


## Conscientization in the Indian Classroom: An Experiment in the Critical Learning of Postcolonial Literature

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*The article tells the story of a pedagogical experiment that the author conducted in collaboration with final year master's students in Kolkata, India. The aim was to "open up the classroom," adapting Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's notion of critical pedagogy to an Indian context. The diverse group of students who participated in this experiment had a high degree of political consciousness regarding issues of gender, caste, sexuality, disability, and class due to the university's history of student activism. Most students had already read a fair amount of postcolonial literature and theory. Postcolonial literature syllabus as it had conventionally been taught would not be able to engage these restive students or be relevant to their lived experiences. The experiment on classroom democratization and collaborative teaching would demonstrate to the future college teacher one kind of interventionist approach for raising student awareness in the Indian classroom.*

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Paulo Freire defined conscientization or critical consciousness as an approach that encouraged intervention in sociopolitical reality in order to modify it. Freire's pedagogical thought has focused on teaching/learning in conditions of socio-economic inequality and on the ways in which communities facing social marginalization might resist and change the conditions of oppression they face. Critical consciousness is based on an acceptance of equity between learners and teachers, leading to an experience that is mutually educative for them. It makes both students and teachers aware of structures of power, including power within the classroom, and encourages the less privileged to exercise freedom and responsibility as agents, and to develop the praxis, pace, and content of learning to reflect their concerns in ways that may often turn out very different from the conventional teaching of a previously imposed syllabus.<sup>1</sup> I wish to tell the story of a pedagogical experiment that I conducted in collaboration with final year master's

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1 Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*. (New York and London: Continuum, 2005).

students of the English Department of Jadavpur University, where we discussed the goals of critical pedagogy as presented by Freire and set out together to “open the classroom” to the world they inhabit.

It would be pertinent to discuss the social contexts and conditions leading up to this exercise in critical pedagogy at the outset of my narrative. In 2014, the *Hokkolorob* (“let there be noise”) protest movement opened up Jadavpur University as a space of extended public protest by students over a range of issues. These issues went, as the movement progressed, beyond the initial demand for justice from university authorities in the matter of an assault on a woman student on campus. The movement was the first in the university’s history to make efficient and widespread use of social media, and used a wide range of protest strategies including sit-ins, hunger strikes, teach-ins, picketing, protest marches, and petitions. It was a tumultuous time, with many teachers continuing to take “informal” classes without recording formal attendance in outdoor locations during the student strikes. The movement led to the capitulation by the state government to the demands of the agitating students. The events, art, installations, polemical writing, and songs of *Hokkolorob* have been documented both by students and the press, and written about extensively by journalists and academics alike. During the movement, students and teachers expressed concern regarding the degree of control the ruling political party and the government had over the functioning of the university. As in other student movements that have rocked university campuses across the country in the last decade, questions were raised about wider social and political issues such as caste, class, and gender inequality on campus. Professor Supriya Chaudhuri states in her perceptive analysis of the impact of *Hokkolorob*:

The unrest on public university campuses over the past few years over issues of gender, caste and political belief has brought faculty and students into conflict with an apparently repressive administration that is openly supported by the government. Many of these issues (especially caste) are not new—indeed they remind us of earlier instances treated with equal harshness and indifference by university authorities. Nevertheless, there is a new urgency in the protests, as though faculty and students alike are aware that time is running out, indeed that it may already be too late to voice their anger and despair.<sup>2</sup>

*Hokkolorob* raised the level of sociopolitical consciousness of a large number of students both in Jadavpur University and in campuses across the state of West Bengal. The continuing politicization and radicalization of many students in the five years that have elapsed since *Hokkolorob* marks its impact as being somewhat different from the previous students’ movements in Jadavpur University. The internet archiving of the movement and the intelligent use of social media by students who were once part of, or deeply influenced by, *Hokkolorob* to enlist new students could be reasons for the remarkable increase in the number of protests related to issues of disability, caste, sexuality, and gender in classrooms and on the campus in recent times.

The MA students who participated in the pedagogical experiment with me had been new undergraduates at the time of *Hokkolorob*. Among the movements that followed *Hokkolorob* was the (ongoing) *HokUnion* (“let there be student unions”), which

2 Supriya Chaudhuri, “On Making Noise: *Hokkolorob* and Its Place in Indian Student Movements,” *Postcolonial Studies* 22.1 (2019): 44–58.

demanded political autonomy for students. On July 7, 2017, the West Bengal government, after a meeting with state-aided universities, had announced that, in the interests of curbing violence related to student politics in the state, “student unions” were to be replaced with apolitical “student councils.” *HokUnion* demanded that students be allowed to choose their own representatives in free and fair elections, as had been the tradition in the university for decades. In the summer of 2018, the university, in line with the state government’s directives, had declared that the time-tested process of admission tests would be replaced by admission on the basis of marks received in higher secondary examinations. Upset at the interference of the government in the matter of the university’s autonomy, students went on an indefinite hunger strike in July 2018 and pressurized the government and university authorities into a compromise. As had happened in 2014, the 2018 protests also created space for raising issues of caste and class inequality among teachers and students of the university. Rimi B. Chatterjee, professor in the Department of English at Jadavpur University even set a mock-examination question in a Facebook post that invoked the memory of *Hokkolorob* with hashtags like “#handsoffJU,” “#handsoffjadavpur,” and “#hokkolorob”:

Q. Admission tests are elitist scams that allow privileged wannabe-white *babus* and *mems* to continue their monopoly of postcolonial cultural capital. Do you agree? Answer with reference to your idea of how a university should be run.<sup>3</sup>

Among the posts by student activists at the time of the 2018 protests was one that referred to a Dalit faculty member of the university in derogatory terms, inviting the charge that student politics was undermined by the insensitivity of many elite students to issues of caste and class inequality.<sup>4</sup>

At the time the course commenced, student sensitivity to issues of inequality on campus was high. The seventy-odd postgraduate students I was to teach postcolonial literature in early 2019 were a lively, highly political and fractious lot. They had been through the student protests of 2018, many were active in *HokUnion*, and most already been through long and intense classroom debates on issues of sexual harassment, casteism, and elitism. The classroom was fairly diverse in terms of the social, linguistic, cultural, and economic backgrounds of the students, and I realized that the old syllabus with its canonical “po-co” authors would not be able to engage most of the students or seem relevant to their lives or their experiences. As former Dalit and Adivasi students of mine over the years had told me, they couldn’t find themselves in the syllabus; there was no reflection of their lives and experiences. The postcolonial literature syllabus we had been teaching graduate students over the years allowed us to examine important themes such as race, nation, and subalternity, but in ways that were far removed from their lived experiences. I was repeatedly reminded of my learning from First Nations teachers such

3 Rimi B. Chatterjee, Facebook post, July 6, 2018, [https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=rimi%20b.%20chatterjee%20admission%20tests%20are%20elitist%20scams&epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=rimi%20b.%20chatterjee%20admission%20tests%20are%20elitist%20scams&epa=SEARCH_BOX).

4 The faculty of the department collectively issued a public statement in response to this use of casteist and elitist language by some student activists: “We, the teachers of the Department of English, Jadavpur University, strongly affirm that the Department has a zero tolerance policy towards the use of casteist, classist, ableist, communal, homophobic or sexist language. We condemn the use of any language (verbal or written), gestures or behaviour that refers to the identity of an individual or community in a denigratory manner.”

as Daniel Heath Justice during my Shastri Fellowship in Toronto of how many Indigenous students dropped out of school and college in Canada because they found no representation of their lives or concerns in the mainstream curricula in most educational institutions. A certain way of teaching postcolonial literature, based on an emerging “canon,” became standardized in most countries in South Asia by the last decade of the twentieth century. This standardization prevented new areas (Dalit and Indigenous writing, for instance, and writing from the North-East) that truly stretch the margins of what might be termed *postcolonial* from being allowed to question and reshape what postcolonial or anticolonial pedagogies might evolve in more contemporary and local contexts.<sup>5</sup> As K. Satyanarayana, who introduced an master’s optional class on Dalit writing at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, recounted in an interview:

I do not wish to contrast and compare the upper caste reader’s consumption of dalit literature as the “literature of pain” and their attitude to dalit issues in day-to-day life. Reading literature and responding to issues are two independent domains. Our brahman English teachers do read a lot of black literature. But this reading will not and does not affect their response to day-to-day issues of discrimination. One point I would stress is that the introduction of dalit writing ... would go a long way in sensitizing young upper caste minds to dalit issues.<sup>6</sup>

The drastic revision of the master’s syllabus in the Department of English at Jadavpur University just over a year before this experiment allowed me the freedom to be more flexible in the selection of texts. The preamble to the revised master’s syllabus effective from 2017 to 2018 stated that core courses should concentrate on leveling up the students’ critical abilities and *their understanding of wider social, historical, and political contexts*, whereas instruction related to genre, period, or clustered around a canon should be carried out primarily through the optional courses.<sup>7</sup> The revised syllabus

5 The master’s core course syllabus in previous years included selections from the theoretical writing by Bhabha, Spivak, Said, Dipesh Chakraborty, and other critics and theorists. Primary texts were selected from a list that usually included Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*; Salman Rushdie, *Shame*; Raja Rao, *Kanthapura*; Peter Carey, *Jack Maggs*; Caryl Phillips, *Cambridge*; J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*; Nadine Gordimer, *July’s People*; Wole Soyinka, *Dance of the Forests*; Derek Walcott, *Pantomime*; Ngugi Wa’ Thiongo, *Petals of Blood*; Thomas King, *Green Grass Running Water*; V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas*; Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*; and Shyam Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*.

6 K. Satyanarayana, interview, in *Touchable Tales: Publishing and Reading Dalit Literature*, ed. S. Anand (New Delhi: Navayana, 2003), 16.

7 Keeping in mind the emphasis in the new preamble to the master’s syllabus, the old course on postcolonial literature was remodeled and called “The Idea of the Modern 3: Colonial and Postcolonial Modernities.” The blurb of the course as it was circulated among students read as follows:

The course is intended to help the student develop the means of reading the present that we inhabit, an overlapping of colonial, post-colonial, neo-colonial modernities. It enables students to grasp the range of tools available for such reading, as well as recognise and analyse the texts—social, cultural, literary, material—that are available for this ... It broadens the scope of post-colonial studies to include the study of the impact of different kinds of colonialism—economic, ecological, cultural—on our local and global modernities, and extends the awareness of the student to the futures that might be the outcome of individual, collective, governmental and corporate actions in the colonial/postcolonial/neocolonial present.

allowed for a more interventionist approach to teaching in the context of the concerns of students in the department and in campuses across the country at large.

My experience of teaching ethnographic writing to undergraduate students as part of a course titled “Introduction to Fieldwork” in the semester before January 2019 convinced me further that the students and teachers needed to have greater pedagogical engagement with issues of caste, class, urban, and rural backgrounds, as well as other forms of difference that caused palpable stress in our very diverse classrooms. I had asked my students to conduct interviews on campus based on a simple questionnaire. The questionnaire had three questions, prompted by the recent debates about elitism in the department at the time of the July 2018 student movement:

1. Is your department an elitist space?
2. In what ways does elitism function in the department?
3. How can the department be made a more equitable space?

Students interviewed peers, faculty members, research scholars, and graduate students, and came up with responses that reiterated what had been expressed in numerous conversations with students marginalized by casteism, elitism, and heteropatriarchal attitudes of people on campus. More than forty reports were submitted, of which I will cite only three. One student, Angshuman Dutta, wrote of his interviewees’ opinions:

Troubling strains of elitism do run within the department. Mostly all felt that the difference between the social backgrounds of the students result in marked different social groups based on such prejudices... . People from less privileged backgrounds must not feel excluded or an alien in their own department or conversations. The marginal identities should be allowed the same place as those who dominate in the grand narrative.<sup>8</sup>

Anindita Mondal, a research scholar of the department who audited the ethnography course came to the following conclusion after her fieldwork:

There is a form of segregation between the students which ultimately leads to a state of non-unity in the class and other crucial areas. It is practiced implicitly, and in some instances explicitly, might I add that it happens in such a way that an individual may sometimes feel “I do not belong here.” ... After going through the data I have collected through the interviews I have come to the conclusion that some of my interviewees tried to mask their own elitism subtly by going against the very ideology of elitism.<sup>9</sup>

Another report, from the undergraduate student Anikendu Mondal, identified forms of intellectual elitism that stemmed from class privilege and urban location:

Some students who are more familiar with the (English) language and its nuances practice a form of intellectual elitism, where they flaunt their knowledge and expertise and act

8 Angshuman Dutta, email, August 1, 2018. See note 24.

9 Anindita Mondal, email to the author, August 2, 2018. See note 24.

superior to those who lack the same, mostly because they are from an underprivileged background.

Teachers also partake in this practice, although unconsciously... . All of this creates a communication gap between the urban and rural masses of the students, who are born and brought up in strikingly contrasted scenarios and cultural spaces.<sup>10</sup>

Anikendu Mondal's report mentioned that a common response to the question of measures that might be taken to combat elitism in our department was that "we should bring together all the students, irrespective of socio-economical and intellectual standing, in some form of (community) bonding program. There they would all interact as human beings and work on something productive."<sup>11</sup> I felt that the idea of collaborative academic work might be one way in which students could respond to the issues socio-economic inequality raised in recent times on the campus. As Henry Giroux has affirmed, issues of justice and social equity are not separable from acts of teaching and learning, and a critical pedagogy can motivate individuals to effect change in their social environment through critique and action in different fields.<sup>12</sup>

While module 1 of the course "Colonial and Postcolonial Modernities" titled "The Postcolonial and Anticolonial Toolbox" was taught by me, and focused on theory and critical thought including Indigenous thought, the content of module 2 was opened up to the students to debate and decide what they felt was truly reflective of their concerns and their time. Many of the students were fairly well read and articulate, and I felt that they were mature enough as final year graduate students to have a greater hand in deciding what texts they were to study. Module 2, titled "Strategic Identities and Representation," was to cover issues such as race, caste, class, feminisms, queer identities, borders, indigeneity, subalternity, and forms of resistance in anticolonial, postcolonial, and decolonizing contexts. The class was divided into seven groups, and each group was invited to debate the text that the members of their group would collaboratively teach as part of their assessment. Each group was asked to document these debates about the choice of particular texts and the reasons for the omission of certain others. I would guide them through the process of planning their presentations, helping to shape the way in which the texts would be cotaught and attending each of their sessions in order to intervene wherever there were gaps needing to be filled. Apart from the fact that the teaching/learning sessions would be marked, questions were to be set by me on the texts selected by students, apart from what I had myself taught by way of theory, fiction, and poetry. This put greater responsibility upon the students because their peers would be partly depending on them to learn about texts that they had selected, researched, and cotaught.

10 Anikendu Mondal, email to the author, September 23, 2018. See note 24.

11 Anikendu Mondal, email to the author, September 23, 2018. See note 24.

12 Henry Giroux, "Utopian Thinking in Dangerous Times: Critical Pedagogy and the Project of Educated Hope," in *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization*, eds. Mark Coté, Richard J. F. Day, and Greig De Peuter (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 25–42.

The reports of discussions by the seven groups were emailed to me once the texts had been selected. The students were quite conscious that their discussions were setting a pedagogical precedent and carefully recorded notes of dissent by group members as texts were considered, shortlisted, or set aside. As one group's report stated, "The language in which we had the discussions on Whatsapp has been preserved, anticipating archival value."<sup>13</sup> Each group elected a leader, who acted as moderator during debates over texts, and communicated with me about the time required by members of the group for collaborative teaching, and so on. The group leaders ensured that every member of the group wrote (or cowrote) a paper as part of the preparation for collaborative teaching and submitted suggestions for further reading that could be circulated among their peers in class.

One of the groups, comprising Aditi, Darun, Diya, Ekabali, Peter, Rushati, Sneha, and Tamanna had a long debate about having to choose between Dalit and Adivasi texts. The group was diverse, with students that were from different linguistic, ethnic, religious, caste, and economic backgrounds. Difficult questions were asked about the politics of "discussing and dismissing" texts that would eventually not be selected for collaborative teaching:

A certain group member wondered if we chose Dalit texts, did we not have a commitment towards, say, Adivasi texts, and what did it say about our politics? Moreover, would the luxury of archiving (the discussion of) texts left out end up further marginalising (literally) these texts? It is possible for people, for the sake of political correctness, to include Black/ Queer/Dalit/Adivasi/Muslim literature in the omissions section, while taking up some other text for actual presentations?<sup>14</sup>

However, the students then justified their choice of the Tamil Dalit writer Bama's *Karukku* over other texts by stating:

Some believed that our commitment will be faithfully reflected in the omissions and that if a group was actually considering texts by marginalized writers, they were most likely to go with one for the presentations. It's okay to have good faith. Documentation of omissions will contain the rationale for the omissions and if it does throw up a pattern of neglecting underrepresented texts, then a certain politics can be gleaned from studying the pattern.<sup>15</sup>

It was a great learning experience for me as the course coordinator to follow the debates that led to the selection of *Karukku* and other texts. For the sake of brevity, I limit my discussion to the group that selected *Karukku*. The debates helped me understand better the interests of the various groups, as well as the practicalities they considered as students from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. The groups seemed to avoid the now

13 Ekabali Ghosh, email to the author, February 17, 2019. The report compiling the debates within the group was prepared by Darun S. See note 24.

14 Ekabali Ghosh, email to the author, February 17, 2019. The report compiling the debates within the group was prepared by Darun S. See note 24.

15 Ekabali Ghosh, email to the author, February 17, 2019. The report compiling the debates within the group was prepared by Darun S. See note 24.



“canonical” texts that only a few years before had been widely read and discussed by MA students. As Darun reported, “Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* was half-heartedly suggested knowing full well that it was a common ‘po-co’ text and therefore overworked. It was not seriously considered.”<sup>16</sup> A recurrent pattern in the group debates was that certain texts were “predictably” postcolonial and overdiscussed in the academy, and newer texts that were more challenging or relevant to the students’ interests needed to be brought in. One group, comprising Shalini, Aritra, Reeswav, Laboni, Chandril, Urvi, Souvick, Tanisha, and Anusha eventually chose to coteach Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People*. They reported that they had considered Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, but “were reluctant to work on Ghosh’s novel on the grounds of repetition and familiarity... . We also considered Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* ... Some of us mentioned an interest in working on J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* ... This we rejected because the postcolonial elements in the text were pretty “easy” to locate... .<sup>17</sup> When this group shortlisted *The Bone People*, they justified their choice by stating:

Reading *The Bone People* revealed intriguing elements, particularly the unconventional familial relationships between a shipwrecked and abused white boy, his adoptive Maori father, and the narrator, a part-Maori and part-Pakeha woman, which we felt would be an interesting “microcosm” to examine. The fact that the book is written in a style very different from the prose we are accustomed to, and that it borrows heavily from Maori mythology, also gave us the impetus to actually begin reading outside our comfort zones.<sup>18</sup>

Of the members of the group that specifically debated the selection of Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim authored texts, Peter and Ekabali had suggested *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar. They were not sure if the text could be included under the “postcolonial” umbrella. Students hesitated to coteach the text by an Adivasi author because they felt “not much theorization has been done on them or by them” and because “copies of the book were not easily available.”<sup>19</sup> Ekabali suggested *Allah Is Not Obligated* by Ahmadou Kourouma and *The Inquisitor’s Manual* by Antonio Lobo Antunes. The group deliberated on Kourouma’s book:

This text was suggested because of the unique position it occupies and because French writing from Africa is barely covered [in syllabi of postcolonial literature]. It does amazing things with language, swear words are common, and our normative understanding of the child is completely destabilized. It was rejected because it is the only text of Kourouma’s [that is] available in English on LibGen. All other texts [by him would] have to be bought and they were too expensive to buy. A wide range of Kourouma’s books would have to be read in order to understand his writing better and we did not have access.<sup>20</sup>

16 Ekabali Ghosh, email to the author, February 17, 2019. The report compiling the debates within the group was prepared by Darun S. See note 24.

17 Laboni Mukherjee, email to the author, February 11, 2019. See note 24.

18 Laboni Mukherjee, email to the author, February 11, 2019. See note 24.

19 Laboni Mukherjee, email to the author, February 11, 2019. See note 24.

20 Laboni Mukherjee, email to the author, February 11, 2019. See note 24.



As for the *The Inquisitor's Manual*, the group opined that:

The text is important because of what it does to language. It is also important because literature from outside the Anglophone world is barely read. Portuguese life during the Salazar regime is barely ever a subject of (discussion) in postcolonial studies classes in India. The text was rejected because of its inaccessibility.<sup>21</sup>

Darun was keen on doing either a Dalit text or a regional text (in translation) because he felt that such a text would “pose interesting questions about concepts like the nation-state, nationalism, belonging, and most importantly complicate the phenomenon of colonialism and its legacy.” He proposed *Six Acres and a Third* by Fakir Mohan Senapati, translated from the Odiya, one of the earliest fictional accounts about the exploitation of landless peasants by landlord(s) during the British rule. He suggested that Senapati’s work could be read alongside *River of Blood* by the Tamil writer Indra Parthasarathy or Meena Kandasamy’s *Gypsy Goddess* because these were based on the 1968 Keezhvenmani massacre of Dalit laborers. The group decided not to go with Senapati’s work as “many were skeptical whether this would offer enough for (eight or more) presentations.”<sup>22</sup>

Darun and Balagopal also asked why there was such little discussion of writing on migrant South Asian workers in the gulf states, whereas South Asian diaspora studies focused on more elite categories of South Asian migrants in “first world” countries. They proposed Benyamin’s *Goat Days* (translated from the Malayalam) for discussion because it was about the life of a Malayali Muslim migrant worker, Najeeb Muhammad, who goes missing in Saudi Arabia. They also suggested another novel by the same author, *Jasmine Days*, about life in the “Middle East” during the Arab Spring of 2011. Their selection was based on the consideration of several factors. According to them, the books were challenging because they offered different political/subject positions that come together in the making of the novels.

The group eventually shortlisted several Dalit texts such as Bama’s *Karukku* and *Sangati*, and Urmila Pawar’s *The Weave of My Life* and *Motherwit*, before deciding to collaboratively teach *Karukku*. The collaborative teaching brought in texts that otherwise might not have made it to the syllabus comprising texts commonly taught as part of postcolonial literature in West Bengal. The only novel apart from *Green Grass Running Water* (which I taught alone) that was retained from the syllabus taught in earlier years was Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*. Each group provided a detailed study of the publication history and reception of the novel, the significance of the title, the social and historical contexts of the novel, a brief biography of the author, and a detailed overview of the plot before moving on to individual presentations on themes that I had discussed with them. It was no longer about my talking unilaterally in class on specific texts—students and the teacher were learning from each other in a much more engaged and intensive fashion than had happened in previous years.

Several important questions were raised by fellow academics when I presented the story of this pedagogical experiment at a workshop on decolonizing pedagogies

21 Laboni Mukherjee, email to the author, February 11, 2019. See note 24.

22 Laboni Mukherjee, email to the author, February 11, 2019. See note 24.

organized by Utrecht University, which I discussed with my students when I reported feedback from the workshop. The question of whether the students had read enough or had enough maturity to select texts for coteaching was a pertinent one. Most of the students had been exposed to a fair amount of postcolonial literature and theory by this time. Equally importantly, they actively followed and participated in the debates on and off campus on issues on caste, ideology, class, sexuality, and gender. Because these students were postgraduate students in the final semester of their master's program, most of them would have already qualified or would be going on to take the National Eligibility Test conducted by the University Grants Commission, which would make them qualified to teach in colleges across the country without undertaking any separate program of teacher training as school-level teachers would have been expected to do. In other words, the state *already* viewed them as teachers at the tertiary level. It would be excellent practice for them to coteach texts with me before being thrust into unfamiliar classrooms as college teachers. I was in constant dialogue with the students through this process, both during the creation of the syllabus and later in the classroom, frequently interjecting to explain or clarify topics or themes that they were teaching and providing immediate feedback on the content and style of each team's teaching. Though not all of them will go on to become academics, let alone academic activists, or use critical pedagogy in their teaching, this course was possibly be the last chance I had as their teacher for demonstrating in practice how an interventionist approach in these socially turbulent times in Bengal and India could sensitize their future students to the possibilities of social change. As the final choices of texts for coteaching demonstrated, the students did not let my faith in their sense of judgment and responsibility down, and the syllabus for that semester ended up being both socially relevant and intellectually stimulating for them, far more than I could say for previous years when I had taught canonical course content in a more conventional way.<sup>23</sup> The urgent questions about

23 The group that cotaught Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* offered detailed discussions, using close readings of the text and Nigerian sociopolitical history, of the themes of violence, religion, patriarchal oppression, and silencing to their peers. There were interesting discussions of masculinity and the politics of space(s) in the novel. The discussion of Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* looked at the representation of cricket as a "post-colonial sport" in America, the depiction of people of color in the novel, the failure of the "Great American Dream," and the impact of globalization on immigrants to the United States. Discussions of Rushdie's *Shame* focused on close analyses of various characters in the novel, especially the women, the political allegory, the narrative structure, and the themes of migrancy, partition, and borders. The discussion of Bama's *Karukku* looked at the novel in relation to other autobiographies and life writing by Dalit women, the sociocultural background of caste in Tamil Nadu where the novel was set, the internalization of caste stereotypes by the subaltern, the idea of "testimony," and Bama's critique of both the caste system and contemporary practices of the church in her area. The discussion of *The Bone People* attempted to look at the symbols and narrative techniques of the novel in the context of Maori culture and discussed the aspects of Maori spirituality that were relevant to the novel. There were also close readings of the relationships among the three main characters in the novel using inputs from psychoanalysis, disability studies, queer studies, and memory and trauma studies. One group chose to work on a text translated from Urdu, *The Crooked Line* by Ismat Chughtai, problematizing the process of translation and discussing the representation of gender, queerness, sexuality, and the body in the novel. There were lively presentations by this group on the issues of shame, veiling, motherhood, and non-normative womanhood in Chughtai's work. Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* was an interesting inclusion by the students, and apart from looking at the issue of translation, they interrogated elite and subaltern queer identities in the context of diaspora studies, colonial Vietnamese history, the politics of "food" and "labor," of "home" and "belonging," also examining the narrative strategy

identity and equality, the high degree of political consciousness and the ongoing activism of the students inspired me to think of alternative ways of making the pedagogical more honestly reflective of the performative. In this risky collaborative venture, I learned a lot from my students in terms of different styles of teaching and new ways of thinking about texts that were more attuned to their generation. It meant learning to renegotiate the idea of power in the classroom—to do one's duty as an educator while acknowledging the agency and power of the diverse young people who learned and cotaught alongside me in this interesting, turbulent time.

of the novel and the ways in which the shifts between Vietnamese, French, and English by the protagonist raised questions about the relationship between language and power.

Each of the students mentioned in this article gave consent in writing via email for their names to be used. I circulated this article in its completed form among the students and asked them whether they would like their names to be mentioned. I am grateful to Angshuman Dutta, Anindita Mondal, and Anikendu Mondal for giving me written permission to use their names and quotations from their ethnographic projects in this article. I am grateful to Shalini, Aritra, Reeswavi, Laboni, Chandril, Urvi, Souvick, Tanisha, Anusha, Aditi, Darun, Diya, Ekabali, Peter, Rushati, Sneha, and Tamanna for consenting, through the group leaders Aritra (*The Bone People* group) and Peter (*Karukku* group) to have their names mentioned in this article.