

Teaching Literature in 21st Century Pakistan

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Abstract

The methodology through which literature is being taught poses significant impact on the young mind. This paper aims at studying pedagogical ways and means of teaching literature in Pakistan and attempts to explore the useful and pedagogically beneficial way of teaching literature. In the current scenario, it is necessary more than ever to see what impact teaching of literature is making on the young minds in the context of different ideologies being propagated through literature. Pakistan is a postcolonial state with the legacy of post-colonialism and is passing through the most critical period of its socio-political history where teaching of literature needs to be re-evaluated and re-adjusted for harnessing maximum benefit of teaching literature. The study discusses teaching of literature under the lens of teaching methodology provided by Freire, which stresses that teaching is done to liberate the minds of the young instead of simply making them banks, it may provide a better world view to our students to be more adjustable in the world community instead of getting alienated. The study suggests the need of change impinging on the shift from banking to liberating concept of teaching to help produce liberated minds to make our society more tolerant and a better fit in the comity of civilized nations.

Keywords: Literature, Banking, Liberating, Fluid Times, world View, post-colonialism

Introduction

In the current postcolonial, postmodern and post 9/11 world, the teaching of literature has assumed a new multidimensional role in making up the minds of the individuals, especially in the countries like Pakistan, that have taken much of the effect of the aftermaths of the above said “posts”. The current scenario suggests that teaching in literature needs to be effective to reap benefits of literature. Jose and Galang (2015), while discussing the role of teachers in teaching literature, suggest that they always need to develop ever new strategies to make their teaching (Jose & Glang, 2015).

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Since the postcolonial scenario, literature has been used as a tool to establish and extend a more hegemonic control over the minds of the people through teaching their culture and religion and later on attempts have been made to use literature to voice the opinion of the oppressed and the weak; and in the recent times, literature is used to develop discourses and counter discourses by a particular class to work on the known or unknown agenda of various interests. When teaching of literature is seen in this context, it becomes even more necessary to revisit and revise the strategies being utilized in teaching literature. “Effective teaching does not only involve the utilization of tools, techniques, and strategies but also the comprehension of meanings specifically on how students learn, process information, motivates themselves, and the things which hinders learning” (Jose & Galang, 2015, p. 42)

Almost every nation aims at influencing the minds of the young through teaching literature at the university level. It is because teaching of literature, classical as well as modern, to the young student is exposed to a healthy and positive debate about the socio-cultural aspects of society. Chambers and Gregory (2006) attempted to explore the kind of connection between the teaching of literature and the society and suggested that this “connection students can make with literary works that contribute to their overall education, to the development of their minds and knowledge” (p. 11). Elaine Showalter, on the other hand, says that when English literature became a course of study at University College London in the 1820s, its purpose was to moralize, civilize, and humanize. In the United States, after the Civil War, literature was viewed as a repository of moral and spiritual values, bestowing a sense too of a national culture and heritage (Showalter, 2003). Similarly, Chambers & Gregory are of the opinion that now teaching of literature should be “such as ‘do seminars, not lectures’ or ‘do workshops, not seminars’, but to discuss a ‘global’ approach designed to help teachers help students think more deeply than they might about the possible uses and value of literary study” (Chambers & Gregory, 2006, p. 11). In Pakistan, as well, similar aims and objectives of literature prevail. But this aim cannot be achieved unless teaching methodology is appropriately designed for the inculcation of such aims. Işıklı and Tarakçıoğlu suggest that among the problems in EFL literature teaching - low motivation, lack of confidence, inadequate teaching methods, exam stress, under-qualified teachers, insufficient in-service training - students’ proficiency levels have been always standing out as the most critical reasons for poor performance of teaching literature (Işıklı and Tarakçıoğlu, 2017). With the passage of time, reasons expressed by Işıklı and Tarakçıoğlu, have caused a gradual downfall in the development of critical thinking and freedom of debate on literature in Pakistan. Moreover, the choice of materials and course content was done by the British during their colonial rule and very few revisions have taken place. This problematizes the situation because the British choices were based on their motives of strengthening their rule. It is, therefore, very

pertinent to debate and expose the reality working behind the whole scenario which hinges on the failure of literature to bring a positive change in the minds of the youth.

Research Questions

Following questions are addressed in this paper:

1. Why does the teaching of literature not result in the improvement of critical thinking process of students in Pakistani Universities?
2. How can teaching of English literature be used to promote liberal world view and critical thinking?

Methodology

This study is focused on critical evaluation of teaching literature in Pakistani universities. The researchers have endeavoured to raise and answer the question as to why teaching of literature does not result in the improvement of students' critical thinking process at Pakistani universities. For this purpose, an analytic approach was adopted. Relevant published literature, including research papers, reports, documents etc., was surveyed and analyzed to arrive at the results. The insight extracted from these relevant materials have been employed to critically evaluate and to analyze the strategies of teaching and the choice of material in the class and an attempt is made to explore the reasons as to why teaching of literature in Pakistan has not been fully harnessed to bring a socio-cultural change through its effective teaching.

Rationale of the Study

It is observed that literature is one of those forces which may be used to serve the humanity better as compared to many other political discourses and if literature loses its efficacy and utility in creating harmony among the people in Pakistan and outside Pakistan, it is feared that as a subject English literature may lose its significance very soon resulting in deprivation of humanity of a powerful humanizing and civilizing source. The critics and theorists have been debating postcolonial, postmodern, and post 9/11 developments in literature and have been developing discourses to shape and reshape the identities of people who encounter each other because of migration and world mobilization of capital as a result of globalization. Very little attention has been paid to the outcomes teaching and learning literature in the class room and especially no attention has been paid to the selection of contents of literature to achieve the desired results in the age of the above said political and cultural changes in the world. This is even more specifically complex in case of countries like Pakistan where the contents are selected by following the traditions and selections of the developed world, without realizing the needs of Pakistani society and the issues it needs to grapple with. So, it is important to initiate the debate on efficacy of teaching English literature and the role of the scholar/ teacher in this regard in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Raja (2008) points out while establishing relationship between the course content and the way it is taught that “only a deeply radical pedagogy can attempt to transform our students’ received knowledge into a sort of global politics of care” (Raja, 2008, p.33). Teaching is an art which if accomplished truly develops critical thinking, for which socio-cultural approach of teaching is more effective as compared to the Transmission theory because “teaching should take place through questioning, but also because there is room for feeling” (Dickfors, 2015, p. 6). Same is the case with Paulo Freire, who suggests in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970),

“Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization” (Freire, 1970, p. 86)

He suggests that we are not simply to provide the information to the young ones but also enable them to think and question the validity of the belief system around them. According to him this is the only way through which we may be able to reduce the number of oppressors in the world. Freire (1970) suggests that we need to make radical shift from banking style of teaching to liberating style of teaching if we need to reap the real benefits of teaching literature.

Pakistan, being a postcolonial state naturally inherited some of the conflicting areas of its national life and shared certain oppression at the national and international level and this oppression, explicit or implicit keeps on living. As Loomba (2005) says, oppression is still going on as a result colonialism is also going on. Pakistan, being a special case is the victim to it and provides an explanation as to why Pakistan is still a victim of oppression. Not only this, the education system is also responsible for a continued existence of oppression. Our system of education prepares students as data and information banks rather than the thinking minds and so the half-baked students suffer from fear of losing their possessions which are actually not their own and so becomes a semi-oppressor. The classes literature should have performed otherwise as “Mark Bracher suggests that a literature class can be a perfect place for enhancing or reshaping the public aspects of student identity.” (Raja, 2008, p. 33)

Zhen in his study on teaching of literature to the EFL classes proposes that literature of every nation is its encyclopedia of civilization and culture and is a very vivid picture of the spiritual and cultural customs, history and ideology and so,

literature is very close to social customs of the society. And when a teacher teaches literature, he can “enable the learners to learn about culture in the relatively natural way” (Zhen, 2012, p. 36). Zhen also supports the idea that teaching literature means exposing the learners to the value system of the society and with due process the teacher helps the learners develop their response to these values. He says, “These values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom” (Zhen, 2012, p. 37). Same is the opinion of Robert Eaglestone who says that, “Teaching and learning a subject involves more than knowing about a list of texts, equations or processes: it teaches ways of thinking and approaching material, it teaches habits of mind” (Eaglestone, 2018, p. 4). The above discussion proposes that in Pakistan, above referred aims has not been realized and so approaches of teaching employed to teach literature need to be scrutinized. This critical understanding may be helpful in revisions of the courses and teaching methodologies. This research delimits to the causes of and remedies for the poor outcomes of teaching literature in Pakistan.

Findings and Results

In this age, the student needs to be taught as per his socio-political needs. Raja while introducing his course on postcolonial theory proposed that “I use my cultural background and the knowledge of my students’ culture to create a sort of cultural in-between-ness that usually helps dispel their hesitance and eventually assists in building the teacher-student trust needed to create a better learning environment” (Raja, 2008, 33). This cultural in-between-ness becomes a tool in understanding and absorbing even those cultural items of the foreign cultures and enables the learners to identify the issues and socio-political problems of their own culture.

But the scenario becomes even more complex about teaching of English literature in Pakistan because the students, who join these classes, aim at getting good degree which will ensure their success in job market. As a result, very little change takes place in their minds and attitudes after reading all the wonderful writers in their respective syllabi. Similarly, very few of the students have a good opinion of other foreign civilizations discussed mostly in the classical English literature. For example, they will not be ready to think positive about the western culture portrayed in different pieces of English and American literature being taught in Pakistan. This problematizes the whole situation and invites to debate the question as to why the Pakistani students do not change in terms of Longinus who claimed that a good piece of literature does elevate and ennoble the minds of the reader. The Pakistani student remains similarly prejudiced, unconcerned, and resistant and resilient to the culture portrayed in pieces of English literature used in the class rooms for academic purposes. He does not feel comfortable with the culture, men and women portrayed in the English literature books and is not ready to give any space to the other cultures of the world.

Discussion

The answer to the above debate may be seen in the following aspects of teaching English literature in Pakistan at Graduate and Postgraduate level. Firstly, in the context of above analysis and debate about teaching literature, one possible way to evaluate teaching of literature and the role of scholar-teacher of English language or literature is to see the environment in which literature is taught. Pakistan may generally be termed as a relatively a less liberal society and there is a little room for question. This environment implies much about the failure of literature to achieve its real purpose of development of young mind. This may count for the comparative inability of our youth in accepting the other cultures and understanding them.

Secondly, a critical evaluation of the scholarship and learning of literature in Pakistan provides a good critique not only on literature but also on teaching of literature and its outcomes. Since 1970s, the emergence of new forms of literature, like postcolonial literature, the aims and objectives of teaching literature have become highly complex. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, much of the reading of literature started to be done under the umbrella of dominant political philosophy and, so for the first-time courses regarding women and African writings were included, which resulted in additions into the objectives of teaching literature. For example, Showalter says,

“Minority groups, women writings and African writer began to question the existing paradigms and “their efforts heralded a paradigm shift in canon formation and literary studies generally, and a repudiation of formalism in favor of a more engaged and partisan reading that saw the goal of literary study as the formation of personal identity and political struggle” (Showalter, 2003, p. 23).

Thirdly, all teaching is literature, yet, in the context of Showalter, it is teaching of poetry, drama and fictional literature along with the postcolonial, modern, classical and neo-classical literatures. According to Showalter, teaching in literature is no more that simple, especially in 21st century in which teaching literature(s) “demand more flexibility and less specialization” (Showalter, 2003, v). One of the useful idea is that the boundaries of past traditional method should change like our teaching and learning literature may be accompanied with singing, dancing and even going theater for these very texts. A similar opinion is voiced by Muller (2011) that unlike the recent past, when literature was an enjoyable practice among the families, today, it has become a tool in the hands of different power agencies to make learners understand their culture as well the culture being represented inside the pages of literature.

Fourthly, as Muller says that we are living in a liquid modernity which demands of us to take things as were not taken in the solidness of the society. Everything is changing with so rapid a speed that it makes difficult for us to challenge the whole situation. It has also challenged the teaching of literature because literature

now has to wrestle with the popularly growing social media, cinema, cell phone and other distraction (Muller, 2011). So, this establishes the significance of the methodology through which literature is taught in the class room and encouraged in these liquid times and if literature is still capable of performing such task as of changing of the minds and the behaviors or making a change in the minds of the readers or the students of literature. A teacher, according to Baker, is required to deliver knowledge in a technical way to inspire critical knowledge (Showalter, 2003, p.6).

Fifthly, teaching of literature does not render the same fruit as it may because of the teacher's attitude while teaching in the classroom. He should rather take his teaching as his job and try as much to make it professional- by making it as much research, practical and academic oriented as possible. The teacher should realize the difference between the way text is read and the way a text is read for research. This attitude can help get the desired result of teaching of literature not only in Pakistan but also all around the world. Showalter comments that "we should re-conceive our pedagogy to make it as intellectually challenging as our research" (Showalter, 2003, p.11). A teacher, according to Baker (quoted in Showalter, 2003) is required to deliver knowledge in a technical way to inspire critical knowledge. Teaching of literature does not render the same fruit as it may because of the teacher's attitude towards teaching in class. He should rather take his teaching as his profession and passion, and try to make it as much research oriented as possible. Muller also points out that literature helps us in understanding the other subjects as well because the student of literature develops a capability of relating the stories of literature with the stories of the other subjects (Muller, 2011).

Sixthly, in this age when cross-culturalism is a rampant norm and the world is changing accordingly, the role of a literature teacher has become even more significant in creating understanding among his students. Karim adds that "in our developing society, English literature can serve as a powerful medium of facilitating learner-centered paradigm shift for creative and critical thinking nourishment, increasing language competency and interculturality simultaneously" (Karim, 2011, p. 293). The awareness and need of this utilization of teacher's skill has assumed even larger significance because of the multiple cross cultural and intercultural conflicts and differences. The teaching of literature should, therefore, focus on the goals of achieving global egalitarian relationships, especially among the cultures where greater diversity tends to create greater cultural shock. According to Karim (2011), the benefits of literature are not coming the way they should because of the teacher being embedded in local ideology and culture so strongly that he tends to ignore the egalitarian aspect of literature. He says that the task of the literature scholar has become even complex in the presence of anti-European/American narrative developed around the students in the presence of war on Terrorism. So, in one way, the task of reaping right fruits of

teaching literature falls on the shoulders of the teachers. They should be sufficiently empowered to develop the critical thinking among their students and making them responsible citizens, as is believed by Shaila and Trudell (2010).

Seventhly, this age is also the age of multiculturalism and demands of further improvements in the teaching of literature. Gaytri Spivak, postcolonial critic and theorist, according to Daniel O'Gorman (2012), proposes the concept of “planetarity” which demands of blurring of disciplinary boundaries between literature and Geography. Daniel O'Gorman further refers to Spivak and says that “she contends, the very concept of ‘reading’ texts at university will remain inextricably bound with the antiquated notion of literature as ‘explaining’ or ‘cultural instruction’, with any comprehension of the ‘globe’ being possible only in the language of the local” (O'Gorman, 2012, para 1).

Conclusion

The argument suggests that the age when it has become more than ever necessary that our youngsters should develop a better world view, we are not making concrete efforts in this direction. The most common reasons for this are the old and obsolete teaching methodologies which can be fit only in a stagnant and non-progressive society and hence yielding to the oppression of the worst kind. The need of the time is that the Pakistani scholar teacher must become research oriented and adopt gradually a liberating concept of teaching which depends more on problem posing and solution seeking techniques as compared to the banking concept of education, as propounded by Freire (1970). According to Freire, the traditional method of teaching is like making learners as teachers’ banks of information which the learner pours out in the examination and hence he or she undergoes no change because none of his critical thinking faculties are challenged in the process of teaching. On the other hand, if he or she is taught through liberal approach of teaching literature in which he becomes an equal partner and a co-sharer in understanding and discussing literature, the teacher of literature can be more successful by helping his student identify the socio-political issues with literature being taught. A Liberal/socio-cultural approach to teaching involves the students whole heartedly and so they are able to ask questions and debate the questions raised in the class room. This debate may raise the critical thinking which is necessary to reap the true benefits of teaching literature.

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