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Creative Writing in Language Classes

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Only in some limited sense, creative writing is encouraged in the composition classes of Indian languages and English, both in high school and college levels. My focus here is on possible avenues to improve the course content of such composition classes in Indian languages.

Indian Languages Curriculum and Minimal Focus on Creative Writing

Indian languages curriculum has begun to take notice of the functional aspects of communication that can be carried through Indian languages in modern days. For example, some attempt is made to encourage students to write some letters and reports during composition classes. Use of administrative terms and skill in developing official communication and writing business letters, etc., are not yet fully integrated into the syllabus.

The curriculum continues to focus on inculcating a desire to read, appreciate and enjoy literary works such as poems, essays and some stories. The goal appears to emphasize the learning about the past glories and achievements of the linguistic group whose language the students study as first language in their curriculum. Another goal is to impart moral instruction and ethical ways of

living through the learning of traditional didactic works that are usually presented in poetic forms of various kinds.

Ethnic history, love for mother tongue, skill in reading and interpreting medieval and classical works, appreciation of religious compositions, etc. take precedence over other things.

Allot Time for Creative Writing

That language is an important tool to create literature and for sharing experiences among individuals and groups is yet to be fully recognized. My desire is that a good number of class hours should be devoted to the learning and mastery of techniques and strategies of creative writing and for actual writing of some creative pieces every year by individual students and by groups of students working together as a team.

Great Literature and the Role of Inspiration – An Impediment for Practical Writing

There seems to be an underlying assumption in our Indian languages classes, including English classes, that creative writing is an individual effort left to the individuals to take the initiative to learn and practice on their own. It appears that we all assume that creative writing is only for those who are specially equipped with some inherent abilities, bestowed upon them through some inspiration or the other. There is no doubt that great creative writing is always a product of inspiration, drawn from various sources, both familiar and mysterious.

Fortunately, it takes all sorts of writing to build a body of literature of any nationality. Not all are equally inspired or skilled. And yet all works created and distributed do affect one section or the other, if not now, some time in the future through some discovery of merit. Moreover, reading tastes of individuals do differ from one another. Preferences of both content and form do differ from one period to another. Every literary genre or form has its own admirers and readers.

Need to Cover All Aspects of Writing

As teachers of languages and literatures, we have the responsibility to impart knowledge of all kinds of writing skills to our students, including creative writing. It is likely that many of us are not good at creative writing, but we may be good at identifying what is good creative writing. We've acquired through our reading some literary sensibility that helps us define and identify good literary works. We are also given skills in identifying the structure of good and indifferent creative works. So, what is needed here is the building up of our knowledge and understanding of creative writing based on what we already have.

Free Writing and Creative Writing

Creative writing and free writing have many similarities. When a student in the third grade (third standard) is asked to write 7 sentences on "cows", the student is asked to do some creative

writing as well as some free writing. Such creative or free writing, unfortunately, does not find favor with us in higher classes.

Free writing may be imaginatively done on a given topic, but creative writing goes beyond this level and demands some smart or clever structure to underlie what is written. Free writing may adopt simple language constructions. Creative writing also will and should adopt simple language constructions to possess inherent readability and easy comprehension. However, the narrative constituents will bring in many features that directly contribute to the aesthetic delicacy of the written material. These elements do not consist only of metaphors, similes, and other literary devices. Potential for multiple interpretations in an easy manner, for example, is part of our skill in using the language, apart from its creative basis anchored on to the content of the story.

Fictionalizing Personal Experience

Helping our students to fictionalize their personal experiences or events observed or read in newspapers, etc. is an important step. This does not mean that such fictionalization has to be always in first person. Actually, it is a great skill to fictionalize one's own experience without revealing that the narrative is a product of personal experience. Several strategies for this may be offered to our students.

Strategies to Learn

Selection of good content is followed by various strategies applied on the selected content. We can come up with our own interpretation or rewriting of the selected content and apply strategies to build the content into a readable narrative with literary sensibility. Present our writing and discuss how this could be improved, eliciting ideas and actual words and sentences from the students. It may be better to focus on such strategies in some graded steps.

Let us encourage them to write in simple and plain language, using ordinary examples from ordinary language. Most students may try to sound very bombastic in their writing. They would like to show off their skills and talents in using various “niceties” of their language. They may also simply imitate and borrow from well-known authors.

Slowly but steadily, let the students realize the implications of writing for an audience, even when their desire is to express their own views and their life's experiences.

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