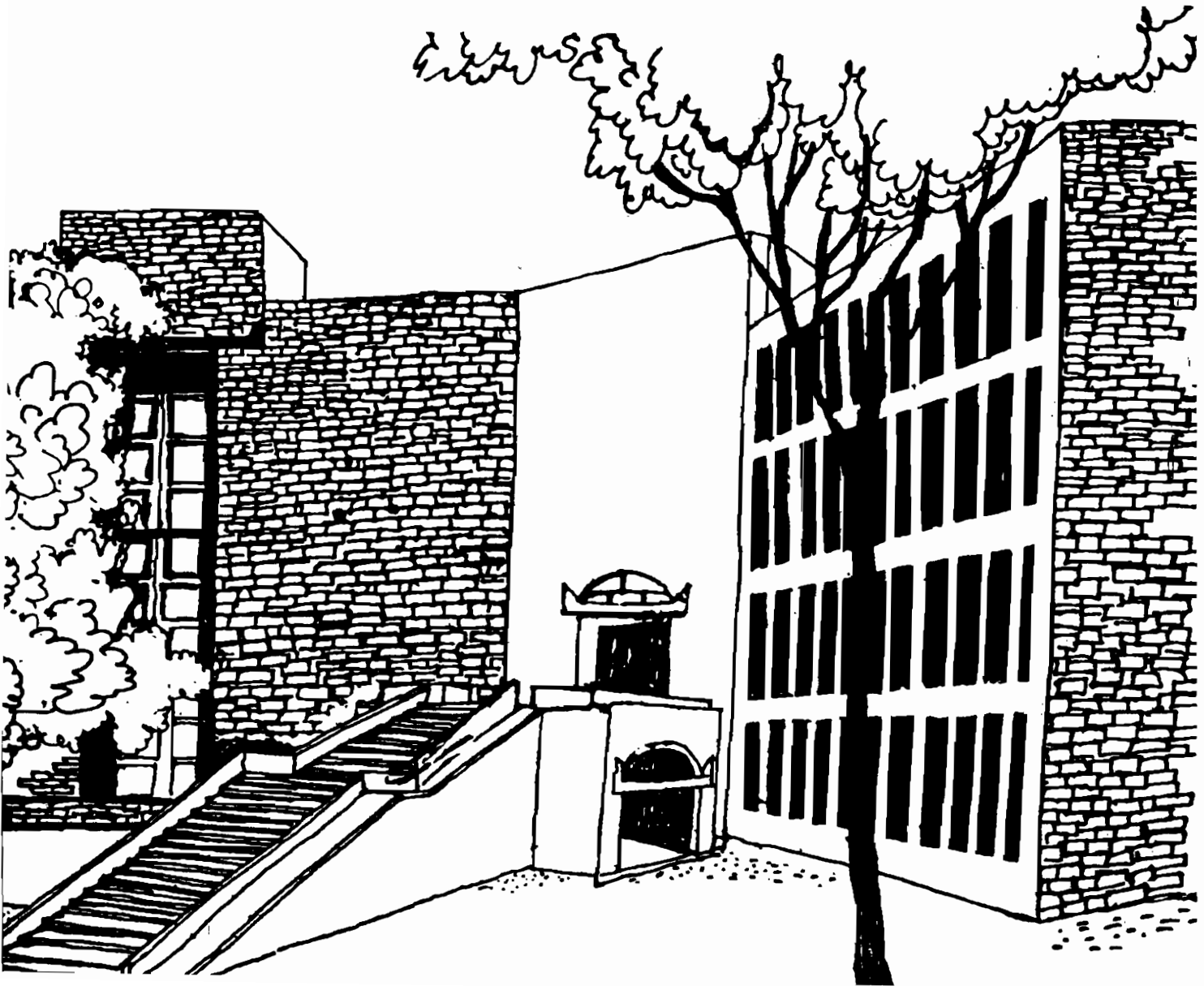




Working Paper



**An Area of Study as a Discursive Field:
Some Notes on Method
and an Inquiry into the Challenge of Moral Education**

Ananta Giri
Visiting Faculty
Ravi Matthai Center for Educational Innovation

WP1149
WP
1993
(1149)

W.P. No. 1149
November 1993

The main objective of the working paper series of the IIMA is to help faculty members to test out their research findings at the pre-publication stage.

PURCHASED

APPROVAL

GRATIS/EXCHANGE

PRICE

ACC NO.

VIKRAM SARABHAI LIBRARY

I. I. M., AHMEDABAD.

An Area of Study as a Discursive Field: Some Notes on Method and an Inquiry into the Challenge of Moral Education*

Ananta Giri

"Academic disciplines don't create their fields of significance, they only legitimize particular organizations of meaning. They filter and rank - and in that sense, they truly *discipline* - contested arguments and themes that often reach them. In doing so, they continuously expand, restrict, or modify in diverse ways their arsenals of tropes, the types of statements they deem acceptable. But the poetics and politics of the 'slots' within which disciplines operate do not dictate the enunciative relevance of these slots."¹

"Though units of study are properties of 'analysis,' they must correspond to the 'emergent' properties by the system. The effort of formulating appropriate units of analysis must be linked to a discovery procedure."²

"The meaning of the world lies outside the world."³

The Problem

When we study anything, our object of study is part of a broader field; while located in this field, our units and objects of study do not exhaust the field. When we look at our object of study with a particular perspective or a vantage point our ways of looking at it neither constitutes nor characterizes it; it reflects our interest and our spirit of inquiry as knowing subjects rather than the essence of either the object or the field. But this simple truth and basic common sense seems to have been forgotten in the agenda of modern sciences -- natural and cultural. Modern modes of inquiry into the human condition has been characterized by what can be called a "disciplinary mode." We make sense of the world through particular specialized and bounded disciplines. We look at the world through the eyes of the discipline to which we belong and tend to think that the whole world is characterized by our disciplinary significance. If one is a sociologist one tends to firmly believe that the world is sociological and sociology holds the key to the social reality while if one is a psychologist then the ultimate reality of the world cannot but be psychological. Indeed modern disciplines have been endowed with essential meanings and have acted as cultural wholes for the subjects of inquiry making them blind, confuse the tree for the forest, and mostly closing off the prospect of transcendence from within and without.⁴

But the boundaries of the disciplines are contrived ones and their specialization and expert knowledge were part of a modern academic division of labour in deciding whose contours the self-styled builders of disciplines and proponents of disciplinary essentialism had very little role to play. For instance, if anthropology were to be the disciplinary and disciplined care-taker of the primitive and the savage then this savage slot was not anthropology's own choosing, rather it was assigned to anthropology by the discursive project of modernity, where the thematic object of anthropology, viz the savage, was part of a broader discursive field, constituted by the regime of economy and power, which had at least two other more determinant themes - namely those of order and utopia⁵. In the

* Paper presented at the National Seminar on "An Exploration into the Nature of Education as an Area of Study" organized by the centre of Advanced Study in Education, MS University, Baroda, August 27-28, 1993. The author thanks Profs. MS Yadav, Sunormol Roy, R.P. Sharma and Anil K. Gupta, and Mr. Durga Prasad for comments and criticisms on this paper. The author requests the same from concerned readers for which he would be grateful. The author's contact numbers are: (0272) 407241 (tel.); (0272) 427896 (fax); and agiri@iimhad.ernet.in (E-mail).

discursive field of modernity the savage made sense only along with a construction of an utopia while "utopia itself made sense only in terms of the absolute order against which it was projected, negatively or not"⁶ In fact, the search for the primitive in foreign lands was preceded by the search for order at home. Thus in constituting an area of study around a thematic unit such as the savage "the internal tropes of anthropology matter much less than the larger discursive field within which anthropology operates and upon whose existence it is premised."⁷

In this archeology of modern disciplines the case of anthropology is interesting for another reason; it sensitizes us to the problematic relationship between units of analysis and the field of study, a relationship which is constructed harmoniously and homologically by the architects of the modern disciplines.⁸ Even when anthropology studied solely such apparently simpler forms of societies such as primitive societies its objects of study and units of analysis such as "tribe", "caste" and "village" did not correspond exactly to the field of study. For instance, the conceptualization and the study of the tribe as a "self-contained unit" does not recognize its inherent and essential links with castes and civilizations.⁹ Though the assumption of an exact match between units of analysis and the field of study was a crucial one in modern anthropology and in its "invention of primitive society" the assumptions of these kinds are subject to fundamental criticisms as the world which created anthropology is itself subject to fundamental structural restructuring and cultural criticism -- the processes which also compel anthropology to distance itself from its providential "savage slot" and to turn to advanced industrial societies.

The above examples show us that both our units of analysis and objects of study have a complex constitution; in fact they are constituted of a dialectic between the local and the global, the internal tropes and the pervasive discursive themes. These also point to the contemporary inadequacies of the bounded disciplines in making sense of the human condition where the contemporary manifestation of forms of life exhibit more the properties of flow, mutual penetration and movement rather than fixity and stasis. Processes of structural and discursive transformations in the contemporary world have forced the bounded disciplines to participate in a flow of consciousness, what anthropologist Clifford Geertz once termed "blurred genres."¹⁰ Crisis in both the existent forms of social organisation and cultural representation has heightened the urgency for broadening ourselves by going beyond our chains of disciplinary illusions. This is the wider context which has led to the need for and the agenda of interdisciplinary research. But this agenda has not made much headway, either in North America or in India, because the agenda of interdisciplinary research has been articulated in the same egoist idioms of modern disciplines. If the global and discursive nature of our units and objects of study make the interdisciplinary mode of inquiry a necessity, then putting it into practice requires an alternative process of knowledge formation, where the subjects, though firmly rooted in disciplines as holding grounds, transcend their disciplinary egos and confront the human condition in terms of its essential richness and mystery, not in terms of the 'partial truths' of one's own discipline.¹¹

Thus interdisciplinary research indeed is a trans-disciplinary seeking, which has to be accompanied by the transcendence of our ego -- "a transcendence from within."¹² It requires an willingness to transform oneself as an initial starting point and as the ultimate ideal. But this agenda of self-transformation has been poorly articulated in the discourse of modernity as it has been preoccupied with the "technology of power" and has been least interested in developing the "technology of the self."¹³ Indeed, the very idea of discourse has been constructed narrowly in modernist regime in terms of political significance of utterances, which has not taken into account the spiritual dimension in the work of self, culture, and society and the emancipatory project of value-seeking and culture as a perennial quest for meaning, which has the potential to criticize and transform power, not merely helplessly reproduce it.¹⁴ This political construction of the very idea of discourse had its most deleterious effect in our comprehension of morals and the practice of education. In fact, in the politically constructed world of discourse, morality itself was been constructed politically where "the purpose of moral practices is to secure and maintain for men mutually advantageous social arrangements" and "the content of 'morality' is a product of the requirements

of the 'polis'"¹⁵. As one commentator tells us "In none of the accounts of morality belonging to this tradition are the needs, interest, and desires whose satisfaction is at issue themselves characterized as specifically 'moral' needs, interests or desires. That is to say, we don't begin with any moral discrimination concerning them."¹⁶ In fact, such a politically constructed discourse not only removes morality from the field of modernity but also removes the "inner life from the sphere of the moral."¹⁷

This banishment of the inner life has nowhere been more total than in the practice of modern education where the object has been solely to provide skills and rational frames of world making to the apprentices rather than develop their inner life and enable them to grow spiritually as they learn how to master the world through "knowledge and human interests." In fact, the discursive field of modernity has conceptualized knowledge only in terms of power and has systematically denigrated and eroded the essential relationship between knowledge and love, knowledge and *Bhakti*. As contemporary transformations challenge us to locate our disciplines in a wider context and conceptualize our areas of study as discursive fields, these processes also challenge us to broaden our idea of discourse by breaking away from its political essentialism and incorporating the transformative strivings in the work of self and culture, and the spiritual praxis which embodies them.¹⁸

The present paper looks into this question of discursive transformation by a close examination of the practice and challenge of moral education in our contemporary world. The paper seeks to argue that we need to go beyond the familiar categories of technique and polis and institutions of state in order to genuinely address the question of moral education in the present day world of science and technology where rationality seems to be the unquestioned foundation of not only science but also the state. But this more specific question of moral education is addressed only after a long discussion on methodological issues in the study of a discursive field. Since the seminar is interested in both the methodological and substantive issues, this paper addresses both of these, though pursuing these two themes simultaneously in the same space might lead to the lack of coherence and thematic unity in this project.

Conceptualizing An Area of Study as a Discursive Field: Methodological Issues

When we look at our objects of study and units of analysis as part of a discursive field it requires of us some shifts in our method of study. In making sense of our object of study we are more interested in variables which can explain it causally as a product rather than the processes which characterize its nature as well as its un-going un-foldment. Our usual method of study is one of model-testing, based upon deductive theories in our conceptual repertoires. We are rarely interested in describing the processes at work in our study of the phenomenon at hand. But conceptualizing an area of study as a discursive field requires of us to pay more attention to the processes at work, describe them, and build contextual and ecological explanations based upon such descriptions.

Among the contemporary thinkers Michel Foucault,¹⁹ to whom we owe the notions of "discursive field" and "discursive formation," has been more insistent in his emphasis on description in the study of a discursive field. For Foucault, what defines a discursive field is not any single or homogeneous proposition about truth rather than the persistence of a theme. This persistence is not simply a synchronic equilibrium of elements at a particular time, it is also a movemental persistence where a focal theme persists in its continuous flow and widening of horizons. Foucault challenges us to go beyond the either / or construction of a discursive field. For him, an analysis of the discursive field "would not try to isolate small islands of coherence in order to describe their internal structure; it would not try to suspect and reveal latent conflicts; it would study forms of division"²⁰. In dealing with the thematic persistence of a discursive field, for Foucault, "One is confronted with concepts that differ in structure and in the rules governing their use, which ignore or exclude one another, and which cannot enter the union of a logical structure.. [in the discursive field] One cannot discern a regularity, an order in their successive appearances, correlations in their simultaneity, assignable positions in a common space, linked and hierarchized transformations"²¹. In this context, the challenge in dealing

with a discursive formation is not simply to "reconstitute chains of inference" and "draw up tables of differences," but to "describe systems of dispersion".²²

For Foucault, the study of a discursive field or what he calls "discursive formation" must provide us a description of the system of dispersion at work. Foucault's plea for describing systems of dispersion of the pervasive themes of a discursive field can be better understood in the light of Paulo Friere's stress on describing and analyzing what he calls the "generative themes" of social and cultural life.²³ Friere urges us to investigate people's "generative themes" which ultimately would enhance the capacity for freedom on the part of ordinary men and women. For Friere, in understanding the "generative themes" of a particular culture and society, one is not engaged in a hypotheses-testing exercise. As Friere makes it clear: "The concept of a generative theme is neither an arbitrary invention nor a working hypotheses that has to be proved. If it were a hypothesis to be proved, the initial investigation would seek not to ascertain the nature of the theme, but rather the very existence or non-existence of themes themselves. In that event, before attempting to understand the theme in its richness, its significance, its plurality, its transformations..., and its historical composition, we would first have to verify whether or not it is an objective fact; only then could we proceed to apprehend it".²⁴ Such an exercise, rather, involves "description of the situation".²⁵ In the words of Friere: "When an individual is presented with a coded existential situation..., his tendency is to split that situation. In the process of decoding, this separation corresponds to the stage we call the 'description of the situation,' and facilitates the discovery of the interaction among the parts of the disjoined whole".²⁶ Friere further tells us: "...the process of searching for meaningful thematics should include a concern for the links between themes, a concern to pose these problems as problems, and a concern for their historical- cultural context".²⁷

But the investigation of people's thematic universe cannot stop only at the description of the themes and the discovery of their essential linkages; it must inaugurate "the dialogue of education as the practice of freedom".²⁸ "The methodology of that investigation must likewise be dialogical, providing the opportunity both to discover generative themes and to stimulate people's awareness in regard to these themes. Consistent with the liberating purpose of dialogical education, the object of investigation is not men..., but rather the thought-language men use to refer to reality, and their view of the world, which is the source of their generative themes".²⁹ The people whose thematic universe an analyst is trying to understand are not simply objects of investigation, but are "co-investigators".³⁰

In a dialogical investigation of "generative themes," "thematics which have come from the people return to them-not as contents to be deposited, but as problems to be solved".³¹ Such an exercise ultimately leads to cultural action for freedom on the part of both the analyst and the people. As Friere makes clear:

"The investigation of people's generative themes or meaningful thematics... constitutes the starting point for the process of action as cultural synthesis. Indeed, it is not really possible to divide the process into two separate steps: first, thematic investigation, and then action as cultural synthesis... In dialogical theory, this division cannot occur... Investigation-the first moment of action as cultural synthesis-establishes a climate of creativity which will tend to develop in the subsequent stages of action".³²

Description As Choice

Foucault's insistence on describing systems of dispersion in our study of a discursive field is an instance of the contemporary move away from deductive theorization and a move towards humane description and narrative.³³ This turn is also visible in the hard and the dismal science of economics. Here the work of Amartya Sen³⁴ who laments the victimage of descriptive economics under the imperialism of prescriptive and predictive economics can provide us an illuminating starting point. For Sen, description is a matter of choice, indeed a matter of committed choice. In his essay "Description

as Choice," Sen comments: "Philosophical discussions in the social sciences have tended to concentrate on prescriptive and predictive exercises, and as a consequence, the methodological issues involved in description have remained largely unexplored".³⁵ For Sen, "...description can be characterized as choosing from the set of possibly true statements or a subset on grounds of their relevance".³⁶ Sen further tells us: "...description can be motivated by predictive interest or prescriptive interest, but it may also have other motivations, and to confine attention only to predictive interest impoverishes the traditions of descriptive economics".³⁷ Sen shows the need for a descriptive method on the part of the economists who are usually interested in statistical profiles and in an aggregate picture. But Sen argues that even in such areas as the study of poverty, description of human necessities is a must in order that we can have adequate understanding of the predicament of poverty from the vantage point of human experience. Sen writes: "...the measurement of poverty must be seen as an exercise of description assessing the predicament of people in terms of prevailing standards of necessities".³⁸ According to Sen, "description of 'necessities' may be far from ambiguous. But the presence of ambiguity in a description does not make it a prescriptive act only one of ambiguous description".³⁹

Sen's plea for description is a part of his plea for having a disaggregated view of the human condition rather than simply remaining satisfied with the totalizing portrait of an aggregate picture. Sen makes us sensitive to the difference between statistical aggregation and descriptive disaggregation in his studies on famine and hunger. For Sen, the predicament of hunger could be looked at in terms of two approaches--the food availability approach and the entitlement approach. While the former is preoccupied with aggregate food amount available to a particular society or community, the latter gives primary importance to the "entitlement" condition of particular individuals and families. The entitlement approach seeks to explore who have entitlement over food and who do not have and also aims at describing their actual predicament in a society whose total food availability might be enormous. Sen's following arguments on the challenge of description vis-a-vis the study of hunger and public action require a detailed quotation:

"One of the central differences between the availability approach and the entitlement approach is the necessarily disaggregative nature of the later, in contrast with the inherently aggregative picture, presented by the former. While it is possible to calculate how much food a country can command, and while such aggregative calculations of 'total food entitlement' for the economy as a whole may have some analytical value as one of the constituent elements in understanding the food situation affecting a particular economy, the idea of entitlement applies ultimately to particular individuals and families.in analyzing famines and hunger, it is often important to make a more disaggregative view of the economy than one might get from standard class analysis. Since the particular reference of entitlement analysis is to families and persons, any aggregation in analyzing movements of analysis has to be based on identifying similarities of circumstances that make such aggregation viable and useful.... The skill of entitlement analysis would lie in being able to make use of these advantages of aggregation in understanding in a tractable way the influences affecting the fortunes of persons and families, without losing sight of the fact that it is the families and their members to whom entitlement analysis must ultimately relate".⁴⁰

Commitment to Human Freedom

VIRRAM SARABHAI LIBRARY
 ANJAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT
 VASTRAPUR, AHMEDABAD-380008

Yes, ultimately are the particular individuals and families whose predicament has to be described! But is description the end all and be all of analysis? What happens after the description of the human condition? Do the students of the human condition who believe in "description as choice" have any stake beyond description? In the kind of descriptive method proposed by Amartya Sen, description as a methodological strategy has to be part of a broader struggle for the enhancement of people's capacities and capabilities. If human beings do not have the basic capacities to survive with dignity and realize their divine potentialities, then the challenge for descriptive analysis is to accept

human freedom and basic capability as a matter of value. It is a value to which the students of the human condition with a descriptive method must be committed. Reformulating the argument of Sen for our purpose here, we can say that description as a method must accept "entitlement of people and the 'capabilities' these entitlement generate" as a matter of value.⁴¹ Here it is essential to note Sen's reflection on freedom, his articulation of the linkage between food and freedom and his distinction between negative and positive freedom. Sen looks at individual freedom as a matter of social commitment⁴² and writes: "The capability to function is the thing that comes closest to the notion of positive freedom, and if freedom is valued then capability itself can serve as an object of value and moral importance".⁴³ Thus, for Sen, description as a methodological choice ought to be linked with a concern for human capabilities and the pursuit of positive freedom as a matter of value.

But what is the basis of value in our method of study? Is commitment to a value possible or, in fact, should it ever be our ideal? The question of value in the social sciences has been a matter of debate for the last two hundred years and since then much water has flown down the river. In what way can we cultivate a commitment to values and what kind of values these ought to be? Before we attempt a provisional answer to this very complex question, it must be stressed that the students of the human condition with a descriptive method have often shied away from the question of commitment to values. Here anthropologist Clifford Geertz's work is a case in point. Geertz had also challenged us for a "thick description"⁴⁴ of the human condition, but in majority of his work Geertz seems to be hibernating inside the beautiful world of rituals and symbols without any sensitivity to victimize and human suffering. Geertz provides us a "thick description" of the Balinese cockfight, but where are the human beings who are sacrificed as cocks in the Balinese Negara, in the theater state of Bali? But it must be noted that in his recent work Geertz, the master of "thick description," seems to be coming out of his phase of "symbolic involution"⁴⁵ and pleading for certain readjustment in our rhetorical habits. He also urges us to have an "imaginative entry...into an alien turn of mind" in order to cope with the challenge of diversity, characteristic of our times.⁴⁶ Geertz is also pleading for resisting temptation to quick judgments and cultivating a habit for "capacious" seeing. Thus in his recent work, Geertz proposes some broad frame of mind to be tied to thick description. Even though this might not be a vocal commitment to human capabilities, this is certainly a commitment to human imagination. As Clifford Geertz challenges us: "Imagining difference... remains a science of which we all have need".⁴⁷

To come back to our question of value vis-a-vis description as a methodological strategy, the key question is what kind of value? What is and what ought to be our basis of valuation? Here I propose a very simple framework. Those forces and processes which enhance and are capable of enhancing the forces of life on Earth are objects of positive valuation while those forces and processes which destroy the forces of life on earth have to be condemned. Celebration of life can be a source of ultimate values which can help us go beyond the limits of extreme cultural relativism. Cultural relativism has use in its own context especially when it has played a vital role in fighting bigotry and intolerance in the traditional and the modern world, but there is also the need for some commitment to human values as values beyond their specific cultural manifestation. Cultivation of a universal value in the spirit and consciousness is possible. For Jurgen Habermas⁴⁸, with the work of what he calls "discourse ethics," it is possible to go beyond the coloration of a particular form of life and to look at the question of justice and ethics from a universal point of view. In the words of Habermas: "Under the unrelenting moralizing gaze of the participant in discourse,...familiar institutions can be transformed into many instances of problematic justice".⁴⁹ Bringing Amartya Sen and Jurgen Habermas together for the purpose of our reflection here, we might say that description of the human condition and deep reflection on our local conventions based upon these descriptions and as embodied in the practice of our "discourse ethics" would enable us to look at human values beyond particular cultural constructions and accept human life as a sacred value in itself. Considered from this point of view, the question of commitment is not the sole prerogative of grand theories or meta-narratives. Description has its own kind of commitment built into our method and, in fact, is a source of critical consciousness in the contemporary times.

Trigonometry of Creativity: Towards An Ecological Explanation

Thus what we are witnessing in the work of Michael Foucault, Amartya Sen and Paulo Friere is a generalized turn away from systems and theories and a movement towards description. While description has to be at the centre of our methodological praxis, we cannot lose sight of the two other important dimensions of our methodological life: observation and explanation. Observation, description and explanation constitute the trigonometry of creativity as it relates to our practice as students of the human condition. As regards observation, we have to sharpen our common sense of seeing and hearing and transform our observation into an ability to see things beneath the surface and to see things in their inherent interconnectedness. Explanation is also a challenge and our focus on description cannot shy away from the responsibility of providing explanation of the phenomenon under study. But the key question here is what kind of explanation should we be engaged in? Should it be a causal explanation or an ecological explanation? Cause and effect are still at work even in our times and we cannot dismiss them. But should we explain them in terms of first principles? Should we explain the subject under study in terms of a deterministic causal framework? The question of succession and a particular construction of a uni-directional time is central to our causal explanation. But in our preoccupation with succession or with successive stages, we lose sight of the process of simultaneity constituting the reality at hand. Especially in our times, as human geographers David Harvey and Edward Soja have told us, time is being supplanted by space as the fundamental constituent element of our consciousness and society.⁵⁰ In this context, our explanatory framework must be sensitive to the total context in which transformation is taking place; it must also be sensitive to the process of simultaneity besides the process of succession.

The challenge for explanation in our times requires us not to be preoccupied with definite or conclusive explanations, but to explain process and reality in an ecological context and in a mode of probability. Probability calls for a flexibility of mind. In his provocative paper--"Einstein, Renoir, and Greely: Some Thought About Evidence in Sociology"--, sociologist Stanley Lieberman tells us about the significance of the probabilistic mode of explanation and theoretical engagement.⁵¹ For Lieberman, there is an "elective affinity" between a correct description of social life and a probabilistic mode of explanation. As Lieberman tells us: "The first step is to recognize that we are essentially dealing with a probabilistic world and that the deterministic perspective in which most sociological theories are couched and which underlies the notion of a critical test is more than unrealistic, it is inappropriate. If theories are posed in probabilistic terms i.e. specifying that a given set of conditions will alter the likelihood of a given outcome, not only will the reality of social life be correctly described, but we will also be freed from assuming that negative evidence auto-matically means that a theory is wrong".⁵² In studying any phenomenon and trying to specify its causes, Lieberman urges us to understand that "it is one matter to conclude that the data support a given theory; it is another matter to conclude that with these data we are confident enough about our explanation to rule out alternative interpretations".⁵³

For Lieberman, "Explaining an event is very different from evaluating or testing a theory.... It means describing the most likely processes that could have led to a given outcome".⁵⁴ In this way, "A probabilistic perspective is both liberating and more demanding. It is liberating because deviations are not automatically grounds for rejecting a theory...In this sense, it should make theorists data friendly....On the other hand, such a perspective is more demanding because tests per se are inconclusive for accepting or rejecting theory".⁵⁵ So, Lieberman tells us that "a more realistic view of our subject matter will result if we adopt a probabilistic view of both theory and evidence and if we use a probabilistic perspective to link them".⁵⁶

The same argument is also made by Ramakrishna Mukherjee in his agenda of "inductive sociology".⁵⁷ For Mukherjee, "Even though a phenomenon may be regarded as an accomplished fact, several relevant but contradictory 'explanations' are now clearly available with the continual accumulation of knowledge on the contextual reality to answer 'how' and 'why' the phenomenon had emerged, disappeared or assumed a new form (and / or content) in the given place-time bound situation. The 'explanations' are thus turned into 'alternatives' and task becomes not a mere

explanation but the search for and the diagnosis of the best possible explanation at the existing stage of knowledge".⁵⁸

Thus a phenomenon can also be explained in a probabilistic manner by means of description of the ecology where it occurs. As one recent insightful commentator tells us: "An ecological constructionism thus fits with and is informed by....a contextual logic".⁵⁹ What I call ecological explanation is very similar to what Frederick Steir has recently called "ecological constructionism" and let us hear Steir in details:

"When the observer is placed within her or his inquiry, we have a beginning for a reflexive methodology for research. In attempting to hear their voices in our stories, and to provide for the mutualness so necessary to contextualize our research...we take seriously the idea of ecology...I mean ecology here in Bateson's sense, of a 'context' constituted by a fitting together of ideas....I have proposed that we understand the various mirrorings involved in locating the researcher in such an ecosystem. It is this premise that allows the idea of a co-construction to be doubly relevant, in that both the relational processes of the researchers, as well as the reciprocator / researcher interaction are 'understandables' that allow for our claim to emerge".⁶⁰

Description of the total ecological context unlocks another door of creativity not only for the analyst but also for the reader and the listener. A researcher provides us a probabilistic explanation of the genealogy and the dynamics of the reality at hand based upon the description of the ecology of the object of study. But since this kind of explanation is based upon description--description of the ecology and habitat of the phenomenon under study--the reader or the listener is also able to see how far the explanation holds ground, especially viewed in the light of the description offered. The analyst offers an approximate explanation of a process and a reality out of a bundle of equally possible explanations and the reader or the listener is free to choose the one that is the most convincing. On the other hand, a commitment to "discourse ethics" and critical rationality on the part of the reader or the listener helps to rescue this kind of flexibility of mind and method from degenerating into narcissistic arbitrariness and methodological solipsism. Thus description of the human condition and an ecological explanation based upon this has a potential to engage all of us in a trigonometry of creativity and widen the horizon of our familiar universe of discourse.

Studying Educational Practice as Part of a Discursive Field: The Challenge of Moral Education

The method described above can be applied in the research of education as an area of study. In the study of issues in education we can map the discursive field which constitutes the reality at hand. But the study of educational practices requires us to be sensitive to the visible actors and institutions which are important in this discursive space as both subjects and objects, and not simply be confined to the familiar and determinant institutions of state and industry. Here it must be noted that it is the State which has been the key actor in modern educational discourse and practice. State has had a stake in imparting students technical skills and the rational world view which is the religion of modernity. Modern education has provided students a technological interpretation of the human condition where technique is thought of as a guide to both theory and practice. In ancient science and philosophy, praxis and poesis were parts of the same meditation of life, but the agenda of modern education is built upon their artificial divorce. "This divorce has been made possible by the one-sided accentuation of technical rationality and a complete disregard for the question of ethics and morality".⁶¹ As Habermas tells us:

"While in classical Natural Law the norms of moral and just action are equally oriented in their content towards the good-and that means the virtuous life of citizens-

the formal law of the modern age is divested of the catalogues of duties in the material order of life, whether of a city or of a social class. Instead, it allows a neutral sphere of personal choice in which every citizen, as a private person, can egoistically follow goals of maximizing his own ends."⁶²

At the same time, what is to be noted here is that while State and industry have been more interested in technical education people's practices and communities have kept alive the traditions of moral education through institutions like the church. Thus study of moral education as an issue in education requires us to go beyond the state-centric discourse of education and pay more attention to the categories of culture and religion and the spiritual urge which is their ultimate identity.⁶³ As we are interested not solely in making a case for educational practice as a discursive field but also in widening our universe of discourse in order to establish a "good society" here on earth, the case of moral education as a substantive issue in the study of educational practice raises uncomfortable questions to the statist managers of education who, after all that has happened to the house of reason in modern West, still proceed with an apriori notion that educational institutions must propound irreligious and anti-religious rationalistic secularism as a positive value and religion as a negative value in life.⁶⁴

A discussion on moral education has another contemporary significance. This relates to the need for a moral point of view on the part of the actors that the rise of complex systems, characterized by the domination of the professionals, requires. The modern educational institutions provide us training in skills and expert knowledge that value a lot in society. But specialized knowledge is also a source of power and privilege and educational institutions ought to create a sense of responsibility and morality in those who gain professional expertise so that knowledge gained becomes a positive force in the enhancement of life in society rather than a source of invidious distinction, oppression and inequality.⁶⁵

But when educational institutions in modern society have cared to teach values to their practitioners they have not gone beyond teaching the obvious that morals are relative to cultures and societies.⁶⁶ But it was Pritrin Sorokin who had argued half a century ago that extreme relativization of morals is a bane of modernity.⁶⁷ In this context it has to be noted that while moral education must teach us respect for each other's cultures as existential embodiments of some universal principles of life it has to do much more than this. Indeed, moral education ought to help us discover truth by experimenting with Truth rather than merely enunciate the liberal agenda of radical relativism, since as Thomas Pantham argues, modern relativism is nothing but a mirror image of imperialist universalism.⁶⁸ Any contemporary discussion on the agenda of moral education cannot lose sight of this fact. In fact, for Pantham, at present there is a need for a post-relativist framework of conceptualizing human condition and engaging in human emancipation. Those of us who are genuinely interested in moral education can be enriched by Pantham's discussion that a post-relativist framework of conceptualization and emancipation is available in Gandhi's agenda of *swaraj* through *satyagraha*. In the words of Pantham:

"The satyagrahis regard their initial truth-claims as well as those of their opponents or oppressors to be relativistic. They then go through a rigorous discipline of hermeneutically testing the truths of the rival claims. The discipline of satyagraha includes hermeneutical and dialogic interpretations of the competing truth-claims and a set of actions based on the refusal to do harm even to one's opponents. These actions include self-purification and self-suffering, the vow of ahimsa, showing love and charity or doing good to the opponents, etc. In this way, for the satyagrahi, truth-seeking is not a mere attempt to secure a mirror copy of some out-there object. The attempt is rather to transgress the relativity of their initial truths as well as that of their opponents and thereby to move on to a postrelativist plane of truth. In this transgressive move from relativism, there is no submersion of the individuality of the

satyagrahi. It is also not a passive or quietest stance. It is rather a hermeneutical move."⁶⁹

For Pantham, "unlike the cultural relativists who assert and cling to the radical or essential separateness or otherness of the to-be-colonized Other from the ethnocentric-imperialist self, Gandhi bases his emancipatory struggle of satyagraha on a post-liberal/post-relativist conception of the human "self," namely, a self that is hermeneutically implicated with other selves".⁷⁰ Moral education must help us discover and develop this hermeneutically implicated self in us. In another context, Indian philosopher G.C. Pande has written: "It is only a self which is conscious of its ideal universality that can distinguish value from appetites, pleasures, and selfish interests and can become the moral subject. It is the notion of the ideal self which is the source of the moral law on which social unity and cohesion depend".⁷¹ Moral education must lead to the work of this self in our discourse and practice--what sociologist Anthony Giddens has recently called "the reflexive mobilization of the self".⁷²

In spearheading such an agenda of moral education around the project of an "ideal self" we can again build upon Gandhi's experiments with Truth. For Gandhi, the self is characterized not only by the political and economic dimension but also by the *dharmic* and *satyagrahic* dimension, characterized by its adherence or "attachment" to *dharma* or *satya-ahimsa*. For Gandhi, "The highest moral law is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind...Our desires and motives may be divided into two....."⁷³

By Way of Conclusion

An inquiry into the challenge of moral education in the contemporary times shows us the need to widen our universe of discourse. It urges us to go beyond the institutions of state and industry and pay close attention to the work and imagination of self, culture, and communities. It also shows us the inadequacy of the modernist discourse to grapple with the problem of moral education, what to speak of finding a solution. The predicament and challenge of moral education in modern societies shows us the inadequacies in confining ourselves to familiar institutions of education.

The paper has pursued two related themes in its engagement--the question of the nature of areas of study as well as the problem of moral education. In case of the first issue the paper has argued that we need to look at our areas of study as discursive fields. But reflection on the predicament of modern disciplines and the problem of moral education shows that our notion of discursive field is in need of a spiritual transformation. And in this reflective engagement, self-transformation holds the key to the building of a good knowledge-base and a "good society."⁷⁴

Notes and References Cited

1. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," in R.G. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1991).
2. Ananta Giri, "Units of Analysis and the Field of Study: Anthropological Encounter with the Postindustrial Society." *The Eastern Anthropologist* 45(3): 205-214, 1992.
3. Ludwig Wittgenstein quoted in Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 302.
4. Clifford Geertz, "Towards an Ethnography of Modern Thought," in Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (NY: Basic Books, 1983).
5. Trouillot (*op. cit.*, 1991).
6. *Ibid.* p.30.
7. *Ibid.* p.17.
8. Giri, (*op. cit.* 1992).
9. Please see, Andre Beteille, "The Concept of Tribe with Special Reference to India", *European Journal of Sociology* xxvii(2), 297-19, 1986.
10. Clifford Geertz, "Blurred Genres: Refiguration in Social Thought", *American Scholar*, 1980.
11. See Rajni Kothari, *Transformation and Survival* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1988)
12. See J. N. Mohanty, *Transcendental Phenomenology* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p.46.
13. In his critical encounter with Michel Foucault Jurgen Habermas makes this distinction between "technology of power" and "technology of self." Please see, Jurgen Habermas, *Philosophical Discourses of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).
14. See G C Pande, *The Meaning and Process of Culture as Philosophy of History* (Allahabad: Raka Prakashan, 1989).
15. John T. Edelman, *An Audience for Moral Philosophy?* (London: Macmillan), p.9.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.* p.55.
18. On the idea of spiritual praxis, please see G C Pande, "Two Dimensions of Religion: Reflections Based on Indian Spiritual Experience and Philosophical Traditions," in Eliot Deutch, (ed.), *Culture and Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991).
19. Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1972).
20. *Ibid.* p.37.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (Penguin, 1972).
24. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
33. Please see, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
34. Amartya Sen, "Description as Choice," in Amartya Sen, *Choice, Welfare and Measurement* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).
35. *Ibid.*, p. 432.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 433.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 447.
38. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Delhi: Oxford U.P), p. 2.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
40. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 30-31.
41. Amartya Sen, *Resources, Values and Development* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 497.
42. Amartya Sen, "Individual Freedom as Social Commitment." *India International Center Quarterly* Spring: 101-115.1990
43. Sen (*op. cit.*, 1984), p. 316.

44. Clifford Geertz, *In Pursuit of Culture* (NY: Basic Books, 1973)
45. Ananta Giri, "Some Critical Notes on the Symbolic Anthropology of Clifford Geertz." Department of Anthropology, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Term paper, 1987.
46. Clifford Geertz. "The Uses of Diversity," *Michigan Quarterly Review* Winter 1986, p.118.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
48. Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. (Cambridge: Policy Press: 1990)
49. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
50. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989) and Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).
51. Stanley Lieberson, "Einstein, Renoir, and Greeley: Some Thought About Evidence in Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 57: 1-15, 1992.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
57. Ramakrishna Mukherjee, *What will It Be: Explorations in Inductive Sociology* (Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1979), p. 2.
58. *Ibid.*
59. Frederick Steir, "Flexibility and Methodology: An Ecological Constructionism," in Frederick Steir, (ed.), *Research and Reflexivity* (London: Sage, 1991), pp. 163-185, p. 181.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
61. Ananta Giri, "Quality of Life and the Method of Science: A Contemporary Critique," *Gandhi Marg* 14(4):618-631, 1992, p. 627.
62. Jurgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 84.
63. Please see G. C. Pande (*op. cit.* 1989 and 1991).
64. Ananta Giri, "Secularism and the Need for Religious Values: Widening Our Universe of
65. I have discussed this at great length in my paper "Universities and the Horizons of the Future." Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad: Working Paper, 1993.
66. See Robert Bellah, et al, *The Good Society* (NY: Alfred A Knof, 1991).
67. Pritrim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*.
68. Thomas Pantham, "Postrelativism in Emancipatory Thought: Gandhi's Swaraj and Satyagraha," forthcoming in Ashish Nandy and D.L. Seth, (ed.) *The Multiverse of Democracy: Festschrift for Rajni Kothari* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, in press).
69. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
71. G. C. Pande, "The Nature of Social Categories," in Ravinder Kumar, (ed.), *Philosophical Categories and Social Reality*, Delhi, 1982.
72. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
73. Gandhi quoted in Pantham (*op. cit.* 1989), p. 19.
74. Please see, Robert Bellah *et al.*, (*op. cit.*, 1991)

PURCHASED
APPROVAL
GRATIS/EXCHANGE
PRICE
ACC NO.
VIKRAM SARABHAI LIBRARY
I. I. M., AHMEDABAD