Introduction: A Writing Pedagogy of Failure*

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The process of conceptualising this issue's theme was organic. As newly recruited writing tutors (at a private university in the National Capital Region of New Delhi) in the emergent field of writing pedagogy in India, we hardly had any precedents to teach writing to students who walked into our cabins or attended the occasional workshop in a classroom. Writing syllabi are yet to be formalised for the Indian classrooms, and so are the evaluative criteria for a writing course. In that case, what constitutes good writing? We hardly had an answer. However, we hoped that the failure to answer this question could be a productive beginning for forging pathways of adjusting a North American import to the Indian classroom. So, in this Introduction, we stick to an exploratory tone of analysis, the reason for which will also be evident in the next discussion on the scant literature of this field in India, and consciously resist the finality of a thesis statement. Hence, we begin by engaging with moments of failure in the classroom.

As an emergent field still grappling with its institutional identity, an 'overview' or a 'history' of writing pedagogy in India may still take time. So far, the only source attempting an overview of sorts is the special issue of *Café Dissensus* called 'Contents: Writing in Academia' published in 2019. It first articulates the necessary distinction between writing centres and language centres, the latter being already present within university ecosystems as support centres tasked with the diagnosis of students' poor English and their remedy. Yet, the issue notes, these language centres need complements to make real dent in a student's academic output. The writing centre, staffed with discipline experts and not language experts only, fill in this gap and hence is a 'paradigm shift from how Indian higher education has and largely continues to

imagine the work of supporting writing' (Dasgupta and Lohokare). In this, the Indian classroom does borrow from the Anglo-American model of writing pedagogy based on 'a central concern for composing as a process,' and a view of the writing centre as beyond 'correction places, fix-it shops for the chronic who/whom confusers, the last bastions of bonehead English' (Brannon and North 1).[1] But, for a postcolonial university classroom, writing tutors are still fleshing out adjustments to that model. Those are yet to be documented[2] (both in private universities and in the writing workshops they conduct in public universities), and till then an 'overview' of an Indian writing centre may be pending. We'd like to believe this issue, along with the *Café Dissensus* one, is a potential stepping stone in that direction.

The emphasis of writing pedagogies on writing as a process, and not as a product, brings a critical focus on the systems of knowledge production that prune out the 'messiness' of cognitive stages of thinking, distilling and projecting only the final sheen of Standard English. As we may continue to consider this Anglo-American monolingual model as our only precedent, writing pedagogies' orientation towards writing as a process could be re-presented as an opportune moment for addressing the uniqueness of the Indian classroom— its multilinguality. All the papers in this issue, in some ways or the other, have shown a critical alertness to how writing processes could actively engage with peripheral or 'lived' languages— in those 'messy' cognitive or ideating stages— to produce new knowledge. Like these authors, our own new knowledge as writing tutors of these processes and 'messy' stages of cognition are also dominantly experiential, with no prior curricula giving us a tested road map. But they connected us (and hopefully our students too) to the labour of writing more intimately. So even as we fail to answer just as yet what constitutes 'good' writing— writing as an end in academia—multilingualism may provide an 'affective' way to engage with the means towards

this end. As the essays in this special issue on "Writing (in) the Post-Colony: Practising Academic English in Indian Higher Education" take deep dives into these means of producing writing/knowledge, we thought of making a small exception here by outlining their content at the outset instead towards the end, as is usually done in Introductions. Since writing pedagogy in higher education is an emergent terrain, still largely uncharted in India, we think it is best to 'guide' our readers of this special issue through the authors' engagements with their own classroom experiences. These are essays in which the authors have relied and reflected primarily, though not exclusively, on their subjective experiences of teaching writing, their small successes and many failures. We also considered it prudent to outline these essays to help situate this Introduction within the evolving literatures of this nascent field.

The issue begins with Sayan Chaudhuri's essay which raises two major issues— the hierarchy between disciplinary knowledge and academic literacy, more specifically the separation between linguistic competence and subject expertise, which he analyses in the mould of the hierarchy between hard and soft skills. Advocating a framework of "critical literacy," Chaudhuri uses ethnographic research to collect reliable data on how known or 'lived' languages as 'funds of knowledge' can raise consciousness (and not just linguistic competence) about literacy, and the socio-economic forces behind it, hence becoming possible critiques of existing norms governing institutions. In the next essay, Shantam Goyal comes close to Chaudhuri's analysis by similarly foregrounding the steadfastly regulated binary between skills-based writing pedagogy and discipline specific learning. He contends that skills-based writing pedagogies as ahistorical and decontextualized rules of engagement can only end up acting as gatekeepers of certain linguistic predilections characteristic of dominant knowledges. He, however, duly acknowledges the space of learning also as a space of aspiration to acquire reading and writing

proficiencies required for social mobility. As we gradually move inwards into the site of the classroom, we find Umesh Kumar advocating for an engagement with vernacular languages for students with lower level English proficiencies, through translation, translanguaging, and creative performances that he himself had used in his own literature classroom. He makes a case for speech in the imaginaries dominated by writing. This integration between speech and writing also finds resonance with Nisha M. and Rajesh K's collaborative paper on the history of writing curriculum in the University of Calicut while attempting to situate their academic writing courses within the semester system of college education since 2009. It argues that although the education policies had advocated for academia-industry integration, the writing course was taught in isolation and did not prove to be a leveller to successfully transpose that literacy to students' home disciplines. As a way forward, they too, like Chaudhuri, suggest that language, or skills-based writing pedagogy, must be mediated with disciplinary knowledge to realise the National Education Policy's aims, whose latest iterations will be discussed later in the Introduction.

Ipshita Hajra Sasmal and Monishita Hajra Pande's survey paper is the apt closure to this issue as it is the only paper that begins the work of data collection — the need that all the preceding papers have highlighted in some way or the other— on how to bridge the gap between language class/writing course assignments, in their case the EAP (English for Academic Purposes) assignments at Ambedkar University Delhi, and course assignments in academic disciplines. With periodic references to the essays throughout, the Introduction will conclude with some 'forward looking' notes reiterating not only the need for surveys and ethnographies to demonstrate linkages between skills and knowledge, but also to resurrect the multilingual intellectual if any pedagogic project has to remain an emancipatory political project as well.

On Failure and the Contradictions in the Classroom

This section begins with failure— failure in the classroom, or failure as a constitutive moment through which we get a clearer sense of the task at hand. But before the moment of utility, the moment we see how the task can be tackled once it has been understood, let us go back to failure. The first site we would like to begin with is the classroom. Sayan Chaudhuri's and Shantam Goyal's essays in this issue begin from these space and we would like to draw attention to two moments in their essays, both of which display moments of failure in the classroom. By failure we don't mean a lack in their pedagogy per se, but a constitutive moment in which failing means a recognition of the contradictions in the classroom. Citing their own experience as teachers, Chaudhuri writes, "the elite student is all too happy to *master* and *perform* a critical vocabulary without tangibly changing their life-choices, dispositions, and social relationships," while Goyal says that a particular class had "achieved its learning outcome" but rues, "I do not recall being too happy about it at that time." In the class Goyal had shown students a lecture of P. Sainath on farmer suicides in Maharashtra followed by the fact that Mukesh Ambani, also from the same state, had become one of the wealthiest people in the world. Goyal says his intention was—

> to try and get them to speak on whether they thought that these two pieces of information, which I had brought up in quick succession, were somehow connected, and to lead to one of those free-flowing classroom discussions about, let's say, how does one become this wealthy? Or what does this concentration of wealth mean?

The discussion, however, was one in which the students, also selected to acquire the English language in the course of that semester, explained that their aspirations were not unlike Ambani's. The crucial point about the failure of communicating what Goyal calls, his "hidden learning outcome," is the fact that students felt acquiring English language would enable them to fulfil these aspirations. This conclusion which draws from an anecdotal source is also seen in Ipshita Hajra Sasmal and Monishita Hajra Pande's survey conducted in Ambedkar University Delhi with students and teachers in the EAP and ESL courses. Among other details, the survey showed that most students wanted the EAP courses to teach them better English. There was also a greater perception of the importance of grammar among students, even though for professors grammar did not have a very high leverage for grades on assignments. The importance of English, its aspirational value which could turn them into an Ambani, is perhaps a *wrong answer*. But it links directly to their life experiences, their aspirations, and expectations from a classroom whose medium of instruction is English. On the other hand, the "elite students" who give the *right answers*—who presumably would have, had Goyal shown Sainath and Ambani in quick succession, spoken of the inadequacies of measuring success in acquisition of wealth in a fundamentally unequal society—can't always relate critical thinking to their own lives and are right for the sake of being right. Similar ideas are reflected in Chaudhuri's essay.

The practice of academic English in Indian higher education is between these two paradoxes—the right answer which hardly makes any real dent in making the classroom question its own socio-economic underpinnings, and the wrong answer which is closely tied to one's own aspirations and values. Chaudhuri has effectively dealt with these questions and has advocated for "critical literacy" as we've mentioned before. For now, let us remain alert to the fact that the elite students who give these 'right' answers, and the non-elite students who give 'wrong'

answers are constituted by their caste, class and gender markers. These markers make the classroom. Access to the classroom, or rather, a denial of access to which, is predetermined by a wide variety of policy measures. But is this binary between the elite and non-elite a useful one? We would even argue against this form of thinking to say that the task of pedagogy could perhaps not be to distinguish right from wrong, but rather recognise the prevailing hierarchies which make something right and something else wrong. As we have said before, paying attention to moments of contradiction and failures could make us even more aware of challenges before the life of academic English in Indian higher education.[3]

The Contradictions in Policy

Having posed this question, let us now move from the micro site of the classroom to the larger question of education policy to try and see how these policies perpetuate and enable some contradictions within the classroom discussed above. We will be discussing the *National Education Policy 2020* (henceforth NEP) in this context. As the document speaks of several issues which cannot be covered in this section, we will specifically write of two issues: the reservation policy in the discussion of equitable distribution of knowledge; and an imagination of the student and the teacher who must "lead the country into the 21st century and the fourth industrial revolution" (NEP 37).

Even when the document shows it is aware of prevailing inequalities within Indian society—section 6, "Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All," exclusively discusses this—it curiously tries to avoid using the word "reservation." The failure to use this word is, instead, accentuated by the use of the word "merit":

> Within SEDGs, and with respect, and with respect to all the above policy points, special attention will be given to reduce the disparities in the educational

> development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. As a part of the efforts to enhance participation in school education, special hostels in dedicated regions, bridge courses, and financial assistance through fee waivers and scholarships will be offered to *talented* and *meritorious* students from all SEDGs on a larger scale of education, to facilitate their entry into higher education. (NEP 27-28, emphasis ours)

Given the history of the opposition to the implementation of reservation policies in educational institutes in India, it would not be wrong to say that merit is the adversary of reservations in popular discourse. It is hard not to ignore the choice of words which, perhaps intentionally, makes use of the word merit when it mentions scholarships for SEDGs (Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Groups). The language of the above quote is unmistakably a language of charity, and it is worth recalling that the reservation policy was drafted as a matter of right, not charity. Some of these measures, meanwhile, have already been implemented in the curricula of private universities as well where their writing centres are responsible to work with these implementations. The Centre for Writing and Communication at Ashoka University, for instance, already offers a bridge programme[4], as well as a one year English Language Teaching credit course, comprising first-year undergraduate students who have varying levels of proficiency in English, but all of whom have proficiency levels deemed lesser than the required standard by the Admissions team. Along with this credit course, the same cohort, since 2018, has been put together in the same class (sometimes divided into batches depending on the total number) to undertake an Introduction to Critical Thinking course, which is a compulsory course, in the first semester. Several of these students receive financial aid through a competitive financial aid process (or merit-based scholarships, to use the words of the NEP), which helps in

diversifying Ashoka University's student population. Despite the well-intentioned move, Goyal found it difficult, among other things, to come to a consensus on formalising an "assessment methodology" (10).

Having come to work with these students a year after Goyal (though at a different department), we too discussed the dangers of seeing the writing centre as an infirmary, exclusively for the sick (often, unfortunately, those who come from non-upper class/ upper caste backgrounds) to get better. However, in considering the writing centre as an infirmary, we also need to shift the focus on those who treat these 'sick' students, that is the writing tutors, and the knowledge they gain thereof. While each of these 'sick' students has specific problems that the tutor examines to (subjectively) identify a tailored 'remedy,' those individual problems cumulatively are expected to lead to (objective) knowledge repeatable and teachable by all. In Aristotelian terms, this move may be deemed as one from 'technê' or practical craftsmanship/hands-on learning to 'epistêmê' or knowledge/theory. Though the 'sick' students coming in for remedial writing tutorials may aim only for hands-on writing skills to pass their next class assignment, the tutors, on the other hand, also have the (necessary) privilege of gaining the knowledge or the 'epistêmê', in the objective sense, besides just the specific 'technê'. In such a relation between the tutor and the student, and the transaction of technê/epistêmê between them, one may ask, towards whose side the benefits of this transaction are more titled? Simply put, who are the beneficiaries of this evolving pedagogy— the 'sick' non-elite students who generate these pedagogical knowledges, or the elite students on whom these new knowledges could come to be applied once this pedagogy is formalised?[5]

The perils of viewing the writing centre as places of remedy can be painfully specific in some other ways too. The taboo attached with remedy is also because writing centres are still

grappling with their own identities, being mostly on the margins of the university ecosystems, not yet part of mainstream educational discourse. They are traditionally looked upon as 'service centres' and not academic departments offering full credits (though the Centre for Writing and Pedagogy at Krea University and the Centre for Writing Studies at O.P. Jindal Global University are exceptions in this regard). As such, visits to these remedial centres are not mandatory and students come mostly on a self-referral basis or in certain cases referred by their instructors. Students who came to visit us for the latter reason often had a sense of fear, anxiety and embarrassment because they had been deemed 'sick' and hence were in need of remedy. Though we are yet to collect reliable data on who needs to visit the writing centre and with what reasons, our experiential understanding of these meetings with the students revealed that it is usually the first-year undergraduates with basic writing needs that visit us, basic writing meaning mostly linguistic aspects and referencing styles. As the semester progresses, students do seek help with formulation of their arguments, engaging with literatures of their respective fields, and other such 'higher order' requirements, however, the number of senior students visiting the centre from second year onwards drastically drops.[6] These analytics further indicate that the image of the writing centre as an infirmary or a 'fix-up' shop for beginner writers has been steadfastly holding up in the imaginaries of the university.

As mentioned earlier already, the major peril of this is to continue to perceive writing only as a product. As a result, the writing centres' goal of re-focussing students' attention to the process of writing is constantly hindered by the poor referral systems by instructors located in academic departments. A potential way out is to perceive these centres as part of the 'language-knowledge' nexus, that is, to consider writing as part of the knowledge production process beyond the lower level sentence-level remedies.[7] Focusing on a collective sense of

sickness in writing—a collective which can only be achieved by having a truly diverse student population through the implementation of the reservation policy—which recognises its own difficulties in writing irrespective of its level of English proficiency, is a better alternative in which a writing community can grow.

To further illustrate writing pedagogies' shared goal of acknowledging the writing process as an integral part of disciplinary knowledge making (a concern shared by Chaudhuri in this issue), let us briefly attend to another moment in Goyal's paper where he recalls a certain university's position on the 'needless' politicising of a skill-based writing pedagogy in English, which, in the Indian context, is linked to social mobility. If writing as a skill needs to be acquired with proficiency in English (which, according to Hajra Sasmal and Hajra Pande's survey, helped students to finish their assignments on time, hence focussing on efficiency), are writing pedagogies with a focus on writing as a process 'needlessly' politicising this assumed 'soft skill,' otherwise only needed to pass college and get jobs? What we mean to emphasise is that writing as a process is not a hindrance or an unnecessary delay to writing as a product; rather the former is an enabler to writing as such. Like Umesh Kumar's paper in this issue which has focused on translation and translanguaging as cognitive means towards writing as an end, we too feel that in multilingual Indian classrooms, the engagement with languages used in the peripheral domains of the home and the street in these cognitive stages are not necessarily obstacles to producing the final publishable Standard English academic prose, but rather enhance and enable it. But we are aware this is still an unsubstantiated claim, a working hypothesis at best, and we have to find robust ways of documenting tutoring sessions (without breaching confidentiality) to find substantial data to develop to a suitable pedagogy. However, the binary between peripheral languages and Standard English already sounds like the persistent dialectic between experience

and theory that haunts the social sciences discourse. Sundar Sarukkai, for instance, engages with Gopal Guru's insistence on theory mediated by lived experience, which brings an ethical imperative to the act of theorising (Sarukkai 31). Here, we use this analogy of experience and theory to understand the dialectic between peripheral languages and Standard English where the former is akin to lived experience and the latter to theory. By 'lived' languages we also mean the ones which in Kumar's, and Hazra Sasmal and Hajra Pande's papers, find space in the ideating and translanguaging stages of cognition prior to writing. This leads us to the following question: do 'lived', peripheral languages have any authority over Standard English academic prose, even though they may be authentic expressions of critical consciousness? How (un)easy is the transaction between these 'lived' languages and the academic English prose when the former is more 'affective' (and hence subjective) and the latter is more 'mathematical/normative', and hence 'objective'? We feel similar resonances with existing debates on experience and theory in social sciences in general, and linguistics in particular, where it corresponds already with many studies on how multilinguality enhances the acquisition of a target language. In light of these facts, where do we have existing comparable frameworks or lenses to evolve a pedagogy of writing based on multilinguality? A conscious documentation in this direction seems to us the logical next step to find any answers.

The second aspect of the NEP that we would like to focus on is the mention of the "fourth industrial revolution" in the twenty-first century. In E.P. Thompson's classic essay on time and industrial capitalism, he mentions the student as one of the few figures who were self-employed (others being artists, writers, small farmers) whose life is not governed by the time of capital. These were one of the few people "in control of their own working lives", whose "work pattern was one of alternate bouts of intense labour and of idleness." The persistence of this mode of

work among the self-employed, "provokes the question whether it is not a "natural" human work-rhythm" (73). The "fourth industrial revolution," however, like the three previous industrial revolutions, requires efficient workers who can efficiently bring their visions of development to fruition. The natural work rhythm of intense labour and idleness cannot be an idle mode of work for such conditions. In the context of academic writing, it will also mean a professionalisation of the genre of academic writing, a genre that Nandini Dhar calls "financialized mode of written expression." In the same essay she calls herself an "inattentive, lumpen professor," and writes that she dabbled in both poetry and dissertation when she was officially required to write only the latter. This delayed the dissertation. It remains to be seen if Dhar's "lumpen professor" can survive in the pedagogic vision of the NEP. The NEP's vision also requires its pedagogic catchwords to prepare students and teachers, the future workers of this revolution. One such pedagogic frame is "multidisciplinary," explained in detail in point 11 in the NEP (36-38).[8] But what is this multidisciplinarity for? We see that this is for a very specific purpose with specific tasks ahead for the arts and humanities, and the sciences and social sciences. In one place, for instance, the document says,

> …in addition to their value in solutions to societal problems, any country's identity, upliftment, spiritual/intellectual satisfaction and creativity is also attained in a major way through its history, art, language, and culture. Research in the arts and humanities, along with innovations in the sciences and social sciences, are, therefore, extremely important for the progress and enlightened nature of a nation. (NEP 45)

The task for the arts and humanities is to carry forward an (unclear and increasingly ahistorical) idea of India's "identity" and "spiritual/ intellectual upliftment," its idea of an (increasingly

Sanskritised) Indian past— elsewhere referred to as an Indic civilisation. The task for the sciences and social sciences is to partake in "innovation" that propels this ancient Indian "civilisation" into the future of the fourth industrial revolution (NEP 45). It is in this context of preserving an ahistorical, already available Indian "identity" while propelling into the "21st century" that multidisciplinarity is envisioned in the NEP. What is this vision likely to lead to? Initially we were unsure, but having analysed the NEP here, it is not too far-fetched to say that it is very likely that the lumpen professor will find it very hard to thrive, if she survives at all.[9]

This does not, however, mean that multidisciplinarity in itself is unwelcome. The experience of introducing writing courses in public universities by ad-hoc measures such as a reliance on faculty in the English literature departments may not always be the best solution. The cases of Delhi University and the University of Calicut have been discussed in Goyal's and Nisha M. and Rajesh K.'s essays respectively in this issue. Writing centres in private universities, on the other hand, already have a multidisciplinary pedagogy.[10] This practice is welcome and a good place to start conversations towards building a writing pedagogy across disciplines to initiate students into academic writing, or to help advanced research students with their writing. Our vision of multidisciplinarity will include a reference to a historical moment in language policy and the formation of linguistic states in India, and, in particular, B.R. Ambedkar's interventions in this crucial historic moment. This will be discussed in the last section.

Against Rote Learning: But What Are You For?

A common battle where all these diverse ideas converge is a battle— an insurgency too perhaps, given the urgency of NEP's ambitions to implement the proposed changes in a decade— against

"rote learning" (Singh, NEP). A corresponding approach that supplements "rote learning" is also the view of pedagogy as care (Dasgupta and Lohokare). We have already argued that such a pedagogy of care will be at its most effective stage if it is a care for all, not for the exclusively sick students who need help with English proficiency, but we would like to draw attention to another aspect of care. First, let us ask, care for whom? What are socio-economic, caste, and gendered aspects of such care?

Before answering this question, let us also take note of the fact that all these diverse efforts against rote learning are also centred on another crucial concern. Kanika Singh succinctly asks in her essay on the Centre for Writing and Communication (henceforth CWC) in Ashoka University: "How could the CWC contribute to make pedagogy at Ashoka inclusive?" This concern is shared across all stakeholders. While this is certainly an important and crucial question to pose, pedagogy is always developed by the way the classroom is constituted; in other words by "the social context of the Indian classroom" (Lohokare). Since caste based reservations, mandated in public universities in India both for student enrolment and teacher recruitment, is not followed in private universities, a more appropriate question for all private universities in India, unless they seriously think of enforcing the reservation policy, is: how can we make pedagogy, currently for an elite class of students, inclusive?[11] A caste-blindness to questions of inclusivity would only be detrimental to our imaginations of inclusivity in the writing centre in a private university. If the work of care ends up being a work of cure, cure as in fixing Standard English, then we are circling back to the gap between generators, practitioners, and beneficiaries of new knowledges and new pedagogies based on them, a gap marked by gender, class, caste.

At the same time, as Chaudhuri writes in his essay for this volume, public universities have hardly paid attention to the writing needs of students from marginalised backgrounds, including, though not exclusively, students who enter universities through the reservation process. The importance of language centres, especially those which provide English, is exceptionally important for a start. A committee set up to investigate into caste discrimination in India's premier medical college, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, said "about 84 per cent of SC/ST students mentioned the need for remedial coaching in English language and basic courses" (Thorat, Shyamprasad and Srivastav 4) and had recommended setting up a "remedial course in English" (Thorat, Shyamprasad and Srivastav 71) as medical education is imparted in English. While this is a necessary and urgent beginning, we need to think beyond framing the need for acquiring English merely as a remedy, as we have been saying all along in the Introduction. The committee constituted its report as a response to the unfortunate spate of suicides by students in AIIMS. It is in such a context; it is not just remedy but also care that is an imperative.

Indeed, an "ethics of care" formulated for a writing pedagogy is necessary. Madhura Lohokare uses the term when she analyses care as "centering the students' and teachers' positionality and the students' voice in the teaching-learning" and defines it as a work of "social, emotional and political labour". In our view, the labour of care cannot only be exclusively reserved for writing centres, and, within the existing writing centre in private universities, for a largely upper-caste, upper-class student body. We say this because the pedagogy of the "fourth industrial revolution" is likely to have a community with poor mental health, and, as is often the solution in capitalism, a specialised centre for care is likely to be instituted. Should the writing centres of the future perform this function and accommodate a flawed structure, or should it aim

for an overhaul of the structure itself? The former would almost be a replication of gendered labour of care in which the family, and, more particularly the women in the family, had to take the unwaged work not just of housework but also care (Laslett and Brenner 394). To draw an analogy, should our imagined writing centres partake of the social reproduction of the worker (here the student) and the various disciplines produce the ideal worker for the fourth industrial revolution?[12]

Carving a Way Ahead

In the final section of this discussion on failure, we would like to offer a possible way ahead for the problems we have discussed so far. We would like to begin with a curious phrase used by Hany Babu M.T. in his discussion of the life of English in our language policy. In "Breaking the Chaturvarna System of Languages," Babu describes the continued prevalence of the language in public life after the first fifteen years of Independence, in spite of even an official mention of English in official documents, as "poetic justice" (115).

In this essay he conceptualises the prevailing three language policy as a varna-system comprised of languages (official language of the Indian union; official language of the state; another official language, either of the state or the union; and Sanskrit) in varying places of hierarchy, and contends that the English language is an outsider to these four varnas in language policy in India. He proposes a two-language policy (State language—the nation state, not to be conceded with federal states— and the mother tongue) to solve the prevalent biases in the three language policy. The NEP, without any real plan for implementation, proposes mother tongue education in school (13), but also, in a direct contradiction, also proposes the implementation of the three language policy (13-14, 54-55) and a promotion of Sanskrit (14, 55).

Since we have been discussing fairly contemporary policies and institutions, we would like to bring back an older discussion on language policy: the debates around the 1956 State Reorganisation Committee on the basis of linguistic states, and Ambedkar's thoughts on linguistic states. This is because these debates in the early days of the formation of the Indian nation, tied together policy, including language policy, and our identities as citizens with a political and cultural life. The Ambedkarite idea of the "State" is based on "fellow-feeling" ("Thoughts on Linguistic States" 154). Ambedkar denounced the idea of a mixed State with several official languages, and his insistence of a single national language for all Indians, comes from his understanding of Indian society as a caste society divided into a "graded inequality" (174) The official language of "Modern India" (155) , as a result, should be a language which everyone can acquire irrespective of their castes. Further, Ambedkar makes a distinction of the idea of the majority (the majority in this context being the Hindu upper castes) into "communal majority" and "political majority".

Ambedkar's understanding of a language policy, in our reading, is to foster a "political majority" which, unlike the "communal majority" in which "one is born into", can be altered (176). In this context, a romanticism around the mother tongue (a marker of communal, not political life, in Ambedkar's reading) which the NEP upholds, is detrimental to Ambedkar's vision of a "State" which fosters "fellow-feeling" (154); indeed, detrimental even to his idea of "Modern India" (155).[13] He proposes a single State language policy which should be acquired by all citizens to participate in the national life of modern India. At the same time, Babu's proposal on a bilingual education that includes the mother tongue alongside English, is not in contradiction with Ambedkar's proposition, but stands in conjunction with it. This is because, even for Babu, there should be one common official language of the State. The child should learn

this language as well as their mother tongue. The debate over specific official language of the State notwithstanding, what is important is that both think of the State as fulfilling the function of removing caste and regional barriers to a unified modern Indian identity; indeed, for Ambedkar, removing any feeling of provincialism apart from "fellow feeling" as Indian citizens.

Speaking in 1938, Ambedkar stated that his suggestions on a separate Karnataka Assembly from the then Madras Presidency, a proposal he opposed, were completely objective. This was because, as a representative of the Scheduled Castes, he had no attachment for such identities as Maharastrians, Gujaratis or Karnatakis and was equidistant from all of them ("On Separate Karnatak Province" 102). Ambedkar's political project, thus, is primarily a pedagogic project. Writing centres, by virtue of their equidistance from specific disciplines, too, can partake in this pedagogic project of true emancipation. English, as a language that is equidistant from other mother tongues which carry the burden of their respective provincialisms, be it regional or caste, class, gendered provincialisms, can function as a language of instruction in this writing centre. At the same time, it can serve as a language that has a relationship with all the other languages which exist in the classroom, through translation and other means discussed in much greater detail in essays in this special issue. This can, as has been argued in the previous sections, be achieved if the classroom is a truly diverse space where accessibility and representation from all quarters, including affirmative actions for marginalised groups, is ensured. English, then, need not only be remedial. It could be a language of creative expression, as it has been for several writers from the subcontinent, a language in which life can be expressed in its fullest, unalienated condition. This may be utopian, but we must think of it as a realistic utopia, as Ambedkar had done in the early days of India's independence, and not put caps on our visions.

We may perhaps even fail in this project, but it's better to fail in a truly emancipatory project, than succeed in a less emancipatory one.

Notes

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1. For an excellent overview of the 'origins' of writing centres in North America, see Peter Carino. "Early Writing Centres: Toward a History." *The Writing Centre Journal* 15.2 (Spring 1995): 103-115. Another major voice in the field is the *WLN: A Journal of Writing Centre Scholarship*, previously called *The Writing Lab Newsletter* from 1976 to 2015.

2. Two relevant studies from our literature review initiating this process are Denise Comer and Anannya Dasgupta, "Transnational Exposure, Exchange, and Reflection: Globalizing Writing Pedagogy". *Currents in Teaching and Writing* 11.2 (Feb 2020): 32-46 (that documented interactions of first year academic-writing students in their writing courses at Shiv Nadar University, Uttar Pradesh, India); and Nandini K. Kunde. "A Writing Center in India-- A case study of the writing center at Parvataibai Chowgule College of Arts and Science, Goa". *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 5.1 (2015): 11-18.

3. These paradoxes have animated previous interesting conversations on the nascent theme of pedagogy and academic writing in India. Anuj Gupta, for instance, writes of his student, who questioned the idea of literacy which pays no heed to life experience in the Indian Census in assignments written in, for lack of a better word, broken English. While Gupta passionately advocates for "peripheral Englishes" (Canagarajah) to find a place in academic writing, students who come from backgrounds who have been denied access to "centre Englishes," as essays in our volume suggest (Hazra Sasmal and Hazra Pande, Goyal), may want to acquire that knowledge and expect writing courses to impart that to them. Instead of the binary of periphery and centre, we may also approach the problem through equidistance, and the possibility of English fulfilling that role of equidistance. This is a concept proposed by Ambedkar and would be explored later on in the Introduction. Approaching the question of hierarchy among languages ("language versus dialect, classical language versus vernacular language") out of binaries is also used by Hany Babu in "Breaking the Chaturvarna System of Languages". "A different approach," he says, "is to view these as not oppositions, but as being complementary and with each of the varieties as operating in their own sphere" (112). This insight would also be used in the course of this Introduction.

4. The Academic Bridge Programme is for incoming undergraduate students in the summer. In 2019, it was a two weeklong course which focused on "English grammar and vocabulary", "critical thinking, research, basics of academic writing, and paper presentation" (*Annual Report*, 13). Some of the students in this programme take the English Communication course in the Monsoon semester and the Intermediate English Communication course in the Spring semester.

5. For the biomedical ethics model as well as reference to the Aristotelian framework, see Rakhi Ghosal. "'Hands on Learning' in Medicine: Who Benefits?" *Economic & Political Weekly* 46.42 (Oct 2011): 16-18.

6. For data on the number of students who booked one-on-one appointments for the academic year 2019-20 see *Annual Report*, 4.

7. For a discussion on the end of remediation in North American writing centres, see Heather M. Robinson. "Writing Centre Philosophy and the End of Basic Writing: Motivation at the Site of Remediation and Discovery." *Journal of Basic Writing* 28.2 (2009): 70-92.

8. This includes a decision to introduce "multidisciplinary Bachelor's programme" (37) as well as multidisciplinary teacher education programs (42): both well-intentioned moves. The ideas governing these important modes of undergraduate multidisciplinary courses in the NEP are not discussed here. A more focused discussion on what we mean by multidisciplinary, which is not quite in collusion with the NEP's vision of multidisciplinarity, is explained later in the essay.

9. As we were re-reading Thompson's essay, we noticed that he had said the student "perhaps" (73) was more attuned to a natural work-rhythm. Writing his essay in 1967, perhaps Thompson had good reasons to suspect if the student indeed remained a type of being who was in control of their working lives.

10. Kanika Singh, the Director of the Centre for Writing and Communication says: "The most crucial aspect of creating such a Center is the composition of its team. We made a conscious effort to create a team where its members came from diverse backgrounds—disciplinary, linguistic and with the experience of writing in different contexts (academic, journalistic,

popular, fiction and non-fiction). We particularly value educators with experience in creating learning materials for different kinds of audiences." Similarly, Madura Lohokare, writing of the first group of individuals who began experimenting on developing a writing pedagogy at a private university in the National Capital Region, writes, "In the following three years, as a motley team of sociology, political science and literature scholars, we taught, tweaked, modified and played around with this original model of the writing course, bringing in our own disciplinary leanings to the practice of its teaching."

11. Data on the caste composition of students at Ashoka University is hard to come by, but there are two surveys conducted by students of the Young India Fellowship program—a one year diploma in liberal arts offered to graduates in Ashoka University. The findings of a 2018 survey by Aryaman Jain and Kartikeya Bhatotia of the Young India Fellowship programme was published online; and of a 2016 survey of the Young India Fellowship cohort was analysed by Rahul Maganti, a Young India Fellowship alumni, in the web magazine *Raiot*.

12. This was, in fact, a task we had to undertake in our one-on-one sessions with students at the Centre for Writing and Communication at Ashoka University, a task which often left us exhausted, and which should have, in the first place, shared by the entire university community, not just specialised centres. In Ashoka University, this labour was shared by the Office of Learning Support, apart from the Centre for Well Being. Unlike them, however, we also had to make intelligent comments on academic writing.

13. Ambedkar juxtaposes the idea of "modern India" with "medieval India". By this he does not mean actual historical time periods. He uses the terms rhetorically to explain the need for a common Indian state where people develop fellow-feeling as citizens, and not as members of a

particular region or linguistic group. This is the paragraph where he uses both these terms: "Having stated the advantages of a linguistic State I must also set out the dangers of a linguistic State. A linguistic State with it regional language as its official language may easily develop into an independent nationality. The road between an independent nationality and an independent State is very narrow. If this happens, India will cease to be Modern India we have and will become the medieval India consisting of a variety of States indulging in rivalry and warfare" (155).

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