

**Global Challenges, National Responses, and the Question of English and Liberal  
Education in Gujarat**

**Synopsis**

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## Contents

1. Introduction .....	2
2. The Significance of the Study .....	4
3. Aims and Objectives.....	6
4. Research Methods.....	7
5. Work Plan.....	9
Chapter 1 .....	9
Chapter 2.....	11
Chapter 3.....	13
Chapter 4.....	14
Chapter 5.....	16
Bibliography .....	17

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## 1. Introduction

Education, its aims, and its effects have been a subject of philosophical treatises, political arguments, sociological debates, and policy discussions since the beginning of civilization. The debate about education for socialization or education for social change is an ongoing debate from Plato, to Rousseau, to Dewey, to Max Weber, to Paulo Fairer to Pierre Bourdieu. Every age Classical, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Modern, Post-Colonial, and Post-Modern have brought new contexts to bear upon the old debate. In the more recent times this debate has acquired wider dimensions with the rise of a ‘network society’ (Castell. 2010). Globalisation has come to be as much a material reality as ideological.

Globalisation has been impacting and reshaping the Indian society for a while now. Developments in the field of science and technology have altered the way we live our lives, and the resultant changes have integrated different economies, nation-states, and people in unprecedented ways, making them increasingly interdependent. A set of material practices across the globe including the gradual withdrawal of the State from the provision of public services, and expansion of the marketplace add to the complexity of what we understand as globalisation. Higher education (understood in terms of tertiary education), is an important site in such an age of globalisation as the State aspires to become a leader in the knowledge economy. It is precisely from this peculiar location that the issues discussed in my research emerge.

The discourse on higher education in India after 2000 is largely defined by the framework of liberalization, privatization and the knowledge economy, within which it is commonly articulated. It focuses on the colossal failure of the vis-a-vis the promise of the market in terms

of its efficiency as a deliverer of the common good. A gradual withdrawal of State funding of higher education, a renewed political resolve to create globally competitive institutions of higher learning, and the unprecedented role of private providers in the higher education sector are three important factors that have transformed higher education in India. Universities in India have gained additional prominence in the last two decades with a growing conviction that, if India is to be a leader, the society of the future must be built on our technical strength and knowledge resources. Universities in India have not remained the elitist institutions of the British Era, but have become centers of mass learning. These changing political, ideological, and social contexts form the background against which the institutions of higher education and my own research are situated.

An unequivocal acceptance of the neo-liberal way of thinking has created different ways of envisioning, financing, and delivering higher education in India, the implications of these on Liberal education have remained largely unexamined. While the term Liberal education may have multiple meanings and usages I use the term in this thesis to mean a philosophy of education that aims to achieve the full human potential of an individual by way of liberal inquiry. I do, therefore, consider the discipline of humanities as neatly aligned to the goals of Liberal education and often use the two terms synonymously. The study focuses on the changing structure and nature of humanities departments to examine the changing character of the university as well as the idea of citizenship in the present context. The ramifications of the changing policies of higher education with a particular reference to universities in Gujarat can give us a better insight and understanding of the larger phenomenon of globalisation.

The deepening crisis around humanities with an ever increasing emphasis on application oriented knowledge is another context within which my research is situated. While liberal discourse, permitting free exchange of ideas, has been an integral part of ancient Indian traditions, it is also true that a university education in India in its modern form is inextricably linked to the colonial context. This thesis will attempt to trace the trajectory of university education in humanities with specific reference to Gujarat, examining its origins, its attenuated growth, its decline, and its reemergence today. A renewed debate about the use of liberal education within management studies adds a new dimension that my study will examine; my position in the English department gives me a useful entry point into the debate. Many English departments have metamorphosed from Literature departments to Culture Studies departments to Language and Communication departments in an effort to engage the globalised market place. These issues are examined against a background crisscrossed by politics, economics, and culture in the context of Gujarat.

In other words, the research is interested in the debates around globalisation to the extent that the changing contexts of liberal education in Gujarat are a product of a globalizing India. It examines the major shifts in our ideas of the role, purpose, and form of higher education, by way of examining the trajectory of English and Liberal education in Gujarat.

## **2. The Significance of the Study**

The emerging global order, in tandem with the local and the national order, has generated new political, cultural, and social contexts within which Liberal education needs to be understood. The new contexts help us understand the changes in the educational policies and structures involved in the production and delivery of education. While changes in the nature of higher

education in this country are readily visible, the connections between higher education, globalisation, social, political realities, and citizenship are not so obvious. My thesis will, broadly speaking, understand and establish the connections between what we understand by globalisation, the repercussions of its advancement in the field of higher education in Gujarat, and, the ensuing implications for Liberal education in this country. The study is an effort to understand the globalisation/education nexus, the mechanisms through which it produces and reproduces itself—its rhetoric, discourses, and practices. In the words of Foucault's it is the study of the discourse of higher education in India; "What individuals, what groups, or classes have access to a particular kind of discourse [of higher education]? How is the relationship institutionalized between the discourse, speakers, and its destined audience? How is the relationship of discourse to its author[s] identified and defined? How is struggle for the control of discourses conducted between classes, ..., linguistic, cultural, and economic collectivities?" (Foucault.1978. 7) While there are many detailed studies published on globalisation as well as on higher education in India, the significance of my work remains in locating higher education as the site of manifestations of globalisation, as well as a medium through which it advances. This thesis aims at making a contribution to the somewhat neglected area of Liberal education in humanities and globalisation in India and hopes that its focus throws light on the changing value of such an education and its implications for the idea of citizenship. In other words, it makes room for the complexities and issues surrounding India's sense of emerging as a "global power" in the global "knowledge economy." It also asks questions about the role and status of humanities education within this new emerging economy.

Whether the humanities and social sciences have fallen by the wayside in the process and what the repercussions may be of such policies for India in the light of the recent changes are

important issues that are raised by the research. The state and future of the humanities and social sciences in India are especially relevant in the light of the growing trend towards skill-based, entrepreneurial, professional education. The changing role and status of departments of humanities, and departments of English therein, within a University system in India, in the larger context of current global, national and regional challenges have not been adequately explored. This study is an attempt in this direction, contextualized in the larger debates about the crisis in humanities across the world, with specific reference to Gujarat.

### **3. Aims and Objectives**

The Universities in India, largely characterized by a combination of crisis and status quo (Altbach 1969), have suddenly been caught in the whirl wind of reforms. While a lot of studies exist on the changes in patterns of access, equity, governance, and financing in higher education; there is a gap that exist in understanding the changing idea of knowledge, citizenship and universities in contemporary India. The study aims to contextualize globalisation and study its ramifications for humanities' education in Indian Universities as well as the ensuing implications. The study has four main objectives of this study”:

1. To examine the changing discourse of higher education in India by mapping the transformation of higher education policy, changing character of stakeholders in the field of higher education, and the mission of universities. The shifting agenda of the State as it moves from colonial, to Nehruvian, to the neo-liberal is examined by a detailed analysis of education reports.
2. To understand the role and the nature of the ‘Private’ in higher education with special reference to Gujarat, historically and at present.

3. To study the value of Humanities in the emerging environment of skill based higher education as reflected in the policy documents, institutional documents, as well as practices of universities.
4. To study the state of the English departments in Universities across Gujarat with special reference to liberal studies programme in private universities, and an emphasis on Liberal education in management schools.
5. To understand the implications of India's new commitment to entrepreneurship, innovation, and skills in higher education and the marginalization of humanities within the universities and in the society.

All the objectives of the study are achieved by engaging in an instrumental case study of the state private university in the city (established in 2009) that is a part of Ahmedabad Education Society (GES established in 1935), a pre-independence trust that has been a major presence in the field of education in the state of Gujarat. The study relies on examples that are close to the researcher's context at the state private university to identify and understand the transformation taking place at the university as well as outside the university.

#### **4. Research Methods**

This dissertation utilized a secondary literature and personal interview methods to address research questions.

The study began with my acute interest in the changing landscape of higher education in Gujarat that I saw change dramatically when I returned to Gujarat in 2013 after a prolonged period of absence. The self-finance institute where I was teaching before I left Ahmedabad had by then converted into a state private university. The presence of state private



institutions in Ahmedabad had increased significantly. There were a number universities that were being established by the state as well that were very different in their structure and nature compared to the older public universities. I was interested in the question of the relationship between globalisation and education. I wanted to see how each affected the other. As I began my survey of the field I began to understand the vastness of the topic and decided to narrow my focus by studying only one set of stakeholders (in this case institutions/ departments). The study involved analysis of secondary sources on the subject, as well as first hand study of the reports commissioned by either the center of Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD). I analyzed the State policy documents, reports on higher education post 1990s commissioned by various ministries (Birla Ambani report, Narayan Murty report, The National Knowledge Commission and Yashpal committee report) as well as international organizations' reports (like UNESCO, World Bank) as well as policy initiatives that were specific to the state of Gujarat. The study used the case of a private university in Ahmedabad as an instrumental case study to discuss the state of humanities in private universities and therefore it also studied documents of the university and the trust that the university has been a part of. I also conducted several interviews of people in administrative capacities to understand the changing institutional responses, philosophy, vision, and future plans of the institutions.

A theoretical framework drawn from globalisation and neoliberalism guides this study. Economic, political and cultural aspects of globalisation theory are integrated to provide in order to provide an understanding of how certain challenges operate in the field of higher education. Human capital theory suggests that the global economy and an increasing demand for international expertise or understanding of the knowledge economy often

motivates institutions to realign the universities with their external context, which may often involve marginalization of the humanities.

## **5. Work Plan**

The thesis has four main chapters. A detailed outline of each is provided here:

### **Chapter 1**

The first chapter of the study takes a comprehensive view of the existing debates in the field of globalisation, and higher education in India. It is important to examine the complex and multiple connotations of this most contested phenomenon of globalisation that has transformed the space of higher education in every nation state. The chapter examines the theories of globalisation often classified into three categories of contributors—the globalists, the skeptics and the transformationalists or post-skeptics (Held et al 1999; Holton 2005). The earliest responses to globalisation were marked by kind of euphoria about the changing economy, politics, and culture that transcended all territorial boundaries and the disappearance of all nationalist economies and cultures in the wake of interdependent economies, multinational corporations, and capital mobility made possible by the new revolution in communication technologies (O'hare 1990; Reich 1991; Albrow 1996; Gray 1996). The second wave of theorization saw globalisation as neither very new nor very global in nature when examined in the light of empirical evidences (Hirst and Thomson 1996; Krugman 1996). They believed that the nation states retained their historical hold on the popular imagination as well as in some places had a bigger role with new forms of nationalism resurfacing and replacing the old ones. They also believed that the spread and impact of globalisation has not been even across the world and the new organization of the world has been felt and received differently in different parts of the world (Smith 1990, Kennedy and Danks 2001; Appadurai 1996, 2001. Osterjae; and Petersson 2005; Robins 1997). The third set of thinkers, often known as post-skeptic are

those who can see both sides of the coin. They realize the validity of the argument made by skeptics about the evidence of a differential spread of globalisation on one hand but they also cannot deny the spread of the phenomenon as the world advances towards greater interdependence on the other (Held et al 1999, Giddens 1990 and Rosenau 1997). It is from the theory of this group that I build my understanding of the relationship between higher education and globalisation. The understanding of knowledge as a creator of value and a new source of wealth in the national economies are rapidly reshaping the educational policies of many countries, including India.

The second section of this chapter maps the academic thinking around issues of globalisation and higher education. The emergence of a knowledge economy has put greater pressures on the systems of higher education within nation-states, and the national education systems are falling short in the face of a growing demand in India (Agarwal. 2009). This has given rise to more providers of education, newer forms of information and communication technology in education, and more competition between the traditional institutions of higher education, private companies/institutions, foreign institutions, and more research on higher education. A large amount of work on globalisation and higher education in India surveyed in this chapter deal with transformation of education into a tradable service (Kale and Sahani 2004; Nayyar 2006, 2007), the growth of the private sector in education and its repercussions (Gupta 2005), financial restructuring of universities (Tilak. 1995, 1997.), issues of governance (Mehta and Kapur. 2017) and equality of opportunities for quality higher education (Deshpande, Zacharias. 2013; Ghosh. 2006). The chapter concludes by identifying a gap in the current literature on higher education regarding the question of humanities departments. The rapid decline of humanities within the Universities as well as a sharp drop in its social value with a concurrent

rise in private universities are issues that need examination with which the following two chapters engage

## **Chapter 2**

The second chapter identifies privatization of higher education as a major reason for the kind of marginalization that humanities departments face in policy, practice, and research. A shift towards greater privatization and decentralization, and a corresponding withdrawal of the State from financing education started with the structural adjustment programmes of the 90s have resulted in an unprecedented growth of private institutions of higher learning in India. Privatization, being pursued in all sectors of the economy, is viewed as an effective measure for improving efficiency and easing financial crisis. This emphasis on efficiency, relevance, quality and expansion as it happens through the market has become more pronounced in the policy documents of the government after the year 2000. Marginalization of departments of liberal education, including language and literature departments, has only worked to aggravate the situation of alienation among people, and disappearance of both the critical and the humane element of education, transforming education into a vocational pursuit.

Many social, political and economic factors lead to the culmination of a moment in 2009 when an old education trust, with its roots in a pre-independence era, 1935 to be precise, decides, after a history of running highly successful grant-in aid, affiliated institutes of education for 44 years, to start a private state University in the heart of a rapidly globalizing city, Ahmedabad. This chapter is interested in both this moment of culmination and in the local and global contexts that facilitated this change. Even though the Indian system of higher education has been largely funded by public financing, fiscal constraints faced by the

state and the Centre led the universities to look for alternative sources of funding. Education policies after the 1990s brought in the private sector to deliver higher education, resulting in the expansion of the system to meet the burgeoning demand. This chapter examines the neo-liberal turn in higher education policies in India. The involvement of the private sector in the field of higher education leads in more ways than one to many questions about changes in quality, assessment, competition, marketization, governance, autonomy, and values at the university level. It changes the way we traditionally understand the nature of the university, education, learning, and the relationship of these with the world of work and society. In other words, the privatization of higher education is an issue that calls for an understanding and examination of in terms of both its origin and the implications. The word privatization is often used imprecisely and is widely misunderstood in education-related literature. Varghese differentiates between ‘private in higher education’ and ‘privatization’, in very much the way Ball distinguishes between ‘endogenous’ and ‘exogenous’ privatization (Varghese. 2013, Ball. 2007). ‘Private in education’ or what Ball calls the ‘exogenous’ aspects of privatization involve the entry of the non-state sector and private companies into the field of financing, knowledge-making or service provision; while ‘privatization’ or the ‘endogenous’ aspect of privatization refers to the application of market principles in the operation and organization of educational institutions, including public institutions. While my use of the of term ‘privatization’ throughout the study is largely consistent with the way Varghese or Ball define it, it also carries an awareness of the transformation of the space of higher education made possible by the presence of many private, non-state players in multiple positions of power. In an age where higher education is a site for reconstructing the social field of power in ways heretofore unknown to us, this chapter examines the various turns in the educational policy narrative of India. This makes it possible to imagine newer ways of delivering,

financing, and envisioning higher education. Gujarat Education Society, the entity under study has metamorphosed significantly in the last twenty years and this chapter will map the specificities of this metamorphosis. While I am interested in the intended outcomes and unintended implications of these changes in the chapters that follow this one, I will limit myself here to a few of the easily observable dimensions of this change. The chapter is divided into two subsections: I) Policy direction after the 1990s, II) The growth story of the Gujarat Education Society (GES) through two moments that encapsulate its transformation.

### Chapter 3

In a global order, where knowledge economies compete for supremacy, questions about the goal and the nature of education are some of the most important ones. Many studies in recent years have addressed the problem of the desirable education for a global citizen from (what is loosely defined as) “Liberal Studies” perspective. In her seminal study titled *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Martha Nussbaum raises the same issue as she laments the ‘silent crisis’ of the humanities, “what we might call the humanistic aspects of science and social science—the imaginative, creative aspect, and the aspect of rigorous critical thought—are also losing ground as nations prefer to pursue short-term profit by the cultivation of the useful and highly applied skills suited to profit-making” (Nussbaum.2010. 21). In a world where education is primarily viewed in economic terms, the humanities and social sciences have to justify their relevance to the growth of the national GDP; where education is understood as a process of skill-development, departments within universities have to remodel their curricula in a way that often undermines some of the defining aspects of a particular discipline. The contemporary period has ushered in a crisis within the departments of humanities. In a consumerist, competitive economy, where education is valued for its capacity to build a skilled workforce for the nation, humanities departments have been relegated to the margins. They

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function more like services that offer tools of language learning rather than developing a literary imagination.

Do humanities perform more of a social function within a university than some of the more professionally oriented disciplines in terms of cultivating sensibilities of a nation's future generation? And if that is the case do we really need to reorient discourses of higher education and citizenship? These are some of the important questions that the research on the declining value of humanities (primarily in the US and UK) have addressed. Unlike the US and the UK, there has been a growing number of humanities enrollment in Indian Universities; the policy, however, is largely indifferent to these disciplines' crisis of existence and value. This study focuses on the recent policy trends and practices within higher education institutions in the 21st century Gujarat.

Gujarat represents a mercantile imagination in the popular perception; for an ordinary outsider, therefore, Liberal education seems to be conspicuous by its absence all through the history of Gujarat. There has been very little work done in the area of a history of Liberal education and the changing role of English in Gujarat. This chapter attempts to address this lacuna. It also examines the return of humanities/ electives in Liberal Arts into management in various universities across Gujarat. What does this resurrection of humanities in management school indicate? How is humanities positioned within the school of management? Does it transform the character or the spirit of humanities? These are some of the questions that the chapter also raises.

## **Chapter 4**

While the crisis of existence and value discussed in the previous chapter is representative of all departments that fall under the larger umbrella of Liberal Arts/Sciences across the globe, the case of Gujarat is of interest to me not only because of my own location within that state but also because of its complex relationship to the English language after independence. This particular chapter studies the crisis and transformation of English departments from the beginning till the present. English Studies in India has been widely analyzed, in post-colonial India as an increasing number of Indian writers began to write literary works extensively in the English language. The publication of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature* by Ashcroft and others in 1989 heralded this post-colonial era. Published at the same time Gauri Visvanathan's *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India* was instrumental in exposing the economic exploitation and material nature of the colonizing mission in India, and the vital role played by English Literature in sustaining the structures of the Empire. The Englishness of the English departments thus began to be called into question, resulting in several critical and self-reflexive works. Harish Trivedi's *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India*, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India* and Svati Joshi's *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History*, among others, made possible the imagining of alternatives to the British canon. Harish Trivedi, for example, deconstructed the nature of colonial enterprise, offering a nuanced understanding of colonialism as cultural transaction taking place within a Foucauldian framework of knowledge/power. "In this perspective, to continue to teach English literature in independent India," he says, "is by definition a post-colonial practice, even though many of us have not yet begun to reflect or care whether it is also at the same time an act of decolonization....In order to move the universe, one needs not only a long enough pole of political will but also a foothold outside the particular universe one may wish to move. Not



everything can always be subverted from within” (Trivedi.1995.7). This moment in the middle of 90s was also a moment of a ‘cultural turn’ in literary studies, leading to a much discussed crisis within English studies. Departments of English tried to make sense of their existence in the light of new critical theories coming from the west, and the emergence of Indian literature in English as well as in translation. Some English departments, in the process, transformed themselves into Cultural Studies departments. However, it was the department of English at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda that was the pioneer in introducing in its MA programme a core course in English Studies in India titled “Politics, Ideology, and the Teaching of English in India”.

A movement from the study of the classical British canon to post-colonial literatures in English and more nuanced cultural studies has shaped almost all English departments in India. Former colonial texts have gradually got replaced by Indian texts and texts from other cultures (all in translation), in departments once devoted exclusively to canonical writers like Shakespeare and Arnold. The linguistic supremacy of English has given English departments new directions and opportunities, but a new crisis of existence has yet again come to plague the departments of English in age where humanities are losing their market value. The way in which English departments survive today is by repositioning themselves as a useful discipline either teaching much needed language skills or offering transferable soft skills to future leaders and business managers. The future of the English department as a discipline within humanities with a distinctive critical edge is being quickly forgotten if not seen as an impediment to a society largely governed by global indices, and GDP growth

## Chapter 5

The final chapter of the study tries to articulate the implications of the challenges discussed in the earlier chapters on the idea of a university as it emerges in Gujarat today as well as on the idea of a student/citizen that the university is engaged in preparing.

The chapter also includes suggestions and recommendations for further research.

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