

GENERAL SEMANTICS IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

STEVE STOCKDALE*

Last April, I received an email from Mr. B.K. Parekh in Mumbai, India. He wrote to say that, “It was a painful surprise to note from *General Semantics Bulletin*, No. 72 that I am the only member of Institute of General Semantics in India.” He went on to explain that he had arranged to sponsor a 3-day workshop at the Centre for Contemporary Theory in Vadodara (Baroda), north of Mumbai, in November. They expected 40-45 scholars from across India to attend. He requested that the Institute provide one “expert” who could travel to India to conduct the workshop, at Mr. Parekh’s expense.

After consulting with Andrea Johnson, then-President of the IGS Board of Trustees, I responded to Mr. Parekh that we would gladly support his request, but offered an alternative. Given the travel requirements and the demands of teaching three full days, we felt it would be better to have two IGS “experts” support the workshop. If he would agree to cover the local expenses for two of us, I would donate some of my frequent flier miles for my airfare. He agreed, and so began six months of preparing for a halfway-around-the-world adventure.

The planning became a bit more complicated when we received an invitation to travel to Pakistan immediately after the trip to Vadodara. IGS member Mr. Usman Ghani, who now lives in nearby Irving, Texas, visited the Institute with his father, Mr. Mian Ghani, from Karachi, Pakistan, shortly after we had agreed to the India plans. Mian Ghani has had a long association with Grid International and its founder, Robert R. Blake. Professor Blake, who died a few years ago, is an Honorary Trustee of the Institute and was honored twice to give the prestigious Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture. Intrigued by general semantics through this connection, Mr. Ghani immediately invited us to give a seminar in Karachi upon learning of our plans for Vadodara. (Most unfortunately, due to the political developments in Pakistan

*Steve Stockdale lives in Fort Worth, TX. He teaches a course on general semantics at TCU, which last fall was added to the general catalog for the school. He recently resigned after four years as Executive Director of the Institute of General Semantics.

throughout late October, we made the very difficult decision to cancel the Pakistan seminar one day prior to the declaration of emergency in Pakistan.)

After Mr. Parekh accepted our proposal to send two people, he and his staff began to make additional arrangements for seminars and presentations in other venues. We ended up speaking to over 350 people at seven different locations, including:

- Mumbai University, with faculty and students from departments of History, Political Science, Sociology, Philosophy, Literature, and Linguistics.
- Pidilite Industries, Ltd, (of which Mr. Parekh is founder and Chairman) for directors, managers, employees, and family members.
- Indian Institute of Technology (Mumbai), faculty and students.
- Bhavans Culture Center (Mumbai), with local authors, poets, artists, and cultural leaders.
- Gujarati Sahitya Parishad (Ahmedabad), founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920, for faculty and students
- H.M. Patel Institute of English at Sardar Patel University (Anand), for faculty and students.
- Centre for Contemporary Theory (Vadodara), Twelfth National Workshop (3 days). Sixty-eight professors and graduate students registered, with fifty-nine attending from as far away as New Delhi, Chennai, and Kashmir.

Mr. Parekh came to general semantics about 25 years ago through *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*. Much of his extensive knowledge and understanding of general semantics, which he demonstrated privately and during his remarks at each of the venues, came from reading articles in *ETC*.

A native of the state of Gujarat, Mr. Parekh has long lived according to the Gujarati tradition: “*If you get what you like; do not keep it, rather share it.*” So inspired, in 2003 he began compiling and publishing his own journal similar to *ETC* in which he collected interesting articles, stories, quotations, etc. To date he’s published seven issues and sent approximately 1200 copies of each issue to a distribution list of friends, family, colleagues, and anyone who requests a copy. Every issue has a section dedicated to GS in which he has reprinted four or five articles from *ETC*. Perhaps a dozen people who attended the 3-day workshop in Vadodara mentioned that they learned of general semantics for the first time through Mr. Parekh’s free journal.

Mr. Parekh arranged to make copies of Ken Johnson’s *General Semantics: An Outline Survey* and provided a copy to everyone at each of the venues. Additionally, for the Vadodara workshop, Professor Prafulla Kar (Director of the Centre for

Contemporary Theory) published a bound volume of eleven articles I suggested as pre-reading for the participants. This was distributed to all registrants about six weeks before the workshop and, unlike our usual experiences in the U.S., the participants seemed to be quite familiar with the readings by the time we started the workshop.

The company he founded, Pidilite Industries, Ltd (www.pidilite.com) is ranked by the *Economic Times of India* as the 131st largest public company in India, with annual sales of over \$350M. Their core business is adhesives, featuring the “Elmer’s glue” of India which they developed, as well as an entire line of industrial bonding materials. His daughter Kalpana proudly related that, although he did not have a chemical background, he mixed the first batch of Fevicol (the glue brand name) in their home bathtub. He then saw to it that his younger brother and one son earned graduate degrees in Chemical Engineering from the University of Wisconsin. They and most of the family’s sons continue to manage and direct the affairs of the diversified company.

Mr. Parekh developed Parkinson’s disease seven years ago. He’s done a lot of personal research about the disease and has access to the very best medical attention, so he and his family are optimistic about his condition and prognosis. Andrea and I had little trouble understanding his bright, enthusiastic English.

He was treated as something like a “revered godfather” everywhere we went. Several people went to great lengths to explain what a wonderful, caring, and benevolent “philanthropist” he was. Among the stories we heard:

- The youngest daughter of his nephew and niece (now 10) was born deaf. Diagnosed early, she underwent a successful cochlear implant when she was 18 months old in the U.S. Mr. Parekh’s brother, Narendra Parekh (and the family) not only paid for the surgery and almost a year’s stay in the U.S., but they also funded a private hearing institute in Mumbai for research, study, and investigation into making implants more affordable for Indian citizens.
- He donated funds to build an entire academic building in Ahmedabad at the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, and insisted that his name not be used.
- He funded the establishment of a Center for the Popularization of Science in conjunction with the Indian Planetary Society in Mumbai.
- He funded the Centre for Contemporary Theory in Baroda, which hosted our 3-day workshop.
- Pidilite is one of the leading-edge progressive companies in India in terms of valuing employees. It was pointed out by several people that few companies provided the benefits that Pidilite offered, including onsite swimming pool and fitness facilities for all employees.

Through the Pidilite Marketing/Communications manager, Mr. Parekh arranged extended interviews for us with reporters from five newspapers: *The Hindustan Times*, *DNA (Daily News & Analysis)*, *The Times of India*, *The Economic Times of India*, and a local Gujarati-language paper, *Divya Bhaskar*.

Mr. Parekh has a broad vision for general semantics in India. I committed to him that I personally would do everything I can to assist him, and to the limited degree I could speak on behalf of the Institute, that the Institute would support him. He and Professor Kar have already held follow-up meetings to plan the next steps for general semantics in India. Professor Kar and his Centre for Contemporary Theory will serve as the focal point for coordinating general semantics activities with universities throughout India and the U.S. as well.

‘જનરલ સિમેન્ટિક્સ’ અંગે રાષ્ટ્રીય કાર્યશાળા યોજાઈ

ભાસ્કર ન્યાઝ. વડોદરા

સામાન્ય માણસ માટે નવો છતાં પણ રોજિંદી ઘટમાળમાં અત્યંત અગત્યનો ભાગ ભજવતો એવો વિષય ‘જનરલ સિમેન્ટિક્સ’, ‘કોગ્નિટીવ લેન્ગવેજ સ્કેલ્સ ફોર ટ્રેવેન્ટી ફર્સ્ટ સેન્ટ્યુરી’ની બારમી રાષ્ટ્રીય કાર્યશાળામાં વિસ્તાર પૂર્વક ચર્ચાઓ. આ કાર્યશાળામાં ઈન્સ્ટિટ્યુટ ઓફ જનરલ સિમેન્ટિક્સ, યુએસએના એકિઝક્યૂટિવ ડાયરેક્ટર સ્ટિવન સ્ટોકોલ અને ઈન્સ્ટિ.ના

સમજતા તેવા કિસ્સા થતા મેં નોંધ્યા પણ જનરલ સિમેન્ટિક્સની મદદથી તે સમસ્યા ઉકેલાઈ ગઈ. સ્ટિવન સ્ટોકોલે જણાવ્યું કે, ‘સંભાવનાઓને આધારે અર્થજાગૃત મનમાં અપેક્ષાઓ ખડી થાય છે પણ ધારણાઓ વાસ્તવિકતા ન બને ત્યારે સંઘર્ષ થાય છે. આ પરિસ્થિતિથી દૂર રહેવામાં જનરલ સિમેન્ટિક્સ ચાવીરૂપ વિષય છે. જનરલાઈઝેશનથી દૂર રહેવામાં, પૂર્વગ્રહોથી બાબતોને નહીં મૂલવવામાં જનરલ