

## Cultural Studies and the Reinvention of English Pedagogy in India

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**Abstract:** The last two decades have witnessed a crisis in English departments in India. Globalization and the liberalization of the Indian economy spawned a new nationalism that was openly political and overtly critical of the ideological investments embedded in canonical English texts. A perceived need to reinvent English studies to suit the exigencies of the Indian postcolonial milieu encouraged a shift toward cultural studies methodology. This paradigm shift is most evident in the construction of M.A. and Ph.D. syllabi at various Indian universities. Such syllabi have increasingly focused on issues of gender, class, and caste oppression, dismantled the cultural hegemony of British literature, and opened up the canon to include Indian and other non-British texts. This essay analyses English postgraduate course syllabi and studies the critical postcolonial pedagogies adopted by universities in India. These pedagogies foreground cultural studies as an interdisciplinary site for research into new areas of contemporary life, complicating the political assumptions of English studies but nevertheless remaining in dialogue with the parent discipline.

**Keywords:** cultural studies in India, English pedagogy in India, postcolonial pedagogies, Shakespeare in India, comparative literature

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This paper argues that the institutional practices and ideologies of English studies in India introduced by British colonial administration, which has continued its legacies in post-Independence India, have undergone significant revisions in the last three decades. Many

recent pedagogical decisions, including syllabi revisions and curricular reforms, point to a destabilization of the imperial, hegemonic agendas that had earlier informed the institutionalization of English literature programs in India. The socio-economic, cultural, and political imperatives of British rule made a particular kind of English literary teaching inevitable as part of the mandate for civilizing “the native”; however, this literary instruction also rendered the Enlightenment ideals attributed to colonial modernity highly questionable and constitutive of hegemonic interests. The nearly seamless continuation of colonial English education into nationalist and later postcolonial contexts, with its pedagogical mimicry rooted in an implicit trust in the emancipatory potential of colonial modernity, however, encountered challenges in the 1980s and 1990s in India with the rise of subaltern studies, women’s studies, and Dalit studies. This essay looks at the contemporary revisions of English literary education in India, specifically the paradigm shift in which instructors and students begin to question their replication of colonial ideologies in English classrooms. I characterize this shift as a turn toward cultural studies in the curriculum that aspires to at least partly dismantle the interpellation of the student as the civilized native. The new curriculum encourages students to read the canon critically and subversively and thus radically critiques the very idea of a universal or apolitical canon. The rise of scholarship focusing on identity politics, casteism, sexism, racism, and homophobia, along with a growing awareness that the political and the cultural cannot be delinked from epistemological formations, has rendered academic practices in India more complex and political.

### **I. Colonial Transactions**

Several scholars have argued that English became a discipline in an age of colonialism with the sole imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, which consolidated Western cultural hegemony in complex ways.<sup>1</sup> In his infamous 1835 “Minute on Education” written for Lord William Bentinck, Governor General of British India, Thomas Babington Macaulay states:

I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalist themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education. (par. 10)

Macaulay's arguments regarding the unquestionable supremacy of English literature over Indian writing laid the cornerstone of both imperial education and administration. This is only one of a long series of propagandist texts that were the basis on which British colonizers formulated educational policy in India. Macaulay's words, while testifying to the imperialist agendas of British educators, also bear witness to the feeling of inferiority that the "learned natives" or "orientalists" had for their own languages and literatures. Further, Macaulay demonstrates his conviction that the category of "learned natives" should include natives familiar with the poetry of John Milton, the metaphysics of John Locke, and the physics of Isaac Newton while excluding those who "might have studied in the sacred books of the Hindoos, all the uses of cusa-grass, and all the mysteries of absorption into the Deity" (Macaulay par. 2). He concludes:

I think it clear that we are not fettered by the Act of Parliament of 1813, that we are not fettered by any pledge expressed or implied, that we are free to employ our funds as we choose, that we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing, that English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic, that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanscrit or Arabic, that neither as the languages of law nor as the languages of religion have the Sanscrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our encouragement, that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom

we govern,—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (par. 33)

It was largely on the grounds laid by Macaulay and endorsed by the Europeanized Indian nationalists, British utilitarians, Christian missionaries, and evangelical leaders that Bentinck devised his 1835 English-language educational policy. It became the fundamental educational policy of the British Raj and required that Indian students study the English language and all courses at the college level be given in English (Cutts 824). Macaulay's vision of using English language and literature in higher education in India to promote loyalty to the British dominion had a more significant impact than he conceived of at the time of his writing. Remarking on the full extent of imperialism's involvement with India's literary culture, Gauri Viswanathan points out the irony that it appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country (2–3). Even in the 1820s, when the classical curriculum continued to be firmly entrenched in England despite many attempts to dismantle its sway, English began to be taught to native Indian learners as part of the British Indian curriculum. Tim Allender also observes that English literature was a central subject of examination in many Indian universities such as the University of Calcutta, where it had been taught ever since the university's foundation in 1857 (227), which is much earlier than the introduction of English programs at Oxford and Cambridge. With regard to the instruction of English literature in schools, Allender notes that "India partly anticipated the metropolis because the subject was not formally incorporated into the curriculum of English schools until 1871" (227). The absolute acceptance and inclusion of the works of William Shakespeare in Indian secondary school and college curricula is a case in point. It is important to take note of the almost uncritical manner in which Shakespeare came

to be taught as the single most legitimate icon of liberal humanist ideals that the English canon embodied and, in the process, masked the colonial agendas of this pedagogical ploy.

## **II. Post-Independence**

English studies was part and parcel of the structures of what Ranajit Guha calls the “dominance without hegemony” that informed both the colonial and nationalist agendas (vii). This meant that English studies, which established the hegemony of English language and culture, both manufactured native consent and enhanced the processes of civilizing and institutionalizing that were necessary to the governance of the British Raj and the Indian national government. Post-Independence, the study of English bifurcated into two streams: the study of language and the study of literature written in English, including that of non-British authors. In post-Independence India, English was adopted as the associate official language and attempts were made to give more importance to Hindi and the mother tongue spoken in respective regions. However English continued to enjoy a prime role in education, administrative, judicial, and social arenas. The teaching of English literature, in what can in retrospect be considered a crucial leg of the postcolonial turn in the study of English in India, incorporated the study of non-British and contact literatures or “literatures in English written by the users of English as a second language to delineate the contexts which generally do not form part of what may be labelled the traditions of English literature” (Kachru 161). Susie Tharu explains that the new discipline of comparative literature, which also dissociates the study of literature from the learning of language, provided a theoretical justification for this bifurcation of English instruction (16). The study of the English language was important because English was the official language as far as administrative and judicial institutions were concerned. It was also the most privileged language in the social arena. English language teaching was therefore largely legitimised through the structures of privilege it enjoyed in Indian society both during the colonial and post-Independence eras. In terms of literary studies, Indian nationalists effectively used the methodological tools of comparative literature to create the category

of “Indian literature” and employed comparative studies to forge connections and patterns of similarity amongst India’s different vernacular literatures. Thus a distinctly different school of comparative literature emerged with the political agenda of unifying the divergent streams of Indian literatures scattered in numerous Indian languages and premised on comparative critical perspectives that were largely postcolonial. It differed from French, German, or American schools of comparative literature that adopted more binary modes of enquiry, placing their own linguistic and literary superiority at the heart of the comparative enterprise on one hand and laying emphasis on the origins, influence, and reception of literary texts vis-à-vis their own on the other. Since India is a land of many languages and literatures, Indian pedagogy used the tools of comparative literature to formulate a model of unity in diversity and in the process evinced the evolution of a unique field of study comprised of scholars acutely conscious of their postcolonial locations and the attendant demands.

The bifurcation of English instruction into the study of the English language, with its emphasis on imitation and reconciliation, and comparative literature with its ideology of ironing out the hegemony of English literature and incorporation of non-hegemonic perspectives, arguably made it possible to effectively nullify the politics of literary protest that the second move alone would have embodied. Politically, the shift sought to signify the priorities and alliances of the new nation state of India that retained English as an interlingual and international language of communication, while the comparativist approach would help place English literature in a non-hegemonic position as one among the many literatures written in English and provide Indian literature a more privileged position from which to access other literatures (Tharu 17–18). This shift sought to apply the postcolonial notion of hybridity by incorporating both the hegemony of the English language and more eclectic vernacular perspectives into the thematic, methodological, and aesthetic concerns of English studies in India. However, while curricular reforms across the country encompassed this bifurcation, pedagogical practices nevertheless continued to take a non-political stance on the colonial history and hegemonic tendencies of English. Although some

attempts at non-hegemony were made in the curriculum, teachers were trained under colonial paradigms and these attempts were not translated into learning environments. Shakespeare, the Romantics, and the Victorians continued to be taught along with comparative literature and Indian literature in English in English literature classrooms in schools and colleges across India with fervent claims attached to the former's status as "classics," their timeless universality, and their continuing relevance, thus foiling the purpose of the formation of the Indian English component.

### **III. Liberalization and After**

This essay mainly focuses its attention on the 1980s and 1990s English pedagogical environment in India while attempting to forge connections and reveal disjunctures with the earlier periods, in the context of economic liberalization of the 1990s, which involved tenuous discursive productions of new political and cultural images of India. These discursive processes were the crystallization of the postcolonial pedagogical impulses that were latent during the post-Independence phase but became increasingly manifest through the creation of a new kind of "Indian academic environment" that capitulated to the logic of the international education market and the global publishing industry but nevertheless sought to dismantle the colonial pedagogical biases of the post-Independence phase in openly political ways. This new turn in English pedagogy, which applies to both English language and literary studies, paradoxically sustained colonial English education's humanist and universalist foundations yet sought to locate them in the midst of a plurality that articulates a politics of difference. English language studies, for example, began to account for the influences of vernacular speech on the speech patterns of Indian speakers of English. English language instruction also adopted a cultural component that emphasized learning the English language through non-canonical and marginal texts in English or English translation rather than canonical English texts. In literary studies, the new turn led to an emphasis on the academic's moral and intellectual leadership and his or her commitment to speaking for marginal communities, minority rights, and issues

pertaining to caste, class, and gender. The rise of this new academic environment can be read in tandem with Partha Chatterjee's arguments regarding the rise of the Indian middle class and its conceptual and political boundaries, which rested on a question of mediation that was caught mid-way between colonial subordination and cultural leadership over the indigenized people (36). However, this new pedagogy is distinguishable from the more compromised pedagogical conservatism of the post-Independence phase by its sharper insistence on radical curricular and pedagogical shifts that are nevertheless being reshaped in the contexts of global neoliberalism and the dialectic between global academic transformation and localized cultures and knowledges that demonstrate the manifestation of neoliberal agendas in particular locations.

The liberalization policies of the 1990s in India (a free market economy, globalization, and the entry of private universities into the field of education) could have in some measure initiated a set of academic discourses, curricular debates, and reforms aimed at re-defining and re-asserting the form and character of Indian academies. While the credit and semester system was introduced in India in the 1970s, it had largely remained confined to the Indian Institutes of Technology and certain elite institutions. The Government of India's 1986 National Policy on Education recommended the introduction of the semester system from the secondary stage of school in a phased manner and the use of grades instead of marks. It also categorically stated that instructors should emphasize the study of English and other international languages. The policy specifically states that India must not only keep up with the tremendous pace at which world knowledges are growing but should also make its own significant contribution with a focus on the study of a global language like English. The Ministry of Human Resource Development's 1992 Programme of Action on Education states that the policy enables academic reforms such as flexibility in the combination of courses, a modular structure, provision for the accumulation of credits, and the redesigning of courses, which would lead to considerable decentralization in the evaluation process. The Department of Education proposed that detailed schemes be developed to facilitate transition to new evaluation procedures concurrent with the changes in the content

and structure of programs. Many universities adopted choice-based credit and semester systems and credit transfer mechanisms during the 1990s in order to make their academic programs more flexible and internationally oriented. That the Program of Action of 1992 charts out a national education policy that encouraged curricular reforms consistent with globalization and free market ideologies is evident in the changes to curriculum that emphasized flexibility, compatibility, and employability in the global market. However, at the levels of implementation and oversight the emphasis was on decentralization and involvement of the people, thus strengthening the argument that the new pedagogy sought to blend the global with the local.

While many studies have examined the socio-cultural and economic effects of liberalization in India, the rise of its urban middle class, and its new culture of commodity consumption, not many academic or public discourses have engaged with the question of liberalization's effects on Indian academia. Much of the loosening of the earlier rigid curricular structures that became possible in the 1990s in Indian universities may be partly indebted to the zest with which at least some universities welcomed market models of academies, which in a sense also inadvertently eroded the traditional "sanctity" attached to knowledge in the Indian spiritual and philosophic traditions. Dalit studies, feminism and women's studies, film and media studies, translation studies, and popular culture and cultural studies began to appear. This move to a market model that could facilitate the creation and packaging of new disciplinary practices dense with cultural content for a global market, coupled with a new tendency to view education as a commodity, created the need to re-imagine and re-present national/local/ethnic ethos in a modular manner that would help link pedagogy to the socio-cultural context. The shift also generated an imperative to create a saleable "Indianness" that would be welcome in an international academic market that embraces ethnic commodities. One of the key components of the English studies curriculum in the post-Independence, pre-liberalization period was Indian writing in English. Many critics express anxiety over its validity as an organic category and argue that it is "largely a fiction of the Western press, a metropolitan media creation

it corresponds to the metropolitan myth of a fetishized body of ‘Indian writers’, the de-contextualization of whose work merely serves to enhance its commercial appeal” (Huggan 59–60). Aijaz Ahmad argues that the teaching of English literature as a discipline be submitted “to the more crucial and comparatist discipline of Historical and Cultural Studies” (283). He asserts the need for “connecting the knowledge of that literature with literatures of our own” so that Indians “can begin to break the colonial grid” and liberate the teacher of English from “a colonially determined, subordinated and parasitic existence”; in the process, he suggests, “we might learn a thing or two about ‘Indian Literature’ as well” (283). Either consciously or unconsciously, the pedagogical and ideological turn toward cultural studies in Indian English departments demonstrates this. The earlier, rather uncritical and soft approaches to pedagogical practices in fields of study such as Indian writing in English have come under scrutiny, with a specific emphasis on pedagogy as a form of cultural politics. Competing in global education markets has created an awareness of the need to generate discourses that situate educational institutions and practices as ideological and material embodiments of socio-cultural contexts and sites that necessarily reflect the lived experiences of postcolonial realities. A list of Ph.D. theses submitted between 1973–2012 to the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad—one of the premier institutions offering English language and literature courses—spotlights the sharp turn in focus from canonical English texts to cultural studies:

1. “A Translation of O. Chandumenon’s *Indulekha* (1889) with a Critical Introduction” (1999)
2. “Amar Chitra Katha: History, Masculinity and the Consolidation of the Indian Middle Class 1969–1991” (2000)
3. “In the Interstices of India: Islam and the Processes of Nation-Formation” (2002)
4. “Reading Laughter: The Popular Malayalam ‘Comedy-Films’ of the Late 80s and Early 90s” (2002)
5. “Psychoanalytic Perspective in Indian Cultural Studies: A Study of Ashis Nandy and Sudhir Kakkar” (2004)

6. "The Concept of the 'Popular': A Marxist Study of the Debates on Culture and Politics in India" (2008)
7. "Caste and the Conversion Question: A Dalit Perspective on Colonial Andhra" (2009)  
(Poduval Appendix IV)

One can see a paradigm shift in the areas of research that the English literature curriculum in India has of late opened itself up to: "a global but unevenly developed space of culture-based consumption whose contours are traced in part by the Western market on 'ethnic goods'" plays a role in destabilising the earlier canon of Indian literature in English (Huggan 61). Thus as the field of cultural studies emerges in the Indian academy it is fraught with many ambiguities and complexities; it both reflects the creation of pedagogies that critique the hegemonic project of English in India and displays an uneasy nexus with neo-imperial agendas that point toward the commodification of otherness. For example, most of the current syllabi on Indian writing in English in Indian universities have a component on autobiography that includes subaltern autobiographies. Underlying the genre of autobiography is the concept of authenticity, which has become part of a representational mechanism of commodification that the intellectually dominant use to manufacture, manipulate, and "sell" images of the other. Often, however, "the sociological dimensions of postcolonial studies: the material conditions of production and consumption of postcolonial writings, and the influence of publishing houses and academic institutions on the selection, distribution and evaluation of these works" are not points of consideration or critique in the prescription of syllabi (Huggan vii). Lately many subaltern and Dalit autobiographies have found their way into English literature curricula in different universities across the country despite their radical otherness in relation to the academy, probably strengthening John Beverley's contention that both literatures and universities create and sustain subalternities (432). I have elsewhere argued that the increasingly global scope and ambition of postcolonial theory today is making "difference" an eminently saleable commodity both in the publishing and the academic world, and this could be the reason a marginalized genre of writing like

the autobiography has of late acquired a discursive value and helped the genre emerge “as the most legitimate form of literary intervention within postcolonial studies” (Pillai 8). In this context, Beverley elucidates Gayatri Spivak’s concerns with representations of the subaltern in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”:

[B]ehind the good faith of the liberal academic or the committed ethnographer or solidarity activist in allowing or enabling the subaltern to speak lies the trace of the colonial construction of the other—an other who is conveniently available to speak to us (with whom we can speak or feel comfortable speaking with). This neutralizes the force of the reality of difference and antagonism our relatively privileged position in the global system might give rise to. (Beverley 431)

Current academic reforms and pedagogical practices in English in India further complicate the neo-colonial agendas mentioned earlier by revealing the agendas of hegemonic intellectuals hammering on at the task of democratizing of the curriculum illustrated, for example, by the project of representing the subaltern, Dalits, women, and other marginalised groups on syllabi. However, many of the courses that demonstrate this postcolonial bias also aim to dismantle the earlier colonial foundations of the discipline, which transforms English pedagogy into a densely complex and contradictory terrain on which neo-colonial and anti-colonial agendas might co-exist. Nonetheless, while syllabi attempt to redress marginalization on the grounds of caste, class, or gender—in however tokenized a manner—strategies of exclusion based on sexual orientations, ethnic affiliations, and sanctioned expulsions continue to hold sway in curricular reforms as well as pedagogical practices. For example, while feminisms and gender studies might form part of the curriculum, it would be difficult to find many universities that include queer studies or projects on sexual minorities. The syllabi thus evoke particular kinds of Indianness problematically associated with salvage ethnography and the implicit condescension of representing/canonizing the minority “other.” Postcolonial transformations of pedagogical practices in English curricula in India continue to perpetuate a different kind

of violence in the selection and teaching of particular texts. The pedagogy of English studies in India that foregrounds political intervention often appropriates Western anthropological metaphors, which might be seen as having both the recuperative and deconstructive dimensions that Graham Huggan writes of while referring to African literature as “recuperative insofar as it conscripts the literary text into the service of a continually refashioned cultural identity: deconstructive insofar as it plays on and challenges Western readerly expectation, and in doing so works towards dismantling self privileging Western modes of vision and thought” (40). Indian national identity formulated in the post-Independence phase was often subjected to postcolonial critiques in which the hegemonic nation-building project of the earlier phase was questioned from numerous perspectives including those of caste, class, and gender. Though during the post-Independence phase English studies in India began using non-canonical and vernacular texts for recuperative purposes, throughout the late 1980s and 1990s deconstructing canonical English texts—and in the process destabilising Western privileged ways of reading—became more common. This contrapuntal reading of literary and cultural texts formed the base of the shift toward cultural studies in India. Isolating this rather protracted yet originary moment marks the time in which English studies in India began to decolonize itself and exhibit a commitment to the study of cultural practices and the networks of power within which the discipline is embedded.

The last two and a half decades in India have witnessed crucial changes in English literature pedagogy, including the formation of syllabi on the principles of de-canonization and classroom practices which de-link English studies in India from its initial imperial objectives and root it in postcolonial literary and cultural practices. As an indication of these changes, critical postcolonial literary studies programs, which have long been in place along with traditional English programs, are now adopting an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach. Instructors are also teaching British and Anglo-American texts in the framework of critical pedagogies that challenge the cultural authority, philosophies, ideologies, and aesthetics of the texts. Interesting and productive discussions of canonical imperial texts explore the shifting contexts in which these

texts are read. For example, in my class on comparative literature for M.A. students at the University of Kerala, we read *Othello* in the context of its numerous filmic adaptations into regional languages in India including my own vernacular of Malayalam. One of the principal texts I teach is the Malayalam movie *Kaliyattam*, in which the Moor of Venice is a Theyyam (a ritual art) artist from North Malabar, and the dynamics of caste supplant those of race, with differently constructed patriarchies underlying both the canonical text and its subaltern adaptation. The film tells Shakespeare's classical imperial tale of love, jealousy, and treachery with its own radical subaltern aesthetic and polymorphic poetics. The canonical reading of *Othello* is thus subverted to incorporate other marginal identities and cultures. The notion of a singular Shakespearean canon is also destabilised through the possibilities of alternative cultural representations that a de-canonized Shakespeare yields. Tharu observes that this shift in discussions of critical orthodoxies, curricular frameworks, and classroom practices offers the English studies programs in India far more choices than have previously existed:

We could choose, for example, to reflect on the selections of authors and texts for study, and ask how the debate on the canon might inform our grasp of the problem; we could investigate the critique of the universalist and foundationalist ambitions of English literature that is being extended by feminists, by some Marxists, and by post-colonial critics generally; we could ask how the curriculum might be transformed, if the thesis of the dalit woman reader/student were to replace that of the White middle-class male as the ideal in our criticism and the norm in our pedagogy. (2–3)

These questions, according to Tharu, must also consider a problem that has troubled teachers and students of English studies in India for over a century—that of alienation. If alienation was formerly at the root of studying the English canon, because doing so involved the study of texts whose cultural contexts were far removed from Indian socio-cultural experiences, the new curricular changes have sought to dispel that alienation by opening the canon to hitherto unexamined cultural and identity

politics and critiquing its liberal humanist and universalist foundations from specific socio-economic, religious, and cultural perspectives. Thus, if Shakespeare's *Othello* alienated and intimidated my students, teaching the subaltern filmic adaptation, situated in their own social context, helps me empower them in entering into play with the canonicity of original and transcend the politics of universalism by grounding it in the ethnic and the local.

In many university English departments, including the one in which I teach at the University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, professors have attempted to de-privilege British literature in the M.A. syllabus by including a large corpus of works in English from the United States, Australia, Canada, African countries, and the Caribbean. However, even a cursory glance at the syllabus offers vital clues in deconstructing this trend. The syllabus might aim to subvert British canons but the actual components of the course are predominantly British. For example, in the 2010 curriculum revision of Fiction I in the English literature program at the Institute of English, University of Kerala, the syllabus lists twelve novels, only one of which is an English translation of an Indian novel; four are American and seven are British. Including English translations from Indian languages in the English studies curriculum is a phenomenon that has gained wider currency during the liberalization phase. Thus while metropolitan writing still constitutes the major portion of English syllabi in Indian universities, there are conscious attempts, however feeble, to include regional/non-metropolitan writings in English translation or otherwise. The optional course offerings often include European fiction, European drama, Commonwealth literature, translation studies, Indian writing in English, and more recently, Indian writing in English translation and literary theory (mostly Western literary and critical theories with a faint sprinkling of Bharatha or Anandavardhana pertaining to Indian aesthetics). Ironically, even when Indian aesthetics is actually included in a syllabus, few teachers are equipped to teach it. An Indian teacher trained in the post-liberalization English studies program of most Indian universities might be quite comfortable teaching Western literary and critical theories but be completely ill prepared to teach Indian aesthetics or Indian critical

traditions. This carries forward Ahmad's contention regarding the class-based divisions of intellectual positions among the new intelligentsia in India who were trained in an education system which was such that "the thin upper crust of the highly Anglicized urban elite which went to the more exclusive convents and the select public schools were hardly ever encouraged to specialize in *any* Indian language, classical or modern" (271; emphasis in original). Higher education in India continues to reel under enduring colonial subordination, both in terms of the curriculum and the training received by the teachers and curriculum makers, yet paradoxically displays new attempts at partial or compromised resistance to colonial structures from middle class intelligentsia and other stakeholders.

Reactions to the removal of a Shakespeare course from the University of Kerala's English program exemplify a strong resistance to change. The Board of Studies decided to do away with Shakespeare in 1995 when the credit and semester system was introduced. Instead of studying Shakespeare, students attended courses such as Aesthetics of Poetry, Twentieth Century British Poetry, Twentieth Century American Poetry, and Commonwealth Poetry in the first semester. The second semester offered Trends in Drama (with a complete omission of Shakespeare), Twentieth Century British Drama, and Twentieth Century American Drama. However, the next syllabus revision in 2005 reintroduced Shakespeare after many discussions and debates over the inevitability and indispensability of teaching the Bard to English literature students. This illustrates C. D. Narasimhaiah's thesis that "the England of trade, commerce, imperialism and the penal code has not endured but the imperishable empire of Shakespeare will always be with us" (v). English literature syllabi in the country, with the staple component of Shakespeare, established their imperishable empire in the 1860s, and Kerala's attempt and failure to dismantle the hegemony point to the difficulty of overcoming the colonial foundations of English pedagogy in India even in the post-Independence phase of English studies. The example of the Shakespeare course also proves that, despite the awareness that English studies is integral to the colonial hegemonic project, postcolonial academic praxis in India continues to be imbricated in a postcolonial

double bind. As Harish Trivedi points out, “to continue to teach English literature in Independent India 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” (7). In its most recent M.A. syllabus revision in 2013 (I was part of the Board of Studies which designed this new syllabus), the University of Kerala created an entire course on Shakespeare with as many as nine of his plays included for study. The syllabus also includes a significant component that covers postcolonial critiques of Shakespeare, however ironic the absence of Indian responses might be (see Appendix 1). That this syllabus appeared in 2013 along with the introduction of a compulsory core course in cultural studies is also noteworthy. However, the cultural studies course is oriented toward Euro-American cultural studies and is heavily grounded in the Frankfurt and Birmingham schools. This course in cultural studies, with its conscious attempt at visibility and institutionalization, is different from “the desire for Cultural studies” (Tejaswini Niranjana qtd. in Radhakrishnan 3) that has developed without any conscious design, mostly through pedagogical shifts in the discipline of English studies and its domains of research (see Appendix 2).

Shakespeare, along with all other canonical English authors, has been entirely omitted in courses at the M.Phil. level (a program students enroll in after their master’s degrees) at the University of Kerala, which by and large have focused for over a decade now on new literatures in English, literary and cultural theories, and more recently, cultural studies and popular culture. This suggests that the university perceives canonical British texts as fundamental to English studies but as expendable once the foundations are in place. Trivedi, analyzing the continued sway of colonial orthodoxy in the study of the discipline of English studies in India, writes in 1993 that

[a] Curriculum Development Centre sponsored by the University Grants Commission of India recently analysed as a sample the syllabi for MA in English of twenty-five universities from all over India, and Shakespeare was found to be far and away the most heavily canonized of all English authors,

a largely unquestioned and abiding traditional preference underlined by the comparatively small weightage given to a small and avowedly post-colonial course such as the one on Indian Writing in English. (21)

However, Trivedi hastens to add that at least two of the universities were willing to award M.A. degrees to students who had not completed a course in Shakespeare and a full two-thirds of the universities taught Indian writing in English. This points to a “significant little erasure and a not so small new inscription” which would have been impossible in any Indian university in the pre-Independence era (Trivedi 22). It would have been equally impossible during the post-Independence era when the curriculum continued to be rigid in actual practice.

It is these new erasures and inscriptions in English studies pedagogy in India that this paper is more concerned with. The new kinds of crises and tensions within the discipline of English studies and the need to engage with the contexts of its teaching give rise to interdisciplinary concerns that would radically change its field of study. Many critics note that this crisis is at the heart of the paradigm shift toward cultural studies:

In the 1980s and the 1990s, an important discussion that demanded a radical revision of the discipline of English in India was the discussion around its colonial origins and its relevance in the present. A number of scholars, attempting to critically engage with problems arising out of the colonial origins of the discipline and to find a resolution for the relevance question, are supposed to have, through the discovery of other post-colonial locations, reached the domain of inquiry that is today termed Cultural Studies. Here the pivot of the story is the engagement of the discipline of English studies with the world of the social sciences, by bringing together in its search for relevance its disciplinary ‘crisis’ with the critique of the nation emerging in the latter. (Radhakrishnan 5)

Another shift that prompted interdisciplinarity was the satellite television boom in the 1980s that revolutionized visual culture in India and

sparked debates regarding the politicality and elitist pretensions of the refusal of scholars to take popular culture seriously and engage with it critically in an academic context. The entrenched modes of teaching the English literary canon in India were implicitly built upon the premise of a distinct and elite domain of the aesthetic within academia that in many ways conflicted with the lived realities of the people of the nation. Thus liberalization witnessed non-elitist modes of discourses built around popular culture and identity politics that made significant alterations to and radically questioned the aesthetic realms that literature was believed to inhabit during the colonial and post-Independence phases. The understanding that the aesthetic is always-already political further complicated the field of English studies.

The 1990s marked another shift in English studies in India that further complicated the field by questioning the idea of a literary “text” and seeking to include all signifying practices that constitute “culture” and meaning into the gamut of a text. Studying popular culture became imperative for both cognitive and political reasons. The shift also illustrated the necessity of cultural studies which, unlike traditional literary study, could engage with every form of signifying practice as a valid object of study while simultaneously acting on democratic principles that seek to address all sections of society and not just the educated elite (Easthope 6).

The 1980s and 1990s also mark the time when multiple locations and marginal identities challenged the traditional humanism associated with English literary studies. Critical theory, with its concomitant critique of singular narratives (such as the narrative of the nation), became widely popular within academia and a new crop of teachers and scholars started to engage with pedagogical practices that de-privileged Eurocentrism and de-centred national and hegemonic canons by including marginal and silenced voices into their curricula. The forces of globalization and liberalization within academia began to be critiqued by the very discourses they had engendered. The impulses to commodify and package local literary cultures and scholarship for the global market become more dialogic in nature. Scholars in most universities began to raise serious questions about how curricula could be re-conceptualized in ways

that would critique colonial and neo-colonial structures of dominance and power and engage with oppositional public spheres. The shift away from the study of literature to the combined study of literary and social issues necessitated the study of oppressions and marginalizations other than those perpetuated by imperialism and colonialism, including relationships between castes, genders, and classes in the Indian social context. The neocolonial influx of Western critical and social theories took a postcolonial turn when it became possible to use locally situated texts to create new and politically radical ways of teaching that destabilized the English canon in more trenchant a manner than occurred during the post-Independence phase.

Postcolonial critics like Homi K. Bhabha played an important role in conceiving of curricula as a third space, where hybridity would replace earlier notions of essentialism, thus opening up curricula to negotiations between variant socio-political interests and various subject positions. Liberalization had unwittingly ushered into the Indian academia the freedom to make the curriculum unique and saleable as a cultural and academic commodity, which augmented both the degree to and manner in which critiquing and subverting the canon of English literature had been possible during the post-Independence phase.

It is in this moment of transformation from a purely literary to a cultural studies orientation that any theorization of postcolonial curriculum becomes truly possible in Indian academia and pedagogy in English. Thus this essay has sought to argue that curriculum and pedagogy are practices that link the production and dissemination of knowledges to identity politics and power. This understanding also makes possible more serious engagements with the cultural and social background in which English literature was previously taught and in the process attempt to erase the amnesia so rampant in earlier generations. Current M.Phil. and Ph.D. dissertations from across India demonstrate the tendency to apply critical theories to local contexts and texts. To illustrate this point, listed below are a few topics of Ph.D. dissertations in progress in the English literature department of the University of Delhi which would have been impossible to negotiate within the institutional

structures of English departments when I was a Ph.D. student just two decades ago:

1. “Creative Engagements: Literature and Naxalite Politics in Bengal (1967–1975)”
2. “The ‘Women’s Question’ in Colonial Assam: A Case study of Chandraprabha Saikiani (1901–1972)”
3. “Print, Communities and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century Kerala”
4. “(En)gendering the Monstrous: A Study of Indian Horror Cinema”
5. “Representations of Delhi (1947–1984)”  
(Poduval Appendix IV)

This diversity of subjects would apply to most major universities with sought after M.Phil. and Ph.D. programs like those at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, the Central University of Hyderabad, and the English and Foreign Languages University, all of which, on the evidence of close analysis of work in progress and work submitted, reveal a slant toward cultural studies. Even the M.A. dissertations at the Institute of English, University of Kerala, where the curriculum continues to retain a strong foundation in metropolitan texts along with newly introduced courses in cultural studies and vernacular writings, trend increasingly toward gender studies, popular culture, translation studies, and Dalit writing. A cursory look at the dissertation work of a batch of students who passed the M.A. English exams in 2013 illustrate this point:

1. “Freedom Struggle in *Mappilappattu*”
2. “*Ramayanas*: Voices of the Silenced Women”
3. “New Directions in Malayalam Dalit Poetry: A Journey through the Poems of S. Joseph, M. B. Manoj and M. R. Renukumar”
4. “New Generation Cinema in Malayalam: A Critique”

It is evident that most of the students, under guidance from their teachers, worked in non-canonical areas and sought to relate the texts

they were analysing to the realm of their own lived histories. This shows a change in the manner in which the new generations of teachers and scholars approach the traditional world of English studies, since they are radically altering its parameters, pedagogies, and perspectives. These scholars reinvent English literature on postcolonial, pluralist, and culturalist premises while attempting to redeem the tools and methods of English literary theory and criticism through the analysis of national/vernacular/subaltern cultures. That their approach is modelled on international educational standards and academic credit patterns complicates the relationship between third world experiences of caste, class, gender, and the market, making it an interesting phenomenon to analyse in the context of globalization. The act of strategically and subversively using Western theories and methods to study the symbolic realm of the socio-cultural milieu in which literature is received has alleviated the cultural alienation experienced at the heart of English literature pedagogy in India. The shift also creates a space that blurs the borderlines between the literary, the social, the political, and the personal.

Consequently, the discipline of English literary studies has undergone a radical self-critique in terms of canon, aesthetics, and how these are taught. As mentioned, when I teach Shakespeare's *Othello* in my course on comparative literature and aesthetics we explore the Shakespearean text and its Western adaptations as well as many cinematic adaptations into regional Indian languages. An initial change in the methodology of teaching the canon makes the shift toward cultural studies and the de-privileging of the imperial logic of the Shakespearean original possible and augments its relevance in a postcolonial classroom. As the titles of the M.A. theses suggest, a certain interdisciplinary approach that informs the frames of analysis makes the cultures and contexts of reception key and fundamental constituents of analysis. An ideological shift in the selection of texts coupled with more non-canonical texts jostling for space with canonical ones, and radical shifts in the manner of teaching make the curriculum transcend, in more ways than one, the neocolonial agendas of the project of liberalization.

This cultural studies turn in English studies pedagogy in India emerged in the gaps and fissures between what was taught as part of

English education in India and the lived realities of Indians. The attempt to ground English studies in the many social and political contexts in which it is taught frees it from its load of elitist presumptions. In India, cultural studies emerged more as a methodology within English literature departments and came into being not as an institutional paradigm but as a cultural formation that arose out of specific socio-political histories that were in part spawned by Western academic impulses and the agendas of neo-imperialism and liberalization but went beyond imperial logic to assume a more ideologically premised postcolonial turn. By the time my home department introduced cultural studies as a compulsory course in 2013 with a number of texts by Western cultural theorists on the syllabus, the methodologies of cultural studies had already been in use for several years among scholars in other universities. A list of Ph.D. theses submitted to the Panjab University shows that similar developments were occurring in other parts of India (Poduval Appendix IV; see Appendix 3).

The rise of subaltern studies, women's studies, Dalit studies, and the study of marginal literatures in English departments in the 1980s also signalled intellectual alliances between liberal academics in Indian universities and Western social and critical theories. Many of these Indian academics had strong leanings toward the cultural left and sought to rework disciplinary concerns by critically engaging with theory, interdisciplinarity, equity, and social action within the field of humanities. The onus was also on the kind of academics mentioned above to be resisting intellectuals who would practise a language of critique that could ideally engender social change. However, the influence of poststructuralist theory on identity politics became one of the constituent features of cultural studies in India and resulted primarily in a movement that seemed limited to intellectual and academic circles and oftentimes indifferent to social activism. While Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Spivak remain some of the most cited thinkers in studies that link knowledge, power, and culture in India, whether their theories were used to create significant structural pedagogical changes that could also become part of an interventionist politics, remains doubtful. The rise of cultural studies also means that the disciplinary boundaries so strictly

maintained in Indian universities have been challenged and curriculums have become multi- and interdisciplinary.

The influence of poststructuralist theory on Indian scholars teaching English studies proved useful, however, because the necessity of placing texts in their cultural and historical contexts espoused readings that broke disciplinary moulds. The attempts, however meagre, to expose various coalitions of power and knowledge often unveiled the fact that disciplines, schools, and universities function as entrenched modes of power. Thus any intervention into the discourse of academia and pedagogy would of necessity be political. Such perspectives help situate today's English studies in India in a historic continuum where the contested and contesting terrain of ideology, culture, and interdisciplinarity create a postcolonial field of study that reveals the shifting dynamics of imperial, national, and subaltern epistemologies. If comparative literature sought to offer a methodology for Indian nationalism in the early- and mid-twentieth century, cultural studies, through its attempts to mediate cultural and market forces in the era of liberalization, offers a methodology for postcolonial critiques of the nation at the turn of the twenty-first century. Liberalization, along with the satellite television boom in India, ushered in an explosion of popular cultural forms whereby academia could not ignore the link between the nation and its populist modernity. Therefore, analyses of media and popular cultural forms such as cinema and television have become one of the major concerns of the nascent form of cultural studies in India as it emerges in English departments today. Popular cultural analyses, along with other factors already mentioned like the move towards interdisciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity, and counter-disciplinarity, have interrupted, punctuated, and critiqued the pedagogies of English studies in India and resulted in tensions that resonate in university classrooms and seek to transform the field into one of interventionist cultural politics.

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Commission in order to change the pattern of the National Eligibility Test for English. They urged that the new test take into consideration the new developments in English studies in India, which, according to them,

influence substantially the manner in which the traditional material of English Studies is approached. Since the 1990s, a large corpus of Indian scholarship relating to key dimensions of English Studies (historical, curricular, pedagogic, interpretive, ideological—to name just a few) indicate that its practitioners seek to respond seriously to specific histories and social subjectivities that are shaping the forms of textual representation and interpretation (Poduval Appendix I).

## Appendix 1

### ENG 512—Shakespeare

Credits: Four

#### Course description:

1. Shakespeare and his age
2. Elizabethan theatre and audience
3. Life and works of Shakespeare—sources—Comedies—Histories—Problem Plays—Tragedies—the Last Plays—Sonnets
4. Folios and Quartos
5. Shakespeare's language—use of blank verse—prose
6. Shakespeare's characters—heroes, women, villains, fools and clowns
7. Songs
8. The Supernatural element
9. Imagery
10. Shakespearean criticism—pre-1950 to post-1950.

#### **a. Texts prescribed for study:**

1. *The Merchant of Venice*
2. *Julius Caesar*
3. *Hamlet*
4. *Othello*
5. *Macbeth*
6. *Henry IV Part 1*
7. *Measure for Measure*

8. *The Tempest*

9. *The Sonnets*

**b. Critical responses:**

1. Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Lecture 1)
2. Sinfield, Alan, and Jonathan Dollimore. "Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism," in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985: 2–17.
3. Brown, Georgia. "Time and the Nature of Sequence in Shakespeare's Sonnets: 'In sequent toil all forwards do contend'." *How to do Things with Shakespeare: New Approaches New Essays*. Ed. Laurie Maguire. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008: 236–254.
4. Showalter, Elaine. "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism." *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman. New York & London: Methuen, 1985: 77–94.
5. Belsey, Catherine. "Iago the Essayist." *Shakespeare in Theory and Practice*. Catherine Belsey. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008: 157–170.
6. Salter, Denis. "Acting Shakespeare in Postcolonial Space." *Shakespeare, Theory and Performance*. Ed. James C. Bulman. London: Routledge, 1996: 117–136.

## Appendix 2

### ENG 543—Cultural Studies Credits: Three

#### Course description:

Cultural Studies is a new area of research and teaching that brings in new perspectives to our notions regarding "texts" and "meanings" and therefore to the study of literatures, cultures and societies. This course will try to develop theoretical tools and critical perspective to interrogate the advertisement, film, television, newspaper and internet texts that saturate our lives.

1. Historical context for the rise of Cultural Studies
2. New perspectives to the notion of "Texts"
3. Defining Cultural Studies
4. Cultural Studies and English Literature
5. Revising the concept of "Culture"
6. Hegemony, Culture and Power
7. Culture and Discourse
8. Culture and Representation

## Reinvention of English Pedagogy in India

9. Popular Culture
10. Methodologies
11. How to do Cultural Studies

### **Unit I:** Cultural Studies: Ideas and Concepts

1. Henry Giroux, et al. "The Need for Cultural Studies: Resisting Intellectuals and Oppositional Public Spheres"
2. Simon During. *Cultural Studies Reader*, Introduction.

### **Unit II:** Cultural Studies: Theory

1. Adorno and Horkheimer: Excerpts from "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"
2. Raymond Williams. "Hegemony"; "Traditions, Institutions, Formations"; and "Dominant, Residual, Emergent"

### **Unit III:** Cultural Studies: Methodology

1. Stuart Hall. "Encoding, Decoding".
2. Janice Radway. Excerpts from *Reading the Romance*.
3. Chandrima Chakraborty. *Bollywood Motifs: Cricket Fiction and Fictional Cricket*.

### Essential Reading:

1. Theodor W. Adorno: "Culture Industry Reconsidered"
2. Stuart Hall: "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms"
3. John Fiske: "Shopping for Pleasure"
4. Arjun Appadurai: "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy"

### Recommended Reading:

1. Lawrence Grossberg, et al., eds. *Cultural Studies*
2. John Storey, ed. *What Is Cultural Studies?*
3. Simon During, ed. *The Cultural Studies Reader* (1999)
4. Pramod K. Nayar. *An Introduction to Cultural Studies*

## **Appendix 3**

### **List of Ph.D. theses submitted to Panjab University**

1. "The Culture of Silence: The Figure of the Marginalized Subaltern in Colonial Accounts of Sati"
2. "Cultural Ideology and Gender Relations in the Cinematic Representation of Literary Texts: A Study of Select Indian Films"
3. "Representation of the Subaltern in the Fiction of Prem Chand"

4. "Prisms of Reality: An Interrogation of Third World Identity in Selected Works of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha".
5. "Televising the Sacred: Tradition and Technology in Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayana*"
6. "Narratives of Homelessness, Belonging and Exile in Manju Kapur's *Home*, Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* and Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music*"
7. "Poetics and Politics of Popular Indian Tales: A Study of the Panchtantra, Birbal, and Tenali Raman"
8. "A Sociology of Panjabi Cultures: A Critique of Gurdial Singh's Major Fiction"
9. "Negotiation Cultures: Emerging Configurations of Post 1905 Travel Writings"
10. "Critical Discourse Analysis of the Re-writings of the Mahabharata: A Study of Yasna Seni's *Parva* and *Second Turn*"
11. "Images of Masculinity: Male Identity in Selected Plays of Sam Sheppard"
12. "From Deification to Commodification: Women on the Hindi Celluloid (With Reference to *Mother India* and *Fashion*)"
13. "The Dynamics of Inbetweeness: Transgressive Depiction of Gender on Screen (With reference to *All About My Mother*)"
14. "Voicing Resistance: A Critique of Globalization in Self Narratives of Four Women"
15. "Problematics of Patriarchy, Religion and Class Consciousness in the Irish Context: A Study of the Selected Work of Maeve Binchy"
16. "Politics of Cultural Memory: A Critique of Harold Pinter's Plays"
17. "Pedagogy Politics and the Market: A Critique of Selected Anthologies in Postcolonial India"
18. "Cross-Cultural Feminism: A Comparative Study"
19. "Critique of Hegemony and Humanism: A Political Study of the Major Novels of Milan Kundera"
20. "Cultural Politics in Graphic Narrative: A Critical Analysis of the Adventures of Tintin"
21. "Representing the Cultural Imaginary: A Critical Study of the Narratives of Amar Chitra Katha"
22. "Islam, Ideology and Nationalism: Discursive Formations of Progressive Urdu Poetry with Reference to the Works of Ali Sardar Jafri, Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Kaifi Azmi"
23. "Problematizing Dalit Consciousness: Resistance and identity: A Critical Study of Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Bama's *Karukku* and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*"

24. "Semiotic Representation of Middle Class India: A Study of Chacha Chaudhary's Comic Book Series"
  25. "The Politics of Marginalization: Oppression and Resistance in the Works of Rohinton Mistry"
  26. "Transformation of the Vampire as a Cultural Metaphor: A Study of *Carmilla*, *Dracula*, *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat*"
  27. "Negotiating Spaces: A Study of Women's Marginalization and Resistance in Selected Accounts of Civil Conflict"
  28. "Mapping of Urban Culture: A Study of Cinematic Scapes with Special Reference to Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata"
  29. "Cultural Economy of Leisure and its Media Representation: A Case Study of Indian Premier League"
  30. "Tradition, Transition and Transformation: A Study in Concepts of Myths, Identity and Subjectivity in Selected Indian Films"
- (Appendix IV Poduval)

## Notes

- 1 Viswanathan, Rajan, Marathe, Joshi, and Tharu critically analyse the ideology and pedagogy of English in India.

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