies in partition are non-existent in syllabi. I would like to argue that the university must embody a notion of ‘Perpetual Peace’ in the Kantian and Gandhian sense. Let me explain. The separation between politics and knowledge, or truth and power marks even the way one looks at the greatest philosopher of the Enlightenment-Kant. The Critique of Pure Reason is rarely juxtaposed to Kant’s writing on politics. Yet in a deep and fundamental way an Indian approach would argue that Kant’s politics was an extension of his notion of enlightenment. That is politics is not merely relation between states but a relation between universities. Agencies of civil society must construct their own dialogues of peace.

Kant was explicit about the first aspects of such an exercise. Even if the legislature is the ultimate font of wisdom, it must ask the advice of its subjects, especially the philosopher. Kant saw the philosopher as an archetypal individual, above the noise of factions and cabals. And secondly he regarded the state as a vehicle of Machiavellian enterprise. The prince is only interested in the perpetuation of his own interests and those of the state. Given his obsession with the state, the Machiavellian is a parochial creature. One needs a universalism beyond it and I believe institutionally this is provided by the city state called the university. It is the univer-
Like Kant, Gandhi argues that "to carry on a cold-war or a diplomatic war often bordering on the verge of actual war, and initiating talks on disarmament of the other side is contradictory" [Desai 1981:54]. Gandhi's notion of patriotism is crucial... "For me patriotism is the same as humanity. I am patriotic because I am human and humane. It is not exclusive" [Desai 1981:54]. Patriotism thus was not a parochiality or a demonisation of the other. Gandhi's plan for a non-violent defense is crucial. He saw non-violence as an invention and in fact claimed that the inventor of non-violence was a great genius as Newton. And it is in inventing further possibilities for non-violence that the university becomes central. Peace cannot be solved by a department of peace studies anymore than security is guaranteed by defence institutes. In fact, they may have a vested interest in perpetuating the problem. It is the university as a form of knowledge that must seek new possibilities of peace. It must guarantee a free flow of scholars and students between these countries will eventually anticipate a free flow of citizens. If knowledge is a gift, it must travel in flows of reciprocity across these countries. The Indian university must be responsible for the freedom of the intellectual in neighbouring countries and in fact provide seats, fellowships to dissenting individuals. What the New School of Research in New York did for emigre intellectuals must be generalised more innovatively in India. Such institutions may not immediately produce a Claude Levi Strauss or harbour a Max Horkheimer but they may help create micro climates of understanding which can help breach the wider environment of mistrust. The International Youth Hostels can be significant as a social movement if they are not ghettoised. It is a pity the Indian UGC or its Pakistani equivalent is so much an adjunct of its nation state. At a personal level I would go much further.

Gandhi was once asked by an American journalist: "How do you meet the atom bomb?" "With non-violence", his reply came a few hours before he died. It is a deep theory of the other breaking through the expert idiocy of escalation and mutual deterrence. He said "I will not go underground. I will not go into a shelter. I will come into the open and let the pilot see I have no trace of evil against him. The pilot will not see our faces from his great height, I know. But that longing in our hearts - that he will not come to harm - would reach up to him and his eyes would be opened. If those thousands who were done to death in Hiroshima, if they had died with that prayerful action - died openly with prayer in their hearts - their sacrifice would not have gone in vain and the war would not have ended so disgracefully as it has" [Desai 1981:57].

This one statement captures something the universities of India should attempt to be. Not just syllabi but forms of life which need to be sustained. It goes against the objectivisation of the other so dangerous both to theories of knowledge and to any construction of diversity. In this sense the university can provide the heuristics, the methodological discipline that satyagraha as a knowledge system requires. If the university is to combine the ethical and the political, a theory of the other as a thought experiment and as a form of life becomes central to it.

VII

The question we have raised about cognitive justice and nuclearism triggers fundamental doubts about the monoculturalism of the nation state paradigm and of modernity itself. The modern nation state is a hegemonic regime that homogenises the other. The three anchoring points of this regime, the quest for security, the commitment to modern western science and the pursuit of development, all tend to create a flatland of monoculturalism.

Modern western science has been contemptuous of traditional and folk knowledges allowing them an existence mainly in the reservation and the museum. The museum, rather than signifying diversity, represents the dyingness of the other in modern cultures. Ananda Coomaraswamy stated it brilliantly when he said "We preserve folksongs at the very moment our way of life destroys the folksingers" [Coomaraswamy 1947:8]. The idea of development has become genocidal today. One recollects Leo Kuper's anecdote about complaints made by human rights activists about the genocide of tribes in the Brazilian north-east. The Brazilian delegate in his reply admitted matter of factly that the tribes had been eliminated but added it was an inadvertent consequence of the pursuit of development. Development projects in India have created more refugees than wars in the last five decades. Large dams in India in particular have displaced around 20 million refugees. Many
of these victims are in fact subject to serial displacement. The question of development is particularly relevant to the university because development theories are first articulated and refined in the academy. What looks like antiseptic syllabi taught as 'objective scholarship becomes a series of death warrants. Let us not forget that even Pol Pot's genocide in Cambodia was merely an attempt to apply a "developmental model, a mirror inversion of the western notions of development." We finally come to the idea of the national security state and its final apogee in nuclearism. The recent protests against the bomb in India showed that any dissent was seen as anti-scientific and anti-national. Giri Deshingkar observes that between the last Indo-Pak war and the futile encounters in Sri Lanka all the awards for gallantry to the army has been for action against our own people. To this we can add the fact that India possesses over a million paramilitary troops for maintaining internal order. This triangular nexus between national security, development and science has created a nation-state with genocidal dimensions. The first is erasure or genocide. The American Indian in the reservation is a classic example. He is an object of study for cultural anthropologists but not an agent of change, an actor with his own voice and theories. Apartheid represents a different form of segregation which is marked by participation in the system but under perpetual bondage and domestic disruption. In assimilation the victim imbibes the values of victor and erases and abandons his own values. He imitates the master. The school becomes fundamental to these acts of socialisation. Import substitution, a policy term is a more ambiguous category. It begins as an act of liberation where a colonial country overthrows the coloniser and then internalises his modes of production and his forms of knowledge. This is rule by technology transfer and the university becomes the new plantation. The system is the same but now the overseas are home grown. ‘Millenialism’ and ‘fundamentalism’ are reactions to modernity, which are captive to modernity in the very act of estrangement. Millenialism seeks western goods from planes to refrigerators as acts of religious magic but under native leadership. Fundamentalism defies modernity but by imitating its violence. There is nothing Islamic about Khomeini’s bomb and nothing about civil society in his idea to return today and were asked “What do you think of Indian civilisation”, he might be tempted to reply, “That would also be a good idea”. It will be the task of any future university to ensure that it becomes more than a mere idea.

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