

**Report for Workshop 2: Indian English Studies in a Changing World
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This report is in two parts. The first offers a session-by-session account of discussions. Each session was focused on a theme and a limited number of questions. Though a few brief presentations were invited in most of the sessions, the emphasis throughout was on free-flowing discussion of the session questions. The workshop was chaired throughout by Richard Allen; Suman Gupta had principal responsibility for the record of the sessions. The main points made by discussants (identified by their initials) in each session is summarised below. The second part presents some general remarks on the proceedings of the two workshops together which seem significant to the authors of this report.

Part I: Session-by-Session Description of Discussions

Session 1: Debate

Session question:

‘The academic rationale of English Studies’ vs. ‘the instrumental drives of English Studies (the economic and developmental rationale)’: Can and do these converge?

Discussants: SA (Shalini Advani), RA (Richard Allen), MA (Mohammad Asaduddin), TapB (Tapan Basu), SB (Saugata Bhaduri), DC (Debanjan Chakrabarti), SubC (Subarno Chattarji), SupC (Supriya Chaudhuri), AG (Anuradha Ghosh), AH (Anjum Hasan), MK (Mini Krishnan), RMP (Rohini Mokashi-Punekar), MP (Makarand Paranjape), GJV (G.J.V. Prasad), MS (Mukti Sanyal)

AH, writer-in-residence at Jamia, made an opening presentation for the workshop from the perspective of a poet and novelist in English. Writing in English within the multilingual context of India, she observed, involves negotiating with questions at two levels: at an individual level, about the influence of the author’s first language (i.e. the vernacular mother tongue) on her English usage; and, at a general level, on whether the English language is appropriate for engaging with multilingual Indian culture. Questions along the latter line usually come with a “moral charge”. They presume a false distinction between writers in English and in Indian languages on the basis that the latter are rooted in the Indian context and enable more “authentic” literary representations/experiences. AH maintained that in India creative writing in English, as in any Indian language, is “constitutive of the world written

about”. The question that needs to be addressed is how the multilingual environment enriches creative writing in all languages, including in English.

The discussion on the session question was introduced by RA. His observations concerned primarily the literary dimension of English Studies, which he described as an academic pursuit (addressing literature from an analytical distance or, so to speak, from “outside”) that is distinct from a keen reader’s interest in literature (engaging with literary texts empathetically or, so to speak, from “inside”). The institutionalization of the former as a higher education (HE hereafter) academic discipline during the 19th century, in Britain and in colonial contexts like India, had both instrumental and scholarly drivers (relevant quotations were given to illustrate this). Through various stages of reconceptualising the thrust of literary studies in the early to mid- 20th century (in liberal humanist, Practical and New Critical paradigms), an autonomous and self-sustaining rationale for literary text-centred studies in English was constructed. Thus such study came to be regarded as valuable in-itself, irrespective of social effects and agendas. In the latter part of the 20th century, with increasing investment in Literary Theory and identity politics, the social effects and ideological underpinnings of literary study were foregrounded. This drew renewed, albeit interrogative, attention to the instrumental agendas thereof. More recently, a top-down instrumentalist agenda has been brought to bear upon HE literary studies in English through education policies and funding practices. This has largely enjoined attention to such factors as employability of English Studies graduates and disciplinary contribution to economic productivity (with the UK context in view, the English Subject Centre’s reports on employability were cited).

The discussion that followed largely went against the grain of the literary confines of RA’s remarks. In a general way, the discussion turned to the place of the English language, and consequently the imperatives of English language acquisition and proficiency, in India. The complex bearing of these on HE English Studies particularly and educational provision generally were noted. Instead of placing the putative academic / instrumental divide of the session question *within* the field of literary English Studies (as RA had), the discussants articulated various positions around two received notions relevant to English Studies in Indian HE. These are: on the one hand, that instrumentalist drives are strongly associated with the need to enhance English language acquisition and proficiency; on the other hand, that academic rationales have centred intellectual pursuits (primarily literary) which presume English language proficiency and neglect to provide the means for proficiency enhancement. That the literary dimension of English Studies was called upon to exemplify the latter was due to the backgrounds of the discussants (in this session all were either from a literary studies or an ELT background); much the same argument about the linguistics dimension of English Studies surfaced in Session 5 (involving also discussants from a linguistics background – see below). Several discussants questioned and sought to complicate the binaristic and polarized characterization of “academic rationale” and “instrumental agenda” in the session question.

SupC observed that the instrumentality of English proficiency has been urged not only from within India but also from without, with global markets in view. She recalled Susan Sontag’s essay “The World as India” (2003) and its observations on call-centre workers to characterize that extrinsic push. Under the circumstances, she argued, English Studies could

no longer subscribe to an academic view of English as primarily a language of creativity and criticism, and nor to a purely instrumental view of English as serving functional market-oriented ends. A balance needs to be struck. To do so, the purposes of a rounded education at different levels need to be considered. HE English Studies has to reflect the multiple dimensions of English usage.

SubC felt that the session question should be understood according to the anxieties about English Studies currently felt in India. He queried whether these anxieties were peculiar to the Humanities. There are reasonable ideological qualms about the purely instrumental view of English (as described by SupC) in academic circles, along with a powerful top-down (from government and institutional authorities) and bottom-up (from students) push to make HE compliant with such a view. Despite those qualms, however, no plausible alternative to ready compliance is available. In the vein of expressing qualms, TapB wondered whether HE institutions (universities) should be regarded as the appropriate site for rendering students market-worthy – i.e., whether HE English Studies departments are the appropriate site for nurturing serviceable English language skills. He also observed that those employed in such departments are often ill-equipped to teach such skills. Several discussants took issue with the practical implications of TapB's sceptical question. MA spoke of the curriculum reform in his university (Jamia Milia), at the behest of the Vice Chancellor, to incorporate greater attention to English language skills. He reported that it had been successfully implemented by (mainly literature) teachers who had received no specific training for that purpose. MS felt that separating ELT from other aspects of English Studies, and therefore putting ELT outside current English Departments, would be counterproductive for such departments. Language skills have a crucial bearing on all aspects of English Studies, and teaching thereof needs to be integrated within English Studies departments. Besides, in current circumstances, if the latter do not do so their relevance will diminish. DC agreed that language skills have input inside as well as outside academia, noting that one of the reasons why the questions about English were so pressing was because of the demand for English in India and the fact that many wanting to study English were first generation readers/learners. GJV noted that demand for language proficiency has served HE English literary studies well in India in terms of recruitment, and averred that universities are responsible for meeting the undeniable demand for English proficiency.

Interrogation of the session question came from several participants. SB suggested that the terms of the question set up a “confrontational discourse”, whereas in practice instrumental and academic agendas overlap substantially. The terms have a particular resonance for English Studies not because they imply oppositional stances, but because of ambiguities in the term “English Studies”. The latter seems to be centred on knowledge of the English language, but in fact incorporates a larger domain of knowledge. Similarly, SA felt that the issue is not so much of instrumental and academic agendas *within* HE English Studies but related to the slippages between what she characterised as “English for life” and “English in HE”. The former is imbricated with issues of power and class mobility in India, which bear upon what the latter offers. SA also felt, and GJV agreed, that the session question limits the issue of instrumental drives in HE by focusing exclusively on English Studies. In fact, such instrumentality has increasingly and systematically been pushed upon all humanities and social science disciplines, in India and other countries. RMP, with her

experience of teaching at the IIT Gauhati in view, spoke of aligned instrumentalism in humanities and technological disciplines. MP observed that a distinction needs to be made between instrumentalism and managerialism. He could see persuasive academic rationales for universities to be more market-friendly and concerned with employment (therefore instrumentalist) than they have been, but felt that universities should not be overly management-led.

Several participants were concerned that superlative emphasis on English language proficiency at all levels, including at HE, has been detrimental to proficiency in other Indian languages. The discussion here took place in the context of figures given by SG that 75.2% of literate Indians describe themselves as monolingual, with the rest professing knowledge of two or more languages (Census India 2001). (By comparison, in UK, the least multilingual culture in Europe, 62% of UK residents described themselves as monolingual according to an EC Eurobarometer report of 2006.)

DC and SupC felt that though the demand for English language proficiency is great and catering to it necessary at all levels, this should not happen at the cost of other languages -- especially mother tongues. They felt that familiarity with the latter had been damaged already in India. MP made this point strongly: he maintained that the demand for English from below (from students) has grown as it has because, in his words, “we have created a self-defeating system which privileges English at the expense of Indian languages... a society dominated by elite consumers who wish to be catered to only in English”. He held the lack of investment in India’s multilingualism responsible. Taking a somewhat different view on the issue, MK argued that multilingual proficiency – including proficiency in English – is better served if teaching practices are not predicated on the notion that language is a skill for functional purposes. She felt that currently dominant skills-based or application-centred approaches to ELT had exacerbated deficiencies in language proficiency for both English and other Indian languages. Proficiency in two or more languages is enabled through literary study, she claimed, and particularly through engagement with literary translations. Taking a contrary view, DC observed that ELT in India has suffered from an excessive dependence on (literary) text-based resources, due to the conventional centring of literature in HE English Studies. This has proved to be prejudicial against first generation learners, and has restricted English to the upper classes which have conventionally cultivated literary interests. At the same time, more applied ELT methods have been recently developed and utilised unevenly in India, and have often been based on standards which are irrelevant to local needs. AG stated that the economic development models which have undergirded an instrumental view of English language proficiency in India have been metropolis-centred, and therefore of limited scope in that sense too.

Session 2: Employers and Employment

Session questions:

- (a) To what extent do employers, in sectors other than the academic, employ English Studies graduates?
- (b) From the employers’ perspective, are English Studies graduates suitable for such

employment?

(c) To what extent do employers provide facilities for job-specific training and development?

(d) Do employers feel that academic curricula and pedagogy in HE English Studies should be more responsive to career prospects? If so, how?

Discussants: TA (Thomas Abraham), SA (Shalini Advani), AG (Anuradha Ghosh), SG (Suman Gupta), RaK (Raman Kumar), MK (Mini Krishnan), MP (Makarand Paranjape)

This session consisted in three presentations with discussion after each: by TA (MD of Hachette India and formerly CEO of Penguin India) on the publishing sector, by SA (Director of Pathways School) on school education and teacher training, and by Raman Kumar (EXL Service) on the BPO sector.

TA outlined some of the salient features of the publishing sector, drawing upon his experience of managing the Indian divisions of international publishing firms. Publishing houses are businesses, he observed, with profit as the primary driver. However, such firms usually operate with certain flexibilities. Hachette India, for instance, works with an “overall-list perspective” which allows for some loss-making titles, and there is scope for editors to acquire completely passion-led books even within their overall commissioning brief of delivering a profitable list. English-language publishing firms became a significant sector (offering career options of choice for graduates) in India relatively recently, after the mid-1980s; the book market is segmented (between educational and trade or consumer publishing); recently the dip in book retailing has been a matter of note; publishing in non-print (electronic) formats is increasingly a direction which interests publishers. English Studies graduates are primarily employed in acquisitions and editing (broadly, editing), with a few in marketing and relatively rarely in other depts. A cursory survey TA had conducted on employment patterns in 8 Indian trade publishing firms (Penguin, Hachette, Random House, Harper, Pan Macmillan, Westland, Aleph, Zubaan) showed that 33 English graduates were employed in these – 24 in editing, 6 in marketing. The total number of editing staff in these firms is 71, and the total number of staff employed is 263. So, English graduates represent 13% of the total number of staff and 33% of the total staff in editing. Copyediting and proofreading are often done by contracted persons outside the firms, and English graduates figure significantly there -- so that, often, the typical English Studies graduate in publishing will have an “outsourced” position. With regard to the session questions TA had the following thoughts. For the first question: English Studies graduates often approach editing with unrealistic and idealistic aspirations (have “slight delusions of grandeur” in that they want to take up this career to reshape literature) which they have to be weaned off, and are (“uniquely”) lacking in business-orientation. English Studies was said to have “abrogated responsibility for [the development of] professional skills”, and graduates in the subject had “a marked absence of numeracy”. They sometimes too have shaky formal communication skills (in letter-writing, for instance), but that applies more to graduates from other disciplines. In general, these deficiencies can be quickly addressed as they acquire experience at work, but with publishing being, so to speak, a kindred field, English departments may want to look at a business refresher module for creative businesses within their course

frameworks. For the second question: English Studies programmes could offer options for skills sets which are necessary for employment; broaden the remit of literary studies to such areas as advertising, journalism, etc.; and convey, at some stage, a sense of the business environment. All this, whether we like it or not, in a context where English learning is seen as critical; indicatively, *Wordpower Made Easy* was Hachette's best-selling non-fiction title and had lasted in the top ten charts for over 20 years.

In the following discussion, MP probed the part played by contracted copyeditors and proof-readers. SG asked about the background of the kind of staff TA had spoken of: almost entirely from the metropolitan middle class, and graduates of elite institutions (Jadavpur University, Delhi University, etc.). SG also enquired about how this profile compared with that of Hindi-language publishing, of which TA had experience in Penguin India. TA reported that Penguin India's attempt to develop a Hindi-language list had been unsuccessful, and needed more rigorous market research than it had at the time. The Hindi market is, he felt, more segmented than the English one, with wide disparities between sales of, for instance, street-side pulp and ("highbrow") literary fiction – the latter sells less than English fiction generally. Editors who were employed to develop the Hindi list were from a similar background as for English ("more scholarly").

To clarify the factors which guide English school teacher training and appointments, SA outlined some of the current features of the discipline and of school students in India. Her observations were grounded in her experience of working for NCERT, managing schools, and her research into English school textbooks and teachers' attitudes. According to her, school teachers aspire to be and are largely regarded by students as "nurturing and enabling figures". English has conventionally been an upper-caste and -class preserve, which has been interrogated relatively recently in terms of postcolonial criticism. School instruction in English generally laid more emphasis on engaging texts than on communication. Teaching English has conventionally been regarded as suitable for women, and the teaching body is predominantly female; Dalits and lower castes have usually been absent from its number. However, the characteristics of the school student body is now changing: new types of students, from backgrounds where the cultural capital of English wasn't available, are entering education and expecting to become proficient in English and thereby find employment in the global market. Over the last two decades the needs of students have increasingly come to be defined by the market. In training and appointing school teachers of English cognizance of these developments is necessary. To make the transition from graduation to teaching, the emphasis is on teachers being able to move from literature-centred study towards broader communicative competence. The effective management of this transition through teacher training and appointments depends on understanding the purpose of education. In SA's definition: "Education is a means for young people to learn skills to earn their living and to live with dignity and contribute to making a better world". Some of the top skills in question are taught through English courses in schools, such as critical thinking, effective communication, etc. That doesn't mean that "long competence" in the subject area is disregarded. The training and appointment of teachers is designed to enable them to accommodate these demands. Since teacher training programmes are a discrete institutional area, these observations have little bearing on how HE English Studies

programmes are currently constituted – by and large graduates from the latter are as well adapted for teacher training programmes as from other disciplines.

AG and MP asked whether the school curriculum in English needed revision or reconsideration in view of ongoing developments. SA said that existing school programmes are structured according to pre-defined syllabi, which assumed a one-way flow from teacher to student. That is contrary to the reality of the learning process, which is centred on communication and interaction. So, the curriculum is adequate in some ways, i.e. to deliver a subject-defined programme; but in the broader sense that answers to the purpose of education, it isn't. English Studies are ordinarily thought of in terms of "competencies required by the market" on the one hand or as providing education which "enables students to earn their living and live in dignity" on the other, but these are not necessarily mutually exclusive. We should beware of a narrow understanding of competencies. In this context MK wondered whether she is correct in thinking that English teachers are often called upon to deliver "value education" and "life skills" classes, such as those required, for instance, by schools following the CBSE curriculum since the mid-2000s. SA confirmed that this was often the case; there is a widespread perception that by dint of their subject-specific interests English teachers are well-equipped to deal with these and other non-standard parts of the curriculum.

RaK drew upon his experience of working in and training personnel for EXL Service to outline how the BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) sector is structured in terms of employment. He observed that employment in this sector is often regarded as a fall-back option for graduates seeking jobs – this is true at entry level, though surviving in such employment calls for specific skills. In general, firms in the sector seek to move from BPO to BPM (Business Process Management), which involves not just providing an outsourced service as a vendor but forming business partnerships which may involve consulting, IT solutions, etc. Employment in the sector may be at the frontline, where call centres are located and workers have direct contact with clients of outsourcing businesses (providing the "voice"), or in the back office (which involves technical support, finance, personnel development, etc.). Workers in the former are remunerated more modestly than is often thought, have relatively insecure positions, and sometimes have to deal with unsavoury situations (complaints, "poor customer experience", etc.). The back office often gets less investment and consequently the quality of personnel suffers, but the back office offers greater job security. In moving from BPO to BPM, the back office gains more weight. English proficiency is more salient to the frontline than the back office. BPO firms provide extensive training for their workers, especially in the business aspects of the sector. English Studies graduates are generally well-equipped by their education to find employment in the sector, especially in the frontline where communication is key. The emphasis on literature in HE English Studies programmes also serves such graduates well, since a general cultural awareness of ordinarily Anglophone contexts facilitates direct communication. However, RK had some suggestions for HE English Studies programmes from this perspective. First, the latter could seek to deepen their students' cultural awareness by extending to interdisciplinary and popular cultural texts (such as lifestyle magazines, advertisements, etc.). Second, there could be more emphasis on linguistic proficiency in practical scenarios, such as letter-writing (some BPO firms have organised tie-ups with management institutes to teach such skills to

their workers). Questions posed to RK asked for clarification on what “poor customer experience” meant. RK gave examples and noted that managing a “good customer experience” is the BPO worker’s responsibility and a significant aspect of training.

Session 3: HE Policy Making and Management

Session questions:

- (a) What public interest role does English Studies have in relation to the Indian polity, social life and social development, from a public policy perspective?
- (b) What general provision is made at the level of policy to ensure academic independence and maximise public access to HE and academic knowledge?
- (c) What sorts of policies, if any, are currently implemented or contemplated which may have an effect on specifically English Studies scholarship and pedagogy?

Discussants: SupC (Supriya Chaudhuri), SG (Suman Gupta), ML (Malashri Lal), MP (Makarand Paranjape), GJV (G.J.V. Prasad)

ML addressed this session from the perspective of senior management at Delhi University (DU), where she has been involved in planning and implementing a significant restructuring of undergraduate programmes. As a professor of English literature she has a particular interest in the implications of that restructuring for English Studies in DU. The latter, she observed, is imminently going to face a “big change”. The restructuring is motivated by changes in the profile of students in DU and demands from students and from the market. Relevantly for English departments, of the current cohort of 500,000 students in DU 60% are from non-English medium schooling backgrounds. This is a marker (alongside others) which gestures in a general way towards the aspirations of current cohorts of students and market needs. It is widely felt by students, employers, policy-makers and other stakeholders in HE that the prevailing structure of academic programmes is not answering to these needs. It is therefore necessary to restructure undergraduate programmes towards more skills-based education for several constituencies of students, with a particular investment in bilingual proficiency (in English and Hindi), and a greater degree of interdisciplinary alignment in programme delivery. There were several other reasons for changing the undergraduate curriculum. To plan and operate such a restructuring, DU resolved on an internal decision-making mechanism (i.e. internal to the university) through a 61-member committee. The main “consultancy platform” were DU students, parents of students, teachers, citizens, community leaders, industry, school educators and others, almost 10,000 persons who were met at various forums, a key event being a symposium, “Redefining Education: Enabling the Young”. The resulting restructured undergraduate programme, to be introduced from the 2013-2014 academic year, would move from a 3-year to a 4-year period, with options of exit points and named qualifications at interims within the 4-year period. Of these 4 years, the first 2 would be devoted to 11 compulsory Foundation-level courses (of which one, relevantly for English Studies, is “Language, Literature, and Creativity”). These courses will be available across degree-programmes, and to deliver these different departments will need to

work in an aligned fashion (for instance, the English Department may need to align even with perceivably “distant” departments like Information Technology). Also, to deliver the Foundation courses, academics will need to be able to teach areas other than the discipline-specific (e.g. English literature teachers may need to be more flexible and teach language -- perhaps focussing on spoken English -- and creativity skills). Teachers increasingly also need to recognise that groups of students will more often contain students who have entered by passing a 90% cut off and students who have entered after passing a 40% cut off. That implies some retraining of existing academic staff and appointment of new staff. Discipline-centred courses will be offered in the first year and their number will increase in the later 3 years of the undergraduate programme for students who wish to pursue the full programme -- so, introducing Foundation courses and Application courses does not detract from attention to the discipline-specific study that has dominated HE thus far.

Immediately after ML, SupC spoke about the policy environment for Indian HE English Studies in more general and less institution-specific terms -- with her considerable experience of membership in government-level education policy think-tanks and consultation bodies in view. She cited the Right to Education Act (passed 2009, first drafted 2005) as the most significant policy document in the field of education to have appeared in recent years, confirming the right of every child to free and compulsory school education. It appeared alongside recommendations by “The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education” or Yashpal Committee (2009) and the reports of the National Knowledge Commission since 2005 -- especially the “Report to the Nation 2006-2009”, which made a strong recommendation for specifically teaching English from Class 1 of schools and onwards. However, the implications of these policy documents for pedagogy and curricula in HE for different disciplines, particularly for languages, has not been followed up. The almost “hyperactive” policy makers were faced by a “slow-moving” academic sector, and there has been a distinct slippage in expectations between policy makers and universities. This situation has been exacerbated by the larger environment. The politics of language in India has been divisive. In the course of the 1990s/2000s a significant number of states had discontinued English language teaching at primary levels in state schools -- most of these states are now engaged in backtracking from that policy, but are faced with diminished English proficiency already and a shortage of teachers. As a result there have been few significant attempts at developing policies with regard to English teaching at schools since the NCERT’s National Curriculum Framework for English (2005) and National Focus Group’s Position Paper to NCERT (2006); and none whatever for English Studies curricula at university level since the recommendations made by the Curriculum Development Committee to the UGC (2001). However, universities and language teachers have woken up to the need for change in English Studies curricula at HE and efforts at bringing this change about have been internal to institutions. The changes that are being attempted need to be embraced by the wider academic community. These are not being led by an over-arching policy, because there is none that has a direct bearing on HE English Studies. Existing over-arching education policies put a strong emphasis on interdisciplinarity and innovation.

Responses to these presentations were addressed either specifically to ML’s presentation or to both presentations together.

With ML's presentation in view, GJV observed that attempts to make one syllabus fit for a great diversity of students appear unrealistic. Instead of attempting this in a centralised and top-down fashion, the need to cater to that diversity seems to argue for greater decentralisation. In a federal structure like DU's (where undergraduate teaching is delivered in 77 colleges across the city), that would suggest more autonomy in curriculum setting for colleges to target particular constituencies of students. On a different note, GJV was concerned with what ML had described as a greater emphasis on "bilingualism". He wondered what bilingualism could mean in this context; bilingualism couldn't be understood as simply to do with English and Hindi or some indefinite other in the Indian context. This arguably needed to be thought through before syllabi were changed and programmes restructured. He felt that because of the policy vacuum that SupC had described, restructuring of programmes were being implemented too hastily within institutions – these appear responsive to social forces but are delinked from the contents and methods of academic disciplines themselves. As an academic discipline the parameters of English Studies had broadened rapidly over the last couple of decades, but the kind of broadening that is sought now is of a different nature – not to do with English Studies, but to do with the social imperatives of education. MP agreed that how a bilingual agenda would be implemented in ML's terms is unclear. But in a broader sense he felt that bilingualism was increasingly to be found "on the ground" with Hindi as the other language – indeed as the dominant language, constitutionally the official language, and spoken by a great majority. English can nevertheless be regarded as having a "special role" in the collaboration between languages. He felt that the kind of restructuring of DU programmes that ML had outlined, though much criticised and unpopular, is the way forward while policy-making "muddles along" and while institutions have to fend for themselves. It is an attempt at responding to a changing environment and accommodating to the "new world".

SG asked whether ML felt that the consultation procedure preceding the restructuring had been adequate. He also expressed some scepticism about the baseline research (i.e., the evidence gathering and analysis of what skills need addressing, how they should be addressed, what the effects of doing so would be on academia, etc.) that informed initiatives like the restructuring she had described. ML answered that the consultation that had taken place was robust in her view. She agreed that there might be paucities in baseline research, but felt that would develop with further investment. She reiterated the immediate need for such restructuring since there is evidence of a strong demand for it.

Session 4: Multilingualism and Translation

Session questions:

- (a) Is the popularity of English Studies and the interests/aspirations pinned on the English language proving detrimental to the study of other Indian languages and literatures?
- (b) What sorts of political and ideological subscriptions apply in contemplating the relation of English to other Indian languages, and are they addressed in English Studies pedagogy?

(c) To what extent does translation figure in English Studies and the study of other Indian languages, and should it become more centred?

Discussants: MA (Mohammad Asaduddin), SB (Saugata Bhaduri), SubC (Subarno Chattarji), SupC (Supriya Chaudhuri), AG (Anuradha Ghosh), SG (Suman Gupta), AH (Anjum Hasan), RK (Ruchi Kaushik), MK (Mini Krishnan), RM (Rama Matthew), MP (Makarand Paranjape), RMP (Rohini Mokashi-Punekar), MS (Mukti Sanyal), HT (Harish Trivedi), PT (Poonam Trivedi)

MK began the session by responding to the three session questions. She answered the first in the affirmative, but on the understanding that this wasn't particularly because of the promotion of English. It had to do with "faceless cultural reasons", such as: a dip in local rootedness, status and snobbery associated with all Indian languages, etc. However, according to MK, in the early decades after independence a casual and "comfortable bilingualism" largely prevailed, and language proficiency in both English and (even more) in mother tongues suffered particularly after the 1980s. MK associated this with moves to take language instruction away from literary studies (see the point she made in Session 1), marked particularly in such initiatives as the CBSE-ELT project 1989-1997 in collaboration with the British Council (this was funded by DfID and ODA, UK). Bilingualism, she felt, could be brought back by more literary study, and bringing students to texts in Indian languages and, particularly, translations into English. For the second question, according to MK the main considerations are: growth of regionalism and chauvinism; and, as far as education goes, increasing emphasis on identity-based studies. Given these circumstances, it is important to be aware of who produces texts and how texts travel – especially across languages and regions. More research into these is necessary; much of the research that appears at present is from monolingual cultures or has monolingual foci. Greater attention to translation might offer correctives. With regard to the third question, MK felt that translated texts are finding more space in HE English Studies than heretofore. However, the study of these often overlooks the fact that they are translated and treats them as original language texts. Greater awareness of translation should be imparted in the process of studying them. The social complexities and ideological negotiations involved in translating, especially into English, render such awareness particularly desirable. For example, the interest in questions of English and other languages is now driven more by caste issues rather than language group issues. As an editor of Oxford University Press MK has recently overseen the production of *The Oxford English Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing* (eds. Ravikumar and R Azhagarasan, 2012) – she reflected on this experience to exemplify her point. In that context, MK briefly outlined why Dalit ideologues (such as, recently, Kancha Ilaiyah and Chandra Bhan Prasad) have chosen to regard English as the language of opportunity and emancipation rather than major Indian vernaculars. Though the English language has been used by class and caste elites in India so that lower classes and castes could be disenfranchised and dispossessed, it still offers more scope for articulating political and economic aspirations than most major Indian languages do. Indian languages have been used to similar effect by elites, and with particularly deleterious effect on Dalits, in ways which appear strongly entrenched. Interlingual translations play a significant role in mediating between social realities and aspirations.

RMP and MP wondered whether the fact that texts in major Indian languages are predominantly translated into English and not across each other means that Indian literature is becoming more “monotonal”. The challenge to translators appears to be to “make language more disparate”. They were also concerned that classical Indian texts tend to be neglected in India, and often receive more scholarly attention in the West. MS and RM felt MK had misrepresented the CBSE-ELT project with the British Council. MS observed that it had not discouraged the use of translated texts in language teaching, quite the contrary. RM stated that the CBSE-ELT project has essentially shifted the emphasis from teaching language through literature toward teaching communication. Only a limited number of students, of privileged backgrounds, had been able to capitalise on the former; the shift towards centring communication was to embrace the greater majority who had been regarded as “low achievers” previously.

MA’s presentation in this session made a strong case for centring translation in English Studies and in the study of Indian literatures in other languages at HE level, with the conviction that “translation builds solidarities”. It seemed to him unarguable that Indian vernaculars have been suffering compared to English. In his university more students are recruited to the English than to the Hindi department (despite its location in Delhi), because they correctly estimate that their career prospects are enhanced with English. In his university, Jamia Millia, subject preferences in order were English, Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, Persian. Those opting for English opted for subjects like Social Work rather than another language, and there was generally a strong market demand for courses in Mass Communications. In brief, English seems to subsume student’s and public interests to a disproportionate degree. Even the most self-interrogative dimensions of English Studies, such as postcolonial studies, have actually been imported to India from Anglophone contexts and been neglectful of Indian vernaculars. This is symptomatized by the fact that Indian literature is often represented as written in English outside India, usually in postcolonial literature courses. And though translations are in fact a continuous presence in English Studies – Greek and Roman classics, French and German critical theory, etc. are constantly studied in English translations – the fact that they are translated is generally obscured; in English Studies such translations tend to get “normalized” as English texts. In terms of publishing, translations of literary texts from Indian languages into English often sell better than their originals – that too is an aspect of such normalization. In brief, translations are already playing a powerful mediatory and inclusionary and connective role in English Studies (and indeed in the study of literatures in other Indian languages), but there is low awareness of that fact. The way forward for HE English Studies in India is to foreground the study of translations qua translations, to realise the full potential of Indian multilingualism through conscious engagement with translated texts as such.

SB observed that the notion of Indian literature – as a corpus of texts – has been created by using translation as a “filtration process”. Developing that argument, SG wondered whether translation should perhaps be seen in a less “innocent” fashion than MA and MK had suggested, as not merely offering mediation and solidarity-building but as a mode of gate-keeping. Translation involves a politics of selection. Insofar as English translations of texts in Indian languages go, these do not extend evenly to every variety of text. Popular cultural texts of various sorts, for instance, are seldom translated, while translations of canonical and

“highbrow” texts are disproportionately dominant. What is represented in translations from an Indian language is therefore a skewed picture of the immense complexity of textual productions in that language. Arguably, translation then represents more the translation of a value system of literariness than of literature in a language. Perhaps translation should consequently be regarded as a mode of perpetuating the domination of a class which subscribes to that value system rather than an invisible conduit of solidarity itself. Perhaps it mainly assists the solidarity of a class. AH noted that some popular pulp fiction texts have recently appeared in English translations from the Urdu, Hindi and Tamil. AG thought it possible that the view of translation MA had spoken of was conditional on the location within which it had been developed, and might well apply indifferently to other locations within India.

HT’s presentation reiterated some of the points he had made in the first workshop. He felt that the persons around the table in this workshop represented a larger group with deep vested interests, and that the sense of a crisis in English Studies being expressed in this workshop arose from those vested interests. For this group English Studies is not really about academic interests, it is about “survival”. If there is a great demand for English from students at present it is because the group represented here has been pre-eminently successful in selling them a “false dream because it serves us”. “We” are in the embrace of this false consciousness too and hence tend to confuse English Studies with a liberal enterprise. Actually, English and the study thereof continues to be instrumentalized for imperialist agendas, as it had been when introduced in India – albeit now as much at the behest of the USA as of the UK. Sontag’s article, cited in Session 1 by SupC, clearly expressed this imperialist attitude in its observations on call-centre workers and their proficiency in English. HT recalled that in a published response to this article he had pointed out that call-centre workers in India were actually the “cyber coolies” of our time. As far as the championing of English by Dalit ideologues went, mentioned by MK, the ideologues “we” choose to listen to are also determined by “our” vested interests. There are many Dalit ideologues with different visions, and Mayawati (leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party, and former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh) is a notable ideologue who had expressed no desire for English proficiency on behalf of Dalits. Given a choice between a Dalit academic like Kancha Ilaiah and a Dalit grassroots politician like Mayawati, HT would prefer the latter. He ended his presentation with the question: “Are we disabling a majority of our population by insisting that they learn English?”

RuK wondered what, in HT’s view, is specifically the English teacher’s responsibility in India? SupC said she was sympathetic to HT’s observations on the imperialism underlying the demand for English proficiency, but felt that history couldn’t be reversed.

In leading up to his presentation, MP said he also felt sympathetic towards HT’s arguments but feared that they would fail to convince. Ironically, those who express the views HT had presented eloquently are heard because they do so in English and have benefitted from their knowledge of the language; so, even while the arguments are strong they are not given full weight. Both a resistance towards and a desire for knowledge of English had appeared in India with its institutionalization, and has remained at that nexus. Sadly the cultivation of bilingualism has suffered in the interim, which used to enrich Indian vernaculars. Moving to the main part of his presentation, MP addressed specific pedagogic

problems with using translated texts and with drawing attention to the nuances of translation. These practical and theoretical issues needed to be contemplated, to begin with by being brought into the open, if Indian texts in translation were to figure more in English Studies. First, it is often difficult to obtain sufficient numbers of original and translated texts to be used in a classroom. Second, different translations of the same original often confuses (especially where students are only able to deal with the target language), though it can also enable revealing comparative exercises. Third, in a related way, confusion is compounded when the translated version is simply significantly different from the original version. Fourth, translated texts often seem to appear as simply reading texts – without adequate introductions, annotations, etc. – which obscure the process and performance of translation, and blurs differences between the receptive contexts of the original and the translation. Fifth, translated texts inevitably lose some of the linguistic qualities of the originals, so that idioms are flattened, inflexions change, and so on. So, while the use of translations seems expedient in constituting an Indian literature canon, it also loses something of the grounding of texts within the Indian context. MP gave examples of each of these pedagogic challenges. On the side of pedagogic advantages in using translated texts, he felt that in India it does enable a more universal discourse for literary study than would be the case otherwise.

SB and SG expressed doubts about the assumption in MP's presentation that the original text is more authentic and stable (is definitive) compared to translated texts. Texts, they felt, could be regarded as implicitly fluid in their productions, circulations and receptions, and arguably variant manuscript forms, different printed editions, divergent readings, adaptations, abridgements, inter- and intralingual translations, etc. should all be regarded as within the scope of textual fluidity and contextualizations, and be approached as such.

As the session moved towards its conclusion, PT offered a few general observations on some of the points raised. In relation to questions of pedagogy, she felt that English Studies continues to have disciplinary integrity and serves an intellectual function in India. In some ways it has opened up new directions of critical engagement for the humanities in India, and in fact, in her experience, Hindi literary criticism has often emulated critical strategies from English literary studies. On the broader issue of language in the public sphere, PT observed that it was obvious that languages mix and influence each other, especially in India. It is desirable that bilingualism is actively cultivated, and the important issue is not simply being able to use languages minimally but to be able to do so creatively. Finally, SubC gave a concluding summary of the main arguments made in this session. With these in mind, he felt the session had demonstrated that talking about English in India often appears with a particular “ideological charge”. It seems to be tacitly assumed that in India the English language uniquely has a history and teleology, whereas other Indian languages are somehow outside ideology. He felt it is worth remembering that social and ideological frictions and power-play have been historically embedded in all Indian languages, and continue to work in and through these languages now.

Session 5: Language and Linguistics

Session questions:

- (a) What is the relationship between ELT and scholarship/pedagogy in linguistics?
- (b) What directions of scholarship and research with an Indian focus are currently being pursued in linguistics, and do these respond to changing social circumstances?
- (c) In what ways could the study of linguistics contribute to a student's career prospects?

Discussants: TisB (Tista Bagchi), AG (Anuradha Ghosh), MK (Mini Krishnan), RM (Rama Matthew), RBN (Rukmini Bhaya Nair)

In her opening presentation RM was concerned with the contexts in which the English language is taught and learned, and especially with the variety of English in question (“whose English?”). She likened the situation *within* India, and within Indian academia, with that described in Braj Kachru’s three-concentric-circles model of World Englishes (1984). Levels of English proficiency and varieties of English usage within India seem to fall into a similar pattern of concentric circles -- but along class lines, with the elites at the inner and the marginalised at the outer circles. ELT programmes therefore need a social agenda, which is not simply about enabling communication skills but doing so with a view to empowering those at the outer circles. The fact that a few have achieved strong abilities in English tends to camouflage the needs of the mass of marginalised learners. Large numbers of students can’t access English but require competence therein because English communication skills allow mobility in work. ELT programmes which attempt to cultivate a single international standard of English – such as that symptomized in “accent neutralization” courses in BPO training – may well not be appropriate here. The keynote should be “English for our own students” rather than standard forms. An empowerment agenda might be facilitated by a more inclusive approach to varieties of English, whereby students are encouraged to use the English which they feel comfortable with in their communicative contexts and which will serve their purposes best. RM recalled that she has come across programmes which focused on a local variety of English usage rather than a UK or USA standard, e.g. in Indonesia. For the ELT programmes she has planned and worked with, RM had largely sought a mediatory position between enabling communicative comfort appropriate to the context (encouraging the distinctiveness of Indian English usage) and, at the same time, enabling communicative efficacy with a wide scope (focusing on strategies for effective and clear communication irrespective of variety of usage). Insofar as research in ELT and the relation thereof to the wider field of linguistics research goes, RM felt that the more theoretical aspects of the latter are unlikely to be useful; ELT researchers and pedagogues would undoubtedly benefit from greater engagement with sociolinguistics. Here as elsewhere there was a need to teach the teachers and develop better pedagogy in language teaching. Questions to RM sought clarification on the relation between ELT research and other areas of applied linguistics, and requested details of some of the ELT programmes she has initiated. RM described the English Language Proficiency Courses (ELPC) that are being offered at Delhi University, and the task-based teaching methodology that is used there, mentioning in passing that in her judgement 60-70% of students in Delhi University colleges were competent in English only to a basic level.

Next RBN addressed the session questions by first offering a panoptic view of the field of linguistics. She noted that conventionally linguistics had been predominantly attentive to grammar, and had later moved towards the study of discourse. She mapped the different methodologies for studying the relation of text/speech and context to the different branches of linguistics. Reflecting on RM's observations on ELT, RBN suggested that ELT assumes -- or should assume -- a contrary pathway to the one through which linguistics had developed. Language teaching should begin by focusing on usage and disregarding the entanglement of grammar, then attend to the communicative context, and focus on grammar last. RBN differentiated language teaching and learning (being able to communicate with a language) from pedagogy in linguistics by characterising the latter as enabling metalinguistic analysis (using language to talk about language). In teaching and learning linguistics therefore assessment is designed to gauge how well students are able to do that. Linguistics research, accordingly, is usually not focused on the process of language acquisition and honing of skills, but on the ways in which language is already in use – on the existing field of language usage. RBN outlined some of her projects to exemplify this, particularly a project on describing and analysing the creative use of English by students in her institution (IIT Delhi) – in everyday interlocution and through electronic interfaces. HE students (particularly the “technobrats” in her institution, but also more widely in other HE institutions in India) often develop localised idioms and distinctive neologisms/phraseologies in English, and use English implicitly metalinguistically to comment on Hindi communication and vice versa. Such creativity in English usage is, however, the consequence of being confident communicators rather than aspirants to language proficiency. Nevertheless, exploiting creativity in language usage may well be effective for teaching and learning languages too; some research has been devoted to this already, and more needs to be. All this expands the range of questions that those concerned with developing English Studies and ELT curricula need to consider. RBN then touched on some of the complex issues which bear upon English teaching in India, and which are of interest to sociolinguists: social and political attitudes to English, the problem of literacy, the infrastructural challenges for language education. In response to the third session question, RBN listed some of the career options that are available for linguistics graduates. She ended by observing that language teaching and learning might need to increasingly take account of the impact of technology on communication. Younger people are now increasingly habituated to communication through the internet, texting, social networking, and so on, which also impinge upon language usage in creative and yet practical ways.

AG and MK wondered about the possibility of introducing some of the reflexive thinking of linguistic research (on creativity, in sociolinguistics) into ELT teacher-training programmes. RBN felt that this would depend not merely on disciplinary thrusts and needs, but also on the institutional structures for teacher training. RM felt that it was desirable to bring such reflexive thinking about language within the structures of ELT teacher-training. Trained ELT instructors usually develop strong cognitive abilities, but there is space to sharpen analytical and reflexive thinking.

With regard to the foregoing discussion, TisB felt that it would be desirable for some mechanism whereby the salient ideas of language structure, morphology, social contexts, etc. could enter language teaching in a way that makes sense to teachers. However, she didn't feel

that linguistics was implicitly connected to specific languages, and, therefore, it cannot be understood as underpinning language teaching (such as ELT). Linguistics has to do with studying the general principles of various facets of language, and has developed from disciplinary backgrounds such as traditional textual philology, anthropology, cognitive psychology, and technology (particularly logic and information science). Linguistics therefore embraces a considerable sphere of intellectual engagement and scholarship, and shouldn't be linked simplistically to language teaching. With a strong push towards skills-training and vocational preparation in HE, demands for contribution to ELT have been made on linguistics departments in India, as on English literature departments; but linguistics should not be regarded as a "service discipline for language teachers". TisB gave a survey of the institutional locations of linguistics courses and programmes in Indian HE, and noted that these appear in a wide range of schools and faculties. However, having made the above points, she did acknowledge that various aspects of linguistics could be a resource for teachers of specific languages. Having a general sense of how languages work and what principles are relevant to them could help a student become more linguistically aware and proficient. Similarly, some aspects of ELT – such as understanding errors in usage, communicative performances – are of interest to researchers in linguistics. But the study of linguistics and the theory and practice of ELT are distinct fields which sometimes look at common material in different ways. Insofar as the career prospects of linguistics graduates go, TisB reiterated the possibilities RBN had listed.

Session 6: Conclusion

In the final session SG and RA reported on other activities of the project of which this workshop is a part, particularly the Delhi-centred student surveys that were being undertaken. The structure of the next workshop in London was also discussed.

Part II: General Remarks

These remarks represent the views of the authors of this report, and do not necessarily reflect those of other participants in the workshop.

1. **Developing themes:** Some of the themes which appeared in the first workshop continued to be debated in the second. However, these debates were not repetitive; in some respects the debates were deeper and more nuanced. The following are particularly noteworthy. *First*, concerns about the need to deliver adequate teaching of the English language at HE level was placed in a more balanced fashion apropos the academic disciplines of both literary studies and the study of linguistics. Instead of viewing literacy and literature loosely as mutually-obstructive drives in HE English Studies, or of presenting academic investment in language and linguistics as vaguely coterminous with teaching languages (especially ELT), a clearer understanding of the

constitutions of literary and of linguistic study seemed to emerge – and of the concern with literacy and ELT as distinct from, and yet related to, both. *Second*, the desire expressed in the first workshop for greater engagement with the place of English Studies apropos other Indian languages, and for engagement with the role of translations in the discipline, was pursued in this workshop. Unsurprisingly, divergent views in this regard were expressed, consistent with the politics of language in India. It appeared to be generally agreed that Indian multilingualism should be embraced within English Studies, and that using translations and nurturing bilingual abilities should play a salient part therein. However, it appeared at times that there are tensions between promoting bilingual (at least) educational agendas and registering the multilingual state of affairs which obtains in India. It also seemed that translations are the repository of somewhat idealistic expectations, in terms of: expecting solidarities to inevitably emerge from the study of translations; hoping that translations could concretise a national canon; seeking to harness textual fluidities by presuming definite directions from source to target languages. Generally, translations were regarded as a panacea for divisions and problems rather than as possibly constructing distinct sorts of divisions and problems. *Third*, there was further clarification of the education policy and institutional environment within which the current position of HE English Studies in India, and the anxieties/aspirations it accommodates, could be understood. The role that is played by government initiative and university management, and the shifts and dearth in articulating education policy (particularly for HE), were more sharply focused in engaging with English Studies here.

2. **Vocationalism:** Where a resistant discourse of “marketization” of education had cropped up repeatedly in the first workshop, the foregrounded employer and management perspective in this workshop encouraged a comparatively compliant discourse of “vocationalism” in education. The normative attitude to “vocational” drives in HE – and especially in English Studies – in this workshop could be put thus: a focus on imparting vocational skills conflicts with the pursuit of higher or more specialist knowledge in different areas, but the provision of such instruction serves an immediate and necessary social good (enhancing employment prospects for more candidates, breaking down class divisions, equalizing society, improving the lot of the next generation of workers, etc.). Where the study of literature in English and of linguistics (in relation to English and more broadly) could be thought of as specialist areas of English Studies, ELT is in the region of imparting vocational skills for HE students generally (whether in English Studies or other disciplines). Communicating effectively in English is one of several basic skills which enhance employment prospects -- for some this has a wider and more pressing social purpose than literary or linguistic study, but on occasion this was seen as a false dichotomy.

Several questions that complicate this compliant discourse of “vocationalism” are worth noting here. *First*, what is the relation between vocationalism and marketization? It seems possible that these allude to more or less the same socio-economic arrangements, but with different emphases: where vocationalism focuses the interest of particular constituencies (marginalised persons, students, employers,

etc.) in existing socio-economic arrangements, marketization focuses the distributive mechanisms and economic/political rationales at work in those arrangements. *Second*, there is a slippage in articulating how vocational drives and the pursuit of specialist knowledge are related – especially with regard to HE English Studies and ELT. It appears circumstantial that because the words “English” and “language” are associated with English Studies, those engaged in the latter are expected to have a special responsibility for the vocational task of ELT and skills-training in communication. The arguments that are offered in favour of this slippery position often fail to persuade. So, where it is urged that an HE English literature teacher can make a pragmatic investment in teaching the English language, one may observe that so could an HE sociology or physics teacher who is accustomed to teaching/ learning/ researching in English. Similarly, where it is observed that English language proficiency is particularly helpful for academic pursuits in English Studies, it may be observed that it is equally helpful in academic pursuits in sociology or history or a range of other disciplines. The special relationship between English Studies (literary or linguistic) and ELT (as imparting a desirable skill) that is largely assumed remains an assertion that calls for more thinking. *Third*, it seems to be taken as a foregone conclusion that the dominant pursuit of specialist knowledge at HE so far has created a deficit in vocational skills, and that greater direct investment in skills-training will redress that situation. The evidence for both sides of that statement is impressionistic and uncertain at present. Again there is a possibility that this is a false dichotomy and that what are described (in apparent isolation) as “vocational skills” may overlap with what are regarded as traditional “academic skills”.

Despite these complications, it was clear at the workshop that concern for students’ interest leads to calls for reform in the direction of what is described as greater vocationalism in HE, and in English Studies particularly. The demand for reform is grounded predominantly on a perception of social inequities and a desire to redress them in some measurable and ends-oriented fashion.

3. **Challenges to slow moving change:** A speaker at the workshop referred to a contrast between the rapid development of ideas about the social function of the university at governmental level and the relative apathy in academia. There has been change in English Studies, but that is regarded as largely confined to existing parameters of social reach and effect. The workshop considered possibilities for more radical measures which would neither be confined within existing hegemonic theoretical and methodological structures nor commit English Studies to the kind of compliant vocationalism alluded to in the previous section. Two sessions particularly should prompt further thought. (1) The session on translation was especially productive in discussing how texts from Indian languages in translation figure in English Studies, exploring possibilities for not merely expanding the range of texts covered but more importantly for teaching translation *as translation* and with questions about social stratifications (such as caste and class) and dynamics in view. (2) The session on linguistics initiated a discussion in two areas: first, with regard to the relation of ELT (and indeed literary analysis) to sociolinguistics; and second, in relation to

pedagogically exploiting creative impulses which are found in students' exchanges and habitus – that is, in drawing directly upon the latter in HE teaching, learning, and scholarship. (The question as to whether and how creative writing might figure in HE English Studies in India was raised in the workshop but not exhaustively discussed.) Aside from the pragmatic questions of what should figure in the curriculum, further discussion of these issues might reiterate the importance of academics as “stakeholder” discussed below.

4. **Inconvenient questions:** In some ways, the focus on English Studies in this workshop could be regarded as a case study which throws light on matters of broader import for HE.

The question raised early in this workshop -- whether HE English Studies departments are the appropriate site for nurturing serviceable English language skills – was quickly (and even somewhat angrily) dismissed. Arguably it does need more considered engagement than it has received, even from those to whom the answer seems self-evident. Interestingly, while in the first workshop the division of responsibility regarding English language teaching between schools and universities was a matter of concern, in this workshop it appeared to be readily accepted that the responsibility does rest squarely with universities (and school education is a separate matter that universities shouldn't concern themselves with). Implicit in these observations is an understanding (or lack thereof) of levels of education: if general communication skills in English, broad employment-oriented English language skills, and literary and linguistic study in/of English are regarded as different levels of teaching/learning, then what is the appropriate institutional space for the delivery of these different levels? Behind asking that question is the notion that institutional spaces are or should be divided according to level of teaching/learning, between lower/middle/higher, and sometimes also (though this distinction has been substantially erased of late) between vocational (or technical or applied) and academic (or scholarly). Further, if it is decided that all levels should be addressed within the same (HE) institutional space (say, a university), to what extent should they be addressed in separate programmes of study, and to what extent in the same programmes – and what is the appropriate balance between the levels if in the same programme, and why? At the bottom of such questions is that old chestnut, “what is a university?” Clearly, the questions that arise with regard to English Studies here are more widely applicable in HE (as several participants noted); the question of institutional organization in relation to levels, and the balance of levels and programmes (and especially the balance of vocational and specialist levels of teaching/learning), are pressing for most domains of HE – departments and faculties in universities – now. The situation calls for reconceptualising institutional and education sector-wide in terms of functions and definitions, including taking such fundamental steps as defining “higher education” and defining “the university”. [We were unable to find a substantive definition for either from, for instance, UGC documents. The Yashpal Committee report of 2009, mentioned in Session 3, begins with a section on “The Idea of the University”: no definition is offered, but the

principle of the autonomy of universities is maintained and “the university” is conceived in larger-than-institutional terms.]

However, such questions are increasingly and widely regarded as somewhat abstruse and pointless distractions. The prevailing modus operandi for education policy making and policy implementation (across the sector and within institutions) works effectively by circumventing foundational questions of that sort. They focus instead on strategic manoeuvres and structural adjustments which move from a given institutional arrangement to another in response to immediate socio-economic imperatives and so-called “stakeholder” demands. Nevertheless, in the context of a research project which is not instantiated by such immediate social drivers foundational questions are worth considering carefully – and the case of HE English Studies provides a pertinent vantage point for doing so.

5. **The role of academics** (HE teachers and researchers): Continuing in the generalizing vein of the previous point, the observation made above about the prevailing modus operandi has an obvious bearing on HE management and governance.

In the course of the workshop generally, and especially in the session on policy making and management, it appeared to be understood that as HE “stakeholders” academics (i.e. teachers and researchers) should be reactive rather than proactive: i.e. they should respond (compliantly) to the proactive demands made by other stakeholders, such as students, employers, government. Academics were variously placed as agents for perpetuating inequities, as obstructive in relation to policy initiatives, as removed from social realities (stuck in “ivory towers”, elitist, impractical), as conservative and self-serving, and so on. These views were (and generally are) often expressed by academics themselves in a spirit of exemplary self-deprecation or with an inflated sense of ethical agency. At the same time, in the workshop there was an evident undercurrent of disaffection and anxiety among academics about some of the HE restructurings and policy directions that were mentioned. And it was evident that this characterization of academics had diminished their presence and voice in policy making and management.

It is reasonable to be cautious about such stereotyping, including self-stereotyping, and to be cognisant of the implications of doing so for academia and academic governance. Against such stereotypes it could be urged that critical thinking about social concerns is a vital part of academic work, often against the grain of establishment agendas (refer to Part 2, point 2, of the report for the first workshop); and that academics do engage regularly with significant numbers of persons from a wide range of backgrounds (e.g. students, research subjects); and that academic research and scholarship is a continuous and comprehensive enterprise. Further, academic work is by its nature not bound to institutions or other enclosed borders (such as state borders), and seeks to adhere to principles of investigative integrity, rationality and even-handedness which cross every sort of boundary. To enjoin a predominantly reactive role to academics in HE policy making and management is fraught with dangers – it is arguable that they are “principal stakeholders” in HE and

should be consulted and enabled as such. This also has a bearing on the important principles of academic autonomy and academic freedom.