Building Bridges: On Becoming a Welder

Bridge Course Manual - I

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"I am a welder
Not an Alchemist . . .
I am the Welder
I understand the capacity of heat, to change the shape of things.
I am suited to work
within the realms of sparks
out of control.
I am the welder
I am taking the power
into my hands"

- Cherrie Moraga*

* From Cherrie Moraga’s poem ‘The Welder’. Cherrie Moraga is a Chicana Feminist Writer-Activist and the co-editor of This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women Of Color published by Kitchen Table Press, 1983. This book is a marker of the political significance of ‘breaking silence’ and ‘speaking out’; something the bridge programme seeks to do in a modest way.
PREFACE

The Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women’s Studies Centre (henceforth Centre) was established in the University of Pune in 1987 with the support of the University Grants Commission (UGC). The Centre in conceptualizing its aims and objectives built upon the earlier pioneering contributions of the women’s studies centres in India and particularly of those in Maharashtra. The Centre at University of Pune began with a reflexive understanding of its location as the first non-metropolitan centre in the region and later in naming the Centre after Savitribai Phule, self-consciously underlined the centrality of caste and community to the study of gender question in India. The Centre has sought to develop a unique pattern of doing Women’s Studies within the university system through

- **Curriculum Development**
  - **Teaching Programmes**
  - **Refresher Courses for Teachers**
- **Publication and Dissemination of Teaching Materials**
- **Research and Seminars**
- **Extension Work and Networking with Undergraduate Colleges**

The material production programme at the Centre, which is supported by the UGC and NRTT (Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust), is conceived as a ‘translations’ programme. The Centre conceives of translations not as limited to the linguistic but in multiple intertwined ways: to translate research into teaching programmes, key readings from English to Marathi and from Marathi into English, resources into manuals for integrating gender in the study of diverse disciplines and fields. Under this programme, the Centre is committed to publishing three series

- **Selected Translations of Key Readings with Introductions**
- **Interactive Text Books for Undergraduate Courses**
- **Bi-lingual Teaching Manuals/Readers**

The team at Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women’s Studies Centre has worked collectively to publish the texts in the above mentioned series and looks forward to your comments on the same. Do send
in your comments on this book, ways in which you brought it into the classroom/your research/design new courses. This is a project in process and as readers you are our key partners in this programme of developing teaching and research capacity in gender studies. Your critical comments and suggestions are valuable for the reworking of these texts and for planning forthcoming publications. So please do send in your comments/queries on these publications or other programmes by e-mail to sharmilarege@hotmail.com or wsc@unipune.ernet.in or by post to Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women’s Studies Centre, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Bhavan, University of Pune, Pune-411007 or call us at 91-20-25601300.

Sharmila Rege

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BUILDING BRIDGES: WELDING PHULE-AMBEDKARITE-FEMINIST PEDAGOGIES

"O learned pandits wind up the selfish prattle of your hollow wisdom and listen to what I have to say"
(Mukta Salve, About the Grief of Mahar and Mangs, 1855)

Let me ask you something oh Gods!... You are said to be completely impartial. But wasn’t it you who created both men and women?
(Tarabai Shinde, A Comparison of Men and Women, 1882)

I begin with the words written by Mukta Salve, a fourteen-year-old; girl student of the mang caste in Jotiba and Savitribai Phule’s school and Tarabai Shinde a young maratha woman trained in the Satyashodhadhak (Society of Truth Seekers) tradition. Both these writings address the complex relations between culture, knowledge and power and have suggestions for pedagogies that seek to ‘talk back’ to the injustice of our times and give hope in times of cynical announcements of ‘the end of meaningful teaching and learning’ in contemporary classrooms.

The stories of our contemporary classrooms, relationships between students and teachers and the political frameworks which constitute these stories can unfold from diary notings we make on teaching and informal discussions with colleagues and those in more formal annual meetings. To develop these stories further, we need to add to these the notes written by students of their experiences – often in moments of disruptions or departure, comments made on formal course evaluation sheets, the comments they half scratch out from these sheets, questions raised in class and those asked hesitantly outside the class, their silences that one rushes past in the business as usual mode and gestures that defy narrative. If we weave all these stories together, we see narratives of betrayal emerging – narratives of – betrayal by the system (this is not what I expected of this place; it was not like this earlier), betrayal of students by teachers (I did not think that someone who waxes eloquent on democracy would be so selective in practice) ; betrayal of teachers by students (I thought at least students would stand with me against the injustice by authorities; it was not so in the magical 70s/is not so in other places). Often these narratives of betrayal and of decline in plurality and of standards of our university become cynical announcements of the ‘impossibility’ of practicing critical pedagogies in our times or place.
It is not a coincidence that these narratives of decline come in times or places where the entry of a new generation of scholars and students from vulnerable sections in Indian society is posing challenges to the social homogeneity of the classroom, boards of studies and other academic bodies leading to obvious frictions on issues related to decline of standards and merit. A new generation of dalit scholarship for instance has underlined the limits of pluralism of the Nehruvian era and bringing to centre the violence of the bleeding thumb of Eklavya and death of Shambhuka has raised questions both about the accessibility of higher education and the limitations in making it enabling for those who struggle to gain entry into it. The nexus of networks of exclusion that operate formally and informally on campuses in the absence of transparency to reproduce caste inequalities in the metropolitan university are being debated.

While there are at present across India, several efforts by students to ‘talk/write back’ I would like to mention a few by way of examples – *Insight: Young Voices*, a journal published by students and researchers from Delhi; the work from Hyderabad of research scholars like Murali Krishna, who employs his autobiography to theorise educational practices; Indra Jall, Swathy Margaret, Jenny Rowena who bring caste to centre to interrogate feminist practices in the academy; the film ‘Nageshwar Rao Star’ which starts with reflections on the star/asterix, the marker of caste identity in the admission list and moves to reflect on and recover new knowledge on the Tsunduru massacre; ‘Out-Caste’ an informal, public wall-journal which looks at caste as a category that structures both exclusion and privilege, discussions on caste on campuses on several list-serves like Zest-Caste; and on going M.Phil and Ph.D. theses across campuses in India. Closer home, in Pune University, mention may be made of Dilip Chavan’s caste-class critique of the debate on reforming the UGC NET, the efforts of Sajag (conscious) students’ research group to reinvent the relationship between social movements and the academia and the ‘Research Room Diaries’ put together by researchers in Women’s Studies reflecting on their diverse histories of hidden injuries and privileges experienced as students on ‘teacher’s day’. These and several other efforts that seek to challenge disciplinary regimes, have encouraged us to open up new ways of looking at the present of our disciplines and pedagogical practices and suggest that critical teachers should be ‘listening’ rather than bemoaning the loss of better times. These are ‘new times’ in the university, and we need to reflect on ways in which confidence and certainty that comes from teaching in areas of our expertise makes us embedded in certain kinds of arguments and foreclose other possible ways of looking and listening. The idea of the Bridge programme emerges from re-listening, reflecting and assigning new value to ‘stories’ and ‘voices’ in our classrooms ignored or discarded earlier.
A Bridge between ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Times in a State University

The growing number of state universities constituted since the 1950s, as a second tier to central universities has been a matter of concern in higher education. The hierarchy of standards between central and state universities draws not only on superior infrastructural facilities but also on English being the medium of teaching and research in the former as against the local/regional language in the latter. In undergraduate colleges and state universities, this ‘language question’ occupies everyday lives of teachers and students in their efforts to address the absence of quality reading material in Indian languages and developing English language proficiency through remedial classes. Several high power committees and commissions which have provided blueprints for restructuring higher education in India have suggested setting up a commission for higher education and research, monitoring entry into university education through a GRE-like test, bringing teacher education into purview of higher education and encouraging private investment in higher education. While some of these suggestions are welcome, by and large the questions of general education in social sciences and humanities both in terms of relevance and employability and those related restructuring of pedagogies have remained relatively unaddressed.

For many of us in higher education, more specifically for those of us in the humanities and social sciences – the last ten years have been very unsettling as we were in many ways witnessing the end of the university as we knew it. These changes are often bemoaned – in terms of falling standards, marketisation of syllabi but rarely have we as a teaching community addressed the question of reforming the structure and practices of our teaching programmes. In this context, it may help to recall that many of the graduate and postgraduate programmes in humanities and social sciences in our universities were designed to produce teachers and researchers in state institutions. Most programmes therefore continue to focus on developing skills for which there is diminishing demand and annually produce products for which there is no market. With widespread freezes on teaching positions, the exploitative parallel systems of teachers on ‘clock-hour basis’ and the ever impending danger of teachers ‘becoming surplus’ because of falling enrollment in some disciplines, the crisis in our universities has become apparent. Every university may now even boast of having revised its curricula, but we need to ask if enough attention has been paid in the process of revision to skill development initiatives.

Revision of curricula, for ‘new times’ often proceeds in two directions – one, wherein core courses remain untouched and courses in ‘new upcoming areas’ or areas considered to be having greater market value. In practice these courses often masquerading as ‘professional
courses', remain poor substitutes; as if for those who could not make it to these programmes. The other direction that revisions seem to have taken is what can be best summed up as vulgar vocationalisation. The ‘core courses’, the study of classics, debates on methodologies and so on are scrapped for having lost their value and new ‘applied courses’ put in their place. These practices proceed through an assumption that training in critical faculties (so central to programmes in humanities and social sciences) and training for employability, as if cannot go together. There are of course, elite institutions which continue to pride themselves on focusing on the former and having nothing to do with the latter. Such institutions with an emphasis on narrow scholarship ‘reproduce excellence’ by encouraging select students to enroll for research programmes that continue both thematically and structurally to envision these researchers as future professors – preferably in the same department/institute.

These developments are disturbing not least because they show an increasing decline of the value of humanities and social sciences but also because these efforts fail to enhance the market value and hence rarely if ever achieve what they set out to do. For often the process of revision of curricula is not backed up with thematic restructuring of the courses, requirements of pedagogical innovations and new partnerships with those in the ‘field’. In practice, this race for making students ‘employable’ is leading to unhealthy practices of gate keeping by the disciplines and fields of specialization; even as we continue to pay lip service to increased need for interdisciplinarity. In our everyday, this race often takes the form of intra-disciplinary or interdisciplinary wars for increasing student registration. At the graduate level, it is common for students at the First Year level to be told that taking up economics as a special subject would fetch them a ‘rewarding career in a bank or psychology a career in counseling or sociology that in social work. At the postgraduate level, this often takes the form of tensions between sub disciplines – each underlining an imagined applicability and employability value.

As a teacher located in the humanities and social sciences, in a state university with over 300 affiliated colleges, presently engaged in a project that seeks to reimagine the practices of higher education; many of the issues raised here emerge from a project that began with a bench mark survey of teaching of social sciences and humanities in colleges and Universities in Maharashtra. The project involves active intervention through design of a new interdisciplinary Masters Programme, production of innovative resource books and capacity building workshops for teachers. This ambitious project funded by the Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust is propelled by the declarations of ‘end of decline of social sciences and humanities’ at a time when social groups whose experiences
and ideas had often been made invisible or distorted are ‘talking back’ to the disciplines and calling for a restructuring of theory and practice of higher education. The project is also driven by the need for us teachers to ‘reinvent’ ourselves and our pedagogies as most of us teaching in graduate and postgraduate levels have been trained to and continue to cultivate students whose futures we imagined would be identical to ours.

Much of the debates on State universities have tended to focus on the relative lack of resources, the declining standards, and the politicization of the everyday – often overlooking the significant development of increased diversity in the social composition of the classroom and the teaching community. While the lack of resources is a real problem, both in terms of the faculty size, the state of hostels etc, the most immediate and pressing problem for the diverse groups of students coming to study social sciences and humanities in a state university continues to be that of ‘language’ and the cultures of learning. Since most of the undergraduate colleges operate on a ‘text book’ model of teaching and learning or on ‘notes’ the students coming into the university often require focused supplementary training in skills like reading texts, critical note taking, reviewing, analysis and presentation of materials. Moreover while state universities ‘allow’ students to write exams in the official language of the state, the official medium of instruction continues to be English. There has been very little in the way of concerted efforts to develop bridge programmes to address specific needs of students. Repeated claims of state patronage to regional languages have not translated into university level projects to develop social sciences and humanities in Indian languages.

Collective experiments are needed in making higher education more adaptive and imaginative beginning with more focused dialogues between teachers in different locations, state bodies, policy makers and the non-governmental sector. Different possibilities of mutually beneficial public–private partnerships in humanities and social sciences need to be explored – both at the thematic level and level of practice. This may require formation of working groups across disciplines and sectors working on similar concerns ranging from poverty, water and food security, housing, popular culture, religion to questions of body and information networks. The terrain of refresher courses for college and university teachers could be meaningfully restructured to have a sustained dialogue between practitioners on the challenges posed by restructuring of higher education and for building teaching capacities for the same. More concerted efforts to build thematic consortiums of colleges and university departments and to have constructive programmes to nurture talent in the social sciences and humanities at the undergraduate level. IESC, Bangalore has recently
proposed a state level talent hunt effort to channelise young talent in the social sciences to relevant policy research and practice.

The whole exercise to move beyond the assumed dichotomies between principles of quality and equality in higher education does rest upon political will, policy intervention and meaningful public-private partnerships. But for us as teachers, it means efforts to move beyond the comfort and certainty of teaching in our areas of expertise. We cannot remain embedded in certain kinds of arguments foreclosing other possible ways of looking and listening for at stake is the future of the social sciences and humanities and hundreds and thousands of first generation university entrants. The experiment with 'Bridge courses' began as a way to build 'bridges' between 'old' and 'new' times. It is a collective effort to reinvent ourselves as teachers as we address the 'gaps' in/between undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of our times and a political intervention against an increasingly intolerant meritocracy that expresses itself through a rhetoric of choice and freedom without any reference to power and inequality.

The Bridge Course at Krantiyot Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre:

The Social Science Departments in Pune University are among the oldest departments in the region and attracts equal number of students from the urban and rural areas. Over 50% of the students in the Department come from lower income and rural backgrounds. Many of them come from the drought prone backward areas and aspire for career opportunities in teaching, State and Union Public Services. However, almost all of them have Marathi as their language of instruction, reading and examination up to the graduation level. Hence developing reading, comprehension, writing and communication skills in English becomes essential. The major theoretical debates, discussions on contemporary social issues are all available in English. This leads to a major gap in the theoretical, analytical and writing skills of the students belonging to the above mentioned categories. Most of the students have not had access to computers and therefore do not have a hands-on experience with basics of data entry and processing and efficient use of web resources.

The English-medium student in this classroom often mistakes fluency of language with accuracy of argument. Often these students need special training in skills of reading, making notes, building arguments etc. More importantly, many of these students have very little idea of the rich debates in Marathi/Indian languages happening inside and outside the academia and rarely reflect on own location of privilege and its relation to knowledge and power. The gaps caused by disengaged scholarship and fractured understanding of the middle class English educated students issues in
Indian Society is also a matter of concern as is the over dependency on web resources that leads to ‘download’ mode of learning and writing.

The Bridge course started therefore with the following objectives

- To improve the linguistic skills in English language by teaching basic grammar, phonetics by using readings from the classroom as ‘texts’ for reading and comprehension skills.
- To enhance analytical skills through learning skills of discussion and presentations
- To develop skills of argumentation and presentation of subject matter.
- To develop basic skills of data entry, use of web resources and processing through social science packages.
- To develop Social Science Vocabulary in Marathi /Indian Languages
- To ‘reflect’ on social location and processes of knowledge
- To recognise that diverse groups work more efficiently and creatively

The Bridge Course was designed around the following four modules

- Oral, Written, Aural and Visual Comprehension in English
- Basic Comprehension of English Grammar
- Instructional Sessions to navigate real and virtual spaces in English
- Foster respect for diversities through understanding inequalities and creating equal opportunities

The Bridge Course was conceptualised thus as distinct from ‘English Language Courses’ and ‘remedial programme’; in that at its centre was an effort to wedge open the language question.

Wedging Open the Language Question: Learning from Dalit Imaginations

“Now if you want to know why I am praised – well it’s for my knowledge of Sanskrit, my ability to learn it and to teach it. Doesn’t anyone ever learn Sanskrit? ...That’s not the point. The point is that Sanskrit and the social group I come from; don’t go together in the Indian mind. Against the background of my caste, the Sanskrit I have learned appears shockingly strange. That a woman from a caste that is the lowest of the low should learn Sanskrit, and not only that, also teach it – is a dreadful anomaly...”

(Kumud Pawade 1981:21)
"In a word, our alienation from the Telugu textbook was more or less the same as it was from the English textbook in terms of language and content. It is not merely a difference of dialect; there is difference in the very language itself. . . . What difference did it make to us whether we had an English textbook which talked about Milton's 'Paradise Lost' or 'Paradise Regained', or Shakespeare's 'Othello' or 'Macbeth' or Wordsworth's poetry about nature in England, or a Telugu textbook which talked about Kalidasa's 'Meghasandesham', Bommera Potanna's 'Bhagvadam'. . . We do not share the content of either; we do not find our lives reflected in their narratives"

(Kancha Ilaiah 1996:15)

"Through his initiatives, Lord Macaulay was to re-craft a new intellectual order for India which threatened the dominance of the Brahmmins and questioned the relevance of the Varna/caste order. This was to give Dalits a large breathing space. . . . Should we know our past the way we like to, or we know the past as it existed? Or should there be any distinction between History Writing and Story Telling? Those who condemn Lord Macaulay for imposing a 'wrong' education on India do never tell us what kind of education system which Macaulay fought and eventually destroyed".

(Chandra Bhan Prasad 2006: 99 &115)

"While giving calls of 'Save Marathi', the question I am faced with is 'which' 'Marathi' is to be 'saved'? The Marathi rendered lifeless by the imprisonment of the oral in the standardized written Word? The Marathi with its singular aim of 'fixing meaning' which loses rhythm, intonation, emotion, Rasa? The Marathi that generates inferiority complex in those speaking 'aani-paani'? The Marathi that forms centres of power through processes of standardization of language? . . . Or the Marathi sans the Word that keeps the bahujan knowledgeable?"

(Pragnya Daya Pawar 2004:45)

. . . I dream of an english
full of the words of my language.
an english in small letters
an english that shall tire a white man's tongue
an english where small children practice with smooth round
pebbles in their mouth to the spell the right zha
an english where a pregnant woman is simply stomach-child-lady
an english where the magic of black eyes and brown bodies
On Becoming a Welder

replaces the glamour of eyes in dishwasher blue shades and
the airbrush romance of pink white cherry blossom skins . . .
an english that doesn't belittle brown or black men and women
an english of tasting with five fingers . . .
(Meena Kandaswamy 2007:21)

Kumud Pawade’s story of her Sanskrit, Kancha Ilaiah’s comment on the sameness of the English and Telegu text book, Chandra Bhan Prasad’s counter commemoration of Macaulay, Pragnya Daya Pawar’s interrogation of the power of the printed Word over the spoken word and Meena Kandaswamy’s dream of a global English in small letters offer immense possibilities for wedging open the ‘language question’.

Kumud Pawade, a dalit feminist intellectual in her testimonio ‘Thoughtful Outburst’ (1981), reflects on her journey into Sanskrit, teasing out in the process the complex character of the ‘language question’ in our academia. Kumud Pawade foregrounds memories of her school teacher Gokhale Guruji, a prototypical Brahman dressed in a dhoti, full shirt, a black cap and the vermillion mark on his forehead; who she expected would refuse to teach her Sanskrit. However expected responses stand interrogated as he not only taught her but also became a major influence in her life. People in her own community often discouraged her from pursuing a Masters degree in Sanskrit arguing that success at matriculation need not embolden her to this extent. At college the peons as also the higher up officials usually commented on how ‘they’ were taking strides because of government money and how this had made them too big for their boots. At the university, the head of the department a scholar of fame, took great pleasure in taunting her. She would find herself comparing this man apparently modern in his ways to Gokhale Guruji.

However on successfully completing her Masters in Sanskrit achieving a place in the merit list, her dreams of teaching Sanskrit received a rude shock as she could overhear the laughter and ridicule in the interview room about people like her being government sponsored Brahmins. Those passing these comments, she recalls were not all brahmins, many of them were from the bahujan samaj who thought of themselves as brahman haters and even traced their lineage to Mahatma Phule and yet the idea of a Mahar girl who was a part of this bahujan samaj, teaching Sanskrit, made them restless. After two years of meritorious performance at the Masters level, unemployment and her marriage to Motiram Pawade, a Kunbi Maratha, she finally got an appointment as an assistant lecturer in a government college and in later years went on to become
a professor in her alma mater. However, a thought continues to trouble her – it was 'Kumud Pawade' and not 'Kumud Somkuvar' who got the job. Pawade’s critical work of memory unfolds the complex gender and caste parameters in the ‘language question’ and lays bare the dynamics of a dalit woman acquiring an authorized tongue. Importantly she underlines the operation of language as a marker of subordination and exclusion in our academia and thus the impossibility of viewing the ‘language question’ as a matter of communication separable from power relationships and cultural and symbolic effects of language.

Ilaiah comments on the sameness of Kalidasa and Shakespeare, despite the former appearing in the Telegu text book and latter in the English. He draws attention to the difference between brahmanical Telegu and the bahljan renderings locating the difference in the latter emerging from production based communication. He argues ‘the communists and nationalists spoke and wrote in the language of the purohit. Their culture was basically sanskritised; we were not part of that culture. For good or ill, no one talked about us. They never realized that our language is also language, that is understood by on and all in our communities. . .’ (p. 14). Ilaiah further underlines the sameness of the English and Telegu books in being ‘alien’ to the bahljan; their only difference being that one was written with twenty-six letters the other with fifty six. Ilaiah’s reflections problematise the secular vernacularist position, underlining the complete domination of Hindu scriptures and Sanskrit cultures in vernacular education. Any easy equation between English as alien and Telegu as ‘our language’ – yielding ‘our categories’ of analysis stands interrogated. Further, Ilaiah suggests that the question of culture mediates between the axis of equality and the academia and the ‘language’ in which education takes place is an epistemological issue more than a matter of mere instruction.

Prasad’s celebration of Macaulay’s birthday on 25th October 2006 and installation of a ‘Dalit goddess of English’ to underscore the turn away from tradition has been brushed aside often as an attention seeking gimmick. This counter commemoration of Macaulay has significance for destabilizing the hegemonic memory of Macaulay as the ‘villain’ who declared that a single shelf of Shakespeare was worth more than all the Sanskrit and Arabic literature of the East. Prasad re-reads ‘Minutes on Education’ to underline Macaulay’s argument about the British having to give scholarships to children to study in Sanskrit and Arabic, even when they were ready to pay for English education. This re-reading disrupts the ongoing processes of collective remembrance of language and education in colonial India. Prasad’s act of counter commemoration renders Macaulay’s argument as not directed against the vernaculars; but against the outmoded literature
of the Vedas and Upanishads, and thus an important moment in the history of Dalit access to education. It is important to note Prasad’s comments on discovering the top secrets of the language politics of Macaulay in his explorations into the tensions between history writing and story telling; thereby suggesting that an engagement with the ‘language question’ is also essentially an engagement with ‘reinventing the archive’—the very methods of knowledge.

Pragnya Daya Pawar (2004) talks back to those giving calls in Maharashtra to ‘save Marathi’; asking them the pertinent question ‘which Marathi?’ and teases out the collusion of state and elites in framing the ‘language question’. Interrogating the processes of standardization of the language, she points out to the homogenization of meaning constituted by the processes of standardization. She draws attention to the efforts of the Maharashtra state to empower Marathi as a language for science and technology which freeze and de-root the diversity of words into the singular ‘Word’. Standardization on one hand brutalizes/marginalizes/fails the dalit bahujan who bring into the system the ‘non-standardized’ language practices. On the other hand, more violently, it wipes away the epistemic value of all oral forms of knowing of the bahujan. She recalls that the dictum of the liberal humanists ‘society will improve when its people gain wisdom from education’—was first called into crisis in India by Jotiba Phule. That a bahujan struggling against all forms of cultural colonisation, should have been the first to call this liberal agenda into question—she observes ‘is logical and not coincidental’. The ‘language question’ thus opened up, traces the politics of internal fragmentation and hierarchisation of the vernacular in postcolonial Indian states and sees these processes as inseparable from those that monitor the differential epistemic status of different knowledges—particularly of the printed and the oral.

Meena Kandaswamy in ‘Mulligatawny Dreams’ dreams of an ‘english’ full of words selected from her language, an ‘english’ that challenges both the purity of standardised vernaculars and the hegemony of English. It is an ‘english’ in small letters, a language that resists imperialist racism and casteism of both English and the vernacular. Such hybrid formations of language are seen as enriching English by opening it up to appreciate brown bodies, black eyes and eating with five fingers. English as the language of modernization is disrupted suggesting that in the present conjuncture spread of English has gone beyond the worldwide elite thus opening up possibilities of challenging the hegemony of imperialist English with many resisting ‘englishes’. Further, ‘the dreams of english’ point to the limitations of framing the language question in terms of proficiency in English language, leaving little space for playful radical innovations in pedagogy.
The bridge programme drawing upon dalit imaginations of language seeks to escape the modes taken by remedial English programmes or programmes to enhance and augment the use of Marathi. While this is easier said - the practice of such programmes means struggling with questions of pedagogical strategies, issues of power and authority in the classroom.

**On the Bridge: Traversing Circuitous Paths of Phule Ambedkarite Feminist (PAF)Pedagogies**

Many of us who see education in general and the classroom in particular as a site of struggle do often discuss several of the above mentioned issues. Yet, in practice the challenge seems to be to move beyond personal blaming or/and feelings of guilt and to design and develop pedagogies as a political project. The challenge is to develop a method of reflexive analysis, employing self questioning as an analytical and political process – to see how experiences are socially constructed. To review how a ‘normal/good’ teacher, student and classroom are socially and politically constructed and thereby interrogate our different and contradictory locations within the social relations of teaching and learning. Thus understanding and transforming the social relations of learning is a struggle that is both personal and political.

The search for new subject positions as teachers and students is constrained by the given educational settings and therefore cannot be entirely straight forward. As we search for new subject positions, taking pedagogical risks avoiding a cost-benefit analysis of remaining within the dominant discourse; we have drawn heavily from our interpretations of Phule-Ambedkarite-feminist ways of learning and teaching.

Both Phule and Ambedkar sought a rational engagement with the pedagogy of culture to see how power works through the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge within particular contexts and re-imagine a culture of pedagogy based on truth-seeking. The ‘difference’ of Phule-Ambedkarite pedagogical perspectives lies in a double articulation that conceives education not only in terms of cultures of learning and teaching but also dissenting against that which is learnt and taught by dominant cultural practices. This entails constituting teachers and students as modern truth seekers and agents of social transformation who seek to become ‘a light unto themselves’. The methods are those that seek to integrate the principles of prajña (critical understanding) with karuna (empathetic love) and samata (equality). This democratisation of method of knowledge marks the difference of Phule-Ambedkarite perspectives from methods based on binaries of reason/emotion, public/private, assumption of neutral objectivity/celebration of experience that inform much of our teaching and research. One sees significant intersections
with Black feminist pedagogies that directly link pedagogy with political commitment in envisioning education as the practice of freedom and thereby seek to challenge the assumed divide between mind/body, public/private and reason and emotion\(^8\).

Generally speaking, teachers who believe that learning is linked to social change, struggle over identities and meanings, may practice variants and combinations of three possible models of progressive pedagogical practice\(^9\). The first model is the one in which the teacher believes that she understands the truth/the real relations of power and imparts it to the students. The second model believes in a dialogical mode and making the silenced speak. While in the third the focus shifts on developing skills – so that students are enabled to understand and intervene in their own history. It is possible that different combinations emerge from these models, for common to all three are a set of similar assumptions. The first model believes that the teacher can and does know the truth – the real interests of different groups brought together in the classroom and has to just impart the truth to them, the second overlooks the real material and social conditions which may disenable some from speaking and others from ‘listening to silences’ and the third assumes that the teacher knows and can impart the ‘universal skills’. These assumptions become problematic, for as PAF pedagogues, we agree that students are neither cultural dopes that have to be brought to predetermined positions but this is not to say that the dominant institutions do not seek to dupe them. There is then a loss of certainty for the teacher, she does not have a readymade mantra to save the world nor can this be replaced with a set of relativist celebration of different voices and experiences.

This kind of a rendering of the PAF pedagogical model which rejects convincing predefined subjects to adopt the teacher’s truth; draws upon not a unilateral but circuitous understanding of the Phule-Ambedkarite principle of ‘Educate, Organise and Agitate’. Education, organising struggles over recognition and redistribution identities and social transformation related in a circuitous path; are constitutive of each other and as such the possibilities and constraints on agency as it intersects with social formation cannot be predefined. If we look again at Mukta Salve’s essay with which we began, it is clear that education becomes ‘Tritya Ratna’ in Jotiba and Savitribai Phule’s school because what was demanded from students was not conformity to some image of political liberation but of gaining understanding of their own involvement in the world and its future. This makes the task of the PAF pedagogues slippery and hazardous – since the focus is on contextual practice, one of multiplying connections between what may seem apparently disjoint things.
Unhinging and Linking: Developing a Bridge Course Manual

Critical pedagogies do not in them constitute a method, and micro level pedagogical implications of PAF which are crucial to the everyday work of the classroom need to be discussed and developed through tools, methods, and strategies to combine social critique with skills of doing critical work. The manual is an experiment in building a tool kit required by students and teachers in the first semester at the University. The first in the manual series addresses the 'immediate' needs of the students in the first semester, the second in the series to be published soon engages with 'diversity and inequalities' in learning teaching processes. The division of these issues over two manuals is a matter of convenience and in no way a statement on the possibility of separating the immediate and urgent needs of students encountering a credit – semester programme packed with assignments and questions of diversity.

Every chapter in the manual is planned in two sections – the first deals with issues of language, vocabulary, comprehension, dealing with new spaces and practices and the second with grasping ways to efficiently use the computer, word processing software and the library real and virtual. The manual has emerged from engaged labor of planning sessions, learning from issues that emerged in the classroom, re-designing the lessons, drafting and redrafting modes of learning-teaching skills generally assumed as 'known' in a postgraduate programme. The character of the lessons is constituted by the rhythm of the semester – a slow start with people getting to know each other, the anxieties of negotiating alien spaces inside and outside the university and the deep tensions of accelerated pace of written assignments, class presentations and submissions of response notes.

The first lesson addresses the anxieties of introducing oneself and getting introduced to the computer. The second seeks to integrate learning English grammar with grammar of themes in Women's Studies while the third chapter - sensing the problems of following class lectures and taking working notes focuses on listening comprehension and preparing for assignments by outlining efficient use of the library. Lessons 4 and 5 dive into the skills required for reading, building arguments, presenting arguments and using the internet effectively. The first section of all the five chapters have been written by Sugeeta Roy Choudhury and Pallavi Das and the second section by Tina Aranha. The manual has taken shape from collective discussions and learning 'on the job' from students. The manual has benefited immensely from the inputs on 'experiences in the classroom' and 'comments on assignments' given by Anagha Tambe and Swati Dyahadroy as from 'problems' shared by students outside the classroom and in course
evaluation forms.

The Centre thanks all the students who attended the bridge course voluntarily and 'not so voluntarily'. While it is too early to evaluate the failures and successes of the Bridge programme, the bridge course team of Sugeeta, Pallavi, Tina and myself feel that it takes more time and effort to unhinge 'old structures' than build 'new ropeways' and in the process we have unlearned more assumptions and practices than teaching new skills and tools. We look forward to your comments and suggestions - your experiences with similar and different experiments in 'Building Bridges'.

Sharmila Rege

(Endnotes)

1 English Translations of Mukta Salve and Tarabai Shinde's writings were first published in Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to Present*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991). Vidyut Bhagwat, the regional editor of this section, highlighting the politics of selection and erasure involved in the building of archives discusses how Tarabai's writing was 'retrieved' in 1975 by S. G. Malshe and that there is no account found of later writings of Mukta Salve. Scholars like S. G. Mali and Hari Narke have countered the doubts raised about the authorship of writings of Savitribai Phule with historical documents; thus highlighting the erasure of intellection of women and women particularly of the non-Brahman and dalit castes from the processes of established archiving.


6 Aani Paani - literally means 'and water' but as a phrase it refers to the Brahmanical colloquial reference to dalit rendering of Marathi which is considered 'impure' and technically incorrect.


I draw upon and seek to rework the models of progressive pedagogies outlined by Lawrence Grossberg; op.cit, 1994.