

Sanskrit, English and Dalits

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The intervention by S Anand on 'Sanskrit, English and Dalits' (*EPW*, July 24, 1999) makes several points about major languages used in India. One minor aspect of this intervention, making a response necessary, is the engagement with my book *The Otherness of English: India's Auntie Tongue Syndrome* (published by Sage, New Delhi in 1993). Anand maintains that this book culpably neglects the specific interests of the dalit-bahujans and misrepresents the nature and tractability of English language learning problems in Indian education. My response to these charges must be contextualised within his larger intervention.

At that level, Anand presents certain views from what he visualises as a dalit-bahujan standpoint. He suggests that to invoke Sanskrit no longer helps us to imagine any Indian unity; rather, it divides us. He sees English as a space where foundations for sustainable solidarities can be built instead, especially by dalit-bahujans pooling together nationally their regional trajectories and strategies. Anand further believes that dalit-bahujans should not try to operate in India's regional languages in their present form – arenas dominated by 'savarna' hegemony. They should instead move into a national base in English where they can establish new credentials in terms of the 'merit' they have been excluded from. From this national base, they can and must contest the regional power of these languages.

In responding to Anand, I react also to other views that overlap with his. Anand's opposition to the national privileging of Sanskrit is echoed and supplemented by a more recent intervention. Gail Omvedt shares his sense that Indians need to pay fresh attention to viewpoints rooted in two major national counter-Sanskritic categories: Dravidians and dalits [Omvedt 1999].

Writing in a different context, linguist critics of the standard methods of Indian language modernisation tend to target the excessive Sanskritisation of newly coined technical terms. A Abbi (1996:157-59) is one among them [Abbi 1996:157-59]. Such

authors converge with Anand's view that modern Indian languages in their current codifications feed a Sanskritising imagination. That imagination, some of its opponents argue, imposes Sanskritic culture as a nation-defining inheritance that disinherits dalit-bahujans and many others.

These views critical of Sanskritisation may lead those of us writing in modern Indian languages to recognise that moving away from Sanskrit, towards an uninhibited acceptance of English loans, is in many cases the transparent and user-friendly way to go. I have been both practising this when I write in Bangla (Bengali) and basing my practice on explicit precepts compatible with Abbi/Anand/Omvedt [Dasgupta 1996a].

I gather that Anand, though, is not particularly concerned with mending the ways of regional language terminology choice. For dalit-bahujans to even consider seriously writing in regional languages, he suggests, is a dead end. He appears not to consider dalit regional language writing a serious enterprise worth continuing.

What leads Anand to this standpoint? Apparently the key to his thinking is the way he would have us imagine the nation. Anand seems to hope that the dalit-bahujans as an all-India community will choose to move into English as a unifying cultural space and thus, hopefully, overcome a disability which he thinks prevents them from acting as a national force. Only such a transition would provide usable access to state-of-the-art critical tools and global knowledge.

Anand argues that savarnas deliberately withhold such tools and knowledge from dalit-bahujans. Savarnas monopolise these cognitive resources at the national level by hoarding English, preventing dalit-bahujans from learning it.

Anand believes that savarnas make regional languages unusable for the task of acquiring cognitive resources by loading these languages with erudite terms remote from dalit-bahujan cultural habits. Dalit-bahujans should react by walking away from regional languages, which offer them a dead end, and forcing their way into English.

Anand's intervention invokes a standard notion of merit. Speaking from a vantage point from which he claims to see how excellence is distributed, he sees English as bright, regional languages as dull, and Sanskrit as just ancient. For him these are the characteristics of the languages in question and should drive the discussion.

But Anand's speaking position is clearly not a dalit-bahujan standpoint. That standpoint feels obliged, even when operating in English, to keep faith with existing interventions in the regional languages. Consider the discussion of Vasant Moon's work translated by Omvedt and related issues in Vijapurkar (1999). The above mentioned interventions have affected, and continue to affect, the relative positions of the various languages on the Indian scene. The language choices that dalit-bahujans will make in their actions and articulate in their explicit thinking are among the most potent factors shaping this scene today.

One very recent articulation in this field comes from a thinker whose 1996 book Anand himself invokes. Kancha Ilaiah says "If the brahmin clergy declare that Hinduism is a religion like any other, it is their spiritual duty to grant all the people the right to become priests and interpret its tenets based on their life experience" [Ilaiah 1999]. At the language level, this means for Ilaiah that "if the brahmin clergy of India declare that the SC, the ST and the OBCs are Hindus, their right to priesthood and their right to use all non-Sanskritic languages as ritually correct languages must also be recognised".

The point is not simply about languages other than Sanskrit. More specifically, Ilaiah argues for 'the right to communicate with the divine in one's own mother tongue'. It may be useful to place this argument in the contemporary context of a major initiative on mother tongues.

On November 17, 1999, UNESCO unanimously adopted a Bangladesh-sponsored resolution recognising that country's 'language martyrs day' (February 21) as 'international mother language day'. This recognition was apparently prompted by the belief that "all moves to promote the dissemination of mother tongues will serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also to

develop fuller awareness about linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity and understanding, tolerance and dialogue” (*The Hindu*, November 19, 1999).

This new recognition of the importance of the mother tongue, however, is not going to be automatically associated with the struggle of weaker sections of society for social and spiritual equality. Socio-political articulations and actions are needed so that the two enterprises actually get connected.

Ilaiah’s 1999 article is an intervention of this sort. While it reinforces the widely-held view that the position of regional languages in modern India needs to be strengthened, such an intervention does not necessarily affect our views about the relative merits of the various languages we use. Anand’s argument, therefore, still needs to be tackled. My remarks so far serve merely to set the context for this task.

Repositioning Merit

The background proposal is that dalit-bahujans – on behalf of many other actors guided or affected by their choices – should choose between placing their intellectual centre of gravity in English and placing it in Indian languages. Anand’s foreground proposal is that they should choose English.

When one thinks about these issues, it helps to look at some ways in which the choice between English and Indian languages tends to affect the content of public discourse. Consider the following bilingual notice displayed in Kolkata’s underground train compartments: “Sliding doors – do not lean on them” (English); “Darjaa paashaapaashi khole – darjaay helaan dewaa bipajjanok”, (Bangla, meaning “Doors open sideways – leaning on the doors is dangerous”). Only the Bangla version assumes that the public needs to be informed that it is dangerous to lean on doors that open sideways.

More generally, public discourse in English presumes a well-informed audience. The corresponding discourse in Indian languages works with the possibility that a large section of the public does not yet know the ‘obvious’.

Suppose, for argument’s sake, that this observation can be generally replicated over a wider range of data. Only the hasty will jump from even such a generalisation to the conclusion that English (as used in India) alone is a serious and critical language vis-a-vis the merely distributive Indian

languages. Surely the reverse follows.

To unpack the way the argument actually points, let us suppose for a moment that the very writing conventions of Indian languages encode an assumption that writers must give the public complete access to relevant knowledge. Such an assumption is likely to work in favour of greater transparency when communicators use Indian languages. Writers in English tend to assume that lots of background facts are obvious. This makes them oblivious to the diversity of their readers’ backgrounds.

It tends also to mask various gaps in their reasoning. If writers in Indian languages are forced to make their steps explicit, the necessity of restating the obvious can lead to the virtue of discovering that the obvious is often wrong!

To bring this point into direct contact with dalit-bahujan concerns, consider the problem of these groups with the textbooks, syllabi, and teaching methods in the mainstream educational system. The culture of mainstream education presumes home coaching and inherited family traditions of study. This presumption shapes the questions to which standard textbooks and other materials offer sequenced answers.

But dalit-bahujans come from backgrounds that often force them, for practical reasons, to pose tough queries. These queries look like fundamental methodological questions – and for textbook writers and their allies, that is what they are. The English-using elite normally ignores these questions, for it takes the standard catechisms for granted. Textbook writers in Indian languages are used to writing in a framework that foresees elementary questions instead of dismissing them as classroom matters a textbook can omit. Such writing thus provides a niche where the needs of dalit-bahujan entrants into academic practice and discourse can be recognised and met by existing means.

English is not a language in which these strategies of negotiation are in place. It is a language focused on the self-confidence of experts who pontificate, not on questions that can come from diverse audiences. Why and how is this so? My answer to this can usefully hitch a ride on Anand’s objections to Sanskrit.

The use of Sanskrit in classical India for producing and transmitting knowledge strikes Anand as having been an insufferably elitistic and exclusionary enterprise. Sanskrit teachers and users left potential learners and interlocutors out, and said so. The way we run our businesses in English

today makes it ‘obvious’ to us that there was something wrong with this procedure, wrong enough to detract from the value of some of the knowledge so produced. The terms of this obviousness prevent us from seeing what is wrong with the ways of knowledge production and sharing in contemporary English.

When you enter English, they confiscate most of your background baggage at the gate, as the stuff is not ‘obvious’ to the English eye. Only translations are allowed in, and on two conditions. One is that these texts have to please the English nose, in its decolonised reincarnation – which is just as snooty as the earlier versions. Secondly, you must presume that the major part of your audience has no time or attention for texts translated from your language. They will have been immersed in various canons or in one of the radical anti-canon anthologies.

Should you wish to ask questions that refer back to contexts that have shaped the way you make sense of things, the ‘English territory’ you have entered allows you only to wave at the rudimentary maps of your hinterland drawn by these translations. Your questions are standardly met with polite incomprehension if you speak with any reference to the background that has shaped you. To be heard you must rephrase your question as one coming from an individual standpoint. This procedure of course instantly abridges your question, decontextualises you, reassures your questionee that she or he need not do any actual comprehending work to deal with your baggage, and restores order.

This is the way ‘democratic, free, critical’ discussion in Anglophone Land works, as we all know from our experience. Most of us are quite untroubled by the ways of this freedom. Some of us are even prepared to celebrate it. But I, for one, am not. I ask readers who agree with Anand on Sanskrit to notice that the very logic of his argument undermines what he says on behalf of English in its current hegemony-laden form. My point is that English has to be made safe for serious negotiation.

Some readers will object that this is a romantic or shrill remark that does not imply any concrete implementation. But it does. It is possible of course to reject my diagnosis. But if one accepts it the sorts of prescriptions that follow are obvious. One such prescription is spelled out here to make this point concrete. Not necessarily ‘the’ regime I would recommend, it calls for a change in our habits of reading

(hereinafter taken to include television viewing, etc). I can unpack this as a three-point programme.

Point one has to do with our cognitive health – which receives as little attention from the Indian intelligentsia as the possibility of ‘smokogenic’ cancer. Our cognitive health requires a diversified diet richer in ‘translations’ than in ‘originals’. (The scare quotes of ‘translations’ are a reference to the need to include mediating texts that do not strictly reproduce any ‘original’.)

The second point pertains to the long-term background that underwrites our short-term intake and output patterns. On that front, the classical or rather inter-classical imperative requires that the Greco-Christian underpinnings (and specifically the post-Christian atheist ones) driving normal English discourse and its ‘common’ sense be placed on an agenda of explicit inter-foundational negotiation, changing the current practice of letting the defaulting post-Christian foundations tacitly run our ‘rationalities’ for us.

Thirdly, on the equally essential methodological front, we who wish to go in for this healthier diet before time runs out need to make sure that, for the sake of deeper English-vehicled critical cognition itself, we also inhabit the serious textual (knowledge-negotiative) world of at least one other language. This is a condition that Anglophones in India standardly fail to meet and illiterately dismiss. They cover up their illiteracy with a raucous pooh-poohing of all contemporary discourse in Indian languages – behaviour similar to, and worth comparing with, macho derision targeting the feminine world.

These remarks are addressed to readers who think my reading of the malady is vague and does not lead to an implementable programme. I turn now to readers who, despite general lack of sympathy for my position, may grant that my position as developed so far may make a little bit of sense so far as elementary pedagogy is concerned. As I imagine them, such readers will then go on to assert categorically that excellence, however, needs only English. I must be perverse or simply wrong to suggest otherwise.

Some among the readers of the second category may generously concede that excellence in literary creativity involves the use of whatever language one chooses. But even generous readers are likely to find it ‘obvious’ – and to find it perverse of me to deny – that analytical, critical, cognitive discourse must treat English as

‘the’ vehicle. ‘Obviously’, Indian languages cannot produce anything serious in analytical domains. They can at best help distribute the products to the hinterland, or help people from the hinterland to enter the real world of English-medium production and comprehension of knowledge wares.

But this point seems obvious only if one takes as a given the uniqueness of the knowledge-carrying virtues of English. And such a view of virtue and excellence, perceptive readers will have noticed, is identical to the Sanskrit view that Anand rightly opposes.

The idea that a particular knowledge carrier is a uniquely suitable vehicular language – be it Sanskrit, English or Arabic – appeals only to a vision that desires centralisation of the conversations that negotiate knowledge. Such a vision remains nostalgically attached to ancient teacherly authority. In real life today, knowledge exists only in and as recurrent and negotiative handing over to fresh learners. It is learners who call the shots in this serious traffic.

I conclude from this that English, however firmly entrenched as a global queen, can only become a language of modernity – which it hardly is at present – if authoritative discourses in that tongue get recycled and mutated through other linguistic niches globally. For the claim that English carries modernity crucially commits the claimants to a process of testing the replicability and sustainability of English-borne messages through conversations that come naturally to other languages. In other words, those who claim a unique ‘cognitive modernity vehicle’ status for English are making a commitment to testing a crucial corollary. This corollary is the prediction that English-borne cognitive messages, when recycled elsewhere, will come out as replicable, as generalisable *mutatis mutandis* (subject to necessary alterations which do not affect the main points) and therefore as ‘knowledge’.

Those who wish to test this prediction will need to initiate a massive traffic of translation both into and from English. What has been observed so far is only some literary translation into this much advertised vehicle. And these efforts hardly seem motivated by the urge to test any serious claims.

I have argued that Anand is simply wrong about merit. What is good for analysis – good for the health of an analysis, in one

language, of human realities occurrent in other languages – has to facilitate access to this analysis of for those who speak nothing but those other languages. If for instance it is to be shown that an *EPW* article has made valid claims about phenomena that float in a Bangla-speaking pool, someone has to take these claims, translated into a locally-usable Bangla, to the relevant subcommunity. There the translated version of the claims enters the currency of local theses and counter-theses and gets renegotiated. If this works out, the result wends its way back to *EPW*, not to end a cycle and achieve closure but as part of a ‘back and forth’ process that is not supposed to end.

If at all such treatment of *EPW* – which I am mentioning only to minimise the referential distance – has been standard practice in any part of India, I would like to see it emulated and discussed in this and other journals.

The criteria for judging the merit of an analysis then, are the same as those for determining whether the analysis contains, responses to actually arising queries in the relevant constituencies – or can in practice be readily extended to include such responses. It is not enough for the analysis to answer the ritual ‘good questions’ of some catechism.

The implementation of merit, in that case, leads to a multilingual and translative strategy, not to the monoglot Anglophone goal that Anand sets for a dalit-bahujan language policy.

Reanalysing Positions

If merit is respecified along anything like the lines suggested above, Anand’s portrayal of the relative merits of English, Sanskrit and contemporary Indian languages cannot stand. The picture will need to be revised in various ways. The revision is best left to the various standpoints from which it will have to be done. No author can claim to survey the whole field of actual needs as perceived from so many points of view and of action.

No immediate conclusion follows, therefore, about whether dalit-bahujans or any other group of actors, should place their cognitive centre of gravity in English or in Indian languages.

Other things being equal, one should then invest one’s resources in many baskets at once, evenhandedly. That decision would leave the default centre of gravity where it is – perhaps in the Indian languages

if dalit-bahujans have made their primary linguistic investment in these. Individual dalit-bahujans will make personal decisions commensurate with their respective profiles of ability, opportunity and context. I refuse to pontificate on what choices all members of this or any other category should make.

As part of the work of reanalysing merit, those of us who think about knowledge and language need also to remap the positions of the relevant languages. We have tended to view these positions too discretely, like mutually non-overlapping territories on a standard map. This is the fallacy of simple location. Languages are sets of reminders of conversations. Words land in the strangest places, and persist there.

One consequence that we need to notice is that there is much Sanskrit in various Indian languages, and also plenty of English, and we cannot always tell them apart. We have used the strategy of Sanskritic revival and coinage to replicate the English conceptual vocabulary in modern Indian languages. Our strategy has often sought continuity with both classical Indian traditions and English-carried modernities. This strategy is under attack on several scores and will probably need to be recast. However, the basic presence of our important languages in each other is not going to change. Only its details will.

Can a single Sanskrit represent classical India after this recasting has run its course? Will brahmanical hegemonies remain in place? They certainly will not. Dalit-bahujan authors obviously wish to redraw the cognitive map of classical India by strengthening the status of Pali and the Prakrits, for instance. Such a process will elevate many non-Vedic traditions to the status currently monopolised, in standard writings and textbooks, by the Vedic traditions. I certainly hope, apparently with Anand, that serious thinkers who are not themselves dalit-bahujans (and thus cannot lead this process) shall either second this wish or at least not perversely oppose it.

For reasons I do not understand, my claim that some northern Indian discourses today can be usefully traced back to the bhakti-sufism period strikes Anand as 'mischievous' support for a pro-brahman and anti-dalit-bahujan reading of Indian history. On the contrary, I hope that the current work of reimagining India's past will treat the bhakti-sufism period as a moment of fruitful inter-regional and inter-faith

contact that subjected the caste system to a welcome, if incomplete, challenge.

The bhakti-sufism moment was certainly a juncture at which languages, and the knowledges woven into them, visibly and inextricably repositioned themselves inside each other in what thus emerged as an Indian set of interlocking spaces. Reference to that period is thus crucial for the point that the relative positions of India's many languages need to be visualised in terms of overlap and interpenetration. For this and related reasons, it does not really make sense to compare our languages and choose between them, as Anand and many others suggest that we do.

I am not advocating a revival of bhakti energies, of course. I hope, with Anand, that the dalit-bahujan and other positive forces active today, including the women's movement, will bring about a major realignment in our time. In particular, I look forward to a widespread recognition of the dalit-bahujan creative resurgence in the regional languages as not just an emotional but a cognitive activity.

To see the importance of this point, let us remind ourselves that the current national division of linguistic labour rather naively assigns an instrumental and cognitive function to English and a 'merely expressive' creative, literary role to the Indian languages. Now the dalit-bahujan autobiographical insurrection in the Indian languages breaks down the expressive-instrumental divide. It does so by continuing the authors' expressive impulse into a new cognitive space being forged precisely by the struggle for dalit-bahujan dignity.

The success in breaking down the expressive-cognitive divide a naive one, leads one to hope that further successes will follow in its wake. We may expect that a new space, neither aridly cognitive like that of English nor over-emotionally and populistically 'just expressive' like those of the savarna-dominated Indian languages can be established by a sustainable new coalition. The coalition could be constituted by regional dalit-bahujan forces working inter-regionally, translating between Indian languages and not just relying on the English umbrella every time they step out of their respective regions.

One can dream, then, of a multilingual, translation-wedded coalition reimagining an India of non-Sanskritic pluralism. For such a coalition and the scene it works towards, the strategic use of English by some participants as a primary language they can feel

comfortable with is only one private means to the public end. This public end is the emergence of a new space of serious discursive negotiation as to what shall count as productive activities and the 'knowledges' that underwrite them.

The process whereby this space begins to emerge will throw up sustainable and 'meritorious' tools, completing the critique of 'merit' as it now stands. For these instruments will manifestly outperform what the global market, functioning in elite-driven English, has been able to offer to any of us. Such sustainable tools for imagining a nation will give cultural-political teeth to the struggle against the blue-blooded meritocracy.

Does such a scenario romantically cut the dalit-bahujan movement off from global trends? On the contrary, savarna meritocracy is what perpetuates the obsolete division of linguistic-cultural labour operating with an instrumental English and expressive regional languages over which savarna authors strive to retain their sway. Notions of the literary have been breaking down outside this savarna enclave. India's regional-language press, whose falling lexico-grammatical standards purists lament, reflects the growing power of the formerly marginal, non-literary uses of every language (I base this remark on personal communications from Shivaram Padikkal). This is in keeping with the more visible 'big-time' trends.

On that global scene, discursive giants like Barthes and Eco have added creative writing to their analytical tool kit. And creative stars like a Rushdie or a Kundera have mixed their literary work with journalistic and analytical discourse much more freely than realist conventions would have allowed. Both sides to the old textual divide (between the creative and the cognitive) have been abandoning canons of literary imagination and intellectual discourse.

Parallel to this abandonment, the old importance of the written text itself has been affected by a larger media and cyberspace displacement. In this more inclusive set of communications, a hegemonic elite setting and enforcing standards of merit no longer gets a political walkover anywhere in the world. Such elites face a harder task. To the extent that they are still managing to win in some arenas, their opponents have to climb a steeper hill.

These are political realities about texts that those who wish for greater political sensitivity will need to do business with.

Self-Defence

I turn at last to my personal task here. In the course of lamenting the absence of writings that address the specific difficulties faced by dalit-bahujans in trying to learn or use English, Anand criticises my 1993 book on English in India for its failure to deal with this issue. It is possible that expanding the data base to cover my work on dalit-bahujans, on the teaching of English in India and on the shifts in the cultural politics of the presence of the language in this country [Dasgupta 1996b, 1998b, 1995, 1998a, 1997] would modify the framework of discussion. But I leave this for others to judge.

Anand's main problem with my 1993 book is that he believes it mystifies the failure of 'Bharatias' (this he thinks might be a reference to dalit-bahujans) to learn standard English. He reads me as having romanticised this failure as a resistance whose history I furthermore mischievously try to trace back to the era of bhakti and sufism. My entire gambit, as he reads it, seeks to find a virtuous justification for the unwillingness of academics such as myself to help contemporary dalit-bahujans to learn a standard English that would empower them on the national scene.

In my 1993 book, the regions of India are constituted primarily along ethnic lines at a level that can be contested both politically and intellectually, but not without acknowledging the way they now stand in standard public awareness. The ability of these regions as spaces to sustain their cultural autonomy in the face of homogenising national processes was coded, in my argument, as the principal opposition in the diglossic polarisation of the Indian linguistic scene: the opposition pitting a regional low(L) against a national high (H). In this framework the aggregation of resistant ethnic regions constitutes a Bharat to which a national-metropolitan India is compelled to relativise itself.

While the book makes its diglossic basis clear, it may not have specified how completely its argument depends on the diglossic premises – which, incidentally, still strike me as a reasonable point of departure. Readers of this article unfamiliar with the book will need to know, furthermore, that my visualisation of diglossia uses predicates not just from language but from a theory of knowledge-defining discourses. The book argues that a process of discourse reception drives the dynamic transaction between donor H

discourses and receptor L conversations and shapes the range of educative endeavours that can take place in L.

My alleged romanticisation of incomplete learning of English as a form of resistance has nothing to do with caste categories. I was referring to the fact that readily identifiable regional accents (a term I am using here to highlight peculiarities most salient in phonology but not confined to it) are associated with several ethnic categories. A Bihari speaking English in Bihar in a pan-Indian, 'neutral', educated accent would, S K Verma has given me to understand (in a 1987 conversation), be censured by fellow Biharis for wantonly abandoning his or her regional identity.

I stand by Verma's claim – which I found echoed by other observers – that many Indians who learn English 'find it impossible' to shift completely into standards of correctness which if acquired would cost them their identity. In my recasting, this came out in the form of the claim that the 'faulty' or 'incomplete' learning of English (from a normative, prescriptive viewpoint) by many Indians strongly committed to their regional identities was a form of resistance to the region-free accent and other impositions of 'India – as opposed to 'Bharat'.

My reference to the bhakti period was in emulation of a standard feature of the conventional historiography of the major northern languages. It is difficult to make sense of the history of a Hindi or a Marathi without referring to the 'bhakti phenomenon'. The various Indo-Aryan languages individuated into roughly their current identities at the point at which the bhakti-sufism period's large-scale redrawing of all maps respecified the linguistic terrain as well.

I would like, with Anand and Omvedt, to find a way not to invoke Sanskrit as a total unifier every time we wish to speak of India as a whole. This desire could conceivably lead new narrators of an Indian story – as long as we feel like telling stories about an India at all – to feel like throwing the bhakti-sufism baby out with the Sanskrit bathwater. I would, however, advise caution on this.

The emergence of bhakti-sufism and that of the new Indo-Aryan languages are closely interwoven. This narrative can and needs to be diversely celebrated, retold and reinherited by dalit-bahujans, Muslims, Dravidians and others who seek to contest the way brahman-led northern Indian narrators appropriate the tale of these

languages. Otherwise one is proposing to give these languages away to forces interested in hegemonically controlling them, and then apparently (if I heard Anand right) to move into English instead.

To reiterate the cultural-political point I made in this connection above, I find this strategy proposed by Anand odd and unsustainable.

I do agree that my 1993 publication, like many others of its kind, does not address caste issues. But surely theory emerges from practice. If I may follow Anand in treating as a typical example the book he targets, that book was written between 1985 and 1991. The majority of my students till 1991 had been Thais, Manipuris, savarna Oriyas and savarna Maharashtrians. The marginalisation of Deccan College in Pune and of linguistics in academic and political discourse was (and remains) total. This marginality ensured that dalit-bahujans had neither found linguistics a usable avenue of social mobility in their practice nor been able to give it specific attention in their theoretical articulations.

Only in later years have the collectives in which I participate as an academic been throwing up articulations of the dalit-bahujan experience in English teaching and learning. Mine is likely to have been a typical trajectory for academics in the language professions and the learning milieux they try to represent in their texts.

I strongly hope that the issues Anand has raised, with the emphasis lent by his conceivably welcome anger, will remain on our various agendas. I hope also that the regional variousness of these agendas will increase instead of surrendering to any of the homogeneities that beckon. Surely no counter-homogeneity of dalit-bahujan origin will arise to destroy the regional diversity promised by the ecological awareness of today's dalit-bahujan thinkers. But on this issue I look forward to hearing what other 'anti-romanticising' voices have to say. [27]

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