Chapter 3

ENGLISH AND THE POLITICS OF THE VERNACULAR

Section I

On posing the question of the vernacular

In the previous chapter, I had suggested that colonial-national struggles often translated into the English-vernacular debate. In this chapter I focus on the manner in which the vernacular was shaped through nationalism. I will argue that the national elite invoked the vernacular as a counter to the imposition of an 'alien' language. However, the reshaping of the vernacular for nation and modernity constructed it in terms closely linked to the nature and function of English. In tracking the emergence of the modern vernacular in the demands for a vernacular university (first section), the fashioning of national education (second section) and the nativization of the lyric form in Gujarati (third section), I attempt to show that the relationship between English and the vernacular is more collaborative than oppositional. In the last section I argue that despite national characterization of the vernacular as popular, the vernacular can be as alienating as English.

In 1870 the Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, Edward C. Bayley declared : "I would disclaim all sympathy with the 'orientalism,' which was overthrown, and deservedly overthrown, some five and thirty years ago" (1870, 101). Bayley was clearly referring to Lord Macaulay's Minute of 1835 which was supposed to

have "overthrown" orientalism and to have inaugurated the phase of anglicism in colonial education policy. The occasion for Bayley's declaration was the proposal made for the creation of a vernacular university in the North Western Provinces. It is through a historically situated reading of the vernacular debate over education, particularly in the context of the demand for a vernacular university, that I propose to put into perspective certain commonly held assumptions about "orientalism" and its relationship with the vernacular.

In 1867 the British Indian Association of North Western Provinces submitted a petition to the Viceroy and Governor General of India in Council for the use of modern Indian languages for imparting "European knowledge." Earlier to 1867 education in the schools was given through the vernacular; however, the demand for the vernacular in higher education served not only as a comment on the existing system of higher education but also inaugurated a fresh debate over some of the provisions made in the Education Despatch of 1854.

The Despatch of 1854 had made a distinction between the vernacular language as a medium of instruction and English language as an essential requisite for higher education. Consequently, the entire system of education with its hierarchy of schools and colleges reflected the asymmetrical relationship of languages. However, such an arrangement with English for higher education and the vernacular for popular education was not likely to be of permanent duration. It was envisaged in the

Despatch that "as the importance of the vernacular languages becomes more appreciated, the vernacular literature of India will be gradually enriched by translations of European books, or by the original compositions of men whose minds have been imbued with the spirit of European advancement, so that European knowledge may gradually be placed in this manner within the reach of all classes of people" (Oliphant et al 368).

Commentaries on the orientalist and anglicist debate have always gone back to Wood's Despatch of 1854 to show the aggressive side of the anglicist position. It is true that English was recommended as the language of instruction but it was clearly stated that it was neither the "aim nor desire to substitute the English language for the vernacular dialects of the country" (Oliphant et al 367). In fact, it was broadly agreed that any efficient system of education would necessarily have to replace English with the vernacular.

It was precisely in the context of such a provision for the vernacular that a demand was made in 1867 to impart higher education through the instrumentality of the vernacular. It was argued that "an examination in the vernacular be annually held in those very subjects, in which the student is now examined in English in the Calcutta University, and that degrees now conferred on English students for proficiency in various departments of knowledge, be likewise conferred on the students who successfully pass in the same subjects in the vernacular" (Mookerjee et al 27). The demand for a university degree in the

vernacular subjects might look natural in independent India, but such a demand in 1867 meant that the degrees offered in English subjects be made equivalent to the ones offered in the vernacular examinations.

Calcutta University was founded on the assumption that "true knowledge, in its higher branches, can only be imparted to the people of India through the English language, and that the only literature that has any value is that of Europe" (Bayley 1868 41). Such an assumption came under stress when that a similar status is claimed for the vernacular. In fact, the colonial government pointed out promptly that any attempt to establish equivalence between an English and vernacular degree would "materially degrade the character and lessen the value of an Indian University degree" (Bayley 1869 56). The petition submitted by the British Indian Association, however, had only pleaded for a possible arrangement of an alliance: "The system we propose may be different from that now in vogue, but it is not antagonistic to it, the ultimate object of both is the same. What we urge is that instead of English alone, the vernacular also may be made the channel for the instruction of all the people alike in the very highest subjects of culture and education" (Mookerjee et al 25).

The colonial government was committed to the cause of the vernacular in principle but the demand for its application meant the creation of a vernacular university. What was perceived to be at stake was the imperial character of the university education

in India. The universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, it was argued, were at least "founded on the same general principle" (Bayley 1877 222), even though doubts were expressed about the comparative worth of the degrees offered at Bombay and Madras. But the proposed vernacular university repudiated those educational principles by insisting on an education through the vernacular. E.C. Bayley who had earlier spotted in the move for a vernacular university the emergence of a certain "orientalism," warned the colonial government in 1877 of the dangers in "reversing the policy of centralizing university influence" (Bayley 1877 219) under the influence of local demands.

The terms on which the debate over orientalism was set up in the 1860s and 1870s were based on a new agenda. The earlier agenda was "to make the classical languages of the East the media for European knowledge" (Bayley 1870 101), but the new demand was not merely for a "pure oriental learning of the old type" (Thibaut 407). The British Indian Association had made it clear in its petition that "by the terms, education through the vernacular, we do not mean the revival of Asiatic learning and science as subjects of instruction. On the contrary, we seek only the diffusion of sciences and arts now prevalent in Europe, since we aim at nothing else than the universal spread of European Enlightenment throughout India" (Mookerjee et al 25). The petitioners, while acknowledging the benefits of education through English language, observed that these benefits were confined to only a small section of the natives. They further

argued that the achievements of "these few are insignificant when compared with the great majority, and this majority has received no enlightenment and in fact has not been affected at all" (23). The spread of education, it was felt, would be limited if instruction is imparted through a language "which is foreign and unknown and can never be acquired by the vast majority of the 140 millions of British India" (25).

The argument in favour of vernacular education, however, was never made in opposition to an education in English. Instead, it drew its strength from its implied conviction that the vernacular can be a possible ally of English. The petitiners argued that education through the vernacular would benifit "not the few only but the large masses of the people" (Mookerjee et al 23). In 1869 Sir D. Macleod, Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab expressed doubts over the efficacy of Macaulay's filtration theory by saying that "the great majority of those most highly trained by us have, by that training, been rendered almost as alien to the bulk of their countryman, as we are ourselves" (53).

Macleod's observation was in tune with the arguments of the petitioners. He had argued that in spite of the success of English education in promoting intellectual development of students, its "exotic" character did not allow it "as a means of raising a nation into robust and healthy activity, permeating the mass and bringing all classes into suitable relations with each other" (52). He thought that the taks of "raising a nation" and "permeating the mass" could be better accomplished by the

vernacular languages as instruments of education. English education had declined into mere "rote-learning" and "word-acquiring" (Kempson 84) and therefore needed to be substituted by the vernacular. But Kempson redefined the vernacular education in terms of its interlacing with "an occidental, rather than an oriental form" (84). He suggests that the spoken tongues would lay "the foundations of a future and more self-expansive enlightenment" (84), an idea that launched the trajectory of vernacular education in tandem with the English. The proposed vernacular university was envisaged merely to offer education through vernacular medium, but to help raise "men thoroughly competent to re-produce in an oriental garb the morality [Moral and Mental Philosophy] and science of Europe and to raise the dignity of the vernacular with the aid of its cognate classical language" (Reid 79). As M.S. Howell had argued, this university would help in the development of native thinkers and writers who "when their scholastic and university career is terminated...may be put into a position to increase more effectually by their own writings the diffusion of knowledge amongst their countrymen" (70).

However, the relationship between the demand for a vernacular university and the desire for the development of the vernacular literature was somewhat problematic. The argument that a shift from English to the vernacular would produce creative works of merit did not seem to have a strong basis. The example of Bengali literature was cited to demonstrate that "it was

precisely those who distinguished themselves by their mastery of the English tongue...devoted themselves to the formation of a healthy literature in their own language" (Bose 310-11). Bayley wrote in 1870 that "the last thirty years, during which it [Bangalee language] is said to have been enriching itself so largely from Sanscrit sources, has been precisely the period in which enormous efforts have been made at great expense and with remarkable success to spread English Education in Lower Bengal" (1870 104). Bayley was suggesting that English education did not necessarily work against the interests of either the vernacular or of Sanskrit. The improvement, enrichment and expansion of the vernacular, according to Bayley, should be guided by "natural laws" and should not be controlled "artifically" by the endeavours of Government (1870 104). A.M. Bose, Secretary of the Indian Association in Calcutta made a similar argument by saying that "foreigners, however learned and well-intentioned, can never hope to form the literature of another people and the only way in which they can help in the formation of such a literature is by bestowing on the people a *sound education* and thus enabling them to create a literature for themselves" (310, emphasis added).

Both the orientalists and anglicists emphasized the improvement of the vernaculars. In fact, the new orientalism of the 1860s and 1870s marked a crucial phase in the history of education in India as it tried to rework orientalism within the premises of anglicism. Such a reworking needed a rearrangement of the existing system of education. Although the orientalists

and anglicists had different views on the question of language to be used in educational institutions, both had faith in the capacity of these institutions to improve and develop the vernacular languages. Both considered English and the vernaculars as potential allies in the spread of the ideas of the European enlightenment and civilization among the natives. In their demand for a vernacular university the British Indian Association had only set the terms for a possible alliance between these two seemingly opposite groups: "while maintaining and promoting English education, can we not adopt a vernacular language, as a medium better suited than a strange tongue for the general diffusion of knowledge and the general reform of ideas, manners and morals of the people?" (Mookerjee et al 25).

The new orientalism had also brought the question of the vernacular to a state of crisis. M.S. Howell acknowledged that "Hindustani boys should be taught, like English boys, in their own vernacular, because that mode is more expeditious and more sure" (70) and "more within the comprehension of the people" (67). But questions were legitimately raised as to which language was exactly meant to be "vernacular." In the context of the North Western Provinces it was held that there are not one but two vernaculars - Urdu and Hindi. This pushed Howell to address the problem of the "educational vernacular" by arguing that "the development of two rival vernaculars within comparatively so small a tract of country as the North-Western provinces would be fatal to national intellectual progress" (73). In fact, the issue

of the educational vernacular in 1868 marked the beginning of a difficulty in the education system which needed to look after the diverse interests of the people in the administrative unit called the "province." This difficulty continued to influence subsequent thinking on the subject and finally occupied the centre-stage in the linguistic creation of states in independent India. The issue of the vernacular, therefore, can be better understood by recognizing its political aspect. Bayley had, in fact, argued that the demand for a vernacular university was "not educational, but political," evinced by a certain class of people "who have not acquired and are not likely to any great extent acquire, English" (1870a 101). According to him, ambitions of these people were "stimulated" by watching the career and acquisitions of people in other provinces through English. The recognition of the educational as the political problematizes any easy association between the demand for a vernacular education and the claim for democratization of education. There is clearly a need to reiterate the political dimension of the vernacular which has remained under erasure on account of the way it has been constituted in the literary-aesthetic domain.

The terms around which the debate over the vernacular was conducted would suggest that the issue belonged to the domain of pedagogy: "if teaching be not in the language in which the pupil thinks, and illustration by objects and associations with which he is conversant, intellectual development becomes dwarfed and

stunted" (Elliott 118). The interest in the pedagogical value of the vernacular entailed also the task of producing a "suitable" language and literature for the purpose of teaching. "The great want of the people is a vernacular literature; - works in History, Art and Science, containing sound knowledge, written in an elegant style, and composed on models of thought and expression agreeable to the native mind" (Simson 1869 93). The rearrangement of education along the lines of the vernacular needed a corresponding rearrangement of aesthetics and pedagogy, which, as recent studies have shown, produced enormous effects on the native perception of language and literature. In the subsequent sections I will explore through example the complex negotiations that were underway between English education and the fashioning of vernacular language and literature.

Section II

Sister Nivedita on national education

The focus in this section would be on Sister Nivedita's papers on national education in India.[1] A close look at these papers would reveal how a quasi-religious national identity is articulated by collapsing the language of religion into a discourse of the nation. In fact, Sister Nivedita's mission is to write "an Upanishad of the National History [that] would make eternal foundation for the Indian Nationality in the Indian heart, the only world in which the nationality can be built enduringly" (104). One could see how such a history is produced

by a systematic placing of the liberal, humanist ideas of the west alongside the "civilizational" values of the Indian past. In the process, India is mapped onto a western framework of national development. A clear example of such a mapping can be gleaned through the following passage:

> Henceforth they [the Indian People] will understand - indeed they have understood for several years past - that even schooling has to justify itself to the conscience of the schooled by the great law of sacrifice and that this law here is the development of the child for the good, not of himself, but of *Jana-Desh-Dharma* or, as the Western would phrase it, the development of the individual for the benefit of the environment (27).

One could see here the insertion of a western vocabulary into the political imaginary of the native. Here, the development of the individual for the benefit of the environment = the development of the child for the good of *Jana-Desh-Dharma*. Of course, such a translation of the western into the Indian is fraught with the realization that the western vocabulary is only the product of a particular conjuncture in western history and that the vocabulary which is supposedly Indian is only of a sanskritized and brahminic variety. However, this uneasy realization is overcome, in the above passage, through a systematic suppression of the respective histories of these two sets of vocabulary. In fact, their easy translation in the

passage is an indication that western political vocabulary is equally complicitous with the vocabulary of the sanskritized Indian variety in producing the nation and its history. But, as we would see and as Nivedita would argue, it is the education which would naturalize the politics of such a translation, while making the rite of passage look smooth, natural, normal.

Nivedita's course in national education is designed to ensure the easy translation of western language and thought into the Indian as that would constitute India's entry into the modern world, into knowledge itself. "Knowledge is one," Nivedita says, "In pure knowledge and therefore, in science, there can be neither native nor foreign"(42). And it is this knowledge which is to form a part of her agenda for national education in India.

She perceives for India "the task of conveying modern knowledge in the tongues of women and the people" (63). "How are people to understand Indian history" she asks, "if they have first to learn a foreign language?"(63). She knew that the spread of modern, western forms of knowledge through a foreign tongue would be slow and very limited in scope. One way to expedite the process would be to make that knowledge form available in the vernaculars. The development of the vernaculars, it was believed would not only end the hegemony of sanskrit but would guarantee the speedy availability of modern spirit to people at large. It was also perceived that since Sanskrit was considered the repository of traditional knowledge in India an apology for the dissemination of that knowledge in the vernaculars would seem

normal. Nivedita argues that the task of conserving tradition and culture need not lie in the hands of the antiquarian or the pedant; it should be made available to people in general.

Thus, a thorough democratization of traditional Indian forms of knowledge is envisaged through the production of a set of sanskritized vernaculars which, while releasing culture from the hegemony of the Sanskrit language and its scholars, also creates the hegemony of a certain form of the vernacular. The entry of culture into the vernacular does not mark the end of the hegemony of Sanskrit, rather it marks the beginning of a new form of hegemony which is to be exercised through sanskritization of the vernacular. In the context of such sanskritization, which is clearly the product of a certain desire to democratize culture, the case for the study of a foreign culture stands vindicated. Nivedita further argues that "the form may be foreign; but the life, the energy, the holiness of dedication will be Indian and know themselves for Indian. The whole body of knowledge can be assimilated easily by the native who is rooted and grounded in his relation to his own country" (50).

The anxiety of a foreign influence which haunts through Nivedita's writing is temporarily resolved through the recognition that cultural forms "are some old, some new, but the ideal itself knows nothing of time" (50). She argues that a national education should release our imagination which is made up of familiar and known elements of our cultural past. It should lead us through the limiting forms of our and other people's

culture which are but time and space specific. It should lead us to the ideal and "when we reach the ideal itself, we have reached the eternal. Here all humanity is at one. Here there is neither new, nor old, neither own nor foreign" (35).

The logical fallout of such an assertion is that there is an ideal form of knowledge which can be realized by people at all places and at all times. This also will mean that the real test of our education is the degree to which we have attained to this ideal, this universal. "This is the necessary condition," Nivedita writes, "of all healthy education in all countries whatever their political position or stage of development" (29).

Nivedita, thus, resolves the question of cultural difference by proposing a democratized form of education where the vernacular is requisitioned for the dissipation of anxiety concerning cultural invasion from the west. "The true differentiae of the Hindu mind" Nivedita says, "is not a preoccupation with Sanskrit" (101). Thus, by defining the Hindu identity away from Sanskrit, Nivedita reclaims the position of the vernacularists through co-opting them as partners in nation-building. But the proposed identity, in the context of nation-making, turns out to be problematic. On one hand, it produces a hegemony of the vernacular, quite in the manner of Sanskrit. This form of the vernacular shapes itself in the model of the Sanskrit and in doing so delegitimizes other forms of the vernacular. On the other, by mapping the national onto the hindu, Nivedita apparently denies nationality to a series of subjects (muslim,

christian, tribal, etc.). Nevertheless, she reclaims them for her national project by proposing a shared identity, which she thinks can be realized by emulating the spirit of a modern Indian who is given to the course of humanity, of people, of country and who is free from the limits of the local. "There is a level of achievement," Nivedita writes in a self-assured tone, "where all educated persons of the world can meet, understand and enjoy each other's associations. This level is freedom. Intellectually speaking, it is *Mukti*" (39). In fact, she argues that national education in India should ensure the production of "an oriental in whom orientalism had been intensified, while to it had been added the Western conception of the cause of Humanity, of the Country, of the People as a whole, Western power of initiative and organisation, Western energy and Practicality - such an ideal should inspire our energy of culture in the East" (69). Here, Nivedita has only given the outlines of a problem which has occupied the interests of those who are engaged with questions of identity in independent India. Further, our national education, premised on the idea of a unitary national identity, will perhaps be the privileged site where contestations over identity are being and would be staged.

Section III

Narsinhrao and the refashioning of vernacular literature

This section is concerned with the Indian trajectory of romanticism and its crucial role in the fashioning of a modernized, literary vernacular. Among other things, romanticism

enabled a new kind of poetry-writing. I will attempt to trace the development of this new form and its peculiar history in India by way of an example of the late nineteenth century Gujarati poet-critic Narsinhrao B. Divetia (1856-1937), popularly called Narsinhrao. Narsinhrao's ambition was to acquaint his Gujarati readers with some of the finest tenets of romantic poetry. Umashankar Joshi and others have remarked that his nature poetry which had combined the emotional richness of English romantic poets with the linguistic elegance of Sanskrit was received "ecstatically" by the "Wordsworth and Shelley-loving youth of Gujarat" (356). Indeed, he is considered to be the Wordsworth of Gujarati poetry (Mehd 3-4).[2]

Nature poetry certainly had existed in both Sanskrit and folk traditions in India before the arrival of English romantic poetry. But English romantic poetry is significant as it played a crucial role in modernizing of vernacular under colonialism. India's acquaintance with romanticism is inseparable from the beginnings of English education. Through this education and study of English literature romanticism as a literary impulse became firmly entrenched in the Indian sensibility during the second half of the nineteenth century. Besides it was enriched by German and French ideas. Therefore British romanticism in collaboration with the German and French counterparts gave to English educated Indians a sense of European ideas. But the importance of British romanticism to the vernacular need not be overemphasized; it was only one unit of the neatly packaged literary education that the Indians received.

Further, the Indian understanding of romanticism was not confined to the writers of the romantic revival in England. It was as much informed by the impact of writers like Shakespeare and Tennyson as by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats. Narsinhrao's understanding of romanticism emerged out of his engagement with writers ranging from Shakespeare, Suckling, Carlyle, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats to Tennyson, Max Müller, Goethe, Wagner, Rousseau and Poe.[3] The vernacular writers were thus open to the *western* influence under the impact of English education envisaged by Arnold. As English education in such an "expansive" definition means European education, it may appear somewhat reductive to study the reception of romanticism in India only in terms of the institutionalization of English Studies. In tracing the history of this reception one has to think of it in terms other than the process of institutionalization. Once we fracture the reception of romanticism in this manner one could arrive at a more nuanced and complex account of our encounter with English literature, which was, institutionally speaking, decidedly British but was hardly so in terms of creative and critical practice in India.

Narsinhrao was the first Gujarati poet who acknowledged freely the influence of romanticism in his poetry and took to writing romantic poetry in his language.[4] The issue here is not the success or failure of his poetic enterprise. Many critics have alleged that in his attempts to write romantic poetry he was like a schoolboy who mastered a particular metre and then

incessantly tried to flesh it out with a certain type of subject matter (Mehd 30). If such criticism is taken seriously it is possible to call his poetry `formulaic' (Joshi 363). Sometimes his poetry is described as instances of "fancy" and not "imagination" (Mehd 30). The application of such Coleridgean notions are ways of legitimizing such concepts. The criticism that his romanticism stays only at the level of precepts and fails in practice speaks about the critics' set of expectations about what romantic poetry should be.[5] His `formulaic' poetry which was not imaginative by western standards can throw interesting light on the way he nativized romanticism and fashioned a new form of writing.

The form of poetry he introduced and popularized in Gujarati was the lyric. His long and laborious essays on the nature of the lyric are evidence of his attempt to define a conceptual space for this new form of poetry.[6] He was engaged in a lively debate with his contemporaries about how to define the lyric in an Indian language. The range of expressions he used to describe the nature of the lyric indicates that the native writers were not only engaged with this western form critically but also made it their own. The various usages of the lyric such as *Sangita Kavya, Atmalakshi Kavya, Swanubhavarasika Kavya, Raagdhwani Kavya, Sangitakalpa Kavya, Urmi Geet, Urmi Kavita* (Narsinhrao 205-6) provide a clue to the range of complex negotiations involved in the process of its nativization. The process involves not only the creative adaptation of western

form but its appropriation in another culture. Narasinhrao was concious of the implications of adapting an 'alien' form for vernacular use: "there are two reasons why it is difficult to find poetry of intense feelings [lyric] in Gujarati literature: One, the context for the poetic evolution of the form was not available on account of the peculiar circumstances of our country and two, forms and metres appropriate for the poetry of intense feeling obtains rarely in our literature, if it exists at all" (66). He argued that the absence of the lyric form in Gujarati poetry made him "to press other verse forms into play to suit poetry of intense feeling, if a convenient metre does not already exist" (66).

Narsinhrao's engagement with the romantic tradition and his fashioning of the lyric in Gujarati clearly shows that romanticism has a different trajectory in the vernacular. But the question which then needs to be asked is: how has one to understand the nature of this creativity and adaptiveness when one is aware that creativity is embedded in a history of colonial violence and appropriation? Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has shaken the easy acceptance of western romanticism and has demonstrated that the west's romantic preoccupation helped naturalize colonial violence and consolidated imperial power. Although it is possible to argue that Said's reading of romanticism is too instrumental, one is compelled to engage with the fact of our romanticism, Indian romanticism and the violence it has naturalized in both the colonial and nationalist phase of

our history. What, for example, is the function and effect of romanticism in Narsinhrao's poetry?

The poem *Rajyarohan*, (`Ascendancy to the Throne'), is perhaps the only poem in which Narsinhrao deals explicitly with a political theme. Written in 1911, it celebrats the coronation of George V as the Emperor of India. Although the poem sets up a tension between the mutability of dynasties and the valorization of the King, it remains celebratory in tone with the employment of the martial metre at certain junctures.

> Gone are those anxious days, the days of darkness
> Peace has spread like brightness in the sky,
> Again Delhi! dressed in festive clothes
> You now welcome the new emperor with ecstasy.
> ....
> Wearing the Emperor's crown,
> Leaving aside kingly comforts,
> He will satisfy his subjects.
> And fill them with happiness.
> The high hopes of the subjects,
> The king who is eager to fulfill,
> Will attain to fame eternal,
> With bonds of love. (Mehd 80-3).

One can see here the poet's natural acceptance of a political order, an acceptance which erases the history of colonialist violence. His acceptance of the colonial political

order is consistent with his romantic poetic ideal. In this respect, he is not much different from Rabindranath Tagore who professed strong nationalist sympathies. In fact Narsinhrao, in his essay "*Kavita ane Rajkiya Sanchalan*" (`Poetry and Political Movements'), goes along with Tagore in saying that

> When some storm of a feeling sweeps across the country, art is under a disadvantage. For in such an atmosphere, the boisterous passion breaks through the cordon of harmony and thrusts itself forward as the subject, which with its bulk and pressure, dethrones the unity of a creation (3 ; original in English).

The `storm of feeling' clearly refers to the nationalist struggle. Narsinhrao, like Tagore, thinks that the nationalist question is basically a political question, a merely "boisterous passion" which threatens to deprive poetry of "the unity of creation." He argues that "the beauty of poetry is damaged when it is used for political purposes" (3) and that the "treatment of political themes in poetry narrows down our feeling and thinking, whereas poetry which sings of the whole mankind attains universality and width" (5). He substantiates his argument by drawing from the Sanskrit tradition of Bhavabhuti whose statement "*Amruthaha Atmanaha Kala*," (The poetry of the soul is eternal) he claims to be the ideal of all poetry. He describes his poetic vocation in almost religio-spiritual terms: "In the face of God's vast creation and the splendour of human existence, the nationalist feelings of a people would certainly look narrow. The

poetry which could deal with this theme capably is very rare. The permanence of poetry, therefore, lies in fitting the soul of poetry to the spirit of mankind. Such poetry is only eternal" (6). Again, "poetry dwells in the realm of the divine" and has no truck with the "material world" (7). He ends his argument with a rhetorical question: "How can we create poetry consonant with the ideal *Athmanaha Amrutha Kala* in the mean atmosphere of politics, after accepting that poetry is divine?" (7). Narasinhrao's assessment of poetry in terms of the divine served to undermine the nationalist project. His invocation of the Sanskrit tradition of a particular historical juncture is not only to redefine lyric poetry but also to characterize nationalism as a form of violence against a "cordon of harmony" and "universal brotherhood."

Although Narsinhrao's idea of poetry was meant as an opposition to nationalism, it remained curiously analogous to the nationalist project. Narsinhrao tried to bracket the literary-aesthetic away from the political in precisely the way the Congress sought in its early years to bracket the social away from the political. (I have argued this point in the second chapter). It is perhaps for this reason that a vernacular poetry which draws both from Sanskrit and English was not incompatible with a nationalist commitment to a sanskritized vernacular education as an entry into the benefits of modernization. It is on the basis of such a compatibility that Narsinhrao could defend himself against the charges that he was cut off from the masses.

In the 1930s, with the advent of Gandhi, a new school of Gujarati writers professing closeness to the people emerged. Coinciding with the emergence of such a school, attacks were launched against Narsinhrao and other writers of his generation on the grounds of their alienation from the masses, an alienation evidence in the adoption/adaptation of foreign models of writing. Narsinhrao defended himself against these charges by stating that the writers like Umashankar Joshi and Kaka Kalelkar, who belonged to the "Gandhiyug" and were presumably committed to the masses, had, in fact, poetic ideals no different from his. He said that Joshi's poetic desire for an expansive, unlimited idea of world peace" (610) "is not satisfied with the attainment of a worldly *swaraj*; it is not even content with a world-wide spread of peace ; rather it aspires for something still higher, greater" (609).

The case of Narsinhrao demonstrates that the literary vernacular, whether fashioned in the colonialist or the nationalist phase, was shaped through a complex engagement with both the high tradition of Sanskrit and the liberal-humanist tradition of the west. This version of the vernacular still continues to be at the heart of the mainstream educational projects which are supposed to benefit the masses. I shall argue that such a vernacular, instead of benefitting the masses, disenfranchise them. It is precisely against such a history that it is easy to understand why current assessments of Narsinhrao have eulogized his role in brahminising a vulgar tongue:

"Narsinhrao succeeded in civilizing the low-born *Shudra* poetry of the age of Narmad, making it brahmin [*dwija*]" (Mehd 13).

Section IV

The vernacular and the popular: reading Tagore after Ilaiah

In the preceding sections, I had argued that both English and the vernacular emerged as "equal" claimants in the native education programme during the later half of the nineteenth century. The claims of the vernacular, however, were accompanied by a task of producing a suitable language and literature for "modern" education. Alongside the vernacular had necessarily to counter the perception that an English education was the arbiter of what was "sound" and "accurate."

The universalist and humanist claims of English education were challenged by native writers on the ground that these ideals were only problematically located there and were not in consonance with the requirements of the colonies. The native writers who challenged these claims were, however, culturally predisposed to these ideals in their own literature. Consequently, both the English and vernacular literature worked towards the fulfilment of similar objective -- to consolidate in the native society the ideals of universalism and humanism.

The emergence of the vernacular as an ally of the English language and literature did not have any adverse effect on the status of English in the native society. On the contrary, it was viewed as a "force" and directed towards the diffusion of

European knowledge. Both the colonial and the native elite made investment in this "diffusionist" programme of native education. If this logic offered the colonial government the possibility of greater penetration into the native society, it also gave the native elite the opportunity for a career in the vernacular.

It is important to note here that the emergence of the native interest in developing the vernacular is crucially related to the social, political and economic conditions under colonialism. A large body of writing has come out in recent years tracing the various processes through which English language and literature were institutionalized in the native society.[7] But nothing much has been written about the historical emergence of the vernacular languages and literature. Although it is possible to study the 'influence' of English literature on the development of the vernacular languages and literature, it might be more productive to explore the changes which took place in the native perception of language and literature which brought about the affiliation between the two under colonialism. True, the interaction between English and the vernaculars took place within the agendas of the colonial state, but their development marked a "rupture in existing literary practices as well as in the social processes that appear to have been at work transforming the languages and their literatures" (Tharu 1991 164). The rupture in the literary practices of the vernacular did not simply mean a break with the past; it rather involved a process of "selective marginalization and delegitimization of existing literatures and

literary practices, and the constitution of a classical Indian literary tradition" (Tharu 1991 171). It is therefore necessary to examine this history of "marginalized" literature and literary practices in order to understand the nature and extent of the native investment in the "constitution" of a classical Indian literary tradition. An exercise of this kind, I believe, would dispel the notions about a stagnant hindu society. It would also show how a mutation took place in the vernacular language and literature on account of colonial intervention and of how a native "tradition" was invented and pressed into the service of vernacular literature.

Sudipta Kaviraj argues that the earlier traditions of vernacular language and literature had "a consciously subaltern relation between themselves and the high classical texts" (1992 34). Citing the example of *bhakti* poetry, he argues that these traditions had worked against "the logic of exclusion of common people from aesthetic and religious seriousness built into the classical Hindu tradition" (1992 34). The traditional hindu society had a highly literate culture, but that culture thrived on the basis of a "logic of exclusion," thereby limiting the scope of literacy, preventing it from spreading to ordinary unlettered people. The people in the society spoke only vernacular dialects and had no access to a language and a culture which maintained and was maintained by a system of caste prohibitions.

It is through the system of caste that the brahmins had ensured that the skills to master Sanskrit be produced within their own caste. Kaviraj suggests have shown that the caste system came under stress on account of the changes brought about by the muslim rule in India Although the status of Sanskrit did not diminish under this rule, the entry of both Arabic and Persian languages made a crucial shift in the native perception of language. A mastery of Arabic and Persian was considered essential under the new dispensation. Although the native elite remained tied to Sanskrit on account of the obvious advantages it offered in terms of social authority, they saw in the language of their rulers greater possibilities of control and dominance. Such a change in the native elite's perception of language "continued undisturbed down to the time of Ram Mohan Roy who was proficient in both Sanskrit and Arabic-Persian besides his native Bengali and colonial English" (Kaviraj 1992 32). Despite the intentions of the native elite, the muslim rule created an atmosphere where *bhakti* poetry could flourish and define itself away from the high tradition of Sanskrit. The *bhakti* poetry, which came into prominence in the writings of Nanak, Kabir, Ramanujan and Chaitanya started to undermine the literary and religious hold of Sanskrit. The use of the vernaculars by the *bhakti* poets, Kaviraj shows, marked "an internal conceptual rebellion within classical Brahminical Hinduism": "Bhakti Hinduism, like strands of European Protestantism, sought to destroy the brokerage of the Brahmins between the devotee and his God" (1992 38). This is, of course, not to suggest that the vernacular completely displaced

the authority of Sanskrit language and literature. Rather, the historical emergence of the vernacular could be traced to the point when "the vernacular literatures and poetic traditions began an undeclared revolution" (Kaviraj 1992 35) against the supremacy of Sanskrit language and literature.

But such a tradition of the vernacular got increasingly transformed into a "modern" form under British colonialism. Tharu has characterized this "break" as "one in which the principal arenas of literary production shifted from the temple and the court on the one hand and the field or village on the other, to the new port cities : Calcutta, Bombay and Madras" (1991 176). She suggests further that the arrival of the printing press crucially affected the "development" of the vernaculars. Kaviraj has shown that Calcutta, which was an unknown village before the advent of the British, came to acquire a place of eminence and "slowly, the language of the Calcutta *bhadralok* with occasional skillful mixtures from areas which had a reputation for particularly mellifluous accents came to be regarded as the norm language for *bhadralok* Bengalis for all regions of this linguistic area" (1992 44). The making of the "norm language" is related to the emergence of the "written" form of the book.

The use of the vernacular in the book organized language not only at the material level of letters but elevated the language of the book to a supremacy by allowing it a greater reach and penetration. I am not suggesting that the "diffusion" of knowledge is possible only through the instrument of the book.

But I would like to emphasize that the colonial state conceived of a possible diffusion of knowledge among native people only through books. Such a tendency is nowhere as glaringly visible as in the colonial policies on education. For example, every time a case was made for the use of the vernacular in schools and colleges it invariably led to an official stock-taking of books available and the case was stalled quite predictably on the ground of the non-availability of books in the vernacular. English decidedly had an advantage over the vernacular in this respect. The arrival of the English book in the native society created not only hunger for English language and literature but also charged the native community with the imperative to produce books in the vernaculars.

The printing press had opened up new opportunities for a large-scale consumption of vernacular books. But uncontrolled proliferation of printed texts posed a problem for the colonial state which had no idea about the kind of effect these books would produce in the native mind. It also posed a problem for the native elite whose cultural hegemony began to shake. Therefore the production of books came under surveillance of both the colonial state and the native elite. The colonial rulers could only control the production process by way of censorship, whereas the native elite did it through the criteria of classification. In the context of the publication of Bengali books Tapti Roy has argued that both the colonial state and the

native elite had common interests in staking out "criteria of classifying printed literature by *quality* and *taste*" (32; emphasis added).

It is precisely through a careful institution of "quality" and "taste" that the native elite could judge books either as "good" or "bad," "vulgar" or "refined." New rules of taste and respectability were sought not only to define a "high" culture of vernacular literary practice but a strict adherence to these rules was required for the upkeep of the moral health of the native population. This was clearly not only a matter of literary taste but also of politics. The ascertainment of literary taste was one of the tasks which the native elite had to undertake. Almost from the moment this task was formulated there seemed to be two approved sources which the native writers could use for the "improvement" of the vernaculars: One was the "classical" source of Sanskrit language and literature, the other was "modern" English.

The "modernization" of the vernacular was thus envisaged within the limits of orientalism and anglicism. Orientalist scholarship which had "retrieved" and put into circulation a large body of classical texts had also created conditions for easy and ready access to knowledge about the Indian past. The orientalist enterprise was directed towards the reconstruction of an Indian past which, as Tharu and Lalitha have argued, was "a brahminic one in which the Indian society and its history was reduced to what could be found in the ancient sacred texts" (1995

11). It is obvious that the methodology which worked only with "the ancient sacred texts" was reductive and partial. But the working of such a methodology produced effects which were crucial to the making of vernacular literature. Tharu and Lalitha argue that "one of the consequences of reaffirming the high brahminical image in the context of a history that was ostensibly in decline was the marginalization of the more recent literatures as well as the literatures that emerged from historically changing, non-brahminical and secular contexts" (1995 11).

Following Tharu and Lalitha it is possible to argue that orientalism involved a process whereby the Indian past was strategically essentialized as "pure" and "authentic" and that the brahminized and sanskritized past was constituted at a certain point of Indian history. Therefore, the claim for its location in the past is as problematic as its continuity in the present. The advantage of such an argument is that it helps problematize easy associations between "Sanskrit" and the "tradition." It brings to the fore the `constructed' character of both these categories. Once Sanskrit is viewed in this manner it no longer remains merely as a "language" or a "literature" but emerges as, to borrow a phrase from Vivek Dhareshwar in the context of English language, "a juridical/legal apparatus, also a political idiom, in short, a semiotic system signifying modernity etc. - to impose its secular categories on the social world" (1993 116). Such a view is defensible if one recognizes the extent to which the Sanskrit legal texts were crucial in

producing orientalist knowledge. The orientalist decision to institute hindu law on the Sanskrit *shastras* not only led to the enfranchisement of the hindus but also inscribed brahminical norms into the making of that law. This decision, according to Rosance Rocher, had "a deep effect on Sanskrit scholarship, in that it led to a renaissance in *dharmasastra* literature" (221). Thus, the interest in Sanskrit in the nineteenth century was not merely literary-aesthetic but politico-ideological. Its retrieval as "tradition" was made precisely at the moment when it entered into a "modern" career. Warren Hastings decision that "in all suits regarding inheritance, marriage, caste, and other religious usages, or institutions, the laws of the Koran with respect to Mahometans and those of the *Shaster* with respect to Gentoos shall be invariable adhered to" (in Rocher 220) was only the beginning of such career.

Sanskrit as a source language for the improvement of the vernacular was only problematically ancient but its functions were modern. What was retrieved as an ancient Indian tradition was no doubt, an orientalist construction, based on a sanskritized brahminized and hinduised past. Such a tradition was invoked to serve as a model for the betterment of the vernaculars. The other approved model was English. But as I have suggested in Chapter I, this model was also of a configuration which had many resemblances with the Sanskrit model. The status of Sanskrit in relation to English was however ambivalent. On the one hand, Sanskrit-as-tradition was only a thing of the past, a

reminder to the hindus of their earlier achievements and subsequent degradation. On the other, Sanskrit-as-modernity had a function similar to English: to improve the hindu society from its present degradation.

It is, however, important to note that the acceptance of this twin Sanskrit-English source for the development of the vernaculars was not total. Although there were efforts at fashioning the vernacular in the image of Sanskrit, such efforts came into conflict with the nationalist urge to widen its politics through the vernacular. During the nationalist phase of its development the vernacular was required to be reconstituted in terms of the "national" and the "popular." Nationalism had to develop its own critique of the vernacular in order to overcome, on the one hand, the limitations of a foreign language such as English and on the other, the inaccesibility of a highly Sanskritized vernacular language and literature. However, the nationalist projection of the vernacular as popular is to be viewed as part of its politics and not to be treated as "a democratization of the linguistic field" (Kaviraj 1992 45). Since the case for the vernacular was made in the name of the people, it had an obvious democratic agenda but, as Kaviraj has argued, "within its incontestably democratic trends were lodged sharper inequalities of a new kind" (1992 45). Citing the example of Bankim's essay "Bangadeshar Krshak," Kaviraj observes how "the peasantry, the Hashim Sheiks and Rama Kaivartas of Bankim's famous essay, stood no chance of comprehending the argument in

which they figured, and which was made on their behalf - for no other reason but they could hardly understand its Sanskritic grace" (1992 45). The point is that the popular-vernacular literature of the nationalist variety was part of the burden of nationalist politics to produce a sense of community around language and speech. The construction of a national popular image of the vernacular was, no doubt, crucial from the point of view of the politics which nationalism conducted but it was precisely on account of such a politics that other available critiques of the vernacular were insistently marginalized.[8] In fact, the nationalist critique of the vernacular was both a response and a counter to the subterranean critiques of privilege and monopoly. As a consequence, nationalist invocations of the vernacular were charged and constrained by the necessity to prove that the vernacular was for the people, by the people and of the people.[9]

It is perhaps in this context that it might be useful to examine Rabindranath Tagore's engagement with the question of education in the vernacular. It is through a reading of Tagore's essays on education that I propose to explore the ways in which a link was established and naturalized between the vernacular and the national-popular.[10]

In his essay "The Vicissitudes of Education" (1892) Tagore observes that "since our education bears no relation to our life, the books we read paint no vivid pictures of our homes, extol no ideals of our society. The daily pursuits of our lives find no place in those pages, nor do we meet there anybody or anything we

happily recognize as our friends and relatives, our sky and earth, our mornings and evenings, or our cornfields and rivers. *Education and life can never become one* in such circumstances, and are bound to remain separated by a barrier" (45, emphasis added). Tagore's critique of English education derives its force from the separation of "education and life" in the English textbook. There are two reasons, Tagore argues, which make the English book "doubly foreign" to us: "Language is our first difficulty. Because of the many grammatical and syntactical differences between English and our mother-tongue, English is very much a foreign language to us. Then, there is the difficulty connected with the subject matter" (40). Having located the "foreignness" of the English book in terms of language and subject matter he offers the following facts for our consideration:

> Suppose a children's Reader in English contains a story about haymaking, and another about a quarrel that Charlie and Katie had when they were snowballing. These stories relate incidents familiar to English children, and are interesting and enjoyable to them; but they rouse no memories in the minds of our children, unfold no pictures before their eyes. Our children simply grope about in the dark when reading these books (41).

Such arguments have become so natural and normal that their continuity in independent India is taken for granted. There is, however, a need to understand how and why such assessments of the English textbook have become powerful.

Tagore recognizes that "the schools in our country, far from being integrated to society, are imposed on it from outside" (68). On the other hand, in Europe, far from being divorced from life, education is "an integral part of it. It grows, develops and circulates in society, and leaves its imprint on what people say, think and do in their everyday life" (68). Such bonding between education in schools and the life outside does not obtain in India where there are "many disagreements, between what [students] learn at school and what their parents and relatives talk about at home" (68). The reason for the failure of the English textbook and the European style of learning, Tagore argues, "need not be sought in any defect in that learning, but in the unfavourable conditions of our life" (46) which precludes the necessary "unity of mind and life and culture" (207). Although it is possible that we might succeed in copying to perfection the externals of the European school "we shall never get the real thing" (68). The "real" thing, according to Tagore, is the harmonization of Indian education with Indian life (69).

How is this unity between education and life to be effected? Certainly not through the imitation of European models. What Tagore proposes is an education based on an understanding of "the ideals by which our country has been attracted and stimulated in the past" (69). He is aware that both European and oriental learning in their present form are inadequate for the attainment of the "ideals" of the Indian past. Referring to the contemporary system of education, Tagore observes:

> Modern European Culture, whose truth and strength lie in its mobility, comes to us rigidly fixed, almost like our own Shastras, about which our minds have to be passive and uncritical because of their supposed divine origin (208).

He is as critical of modern European knowledge as of the knowledge of the *Shastras*. This is what he says about the culture of the Sanskrit *pathasala*: "it was belauded, as having come straight from Brahma's mouth, or Shiva's matted locks, so that it was unlike anything else in the world, and had to be kept apart and guarded, lest it be contaminated by the touch of the common people" (219). The effect of such an exclusive approach to knowledge, according to Tagore, is that it only allows a foreign language and a foreign culture to have "perfect freedom of movement and growth" (21). The task, therefore, that he recommends to his contemporaries is that of "breaking open the treasure-trove of our ancestors and [of] use[ing] it for our commerce of life" (224). He acknowledges that the present set-up of hindu society is "letting the Hindu down by smothering his true nature and power" (152).

More than the foreign rule, it is the system of caste, Tagore implies, which is at the root of our educational malady. He maintains that the exclusion of oriental knowledge from the system of education is one of the reasons why caste has not come under the scrutiny of science. The reason why educated Indians are still under the influence of the pandits and the scriptures,

according to Tagore, is that they "study western science at school or college but oriental ones elsewhere in a different milieu" (151), a milieu which forces one into silence by threats of social ostracism when one dares to bring what he learnt at school to bear upon what is outside. The result is the separation between school education and social practice. Although there is a licence to learn western science, "The strict regulations regarding the licence are calculated to discourage their use" (191). It is therefore necessary to 'discard' all customs and prejudices that have kept us isolated behind artificial barriers" (156). Tagore particularly refers to the manner in which Gokhale's Bill for the introduction of compulsory primary education was received by a section of the educated class in the native society. He locates a self-contradiction among the educated Indians who while they sending their children to modern schools opposed the extension of the benefits of similar education to the masses. Their opposition, Tagore argues, is not an instance of their "hypocrisy"; "it is simply this: in the soul there has arrived the spring of a new faith, while on the lips the old beliefs still linger" (155). He wants education to spread to the masses but, at the same time, he recognizes the hold our social customs and prejudices have on the native mind. The task before us, according to him, is not merely to overcome the language and content of English education but, more important, to overcome the habits of custom and prejudice that prevent education from spreading to the masses.

In Tagore's scheme of education the study of English language and literature is sidelined to "make room for the study of all the languages which carry the living stream of the mind of modern India" (224). To him, through the development of modern Indian languages knowledge, both oriental and occidental, can be made available to a great number of people. He thinks that the issue of the vernacular is closely tied to the issue of mass education. It is the vernacular which can effect the union of education and life, a union which is impossible through an education in English. Tagore argues that "in spite of the great care with which English is learnt in this country, the books that are likely to live a long time are all being written in Bengali" (47). Citing the example of Bankimchandra Chatterji's periodical *Bangadarshan*, He claims that "it was the instrument with which a great genius broke down the barrier between our education and our life, and effected the joyous union of our head and heart" (46). The reason for Bangadarshan's mass appeal, Tagore argues, was not because it produced truth earlier unknown, but it "made us see ourselves in a new, revealing light. In the figures of Suryamukhi and Kamalamani, it showed our women as they are; in the characters of Chandrasekhar and Pratap, it raised the ideal of Bengali manhood; and it cast a ray of glory on the petty affairs of our day-to-day life" (47). What characterized *Bangadarshan* was its "universality" which was consistent with "the world literary trends" (134).

In Tagore's scheme of things the vernacular was poised between English and Sanskrit: like English it was in tune with the western knowledge of the world and unlike Sanskrit it could carry the living stream of folk tradition back home, admitting no barrier between caste and caste, the learned and the unlearned. Therefore, it was the fit vehicle for bridging the gap between "education and life." Post-independence conceptualizations of mass education continue to invoke such a function for the vernacular. In fact, Moturi Satyanarayana in "Common Language as a Functional Vehicle and Its Place in Education" refers to Tagore's notion of the vernacular in relation to the linguistic policies adopted by independent India:

> The language of the region today is the sole educational medium throughout India upto high-school standard with a few exceptions here and there ... the country's decision in this respect has not only been firm but irreversible. With the formation of linguistic state [sic] the implementation of this decision has been accelerated. Rabindra Nath Tagore once said: "in no country in the world except India is to be seen this divorce between the language of education from the language of people" (54-55).

Kancha Ilaiah in his *Why I am not a Hindu* (1996) invokes precisely this disjunction between education and life. More than a hundred years after Tagore's "The Vicissitudes of Education," Ilaiah describes education in independent India in terms

astonishingly similar to Tagore's.However, his account of this disjunction is made in the context of a vernacular education offered by the Indian state as a part of its commitment to the democratization of education. The question to be asked then is: How is it that a vernacular education which Tagore so strongly advocated and which the Indian state so promptly implemented as a means of bridging the gap between education and life can be shown as producing the same gap?

Ilaiah's reading of vernacular education occurs in the context of his book subtitled "Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy." He suggests that there is a need to rethink the vernacular question. According to him, language like other civil-social institutions, is a significant arena where caste conflicts are staged. Giving the example of school text-books, he says:

> As we were growing up, stepping into higher classes, the textbooks taught us stories which we had never heard in our families. The stories of Rama and Krishna, poems from the Puranas, the names of the two epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* occurred repeatedly. Right from early schools upto college, our Telugu textbooks were packed with these Hindu stories. For Brahmin - Baniya students these were their childhood stories very familiar not only in the story form but in the form of the Gods they worshipped.... I distinctly remember how alien all these names appeared to me. Many of the names were not known

> in my village. The name of Kalidas was as alien to us as the name of Shakespeare. The only difference was that one appeared in Telugu textbooks, while the other appeared in English textbooks (13).

Ilaiah shows through a systematic analysis how the "production-based communicative language" (13) of the dalitbahujan is written out of the school textbooks. The standardized, sanskritized Telugu of the school textbook is not, he argues, "merely a difference of dialect; there is difference in the very language itself" (13), indeed they represented two cultures. Showing how dalitbahujan "homes have one culture and the schools have another culture" where "the textbook language was against [the dalitbahujan], Ilaiah further argues:

> What difference did it make to us whether we had an English textbook that talked about Milton's *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained*, or Shakespeare's *Othello* or *Macbeth* or Wordswoth's poetry about nature in England, or a Telugu textbook which talked about Kalidasa's *Meghasandesham*, Bommera Potanna's *Bhagavatam* or Nannaya's and Tikkana's *Mahabharatam* except the fact that one textbook is written with twenty six letters and the other in fifty six letters? We do not share the contents of either; we do not find our lives reflected in their narratives. We cannot locate our family settings in them. In none of these books do we find words that are familiar to us without the help of a

> dictionary neither makes any sense to us. How does it make any difference to us whether it is Greek or latin that are written in Roman letters or Sanskrit that is written in Telugu (15).

The above passage contests the idea of a "singular" vernacular. On one hand, the alienation felt by the dalitbahujan in the context of vernacular textbooks resonates with the alienation that Tagore located in the predicament of the Bengali boy's relation with the English textbook. On the other hand, the dalitbahujan alienation renders problematic Tagore's easy conflation of the vernacular with the "national" and the "popular." A caste reading of the vernacular leads to questions about the nature of the vernacular which has been institutionalized in independance India, a vernacular which alienates the very `masses' it aims to integrate.

Tagore is clearly aware of the link between caste and education. He characterizes caste as an evil to be overcome in order for the hindu to "secure a special kind of fulfillment for humanity, a level of perfection that must be a gain for all" (131). His essentially humanitarian project, therefore, visualizes a generous sharing of "*our* religious and social customs," "*our* places of worship," "*our* ancient lore" (132, emphasis added). He could construct a tolerant Hinduism which could make space for Islam and Christianity (131) only on the basis of erasing a history of caste violence. He could effect such an erasure by powerfully arguing against the caste system:

"If we stand aloof in our 'purity', passing on this pride of isolation to succeeding generations, if we make our religion and social customs exclusively our own, our places of worship forbidden to outsiders and our ancient lore kept under lock and key, then we shall simply proclaim to the world that we have been condemned to death in the court of humanity" (132). This expansive humanitarianism which engenders a throwing open of ancient lore, hitherto forbidden, to the "masses" is at the heart of Tagore's vernacular project. The vernacular born out of an impulse to democratize what Ilaiah calls brahminical knowledge, was informed by sanskritic traditions that were central to caste privileges. Constituted thus, the vernacular of education in independent India remains an area where caste privileges are reinforced and modernized in the name of democracy.

Notes

1. Sister Nivedita, the American disciple of Swami Vivekananda, was closely associated with the Ramakrishna Mission. Influential in her time and after, she was described by Rabindranath Tagore as having "uttered the vital truths about Indian life" in his introduction to her book *The Web of Indian Life* (1917). In the subsequent section, I have focussed on a compilation of her writings on education: *Hints on National Education in India* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Press, 1967).

2. All quotations except wherever specified are translations from the original Gujarati. Translations mine.

3. For example, see his *"Kavitha Ane Sangit," Kavithavichar* (Bombay: R.R. Sheth, 1969) 8-75.

4. For a statement about his poetic vocation see *Kavithavichar*, 211-2.

5. Critics such as Umakant Joshi, Manilal and Balwant Rai have also made similar comments. See Joshi et al, *Gujarati Sahityno Ithihas*, vol. 3 (Ahmedabad: Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, 1978) 363.

6. See, for example, *"Kavitha Ane Sangit"* and *"Gujarati Sahityama Sangit Kavya," Kavithavichar*, 8-75 and 166-204 respectively.

7. See, for example, Svati Joshi, ed., *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History*, (New Delhi: Trianka, 1991); Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, ed., *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1993); Susie Tharu, ed., *Subject to Change: Teaching Literature in the Nineties*, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1998).

8. See, for example, V. Geeta's reading of the works of Ayothidas Panditar and E.V. Ramaswamy Periyar in "Re-writing History in the Brahmin's Shadow: Caste and the Modern Historical Imagination," *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 25-26 (1993): 127-137.

9. See, for example, Partha Chatterjee's reading of Bankimchandra in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1986) 78.

10. All references to Rabindranath Tagore's essays are from his collection *Towards Universal Man* (Bombay: Asia, 1961).