

THE USE OF LITERATURE AS AN IMPORTANT WEAPON FOR TEACHING OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract:

This paper aims to define the literature, teaching of prose and poetry and emphasizes the use of literature as an important weapon for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. writing, speaking, reading and listening) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation). It also explains that the study of English literature is a desirable item in any sphere of life and education. Moreover, the teaching of language skill's benefits are obtained through different genres of literature (i.e. poetry, short fiction, drama and novel) and some problems encountered by language teachers within the area of teaching of English can be solved through literature.

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Each artist makes use of an appropriate medium to express his experience. Thus a painter uses colour, the sculptor uses stone, a musician uses sound and a dancer uses movements of the body to convey their experience to us. In the same manner, a literary figure makes use of language as the medium to express his experience. In the beginning, Literature existed in spoken form, because there was no written language. Afterwards, when the written language was developed, literature face book begin to be preserved in the written form. Literature of a period reflects the moral, social, ethical, imaginative and affective life of the people of that period.

Custodio and Sutton (1998:20) explain that literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore.

Thus English literature is a record of the social, the cultural and affective life of those who makes use of English language for self-expression. And those who make use of English for self-expression are not bound by geographical boundaries.

Maley (1989:12) lists some of the reasons for regarding literature as a potent resource in the language classroom as follows:

1. *Universality*
2. *Non-triviality*
3. *Personal Relevance*
4. *Variety*
5. *Interest*
6. *Economy and Suggestive Power*
7. *Ambiguity*

WHAT IS LITERATURE?

It is absolutely right that literature is the reflection of society and of time. Literature is not a sheer record of anything. Commonly books and writings of artistic value are called literature. In other words, literature comprises writings that are valued as works of art, especially fiction drama and poetry. In a composition course, whose reading content is literature, students make inferences, formulate their own ideas, and look closely at a text for evidence to support generalizations. Thus, they learn how to think creatively, freely and critically. Such training helps them in other courses which require logical reasoning, independent thinking, and careful analysis of the text (Spack 1985:719).

There are approximately four elements into this or that form of literary art-

- (i) **The Intellectual Element-** The thought which the writer brings to bear upon his subject and which he expresses in his work
- (ii) **The Emotional element-** The feeling which his subject arouses in him and he wants to rouse up in us.
- (iii) **The Element of imagination-** It is infecting the faculty of strong and intense vision and by the exercise of which we also develop a similar power of vision in ourselves.
- (iv) **The Element of a style of composition-** The produced matter has to be moulded and fashioned in accordance with the principles of order symmetry beauty and effectiveness.

"Literature" according to Mathew Arnold's much discussed definition, "is a criticism of life" but this can mean only that it is an interpretation of life as life shapes itself in the mind of the interpreter. The French epigram hints the mark. 'Art is life seen through a temperament', for the mirror which artist holds up to the world of him is of necessity the mirror of his own personality. "Personal experience", it has been rightly said 'is the basis of all real literature'.

Now, the question is whether those who learn English language in colleges in India should be introduced to English literature. Collie and Slater (1987: 3-6) support the inclusion of literature in the language classroom as it provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and help contribute to readers' cultural as well as language enrichment. These advantages, they move on to assert, can be achieved provided teachers use the relevant and the appealing material to learners through the use of activities that promote involvement, reader response and a solid integration between language and literature. There are many who believe that it is unnecessary to introduce literature to our student. Our aim in teaching English is to develop language skills among the learners and so it is waste of time to make them learn literature. This attitude is not acceptable because of the following reason:

First, English languages are taught in educational institutions as one of the subjects of formal education. Its teaching should be in perfect harmony with the general aims of education .one of the most important aims of the education is to help the learners to adjust themselves effectively with their environment, so that they may live in harmony with their fellow beings. If a student of English language is introduced to English literature, he puts himself in the position of its authors, he identifies himself with them and he is made to feel that their problems are his own problems. As a result of this, his attitude to the world is refined. He becomes tolerant and friendly. He is brought out of his native shell of selfishness, narrow-minded nationalism, and parochialism. The life and the work of the leaders of our freedom struggle speak volumes to

prove this and so it is clear that the student of English language should be introduced to English literature.

Secondly, through the study of literature in general and English literature in particular, the character of students will be well shaped. It has often been said that the crown and glory of life is the character. Literature being the record of the ethical God of the ethical, moral, cultural, imaginative and affective life of man, those who go into its depth will be inspired and influenced by it. A student who is exposed to good literature will be a man of good character in their life. It will keep them in good stead in their life. They will play their creative and constructive role as useful citizens when they grow up.

Thirdly, if English language is taught to our student along with the literature, they may develop a love for literature. This love for literature is useful to them mainly in two ways. First, it will develop in them the habit of reading literature. They will be able to make use of their leisure time to read good literature. This habit of reading literature goes a long way to make their life happy. Secondly, most of our students who learn English in India do not get a chance to have language experience after their education. If we are introduced to learn literature during their college days, they will continue to read literature and this will provide them with good language experience which will be of great help to maintain and even improve their proficiency of English.

In sum, literature provides students with an incomparably rich source of authentic material over a wide range of registers. If students can gain access to this material by developing literary competence, then they can effectively internalize the language at a high level (Elliot 1990:198).

The Students of literature will appreciate it when they understand the original text. So they must be motivated to go to the text and discover for themselves the experience expressed in it. The student may be helped to achieve his objective by asking them appropriate questions. The questions should be framed in such a manner that in their attempt to answer them they may be led into the heart of the literary work and appreciate it as a whole.

What is Prose?

In its ordinary and practical sense, Prose is the sustained use of language as we ordinary speak it. Prose is difficult from verse. However, the lack of meter does not mean that prose has no art or aesthetic sense. The writing of distinguished prose has as developed much later than written verse. Good prose has high aesthetic value, and it can fully make use of all figures of speech. Good prose can also have high poetic cadence too, as the prose of the Bible.

Many forms of literature are normally written in prose only. They include long social, religious, scientific, or metaphysical treatises, essays, prose romances, novels, short stories, biographies, autobiographies, memories travelogues, adventures and literary criticism. The world of short fiction acts as mirrors and illuminates the human lives (Sage 1987:43). The inclusion of short fiction in the ESL / EFL curriculum offers the following educational benefits (Anogul 2001:11-18):

- Makes the students' reading task easier as it is simple and short when compared with the other literary genres,
- Illuminates the students to write short stories.
- Makes the peers to analyze the theme of moral values, love, despair, friendship etc.

TEACHING OF PROSE

The prose text prescribed for college classes consist usually of essays, novels, short stories, fiction and modern dramas. They form the core of English courses in Indian university education Moreover, short fiction, like all other types of literature, makes a contribution to the development of cognitive analytical abilities by bringing the whole self to bear on a compressed account of a situation in a single place and moment (Sage 1987:43). In our country a post-graduate holder with no professional training could become a college teacher. He begins to teach his students more or less the same way he was taught. The old and out of date lecture method is followed in our educational institutes with sacramental sanctity to teach any subject including English. As a result of this attitude a college teacher who comes to teach a novel lived, the characteristics of the age, the life of the novelist, his works etc., etc., after having completed this long and scholarly discourse on the backward of the novel, the teacher begins to interpret and explain the content of the novel. The same method is followed to teach the drama and essays. Suppose one of the essays prescribed for the study is by Charles Lamb. The English teacher begins class with an accurate account of Romanticism, the life and works of the important romantics, the life of Charles Lamb, his literary associations, his works, style etc.

When this long lecture about the author is over, he begins to read each sentence of the essay explaining each word and structure. Anything that can be asked for the examination is given more importance than the other. When this interpretation and explanation are over the teacher begins to dictate notes. It is at this stage that the students become serious. They write the notes, memorize and reproduce them. This is the traditional method of teaching prose in our colleges.

This method emphasizes the importance of the role of the teacher. The teacher does the "work" and the students are passive recipients. Teaching the text becomes a process of spoon feeding. It is rather a process of coaching the students for the examination than teaching them English.

Another defect of this method is that too much importance is given to "background" information and the content of the teaching material. It may be argued that this "background" information may be useful to understand and appreciate the text. This may be true of the advanced student. But even in their case, it is not necessary to spend time on this by the teacher; because it is better that the students are directed to reference material in the library to gather this knowledge.

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four important language activities which a student of English language is to do. But at present English is a library language in India. It follows that reading skill is to be given more importance than the other skills. So, the important aim of teaching English prose to our students is to develop the reading skill.

Now, the question is whether we should develop the habit of loud, slow reading or silent, fast reading in our student. If the teacher reads aloud, asking the students to read the text as they listen to the teachers reading, students get the meaning of the passage more easily. Moreover, it will be a sort of support for the students and create in them a sense of self- confidence. Slowly the teacher may withdraw his support so that the students may read independently.

Education is a preparation for life. So the process that goes on in the classroom must keep the students in good stead when they face "real life". In real life, the kind of reading they do is silent, fast reading. In the light of this fact, our aim of teaching prose may be modified as the development of the habit of silent fast reading with understanding.

A good teacher should take appropriate measures to avoid these obstacles before the lesson is presented to the class. The introduction by the teacher should remove all these obstacles, especially linguistic obstacles and should create in them a desire to read. A successful language teacher will make a framework which will help him to lead the students to the text. He may narrate an anecdote, or talk about something that was taught earlier. Another technique that can be used effectively is to kindle the curiosity of the students by asking questions which will direct them to the text. When the students are made eager to read the text the teacher removes the linguistic difficulties. He must select the words which may cause difficulties to the students when they read the text. These vocabulary items can be of three types:

1. 'Ad-hoc' Vocabulary- They is words which are important in the context. The students may not need them for their use. They are not likely to use them outside the context in the text.

2. Passive Vocabulary -The students are likely to meet them in speech and writing. So they will have to recognize them. But they are not necessary for their use 'in life.

3. Active Vocabulary -They are words which will be of use for the students in their life. It is the responsibility of the language teacher to help the students overcome the difficulties caused by the Ad-hoc vocabulary and the passive vocabulary. As it has been mentioned earlier, the ad-hoc vocabulary is not of any use for the student outside the context. So the duty of the teacher is to get them out of the way as early as possible. A common technique is used to achieve this is to gloss them. A word may have more than one meaning or different shades of meaning. In glossing ad-hoc vocabulary the meaning in the given context alone need be given. The passive vocabulary items must be taught with a little more tact and care as these are words which the learners will have to meet within their life. In the introductory talks, these words may be used several times naturally and in meaningful contexts. As the teacher uses them, they may be written on the board so that the attention of the students may be drawn to them. The teacher may also provide the students with their meaning either in English or in mother tongue. If mother tongue is used, care may be taken to limit its use to the minimum and to the teacher. In other words, the introduction should be brief, striking and natural. The next stage is the exercise by the students.

Exercise by the students is the most important part of the lesson.

When they answer the questions, they may sometimes make mistakes in grammar and content. Over-emphasis on correctness may make them different. It is the responsibility of the teacher to develop a sense of confidence in his student. After oral discussion, they may write down the answers. Even before the oral discussion, the students may be asked to write the answers to the difficult questions in their books. This answer they may read and discuss.

Next, the active vocabulary and the important grammar items are to be dealt with. There are different techniques to teach the vocabulary items and some of them have been already described. In the teaching of the active vocabulary, the best technique is to use the words naturally, in a meaningful context.

After this, the teacher takes up the teaching of grammar. The Teacher should decide which the important grammatical Construction worth teaching is. The teaching of grammar should take

use of the context provided in the text to build a sound knowledge of the behaviour of the language.

No teaching is complete without making sure whether the exercise has been productive, or whether it has resulted in learning. This is done by administering tests to the class. This test can be oral or written. An attempt is made to test the student's achievement in comprehension, active vocabulary items, and grammar. Short answer questions, multiple choice tests, filling up the gaps etc, can be used for this purpose. The result of the test may be communicated to the learner so that it can be a feedback for them. Finally, they may be given some home work, basing on the lesson that they have done.

What is poetry?

The dimensions of poetry are so extensive and all- embracing that it is well-nigh impossible to confine it within the limits of a definition. However, in board sense, we can say that poetry is an imaginative and aesthetic re-creation of the world. The Greeks called the poet Vates which meant a maker or a creation. The Greeks believed that after God, the only creator is the Poet. The creations of the poet are more beautiful, more powerful and more appealing than the objects of the world which he recreates. As such, poetry is deep- rooted in beauty, knowledge and wisdom. Aristotle termed poetry as "a speaking picture with the end to teach and delight." Holding the same view Philip Sidney says in An Apology for Poetry: "Poetry is of all human learnings the most ancient and of most fatherly antiquity, as form whence other learnings have taken their beginnings." So Matthew Arnold says, "The future of Poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay." The best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us a nothing else can.

TEACHING OF POETRY

Prose is taught to develop the communicative skill of the learner. Poetry cannot be taught for this purpose. The aim of teaching a poem is to enable the learners to understand and appreciate it as a piece of art i.e., to enable the learner to appreciate it in the same way he appreciates a good picture or a good statue, Nobody will try to appreciate a statue by cutting it into pieces or by going into the details of the life of the artist who has made it. As Cubukcu (2001:1) mentions, poetry is a rewarding and enjoyable experience with the properties of rhyming and rhythm both of which convey "love and appreciation for the sound and power of language."

But unfortunately, the traditional method of teaching a poem over-emphasizes the importance of the biography of the poet or the age in which he lived. The teacher of poetry begins his class with this background information and then he goes to the content of the Poem. He reads each line and tries to paraphrase it. He loads the mind of the learners with a lot of secondary materials.

These traditional methods of teaching poetry are to be discouraged because of the following reasons:

1. The practice of giving the learners a lot of background information about the poet's life, his age etc. will not help the learner much to experience the poem as a piece of art. If at all this background information is necessary to understand and appreciate the poem, he can get it from books. Then why should the teacher waste the valuable time of the class on these unnecessary details?
2. The primary duty of the teacher of poetry is to help the students feel the poem in its totality. When have they this experience of the poem? They themselves will go to the secondary materials for greater and richer experience. A good teacher knows that he should not do for his students anything which they can do for themselves. Further, it is not his duty to squeeze out every drop of significance from a poem.
3. As stated earlier, a poem is a piece of art like a good painting. So it has to be preserved intact if it is to give the experience which the poet wants to communicate to the readers. If the teacher goes on to explain the poem word by word, or tries to paraphrase it, the students cannot and will not go into its depth and share the experience expressed by the poet.

Sarac (2003:17-20) also explains the educational benefits of poetry as follows: provides readers with a different viewpoint towards language use by going beyond the known usages and rules of grammar, syntax and vocabulary, triggers unmotivated readers owing to being so open to explorations and different interpretations, evokes feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind, makes students familiar with figures of speech (i.e. simile, metaphor, irony, personification, imagery, etc. due to their being a part of daily language use.

Everybody will not appreciate a piece of art in the same manner. It has been found that there is a degree of variation in the appreciation of the same poem by different readers. A teacher of poetry must always bear in mind this individual difference. Another important point that he has to bear in mind is that for the proper appreciation of a poem a student must have a seriousness of purpose and a certain degree of acquaintance with the language of the poem. So it is the

responsibility of the teacher to motivate the students and to remove the difficulties that may prevent them from appreciating the poem.

The introduction given by the teacher to prepare the students for their exercise should aim at clearing the linguistic difficulty and motivating the students. The teacher should make use of a proper "framework" into which he could incorporate all that he wanted to say about the poem. The language items and even some of the complicated part of the content which the teacher thinks to be essential for the appreciation of the poem are fit into this "frame-work". There may be some "cultural" and "intellectual" difficulties to be cleared by the introduction. If the understanding of the poem hinges on any difficult "structures", the teacher should try to impress the implication of this structure on the mind of the students by giving examples and making the students see the implication for them. Complicated figures of speech and literary terms may also be incorporated into the "frame work". After this brief, informative, inspirer introduction which makes the students "want" to read the poem, the teacher moves on the "presentation" stage.

The essential element of presentation is the loud reading of the poem by the teacher. A poem is meant primarily to be heard. It has often been said that a good reading of a poem is worth half the lesson. Poetry is "the darling child of speech, of lip's spoken utterance: it must be spoken: till it is spoken, it is not performed, it does not perform, and it is not itself." (Hopkins's letter to his pungent brother). These words throw light on the importance of loud reading of poems. A Good teacher of English poetry should be familiar with the rhythm and intonation pattern of English language. The model reading by the teacher should help the students to experience or feel the poem in its totality rigout going into other details. To see it the students have this experience, they may be asked a few general questions on the poem. The teacher of poetry shall never be dogmatic and insist that his version is the only right one. The students are asked to read the poem silently guided by the teacher reciting it slowly and loud. Then the content of the poem is elicited from the students by a question-answer method. The questions should be formed in such a way that the students are put in direct contact with the poem. They are helped to understand the poem for themselves and to draw out the meaning. If the students are not able to give the answer by the first reading, they may be permitted to go again and again to the poem to find the correct response. The texts prescribed 'for college classes may contain the questions that can be asked for this purpose of the questions are not suitable, the teacher must modify or complement them. Care must be taken to arrange the questions in a sequence of priority and they must be suggestive. The following type of questions may be used:

1. What is this poem about?
2. How many are there in the poem? (People, event)
3. What are they?
4. What do you know about them?
5. Which line in the poem tells you that.....?
6. Which word in the poem tells that.....? etc.

Thus the teacher helps the students by means of his questions to discover what the poem is about and how the poet is able to say what he wants to say.

Conclusion: Literature plays an important role in the English programmes of many non-English speaking countries. However, there are some problems encountered by language teachers within the area of teaching English through literature. The teacher has an important role in teaching English through literature. First, he should determine the aim of language teaching in relation to the needs and expectations of the students which means Student-centered. Moreover, since the students spend most of his time in the school/college, it is the teacher's duty to insist them to talk in English and he/she can be a little multilingual so as to express some terms in the student's language so that he/she can sustain the student to converse in English

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that the study of English literature is a desirable item in any programme of education. In the fields of Higher Education, it is essential that the students are introduced to English literature. But some people object to this because they maintain that the students of Indian universities do not and cannot appreciate English literature. If the student does not read and cannot appreciate English literature, the solution does away with literature, but to study the problem and suggest the suitable solution.

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