

**ENGLISH STUDIES AND THE QUESTION OF REFORM:  
A CASE-STUDY OF GUJARAT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE PHD THESIS

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## 1 Objective

This dissertation aims to interrogate the transactions between the category of *sudharo* or reform and the idea and practice(s) of English Studies in the region of Gujarat from the nineteenth century to approximately mid-twentieth century to understand how the episteme of reform has inflected the institutional practice(s) of English Studies in the region. It, thus, hopes to create deeper insights into the epistemes that shape knowledge practice(s) to enable revising or dismissing them, or employing them with critical awareness of their ideological import.

## 2 Research Questions

I pose the following key questions in this research:

1. How and why does the term ‘reform’ become a proper noun or a qualifier in mid-nineteenth-century western India, what is the distinctive cluster of meanings that stabilizes around the term, what are the shifts in these over the course of a century, and does the reification of certain meanings result in an epistemic bias arising out of the usage of the term?
2. What is the nature of the connection between the prevailing reform discourse and the nature of English Studies in the dominant higher education institutions of Gujarat?
3. Does a regional history of English Studies indicate diversity of regional responses to colonialism and the uneven terrain of its conceptual articulation?
4. Does the trajectory of ‘reform’ in English Studies in Gujarat highlight the role of language in the constitution of coloniality?
5. What are the implications of this analysis for the future course of the disciplinary practice of English studies in higher education in India?

## 3 Research Methodology

The research restricts itself to English Studies in the domain of higher education, that is, a separate academic discipline, as practised in colleges and universities in Gujarat. The historical period examined in the research is roughly from the mid-nineteenth to twentieth century, when Gujarat was not a unified political entity. Thus, it engages with the

negotiations happening across important centres like Bombay, Surat, Ahmedabad, and Baroda, within the larger region identified as Gujarat.

‘Reform’ is not approached simply as a term, or word, but understood in its range of manifestations from conspicuous rhetoric to inconspicuous discourse within which ideas or values are legitimized and delegitimized, in the constitution of colonial modernity and education in Gujarat.

While it focuses on institutions of higher education in Gujarat, it also takes into account early debates and negotiations around the imbrication of reform and English that predate the formation of higher education institutions in the region.

My methodological strategy has been to trace key moments where the trajectories of reform and English Studies converge in Gujarat. I have approached the archive through openings provided by reading historical studies of the region, and then built the network of other primary material through reading of each text and its context(s), allowing the archive to guide my selection of texts. Thus, the primary materials include a range of diverse texts such as essays, articles, official reports, writings by government officials, college syllabi, university calendars, critical notes on literary texts, etc. Each chapter consists of a study of a few central primary texts located within a polyphonic network of other archival texts to allow a rich understanding of the contexts of the key text(s).

The strategy of interpretation was a close reading of the text to unpack the prevailing implications/interpretations of the idea of reform and how these impinge upon the shaping of the assumptions, objectives, and outcomes of English Studies.

The last chapter includes a survey of critical interventions in English Studies in the postcolonial nation that represent both landmark texts and anthologies that have continued to dominate debates on English Studies, responses with a regional bent, and contemporary interventions in the debates over English Studies.

As reform and English both emerged in the encounter with colonial modernity, my methodological approach draws on a range of diverse but interrelated theoretical approaches located within the broad frame of critiques of (western) modernity emerging from both within and outside the west.

These include poststructuralist approaches that critique the fundamental binaries of modernity represented in theorists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida; postcolonial theorisation such as Homi K. Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* that allows a critique of the colonial knowledge project; critiques of Enlightenment universality in Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty, or the Subaltern Studies project; as well as critiques of the primacy of

western modernity in the theoretical approach of alternative modernities. Grappling with epistemic implications of colonisation, I also refer to theorisations of the psychology and epistemology of colonisation in scholars like Ashis Nandy, and scholars on decolonial thinking like Walter D. Mignolo.

As the objective of the research is to trace the trajectory of English Studies, it does not offer an exhaustive account of reform movements or initiatives in the Gujarat region, but grapples with them only where they intersect with education or represent a shift in the understanding of reform.

## 4 Key Findings and Conclusion

**Chapter 1** ‘Chapter 1: ‘Reasonable’ Imperialism and the Manifestations of Reform: Western India in the Nineteenth Century’ traces the trajectory of the term reform and the beginnings of colonial education in western India, from early nineteenth century England to Bombay, Surat, Ahmedabad and Baroda. It argues that the ‘reason’ represented by (western) Enlightenment did not travel uncritically to the colony but involved a broad spectrum of actions and approaches to the restructuring of native society in the frameworks of modernity. It finds that reform ushered in a new term—*sudharo*—in Gujarati, and a new perception towards native society. It became a dominant discourse against which identities came to be defined, and political positions were contested. Broadly, the category of reform allowed the constitution of modernity as a pedagogic project. Specifically in its engagement with colonial education, ‘reform’ conceptually allowed the fundamental assumption of difference governed by a lack that came to be institutionalised in colonial systems. The chapter concludes that the nature of reform adopted and promoted in different parts of the region was contingent upon attitude to British presence in the given area, as well as nature of participation in the network of educational institutions set up by the British. The agentic role of the coloniser in the pedagogic project of modernity was justified by the rhetoric of native immorality. In contrast with the political-institutional idea of reform in England following the Reform Act of 1832, understanding of reform in the colony, in this phase of colonisation, largely remained in the sociomoral domain—whether in debates that explicitly espoused reform like Dalpatram’s essay, or which implicitly co-opted it like the corruption scandal in Baroda. This understanding was allied to older meanings of reform. At the discursive level, reform initiated the process of comparison between the west and the colony in a way that promoted parameters to modify the latter as per epistemic frames of the former. At the political level,

reform in the English imagination, represented a moderate attitude to change, in binary opposition with revolt.

**Chapter 2** ‘Chapter 2: Negotiating Reform and the Nation: English Studies at Baroda in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’ examines formations that housed the question of English in Baroda College in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries within the larger context of important developments in the domain of colonial education, to understand resistance to colonial rule, its impact on reform, and implications for English Studies. It finds that in the late nineteenth century the idea of reform became fully institutionalized in two senses—firstly, it became endemic to the politics and social imagination based on which political institutions such as the franchise was being rebuilt in Britain; and secondly, in the sense of the establishment of more institutions (such as different provincial colleges) which were built to take ahead the project of education—the precondition for access to institutional reform. I have shown how the in emerging questions of nation and independence in the second half of the nineteenth century, the domain of reform was a site of contest between those in favour of sociomoral improvement and those in favour of political-institutional reform. The chapter concludes that the native state of Baroda became a site of resistance to conservative reform inside and outside higher education and that the category of reform had largely moved from its association with material practices of socio-religious change to institutional-political change. It specifically focuses on the discipline of English Studies as the domain where contestations over reform converged in Baroda.

**Chapter 3** ‘Chapter 3: Rejecting Reform?: Gandhi, Gujarat Vidyapith and the Question of English Studies’ examines the establishment of the Gujarat Mahavidyalaya and the publication of *Jodanikosh* in the 1920s to trace the impact of the nationalist politics of Gandhi on education to examine whether it constituted a rejection of reform alongside the rejection of English education. It also examines whether, with the eclipse of the question of reform in British politics of the metropole, it ceases to be a point of consideration in official colonial policy. The chapter finds that changes implemented in colonial policy continued to be cast in the vocabulary of reform but were deeply influenced by the political conservatism. This chapter concludes that the radical rupture and decolonial moves by Gandhi in the domain of politics in the first half of twentieth century did not successfully reverberate in his higher education initiatives. If anything, they bolstered the epistemic foundations of English Studies. What he rejected was English language and not colonial education reflected in the

approach to spelling reform in the *Jodanikosh* as well as the curricula for English and Gujarati in the Gujarat Mahavidyalaya which bore major similarities with the existing colonial curriculum.

**Chapter 4** ‘Chapter 4: Reimagining English Studies in India: A Postscript’ examines the state of English Studies in the postcolonial period to understand the implications of the analysis of the first three chapters for the discipline at large. It surveys the policy-level decisions about English language and literature in India, and the roles ascribed to both as the national identity was being consistently negotiated against global aspirations of the country. Based on an analysis of the crisis debates and decolonisation debates in India, the chapter tests the possibility of exploring a shift to decoloniality via an experimental framework for a curriculum based on decolonial theoretical considerations.

In conclusion, this research pursued the idea that education and pedagogy emerged as central sites where the strategies of colonisation can be observed. The need felt by the coloniser (to educate and change) had to be stimulated in the colonised for the dissemination of knowledge to be successful, and the ‘transplantation’ to take root. This role, I have suggested, was played by the rhetoric of reform.

This research has shown how the idea of reform was imbricated with education in the colonial project of modernisation. It positions itself counter to histories that have relegated reform to an ‘age’ that spanned some specific decades in mid-nineteenth century in India and which consider reform merely as a historical-intellectual backdrop for the mid-nineteenth century.

I have used the question of reform to foreground the question of language—as an identity marker, rhetoric, narrative, discourse—in the history of colonial education in India. The research has examined the discipline of English Studies which became a site for resolution of the ambivalences and contrary interests of various stakeholders in the colonial project, while also standing-in for the religious biases of an avowedly secular education. The domain of higher education was chosen as a focus-area because of the top-down model of colonial education. These variables were analysed in the context of Gujarat to account for regional differentiation in the history of English Studies. By concentrating on Gujarat as a region where this complex interplay of reform, identity and power takes place, my research shows how the category English Studies is inflected by specific regional formations.

## 5 Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the historical examination of reform and English Studies in the context of Gujarat, the major recommendation that this research makes is an experimental curricular framework for English Studies shaped by directions offered in decolonial theory. While former scholarly-critical debates on English Studies have repeatedly focused on the importance of contexts (historical and socio-political) in the study of British literature, I recommend a framework based on co-texts, that is, the collocation of canonical British texts with Indian texts in the same unit or paper of a course in English Studies in higher education.

On a broader level, decolonial thinking could be used as a theoretical framework by future research to reflect on different or other epistemes and/or use similar questions to engage with their own regional histories, which will not only produce more theoretically rigorous research on coloniality but also produce diversified research that brings voices and histories from the regions to the fore generating a rigorous colonial history.

Owing to its focus on the urban centres of Surat, Ahmedabad, and Baroda in Gujarat (to be able to understand the hegemonic discourse on reform in the region), the research has not considered in detail the local responses and institutions in the non-urban areas as well as urban centres in the Saurashtra peninsula, which are areas that future research could delve into.

The selection of critical interventions in English Studies in the postcolonial nation taken up for discussion was shaped to represent both landmark texts and anthologies that have continued to dominate debates on English Studies, responses with a regional bent, and contemporary interventions in the debates over English Studies. It is not an exhaustive account of all interventions in English Studies post-independence, generating the possibility of some works being left out of the discussion. Other such interventions could be considered by future research to contribute to or modify the existing discussion.

The archive of texts was oriented by the question of reform, and the research acknowledges that approaching the archive with a different question may generate a different set of texts. This would offer a rich possibility for future research that could map different historical insights using a different point of approach to the archive, thus contributing to the regional history of colonisation.

**Keywords:** *reform, English Studies, Gujarat, decoloniality, decolonisation, post-colonialism*



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