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**Teaching English Language and Literature in
Non-Native Context**

Smita A. Mujumdar M.A.

The Goal of This Paper

There are varieties of English but English literature produced by the native speakers or writers has remained an important, original, standard and accepted variety of English.

At the same time, teaching English literature and literature written in English by non-native writers also has gained importance and worldwide recognition. This literature has become an important phenomenon of English in current global scenario.

Literature has been included in the syllabi of higher education since long time and it is continued even now. In many parts of the world today, there is a great demand for English language learning as it is a language of international communication of business, commerce, science, technology and higher education. However, the fact is that English language teachers face certain difficulties and problems in non-native contexts.

Therefore, recognizing the need of the significant role of an English teacher and literature, this paper attempts to discuss the need, difficulties and remedies in teaching English literature in non-native contexts and finally makes a statement on the importance of literature.

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Teaching of English Literature: Need, Purpose and Importance:

It is seen that all over the world, the study of English literature is included in educational system even in non-native English-speaking countries such as India. It would be better to examine first, why English literature is studied and being taught even in their non-native identities.

The reason for the need and purpose of study of English literature may possible in its increasing reputation as the literature of world language. With this, the native English Literature is considered essential and important as part of the learning process of the English language. It might be learned and studied for its literary aspects, to know and enjoy, English in original native expressions and to be acquainted with the works of great literary masters.

English literature has always been looked upon with high regards for its variety of subjects, style, reflection of life and magnitude. Mostly the aesthetic beauty and the utility of language proficiency is the main reason behind the inclusion of literature in language study.

Difficulties, Problems: Facts:

But In teaching English Literature in non-native contexts, the teachers and learners face certain difficulties and problems due to cultural, racial and linguistic differences. British or English cultural references are not known or familiar to the learners and hence many times they do not understand the matter as is viewed by the author.

This cultural aspect includes all such factors like geography, topography, climate, history, religion, social and personal relationships, habits of thoughts, social values, moral codes, arts, sports and entertainments and so on.

Next is racial difference or difference of attitudes and of certain assumptions. Racial prejudices about the writer or about his country may become an obstacle in having proper understanding and learning of English Literature or literature of any non-native language.

Then the literature produced in long past with past references and ideas may create misunderstanding in the minds of learners as to the relevance of such materials. Such works are seen to be outdated topics to learn.

In addition, if the learner is not familiar with the history or social upheavals of that country (England), with such references he may feel it all strange and even out of his range of understanding.

Moreover, on the part of learner, if his linguistic ability is not much developed, he faces difficulties in following the meanings and usages at the syntactic, verbal, lexical & other linguistic and other stylistic levels in that work.

Sometimes the huge size of the original work, and the obscurity and clumsiness of expressions in the literature prescribed become an impediment. Some other times, the inability of teachers to deal with the prescribed book hinders the process of comprehending and so learning it properly.

With all such reasons, problems arise and teaching of English literature can become a challenge in non-native contexts. For example, snow, frozen ponds, winter and craze for spring are common in the description of English literature that are not shared by Africans. Likewise the biblical references and Latinized words and allusions in Milton's poetry, social & royal occasions of 18th century England in Pope's poetry and bombastic language use of classic writers may create aversions of English literature in an inexperienced foreign learner.

The Question: How to Overcome This?

Then the question arises how within the total field of education, can the study of literature make its maximum contribution? How far is the study of literature significant and relevant in the process of education?

The answer can be made positive, provided certain precautions are taken and improvements are made in the methods of teaching, learning and selection of works for study. Teaching literature can develop language skills and perceptual ability among the learners if it is taught properly or with willingness to change methods as per new demands.

Teaching Methods and the Role of Teacher:

The traditional methods of teaching are lecture methods wherein we find one-sided discourse of the teacher and passive response or blind acceptance by the students. Much is left to the imagination of the teacher and the students, and, if possible, upon the interpretative ability of the students.

In new methods, the teacher's skill in making the learner feel the experience of the writer contributes to effective learning. The teacher has to have ability to apply new techniques suitable to the learning of English literature in content-oriented and language-oriented aspects. The teacher has to train the minds of the learners to grasp the writer's vision, approaches and the beauty of language as well as the use of new words; he requires such new skills.

The teacher must have an ability to connect the non-native aspect in the content and language with real life situation.

Changes in Focus of Learning

In the new world of changing global requirements, the methods are to be modified by the teacher while educating the students. Teaching English Literature in non-native contexts involves the linguistic skills competence and the human value systems of the concerned society. Globalization now has altered the objectives of teaching English into skill based, self- learning, professional and unicultural concerns.

Relation between Language and Literature

There is close and firm relation between language and literature. Teacher must understand this relation and be ready to change the traditional methods. The modern techniques, use of materials like audio-video, participations in seminars, live interactions, preparing students for diverse source of information on their own, developing the skills of synthesis of knowledge among them, such methods are to be followed to remove the cultural and linguistic barriers and make the learning more fruitful.

Use of Video aids can give visual information of unseen places and references to make them more familiar. The advanced information of the topic on Internet enriches the teacher and learner to equip himself before dealing with the topic.

For this, the teachers and institutions must have new perspective and vision, new approach and readiness to change. Teaching thus can become easy and interesting even in non-native contexts.

Importance of Literature – Its Study and In the Syllabi

English language is no more the asset of native users or writers only. Non-native groups, crossing the national, racial and cultural borders, have been generating a kind of sensibility and yet a separate identity in the use of English language and in creative writings. A sense of ownership of this language has grown. In such non-native perspective, English is not a monopoly of only the native speakers and writers. Although English literature by English native speakers is great, literature produced in English by non-natives is of no less value. It has global and universal quality and circumstantial significance.

In the view of Prof. C.D. Narasimhaih, the pioneer of Commonwealth literature studies and Scholar-critic, "Marvels of creativity during past hundred years are seen which has slowly reversed the literary traffic from Euro-centric world capitals to the unsuspected nooks and

corners of dark countries of Africa & densely peopled India, where anyone can feel a country belongs to him by right of vision” (Narasimhaiah: 1995:7).

Literature is Universal

In fact, literature is such a phenomenon with its wonderful universal appeal and artistic literary qualities that it needs no exact knowledge and information of the culture or the society it belongs to. Literature could be enjoyed for its great literary values and universality.

The teacher has to become a good communicator, for example, in the teaching of the famous poem *Daffodils* by Wordsworth. Even if the flowers Daffodils are not seen by people from other countries, the gaiety and the scene of golden flowers dancing merrily can be shared by anybody. The reader of Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* needs not to go to the sea or to South Pole to see the bird albatross. Real work of art and proper selection and effective methods of teaching can make the learning interesting and comprehensive. If one learns literature with perception, he can learn even more.

“The real great work of art achieves a higher result and acknowledgement by readers and learners. A work of art worth the name awakes nine principal emotions (sthaibhav) in us and any number of fleeting emotions through its causative imagination and ultimately generates ‘rasa’, the legitimate end of work of art. It may be seen that ‘Alhada’ (pleasant experience) is the immediate purpose of literature and then the reader reaches to transcendence.” (Narasimhaiah, 1995:8).

The Utility of Literature

This is the purpose (Prayojana) of literature and literature renews this function from time to time; the work of art achieves a higher quality. Such work of art goes beyond all cultural, racial, linguistic barriers to be enjoyed.

The teacher must aim to achieve this purpose of literature fully. The students of languages and literature in college and universities have to learn to perceive through alternative readings. They must be taught to read with proper perception.

The study of literature can be used to extend the range of perceptions of all senses of sight, smell, touch, hearing etc. In the field of drama, literature can make a fundamental contribution to ‘sensory & motor’ (physical) activities, through which human body can be trained to expose itself.

The teacher has to train the minds of learners. The training of emotion and intellect is possible through learning literature. Literature enables learners, readers to develop their feelings in an appropriate way. It also creates social awareness, religious sense and morality sense.

The study of literature develops keen sense of value. "Literature thus provides unlimited fields of experience. Its study is useful as it confronts the student with the opportunity of dealing with an endless stream of fresh and unpredictable experience. It is an excellent preparation for later life." (Moody: 1971:13). Above all, if humanity is the subject matter of literature; it transcends any cultural or linguistic level.

Students in Developing Nations

The students in developing countries are now willing to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries in the process of globalizing. Thus, work of art of higher quality has the power to remove these differences and enable people to think of literature and give holistic view of life. It is wisely said in Uganda some years ago, "Through the great writers you will inherit more fully the spirit not of white men or brown men or black men but the spirit that has no colors, the spirit of man" (Warner: 1990).

Thus though the functional and technical aspect of the English language is much thought and considered of greater significance than the study of literature, the raw material of literature, is language itself, literature thus has all the functions that can be performed by language. Literature is something more than language Therefore, the inclusion of literature in the courses of higher education in both literary and linguistic points of view is essential even in native and non- native contexts.

Insufficiency of Language Skills *sans* Values through Literature

In this world of mixed cultures, attitudes, and ideologies; only teaching language skills at practical or commercial level are not sufficient. In order to create and promote human qualities, philosophical mode of thinking, ethical and moral literary outlook and holistic view of life, teaching of literature is must.

The processes of creating new icons in different languages and of developing new connections between countries culture, races, and colonial societies have been started. The aim is now to have the ideal and holistic view, through the study of literature for any discriminate learner who values imaginative experience regardless of country or culture.

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