

# 5.

*Once, when contemplating the apparently endless growth of administrative responsibilities in British academic departments, I came up with one possible vision of hell. Hell is a collection of individuals who are spending the bulk of their time working on a task they don't like and are not especially good at. Say they were hired because they were excellent cabinet-makers, and then discover they are expected to spend a great deal of their time frying fish. Neither does the task really need to be done—at least, there's only a very limited number of fish that need to be fried. Yet somehow, they all become so obsessed with resentment at the thought that some of their co-workers might be spending more time making cabinets, and not doing their fair share of the fish-frying responsibilities, that before long there's endless piles of useless badly cooked fish piling up all over the workshop and it's all that anyone really does. I think this is actually a pretty accurate description of the moral dynamics of our own economy.*

— David Graeber <https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/>

*And now we may fairly take him[the poet] and place him by the side of the painter, for he is like him in two ways: first in as much as his creations have an inferior degree of truth—in this I say, he is like him; and he is also like him in being concerned with an inferior part of the soul; and therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reasons.*

—Plato in *Republic Book III*

#### Outline:

This chapter being the final chapter of my thesis shall attempt to achieve three main objectives. It will begin by tying the threads of the earlier chapters together. It shall then interrogate the implications and draw my conclusions on the changing nature of humanities education, English departments, and by extension the purpose of education in the present Indian context. The chapter will also try to suggest in its own humble way, a path forward before zoning on the limitations and gaps of this research that open up future possibilities for research.

#### The Problems:

The design of the thesis has been exploratory and it has emerged out of my extensive reading on the issue of globalisation and higher education. I realized early on, as I have demonstrated in my chapter on literature review that very little work had been done on the relationship between globalization on higher education. In addition, a study of the practice of higher education in terms of institutional manifestation with special reference to the state of Gujarat has been absent from this new literature that examined the implications of globalization for India. I also discovered that a raging debate on the place and value of humanities in the new neo-liberal universities in the West has no facsimile in India, despite its speedy erosion from university campuses. The thesis began with an acute awareness of the changes taking place lightning speed within the education space of a university, especially in the English department from where I operated as a teacher/ researcher. Many of these changes I saw resonated across campuses in Gujarat and India and stemmed from a State sponsored policy direction. It was in this effort to put two and two together that I first raised the question about the relationship between globalization, higher education and an education in the humanities/ English. The first chapter of the thesis works towards building this context within which I raise my questions.

One of the striking changes that I saw in Gujarat as I returned to it in 2013 after a twelve years long exile were the billboards advertising new private institutions of education. The centrality of higher education in the public space, in media, in government policies led me to ask the first question of this thesis about how privatization affects the space of higher education in Gujarat, and by extension in India. The second chapter of this thesis examines the debates around globalization and privatization across the world. It goes on to demonstrate that in India, much like in the west, privatization has its roots in the structural adjustment policies and the ensuing neo-liberal withdrawal of the state from public provision of services. Education being perceived a semi-private good gets largely delivered by private players in India in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. But it is not only in the delivery of the goods that we see an increased role of the private but also in the funding, and even conceptualization or policy making arena that we see a conglomeration of industrialists, and corporate leaders working alongside the government. The chapter tries to explain how privatization is to be understood not merely in terms of who provides higher education but also how the mechanisms of provision are structured, used, evaluated, and legitimized in a society as well as what constitutes education. It concludes by charting the journey of a private education trust from 1935 to 2015 and beyond; from its industrialist-philanthropist's Gandhian initiative to its present global aspirations.

The third chapter takes one deeper into the campus that we encountered in the thick descriptions of the previous one. This chapter is an attempt to understand the effect of privatization on the departments of English, a position from where I operate as a researcher and a teacher. It attempts to analyse the way in which departments of English, traditionally considered to be within the humanities, negotiate their space in the new academy and try to remain relevant in the changing ethos. It traces the

historical journey of this particular discipline with its transformation at each milestone. The chapter also demonstrates that a new matrix of value that one associates with privatization has come to demand the most radical transformation of the English department. The reason why English departments survived the private space of education in the recent times, unlike other languages, is because of its newfound utility in offering linguistic and soft skills to professional graduates. The chapter, interspersed with the story of a particular department at a private university, leads one to ask the next logical question whether the fate of departments of English is unique or rather a shared plight of the humanities as a whole.

The fourth chapter of thesis places the humanities in their global and national context to understand their changing value. It reengages with the age old debate of the two cultures of science and the humanities to reveal how the dynamics of the present world have placed the humanities in a position of disadvantage, trying to justify its legitimacy rather than being a contender for space and value on an equal footing. It also brings us back to examine the immediate context of Gujarat with its policy reforms in higher education in the last decade. After delineating the erosion of humanities from public universities, its absence in the infertile space of private universities, the chapter returns to locate its feeble reclaiming of space in the little creeks of technology and management departments.

An almost ascending order of these chapters brings me face to face with three major questions that all of these chapters together raise; namely: What does the current plight of the humanities say about the future of liberal education? Where do humanities belong? What should be their role, space, and value not only in the world of higher education but in public life?

The science major asks, "Why does it work?"  
The engineering major asks, "How does it work?"

The accounting major asks, "How much does it cost?"  
The liberal arts major asks, "Would you like fries with that?"<sup>i</sup>

While corporate leaders make pronouncements on why they love to hire an English majors<sup>ii</sup> and many like *Forbes* business writers write about the value of the “useless” liberal arts, the social media continues to lampoon the liberal arts majors through memes and caricatures. The defenses put forward by the business leaders and the writes like George Anders in *You Can Do Anything: The Surprising Power of a “Useless” Liberal Arts Education* (2017) and Randall Stross in *Why Liberal Arts Majors Make Great Employees* (2017), and by an academic book like Mark William Roche’s *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?* are utilitarian. The books, more like self-help manuals for a humanities graduate, reassure her of multiple job opportunities available at the intersection of technology and data science, in digital fund raising, digital designing, and project management for one equipped for one with the skills that the humanities offer. The humanities with its universal and time-tasted approach can be the way forward in preparing students for an uncertain, unknowable future, as long as it focuses on the skills. An analytics software company called Burning Glass that works on delivering job market analytics claimed that with a little bit of extra work a humanities graduate could become employable. They provide a list of additional technical skills, over and above “soft skills”, that a liberal arts graduate can acquire in marketing, social media, programming, or other fields that can significantly improve her chances in the job market<sup>iii</sup>.



Figure 1. <https://www.burningglass.com/blog/specific-skills-make-liberal-arts-graduates-more-marketable/>

What these instances demonstrate is the unprecedented and close-knit relationship between higher education and the economy that has come to define the current landscape of the university. If a small dose of the humanities quite often gets added to the staple diet of a management or technology student, a bigger dose of disappointment gets added to the humanities platter with the governments regularly withdrawing its meager funding<sup>iv</sup>. The practice and the policy making in higher education stems from the conviction that the most important, if not the sole, purpose of education today is to produce employable graduates for the economy; and the losing financial value of the humanities' own endeavors and their graduates is one of the chief contentions against it. I have tried to demonstrate throughout the previous chapters that such policy making and practice of higher education in Gujarat has resulted in an extraordinary growth of uni-disciplinary, professional, or vocational universities; while the humanities are to fend for themselves in the face of apathy of the state and the private<sup>v</sup>.

What I want to discuss here is the problems of such a neo-liberal republic of the universities of the present, which bar the humanities disciplines an entry, is that it changes the very character of the university and education. Two of the defining moral virtues of a University in India have been secularism and diversity. The universities established in the colonial era in India were one of the earliest secular institutions, where divisions of gender, class, caste and religion were contested if not entirely negated. These universities in 1857 in the midst of a hierarchically structured, divisive society were, what Ramachandra Guha calls, the first “cubicles of modernity,” playing an astounding role in shaping the modern, nationalist sensibility of a nation (Guha. 2008). An essential character of this space of the University, contends Guha, is plurality. The university as a secular space has to reflect the linguistic, social, religious, and political diversity of India through its funding resources, student body, faculty members, curriculum, and pedagogies. The efforts at maintaining the diversity of faculty members and students have remained a continuous challenge for all institutions of higher education in India after years of independence as these institutions continued to be dominated by a certain class, class, and even religious groups<sup>vi</sup>. The most recent onslaught on the space of the university from the market, which not only funds institutions, and research, but also dictates curriculum and pedagogy, means a slow and steady exile for the humanities. The “long and slow realignment” of the humanities, where “the humanities...become a loosely defined collection of technical disciplines” destroys the prized plurality of Indian universities. (Stover 2017). The Vice Chancellor of Ashoka University Pratap Bhanu Mehta told the *Economics Times* that liberal education is about handling the challenges of the future, when the jobs will demand more of reasoning skills and abilities to make one stand out in the market rather than content. “The focus is now shifting to how good you are with reasoning, mathematical

skills, and writing skills – with these you can do any job well regardless of what content you are taught...our students...can solve a lot of problems and understand what questions to ask and have strong interpersonal skills –all attributes of a liberal arts education” (Mehta. 2018). The humanities cannot make a case for themselves by repackaging themselves into neat vocabulary of “skills”, “relevance”, and “changing economy”. In fact the very perception of the humanities as a training in skills fails to understand them as a set of disciplines, each in its own right and distinct from the other in ways of understanding and interpreting the world through a set of different epistemologies. A narrow-minded focus on skills ignores the multiplicity of internal debates within each of the humanities, debates which constitute the very essence of the nature of the humanities. If it is futile to craft a defense of the humanities Education as a search for truth, an education in value, ethics, civics, or creativity, so too it is to make the case for them in the name of ‘useful’, ‘transferable’ skills, which are more like byproducts than the essence. The humanities operate beyond the realm of life-skills and soft-skills; at the level of raising consciousness. This consciousness that is self-reflective, and aware of the constructed nature of our selves, society, culture, and politics. The humanities have always been constituted of a class of people, not necessarily interested in changing the world in any practical way; or in contributing to the economic, political or the social order of the day in any pre-programmed fashion; but rather passionately interested in understanding, examining, exploring, and celebrating the humanness of our entire existence. This existence, however, is distinctly different from the way the neo-liberalism rationality understands it, where every human pursuit from health, education, transportation, nature, and art is converted into an individual consumer good, an investment instrument, aspired, and consumed by entrepreneurial individuals completely in charge of own needs and desires. The



humanities are the preventive measures against such reductionism of our lives and worlds. The criticality of the humanities come more from their position vis-a-vis a neo-liberal world, which is counter to “the one-dimensionality of *homo-economicus*”, than from their disposition (Brown. 2011).

People have read Virgil for two thousand years, and people have built institutions designed to facilitate the reading of Virgil. For reasons high and low, people long believed that the one qualification truly necessary — for civil service, for foreign service, for politics, for medicine, for science, for law, for estate management, for ecclesiastical preferment, for a life of aristocratic leisure — was the ability to compose good Latin hexameters. They were not looking for skills or creativity or values. They did believe that conjugating irregular verbs would mysteriously produce moral improvement (perhaps it did), but they were not too concerned about how. They simply believed in the humanities and knew from experience that the disciplines would bring students above the categories of nation, vocation, and time to become members of a class constrained by no such boundaries. (Stover. 2017)

In other words, the humanities address and cultivate over and above the historical, philosophical, literary consciousness and perspectives, or notions of the political, “the play of ambiguity, vulnerability, awe, ambivalence, psychic depths, boundary, identity, spirit,” and other elements that enrich a human life (Brown. 2011. 14-15). The distinctiveness of the humanities lie in this understanding of the human condition from within, unlike the natural sciences and social sciences that understand the human in terms of physical laws, mechanical systems, biological drives, psychological disorders social structures, for example. (McClay. 2008) A university minus the humanities departments or a university that views the humanities as a toolkit for skilling of sensibilities of economic actors fail to place the humanities where they truly belong—at the heart.

The education in the humanities has been at the heart of a liberal arts education and a liberal education is to be imagined as a humanistic education, with its history dating back to Ancient Greek conception of *paideia*, to the Roman ideas of *humanitas*, to the medieval Europe’s religious universities built around grammar, rhetoric, poetry,

history, and moral philosophy, to the secular and scholarly understanding of 15th century *studia humanitatis* with ancient Greek and Latin studies added to the list, in its 19<sup>th</sup> century understanding of their material and methods in “human” terms . In its modern form liberal arts, with a strong core of the humanities includes humanities (literature, language, philosophy, the fine arts, history), the physical and biological sciences and mathematics, and the social sciences. A liberal education curriculum is aimed at developing intellectual capacities of an individual as opposed to professional, vocational, and technical training.

However, the liberal education in India, offered by new private institutions like Ashoka University, FLAME, Symbiosis School of Liberal Arts, and Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, gets defined in terms of choice, and flexibility (refer to image 1). Liberal arts come get defined as, “a multidisciplinary course that includes an eclectic mix of subjects from different disciplines such as the humanities, science and commerce,...[which] allows students to study an array of subjects before choosing one they wish to major in” (Agarwal. 2015). In addition to the flexibility and choice that the system of liberal education claims to offer, it is also touted as the most relevant education system for a rapidly changing society that works on real life problems with a pedagogical approach that is unique, involving project-based, hands-on learning, student-led-classrooms, field trips, presentations, in-class discussions, problem-solving, and inter-disciplinary learning. If the pedagogy is enable students to work with and solve real-life problems of India and the globe, the interdisciplinary education to make it relevant and marketable at the same time, by opening up multiple career opportunities. At UWG the premise on which the new undergraduate liberal education programme of 2019 is being introduced is ‘interdisciplinary, experiential and research based learning’.

**Myth:** *Liberal Arts only include subjects under humanities, fine arts or the performing arts.*

**Reality:** Liberal Arts include not only humanities but commerce and science subjects as well. Liberal Arts is a system of education which combines various streams and give you the opportunity to study various combinations of humanities, sciences, mathematics, statistics, natural sciences, etc. together.

**Myth:** *Graduation in any humanities course will be Liberal Arts!*

**Reality:** If you search for Liberal Arts, and come across multiple courses such as BA in History, BA in Psychology, BA in Geography, etc., they are not liberal arts. This kind of information can be misleading. Liberal education is a system in which you have the freedom to study your own subjects. You can choose your own minor and areas of specialisation. These courses often successfully amalgamate humanities with sciences. This contributes to your overall development.

The course focuses not only on academic-oriented subjects but courses like photography, performing arts, film, etc. are also given importance. In the next section, I will take you through the various universities in India that provide Liberal Arts courses, as well as certain important details you will need to pursue the course.

[Srishti Mahendru](#) June 20, 2017

Image. 1.

Source: <https://www.mindler.com/blog/liberal-arts-education-india-guide/>

“We’ll put now the School of Liberal Arts’... I insisted that I am not going to have a School of Humanities, a School of Liberal Studies, or a School of Social Sciences, School of Sciences, which is how we had envisioned it earlier. Because I think there needs to be a conversation between disciplines which is very, very important and I think that also is an opportunity to construct it anew – all these disciplines, all these other schools have been existing and this is one opportunity to start from scratch” (excerpt from an interview with the Vice Chancellor UWG). The new undergraduate programmes of the School of Liberal Arts are imagined as clustered around various problems that surround us in the worlds, and at the intersection of different disciplines.

Interdisciplinarity often comes to be defined not only relevant but even preferable, and inherently, if not morally, superior in its open, plural and democratic approach to knowledge production, in its implicit or explicit contrast to the dogmatism and conservatism of disciplinary work. The future plans of the school resonate with some of the six point restructuring agenda that Tylor offers to Universities across America to contribute to the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

Abolish permanent departments, even for undergraduate education, and create problem-focused programs. These constantly evolving programs would have sunset clauses, and every seven years each one should be evaluated and either abolished, continued or significantly changed. It is possible to imagine a broad range of topics around which such zones of inquiry could be organized: Mind, Body, Law, Information, Networks, Language, Space, Time, Media, Money, Life and Water.

Consider, for example, a Water program. In the coming decades, water will become a more pressing problem than oil, and the quantity, quality and distribution of water will pose significant scientific, technological and ecological difficulties as well as serious political and economic challenges. These vexing practical problems cannot be adequately addressed without also considering important philosophical, religious and ethical issues. After all, beliefs shape practices as much as practices shape beliefs. (Taylor.2009) <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/27/opinion/27taylor.html>

This problem centered grouping of faculty and research and research institutions may have an appeal for an age of the instrumental; but the question that such a conception fails to engage with is can the humanities that go beyond the instrumental and the immediate can thrive in universities that function more as labs, incubation centers, professional schools, or engines of socio-economic change or do they have a different role. An understanding of the humanities is not separate from its pedagogical uniqueness. A humanities education or liberal arts education takes its root in the Socratic method of dialogue, critical questioning and argumentation. The classroom experience in humanities is very different from the classroom experience in STEM. The opening of the consciousness that takes place is not a result of a successful lab

experiment but a sustained immersion, engagement and argumentation often may have no visible, demonstrable signs of transformation. It is like a spark that one carries within oneself not knowing when it will ignite our understanding of the world. One wonders if the plurality of the pedagogical approaches that defines a university will get lost with the rise of a new matrix of the practical.

Progressives who want to turn the humanities into a laboratory for social change, a catalyst for cultural revolution, a training camp for activists, are guilty of the same instrumentalization. When they impose de facto ideological litmus tests for scholars working in every field, they betray their conviction that the humanities exist only to serve contemporary political and social ends (Stover. 2008. 2)

Beyond instrumentatlisation, a dismantling of disciplines, or a problem centered programme, of the kind that Tylor advocates and a new university aims to start assumes a certain grounding in certain disciplines from where the problem arises. Even before one sees a problem in its multi-dimensional way, as a problem of distribution, production, market, society, commodification, aspiration, nutrition, fashion, one has to see it as a problem centrally grounded within a discipline. A problem based education which works outside the disciplinary frameworks assumes such a grounding in one or two disciplines, and therefore in the absence of it seems to takes off mid-air.

The truth is that the humanities resist attempts to control and manage. The humanities are heteroglossic, defined by conflicts among diverse voices. The humanities is dialogic, continuously engaged in a dialogue and evolving with each exchange. The humanities is carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense of the terms. "Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act... The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and

etiquette connected with it... or any other form of inequality among people.” (122-23)

I see the humanities primarily as such a carnivalesque space marked by a multiplicity of voices, identities, and truths. They are performances at the intersections of art and life, beautiful and grotesque, excess and lack, form and chaos, conflict and consensus, critique and closure. Above all they are an expression of what makes us distinctively human. To explore what is distinctively human is to be open to all possibilities, to know there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in management philosophy, more than matters of profit and loss. That training will indeed produce better citizens who care for humanity, but it also lays bare the inadequacy of markets to satisfy the seriousness that comes with questions of meaning and purpose. As Wolff says,

I suggest to you that this is the real justification for keeping alive the great tradition of liberal arts and letters in our colleges and universities. Not as a patina for modern aristocrats, not as an instrument of upward mobility, not even as an introduction to the Great Conversation, but as a way of putting young men and women in touch with their repressed fantasies of gratification in such a fashion as to awaken in them the hope, the dream, the unquenchable thirst for liberation from which social progress must come (Wolff 2011,149)

### **Future Directions:**

The thesis has explored the implications of changing understanding, place and value of the humanities and the education in English in Gujarat and by extension in India. It has focused on a single instrumental case of UWG given its constraints of time and space. But I do believe that questions raised by this study are the ones that I would like to explore further down the road. What are connections between UWG and other private universities in Gujarat? How these new schools are defining liberal education will add to our understanding of changing contours of higher education in India? What kind of ideologies they create and reproduce that play a role in the marginalization of the humanities, and what is the role of the media? In what ways K-12 students’ early

socialization into ‘science’ and ‘humanities’ streams to be addressed to bring about a renewed understanding of the role of the humanities in Indian education? These are some of the questions that I look forward to addressing in my future research endeavours.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://collegeadmissionbook.com/blog/liberal-arts-major-would-you-fries>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/04/10/survey-finds-business-executives-arent-focused-majors-those-they-hire#ixzz2XUfv5ppg>  
<https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/openforum/articles/why-english-majors-are-the-hot-new-hires/>  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/donna-randall/new-study-points-to-liberal-arts\\_b\\_4759837.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/donna-randall/new-study-points-to-liberal-arts_b_4759837.html)  
<https://www.marketplace.org/2013/03/01/education/what-do-employers-really-want-college-grads>

<sup>iii</sup> For a detailed report titled Saving the Liberal Arts refer <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Saving-the-Liberal-Arts.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> There are many reports of the cuts on the humanities budget in the UK <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/29/war-against-humanities-at-britains-universities> , <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n17/marina-warner/diary> as well as in the US more recently, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/with-elimination-of-nea-and-neh-trumps-budget-is-worst-case-scenario-for-arts-groups/2017/03/15/5291645a-09bb-11e7-a15f-a58d4a988474\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.943a3235113d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/with-elimination-of-nea-and-neh-trumps-budget-is-worst-case-scenario-for-arts-groups/2017/03/15/5291645a-09bb-11e7-a15f-a58d4a988474_story.html?utm_term=.943a3235113d)

<sup>v</sup> An occasional experiment like Ashoka is the only one that one can think of when one tries to locate private universities that have embraced the liberal arts in India. The question though about how the new private university understands the “liberal” in liberal arts remains to be raised in the light of recent controversies that Ashoka went through. But it is a topic of a separate research paper.  
<http://www.firstpost.com/india/ashoka-university-issue-are-universities-encouraging-liberal-democratic-and-free-speech-3055746.html>

<sup>vi</sup> A much needed academic work on the chasm between practice and principles of inclusion is edited by Satish Deshpande and Usha Zacharias *Beyond Inclusion: The Practice of Equal Access in Indian Higher Education* (2013). The talk by Suraj

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Yengde on this issue is very illuminating in terms of the facts and the figures that he presents. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyzBZb2Qr7M>