The subject of general semantics, introduced by Alfred Korzybski in the 1930s, was almost unknown to India until very recently when Balvantbhai Parekh, Chair, Pidilite Industries in Mumbai, took the initiative to bring it to our door step by sponsoring the visits of Andrea Johnson and Steve Stockdale for seminars and lecture-programs in Western India during October-November 2007.

Although Balvantbhai has been spreading some awareness of the subject among his friends through intermittent circulation of excerpts from seminal essays included in his volume titled *Gamtano Kariye Gulal*, there was no institutional recognition of the importance of the subject until Andrea and Steve spoke on it in several lectures and workshops held in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Anand and Baroda. The three-day national workshop that the Centre for Contemporary Theory in Baroda, organized during 3-5 November, brought together around sixty scholars from various disciplinary locations under the broad rubric of “Cognitive Language Skills” to debate on the subject and to think of the possibility of according it some institutional legitimacy within the curricular framework of higher education in India.

As the participants at the Workshop had got some familiarity with the field by going through the various essays handed out to them sufficiently in advance, the discussions that ensued after the talks by the two experts became lively and engaging. The written comments that each participant has left with us bear ample testimony to the relevance of the subject not only to the emergent discipline of Communication Studies, but perhaps more importantly to life as it should be lived.

Korzybski had directed his effort to turn human ingenuity toward positive and constructive goals at a time when Europe was ravaged by World War I, and developed the discipline of general semantics to make people aware of the utility

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of a scientific approach to life. By scientific approach he did not mean to suggest that one had to uncritically accept everything that science had produced, but it was the inherent belief of science to question and to interrogate the ideas of the past against the current ideas tested adequately and proved beneficial that made scientific approach a necessary step toward achieving a sane society.

As language is the most important source of communication, its careful usage would help minimize social conflict, and thereby help in strengthening human relationships. Balvantbhai, an avid reader of general semantics texts, took to the subject almost as a passion, because it helped him in his business by teaching him how to succeed by being “human” and by avoiding unnecessary conflicts with the staff. Thus general semantics is not an academic discipline that has to be merely taught in the academy and discussed, but has a pragmatic orientation toward life and society in a larger sense. One has to do general semantics in one’s everyday encounter with the world.

One should not be under the illusion that whatever one meets through a specular intervention is actually ‘real’ — in Korzybski’s terms, “the map is not the territory.” In order to make sense of the “territory” one needs to move away from its visual representation through a map. Here Korzybski is anticipating what Derrida said later in his philosophy of deconstruction, which posits that there is more than what meets the eye. Man, as a time-binder, has the innate capacity to transcend his limitations and move ahead in life through his analeptic and proleptic visions. But unfortunately many of us do not make any effort to utilize this great gift, and so we suffer and make others suffer. The merit of this great insight from Korzybski will no doubt enable us to live as human beings, with less bickering with the world and with more compassion and hope.

The three-day Workshop in Baroda and the lecture-programs conducted by Andrea and Steve in the States of Maharashtra and Gujarat have brought all of us who took part in these programs, closer together under the inspiring guidance of Balvantbhai, whose dream to spread an awareness of the benefits of general semantics in India has been partially realized. Now that the moment has come to build a structure on the foundation which has been laid by the visits of Andrea and Steve, we need to think ahead and to strive to erect the structure as a testimony to the great vision nurtured by Balvantbhai for the last 25 years.