

Cultural Studies as *labor of negotiation* in Higher Education¹

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Education is ... the greatest and most difficult problem with which [wo]man can be confronted, since insight depends on education and education in its turn depends on insight. ... Two inventions of [wo]man must surely be viewed as the most difficult: the art of government and the art of education.

Immanuel Kant - 1963

Ansgewahlte Schriften zur Padagogik und ihrer Begrundung

Given the fact that education is one the greatest and most difficult problems with which (wo)man has been confronted, given the fact that we have tried to attend to this difficult problem by reducing more often than not the 'art of education' to the 'science of government', given the fact that the history of higher education in India is the history of the reduction of the art of education to the language, logic and needs of government(ality), to the needs of colonialism-development-globalization, this paper will try to see what cultural studies as a 'new thematic specific' in the field of higher education does, through its labor of negotiation to this history of histories. It attempts to do this by focussing on the intimate imbrications of cultural studies, with an applied research initiative we are currently engaged in, which brings together academics (both in conventional institutions – the university, the research centres and undergraduate colleges – and in 'new and innovative institutional structures') with policy makers and grant making organizations. The applied research initiative has to do with the field of Higher Education, but interestingly it was incubated by the *Centre for the Study of Culture and Society* (CSCS) – an autonomous research centre in Bangalore – that started the first coursework supported PhD program in Cultural Studies in India. The *labor*² of negotiation by a Cultural Studies centre in the field of Higher Education is thus one of the focuses of this paper. The painstaking process of the gestation of collaborative interdisciplinary fields of research/teaching is another. The work of mainstreaming with policy makers and grantees is yet another. Called the Higher Education

¹ Ratheesh Radhakrishnan's "The praxis of Cultural Studies in India – a Preliminary Report" has informed me in this work. I have been helped by the structure Radhakrishnan has imparted-imputed to a field that resists definition. The other paper that has greatly informed my work is "The Desire for Cultural Studies" by Tejaswini Niranjana, presented at the Conference on Cultural Studies and the Institutions, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, 2006 as also the CSCS Strategy Paper on Higher Education (HE), prepared by Tejaswini Niranjana and Mrinalini Sebastian, in 2006. I must thank my colleagues in the Higher Education Cell – Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Mrinalini Sebastian, Ashwin Kumar A. P, Meera Moorkoth, Teena Antony, Elizabeth Thomas, Bitasta Das and Rekha Pappu. To Tejaswini Niranjana I owe something more than mere acknowledgement.

² Here labor is, on the one hand, a metaphor of that which is disavowed by the logic of Capital yet that which is fundamental to the birth and growth of Capital. On the other hand, labor could also be thought as a metaphor of 'pain and birthing' or perhaps, 'birthing through pain'. In both capitalist and patriarchal renditions, labor remains 'devalued'; in both the importance of labor is 'denied'; in both labor is tied to a certain 'corporeality'; in both labor 'gives birth'; in both labor is the origin moment of 'value'; and yet in both the one who labors or the one who is *in labor* loses the (re)produce to an appropriating Other; in both labor remains subsumed either under the Law of Capital or the Name of the Father. Both ways of thinking and representing labor give a sense and stand as a metaphor of the peculiar predicament in which Cultural Studies is placed in India in relation to the larger field of Higher Education.

(HE) Cell, an important aspect of the initiative's genealogy is that it is based on (a) a critique of the disciplines that had arrived on our shores from the West and an attention to the birthing of 'new thematic specifics' as also (b) a critique of the form-content of research/teaching undertaken in mainstream institutions and an attention to culture and context specific research/teaching methodologies, an attitude that is central to the formation of Cultural Studies in India. The Higher Education (HE) Cell is at present negotiating across four major functions through which it plans to engage with the higher education sector. These functions are

- (i) Research Initiatives
- (ii) Institutional Collaborations
- (iii) Documentation and Archiving and
- (iv) Grant Development.

Under (1) that is under Research Initiatives we have four fields

- a. *Globalization and Higher Education* (given the decline of the quality of education under the developmentalist state the purpose of this initiative is to produce new data/analyses of Higher Education under globalization and privatization conditions).
- b. *General Education in Comparative Perspective* (given the turn to vocational, skill based and professional education the purpose of this initiative is to develop relevant models for General/Liberal Education).
- c. *Regional Language Resources* (given the creepy Anglicization of education among the elite in India the purpose of this initiative is to develop a comprehensive strategy for strengthening regional language material in Higher Education).
- d. *Social Justice in Higher Education* (given the class-caste-gender divide in education the purpose of this initiative is to engage critically with questions of the socially disadvantaged in Higher Education).

and two disciplines:

- i. Gender Studies (the purpose is to build institutional and research resources in Women's Studies and Gender Studies).
- ii. Science Education and Allied Programmes (the purpose is to strengthen horizontal and vertical integration across the natural and the human-social sciences in science education along with a rethinking of the science question from the client/user's experience and perspective).

The research initiatives have been conceived through collaborations with a range of HE institutions. The wider context of the labor of negotiation is one where (1) new institutional structures are being experimented with, resulting in the emergence of a number of institutions that could be called 'institutions with a difference', (2) new interdisciplinary courseware or altogether new themes/fields of research/teaching are being created, such as fresh areas (film-media studies), fresh issues (gender-sexuality-dalit studies, migration studies, environment studies, violence studies) and (3) new research and pedagogic methodologies are being given shape.

This paper looks closely at two questions: what is the field of Higher Education *and* what is Cultural Studies in India? It then tries to see how Cultural Studies has affected the *given* field of Higher Education. What displacements has it produced in the field of Higher

Education? How has the field of Higher Education resisted change? How has the structure of Higher Education in India in turn affected it? What then do we mean by the labor of negotiation in the field of Higher Education? Given that education is “the greatest and most difficult problem with which [wo]man can be confronted”, how has Cultural Studies attempted such negotiation? What was wrong with the field of Higher Education that necessitated such a negotiation? What has emerged out of such labor/negotiation? What was the process of *gestation-production*? What has it *given birth* to? What was the (use) value of such birthing? How did the field of Higher Education receive the contributions of Cultural Studies – with a sense of acknowledgement, with disdain, with contempt, with disavowal, with denial, with trivialization? How has Cultural Studies in turn responded to this reception? What has its labor of negotiation been with existing disciplines and with existing institutions?

This paper is a narrative of *this* labor of negotiation. However, to understand the contours of such a negotiation, we have to understand first the problems in the field of Higher Education, which necessitated such negotiation. In the first section of this paper, titled ‘Higher Education: problem, promise, prospect’ we therefore plan to look at the field of higher education. We shall see in the second section titled ‘Cultural Studies: The Labor of Negotiation’ how Cultural Studies in India has initiated new moves in the field of higher education – both in terms of giving birth to new institutional imaginations and in terms of giving birth to new thematic specifics. In this context, we see the Higher Education (HE) Cell as *one* product of the labor of negotiation.

I. Higher Education: problem, promise, prospect

Higher education in India inherits the legacy of colonial legislations. In a 1797 paper on the need for the diffusion of Western knowledge in India, Charles Grant, an official of the East India Company, condemned the cultural practices of the Indians³, arguing that only the propagation of Christianity would redeem them. Grant’s proposal was not implemented at the time because of the Company’s anxiety about tampering with the customs of its subjects. T. B. Macaulay’s Minute of 1835 and William Bentinck’s support of its recommendations caused a long drawn out controversy between those wanting the propagation of Oriental education and those arguing for Anglicization. From the 1830s on, the government instituted several enquiries into the practicability of introducing and strengthening vernacular language education, but time and again these initiatives failed to take root because of the deep ambivalence of officials about the purpose and mode of instruction. It is evident that the present-day Indian education system’s inability to address the problem of regional language educational resources stems from this complicated history.⁴ Drawing from the educational concerns of Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1856, the Education Despatch of 1854 stressed the necessity of imparting English education (“the improved arts, sciences, and literature of Europe”) to the Indians; this would give the Indians access to the “moral and material blessings which flow from the general diffusion of useful knowledge”. The Despatch also emphasized the importance of vernacular languages in the diffusion of European knowledge. In 1857, affiliating universities were established in Madras, Calcutta and Bombay on the model of the

³ T. B. Macaulay could be credited with the infamous dismissal of “Eastern” knowledge (“all their books would fit on one shelf of an English library”) and the advocacy of English-medium education in the Minute of 1835.

⁴ The Regional Language Resources (RLR) initiative of the HE Cell focused on developing a comprehensive strategy for the strengthening of regional language resources in HE is an attempt to address the inheritance of this ‘complicated history’. The other problem that the RLR would like to address is the problem of ‘translating in’ and ‘translating out’; while we have had bouts of *translating in to* Indian languages, *translating out to* foreign languages has not gained much ground; given the monolingualism of *both* the nativist and the anglicized what we need most is perhaps *critical multilingualism*.

University of London, with a Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Fellows. Interestingly, *there was very little representation for teachers in this system of governance*. New career opportunities, especially in the government, compelled students to opt for English-medium instruction, so that contrary to the recommendation of the Education Despatch of 1854 vernacular language instruction was not easily available after middle school. The Indian Universities Act of 1905 appeared to consolidate the dominance of the British government in the field of higher education, and led to widespread disaffection amongst nationalists who had started many educational institutions of their own, and who now started a debate on what might be the content of a national education, including primary education (Ghosh 2000). For better or worse, the present-day system has not deviated much from this model. Cultural Studies and now the HE Cell have to negotiate with this legacy and this model.

Post-Independence, India set out to develop an education system that is massive (it is recognised by UNESCO as the second largest system in the world). This includes over 300 universities including deemed universities, and thousands of colleges. The colleges, which were often much older, were increasingly drawn into a formal relationship of “affiliation” with the universities, which were endowed with the authority to regulate teaching, set syllabi, conduct examinations, and give degrees. Although the affiliating system originated in England, it now survives only in South Asia. Elsewhere, varying degrees of autonomy for colleges has been necessitated by the enormous growth of the system. At present, universities sometimes have over a hundred affiliated colleges, which do the undergraduate teaching. The university usually does only PG teaching, apart from carrying out its regulatory functions. Although the university departments are supposed to combine research and teaching, with some scattered exceptions they tend to concentrate on teaching (and supervising the research of PhD students) while the research institutes set up in the 1950s and after are supposed to concentrate solely on research.

The CSCS Strategy Paper on Higher Education (HE), prepared by Tejaswini Niranjana and Mrinalini Sebastian, in 2006, had suggested that the major challenge for the HE sector lies in crafting initiatives so as to forge a *vertical integration* of the three ends of the HE spectrum – (i) the Research Institution, (ii) the University and (iii) the UG college. They have tried to show that one of the challenges for the sector is that much of what is happening at the UG college level does not impinge in a *bottom-up* manner upon research or pedagogy in the university; and much of what happens in research institutions and in universities does not reach the UG college. Taking off from Mrinalini Sebastian and Ritty Lukose’s observations one can say that UG colleges are no more elite institutions that cater to a few but have transformed themselves into public institutions; the UG College is both a social space that marks the rites of passage for the youth and a space of both education and knowledge production; the demographic profile of an undergraduate classroom has also changed over the past few decades making colleges a microcosm of contemporary Indian society; they represent the heterogeneous reality of the Indian society. They also bear the brunt of the global and local demands on the institutions of higher education, contend with the dire effects of neglecting and underpaying teachers, demonstrate the impact of stagnation in curriculum, reflect the urban and rural divide in educational practices and constitute the site where contests over knowledge, professional skills, access, cultural rights and political mobilization are periodically staged.

The Research Institutions by and large are not concerned with teaching, and the Universities with – remaining for the most part outside the inter-disciplinary debates that animate Research Institutions – have not been able to equip themselves to deal with curriculum revision. The other problem is that disciplines, cocooned as they are, have not

tried to *speak with* each other to think innovative initiatives; in the process, critical *intra-disciplinarity* and *inter-disciplinarity* have both suffered.⁵

Post-independence the report of the University Commission (1948) headed by the philosopher S. Radhakrishnan who later became the President of India proposed a distinction between facts (nature), events (society) and values (spirit) (which in turn would be the subject matter of the sciences, social sciences and humanities respectively). The goal of education was training for citizenship, according to the report, providing a definition of 'general education', which was supposed to include *theoretical contemplation*, *aesthetic enjoyment* and *practical activity*. The disciplines fell into place along this tripartite division. This tripartite division and this model of disciplinary compartmentalization have ruled the understanding of Higher Education in India; it has been no mean achievement on the part of Cultural Studies in India to have negotiated and attempted integration across this pseudo-division.

Cultural Studies in general and CSCS in particular along with some other institutions were the first to problematise this rigid division. When in CSCS or in the HE Cell we speak of collaboration in Higher Education, we speak of Horizontal Collaboration across fact (natural science), event (social science) and value (humanities).⁶ The other understanding of collaboration that informs both CSCS and the HE Cell is what could be called Vertical Collaboration, which is collaboration across research centres, universities and colleges.

However, Radhakrishnan's emphasis on 'general education' was soon replaced by an emphasis on education for 'development' of the nation, especially through the inclusion of 'science and technology' or 'area studies' which in turn would provide key inputs for state policy. During the 50s and the early 60s in India, most of the key educational institutions and statutory bodies for regulating higher education were set up, as well as institutions meant for the identification and recognition of artistic practice. The University Grants Commission, an autonomous body to control higher education, was formed through an Act of Parliament in 1956. Developmental aid from the Soviet Union, the USA and West Germany helped set up the first Indian Institutes of Technology, which were granted recognition as "institutions of national importance" through the IITs Act of 1961. The first management institutions or business schools were set up in Ahmedabad and Calcutta in 1961. The setting up of these specialized institutions further reinforced the *separation of skill-based learning from 'general education'*, that was already evident in the medical, architecture and engineering colleges from colonial times. The Kothari Commission (1964) also emphasized the need for vocational courses at all levels, including that of higher education. The *vocationalization* was intended to stem the inflow into arts courses which

⁵ Perhaps Niranjana and Sebastian (2006) were drawing from experiences within CSCS. Over the years, CSCS as an institution, in its limited capacity, has learnt a lot from the work of interdisciplinarity as also from institutional collaborations. The exercise of interdisciplinarity (in CSCS as also in other institutions/departments) and of institutional collaboration (by CSCS and by other institutions) has given CSCS an on-the-ground sense of 'Collaborative Interdisciplinary Work' in the HE field; in the years before the founding of the HE Cell, CSCS as an institution was beginning to realize the need to move towards the building up of a network/forum of teachers and researchers so as to share experiences of teaching as also share research/curricular/courseware. One felt that such a network/forum could work towards 'capacity building' among both teachers and researchers; it could also identify potential new areas/themes/fields/approaches for intervention in HE. The HE Cell is now trying to draw on the experience of the successful collaborations (both within CSCS and outside it) to produce analytical reflections on the collaboration process, and to create occasions to share the experience of the collaborations with other institutions or groups interested in replicating the process. With such purposes in mind, the Cell has given shape to institutional collaborations as a necessary supplement to all the initiatives within the HE Cell.

⁶ The initiative for *integrated science education* the HE Cell has with the Centre for Contemporary Studies [CCS] in the Indian Institute of Science [IISc, Bangalore] is a move in the direction of Horizontal Collaboration.

were still based on the colonial model for creating lower-level government officials, and which thus attempted to provide only a broad 'general education'.

Even when there were revisions in education policies, as for example in the New Education Policy (1986), the tripartite division of disciplines based on *facts, events and values* found in the Radhakrishnan report did not change substantially. The NEP's main recommendation was indeed once again vocationalization, proposed as the antidote to the colonial emphasis on the liberal arts, which were supposed to equip graduates only for the civil services. Another aspect of the NEP relating to higher education was the recommendation to develop *autonomous colleges* and do away with the affiliating system.

Fifteen years after the NEP, and following on the heels of the Revised Programme for Action (1992) that endorsed the formulations of the NEP, the heads of two major industrial houses authored the Birla-Ambani report. The report renewed the plea for *vocationalization*, but now in the context of a rapidly globalizing economy: knowledge in this report came to be redefined as technical knowledge and managerial competence. The assertion was that "Education must shape adaptable, competitive workers". The report declares that India must invest in "Upgrading education content, delivery and processes – we have to change from seeing education as a component of social development to treating it as a means of creating a new information society". Here, however, we have a redefinition of vocationalization to mean professionalization in both its senses: focus on technical and managerial skills rather than on general education, and focus on "delivery of services" rather than on exploring forms of knowledge. The Birla-Ambani Committee points to the need to evaluate the utility of current Arts and Science courses, and link them to employment opportunities. "Economic value" is proposed as the measure rather than the "intrinsic merit" of education. The concern with "useful knowledge" – first expressed in the colonial period (the period of the 'civilizing mission'), then in the context of a developmentalist state, and now after the fall of the Soviet in the context of globalization (presumably with different referents) – resurfaces in the current critiques⁷ of higher education.

By the 1990s, we were witnessing a palpable sense of crisis in the developmental initiatives of the state. It was a crisis brought on by the large-scale transformations of the economy-polity, as well as by sustained political critiques of socially disadvantaged groups. The social and political crises were paralleled by disciplinary crises. While in areas such as English literary studies and history there was a re-thinking of the conceptual and methodological foundations of the disciplines, in some other instances, the disciplinary crisis manifested itself as an institutional crisis. Crisis in developmentalist institutions (often dominated by economists) lead to the imagination of 'new structural specifics' (in terms of new institutional designs). These non-conventional institutions (some of which were autonomous⁸) usually had an activist-academic beginning – where one was redefining both activism and academics – where one was also critically working one's way in relation to both (global) capital and the State (the State too is acquiring new functions in the post-GATT period). Started by a close well-knit collective, research for most of these new institutions meant 'applied research'; it was research with a certain amount of accountability to the

⁷ Most of the post-1980 critiques of higher education in India present a story of decline and disarray. Higher education institutions are described as having compromised on quality, and as unable to afford the resources for advanced research or even good teaching. Teaching materials, where they exist, are derivative, West-inspired, thoughtlessly assembled. The curriculum is sadly outdated. An experience-occluding structure is imposed on students in the name of education; students are pressurized to acquire knowledge by rote, and have their proficiency assessed through antiquated accreditation methods.

⁸ Following the UGC Guidelines of 2003, colleges across the country set in motion the process of obtaining academic autonomy. While these institutions are keen to generate resources by offering expensive courses in management, catering, tourism or video production, autonomy also opens up new possibilities for the humanities and social sciences as also for classroom ethos and evaluation methods.

public at large; there was also a desire to intervene at the level of policy. New institutions often went hand in hand with new thematic specifics (new fields of research and teaching), and new thematic specifics have at times necessitated the founding of new institutions. Interdisciplinarity and Collaborative Institutional work was the strong point of most of the new institutions. Post 1989 these new institutions have brought into the field of Higher Education skills and attitudes hitherto not common in research centres and universities; they were as if 'living organisms' (and not just brick and mortar structures), learning and unlearning, mutating and metamorphosing. These institutions have ushered in different/new *products* (that is new knowledge pools; cultural studies being one; migration, film, media, women's studies being others) and/or different/new *methods* of approaching knowledge production. These institutions offer a view of higher education beyond the mere narrative of decay and decline; they usher in the field of higher education a different philosophy of research and education.

We see in the University a series of significant new phenomena: the gender and caste composition of the student body is changing in the UG space, especially in regional universities; and with the changing student profile, social exclusion and social justice are emerging as issues. Elite students no longer enrol in the natural and social sciences, and the pattern of professional education as the most lucrative career option is only being reinforced. Non-elite students demand that the university still function as a source of accreditation. The linguistic problems caused by the discrepancy between the language of instruction and the social background of the students are growing.⁹ Simultaneously, one witnesses an emptying out of faculties, with social science and humanities teachers choosing to avail of new job opportunities abroad or new economy jobs in India.

Higher education could thus be seen as standing at a strange crossroad – the crossroad of (a) a classical Humboltian approach (the classical approach was however displaced by colonialism/'the civilizing mission'), (b) a reformed Developmentalist approach (at times 'Top-Down Statist', at other times even if rarely 'Bottom-Up people centric') and (c) what could provisionally be called an Efficiency approach (an approach modelled around (global) competition and productivity; and represented by the IT sector, and IIM and Business Schools). Given the crossroads, which way would the field of HE go now? What are problems that afflict the sector? What are the solutions? What are the promises, if any?

The HE Cell's diagnosis of the key problems afflicting higher education are lack of professionalism (poor research training, weak assessment structures, derivative frameworks and theories), lack of resource (poor infrastructure, dearth of reading material that's local, relevant, and contemporary), and lack of exposure and training (dearth of teacher capacity building for UG and university teachers). While the immediate field of intervention might be the college, the preparation for this crucially has to be at the research institutes and universities. The idea is to have significant research in different social science and humanities disciplines energise the re-visioning of UG curricula, and in turn to have the products of colleges – with a far richer general education than the older system could provide – be stronger participants in the emerging knowledge economy at all levels, whether it is in the media, in civil society groups and in NGOs, or in more specialized research locations. The larger challenge for the set of interventions we have proposed first through CSCS (and Cultural Studies) and now through the HE Cell would be to transform the disciplines themselves, making them relevant to our social conditions and responsive to the changing global situation. We see the beginnings of such change in disciplines that have experienced, what could be called, a Cultural Studies *turn* in the 1990s, but the process needs to be systematized around projects relating to (a) critical *intra*-disciplinarity in terms of reflection on the methodology of extant disciplines as also reflection on existing

⁹ Yet, there is only anecdotal evidence for these changes. Initial attempts to reflect on the changes are to be found in Susie Tharu (ed.), *Subject to Change* (Tharu 1997). The *Social Justice* initiative of the HE Cell is an attempt to track and address this change.

curriculum, (b) production of readers supporting new curriculum (c) devising of new and innovative inter-disciplinary courses: examples can be drawn from existing programmes in Cultural Studies (d) availability of quality e-resources: developing digital courseware and networked online education (e) training of teachers and researchers (f) production of material in regional languages.

Listed above are a few ideas for the possible re-energizing of the interactions across the higher education spectrum. These ideas have been put to test by CSCS. However, it was felt that they would need to be tested beyond the activities of CSCS; they would need to be tested against the actual situations in different kinds of institutions at all three levels, and would require the input of academics and institution-builders. The need of the hour was a greater and larger elaboration of the ideas. The HE Cell, an autonomous initiative spawned by CSCS, was a step in the direction. CSCS in the past and the HE Cell at present feel that to re-invigorate the disciplines across the higher education spectrum, one need to promote ways in which the Research Institute, the University, and the College could work together. In the past, we at CSCS, and at present in the HE Cell, have emphasized the necessity to strengthen the links between Research and Teaching, to engage in Inter-institutional Collaborations, to have Integrated Course Content and Classrooms and focus on Interdisciplinarity. *We have also recommended a focus on Undergraduate Institutions as the target groups for bootstrapping activities.* Not only are they neglected in most discussions about the quality of higher education, they could also be a significant location for the testing out of new ideas (like inter-disciplinary Cultural Studies). In addition, we strongly feel that the problems of postgraduate education as well as research often stem from poor undergraduate education, and that a focus on the latter would yield potentially far-reaching results; the indirect impact of changes in the college's pedagogic and evaluative structures will be felt at the University level and eventually at the Research Institute level as well. This is what for us the *Bottom-Up* imagination is. Ironically, this might reverse the trickle-down effect often advocated by educationists, where the University is seen as the standard-setting and syllabus-devising authority.

The other issue we would like to bring up in this context is the question of the philosophy of education. The philosophy that drives us is Leninist vanguardist – it is, as if, we know “what is to be done”; while Cultural Studies raises the self-reflexive “what is (*not*) to be done”. It shows how the ‘art of education’ as “the greatest and most difficult problem with which [wo]man can be confronted” has been reduced to a ‘science’¹⁰ and that too a ‘science of government’; how education has served first the colonial administration (with the trope of civilizing mission as masquerade), then the developmentalist state and now the government of globalization. The ‘Cultural Studies’-‘Higher Education’ interface is to see “what can (still) be done”; given the leash Cultural Studies puts on thought (Cultural Studies also unleashes thought) it is to see, “what one can still do” in the field of higher education. Given the aggressiveness that underlies the activities of the philanthropist, the idealist, the pedagogue, and even the reformer, cultural studies for me is also a *turn to* the relationalities and the uncanny intersubjectivities at work in the classroom, in teaching-learning; this is important because meaning is not just found in what language says (in its statement), but in *the fact of saying it* (in its utterance); this meaning which is constituted in interlocutive speech¹¹ and no place else, this “signified = x”, is the subject (of teaching-learning), in so far, as the subject “wants to say” (*veut dire*) and expresses itself to another (Borch-Jacobsen, 1992: 82).

¹⁰ Gadamer (2004: 556) has tried to suggest that in a “when science penetrates further and further into social practice, science can fulfil its social function only when it acknowledges its own limits and the conditions placed on its freedom to manoeuvre. Philosophy must make this clear to an age credulous about science to the point of superstition”.

¹¹ The situation of the interloutor, “comes upon the simple fact that language, prior to signifying something, signifies to someone” (Lacan, 2006: 66).

Cultural Studies is also a turn to 'thought' as against 'knowingness'; at a time when knowingness has taken the place of thought, Cultural Studies questions knowingness and returns in turn to thought (Lear, 1998: 84). It asks: what would be a philosophy of education that would *learn to learn from below*?¹² Metaphorically put learning to learn from below would be something like this: if we look at the table from above we see laptops; if we look at the same table from below we see *cobwebs*. We have looked at HE from above for too long. For too long we have taken the teacher's story for granted. However, one will now have to accept that it is only *one* story; and a *partial* story. It is time we looked at the student's perspective; maybe we will see cobwebs we have not considered before.

II. Cultural Studies: The *Labor of Negotiation*

We now plan to see what Cultural Studies – cultural studies as what Julian Sefton-Green calls a 'system irritant' – has done to the field of Higher Education in India. However, to get a sense of that we need to see what Cultural Studies *is*. In this paper, we represent the rather disaggregated and variegated field of Cultural Studies from *two*¹³ possible directions. One, the direction-dimension of the question of the 'discipline', where the contours of the discipline and questions *within* the discipline emerge as crucial and the other, the direction-dimension of the question of 'culture', where the '*concept* of culture' emerges as crucial. In the process, we try to take stock of the questions "what is cultural studies" and "what cultural studies is *in* India" and the trajectories the field has taken in the last decade or so.

In the conceptual space of the 'discipline' once again two questions arise – one comes from the *past* and the other comes from the *future*. One question pertains to the (western and colonial) origin/history of disciplines, the *derivative-ness* of disciplines in terms of western and colonial contexts. At times, such questions become crucial and produce a veritable crisis within the discipline; crisis in terms of questions disciplines had hitherto tended to be immune to, questions pertaining to the inescapable historicity that haunts any given discipline: *are disciplines ethno-disciplines*. How would then one make sense of her discipline in the Indian context? Would the discipline need to go through fundamental displacements to shed most of its *a priori* assumptions and become in the process habitable, become meaningful in the Indian context? Alternatively, would we have to think the discipline anew, think it beyond or outside of the 'structures of reasoning' that have hitherto driven the discipline?

The other question comes with respect to the status and standing of the disciplines in a milieu of globalization; what are the new necessities globalization is throwing up for the disciplines? How would the disciplines respond to it? What are the emerging hierarchies among disciplines? On the one hand, how would disciplines negotiate the concerns of 'global capital'-'industry'-'technology'-'services' and the 'international division of intellectual labour'? On the other, how would disciplines negotiate the concerns of 'social exclusion' and 'social justice'? Such questions in the contemporary of globalization – a contemporary marked by both the 'unmitigated global flow of capital' and 'democracy-justice related considerations' ('human rights' being a case in point) – further complicates the picture of the discipline.

¹² Learning to learn from below does not mean a prostration before the Other; it means more a resistance to the 'master ideology' passing off its own commandments as the truly authentic, spontaneous and 'honourable' inclinations of the (learning) subject (Zupancic, 2000: 1).

¹³ This restricting of a variegated field to just *two* possible directions would perhaps entail a smoothening out and a clubbing, at times, of a number of conflict ridden or contradictory strains within what could be called the field of 'Cultural Studies'. In fact, the two possible directions that we delineate in this paper are not the only two ways in which the field of cultural studies could be understood. There could be other ways of conceptualising the field.

New questions incumbent upon the discipline due to turns in philosophy/'theory' elsewhere (namely French Post-structuralism) and future trajectories the discipline could possibly chart due to concerns of such philosophy/'theory' have also come to be seen in some spaces as fundamental to the imagination of the discipline. Cultural Studies has at times become the 'space' where such questions – questions of the derivative-ness of disciplines, questions of globalization and questions of philosophical displacements – have been played out with respect to the given contour of a discipline. Such questions have also made space for a certain turn to *interdisciplinarity*. Thus, Cultural Studies emerges as a space where disciplines interact; where not just humanities tuned to postcolonial concerns interact; but also the social sciences. Interdisciplinarity at times means a speaking 'between' pre-given disciplines; at other times, it means a space of overdetermination such that each discipline is fundamentally constituted and displaced by the other disciplines. Cultural Studies thus emerged out of the stretching of the limits of conventional disciplines; by rethinking the realm of the economic as also political-cultural practices, Cultural Studies was able to generate critical insights and problematise existing disciplines, sometimes by focusing on aspects of mass/popular culture hitherto considered irrelevant, trivial or low. Cultural Studies also emerges as a space of questioning disciplinary givens, such that one could no longer do research within the conceptual confines of a discipline using the conceptual tools as they were available to the researcher but had to at the same time critically examine the veracity of such conceptual tools; examine even the foundation of a discipline. Research could no longer be 'description-driven'; one had to have a 'problem' that one tried to tackle or solve; one's research was tied to 'questions'; one's research was *also* about questioning the hitherto accepted.

Interestingly, such disturbing questions have hit and unsettled not just disciplines (ranging from English literature, history, political science, social anthropology, and to some extent law and science) but also political ideologies, be it Marxist, Feminist or Dalit positions and has made room for thinking instead 'standpoint' epistemologies. Of course, in its initial years cultural studies had hit Marxist ideologies the most through a turning away from 'economism' and had made room for an attention to

- (1) the space of the non-economic (namely the space of the 'political' pertaining to 'relations of power' and the space of the 'cultural' pertaining to 'relations of meaning') and
- (2) the space of non-class questions (namely questions pertaining to 'new social movements', movements on questions of gender, race, caste, environment)
- (3) 'spaces of the political' outside of what could be called the 'liberal humanist' or the 'developmentalist' or the 'nation-statist'.

But with time, even gender and caste ideologies have come face to face with questions hitherto incumbent upon the Marxist space and these have opened floodgates for a rethinking of even Feminist and Dalit ideologies; such rethinking have in turn made room for thinking 'standpoint' epistemologies. In fact, it has marked a movement from 'ideology' to 'standpoint' (Achuthan, 2005), from vanguardism to what Handel Wright calls 'politics without guarantee'.

If interdisciplinarity is *one* route cultural studies has taken, then the *other* route that animates Cultural Studies questions is the 'culture concept'. Institutions like the National School of Drama (1959) under the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the Film Institute of India (1960), renamed in 1974 as the Film and Television Institute of India, and overseen by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and the National Institute of Design (1961) under the Department of Science and Technology were established post-independence. This diverse set of institutions, along with the Sangeet Natak, Lalit Kala and Sahitya Akademis

covered the field of “culture” for the post-colonial state. It was in this space of the thinking (and practice) of culture that Cultural Studies inaugurated questions hitherto un-thought.

Cultural Studies put to question the idea(l) of the ‘nation’ as an *a priori*; the *given* of national culture – represented as either the “glorious Indian civilization *in the distant past*” or that which is “irrational, immature, depraved and lazy” was also put to question. Such questioning opened ways to thinking the fundamentally political nature of culture as a domain of research. It has also kept alive the space of culture as a space of epistemological enquiry – some have seen culture as a ‘way of life’; others have seen culture as a ‘space of struggle’. The question of culture has remained a fundamental question in a number of Cultural Studies approaches in India. Some have tried to grapple with the question “what do we mean by (Indian) culture”; others have tried to look at *local* subcultures; still others have tried to track changing patterns in the space of culture in the context of globalization.

Cultural Studies has also marked a move from the study of culture as the study of ‘high culture’ to the study of what was purportedly known as ‘low’ culture. The turn to the ‘low’ has opened space for the ‘turn to subalternity’ in history (once again *Subaltern Studies* being a turning away from (1) nationalist elite history and (2) Marxist history focused on (a) working class and (b) economic relations as against ‘relations of power’ and ‘relations of meaning’).

The further turn in the thinking and study of culture that scholars have produced is the turn on the one hand to art and art history and on the other to ‘film-media-moving images-web spaces’ where one attempts to critically read the media and other cultural institutions and texts, to understand how they shape our subjectivities. Further turns in terms of a turn to the ‘popular’ as against the ‘esoteric’, the ‘local’ as against the ‘global’, the ‘urban’ as against the ‘rural’, the ‘diasporic’ as against the ‘national’, the ‘in-between’ as against the ‘identitarian’, the peripheral-marginal as against the metropolitan have inflected the disaggregated nature of the field of Cultural Studies. Overall, the culture question in Cultural Studies has followed two trajectories: at times, it has been premised on a critique of nationalism¹⁴; at other times, it has been premised on a critique of Marxist economism and has marked a move beyond the mode of production debate.

III. *Whither Cultural Studies?*

In the context of the above moves and initiatives, one could ask: which way would the field of Cultural Studies possibly go in future? To put it rather telegraphically, we at CSCS and at the HE Cell would like to see Cultural Studies emerge as the *critical space* in the *interstices of the humanities and the social sciences* as also in the *dialogue between the human sciences and the natural sciences*. Here *law and science* would be for us two new sites where we think questions of interdisciplinarity could be seriously pursued; where questions of *representation, interpretation* and *objectivity-evidence* could come up for serious consideration. Of the new problems that Cultural Studies initiatives have already thrown up or would probably throw up in the coming years HE Cell would like to engage intensely with at least a few, namely (a) *Social Exclusion* and *Social Justice* (that could in turn be tied to the question of Law) and (b) the *Digital*, the *Cyber* and the purportedly *Post-Human* context (that could in turn be tied to the question of Science-Technology).

Somewhat like the *return of the repressed* CSCS has seen in the last couple of years a turn to a re-thinking of the ‘economic’ as a site of study, research and analysis. Curricula

¹⁴ The critique of the ‘national modern’ has inaugurated space for a political understanding of (national) culture: “this critique is most powerfully articulated in the social movements of the period (peasant and tribal movements, the women’s movement, the slightly later dalit movement) and in the intellectual initiatives inspired by those movements (Subaltern Studies, feminist scholarship, dalit critiques). The immediate history of Cultural Studies [in India] is [therefore] to be derived from this broad critique” (Niranjana, 2006).

have been framed that takes a close look at '*capital*', beyond the familiar Marxist critique and the neo-liberal defence. The Cell would continue to generate research on and around 'global capital' so as to contribute to the field of the 'economic', a field hitherto *purloined* in Cultural Studies as also to work at the cusp of Globalization and Development Studies.

CSCS as also the HE Cell would also like to find *new institutional locations* (like Law Schools, Institutes of Science Education and Research, Institutes of Technology and Management Schools) where Cultural Studies questions can be taken up.

The other question one would like to think in a Cultural Studies milieu is the question of the 'political'; think it beyond the given of political ideologies; think it in terms of a turn *from ideology to standpoint*; but a turn to standpoint that is in deconstructive embrace with questions of 'subjectivity' as also with purportedly 'liberal' concerns; that is at one and the same time negotiating a space in-between a (vaguely Kantian) universalizing pole, where ethico-politics is grounded in the abstract universality of general 'human' attributes or rights and a (vaguely Levinasian) differential pole, attuned to the irreducible alterity of the Other (Badiou, 2001).

IV. In lieu of a Conclusion:

Let us end this paper with the hint of a possible turn – the psychoanalytic turn – that perhaps awaits Cultural Studies and a philosophy of education. We began with Kant. Let us end with Freud.

Both education and psychoanalysis, Freud warned in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" are "impossible professions" in which "one can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfactory results". ... The third "impossible profession," according to Freud, is government. (Jonte-Pace, 2003: 3-13)

Given that both education and psychoanalysis are "impossible professions" haunted by "unsatisfactory results" how about queering the pitch further by imparting to education a psychoanalytic turn. The psychoanalytic turn in education would mean a *turn to uncanny subjectivities* – both *intra*-subjectivities and *inter*-subjectivities – at work in the classroom and in the institution; it would also be a turn to subjectivities understood in terms of the "subject's relation to the signifier – both *nodal* [*point de capiton* as "button tie" in Lacan, 2006: 681] and *repudiated*" (*verwerfung* as the "foreclosure" of the signifier in Lacan, 2006: 465). What would the psychoanalytic turn mean in education? For example, if one is thinking, say, social exclusion and justice in higher education institutions, the 'psychoanalytic understanding of the activated-afterness-of-hurt' would offer a deeper theorization of 'disadvantage' – a theorization that does not get reflected in the roll call register – and that cannot be addressed by mere reservation of seats for the disadvantaged. The psychoanalytic turn to Cultural Studies would mean a deeper understanding of culture that is not available in terms of what gets written on the 'transparent sheet' of the Mystic Writing Pad (see "A Note on the Mystic Writing Pad", 1925, by Freud) but is retroactively recuperated with difficulty-patience-care from the somewhat illegible script, from the Other language inscribed-encrypted on the wax slab underneath.¹⁵

The question that remains and that haunts: would all this displace the imagination of education produced by a "few shepherd subjects" to an imagination produced by the "flock

¹⁵ The other understanding of culture – *not* psychoanalytic – but crucial in a Cultural Studies milieu – would relate to a *turning away* from non-critical cultural relativism as antidote to indiscriminate universalism and would instead be a *turn to* a "science of cultural difference" (Dhareshwar, 1996).

of subjectivities"?¹⁶ The imagination of education produced by the flock of subjectivities – polymorphous, heterogeneous, disaggregated, conflict ridden and contradictory – is rather apposite to what could be called the difficult task of a *bottom-up* approach to education as against a Top Down approach.

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¹⁶ Among all the societies in history, ours – I mean those that came into being at the end of Antiquity on the Western side of the European continent – have ... alone evolved a strange technology of power treating the vast majority of [wo]men as a *flock with a few as shepherds* (Foucault 1988).