

Jagdish S. Gundara is Professor of Education and Head of the International Centre for Intercultural Studies, Institute of Education, University of London. He is President of the International Association for Intercultural Education.

Interculturalism, Education and Inclusion

by

Jagdish S. Gundara



research into intercultural issues. As a result the field has become better defined in at least some pedagogic circles. However, much needs to be done to refine it further, and to persuade the universities to recognise it institutionally.

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Introduction: An Intercultural Apprenticeship

GROWING UP IN KENYA

My home was Kenya. I was born of Indian parents and spent my first eighteen impressionable years in an atmosphere replete with contradictions. My father, a Sikh, was a forester at Ngong. Ngong lay on the outskirts of Nairobi, neighbouring the elite and exclusively European residential area of Karen. At first my father's position as a government officer seemed to me to have a certain glow of authority and respect.

However, it became clear that, although he was a dedicated forester with a passion for flora and fauna, under the colonial system he would receive little recognition of his dedication or advancement of his career. This prompted the belief that ambition was a fruit devoid of sweetness and that I would be allotted a similar position in a closed social and political world based on racialism. The concept of a proud but independent, egalitarian Sikh nurtured through the stories of the Gurus, told passionately by my mother, thrived only in the dusk of my imagination.

We were an isolated Indian family living in the forest. We could not go and worship in the Sikh temple in Nairobi. Because of this cultural isolation I did not receive the support of other members of the Indian community – a community that, with the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947, became known as 'Asian'.

We spoke Punjabi. My father knew English but would not normally speak it at home. I naturally turned to African children who were my neighbours and we spent much time playing together. I picked up their languages – Kikuyu and Swahili – and I learnt the secrets of the forest from them. We grew up together as an integral part of the forest and of each other. This was a broad group of older and younger children. My brother, sister and I shared many common interests with our African friends surrounded as we were by the overwhelming sounds and aromatic smells of the woods at Ngong.

European children too were attracted to the forest environment, and to the plant nursery and dam, to play. We would play with them, and learn their games and how to horseride.

But there was one aspect of our home which marred my childhood. In a stratified Kenyan society, our thatched house in the forest seemed to reduce our status, which I felt was further eroded by the lack of electricity in the house. The power-lines, which stood barely four hundred yards away from our home, supplied electricity to the neighbouring European residential area. I was embarrassed by our house, and refrained from mentioning to my city friends that we used paraffin or gas lamps. My subsequent association with city children made the issue seem important.

Upbringing at home played a complex role in my learning processes. Our family was basically a nuclear unit which was reinforced because of our geographical location. However, a constant stream of people drifted in and out of the home. My father tended to be strict, loving, authoritarian and prone to exercising discipline, including an occasional thump. But the complex elements of relationships within the family considerably dampened my teenage anger and rebelliousness towards my father. This dual adult authority and affection mutually and continually reinforced the superior status of parents and other adults, and relegated peer group relations to a secondary position and importance. One grew up in an environment of moral values and decisions made by adults.

I subsequently subscribed to Arnold Wesker's remark that 'men are mere rebels, women are the true revolutionaries', because I felt that in our household my mother was the essential person who loved while she instructed, who placated wild emotions and saved against the rainy day. On reflection, however, I feel that there was a balance of paternal and maternal functions in our household which aided my training and acted as a backdrop to it. The rest of us seem to have relegated these skills, and those dealing with creativity and other physical rhythms of life, to a more secondary place.

Schooling

Before I went to school learning was done together with others spontaneously. I was not instructed *why* certain things in the forest had to be learnt. Somehow much of what my parents taught seemed to be valid. It was the school-oriented teacher-learning that was agonising, because the information imparted had no immediate relevance.

Parental authority was not the only agent fragmenting my peer group relations. As an Asian, I was not permitted to attend a school in my neighbourhood because it was an African school, although all my friends attended this school. I was also debarred from going to a European school which was only one mile from my home – I was compelled to go ten miles into Nairobi to attend an Asian school. I travelled to the city and operated alone, outside of the milieu to which I belonged and understood. In my new environment relationships were

based on the personalities of individuals, and I became very shy, insecure and depressed, having to cultivate such relationships.

I travelled by bus into the centre of Nairobi and from there to my school in an Asian neighbourhood. I recall enviously watching the African and European children travel in an opposite direction to their respective schools nearer their and my home. However, I continued to treasure my deep relationships with the children with whom I spent so much of my real life outside the artificial construction of an equally artificial school. The Asian pupils attending my urban school had hobbies and interests that did not necessarily coincide with my own, although we were supposed to share common cultural and linguistic norms. However, this was not necessarily a rationally planned policy.

In school I had to learn English and Urdu. My mother tongue was Punjabi, but there was no opportunity to learn this formally. Of my two new languages Urdu proved the most difficult. Unlike Punjabi and English, it is written from right to left. This made hand and eye co-ordination extremely difficult, and was problematic since the teachers did not understand this aspect of teaching language. The result of such haphazard teaching of language is that I cannot read or write Urdu well – and nor do I write my own mother tongue to this day. This is in marked contrast to my parents' generation who were fluent in Punjabi, Urdu and Farsi (Persian). This dubious advantage of being sent to an 'Asian' school relatively late, for cultural and linguistic reasons, became particularly suspect when we were instructed to speak in English throughout the school day. It was, in fact, a crude division of children on the basis of racism.

From the first day, going to school proved to be a painful experience. My father, a driver and Ngure Maina – my favourite 'uncle' – and I were driven by lorry to this neo-classical, whitewashed, red-tiled-roof structure. To induce me to stay I was given sweets (as was the teacher) and a hundred-shilling note, and Ngure Maina, a Kikuyu who worked with my father till his retirement from the Kenyan Government, was requested to stay in the school compound to provide moral support.

This was an interesting paradox. I was a cross-culturally attuned child, and only stayed in this Asian school because I felt secure that Ngure Maina, my trusted 'uncle', would not forsake me. It is possible that had Ngure not acted as the important link between my rural home and this urban Asian school, I would not have adapted to the school environment supposedly created for the benefit of Asian children such as myself.

My first teacher was a rather severe Indian matron who was, however, kind to me. City children nevertheless taunted me as a 'hick', pinched me, and played games to which I was unaccustomed. I had to unlearn some of my earlier skills and learn new ones. I continued to be withdrawn and never quite mastered playing marbles which was the passionate occupation of my school contemporaries.

After school, my classmates walked to their homes in groups while Ngure and I had to make our way back home to the forest. We must have appeared a strange pair to the city children as we transcended the peer group camaraderie. For them

there was continuity in their social and school life; for me it was a fractured experience.

My discomfort at school was not made any easier by being constantly late because I lived so far away. The bicycle trip from Ngong was three miles to the nearest bus stop, then a five mile ride to the centre of Nairobi, followed by another bus trip to the school. Buses were invariably late, but the class teachers did not appreciate the reasons for my tardiness. I was treated like any other urban child although in my experiences I was a very different person. My teachers often punished me in front of the class, an experience I found humiliating. This impacted on my academic performance and interest.

At least subconsciously, I rejected this sort of racially segregated schooling. I deeply resented the fact that I could not go to school with the children amongst whom I lived. While it was the urban children, because of their group solidarity, who felt that I was an oddity, I secretly rebelled against their narrow city-interests. I was averse to children who displayed little rebelliousness and slavishly emulated roles ascribed to them.

I could not identify myself with one single group of children, but tended to hover between those who excelled at academic work, others who were good athletes and a group of rebels who rejected school altogether. These three groups were not part of the mainstream of school life since they defied mediocrity and were sometimes mutually exclusive.

In retrospect I felt that no one group had the monopoly of the learning experience, and only by relating to these diverse groups would I be able to re-establish some capacity to learn which I had originally brought to school. The mainstream, it seemed to my rebellious friends, had accepted their marginal role in society and the narrow norms laid down for them without question. To preserve this precarious balance at school I had to keep my parents as far away from there as I could.

Contacts between parents and school at the primary level were extremely limited. There were no parent-teacher get-togethers. Many children only managed to get educated by sheer dint of personal effort. In my own case, the home-school distance in geographical terms made school remote for my parents.

As a forester, my father dressed very simply in khaki shirt and trousers. Along with a thatched house, khaki clothes did not signal social importance in stratified Kenya. Once I started attending school in the city I became increasingly aware of subtleties of social status, based on the clothes one wore, the type of houses and parts of the town in which one lived.

My parents and our home in the forest became a secret haunt. They were protected from the narrow and mediocre status that I felt we, as Asians, had to endure. In as much as I respected and admired my father, I wanted to protect him from this social milieu which I did not particularly accept. I was having such a difficult time developing my own techniques of synthesising diverse and sometimes contradictory strands which I felt my father would not understand, that I preferred him to stay away from school altogether. On the occasions when my

father did visit school on a prize-giving day, especially if I had won a prize, I remember pressing him to dress up in a suit and tie.

The lack of contact between my family and the school was not due to their lack of interest in my education. It is asserted that sometimes children fare badly in school because their parents lack contact with the school. My parents had such implicit faith in the ability of the teachers to perform their professional duty that they felt they had no right to interfere. My parents always ensured that we did our homework and attempted to help when they could. When they could not help, they secured tutors.

During the middle years of my primary school we attended for half-a-day because the classrooms were used for a second shift in the afternoon. This practice was abandoned, however, when more new schools were built, and during my last year in primary school we were transferred to one such modern structure. I did not particularly like this nondescript building, particularly because we now had to attend school for morning and afternoon sessions. I had preferred the one session in the mornings because it enabled me to return home in the afternoons and spend time with my friends in the forest.

There, my initial attempt to reconcile my friendships with my African and European peer groups which stemmed from common interests were reinforced with the rather nefarious activity of smoking. I became the prime instigator of an underground smoking club in the anteroom of my study. We papered the windows of our hideout to discourage intruders. It was furnished with slatted plywood boxes stolen from the nursery where they were used for growing seedlings and plants. We turned them into seats that also concealed the various brands of cigarettes that made their way into the den.

Two very clear issues emerged. Firstly, although I was the one who took the risk of providing these premises and of bringing together these African and European children, I perceived their disdain towards me. After all, was I not one of them – did we not share the forest and many other interesting things together? I was the one who became the intruder in my own den. I did not quite fit into their respective worlds. This became a painful experience because I was wrenched from my peer group friends by their indifference to me. This indifference was, of course, part and parcel of the racially segmented life officially sanctioned in Kenya.

The second element was that my father discovered the smoking den and was so incensed that he dealt me a sharp slap across the face. When he realised that he had hit me too hard he placed his arm around my shoulders while we walked under the acrocarpus and chestnut trees. He attempted to explain to me why smoking was a bad habit, but he did not refer to the religious sanctions (Sikhs should not smoke) during his discourse. The head of the family had thus asserted his authority and protective role, and this integrative aspect of the Asian family system made it extremely difficult for me to break away from what was a cohesive and functional unit.

Another aspect of living in colonial Kenya affected my social learning. Going

on holidays was impracticable and therefore non-existent during my early youth. Asians were not allowed into hotels, and had few of their own, an indication of this community's regrettable inability to cater for its needs. So broadening one's vision through travel was therefore limited. A substitute was to be permitted to stay at the homes of various friends overnight or for a weekend. In this way one was able to escape periodically from home and, at the same time, to value its worth.

I managed to pass my public primary-school examination at the end of my first seven years of schooling and was sent to an academic secondary school which appeared quite grand.

Political Awareness and Renegotiation of Identity

Kenya was in political ferment and turmoil during the 1950s, and everyone was inevitably aware of it. It caused me many emotional problems because it raised issues of identity and of belonging. This provoked a fair amount of thought and was not directly related to academic and classroom learning.

The first four years in my secondary school were extremely difficult. But, once I had passed the Cambridge School Certificate Examination and was accepted to complete my Cambridge Higher School Certificate, school became more acceptable. When I had completed sixth form successfully, the officious aspect of schooling, for some strange reason, seemed to have evaporated, and I was left with a rosy-tinted image of what had been agonisingly difficult years of learning and growing up. I particularly remember, after accepting a prize at the last prize-giving day, fondly walking away from my secondary school with its avenue of purple jacaranda flowers which carpeted the long driveway.

But I became increasingly aware of the pressures of living in a racially and socially stratified society. I continued to live in the rural African world, and more marginally with my European friends. These friendships were increasingly undermined because I attended an Asian school in the city, and had begun to develop a complex set of relationships at my school. My complex response to my 'Asianness' both at home and at school created conflicts. The strenuous pressures of the secondary school cut a swathe through my ability to integrate and function effectively in both worlds.

One affliction of this era that impeded my academic pursuits was a disdain of my apparent 'Asianness' as defined by the colonial elite. Since I operated in an inequitable society and could not shed the colour of my skin, I felt I ought at least to change my name. I thought perhaps that if I Anglicised my nickname it would assist me in assimilating, and some of my problems would disappear. At the same time I was ashamed of contemplating such an idea.

Many years later in North America, when I realised that other people were similarly preoccupied, my private shame at my youthful attempts to break out of the confines of mediocrity from outside abated. From my point of view at that time, I thought that I might be able to relate better with my European and African friends, from whom I was becoming increasingly alienated. Perhaps iden-

tification with the dominant group was the easiest answer, whilst, in effect, I instinctively identified with the Africans. Since the issues were essentially political in the context of complex Kenyan society they created a fair number of dilemmas which could not be easily resolved.

It would probably be true to say that Asian schools performed relatively well. Education was seen as the only avenue that would lead out of the trap of the complex middle position of the Asian minority in Kenya. While I admired the academically bright students, I could not systematically apply myself to formal learning and therefore did not spend much time in their company.

Another group of friends with whom I associated rejected both the dominating elite and the adults from amongst our own community. They despised their parents and teachers because they had accepted appallingly abject political and social conditions. Many of these friends were senior to me and were used as role models, not only to establish my identity but also to challenge authority and the accepted norms.

Their rebellion took the form of enhancing physical stamina, or asserting premature manhood by staying out late and drinking. A small group of boys played truant from school to drink beer and play snooker. Others became good cyclists, scouts or hockey players. Apart from an occasional act of bravado like driving a car fast without parental permission, I preferred the more congenial pastimes of sitting in coffee-houses or watching films during school time on Saturdays. Resistance to schooling but respect for education was somehow natural: I still cannot discern how the mind was able to distinguish between the two.

A third group of people with whom I associated were either adults or were senior to me, and had either qualified in their field of specialisation or had returned from abroad and rejected the mediocre Anglicisation of our parents' generation. I found this group fascinating because they had returned from the metropolis and were critical of it. While this was a new and thrilling experience in many ways, it also generated insecurity because one felt out of one's depth.

My feelings about European domination and oppression on the one hand and the mediocrity and pettiness of the Asian community on the other were lent credibility by a friend and relative of my parents' generation. I respected him because I considered him to be my intellectual mentor. Mr N. S. Mangat Q.C. was a leading criminal lawyer in East Africa and the president of the East African National Indian Congress during 1954 and 1956 when I was in secondary school.

During the first year of his presidency he criticised the Europeans for their arrogance and presumption of superiority. This clarified some of my earlier dilemmas and the errors of my ways, and I began to realise why we, as Asians, were placed in such a tenuous position. In 1956, however, on a similar occasion, he took the opportunity to criticise the Asians for their narrow-mindedness, pettiness and lack of vision. This too struck a note which put my feelings in perspective and I felt more relaxed about issues that had hitherto perplexed me. Needless to say Mr Mangat was not re-elected to the presidency of this august organisation after his second scathing speech on the Asian community. He was

obviously a person with a vision and a sense of pride appropriate to the grander values of life, and was able to attack the weaknesses of the community.

Exposure of this nature at home had made me politically conscious and compelled me to look critically at my teachers and the school system. On the whole Asian teachers taught us but an English Oxford graduate taught English literature. This teacher took an instant dislike to me and he referred to me as a 'lesser Caucasian', being himself blond, blue-eyed and arrogant in the extreme. I did not know what this meant and in an attempt to protect me from such an insult my parents papered over the incident.

However, when I did realise the implications it prompted an extremely complex response. I began to read avidly, partly because of the fear that I might not do well in English literature. My avid reading was reinforced by the fact that the teacher persisted in treating me invidiously and openly taunted me that I would fail in my final Higher School Certificate examination. As it turned out, I was the only pupil who obtained a distinction in literature. That this teacher never congratulated me was no surprise. I was, however, exhilarated by my results and my headmaster and other teachers became extremely friendly.

The discovery that the teaching profession included teachers who were racist and insensitive remains one of the unforgivable experiences of my school life. My negative experience with the literature teacher provoked another personal response. I had been brought up in a cross-cultural framework despite the sectarian and racial divisions cutting right across Kenyan society. But I was turned by this teacher to think in terms with which I basically disagreed. I became an inverted snob after his rebuke, in order to protect my sensibility and inner person.

It was only many years after, when I saw the Gandhara sculptures in the Boston Museum of Fine Art, that I established a realistic sense of personal identity. This civilisation, which existed from the first to the fourth century AD, was a syncretism of Graeco-Roman and Indian cultures in North West India. The realisation that ancestrally I belonged to a complex and ancient culture – a knowledge hitherto denied – gave me confidence and an ability to function as a composite person. The inverted snobbery and somewhat false pride in being a Punjabi did not then need assertion.

I became conscious of the general problem of how dominant cultures wiped out the histories and identities of dominated groups. The predicament of the African-Americans came into prominence in the 1960s and I gave some thought to their problems as one group which had been forced to lose their African identity. I felt that the dominant American society had done a disservice not only to the native Americans and the African-Americans, but also to themselves in denying a real possibility of becoming genuinely American. They had, it seems to me, in fact imposed a fragment of a certain period of Europe on North American society and were destined to remain a Euro-centred paranoiac community which had imposed itself on but not allowed itself to take root in this

new, varied and fertile landscape. Problems of my own personal identity paled into insignificance in comparison.

Thinking and research on political issues associated with these conditions demand original multidisciplinary work by social scientists. This is perhaps one of the major challenges of the twenty-first century, particularly as the national minorities all over the world have a new consciousness. My attempt to explain the results of being labelled inferior by my teacher's remarks has been to demonstrate the long and tedious process of examining issues of personal and cultural identity. The school in Kenya should have avoided judging certain groups as culturally or racially inferior. The ideal task the school had to perform should have been to demonstrate the differences between people without labelling them as 'better' or 'worse'.

My literature teacher in particular and the school in general had succeeded in reinforcing differentiation on a false basis rather than on a basis of equality. The school added to problems of identity and therefore failed to educate us with open, humane and sensitive values. As a result of this educational incident, I turned against the elitism in English academe which I felt I could not count on to solve the grave issues that I perceived and which haunted the country in which I was brought up.

Didactic Learning at School

Asian teachers trained in British colonial India or Kenya taught us, but mainly on the basis of a British-centred curriculum and through books stressing the role of Britain in civilising the world. For the life of me, I could not understand why I was not allowed to attend an English school if the purpose of my education was to be taught an English-based curriculum. When I was sent to an Asian school and taught by Asian teachers, I might have expected that the content of the education would also be Asian. However, the colonial school served imperial interests.

I now feel that teaching an Anglo-centred curriculum, using Asian teachers who only understood it in second-hand terms, was unfair on the teachers and the pupils. After all, these teachers had no close experience of England to perform a first-rate teaching job of imparting knowledge about England and English values. But when they taught us subjects like Urdu language they recited the verses from Urdu poetry with such verve that momentarily the far away and long forgotten Indian sub-continent became real. If any real aspect of it was taught in the school it was through language teaching. It was the preservation of this aspect of Asian society which allowed Asian culture and poetry to thrive in Kenya. My generation did not adhere to the values of the temple, so it was mainly the linguistic aspect taught at school which ensured contact with the variety of the sub-continent.

Another aspect of being taught by Asian teachers was that the teachers reinforced paternal authority at home, in the context of the school. On the whole these teachers, as members of a dominated community, were exceedingly com-

mitted to their work. Many were in the profession because they experienced a genuine need to help children from this community to overcome the hurdles placed by the dominant community.

My own responses to the stern and disciplinarian teachers only changed later, after some reflection. The harsh responses of teachers towards those of us who were difficult, lazy or none too keen to learn were easy to understand. These teachers felt that we, as youths, did not see the barriers to our advancement in a prejudiced society. When we refused to accept rules laid down by them they felt obliged to point out to us the error of our ways. In some senses it was our fault that we did not understand the urgency of our situation, prompting our teachers to resort to corporal punishment. Some teachers felt that the school was the only institution that could positively change our lives, and they saw us missing this opportunity.

Relations between our teachers and us were formal at one level but informal at another. At the informal level they could relate closely to us because, as members of the oppressed community, we were in the same boat. A few teachers were either radical or nationalistic, and attempted to correct the imbalance of the curriculum and the books, particularly in history lessons. However, the Inspectorate of the Education Department rendered such teachers powerless. Teachers who accepted the mores and norms of the English dominated department were rewarded by promotion to senior posts.

The first Asian inspector in this department was an Anglicised headmaster who also happened to be an extremely good teacher of Shakespeare. On the other hand, a teacher who was nationalistic, and wore *khadi* (traditional Indian cotton suits) and taught Gujarati language, remained at the lower-scale post, despite his ability. He was given 'low-ability' classes which, in professional terms, must have made him feel a 'second-rate' teacher.

The same was true of an Urdu and physical education Sikh teacher, who was very popular with the students. He had a strong sense of Punjabi values and was a good teacher of Urdu and Punjabi. He did not attempt to operate in the mainstream of the English-dominated Education Department. He was not only ignored in the line of promotion but was also transferred to another less 'prestigious' school. The treatment of such teachers demonstrated to me that the struggle for a newer and different, but fairer, society was long and arduous.

Teaching in school was, in general, formal and based on a syllabus with the sole aim of eliciting good examination results. My initial introduction to English language in the class was through teaching by rote. Literature was taught on a similar basis with set textbooks. Story telling at home, apart from those stories with religious connotations, was non-existent. Since Punjabi literature and poetry was, and continues to be, heretical and progressive, it is a matter of concern that its oral traditions in Kenya were so easily suppressed. This type of delegitimizing of life and knowledge also silences the voice of women on their experiences of life and living.

Both at home and school, there was little opportunity for expanding learning

through stories and general literature. Although my father was unable to assist in formulating a sensible pattern of reading, he was, however, successful in encouraging an interest in books. He made it a practice on Saturdays to take us as children to a reasonably good bookshop in Nairobi while he visited his head office. This gave us an opportunity to browse and choose books. This self-selection of books in literature has left large gaps in my reading. For instance, whereas I had read Steinbeck's *The Log in the Sea of Cortez* I have yet to read *The Wind in the Willows*. Similarly my familiarity with African and Indian literature is very superficial.

My interests were therefore directed by what and how we were taught. Our teachers used traditional methods mainly to impart facts and schools. Various teachers taught us specialised subjects and the students had to organise and structure materials to make them comprehensive. One of the drawbacks of being taught by traditional methods was that teachers applauded only the work of good students. Those who were not identified as achievers were either criticised or ignored. Many of us sat at the back of the class so as not to attract the teacher's attention. Creativity in writing that somehow related to one's own experiences was not encouraged and therefore did not emerge for a number of children.

There was no systematic teaching of specialised subjects within an integrated framework. There was no flexibility in the teaching system, no team-teaching or guidance to younger teachers from those more responsible and experienced. For instance, no connections existed between subjects like geography and history, or the various sciences and specialisms in mathematics. There appeared to be no synthesis between these various subjects, and I tended to focus on those subjects which I liked or found easy.

I was also dissatisfied with the way history was taught which perpetually reinforced the positive values of the dominant group and the negative features of India and Africa. For instance, the 'Indian Mutiny' was taught not to demonstrate its nationalistic aspirations but to exemplify the disloyalty and untrustworthiness of the Indians. Africans and Asians were presented adversely without asserting each other's positive contributions in historical terms. Additionally, the British in Kenya had a totally misplaced conception of who they were. This misconception of their own history, and their role in it, was profound and based on erasing that of other peoples.

This system of education rejected any subjective values of students. Perceptions of certain subject matters, even within the limitations in which they were taught, could possibly have been explored from different perspectives. All the arts subjects, it seemed to me, could be enriched by diverse interpretations. My English literature teacher illustrated that my interpretation was unacceptable by denying my subjective values and rejecting interpretations which did not conform to his dominant values. Was it possible, for instance, that literature was considered by this teacher to be near the core of his own culture, and since he felt threatened in this different country, he imposed his interpretation even more vigorously?

Whatever, it denied us as students a genuine opportunity to interact and learn positive features about him and each other. We were fortunate at least to have some teachers who did understand our background and to some extent upheld it as valid. But they could do this only marginally because the whole schooling system was formal and oriented to English public examinations in which they did not want us to fail.

I had brought to school a fairly wide and associative linguistic network which, if it had been systematically tackled, might have furthered my cognitive processes. I was able to develop categories and analyse issues which became useful in the learning of social sciences, in terms of developing abstract frameworks. I had, however, to wrestle with my mother tongue, Punjabi, with Urdu, another sub-continent language, and English. Since these were neither systematically taught nor learnt, there were limitations to my ability to categorise abstract thought.

At university level I found it difficult to cope with linguistic analytical philosophy because I found the concepts too erudite or abstract. As we were categorised in general terms between technical and academic schools, and streamed according to our examination performances, I did not become accustomed to the formal testing and examination situation and consequently did not perform well. In the formal classroom I learnt slowly because I was afraid of making mistakes and therefore tended to avoid subjects like mathematics which I could not deal with competently.

Going to school in the city gave me experience of the man-made city environment in addition to the rural environment of a temperate forest. We combined in our psyche the vertical planes of the trees in the forest and the horizontal planes of the grassland and open spaces. In addition I spent some of my time in the rectangular environment of the city. The combination of these two aspects of learning possibly developed perceptual and inference habits which varied from those of the other children I knew in and out of school. If the school had encouraged a systematic fusion of the visual perspectives then I might have not only developed an appreciation of various arts, but also contributed to them. As it is, I attempted to accomplish this through a process of self-education.

Living in Kenya, I had, for instance, an interest in the non-perspective African art. I continue to have an interest in the works of various angular and rectangular artists like Albers, Mondrian and the Bauhaus school. Is this a result of the imprint the city made on me? I also appreciate the two-dimensional art of the Impressionists and the Post-Impressionists, which entails seeing depth in the intentions of the artist's work of a 'softer' nature. Is this facility of appreciating or operating in both the two- and the three-dimensional worlds a result of operating in both the rural and the rectangular man-made city environment at an early age? Furthermore, is the ability to appreciate – but not to be able to draw – a result of the impractical and non-pictorial aspects of education? It is possible that if the schools had channelled our perceptual experiences in some systematic manner, students like me would have been able to relate African, Asian and Western art and literature. This process, however, never took place,

and it was left to the individual to synchronise these various aspects of life in whatever manner one could.

These varied concerns and interests did not lead to an excellence in academic terms in school. When it came to embarking on higher education and acquiring A-levels in England, I worried because I had seen many older friends return from England without having completed their education or securing a qualification. Since my father was a civil servant, and there were four of us to be educated, I felt reluctant to accept any remittance from him to continue my education abroad. I, therefore, re-applied to my old school to complete my Cambridge Higher School Certificate.

This turned out to be an excellent decision because as a fifth and sixth form student I received special attention. I was not one of the many downtrodden and forgotten in the lower forms and streams of the school. It was also the first time that boys and girls in our school had studied together. This was a thrilling new experience. Only two of us studied the arts and we had tutors who taught history, geography and economics. Both of us were under pressure to work and produce results because a great deal of attention had been devoted to us. There was no escape to a bench at the back of the class. For the first time we began to enjoy our work in school since we could discuss it with our teachers. Even the history of Anglo-Saxon Britain seemed to come alive, remote though it was from contemporary Africa.

NORTH AMERICA

Once I had completed my Higher School Certificate examinations I was again faced with the dilemma of whether or not to study in England for my higher education. The high failure rate of friends who had gone to study in England, my family's inability to finance such a risky proposition, and the experience of my literature teacher who was English, led me to decide against further education in England.

I, therefore, took a job with a horticultural firm which I really enjoyed. My brother-in-law, a qualified barrister, also worked as the manager of this firm and jokingly remarks: 'It has been downhill ever since'.

I was eventually awarded a scholarship to study in America. The American experience was an eye-opener, particularly since it was a total break from Kenya. As a scholarship student I felt secure in the feeling that I was not risking my parents' meagre savings on this venture. The liberal professors reciprocated in my new intellectual and political awakening, and I was free of the English domination felt in Kenya. Nevertheless after three years in the United States I left the country because I feared that I might become Americanised by default.

The American experience was very productive in academic terms, but also in having to cope independently by trying to find work. It was the first time that the cocoon of the family, the forest home, had been left behind. There was therefore no support or network, and one had to create one's own network of friends and individuals inside and outside the college.

Since I was a scholarship student, I needed to work during the school term as well as in the summer. Finding work outside college was not all that easy and provided me with major insights into the complexity of American society and of the exclusions within it. I learnt, for instance, about the extremely brutal form of racism towards the African-Americans. This acted as an antidote to the romanticisation of the United States, which many other students from abroad tended to.

Stints of research work in offices in the United Nations and at Columbia University provided an inkling into the way in which people lived, thought and worked. Friends would take one home, and one had a glimpse and some understanding of the warmth, friendliness and openness of America generally.

There was, however, also the other face of America. For those of us from overseas the Kennedy 'Golden Era' was not necessarily the progressive period it has been portrayed. The super-power politics and America's role in suppressing progressive forces tainted it. The Cuban Missile Crisis in the early 1960s and then the Vietnam War raised complex questions at an international level for a foreign student from a small country. The racism that was so prevalent within American society became very evident. This made it less easy to identify with the country. Hence, ultimately, I had to decide whether to stay on in the United States, with all the advantages that, despite everything, it offered, or to move.

My decision was to leave and study in Canada. Quebec was in a dynamic phase, having rebelled against the Catholic hegemony and the autocratic Duplessis regime. A progressive Quebec was a welcome change from the hegemony of the Anglo-Saxon-dominated, commercially dominant superpower. I chose to study at McGill University in Montreal because it seemed to be an interesting city. Also the French and English conflict in Canada was an example of dominant and subordinate group relations in the process of change.

There were certain assumptions about the teaching of the social sciences in the United States which were legitimised in the Canadian context, a factor I found depressing. The assertion that the social sciences could formulate 'value free' theoretical constraints, and that the mainstream of North American social sciences was based on these, was unacceptable for me. These pseudo-scientific norms which incorporated within their framework the rationale of North American society in no way could have been assumed to be 'value free'.

Meaningful learning in my case did not begin or end within the formal institutional framework. Learning started informally and socially at a very early age and continues outside this framework. Learning in this social milieu is complex and sometimes contradictory. For instance, how and why did I, having been brought up in a racially segregated school and social system, come out of it thinking differently? It can only be because of a learning process that went on in and out of the institutional framework and operated not only at a personal level but also at various levels of consciousness.

EXPERIENCING BRITAIN

A Historical Approach

The complexity of North America left me enchanted as well as disenchanted and would have meant a complete engagement and involvement; therefore I decided to complete my formal education in Britain.

North American social science in the 1960s was preoccupied by ideas of modernisation and development. Aspects of this type of social science were of obvious interest to those who were interested in using concepts like social change and status discrepancy, or analytical concepts like class, or quantitative methods of study. The one tradition that was not strongly represented there was the historical tradition, as exemplified by the French *Annales* model with its *longue durée* approach. Those who came from a non-American background, and especially those from the 'modernising' and 'developing' ex-colonial states, found this remiss. So we were not very excited at using input/output models and systems theory. Though we could not know it, the social sciences were then riding on the crest of an understated triumphalism. This is an issue we will explore in Chapter 9.

I therefore moved to Scotland, to the University of Edinburgh. It seemed familiar ground since Scotland stood in a similar relation to England as did Canada to the United States or English Canadians to the French Canadians. Here was an opportunity to bring together the diverse strands of social science and law, and to examine them in detail in a proper historical framework.

I felt I had to come to grips with how, as an Asian from East Africa, I had ended up where I was. I determined to investigate in my doctoral thesis how historically the British Imperial project had caught the Asian community in East Africa in a double bind – they were legally British, yet they remained outsiders. The longer I stayed in Britain, the more I saw the relevance of this theme to the status and treatment of Asians, indeed of all the marginalised communities, in this country today.

The assertion of British nationality, and at the same time the denial of it, has been particularly painful to the British Asian community. What I came to perceive, as I studied for my thesis, was that this situation had not suddenly arisen in the post-colonial era, but has been and is firmly rooted in the nineteenth century – something that previous studies had not adequately analysed or examined. It became clear, for instance, that the vulnerability of the Asian community in Uganda in the 1970s was a consequence of a long process of pre-colonial and colonial history when they were alienated from the local East African societies.

In the nineteenth century Britain used the concept of extraterritoriality to keep Asians under control. Today, when Britain no longer has pretensions to exercising extraterritorial powers, it is used to disclaim responsibility for them. For example, as a result of the 1968 Immigration Act, the British government has refused to accept Asian citizens to give an example:

The British Consul cannot interest himself officially in the case . . . because not having 'landed' in Germany, they are not formally within his 'parish'. The consul said, 'They are in the extraterritorial position, so I have not been to see them. But I would not go anyway, unless I was asked to, or if someone was ill.'

(O'Brien n.d.: 10)

The concept of extraterritoriality has come full circle. Yet both Britain and the Asians will find it difficult, if not impossible, to shed their nationality which was asserted and acquired through such a long, painful and tedious process. A dominant power might impose its will over a powerless minority, but the historical process, its Nemesis, will not allow it to shirk its obligations so easily.

I also came to realise the inadequacy of previous studies. These academic discourses had constructed an image of the East African Asian community within the narrow focus of their own disciplines and had tended to fragment its history. There was therefore a need to re-interpret (or re-construct) its past in a more holistic manner. This could be undertaken by trying to re-interpret its present position by analysing its past, focusing on disciplines like economic history, law (extraterritorial jurisdiction), and social and political analysis.

These were the issues raised for me by the East African Asians at the PhD level. Subsequently I was to take them up again to analyse the notion of how Europe constructs itself, and in particular how knowledge about Europe is constructed, and how outsiders and the 'other' are portrayed as not being civilised.

Experiencing London

Research for my dissertation had to be done in London where the archival materials were based. Yet again because there was no grant to carry out research, and no scholarship, study for the doctorate became more of a challenge. One had to find jobs, preferably part-time, and preferably in education. But the exclusions that I had felt in North America were compounded even further. The first problem was that foreign qualifications were not accepted or acceptable. Secondly, there was the issue of exclusion, racism, even in circles that were 'progressive'.

After interminably large numbers of applications, I was eventually able to get part-time jobs in London secondary schools, further education, adult education and then in community education. This provided me with a broad insight into the various levels of the education system. A main preoccupation was the ways in which the poorer and the black Britons did badly. It became clear that only a major shift of thinking, and of personnel and resources, could change the educational outcomes and learning capacities of the marginalised groups.

Rural England: The Village

Prolonged living in the city led to yearnings for the quiet and solitude of forest and rural life in Kenya. Over the years since the late 1960s I have had an opportunity to spend time in a friend's cottage in a Bedfordshire village.

The local landscape has changed as storms and Dutch Elm disease have

knocked down trees, and the hedges have disappeared over the years because of changed farming methods. Changes in my own life brought about another set of associations with the place.

The village has changed since I first knew it in 1969, changes caused by the migration of young people, and increased traffic of vehicles and aircraft. The old farm workers have retired or died, the tenant farmer has retired and a new one has taken his place. As this old community disappears new faces, not only from the farming profession, appear. The Manor House is no longer a manor but an office for some business enterprise. The current blend of local residents and 'outside' interests makes for an uneasy mixture of old and new, tradition and its absence.

There are also social changes as generations move on and others move in. A lawyer takes over a derelict cottage and transforms it. He is open and friendly because we share experiences of the city and the countryside. A couple who stayed in the cottage in the intervening period and then moved up the road connect with me as a previous occupier of the cottage. So I have stories to tell about the place. Another family, who have now moved away from the village, turn up for tea unexpectedly. My presence is reassuring. Hence, those who belonged and then moved away to other parts of England are now getting a sense of reassurance from someone who was previously a non-belonger. So have I now become a belonger? And if so, what is it I belong to?

The notion of belonging to a place, a locality or a community, is a complex construction. One's own understanding of it may be valuable for, and be valued by, oneself. But it also has other layers consisting of gaps in understanding, and of rejecting and being rejected, which detract from its being a straightforward relationship. An urban person rejecting certain things in rural areas, and the rural communities rejecting the urban person or other outsider, add to the complexity of the situation. Yet shared feeling of belonging in cities and rural areas is borne out in the ways in which images of green and pleasant countrysides, with their villages and towns, are seen in essence as being part of the English national identity.

This imagery is evoked in films and literature, particularly in the pervasive cult of 'English heritage'. National Front politicians also use it. Enoch Powell's reference to an 'alien wedge' can only be seen as an intrusion into notions of Englishness which lead to a confrontation with the English yeomen. But as the uncertainties in the polity grow as a result of devolution, and the rural economy is decimated, the conurbations encroach and the rural becomes a haven for the upper middle classes, patriots and refuge seekers. The construction of this safe ruralism by those who are themselves thoroughly urban harks back to the perities and certainties of the past. The values of being English, like those of the German Volk, emanate from what is perceived as the close connection between blood and soil. Inevitably it must exclude 'the other'.

In Kenya the English sought to impose an imagined fragment of what they interpreted as their own rural life on the Kenyan countryside and to belong to

it (just as it belonged to them). It was a haven where 'the other' was excluded. In England I found it was much the same. 'The other' tended to feel excluded in the English village. It was as if the overseas colonial relationship (a relationship which also prevailed in the countries of British settlement, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa) had been brought home as an internal colonial relationship. The English village too resonated as a haven constructed in an imagined, class-based and allegedly manorial mould.

As Alex Potts suggests, writing about nationalist ideology in the interwar period:

A theory of racial identity was transferred to the inanimate landscape, a kind of reification in which the people still living and working in the countryside were assimilated, not just pictorially and aesthetically, but also ideologically to the landscape.

(Potts 1989: 166)

As he sees it, the construction of this excluding and exclusive rurality detracts from the development of a viable and inclusive polity. This would see 'England as an epicentre of dynamic change rather than England as a refuge from the more violent and thrusting tendencies of the modern world' (ibid. 172). Instead, the trauma of the post-imperial, post-colonial period has led to a retreat into what are conceived as being rural 'organic communities' representing an ideal of wholeness, in itself an excluding concept. Hence, the rural domain is re-colonised to regain what the English mind thinks has vanished.

Hartmann presents this trend in a political context:

Unfortunately, simplification and demagogic exploration make the appeal to the (lost) land and landed virtues, to native soil, *pays, patrie, Heimat, Heimatland*, a dangerous weapon of the revolutionary (i.e. counter revolutionary) Right.

(Hartmann 1997: 184)

Belonging in England

While I think of the village and the rural area as an entity, the present village inhabitants look at me as a stranger, a non-belonging, non-comprehending intruder. Yet, I think back to how 'they' intruded into the contexts to which I virtually belonged, resulting in my being here in the first place. In their imaginations, that past which constitutes my past, and the past of imperialism and colonialism – and, did they but realise it, the colonial model that is replicated in the village – is absent. To make the new rooted in the rural, they need to create links with the stability and continuity of a presumed, coherent past. I represent an uncomfortable feature that disturbs such a posture.

Their posture derives from constructing a past to make the present more accepting of them, based on selective historical knowledge. In the rural context of England the country's past escapades, which relate to its complex imperial history, lose any immediacy or relevance. The pristine, innocent nature of the imagined countryside, disassociated with outside elements, makes it seem unrelated to the nation's complex entanglements. Hence, I am seen as someone

who is an outsider and does not belong, precisely because my presence activates uncomfortable, best forgotten, constructions about a person who looks different. Many others would like to erase the memories of past dominations in faraway lands because they necessitate complex associations with 'the other'.

To establish cognition of me as a part of the village requires the villagers seeing neither themselves nor, more importantly, me fitting into stereotype categories. But then one realises that the discourses prevailing over the village for many life spans have not challenged the stereotype of 'the other'. The imperial and colonial past remains as a legacy based on the terms of an English-centred understanding. Yet suppose that I were to be recognised by the genuine locals, not to be seen or treated as 'The Same', but as an 'autonomous person who belongs' in the village. The question would then be whether such recognition detracts from their own sense of belonging and their notions of Englishness? Does an autonomous acceptance of 'the other' dilute that Englishness? Here too a very complex issue opens up because the question assumes that there is a singular, identifiable, notion of Englishness. Are there – even within the lives and lifetimes of this village – very distinct and multilayered identities? Can, for instance, the old English, or even the new English, become South Africans? Are those who are already there already South Africans?

This is an important issue. In Malaysia the Muslim Malay constructs himself as the *Bhumaputra* (son of the soil) while the *Orang Asli* linger on the margins unacknowledged. This, however, is just one example of long settled and so-called indigenous communities where privileging one's belongingness may lead to the ethnic cleansing of 'the other'. Are these certainties and purities of the past substantively correct – or are these imagined communities, purposively constructed, and based on narrowly imagined pasts? Does it provide them with greater certainty in a present which is seen as uncertain?

I am reminded of my father who, on his retirement from forestry and conservation in Kenya, returned to India to retire on an orchard he had planted. As a Sikh Punjabi, did he go to the Punjab to retire, and die among his Punjabi-speaking Sikh people? He did not, he retired in the small state of Rampur which was a heterogeneous community with Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. What understandings did he have of himself, and of what constitutes a society?

There seems to be a danger of constructing a singular identity in England, as in other parts of the world. There are, however, people who can claim that they are distinct enough to be firmly located as pure communities. If there are fears in England of the English identity being swamped by a few million immigrants, there is something fundamentally wrong with constructing a notion of Englishness that is locatable, timeless and perhaps quaintly archaic. In fact, the vibrancy of Englishness has a greater chance of being dynamic if it is seen as being multilayered, vivacious and interactive. To turn oneself into a tweed-clad squire does not make the village more indigenous and English. Interactivity has perhaps more possibility of developing inclusive and rooted understandings of

being English. Are there possibilities of developing dynamic values which enhance the belongingness of all within the village?

As the diversity in British society, initially based on the Scottish, Welsh, Irish and English nationhoods, is now enhanced by those who came from other countries, a new different paradigm is operationalised. As the colonies have disappeared, and the autonomous ex-colonial represents new realities, their contribution to the British polity is of a very complex nature. It represents, for instance, liberation and freedom from colonialism – for both the coloniser and the colonised.

The young black British of the new generation which is predominantly socialised in Britain are now losing the memory (or if born here never had the memory) of their country of origin and are perhaps more of the society where they have been socialised. They have complex – positive, negative and indifferent – readings of this polity. They cannot be converted back to subservient coolies, slaves or plantation workers, nor become squires – sahibs in brown skin.

But is there only one logical consequence of this – that the more British and comfortable a black feels in Britain, the more uncomfortable and out of place a white Briton becomes?

Perhaps the uncertainties presented by such a map of different British nationalities, of the complex reading of the past and present of the new British communities, represent the reasons for not understanding them in open terms. To develop an understanding requires a more rational mind, based on a more rational system. Yet, these islands have had an insecure elite which has not had the courage and openness to deal with these urgent and intractable matters. It has ignored the positive dimensions of such a challenge and, through a sleight of hand, the deep social changes and inequalities are reconstituted as belongingness to the market place.

The rural, shaken by the urban, and the sudden thrust of the market, cannot come to terms with the paradoxes. Perhaps because the dilemmas currently faced are so great, it is difficult to accept such an enormous amount of change in consciousness. The village sees itself disappearing, the change speeded up not only by the current elites, and manifested by the new owners of the Manor House, but by the disappearance of the village shop, school and parish priest. An institutional void has been created where comprehensible changes could have been understood and stabilities re-created.

Alternatively, is it possible that increasingly marginalised villagers can understand the process as a result of which another set of people – the black British, perhaps many of the Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalities – are likewise marginalised? Is that a matter of politics and/or education?

While they may have become marginalised, their consciousness and notions of autonomy are not totally erased. The slaves, the indentured and the unemployed did not all lose a sense of who, where and what they were. A more constructive rather than a reactive stance remains a possibility. Strident attempts to devoice and silence cannot be synonymous with total voicelessness. Total voice-

lessness would entail an assumption by the state of total submission of all, and the silencing of all resistance and rebellion.

The lack of voice also entails lack of visibility. It is the feeling I have had of being seen, but ignored and dismissed. By ignoring and dismissing my present my past is erased. Not only do I become voiceless but invisible.

Were the villager and I to get together and weave a more authentic tapestry of our complex present, it might resonate with the more vibrant dimensions of both our pasts, to reactivate the values and histories of the locality and the community. Juxtaposing local pasts with those of 'the other' does not of necessity invalidate either, or make them lose their meaning. It may provide new meanings which have, because of the interactive present, possibilities of a more relevant and meaningful future.

To make 'the other' local is not to lose the local – it is to take off the tinted glasses and have slightly clearer lenses to see who and where one is at present. This mutual recognition does not have the negative connotations of 'being assimilated'. It is a much more substantive engagement to develop a newer language of which both are part, to broaden the horizons of the local by empowering it, and by setting out a new agenda of what are the historical memories of those involved in this process. To stretch the imagination and accept that not only is the multicultural present based on the playing of a complex multicultural past within us, but that we are by definition part of a multicultural future.

But where is this multicultural future to be defined? Today the country seems even more specifically an England than it did, but an England that needs definition. The exclusivities and racisms may continue, or even become sharpened, but the underlying rationale and substantive ground is shifting. With devolution, and democratic divorces and muted mutual antipathies between the English, Welsh and Scots, the English must now find new ways of replacing the previous exclusivities of the English nation. But this will mean re-thinking how to re-create a more mature and broader sense of nationhood which looks beyond the St George's flag.

The changing new English nation must learn to derive political legitimacy not from the received wisdom of the dominant nation, but from popular and democratic sovereignty. And here the role of education in consolidating a democratic English state cannot be overestimated. The new political integration has to build on inclusive understandings to establish a political integration which is based on a citizenship which includes religious, cultural and ethnic bonds. It must also mean that the English working class and the English poor do not get left out. Otherwise 'the long night of the crisis of English national identity' (Rattansi 2000: 26) will only breed a culture of resentment and anger.

Local custom, practices and ways of life are one dimension in which community functions. They are subject to legal norms which are operative in society. In democratic and constitutional states the issue of legal belongingness also pertains to rights of citizens which do not define issues for rural or urban communities or areas separately. The combination of levels of belongingness also

presents challenges to the education system to develop local and relevant curricula and teaching that is inclusive and fosters social peace and cohesion and is governed by constitutional principles at the national level, which pertain to all those who live in localities and society.

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1

Multicultural Britain

STATE AND SOCIETY

In this chapter I present multiculturalism differently from how it is commonly presented. I argue that British society has historically always been multicultural, and show how the descriptive and taxonomic features of societal diversity are persistently camouflaged by the hegemonic state. Nevertheless, devolution within Britain to the Scottish and Welsh nations and the constitutional arrangements in Northern Ireland are now visible as strong markers of the fundamental historical features of the multiculturalism of British society.

The immigrant presence merely highlights aspects of the historical diversity and has itself a historical dimension. So, despite attempts during the contemporary period to 'otherise' Blacks and Asians and construct them as aliens, they remain an integral part of Britain's diverse society. The Black and Asian communities have now become rooted, and are demonstrating, women as well as men, their own complex patterns of rooting – patterns which include resistance to racism and marginalisation. The young Black generations born and socialised in Britain are creating their own syncretic and multiple cultures, politicised cultures that give them a measure of autonomy, and are contributions to national culture, making British society more complex and vibrant, despite the lack of official recognition.

Multiculturalism, therefore, has not weakened but strengthened the cultural life of Britain. The issues it raises are not issues of political correctness, but of recognising that the inherent divisions within Britain enrich national culture and should not be marginalised.

A Multicultural Approach

If we are going to use the terms 'multicultural', 'multiracial', 'multiethnic' we must begin by deconstructing the nature and relationship of the cultures of the British Isles and the concept of the British nation/nationality. The very use of the terms Briton, Britain, British is liable to raise confusion, since to many English people English/British, England/Britain are synonymous – something many Scots, Welsh, Asian and other British nationals find misleading.