CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE “CRISIS” DEBATE ON THE UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA

In recent years there has been wide-spread talk of a “crisis” in the field of higher education\(^1\) in India. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) claimed in 2006 that such a crisis “runs deep” and “is not yet discernible simply because there are pockets of excellence, an enormous reservoir of young people and an intense competition in the admissions process” (NKC Note 2006, 1). Declaring that universities would be crucial in developing India into a “knowledge society,” it struck a note of despair: “It is difficult enough to provide a complete diagnosis of what ails our universities. It is even more difficult, if not impossible, to outline a set of prescriptions...” (2). In 2007, Arjun Singh, the then Union Human Resource Development Minister, termed higher education in India as a “sick child” and called on the vice-chancellors of universities to provide a way out of the predicament (Hindu, October 11, 2007). In 2008, Pratap Bhanu Mehta referred to the Eleventh Five Year Plan of the Government of India (hailed as the “Education Plan”) derisively as “plans for university buildings, not for building universities” (P. B. Mehta 2008). The tone of pessimism has continued unabated both in popular and academic literature, showing itself in innumerable words such as “decline,” “disarray” or “decay.” Universities are said to be in need of “reform,” “rejuvenation” and “transformation” (A. Singh 2003; Shah 2005; Kapur and Mehta 2007; Altbach 2012).\(^2\) Little seems to have changed despite attempts to address the situation for over a decade now.

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\(^1\) In this thesis, I address the narrative of crisis in universities (and colleges) in India, institutions that are traditionally associated with liberal (arts) education.

\(^2\) The Eleventh Five Year Plan announced several structural reforms including the establishment of thirty new universities funded by the central government, upgrading of vocational institutions, dozens of IITs and IIMs among others. The Yash Pal Committee Report (2009) recommended several structural reforms at various educational levels.
What are the contours of this perceived crisis? We can identify two sets of concerns in the debate: one pertains to the external and another to the internal relations of the institution of the university.

The first set is about the relation of universities to the larger society of which they are a part. The anxiety is that our universities do not serve the needs of the society, addressing neither the demands of the labour market nor enhancing the intellectual life of the people. They have instead erected “invisible walls,” alienating themselves from “the local knowledge base of the worker, the artisan and the peasant” (Pal et al. 2009, 13). The universities are often antithetical to the traditional forms of knowledge that help people go about their world, helping neither to understand nor refine them (Nandy 2000; Visvanathan 2000; 1987).

The second set pertains to matters internal to the university. The perception is that our key institution of modern learning lacks vitality in comparison to its Western counterparts. This is expressed in various ways: our universities are failing to generate enabling structures for learning; they are unable to create and transmit knowledge effectively; they do not cultivate intellectual virtues in students, making them learn by rote rather than understand an issue; the brightest among them go abroad to study; those continuing here opt for engineering and management which promise them lucrative careers rather than pursue basic, theoretical sciences; there is little by way of research in our universities and they do not figure anywhere in the global ranking lists (Altbach and Agarwal 2012; Pal et al. 2009; Agarwal 2009; Kapur and Mehta 2007; Béteille 2000).³

In short, the apprehension is that the university is neither able to contribute to the surrounding society nor is it able to sustain itself in a robust manner.

³ Refer to the debate about the quality of higher education in India that erupted as a result of an article by Thane Richard (2013) who called higher learning in India, a “joke”, when compared to what they were used to back home in the United States. See also A. Kumar (2013), Bhan (2013) for the controversy that erupted over the introduction of Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) in Delhi University.
Should we comprehend this complaint as saying that our institutions reflected a certain kind of vitality till a particular period after which they steadily and gradually declined? However, we find similar articulations on our educational system at various points in history in the past century. The two decades after 1950 would be an exception when the newly-emerged nation imbued universities and research institutions with a sense of importance. Therefore, perhaps, the historical context of the complaint is new and not the content. For instance, in the 1990s, the crisis in the institutions of higher learning was placed alongside a similar articulation in other “alien institutions of modernity” such as the nation-state, political parties and bureaucracy. However, while today the discourse around these other institutions has receded, the narrative of crisis in institutions of higher learning continues unabated and has even grown shriller.

One explanation for this increased concern in the last two decades has been the growing importance of the idiom of knowledge economy. Knowledge has emerged as a parameter through which a nation’s development and wealth is measured, with the result that education has taken centre-stage like never before. The goals of education have become concomitant with that of the nation-state, largely restricted to serving the state’s developmental agenda. This is evident, for instance, in the proposal of the NKC which emphasizes the importance of creating exemplary institutions which “would not only develop the skills and capabilities we need for the economy but help also transform India into a knowledge economy and society” (NKC Note 2006, 2). In what is a key educational policy document, it comes as a surprise that knowledge is understood merely as an external good to be acquired to fulfil a social-

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4 This is one body of literature which does not easily posit “a golden past.” The rare few who do would place it either in some point in history prior to colonization or in the decades immediately after independence when new institutions were started. See, for instance, Beteille (2010, 2008). While the historical details of the crisis may vary, the poles of the debate remain fairly constant. For example, one element of the crisis expressed in the late nineteenth century was that liberal education was alienating the people of India from their own traditions and was resulting in moral as well as cognitive failure. I deal with this in greater detail in Chapter IV.
economic goal of the nation, without any reference to the pedagogic value of learning pursuits to the subject of education.

Despite the persistence of the “crisis” narrative, there have been very few attempts to make sense of this perception. The university, though central to liberalism, has rarely generated the kind of scholarly enquiry that other liberal institutions like the state and institutions of the civil society have. This lack of research and reflection in an area which is of importance to the health and well-being of any society is indeed puzzling. While we have had innumerable reports and books complaining about the poor quality of our institutions of higher learning, suggesting countless regulative reforms at various points in history (A. Singh 2003; Altbach and Selvaratnam 1989; Agarwal 2006), there have been few sustained efforts to obtain a conceptual grasp on the issue.

One could object to the argument made so far by observing that the narrative of crisis is not peculiar to India and is a reflection of a larger uncertainty with regard to the role of the university, the world over. While it is true that articulations of crisis in the university have existed even in the West for some time now, we can identify some noticeable differences. In India, the problem is often formulated in bureaucratic and social terms with an emphasis on structural, financial and administrative aspects as well as on issues of social justice. This is in striking contrast to the West\(^5\) where the articulation of the crisis is accompanied by reflections on the institution of the university and the conception of education it embodies. An extensive body of literature on the idea of the university and liberal education has developed into a flourishing genre of philosophical writing in the West.\(^6\) Few ideas have had

\(^5\) The scholarship on the university and higher education in India works with the categories of “Western” model of the university and the “non-Western” one, where Western universities are cast as models worthy of being emulated. By the “West”, the scholarship largely refers to the European and Anglo-American contexts. I have retained the use since the contrast posed is useful and worthy of being investigated into.

\(^6\) The university in the West is the second oldest institution after the church. The list of works that engage with the idea of the university and liberal education in the West is too long to mention here but among the more...
as clear a historiography as does the idea of the university in the West. Although other institutions have at times been examined for their “underlying idea” and conceptual foundations, none of them have inspired a literature that constantly builds on itself and is an integral part of the institution that it refers to.7 This prolific body of literature provides a way of organizing our thoughts about the activity and practice of higher learning. In the absence of the idea, the university would be utterly shapeless, possessing no means of distinguishing itself from other institutions and corporate bodies (Rothblatt 1997). In non-Western contexts, the near absence of this genre is particularly striking.

A second point of contrast is that despite the Marxist, feminist and postcolonial criticism of liberal education in the last two decades, liberal education continues to be of significance in the Western academia. This is made evident in a forceful speech by the American philosopher, Robert Pippin who emphasizes the salience of the ideal of liberal arts education in an inaugural address to an incoming class in the University of Chicago (2000). Preferring the old-fashioned term “liberal arts education”8 where arts refers to a particular skill, a particular way of thinking about objects “according to which biology and economics, just as much as literature and philosophy can be studied as a liberal art if studied in a certain way”

7 Rothblatt points out that the question is not whether the university requires an idea or not but that historically, it has been assigned one and “for two centuries a particular kind of debate has gone on, revived in every generation, concerning the role and purpose of a university and the education it provides” (Rothblatt 1997, 1). Also see Rothblatt and Wittrock (1993).

8 Pippin (2000) points out that the term “arts” is often dropped, because it is misinterpreted to mean painting, music and dance. However, he holds that the term liberal education is more confusing since it might be mistaken to refer to the kind of education that American bureaucrats and senators have often received. See http://www.ditext.com/pippin/aims2000.html.
Pippin highlights the specific form of self-development of the student that such a pursuit makes possible. Interpreting the ideal of liberal arts education as a realization of freedom, gained by the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, Pippin observes that by pursuing “the objects of study worthy of a free person,” one emerges a freer person by learning to think for oneself. This involves cultivating an ability to reflect critically on what we have taken for granted and “to learn to do this by an acquaintance with the best that has been thought and written by human beings” (ibid.). Pippin points out that the recent criticism of liberal education that it has been in the service of certain class, caste, gender or imperial interests rather than foster the realization of a kind of freedom as it was originally meant to, can be seen as an attempt to uphold the ideal even more “purely.”

The volatile debates on the canon in the 1980s have come to be interpreted as a plea to include texts and viewpoints from marginalized groups but not as a challenge to the very idea of the canon or of liberal education itself. It has often been argued that liberal arts education is an ideal in need of reassertion in the wake of increasing utilitarianism, for the loss of such a conception of education would be disastrous to the continuity of a culture.

We can now conclude that the crisis in the Western university is articulated in terms of the decline of liberal education or in terms of a loss of the concept of education. The presumption is that there exists something worthy of being preserved which now faces disintegration. The

9 Liberal education, unlike the utilitarian theory of education, conceives of goals as intrinsic to itself and to the development of the idea of personhood. Marxist and feminists critics of liberal education, presuppose the theoretical concept of the free individual whose potential for self-activity and self-fashioning is of supreme importance, with capitalism and patriarchy robbing the individual of such potential. Hence, Robert Pippin’s point that these critics only seem to be arguing for pursuing liberal education even more “purely,” by drawing attention to the various obstacles that come in the way of the formation of the individual, is insightful. See Pippin (2000).

10 This is not to say that there is a static, fixed idea of tradition or canon. As Searle points out “there never was, in fact, a fixed "canon"; there was rather a certain set of tentative judgments about what had importance and quality. Such judgments are always subject to revision, and in fact they were constantly being revised” (1990). See http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1990/dec/06/the-storm-over-the-university/

11 See, for instance, Nussbaum (1997, 2012) and Pelikan (1992). Also refer to the introduction to Rothblatt and Wittrock (1993, 1–15), where they point out that the idea of the university and liberal (arts) education continues to move people, drawing attention to a particular moral order of which the university is a part, “comprising the cultural or emotional barrier separating the “university” from “higher education” (14).
A typical response to such a crisis has taken the form of a recognition that yet another moment has emerged when the conception has to be clarified, the original arguments recovered and rendered visible. In India, however, the crisis is expressed in terms of liberal education and its corresponding notion of liberal knowledge, learning and selfhood not taking root, of the “inadequacy of a borrowed structure,” in terms of a “lack,” incompleteness or a “failure” on the part of Indians to acquire certain critical normative goals or articulated in terms of alien-ness of liberal institutions and concepts (Altbach and Selvaratnam 1989; Seth 2007; Nandy 2000). Liberal education in our context has often remained a vague, empty term, without any substantive and intellectual content. When used in scholarship, it appears in rather confusing and contradictory ways – some refer to the institution of the university, some to liberal arts and science colleges specifically, some to English education and some to being exposed to a broad range of courses. It is simultaneously posed as a cause for the crisis due to its minimal linkages to the professional world and its excessive presence for the last two centuries (Agarwal 2006, 47-48; Kapur 2008, 66–69), while for others, liberal education is yet to take root in India in the substantial sense of the term and is part of the solution (Pal et al. 2009; Bhushan 2011). Often, we do not know what makes a newly announced liberal arts institution in India different from the institutions that have been with us for the last two centuries.  

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12 See Srinivasan (2013) for the confusion that surrounds the idea of liberal education in our context. The Yash Pal Commission Report, while identifying the IITs, IIMs and IISc as institutions that excel, and our universities as being in deep crisis, nevertheless suggest that the solution lies in transforming these “spots of excellence” into universities. The IITs went on a protest, arguing that they were the embodiments of liberal education and not the universities. See “IITs Stare at ID change – Panel Moots Converting Tech Schools to Universities,” (Telegraph, September 13, 2008) and “IITs Oppose Varsity Model” (Telegraph, November 22, 2008).

13 The term “liberal education” was used more frequently in the colonial period. In nineteenth century reports, liberal arts education is used to refer to universities along with the arts and science colleges in general. It must be remembered that in India, universities were degree conferring and affiliating bodies till the first decade of twentieth century when teaching universities emerged. Teaching mostly took place in colleges. However, in contemporary scholarship, scholars have tended to avoid the term “liberal education,” with a few exceptions. Strangely, more than the universities, it is the new-age management institutions that seem to find use for the term. See for example, the brochure for “FLAME: Foundation for Liberal and Management Education,” a management institution in Pune, started in 2004 which announced itself to be one of the first institutions in
The differing narratives of crisis across the Western and Indian contexts make it clear that the crisis is experienced differently in the two contexts. For analytical purposes, it is necessary to separate the two strands in order to contextualize the experience of the crisis and gain a firmer grasp over what is at stake in these debates.

1.1 The Western Debate on the Crisis in the University

In the West, some of the strongest articulations of the crisis in recent times have come in the wake of an increasing emphasis on strengthening the link between university education and employability in educational policy. The Bologna Process in Europe, with its emphasis on knowledge society and competencies, is considered to have signalled a shift away from the humanistic ideal of education to a professional and technocratic one (Reindal 2013; Wimmer 2003; Siljander, Kivelä, and Sutinen 2012). A similar shift has been observed in the American academia. This has once again raised some foundational questions as to what education truly is, why we need it and what is its end. The most common answer one would get today is that education aims at helping students acquire knowledge and competencies that enable them to get jobs. However, it is against this professional goal that the Report on Yale College Education (2003), the result of a year-long reflection on the nature of education to be pursued, makes its case for liberal arts. Concluding that liberal arts education, despite being “an old idea,” was “not only not passé but may bear even greater value in the future than it has in the past,” the report notes:

In many parts of the world, a student’s entry into higher education coincides with the choice of a field or profession, and the function of education is to provide training for this profession. A liberal arts approach differs from that model in at least three ways. First, it regards college as a phase of India to offer a liberal education. See http://www.flame.edu.in/program/school-of-liberal-education. Of late, there has been a growth of some private universities with huge campuses, infrastructure and funding which announce themselves as liberal arts institutions. However, it is unclear how their vision is different from the others.
exploration, a place for the exercise of curiosity and the discovery of new interests and abilities, not the development of interests fully determined in advance. Second, though it permits (even requires) a measure of focus, liberal arts education aims at a significant breadth of preparation, storing the mind with various knowledge and training it in various modes of inquiry rather than building strength in one form alone. Third and most fundamentally, liberal arts education does not aim to train a student in the particulars of a given career. Instead its goal is to develop deep skills that people can bring to bear in whatever work they eventually choose. (*Report on Yale College Education* 2003, 9–10)

Present through the vision of the Yale Report is a notion of higher learning as a phase of exploration and adventure, the process through which the hidden, dormant potential of the student unfolds. The emphasis is on the pedagogic value of these learning pursuits on the growth of the student. This notion of self-development that underpins the Yale report has been influential in Europe as well. Many European scholars confronted with changes in their higher education system along the American lines, have likened the idea of liberal arts education to the notion of *Bildung* (a German word for education as self-formation), a specifically European conception of education, emphasizing a similar form of cultivation of the self. Can “knowledge” envisaged as amassing of “external facts and information” initiate *Bildung*? Can the process of acquiring knowledge be delinked from the internal transformation and self-development of the student? These questions have triggered a renewed public debate in Europe on what higher education is all about. In response to the assertion by committees that higher education must make possible *Bildung*, the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR, 2011) asserted that *Bildung* cannot be attended to by just inserting it in the liberal arts curriculum as if it were another fact. The scope of *Bildung*, the UHR asserts, is broader:

The question is, to what extent one can expect knowledge about *Bildung* to result in *Bildung*. Ethical *Bildung* is recognized through how it builds personal character and identity. Can the student increase his or her ability for ethical reflection by studying ethical theory, or improve in scientific reflection by
studying the philosophy of science?...The UHR committee holds that it is not possible to add Bildung to the curriculum, as if it were a prescribed bit of knowledge or a learning goal. This argument we base on what has already been said, about Bildung as internalized knowledge and competence – “what we are left with after we have forgotten what we have learned.” (Cited in Reindal 2013, 536)

The UHR also notes that the understanding of education as Bildung in the National Committee Report of Norway (Dannelsesutvalget) is too philosophical: “While Dannelsesutvalget limits the concept of Bildung to the philosophical variety, the committee believes it is important to stress that Bildung occurs in all the disciplines, also in the technical and natural sciences’”(ibid.).

While it may be difficult for those outside the tradition to understand what is meant by Bildung, it is enough for our purposes to note that a specific conception of education that has a long history in the Western intellectual tradition and is considered essential to the idea of the university is at stake. Is such an ideal necessarily linked to education in humanistic disciplines? Can Bildung be acquired through natural sciences and technical disciplines too? How does one acquire Bildung which is not a fact but a “competency”? These are questions raised with some urgency in the report.

Three features stand out: whether in the United States or Europe, a specific conception of education seems to be at work, which emerges as an active tool of reflection, particularly when there is lack of clarity about the purpose of higher education. This concept of education is considered essential to distinguishing between processes that constitute higher education in the substantive sense of the term and processes that do not. Lastly, it relates knowledge to the pursuits of the self, referring to a process of self-development that occurs through the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.
The Diagnosis

How have scholars explained the crisis in the institution of the university in the West? For most scholars the crisis in higher education is a crisis in the idea of the university and the conception of education that underlies it. It is recognition of the obstacles that come in the way of the formation of the student, in the reflection and further refinement of knowledge traditions that are essential for the continuity of a culture and the formation of its people. We find two strands in the way the problem is diagnosed: a) One strand asserts that the conception of education underlying the modern idea of the university as envisaged in the classical and Enlightenment tradition needs to be reasserted and made visible once again b) The other strand points to the crisis in the very conception of education underlying the idea of the university. I shall discuss Martha Nussbaum as representative of the first strand and Bill Readings as representing the second.

In her famous Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities, (2012) Martha Nussbaum announces a crisis in education of unprecedented proportions world-over. This crisis, she maintains, unlike the economic crisis of 2008, “goes largely unnoticed, like a cancer; a crisis that is likely to be, in the long run, far more damaging to the future of democratic self-government: a worldwide crisis in education” (1–2). While acknowledging that education is more than for citizenship, Nussbaum argues that education is central to the functioning of any democracy where young people are prepared for making informed choices on crucial issues and encouraged to cultivate the ability to discuss with people belonging to different cultures, ethnicities and religions. These abilities, for her, are best cultivated by the humanities and the arts and it is precisely these that are under threat due to a market-driven approach to education.
Central to Nussbaum’s understanding of liberal education is critical thinking, or the emphasis on critical reason and its antithetical relationship to tradition. The tension between them, for Nussbaum, is at the heart of liberal education. In *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997) Nussbaum, through her reading of Aristophanes’ comedy *The Clouds*, explicitly distinguishes between two kinds of education: an old education where people followed the ways of their parents and ancestors, with “lots of memorization and not much room for questioning” (1) and a new education represented by Socrates where one learns to think critically about apparently timeless moral norms and to think on one’s own without fear of authority:

> When we ask about the relationship of a liberal education to citizenship, we are asking a question with a long history in the Western philosophical tradition. We are drawing on Socrates’ concept of “the examined life,” on Aristotle's notions of reflective citizenship, and above all on Greek and Roman Stoic notions of an education that is “liberal” in that it liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world. This is what Seneca means by the cultivation of humanity. The idea of the well-educated person as a "citizen of the world" has had a formative influence on Western thought about education: on David Hume and Adam Smith in the Scottish/English tradition, on Immanuel Kant in the continental Enlightenment tradition, on Thomas Paine and other Founding Fathers in the American tradition. Understanding the classical roots of these ideas helps us recover powerful arguments that have exercised a formative influence on our democracy. (8)

Defining “liberal” in liberal education as that which “frees the mind from bondages of custom and habit,” Nussbaum lists three capacities which she sees as essential to the cultivation of humanity for contemporary times: a) the Socratic ability to question and justify our beliefs, with the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one’s tradition b) producing students who are well-informed about lives of people different from themselves c) narrative imagination and the ability to empathize with others.
One could argue that Nussbaum’s opposition between reason and tradition is simplistic, for all reasoning takes place within traditions. We could also point out, based on Foucault’s masterful reading of the Socratic “care of the self” (Foucault 2005), that to attend to oneself meant a self-mastery acquired by learning to access the nature of things by thinking through what people had said about them rather than the one referred to by Nussbaum which is more reminiscent of the Enlightenment stance on the infallibility of the authority of reason and its antithetical relation to tradition. Yet for now it is sufficient for us to note that the crisis in the university is expressed in terms of a crisis in education. Nussbaum is concerned with obstacles that come in the way of the formation and self-development of the student. Hence, she holds that it is the value of liberal education with a rich heritage in the Western tradition that one needs to recognize and assert in these uneasy times when different kinds of threats seem to thwart the nourishing of the “complete,” “whole” person.

If Nussbaum looks to classical Greece and Enlightenment thinkers, Bill Readings (1996) turns to the Humboldtian ideal\textsuperscript{14} in order to provide a structural diagnosis for the problem. For Readings, it is the very conception of education underpinning the Humboldtian ideal that is in crisis. He argues that historically, the raison d’être for the modern university as

\textsuperscript{14} Many scholars emphasize the importance of the Humboldtian ideal all over Europe in the nineteenth century, with the idea eventually crossing the Atlantic to have a tremendous influence on the Anglo-American world as well. For the extraordinary influence of the Humboldtian model in Oxford and Cambridge in Britain as well as France and Russia as early as in 1830s and a little later in the United States too, see Rüegg (2004), Readings (1996). By the end of the nineteenth century the model had spread to Japan and the non-West. The spread of the scientific spirit embodied in the University of Berlin to other parts of Europe as early as 1830 was evidenced in the introduction of research in university, establishments of laboratories, the scientific content of doctoral theses, the establishment of specialized scientific journals and societies as well as the organization of conferences by disciplines. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Germany surpassed France in medical and natural sciences, with Berlin (which was intellectually arid till the establishment of Berlin University) displacing Paris as the centre for scientific research. In the American instance too, as Timothy Bahti, points out, the plot remains the same and a detailed analysis may show that there is still only one story: the history of the rise of the modern university, resulting in a switch from emphasis on colleges to universities; “Whether it is the integration and enhancement of research in public universities which were facilitated by the Morrill Act for land-grant institutions, or the founding of Johns Hopkins, or the establishment of Ph.D. degrees and graduate schools at Yale, Harvard, and Columbia, the story, from roughly 1850 to 1880, is one of the “universitarization” (as opposed to the former “collegialization”) of American higher education, and the Germanizing of the latter” (Bahti 1987, 439). Also see Howard (2009), Kweik (2006) among several others who emphasize this point. For the influence of the Humboldtian model in India in the early twentieth century in a “vague and attenuated form,” see Béteille (2010, 167).
expressed in the Humboldtian ideal has been provided by the modern nation-state which it has until now served by taking part in producing the idea of national culture. The emergence of the concept of culture was a particular way to resolve the tension between the university and the state, the two key institutions of modernity. In this process, culture came to stand for both - the unity of all knowledge that now constitutes the object of study and culture as a process of self-cultivation or education as Bildung. However, with globalization and the decline of the nation-state, the unifying idea of national culture has come under threat, with the university ceasing to be the producer and preserver of national culture. The “story of liberal education,” Readings observes, “has lost its organizing centre - that is, the idea of culture as the object, as both origin and goal, of the human sciences” (10). Instead, the central idea of ‘culture’ today has come to be replaced by ‘excellence,’ an empty word with no referent. As a result, “the grand narrative of the university, centred on the production of a liberal, reasoning, subject, is no longer available to us” (9). With a lack of any serious role, the university of culture (as Readings calls the modern Humboldtian university) has tilted towards a market-oriented model, with the older ideals of a unifying national culture, Bildung, the liberal subject-citizen and the nation-state no longer relevant.

Readings, however, does not believe that we can return to the original mission of the university. Distinguishing himself from other writers on the idea of the university such as Jaroslav Pelikan who reasserts and recalls to us the lost ideal of Newman’s model of liberal education (1992), Readings emphasizes that one cannot return to the past and resurrect the national canon. He instead offers an alternative in the form of putting forth the idea of the
university which no longer serves the nation but is one site among many that actively works towards producing a “being-in-common” without aiming at producing the Common Being.\textsuperscript{15} One could quarrel with Readings, as some critics have done for taking the rather simplistic route of projecting the glorious ‘university of culture’ as a contrast to the ‘university in ruins’ which has fallen prey to global capital (see LaCapra 1998). However, Readings, in drawing attention to the emergence of the concept of culture which was deeply tied to Bildung or education as self-formation, gestures towards the lost pedagogic subject of liberal education and points to the stress in the very concept of education that underpins the university.

Whatever the different routes Pippin, Nussbaum and Readings take,\textsuperscript{16} we see that they converge around the need to attend to the conception of education and the notion of formation embodied in the idea of the university.

\textbf{1.2 The Indian Situation: Diagnosing the Crisis or Displacing It?}

How have we diagnosed the problem in India? Has the scholarship on the issue been driven by a search for an answer to the question of institutional crisis? When we examine the scholarship on the crisis in institutions of higher learning in India today, we find it incoherent with various \textit{ad hoc} explanations forwarded, often in contradiction to each other. Till date, we have no systematic analysis of the crisis or an assessment of the various explanations

\textsuperscript{15} The “being-in-common” refers to the community as a complex of relations that are forever incomplete and is set up as an alternative to the totalizing tendencies present in the idea of a Common Being that a strong nation produces. Readings borrows this phrase from Jean-Luc Nancy (1991).

\textsuperscript{16} We could add to this list Jaroslav Pelikan and John Searle, both of whom emphasize the need to reassert the true mission of the university and its idea of education at a time when these are in doubt (Pelikan 1992, Searle (1993). Allan Bloom (1987) is one of the few to locate the cause in the Humboldtian ideal and its conception of self. Arguing that unlike the Socratic call to “know thyself” which meant an invitation to philosophy to figure out the nature of things, the German intellectuals emphasized “be yourself,” thereby making sincerity and authenticity the main criteria of a “healthy self.” This, according to Bloom, led to value relativism, leading to a crisis in the house of reason, the university. I deal with the Humboldtian ideal in detail in the next chapter.
forwarded. With some effort, we can extract four basic explanations in the scholarship for the problem we have set up: (a) The institutional structure is flawed b) Institutional resources are scarce and quality management absent c) The crisis in higher education is not real but merely a perception, i.e. it is not that our university education is really in crisis but it is just a perception in the minds of upper-caste and middle-class people (d) It is a symptom of a larger crisis in ‘modernity’ and the causes should be located in the colonial period. Let us look at each of these explanations briefly.

*Flaw in the Institutional Structure*: One strand of scholarship that tries to explain why Indian institutions of higher education are in crisis, locates the problem in flawed institutional structures. Since our institutions are legacies of colonial times, it is often argued that they are unsuited to meet the needs of contemporary India. The disproportionate emphasis on liberal arts and sciences colleges instead of encouraging the growth of professional courses, the unmanageable system of affiliation, the rapid expansion of the sector with innumerable regulatory bodies, the separation of research institutions from the universities are identified as some of the problems. Given the formulation of the problem, the solutions are predictable: the creation of more deemed universities and private, autonomous colleges, the restructuring of the system of affiliation, the creation of research academies within the ambit of the university and so on (A. Singh 2003; Shah 2005; Agarwal 2006).

Our purpose is not to go into the merits and demerits of each of these structural solutions; with discussion and debate, some would be proved worthy of being implemented and some of being discarded. What is of interest to us here is that the literature views institutional structures predominantly as physical structures and conceives of them largely in administrative and bureaucratic terms. However, institutions are always more than the

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17 The classification is not meant to be exhaustive. It is intended to provide a grasp of the various ways afoot to understand and address the crisis.
physical structure. They are often formalizations of already existing organized patterns of actions and behaviour in a particular community. For example, the idea of the modern research university of which the Humboldtian model is a dominant example is upheld by a cluster of concepts such as self-formation, nation-state, autonomy and knowledge for its own sake which are expressions of already existing practices and dispositions in a culture. In the Humboldtian ideal, the pursuit of Wissenschaft is not tied to economic, political or social ends but is integrally tied to the self-development of the student. Do these structures emerge in India? Without having an adequate understanding of the conceptual underpinnings of modern, Western education and its links to the larger culture, making a diagnosis like the above is insufficient and perhaps even misleading, for such an approach may identify symptoms or effects as the cause of the problem. After all, it is possible to say that what are identified as causes, such as unplanned expansion of affiliating colleges and the decoupling of research from the universities, are more an effect of incomprehension or a lack of self-understanding of the nature of modern institutions than being the cause of the crisis. We see here that the crisis in the university is interpreted to be one of inadequate institutional structures, with the idea of institutions being restricted to institutions as physical structures.

**Lack of Management in Higher Education:** The other response, not unrelated to the first, argues that there is a systemic collapse in our institutions of higher education. These scholars suggest that the solution lies in emphasizing a range of parameters such as quality and efficiency together with a managerial focus on planning, governance and measurement (see Agarwal 2009; Khurana and Singhal 2010). This mode of thinking has made significant inroads into the development model of education, which largely focuses on issues of access and equity. With greater access, better infrastructure, increased funding and a sharper focus on governance, efficiency and quality, the spectre of “bad education” would stop haunting us.
Once again, we see that these scholars confuse the symptoms of the crisis with causes for the crisis: unwieldy growth, lack of adequate resources and the unchanging curriculum are some examples. Moreover, this body of scholarship places the blame for lack of quality in higher education on the lack of quantity. Hence, to address the issue of quality, the following quantitative measures are suggested: increasing the number of universities, increased funding, providing more and better infrastructure as well as improved access to educational institutions and technology. The NKC, for instance, followed this route and recommended an increase in the number of colleges, universities and doctoral students.\footnote{This is despite the fact that in many state and central universities, the level of enrolment is way below the expected levels. See Tilak (2007).}

While these debates have been useful in compelling us to reflect on the vitality of our institutions, the concept of quality (accompanied by other ubiquitous terms such as “excellence” and “relevance”) often remains rather fuzzy and of mostly rhetorical value. At most it constitutes a kind of checklist that enables measurement of various parameters that are deemed to be important to the field. Krishna Kumar observes that rather than focus on any core aspects of education, the emphasis on quality has tended to restrict itself to an instrumentalist approach to education and that “contemporary debates on quality often stick to the limited view of learning which became synonymous with behaviouristic educational theory and pedagogy — something that can be planned, predicted and accurately measured when it has occurred” (2010, 10). Central to this idea of achieving quality in education, as we noted earlier, is the focus on infrastructure and increased funding. However, while infrastructure and funding might be crucial in certain instances, especially in case of institutions outside state support, there are several other instances where the paucity of good research proposals in recent times has ranked much higher than lack of funds per se, at least in the research scene in social sciences (Deshpande 2008, 26–27; Vaidyanathan 2008, 21).
Thus quality, a concept from management, ensures that material requirements like necessary infrastructure and funding are met, the product is checked at various points, process mistakes corrected, and timely deliverables ensured. However, while the concept is useful in compelling us to adopt processes with greater accountability, its beginning and end points are fairly determined. In other words, though the concept of quality in our case helps indicate the problem, it does not help us conceptualize the nature of the problem which lies outside the ambit of a managerial gaze. Instead, we see that a discussion of the crisis in education becomes one of managerial or governance crisis: if we learn to manage the system better, we will find our solution to the problem.

Denying the Crisis: The third response, which has been mostly from a section of social scientists, has been to question the very perception of crisis. Largely referring to the decline in social science institutions, this body of scholarship questions the simplistic perception of crisis in order to nuance the generalized understanding of the problem. It does this in two ways: by differentiating the extent of decline across different kinds of institutions and disciplines through empirical analysis (Chatterjee 2002), or by showing that the motif of “decline and crisis” is a reflection of changes in the social context of the social sciences (Deshpande 2008).

Even if we were to grant that there is a great deal of exaggeration in the narrative of institutional decline, whether of the universities or of social science institutions, we still would need to ask what is generating this perception in the first place. In a study on the Social Science Research Capacity in South Asia (2002), an attempt to test this prevalent perception, Partha Chatterjee notes that their findings reveal that the decline story does not hold for all of South Asia equally and its extent also varies across social disciplines. Challenging the growing sense of perception that various social science institutions set up in
South Asia in the 1950s and 1960s are in a state of decline, Chatterjee observes that not all regions, institutions or disciplines share a sense of decline or crisis. Where they have indeed declined, it is due to varied reasons: in some cases, the foundations for research were not properly laid out, in some political reasons played a role and in certain other cases it was due to the withdrawal of government funding and the changing nature of research. Chatterjee’s attempt is to draw attention to the fact that the crisis is not a macro phenomenon as it is often thought to be but a result of micro, region-specific or perhaps even institution-specific problems which cannot be generalized. However, towards the end of the report, Chatterjee admits that while the narrative of decline is neither simple nor general, it “is not to say that it does not contain the proverbial grain of truth” (142). He goes on to note that of the ICSSR institutions, the A. N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, the Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi and the Centre for Social Studies, Surat, were once active places of research, but for various reasons, declined in recent times. Similarly, the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, and Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, which are research centres outside university departments and ICSSR institutions, are also marked by decline. Despite Chatterjee’s attempt to nuance the decline thesis, the degeneration of so many institutions (across regions and time) remains puzzling. It also tends to undermine his thesis which attempts to locate the reasons for institutional decline in its historical and regional specificity.

For Deshpande, it is not the crisis as much as its perception or the crisis discourse itself that requires explanation. According to him, the entry of the newer castes and classes in higher education for the first time and the exit of old elites who increasingly prefer the Western academy even for undergraduate studies are some of the reasons for the perception to gain ground. Thus, the changing composition of the student body due to the entry of new and disadvantaged castes, later generations having to share intellectual and institutional space
with much larger numbers of students and the severe shortage of people opting for research due to different kinds of institutional frictions caused by changes in the larger environment are seen as the reasons behind this perception. Implicit in this formulation is the idea that the crisis discourse itself is an expression of a struggle between the privileged and the non-privileged groups in the society. Highlighting the need to attend to sociological and contextual factors behind the perception and to be self-reflexive, with “an awareness of who “we” are and where we stand when asking and answering such questions” (Deshpande 2008, 28), Deshpande poses the question of how to create and sustain good institutions of higher education, more particularly, institutions of research in such circumstances.

While one can agree with Deshpande that we need to take into account the changing social composition at the undergraduate, university and research level, it is not clear why this change itself should result in the growing (but “false”) perception that there is a crisis in the Indian higher education. Even if this is the reason for the perception, it should be possible to counter it through other means such as garnering statistical data to show that it is a faulty perception, without any evidence. Besides, if we assume that “good” institutions should be able to produce good, independent thinkers irrespective of the social background of the students, then their failure to do so is reason enough to think about the vitality of our institutions.\textsuperscript{19} After all, strong, vibrant institutions are likely to have the ability to initiate students (irrespective of their social background) into the tradition of activity it embodies rather than themselves be transformed by the interests of varying groups who come into the institution (which is more often the case in our context).

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\textsuperscript{19} By contrast, Western universities are not easily threatened by the presence of immigrant population who are from varied cultural backgrounds.
Moreover, attributing the perception of the crisis to the changing student composition might give us the impression that the problem is with the social fabric of the land and that the students from more privileged backgrounds are able to perform better than the others. While sociological factors are indeed extremely important to nuance our understanding of the crisis, as an explanation of the crisis, it remains unconvincing: rather than explain why people perceive a crisis when there is none, it merely “explains away” the crisis. To use an example, if a pencil appears bent in water when it actually is not, a good explanation must be able to tell us why it appears bent without questioning the integrity of the perceiver’s experience. This should also be the case when we seek to explain the perception of a crisis in higher education, even if we wish to argue that there is no such crisis. Instead, the recognition of a crisis in higher education itself is seen to be generated by one’s location and therefore an immoral act driven by self-interest that runs against the interests of the non-elite, non-metropolitan student.

One could concede that there is an insight in this strand of scholarship. It attempts to go beyond the dominant narrative of crisis and decline by emphasizing that a better diagnosis of the phenomenon of the “crisis of institutions” is that it is the product of the lenses through which we see the ‘phenomenon.’ If this is true then a better approach would be to come out with a scientific account of why this is so and not provide merely ad hoc explanations reducible to interests of various groups. For if all accounts can be reduced to interests of groups, then each explanatory account, including the one under discussion can be charged of furthering specific interests, ad infinitum. Moreover, if all our arguments, perceptions and use

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20 Deshpande’s article is a response to Restructuring the Indian Council of Social Science Research: The Report of the Fourth Review Committee. The report notes that social science research no longer attracts bright students and that the mediocre quality of research by both faculty and students is a “long-standing, not a recent, phenomenon” (Vaidyanathan et. al., 2007, 80). Rather than look into the nature of social science research, education and pedagogy and ask what prevents learning from taking place in the domain, Deshpande’s response asks us to look at the changing composition of the student and the differential access to resources. It thereby makes it appear that the problem and solution lies in the social fabric and the struggle for power that takes place in the social domain.
of concepts are, as Mehta puts it, mere “ruses of power,” primarily structured by our identity and class/caste interests, then why bother to have a discussion at all? (P. B. Mehta 2006).

**The Alien Nature of Liberal Institutions:** Is it that our institutions of higher learning have not struck deep roots because they are an imposition of alien frameworks of categories and thoughts produced in another culture? Much of the studies under the rubric of postcolonialism, despite the rich variations in them, would indeed argue this. This scholarship traces the birth of many of our liberal institutions - democracy, the legal system and institutions of modern education such as the university - to the colonial period and locates the crisis in these institutions alongside the crisis in other liberal institutions of modernity. A central assumption of this body of work is that many of the problems that we associate with contemporary Indian society can be traced back to the introduction of ideas and institutions which had developed in a different cultural and historical context, with meaning and resonance in the context of origin. However, when these set of ideas and institutions are transplanted into the Indian context, they have unforeseen and complex consequences, the effects of which are still to be investigated (Joseph 2006, 422). Thus, one implication that can be drawn is that we are saddled with a set of alien, modern European concepts and institutions which not only limit our understanding of the non-Western cultures but also produce unexpected and complex consequences when used in relation to them.\(^{21}\)

One of the most interesting aspects of this body of work is that they see institutions as more than physical structures and point to a disjunction between existing ways of going about the world in these locations and the inherited Western, conceptual frameworks through which we

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\(^{21}\) See for instance Nandy (2000, 1994, 2002). Also see Chakrabarty (2000, 2002), Kaviraj and Khilnani (2001), Chatterjee (1993) among other works by the authors who focus mainly on the difficult question of the transfer of political concepts. They constantly draw attention to the interaction between institutions and its relation to the larger culture as well as what institutions elide and exclude. Also see Joseph (2006) for a succinct bringing together of the postcolonial scholars along the axis of their critique of liberal institutions of modernity, from which I draw.
understand and describe our practices here. For the first time a body of scholarship, in direct and indirect ways, points to the disjunction between experience and concepts as the predicament of the postcolonial condition. The awareness of this disjunction also resulted in the scrutiny of existing conceptual frameworks that were built into disciplinary knowledge.

While the mismatch between concepts and experience is a common theme that runs through much of postcolonial writing, the emphasis of each is different. Ashis Nandy, for instance, focuses on the imperialism and alien-ness of European institutions and categories which violently fit the people of a different culture into normative European categories. We can reformulate Nandy’s point to mean that institutions are not just physical structures but patterns of activities that are structured by the way people go about their world. The values these institutions embody, the concepts that uphold them and their behaviour have a certain history which are not necessarily theoretically articulated but are embodied in the very activity of knowing how to do things. Thus, concepts are not merely external signs for actions. To have a concept is to possess the knowledge of how to perform that particular action. Institutions, therefore, are manifestations of customary ways of performing certain activities. Thus, when modern institutional structures from a very different cultural context embodying one form of know-how come to India, certain consequences follow. Since institutions embody particular ways of doing things which are not discrete, isolated skills to be learnt but are embedded in larger traditions of activity, it is not very easy to adapt to them in another context. As a result “our assimilation” of these new institutions which came to us under conditions of colonial rule is not a result of reflection and appropriate adaptation but a result of superimposition. This superimposition of alien institutions and categories on existing

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22 In his essay “Recovery of Indigenous Knowledge and Dissenting Futures of the University,” Ashis Nandy notes that dominance is no longer exercised through familiar organized interest like class, nation-state, and multinational companies but “through categories, embedded in systems of knowledge.” The institution of the university “specialize(s) in handling categories” (2000, 115–16).
ways of going about the world has often resulted in confusion, disorientation and violence (Nandy 2000).

If Nandy focuses on the superimposition of modern concepts, Partha Chatterjee highlights the different trajectories these modern concepts take in our context, thereby making a case for “our modernity” (Chatterjee 1993; 1999). According to Chatterjee, modern institutions and concepts that have come to us with colonial rule do have a specific historical context of origin in the West. However, their presence in the non-Western world is not a superimposition but indicative of a larger universal, historical process. This is so because “modernity” as a process itself is universal, involving transition from a pre-modern, feudal structure to a modern, capitalist and industrial one. However, these universals are inflected by local, cultural particularities which give a distinct flavour to “our modernity.” Our modernity then is not sequentially backward to European modernity but a different configuration. In this way, both Europe and India are particular instantiations of the general history of modernity even if the origin of the process, the concepts and frameworks of thought through which we understand this general process are themselves Western and European. For Chatterjee, we have adapted and assimilated these concepts according to our needs. However, Chatterjee’s analysis fails to be attentive to the conceptual confusion that surrounds the reception of many Western categories such as secularism, religion and nationalism among others, an issue that has received much attention in scholarship. (Nandy 1994; Madan 1987; Mandair 2009; Balagangadhara and De Roover 2013).

For Dipesh Chakrabarty, modernity itself is a particular historical product of the West. Far from its institutions and concepts being universal, their very nature is particularity. The

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23 Thus Chatterjee says, “There is the question of the implantation into new cultures of categories and frameworks of thought produced in other – alien – cultural contexts. Do they have different social consequences when projected on different socio-cultural situations? Even more interestingly, do categories and theoretical relations themselves acquire new meanings in their new cultural context? What then of the positivity of knowledge?” (Chatterjee 1993, 27).
emphasis here is not so much on particular instantiations of the universal as in the case of Chatterjee as on the very *particularity* of these institutions and concepts. Chakrabarty expresses this particularity in his call for provincializing Europe. These concepts and institutions cannot just be understood merely structurally but must also be understood substantively. To understand the particularity of these concepts and institutions is to illuminate our own predicament.

The phenomenon of “political modernity” – capitalist enterprise – is impossible to think of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history. One simply cannot think of a political modernity without these and other related concepts that found a climactic form in the course of the European Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. (Chakrabarty 2000, 4)

Chakrabarty’s claim is not just that these categories and concepts bear the imprint of European thought and history but that they are not experiential units in our context. These universal concepts of political modern culture encounter *pre-existing* concepts and institutions which structure our experience and in the process, get configured differently:

There is nothing like the ‘cunning of reason’ ensuring that we all converge at the same terminal point in history in spite of our apparent, historical differences. Our historical differences actually make a difference. This happens because no human society is a tabula rasa. The universal concepts of political modern encounter pre-existing concepts, categories, institutions, and practices through which they get translated and configured differently. (xii)

For Ashis Nandy, it is precisely this form of imperialism of categories which proliferates to such an extent that a “conceptual domain is sometimes hegemonized by a concept produced and honed in the West, hegemonized so effectively that the original domain vanishes from
our awareness” (Nandy 2002a, 61). Sudipta Kaviraj, on the other hand, focuses on the limited penetration and reception, the indisputable externality of these concepts and institutions in India. Holding that most often activities like politics “are spinning out of all recognized trajectories charted by Western political theories,” Kaviraj observes that probably it is a “crisis of theory” rather than a crisis of institutions (Kaviraj and Khilnani 2001, 316). Though Kaviraj here speaks of the institution of state and its peculiar trajectory in India, we could extend his observation to other domains as well.

If conceptual schemes are unique ways of understanding and clarifying experience, then postcolonial scholarship draws attention to the fact that making our experiences intelligible is constantly thwarted both due to the mismatch between experience and theoretical apparatus as well as due to the lack of adequate conceptual tools.

However, several questions arise. Are all modern institutions and concepts alien and un-importable because they are modern, Western and European? If we take other institutions such as banks, we see that though imported, they quickly respond to changes. This means some institutions, though of Western origin, are able to adapt themselves to different contexts and also respond quickly to different situations. The university, one of the key institutions of modernity seems to be a case in contrast. If so, what is it that cannot be imported? Is it the organizational structure of the university that cannot be imported? However, if the critics are to be taken seriously, we have imported an alien structure a little too well for our own good.

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24 His project then is to make visible the domain of “religious tolerance” which has been occluded by the concept of secularism (Nandy 2002a).

25 In an article titled “Towards creation of world-class universities.” (Hindu, October 23, 2008), Philip G. Altbach and N. Jayaram observe that “Generally, when India wanted to innovate in the higher education sector, it has side-stepped the universities and started entirely new institutions such as the IITs.” Similarly, when in the 50s, new Social Science research institutions were formed, they were formed outside the university system under the aegis of ICSSR. Post 80s, we have seen the growth of autonomous, non-university, non-ICSSR research institutions and also the rapid disappearance of some of these institutions in the present decade.
Is it concepts that cannot be easily imported because they are Western and European as postcolonial scholars point out? Here, if we take the example of natural sciences, we find that nobody would dispute the universality of concepts such as gravity, mass or force despite the fact that natural sciences originated in the West. We are unsure about when concepts can be imported and when they cannot be. What determines the mobility of a concept? What kinds of concepts lose their cognitive value in a different cultural context and why? These questions remain unanswered. Is it knowledge that cannot be imported because it is encultured? However, all knowledge is encultured and if something is knowledge, then, by definition, it has to be teachable and learnable despite the differences in context. Thus, we see that despite the many insights given by postcolonial theorists on the workings of modern liberal institutions in India and its relation to non-Western cultures, a generalized understanding of the problem is insufficient for our purposes and the space of higher education continues to be opaque.

While postcolonial scholars have drawn attention to the disjunction between concepts and experience, it must be remembered that they were focussed mainly on the crisis in political institutions and thought. Education too figured in so far as it was a reflection of the larger crisis in politics and political institutions. Thus, when we turn to more specific attempts within postcolonial studies to understand the domain of education in India, we find that much of the work draws inspiration from Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and the Gramscian notion of hegemony in order to formulate education as a cultural and political object of study. A dominant strand that runs through this scholarship is the focus on the function of education in colonial and postcolonial Indian context. Through analyses of specific disciplines, scholars attempted to show how education was not a neutral activity, but a handmaiden to other kinds

26 Culture here was seen in the Gramscian sense, as a site where hegemony or rule by consent was produced before a particular power bloc could take over the state. Hence, culture was a handmaiden to power interests. Most of these studies focussed on what was referred to as “the politics of education,” exploring the relation between representation, identity and power.
of interests – imperial, national, upper-caste and male. Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest* (1989), for example, argues that the Western literary canon was introduced in colonial India as a way to resolve the tension between the East India Company’s increasing involvement in education and its professed policy of religious neutrality. Although education in India would be secular, English literature would play an important role in the formation of an English intelligentsia by inculcating in them Christian morality through its literature with its ‘human and moral attributes.’ In this way, English literature would serve to legitimize colonial rule and play its role in the “civilising mission.” Thus, Viswanathan’s claim is that while humanistic study in England during this period centred on classical literature of Greek and Latin, in India, by contrast, a distinct core of Western canon was developed in service of the empire, with a focus on eighteenth century neo-classical literature along with Shakespeare. However, it must be noted that Shakespeare, Milton, Cervantes and a few other writers were already in circulation in the Weimar idea of “world literature” (Wellbery et al. 2004) with its emphasis on classics in late eighteenth century Germany. Thus, merely accounting for canon formation in terms of the politics of the empire may sideline the conception of education in Europe crucial to which was the idea of formation through inculcation into ancient, classical texts.27 Similarly, Krishna Kumar, though focusing primarily on school education, argues that the modern system of education introduced by the colonizers served to form a colonial elite and was not radically different from pre-colonial systems. Both systems were based on the unquestioning authority of the teacher and did not encourage inquiry. The nationalist movement which was initially marked by a search for

27 For one of the recent statements on the importance of ancient classics in the formation of an individual, see Pollock (2011): “The classic is not what tells me about shared humanity—or, more truthfully put, what lets me recognize myself as already present in the past, what nourishes in me the illusion that everything has been like me and has existed only to prepare the way for me. Instead, the classic is what gives access to radically different forms of human consciousness for any given generation of readers, and thereby expands for them the range of possibilities of what it means to be a human being” (36).
equal opportunity and self-identity was reduced to serve the interests of a few (K. Kumar 2005).

In the period after independence, education becomes the site through which the ideology of national development is disseminated, with its function now being redefined to produce the national, modern subject.\(^{28}\) We see that education as a site for hegemony remains the dominant framework in understanding educational debates, both colonial and post-colonial. This framework dominated a spate of studies in the 1990s which addressed the question of crisis in various disciplines including English studies, social science and political science where disciplinary subjects were seen as serving the interests of the colonial or national elite. An important departure for us would be to understand the actions and events of the colonial period not in terms of politics and power, but in terms of the cognitive limit that determined the horizons of expectation across different participants, a point I will flesh out in greater detail in chapter III.

The aim or function of education as envisaged in the Nehruvian imagination was to produce a modern subject who had shed the primordial markers of caste and community to emerge from a tradition-bound life as the liberal, scientific, rational, self-determining individual. Yet, those who have examined how modern education and knowledge has been received in the Indian context constantly suggest that this imagination of education has failed in India, resulting in a mismatch between the aim of education and its actual result. Thus, this body of scholarship throws up an interesting question: Why does the question of education in our context invariably lead us to the deformed, half-modern, not-yet-modern or the absent subject?\(^{29}\) For

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\(^{28}\) Viswanathan (1989) studies the ideology of British education independently of how Indians received, reacted, negotiated, manipulated or resisted the ideological content of British education, in order to show how English education served the colonial agenda. For the function of education in colonial and postcolonial context, see, Tharu (1998), K. Kumar (2001, 2005), Seth (2007).

\(^{29}\) See the Introduction to Krishna Kumar’s *Political Agenda of Education* where the author introduces the problem of education in India by describing the ‘not-so-modern’ behaviour of Delhi school children in public
instance, Sanjay Seth in his *Subject Lesson* (2007) argues that the modern subject, the knower, who is set apart from the objects to be known, an idea essential to modern knowledge, was never produced in India and hence, “the ‘foundational assumptions’ underpinning and enabling modern knowledge could not in fact be assumed”30 (195).

1.3 The Strange Case of Educational Debates in India

The various diagnoses considered above, despite their differences, share a puzzling feature. Though each strand of scholarship is an attempt to understand the crisis in higher education (either directly or indirectly), they do not talk about a crisis in *education* at all.31 The debate on the crisis in higher education quickly slides into a crisis in institutional structure, a managerial crisis or a reflection of the crisis in politics or on the nature of the social fabric. In other words, we seek institutional, social or political reasons32 as explanations. No scholarship discusses the crisis in the institution as a crisis in *education*, in terms of the nature of development, learning and formation that education involves. Though *implied* in all these debates, education itself is taken as self-evident. As a result, we have had few discussions on what the conception of education underlying the university is, the notion of formation and development that is envisaged and whether the conditions for these exist in our context. This is a significant lacunae in the manner in which the discussion has been conducted over the years. How do we account for this absence in the scholarship? There could be two possible explanations for the absence of a discussion on this issue: either the conception of education

30 I take up Seth’s claims in greater detail in Chapter IV.
31 One could object by pointing out that many of the scholars I deal with here do not attempt to address the crisis in the university or education at all. However, I have shown how it is possible to reformulate their research, in order to speak to the problem I have set up, even if these individual studies are not explicitly formulated as an answer to the question I have raised.
32 In so far we see “interest groups,” whether colonial, national or local, as reasons for the crisis, these remain political explanations rather than cognitive ones, however sophisticated the analysis.
is so naturally available to us that there is no lack of clarity about it. Or the conception of education and the larger conceptual framework within which it is embedded is not easily accessible to us as it is in the West.

Let us consider the first. It could be that the concept of education is self-evident and there is no need to probe into *what education is*. It is assumed that we have a clear idea of what education is and what it is for. After all, do we all not constantly engage in it one way or the other on an everyday basis? We send our children to colleges and universities to get “educated” and we talk about a crisis in education all the time. We seem to know when and where to use the word; we more or less use it to refer to the same set of institutions and also demarcate the activity from other activities as they do in the West. It appears as though we possess the concept and possess it so clearly and obviously that there is no need to reflect on it further. Yet, unlike in the West where the concept emerges as a tool for reflection at various points in history, we seem to have no such dynamic relation to it. Using a word or being able to classify and categorize things using it is not always the same as possessing a concept. To grasp a concept, in the words of the American philosopher, Cora Diamond, is “not a matter just of knowing how to group things under that concept; it is being able to participate in life-with-the-concept....To be able to use the concept 'human being' is to be able to think about human life and what happens in it; it is not to be able to pick human beings out

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33 Of course, it could be pointed out that even this is not always so. For instance, J. B. Tilak observes that more than 100 of the current 376 universities are single-faculty or specialized institutions, thereby “making a mockery of the very concept of the university” (Tilak 2007, 631). Thus, the Yash Pal Committee Report (2009) evoked the standard idea of the university to demarcate it from the growing number of “single-subject universities” in India. There is always a threat of “disorder” where institutions mushroom outside the universities and have to be constantly regulated.

34 See Skinner for the distinction between using a word and possessing the concept. One possesses a concept when one has the ability to use and understand the word in ordinary language in a consistent and agreed-upon way within a community of users. Skinner notes that a community of users may systematically use certain words but it may be possible to show that there is no concept which answers to their agreed usage (Skinner 1989). He gives the example of words like infinity and being. The confusion that surrounds the idea of liberal education in India can be seen to indicate something similar.
from other things or recommend that certain things be done to them or by them” (Diamond 1988, 266).

Thus, even though we might pick out “education” from other activities, criticize some universities as being nothing more than training centres and suggest various reforms needed to overhaul our educational system, we do not seem to use the concept (and the cluster of concepts it is connected to) for reflection, in order to gain an understanding of ourselves and to make sense of what is happening under the rubric of education in our context. In short, if to grasp a concept is to “to have a life with a concept,” to use it as a tool for active reflection such that we can clarify, refine our experience and render it intelligible in order to arrive at some form of self-understanding,\textsuperscript{35} then, we observe something peculiar: it appears that we do not have a grasp of the concept of education\textsuperscript{36} as it is used in the West. This accounts for the difference in the way the crisis in the university is primarily diagnosed in the West in terms of \textit{a crisis in education}, unlike here.

We can now perhaps conclude that the silence around the conception of education is because the framework within which it makes sense and acquires its meaning is not easily accessible to us. For instance, whatever the differences among individual figures, eighteenth century Western thinkers on \textit{Bildung} explicitly formulated education in terms of the formation of the subject of education. \textit{Bildung} was a self-directed activity and was distinguished from “training” which prepared subjects from the point of view of “usefulness” external to themselves, from the notion of “expertise” which was seen as robbing human beings of

\textsuperscript{35} While for Nussbaum, Pippin or Readings, their reflection takes the form of separating the domain of liberal education from other kinds of learning activities, it is not restricted to this. Their reflection also involves the nature of the pursuit, the kind of formation implied, a measure of whether it is taking place or not, the various obstacles that prevent it from taking place and the capacities to be developed.

\textsuperscript{36} As Diamond puts it: “...if we see instead that life with a concept involves doings and thinkings and understandings of many sorts, into which one’s grasp of the concept enters in different ways, then we can accept that coming to understand a conceptual life other than our own involves exercise of concepts belonging to that life” (Diamond 1988, 276).
holistic, harmonious growth and from the idea of mastering encyclopaedic knowledge or technical reconstruction. All of these were concerned with the external, the immediate and not with the self-formation of the individual and therefore not considered education at all.

The focus instead was on a form of self-development through the pursuit of Wissenschaft, or Science, which involved the cultivation of discipline and the realization of one’s unique individuality/self where one shaped oneself like a work of art. To realize one’s self was to emerge as an autonomous moral agent who could make principled and rational choices. Such a conception of education is not more than three centuries old and emerged in the West at a specific historical point. Thus, to attend to a concept involves being attentive to the cluster of concepts surrounding it as well as the social philosophies that the concepts are embedded in and uphold (Skinner 1989).

Let us sum up our analysis so far. We examined the dominant narrative of crisis in the institution of the university and came to the conclusion that the institutional crisis is linked to the conception of education underlying the institution. What is the nature of the link? In the course of our investigation, we found that though the scholarship is concerned about the crisis in the university and refers to a crisis in (higher) education frequently, it seldom talks about the crisis in education as a crisis in education. Further analysis showed us that though we use the word education more or less as they do in the West, and also use it to refer to the same set of institutions and activities in them, we do not use it as a concept to actively reflect on our experience and make sense of the way we go about our world. The peculiar nature of the debate and restricted usage of the term in our context indicates the fact that we do not have a grasp of the concept like we think we do. The reasons for this could be either our lack of familiarity with the self-understanding of the modern university or it could be that the

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37 Wissenschaft is to be understood not in the narrow sense of natural sciences, as distinct from arts but to indicate any form of systematic study, including empirical sciences, arts, religion and philosophy.
particular conception of education underlying the university is not easily accessible to us. Further, this lack of possession of the concept is not self-evident but requires a certain analytical labour on our part to even realize that it is so.

1.4 The University and Traditions of Learning

So far we have seen that the existing scholarship on the university appears to work with a split – between the crisis in the institution of the university on the one hand and the function of education in India on the other. I would like to bring the two strands together and argue that the institutional crisis is linked to the conception of education, the corresponding forms of knowledge and its subsequent translation in India.

In formulating the link between education, institutions and forms of knowledge, I draw from the Indian philosopher, Daya Krishna, who contrasts the fragility of the modern institution of the university in India (and the various experiments in the domain) with the fields of performative arts such as music and dance where traditional patterns of transmission of knowledge has persisted. He observes that universities in India have been unable to function well and even experiments like Tagore’s Visva-Bharati, set up in early twentieth century and once projected as an ideal worthy of emulation, declined after independence. Similarly, the various “alternative” educational institutes established along the lines of a Gurukul, which came about as a result of a growing discontent with modern, Western educational system that ‘denationalized’ the people of India, such as those set up under the influence of Swami Dayananda (known as the DAV chain of schools and colleges established nation-wide) and Swami Shraddhananda, despite all the facilities provided to them, met with a similar fate.}

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38 Several educational experiments took place in the early twentieth century. One can immediately think of Tagore’s Santiniketan, Nāyee Tālim by Gandhi in the 1930s, the Rishi Valley schools and colleges started by J Krishnamurthy in the 1920s, the Sri Aurobindo International Centre for Education which was established in the 1940s in Pondicherry and the Ramakrishna mission which built its first educational institute in the 1930s and had envisaged both the school and the university system on national lines. One can also recall the establishment
Arguing that while institutions in India such as those by Tagore or Gandhi were the product of a creative act bound with the person, he observes that the institutions failed to survive because of the inability of the original founders to recognize that for the perpetuation and continuation of an institution, one needed a different type of vision that is not merely a creative act but also involves the perpetuation of a tradition. However, the fields of music and dance where tradition has continued, with norms of judgement and the standards of evaluation being internal to the practice, have flourished and produced several exemplars. There is no instance of deciding “what is good music” by citing western opinion or comparison, so much so that in these fields even the government was forced to recognize that these kinds of performing arts cannot be learnt in the “western mode” but instead work differently with the logic of discipleship. Thus, an institution like National School of Drama which was built with a different logic and saw great initial success under the leadership of Alkazi, now faces decline (Krishna 1997).

Daya Krishna’s account highlights the integral link between education, forms of knowledge and their corresponding means of transmission along with the necessary conditions for their sustenance. It is worthwhile to ask what Daya Krishna means when he says that institutions need to build intellectual traditions which he thinks of as essential to knowledge transmission as well as continuation of institutions across generations. Buried in his statement is the insight that institutions cannot be delinked from the existing traditions of activity that enable the articulation of and reflections on questions central to that culture.39

39 A similar insight is found in an observation by a British historian of Indian education who, in 1926, notes: “Our education has done far less for Indian culture than for the material and political progress of India. She looks to our schools and colleges for equipment in the struggle for existence; for the secret of happy living, vivendi causae, she looks elsewhere” (Mayhew 1926, 4).
Daya Krishna’s observation about the decline of institutions that rose in the early twentieth century under the rubric of “national education,” in opposition to the modern educational system across different regional contexts within India is worth noting. Similarly, there is an anxiety that our institutions of higher learning, irrespective of their regional location, are failing in their task of knowledge creation and transmission. One could add to this the pervasive perception that the institutions of social science research set up in the 1950s are in a state of decline (Chatterjee 2002).

All of the above perhaps can be seen as instances of the same problematic. Any understanding of the problem of education therefore has to be accounted for at a conceptual-historical level and not by producing more region-specific, institutional histories. In other words, in order to account for institutional behaviour, we need to understand the specific conception of education that led to the rise of the modern institution of the university in the West and examine its reception in the Indian context during the colonial period. For instance, as we noted earlier, the theory of education that explains both the emergence of the modern university in the West and provides the raison d’être for the pursuit of knowledge in the modern institution of university, is driven by education as Bildung or self-formation. The student pursues knowledge for its own sake and in the process emerges autonomous. The pursuit of Science would result in the deepening of the student’s interior life, forming her/his character. This idea of education as self-formation never takes root in India. This raises two questions: What is it about the concept of education as self-formation that makes it difficult for it to travel to our context? Or what is it about our context that makes it difficult for us to receive it?

40 R. S. Peters points out that the word ‘education’ was earlier used to refer to bringing up of children and animals as well as to refer to the instruction that went on in schools. It was only in the nineteenth century that the concept of education as we know it today emerges, coming to stand for moral, intellectual and spiritual development of man. It now referred to a set of processes which have as their outcome a development and cultivation of man, with the educated man now becoming an ideal to aspire to. It is also interesting to note that this concept emerges in the context of articulating a need for higher education (Peters 1975).
**Methodology**

Much of the existing scholarship on higher education and universities in India is a chronological account of the growth of Indian higher education from ancient to modern times. The studies on modern systems focus on a series of educational acts, resolutions, policies and commissions which serve as the driving force of the narrative. The other strand of scholarship has been largely empirical, understood in the limited sense of statistical data on issues such as the paucity in research papers and publications in various fields, the poor standing of Indian universities in world ranking lists, the rapid growth of the private sector and professional institutes or on issues related to finance and governance. The postcolonial scholarship on education, though sensitive to the disjunction between theoretical apparatus and varying cultural contexts, has examined the domain of education as a site of hegemony involving producing consent for the ruling elite or as a reflection of crisis in politics. In this rapidly growing body of scholarship on higher education, there is an absence of a study which attempts to understand the crisis in the Indian university in terms of the idea of education underlying it. If we want to understand the institutional crisis, without trivializing or dismissing the narrative of crisis, we need to attend to the conception of education and the cluster of concepts associated with it as well as examine its subsequent translation in non-Western contexts such as ours.

Most studies on the university and education have always treated the conception of education as self-evident. As a result, we have gone about asking when and how modern liberal education was introduced in the colonial contexts, without asking *what is this education* that was introduced. This is not merely a definitional question. It involves an understanding of the cultural and historical conditions which gave rise to this specific conception of education and its corresponding institutional structure in the West. Further, it requires us to assess *its effect*
(in terms of the work it does, the shift in thought, action and judgement that it makes possible as well as that which it renders invisible) when introduced in other cultural contexts. We have no account of this kind. While there is a distinct tradition of British Analytical Philosophy that emerged from R. S Peters work that focuses on the concept of education (Peters 1967; Peters 1970; Cuypers and Martin 2011), it is increasingly realized that this body of scholarship, despite its insights, tends to equate and defend a specifically cultural conception which arose at a particular historical point in the West with the concept of education (See Winch 2008, 66). The other strand of scholarship that focuses on the cultural and historical aspects in which the concept of education as Bildung emerges is largely self-referential and internalist to the European experience (Lovlie, Mortensen, and Nordenbo 2003; Beiser 2003; Siljander, Kivelä, and Sutinen 2012). As a result, they have little to say about the peculiar trajectory of liberal education in non-Western contexts.

It would therefore be an unproductive strategy to begin with an already available model of education and go about testing its validity in our context. Any such attempt would have to assume that we have a ready access to the framework within which modern education is embedded. Concepts make sense only within a broader network of related concepts and ideas and acquire their meaning as part of this larger structure. However, in the case of liberal education it is not clear what this conceptual geography is and whether these concepts can be acquired. Thus, my attempt must not be seen as theory building or even of comparing two rival theories, though some work towards that end may be found here. I instead ask: What is the conceptual structure through which higher education has been thought about in the West? What kind of a cultural and intellectual matrix gave rise to the modern idea of the university and where do these lines of thinking come from? For this I turn to “the Humboldtian moment” in late eighteenth century Prussia when education emerges as a central problematic. I thereby frame the problem in comparative terms. This allows us to examine the intellectual
and cultural conditions which gave rise to a specific conception of education and investigate its salience in Western debates on education. This is an important task because despite its recent origins, it is easily forgotten that the notion of education embodied in the idea of liberal education is not a timeless, universal concept that existed at all times but is a product of a specific historical and cultural constellation that emerged in the West in the late eighteenth century.

The second set of questions I pose are with regard to the debates that accompany the introduction of liberal education in India. What happens when modern, Western education\(^41\) comes to a non-Western cultural context like ours under conditions of colonization? Within what categorial structure is the activity of education made sense of here? What are the concepts that come into conflict? What shifts in action, reflection and judgement are made possible and what is elided?

Parallel to this effort, I examine the debate on national education in the early twentieth century, particularly the problematization of colonial education by Gandhi and Tagore, two powerful critics of liberal education. Can we find in their response, the presence of a different line of thinking about education? In this way, the thesis hopes to open up the field of higher education to other kinds of enquiry which can focus on cultures, their links to conceptions of education and forms of knowledge.

\(^41\) I use modern, Western education as Sanjay Seth uses it, where the word “modern” designates its relatively recent emergence and “Western” indicates the cultural specificity of these origins (Seth 2007, 1). By West and Western, I reference a cultural entity which has been identified for long, even by Western intellectuals, as constituted by Western Christendom. Harold Berman notes: The West, then, is not to be found by recourse to a compass. Geographical boundaries help to locate it, but they shift from time to time. The West is, rather, a cultural term, but with a very strong diachronic dimension. It is not, however, simply an idea; it is a community. It implies both a historical structure and a structured history...As a historical culture, a civilization, the West is to be distinguished not only from the East but also from "pre-Western" cultures to which it "returned" in various periods of "renaissance." Such returns and revivals are characteristics of the West. They are not to be confused with the models on which they drew for inspiration... The West, from this perspective, is not Greece and Rome and Israel but the peoples of Western Europe turning to the Greek and Roman and Hebrew texts for inspiration, and transforming those texts in ways that would have astonished their authors (Berman 1983, 2-3; italics in the original). This cautionary note will serve us well in the course of this thesis.
Thus, this is not a study about individual educational institutions, the various educational policies that determine the field of higher education or even of specific disciplines and curricula. Instead, I follow a problem-based approach where a contemporary anxiety about the crisis in the Indian university is made sense of through a longue durée conceptual-historical study of educational debates that dot the Indian intellectual landscape. While the Humboldtian model provides us the dominant model of education and sets up the terms of reference, the nineteenth century debates on education in India and the nationalist debate on education provides us with moments of counterpoint to identify the points of departure. It helps us understand the reception or deviation from the model in a different context. The thesis therefore sets up the contemporary debates around the crisis, the Humboldtian ideal, the nineteenth century debates in India and the nationalist moment as central “moments” for investigation.

The objective is not to provide a comprehensive historical account but to make visible the broad conceptual undercurrents and movements. Thus, this is not a historical-empirical account of education or a social history of education. Instead, this work is best understood as an intellectual history with a focus on how and in what terms education emerges as a problematic at certain historical moments in India. Michel Foucault’s notion of problematization might help to clarify the approach. In an interview with Paul Rabinow, Foucault notes that at certain points in history, a domain of action comes to be “problematized,” by which he means that it enters the field of thought. For this to happen, it is necessary for “a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it” (Foucault 1997, 117). These factors, which are larger social, economic and political processes, are at work for a long time before the domain of action emerges for effective problematization as a subject of concern and reflection. A key to understand a form of life is to see the shape and form this
problematization takes. Foucault points out that for a single set of difficulties, several solutions are often proposed, in diverse forms, sometimes taking contradictory route. And yet these diverse solutions are enabled by the form of the problematization (118). I draw from this notion of problematization, in order to examine how modern education comes to be debated during these “moments” that I have set up. I do this by focusing on some of the central texts and educational debates around these moments which elucidate the notion of education, the categories of thought and the lines of thinking that were used by the participants in the debate that render these activities coherent as well as the nature of problematization that education was subject to. I also make use of a range of archival material including policy documents, reports of several education commissions, scholarly and popular accounts of the field as well as statistical data on higher education as and when necessary.

**Chapterization**

What is the specific conception of education underlying the idea of the modern university? The second chapter undertakes an examination of the cultural milieu in which the Humboldtian model of the university emerges. I use the term German Romanticism in a broad sense to refer to this intellectual and cultural ambience, covering the period of 1760-1830 in Prussia. Some of the questions I ask in this chapter are: How do the intellectuals of the period problematize education? What common lines of thinking shape the idea of education that emerges during this period? What notions of inquiry, autonomy, knowledge and self-formation are articulated, thereby informing the idea of “higher” education? My task here is to investigate the conditions and the antecedent conceptual repertoire which give rise to the specific model of education that undergirds the modern university and to bring to surface the underlying categories that continue to influence the debates on higher education even to this day.
In the third chapter, I move to the Indian context to examine the drastically different nature of the debates that led to the introduction of higher education in India in the early nineteenth century. Given that the introduction of modern education is coeval with the colonization of India and colonization is at least partly looked upon as a pedagogic task with “reform” of the natives being the key focus, it is necessary to clarify the nature of this pedagogic task. The postcolonial scholarship often points out that education served as the “civilising mission” in colonial contexts and introduced a new moral order. To make sense of this “new” moral order, I argue that we have to see liberal education as partly a solution to the moral lack in natives, identified as “wanting in the fundamental norm of truth.” The pedagogic task of colonial education was therefore an initiation into the truth norm. In other words, the norm of every action appears to have been transformed into a truth norm. Everyday life comes to be looked upon as a domain of beliefs which now had to be assessed for their truth or falsity. Thus, discussions on education focused on the moral reform of the natives which presupposed a lapse from a normative order rather than emphasize formation, discovery and self-understanding.

In the light of the discussions in the previous chapter, I examine the effects of liberal education in India in the fourth chapter. I do this in two ways: I examine the texts by Rammohun Roy who has the distinction of being among the first Indians to engage with Western frameworks, in order to explore the question of translation of concepts. I also examine the debates in the latter half of the nineteenth century on the “moral decline” or the “incomplete moral formation” of the Indian student. Though liberal education is initially introduced as a solution to the problem of immorality, it ironically comes to be seen as a cause for immorality in the latter half of the nineteenth century. A great anxiety arises with regard to learning goals that are not understood, are half learnt, differently learnt or are left unlearnt. The nature of liberal education in these parts of the world is seen as distorted,
leading to anxieties that the natives fail to learn modern knowledge, both cognitive and moral. Central to the debate on whether the natives have learnt the norm of truth or not, is the concept of conscience. I briefly explore the implications of this debate.

Education erupts as a central problematic during the nationalist movement. The Indian national movement responds to the late nineteenth century debate on education and reopens the question about education and formation. In the fifth chapter I argue that it is Tagore and Gandhi who provide us with a diagnosis of crisis in education, a diagnosis which the contemporary scholarship on the crisis in higher education completely misses: the crisis in education is not as much about an institutional crisis or a crisis in politics or a problem with the social fabric but a crisis in education and learning. In this process, the notion of formation gets a new meaning. By analyzing their writings and the categorial structure through which they articulate their conception of education, I show how there are indications that another conception of education is at work. Thus, the nationalist moment remains one of the few moments in the history of education in India where the leading thinkers of the time grasped the issue of cultural difference and conceptual dissonance with great acuity.

In the last chapter, by examining some of the early nineteenth century reports on indigenous education by the British, I show how the European conception of education and the ideal of self-formation that governs it were means through which the British made sense of native institutions of learning. As a result the specific form of ethical learning prevailing in India, which the chapter on Gandhi foregrounds, is rendered invisible. This assertion of mine is not meant to show that we too had our institutions of learning, but to draw attention to the compulsions of the European frame in identifying what is education and what is not.