A Study on Education for the Anthropocene from Uttarakhand, India

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Abstract
An embrace of non-hegemonic thinking will strengthen the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of education and activism in the Anthropocene. Lakshmi Ashram, a modest girls' school in the Himalayan slopes of Uttarakhand, India, gives an object lesson in thinking differently: in an imbrication of education/research/activism. This essay highlights a continued lack of attention in the literature to local, cultural and place-based diversity in transformational learning for a sustainable community. However, the core topic in this piece is not one of critique but rather one of a Himalayan approach to establishing the educational circumstances for transformation in thinking and conduct in a linked socio-ecological society. Writing across an international space, the two writers outline their ethnographic approaches, analysing the long-term influence of a Lakshmi Ashram education on students and embodying the school's educational experience. A fluid flow of socio-material practice between teaching, research and activism in the school's educational approach points to a Gandhian philosophy-in-action that is worth contemplating a contribution to global educational praxis in the Anthropocene. In sharing this account of one tiny school's pedagogical philosophy, the writers aspire not towards ideological posturing but towards providing new possibilities in thinking differently in education.

Keywords: Anthropocene; Gandhian thinking; new materialism; posthumanism; ethnography; socio-ecological community; natureculture

INTRODUCTION:
When it comes to rethinking education and action in the Anthropocene, Einstein's theory of diverse thinking is essential. He once observed, "We can't fix our issues with the same mindset we used to create them." One of Uttarakhand's modest girls schools, nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, serves as a case study on approaching education, research, and advocacy from a socio-ecological perspective.

A school secretary and leader born in Uttarakhand and educated at Lakshmi Ashram1 (Vaishnava, 2016) and an Australian PhD student who conducts her study at the school are featured in this story (Germein, in preparation). This essay includes our voices, both individually and collectively, and those of girls and instructors, in an everyday intercultural environment. Our collaborative writing and the past, present (and future) of Lakshmi Ashram feature prominently in this article's theme of cultural hybridity and negotiation of difference. As a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, Englishwoman Catherine Heilemann (known in India as Sarala Behen) created Lakshmi Ashram in 1946, an all-girls' residential school, which she named after the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. School visitors from India and around the world come to study, support and share their cultural traditions at the school daily.

One of the most difficult aspects of writing together across cultures within the general context of Western academic discourse (Canagarajah, 2002) is to provide room for the voices of those from the 'periphery' It is difficult to meet Western academic requirements while respecting other cultural backgrounds. How can we collaborate while being mindful of the dangers of 'linguistic and cultural 'translation," Is there a way to productively embrace difference? When it comes to teaching students about the Anthropocene, educators confront similar issues.

PHILOSOPHIES AND PRACTICES FROM DIFFERENT CULTURAL CONTEXTS
Many 'educations,' such as peace, climate change, citizenship, and other responses to specific substantive issues, have sprung up since the environmental movement began in the 1960s and the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014); however, it has been acknowledged that many of these did not adequately embody culturally inclusive and local place-based approaches (Jackson, 2017; Selby & Kagawa, 2015; Somerville, 2016). Furthermore, it was recognised that the development of abilities, attitudes, and values to deal with uncertain futures was necessary (Gadotti, 2008; Jackson, 2016).

With its emphasis on values, critical thinking and process abilities, Education for Sustainability3 (EfS) stood apart from other "educations" (Bedi&Germein, 2016; Smith & Watson, 2019; Tilbury & Cooke, 2009). EfS drew on the ecological worldviews and complex systems thinking of E.F. Schumacher, Fritjof Capra, and Gregory Bateson. In this educational method, educational philosophies-in-action were put into practice, improving the environment for ecological and linked thinking 'in here' rather than 'out there' (Code, 2006; Jackson, 2016).
This special issue explores educational approaches that can better prepare children for the Anthropocene's challenges. On top of that, Stratford (2019) (who thinks the larger educational community is still working to sort out EfS!) stresses the need for'situated, ecological or rhizomic understandings' of knowledge, education and ethics in the Anthropocene (p. 149) while we are looking for solutions (p. 150; see also Smith, Fraser, & Corbett, 2017; Somerville, 2017). Regions like South Asia, South America, and Africa, which make up the vast bulk of the world's population, are historically responsible for the least amount of anthropogenic climate change (Gadotti, 2008). As location and nature-connected communities, many towns in these regions have thrived on a smaller budget for a long time (Selby & Kagawa, 2015). A truly global response to the Anthropocene can only be achieved by incorporating educational ideas and practises from these varied settings. When most educational narratives still rely on worn-out hegemonic "business as usual" tropes (Huckle &Wals, 2015; Selby, 2015), the 70-year-old Lakshmi Ashram provides a fresh perspective.

EDUCATION FOR SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITY
When we refer to a community as socio-ecological, we're referring to a dynamic, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing assemblage that includes both human and non-human elements. According to Guattari's (1989/2000) and Haraway's (2003, p. 6), nature culture is a "refusal of::: binary dualisms" and an emerging subjectivity of "becoming-other," and this idea refers to this (see also Tinnell, 2011). Humans and nature are inextricably linked within such an ecological system, as the word "socio-ecological" indicates.

As a result, what can an education for socio-ecological community look like in many cultures and places, with an understanding of place as a complex, dynamic site of local as well as global influences, constraints, and drivers?

Lakshmi Ashram's Educational Programs

At the Lakshmi Ashram in Uttarakhand, a mountaintop in rural Uttarakhand, girls from regional households are given an education that they wouldn't otherwise have the means to pay. NaiTalim, Gandhi's Basic Education, is the educational philosophy that guides the school's 'brain, heart, and hands' approach to learning. A social, lifelong, and comprehensive process characterises a Gandhian pedagogy. It is founded on sincerity, collaboration, and equitable treatment for all people. Developing self-confidence, independence, responsibility, and bravery results from instructors and students working together in a community. My definition of education is an all-encompassing bringing out of the finest in a child's body, mind and soul. 'Literacy is neither the end nor the beginning of education' (Gandhi, 1937, p. 197; see also Devi, n.d.).

In the Lakshmi Ashram, students and teachers work together, learn from one other, and participate in community activities. Among the school's many social and environmental initiatives involve senior students, faculty, and community activists. As a result of years of listening, working together, and supporting rural women in particular, the school has created trust among the villages of the region (BasantiBehen, personal interview, 29 November 2018).

DEVELOPING PERSONALITIES WITH FULL GRACE

Additionally, and more fundamentally, is the development of girls as individuals who are responsible leaders and connected members of the school community and the larger community, embodying a personal Swaraj—literally self-rule, and in a personal sense, independence, self-reliance, and wholeness—a Sanskrit term.

There are a plethora of schools dedicated just to teaching students how to make money. Those things are already happening. However, we must also work on their spiritual development. Developing one's spirituality is the only way to gain value from everything else in life. Is it possible for our children to grow their consciousness or conscious minds while they are still young? Personal conversation with Vaishnava, 18 May 2017.

In addition to cultivating crops, tending livestock, gathering hay, cooking and cleaning, the girls and instructors also attend classes on various subjects. There is also an everyday inner life and a diverse and lively celebration of cultural and religious holidays. When it comes to the girls' growth, former headmistress Radha Bhatt believes that what's most important is to help them develop their personalities in all their glory. All talents should be allowed to develop. There is a government-run school in Kausani, India.::: In the past, the principal and two instructors came to this room and spoke to me privately. How do you teach your girls to communicate their sentiments so that they are neither timid, or shy?' they inquired. They have total faith in themselves. I witnessed one of your young ladies taking charge of a poetry reading session. She was all, "Thank you very much, you have performed a really wonderful poetry, and now I will invite someone else." She said. As a 5th-grade student, she was a petite girl. " Who made her this way?' (Personal interview with Radha Bhatt, May 19, 2017)

LEARNING THROUGH DOING

Many of the females at the Ashram appear bewildered when they first arrive. However, they've transformed entirely after only a few days, and the girls and instructors alike have shown them nothing but kindness and love. Everyone has the chance to grow. As kids begin to learn by doing, they grow self-assured and believe in their own abilities. Empathy, love,

and equality are just a few of the lessons they learn. A sense of interdependence and connectivity is reinforced in this community.

The kitchen garden and communal cooking are important parts of life at Lakshmi Ashram. Everyone should learn how to work together in order to succeed. It makes me delighted to have learned everything. It's a big deal in my life. I will benefit from the effort I accomplish here in the future. Translation by Kanchan Shukla of personal discussion with Sonu on May 11, 2017.
Confidence helps the girls develop empathy for others' needs. School life teaches the girls qualities of compassion and responsibility, which they may then use to lead thoughtfully in the real world.

Our 10th and 12th-grade ladies had to take exams this year, so they were living in a village home and coming to school every morning to take them. When there was no exam, the students would go to the village and interact with the residents, helping the women trim the leaves or something similar when they weren't in class. People were pleading with them to sing, and they obliged. Many in the hamlet shed tears as they prepared to bid farewell.

As soon as visitors arrive, they are awed by the girls' bustling routine of shared work, education, and other activities. As they go about the campus, they boldly share their knowledge of the institution. The proximity of students and teachers creates a warm setting that envelops the outsider, and visitors often find themselves with a task to complete.

Our alu is being peeled and sliced (potato). To my chagrin, Manju claims that my peelings are excessively large. She whispers quietly, "Patla, patla [thin]." She is concerned about food waste. The females assign me to the task of chopping. My relationship with Pooja becomes more fluid. Half of a large potato she chops into is mine to cut. With her hands swirling slowly in the water, Kala removes the sliced alu from her work area. Pooja takes the washed peelings to the cows as she cooks the veggies. In little time at all, the novelty of having a visitor help with culinary duties is replaced by a shared drive to finish the job—May 2017 (Germein, personal journal, in German).

GANDHI'S EDUCATIONAL THINKING IN ACTION
Gandhi's desire to effect change toward Swaraj at all levels spurred a large number of individuals to become social reformers in his wake. He asserted that women may be more effective change agents than males if they used nonviolent ways (Patel, n.d.). Thus, in Uttarakhand, Sarala Behen's goal was to assist women's empowerment via body, mind, and heart. She began instructing local girls, many of whom became Gandhian social activists (Behen, 2010; see also Guha, 2013).

Even though Gandhi did not write on the environment, it is widely accepted that he was a fundamentally ecological thinker (Godrej, 2012; Lal, 2000). (Hoda, 1997). Early efforts at social and environmental justice education may be traced back to Gandhi's Basic Education (Chhokar& Chandrasekaran, 2006). Today's global issues of materialism, violence, and lack of community connection are still pertinent to his live philosophy (Chaudhury, 2018; Guha, 2019).

Simple living was something Gandhi believed in. He argued human existence should be based on the principles of a non-dual nature culture, in which people only take what they need from the natural environment while also considering the requirements of other living

things, both human and otherwise. For him, it was important to have people perceive themselves as a part of the natural world rather than apart from it (Kumaria, 2003).

Rather than a rigid set of guidelines, these principles are organically developed by students with the help of their instructors and fellow classmates. Humans and non-human alike are treated with respect and compassion by those who practise the virtue of Ahimsa, which is an attitude of empathy.

A SOCIO-MATERIAL6 PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

An grasp of Gandhi's ideas at Lakshmi Ashram would be hampered if the focus were just on certain Gandhian concepts. In Gandhi's view, education should aim to cultivate a person's physical, intellectual, artistic, moral, spiritual, and cultural capacities to their fullest potential in all of these areas. Craft spinning was used as an immersive and rhizomatic exercise in traditional Gandhian Basic Education, allowing for holistic growth and learning to be derived from it. Values and dispositions such as self-sufficiency, inner discipline, the upliftment of others, the social and environmental good as well as responsibility and kindness emerge from the entire package of learning in socio-material pedagogical practise, where learning, doing and making, school, play, work, and responsibility are mutually intertwined.

Fun and lively lessons await you at our school. Everyone loves the art supplies, skits, and games I brought suddenly the small girls become efficient and businesslike, working as a team to stack the low desks and take the rugs outside for a pounding when the bell rings. Students need to clean their classrooms and bedrooms before they go for their afternoon seva [community service] in the kitchen, garden, forest, or cowshed. (Germein, April–May 2017 personal journal).

Assessments at Lakshmi Ashram are not limited to summative evaluations of literacy, numeracy, and conventional subjects, but rather a complete and formative observation of students' intellectual, conceptual, physical, emotional, and social growth; skills; values; leadership and teamwork. Teachers observe a child's daily life. Does the youngster have a habit of finishing their assignments? As a person, how does she communicate? Is she self-assured in her ability to express herself in public? Is she familiar with all of the cows' names? Is there a desire to help others? Is she a good time manager and a stickler for schedules? What kind of attitude does she have toward her own education and development? Teachers can then help a student improve in every area. Senior high school girls and teachers, social workers, and rural women work together to do research and social/environmental activity in the surrounding villages, integrating pedagogy, research, and activism into their daily lives. Nirmala and Suman learn organisational skills, communication, literacy, leadership, and community building as they participate in this educational experience.

KNOTTY ENTANGLEMENTS LOCAL AND GLOBAL

There are difficulties in Lakshmi Ashram. Students and faculty engage in lively and free debate on a wide range of topics at school meetings. Social and family expectations, national educational regulations, and other modernism and globalisation features like the widespread usage of mobile phones and internet access are all issues that schools must contend with on a daily basis (Chakrabarty, 2015). As families and society's views on the importance of education for their girls have evolved through time, so has the school's response to those expectations. As the daughter of a traditional rural family, a woman's aspirations for higher education, job advancement, or social action may collide with her parents. Denim jeans, a

symbol of modernism and a departure from school's traditional Khadi uniform, are preferred by certain females (personal interview, Radha Behen, April 21, 2017).

The school is also affected by global relations. Bhotiya traders7 sold Tibetan wool to the school, which was used for spinning and weaving. Due to the closing of trade lines in China, this coarse and robust wool is no longer available. There was a lot of red tape involved in importing fine Australian wool. Commercially coloured wool was substituted for spinning (Hopkins, personal interview, May 16, 2017). Thanks to a deal struck with a Pahari sheep farmer (who lives in the hills), Obtaining raw wool has just been made possible. It's not ideal, but it's better than nothing for the time being. The process of resolving differences is an ongoing one that yields results. Klenk (2010) and Groff (2018) have researched this unconventional school, which focuses on the gendered dynamics of development and the role of education in the empowerment of young people. Neema and Susan share a more personal material and emotional emphasis: for Susan, a focus on the school's experience, and for Neema, a focus on the experiences of its alumni. Neema discusses her study in this video. A student's personality can be developed via education. NaiTalim has this as its ultimate goal. Until 1970, Lakshmi Ashram offered this education in its original form. So, the school agreed to transfer the girls to a government school so they could receive a government diploma. Since then, a combination of Gandhian and traditional methods has been implemented at the school, allowing students to acquire both life skills and official qualifications. The Ashram is a place where many of the females who complete their education remain on to work at the Ashram or do social work in the local area. Many people go back to their hometowns to settle down with a new spouse and start a career. It doesn't matter whatever path they take, they become leaders in their families and communities.

My goal was to learn more about NaiTalim and how far its graduates had progressed toward a sense of self-determination, or Swaraj. Getting in touch with these young ladies was a pleasant surprise. As a result of their education, they understood how much of an advantage they had over their peers. The research encounter influenced these women's identity-making. Semi-structured interviews and on-the-spot observations were used in the case study research, as were house visits to get a firsthand look at how the graduates lived their personal, familial, professional, and social lives. It was difficult to maintain impartiality between the interviewer and the researcher. As both had studied at Lakshmi Ashram, avoiding prejudice was a struggle. With their distance from Lakshmi Ashram, respondents were confident in their ability to converse openly. It took a long time for the interviewee to divulge her genuine feelings and understandings.

Each respondent required a significant amount of my time. When interviewees first met me, it appeared like they had unearthed something long-forgotten. Their youth and adolescence at Lakshmi Ashram were brought back to life when they met me. They had a great time reminiscing about their past. Some of the females at Lakshmi Ashram were continuously inquiring about the current goings-on and general environment. Having discovered a way to get back in touch with Lakshmi Ashram made them joyful. I, too, was at a loss for words when I realised how they were feeling. I then had to progressively extricate myself from these profound senti-mental sensations so that we could get on with our task. When I went to their homes, families, and workplaces, I understood how their education at Lakshmi Ashram had affected their lives. Despite this, it appeared that some respondents did not share everything that they wanted to say. In 2017 (Vaishnava, 2017).

Nineteen farmers were among the 100 respondents with a high school diploma or GED who were interviewed. Thirty-one were employed by the government as a nurse, teacher, or kindergarten supervisor. Thirty-six others worked for NGOs and Gandhian organisations. Fifteen others worked for NGOs. Regardless of what they were doing, others recognised them as 'Lakshmi Ashram girls' who were responsible, compassionate, well-organized, and great leaders.

The majority of the females were married, and many of them were the primary decision-makers in the family. They excelled at whatever role they performed in the household. Many times, they worked as a mediator to help their husband's family come together. As the leaders of the organisation, they utilised their position to educate the public about their rights and responsibilities, and to inspire others to participate in local or government policymaking. Many of them were achieving their dream of self-reliance while also strengthening their local communities.

Gita, a nurse with three children, was one of the interviewees. As well as a farm and cattle, Gita was utterly self-sufficient in many other areas of life as well. There were three males in her household, but she was the family's primary decision-maker. Her grain and milk production completed, she declared with confidence: "I have Swarj since I am not dependent on the market for our sustenance." She had Swarj. With their independence and financial security, these mountain females have something unique to offer the rest of us. In addition, because I live in a rural area far from the city, I am employed by Village Swarj. My husband suggested that we follow the lead of the majority of the villagers and move to the adjacent metropolis in order to provide our children with access to a quality education. But I refused to go there, saying, "I will not." Because my parents-in-law are ageing, I'll be living with them for the time being. You can move on your own if you choose. It was an informal conversation between myself and Vaishnava in 2015.

These remarks demonstrate Gita's strong feeling of belonging to a larger family and her ability to exercise personal agency in making decisions that affect the well-being of everyone in it.

MATERIAL METHODOLOGIES TOGETHER

Despite being rooted in very distinct intellectual traditions and cultures, our methodological approaches have certain things in common. In Neema's case, it's about paying attention to the minute but telling elements of the grads' life; in Susan's, it's about letting herself be completely immersed in the physical environment. Destabilizing standard interview procedures (Honan, 2014) is something that both of us are receptive to, balancing the exteriority of an interpretative realism with the consequence of being intimately involved in the field. Both the acceptance of subjectivity and the ethical enactment of research are brought about by the researcher's presence in the frame.

We are very aware of our research's impact on the women and recent college grads who work with us. There is a shared sense of responsibility for the girls and a commitment to a relational ethics of care for people and space and responsiveness to the other, who is not wholly distinct from what we term the self (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). (Barad, 2012, p. 69).

The materiality, performativity, and affect that intentionally spring up in and around our work should be the primary focus of our investigation. Methods take shape through the numerous hands of a community and location like roti dough. We go into the field with certain preconceived notions of what will happen, but the diverse group of students, instructors,

classrooms, mountainsides, gardens, and the weather all have their own interpretations of what is going to happen. The unexpected may turn out to be much more significant than expected.

Research technique and pedagogical philosophy are seamlessly integrated in this experience of socio-ecological community. In other words, the same characteristics and behaviours of an ethical research approach are already present in the instructional practice. During the course of the research, researchers and their participants become part of the continuing socio-material discursive activity of place. As part of a pedagogy for the Anthropocene, we think that this continuous flow of doing and learning provides a solid foundation for education, research, and social change.

CONCLUSION

The clock is ticking of philosophy in action and pedagogy in the spirit of Gandhi may be found in this discussion of a small school in which we explore Gandhi's idea of lifelong learning and Gandhian pedagogy. Without hesitation, he began a long-term activist campaign for personal and collective self-determination, always fine-tuning and improving his methods along the way. His famous saying, " My life is my message, an affinity for material practise may be seen in his famous saying, "My life is my message." It is not Lakshmi Ashram's educational philosophy and practise that replaces other situational and cultural practises but rather provides a strong stimulant for thinking differently via education, activism and community-building.

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