



## TEACHING ENGLISH LITERATURE TO THE INDIAN STUDENTS

**DR. ANUPAMA SAGAR WATKAR**  
Sarhad College of Arts, Commerce & Science  
Katraj, Pune – 46 MS (INDIA)

### ABSTRACT

*When an Indian student learns English literature, he does not inherit ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge of the English culture. The teacher and the learner both have no share in culture and tradition of English people or people where English is spoken as a mother tongue or as a native language. Learners are unknown to the literary traditions also. Most of the things like architecture, movies, art, the way people relate to one another in families, the social values and the sense of humour that people share are not much known to the teacher of literature or to the student, because they are not born in the culture of the English language.*

*English literature teaching gives the opportunity to the teacher to compare and contrast the two cultures and civilizations. The comparative study of literatures expands the understanding of students from national to international – from individual to universal. The ELT students can be guided to have some idea of culture beyond their own and draw useful and significant inferences and thereby enhance the insight of the students. Thus, the teacher has to connect literature and culture to make ELT teaching delightful and useful.*

*The goal of English literature teaching should be to increase proficiency when English language is being used across India. It concerns intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability. It should lead to international communication through interactions. Students may be exposed to varieties of English from many different parts of the world where English is spoken like UK, the US, Ireland, Australia, Canada and New Zealand which will help them to know the international character of the English language and the English literature.*

**Key Words :** *Culture, literary sensibility, insight, communication, proficiency*

The study of literature is valuable for the student of any faculty and for each and every person. When students learn a foreign language like English, it serves multiple purposes. It introduces students to new ways of thinking and viewing the world. Works of English literature provided to the students in the Indian universities is either in the original version or sometimes produced by publishers in simplified versions.



In the Indian situation, the purpose for teaching English literature is to improve command of the learner on the English language as an international language. And so, the selection of passages or lessons to be taught in the English literature class should have reflections of the culture of the learners. When an Indian student learns English literature, he does not inherit ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge of the English culture. The teacher and the learner both have no share in culture and tradition of English people or people where English is spoken as a mother tongue or as a native language. Learners are unknown to the literary traditions also. Most of the things like architecture, movies, art, the way people relate to one another in families, the social values and the sense of humour that people share are not much known to the teacher of literature or to the student, because they are not born in the culture of the English language. And so the question is raised whether any literature can be enjoyed without actually visiting the country where it is produced? Knowing about cultural aspect is important while learning any literature. The student living in India is awarded Ph.D in English literature for the study on some British or American writer, which sounds to be somehow superfluous. Because the student does not know the way people behave in England or America. Naturally the interest in English literature remains to be limited. Moreover the student does not think English literature useful for his own life. Anyway, there is curiosity to learn about the English culture for the Indian students.

The fact remains that conversations with native speakers regarding the favourite sports, the current government, writers and outstanding national events are to be made known to the English literature students only through the books like history of English language and English literature. Thus, the language of the teacher and the learner remains to be bookish. It does not retain any cultural flavor.

*‘Our students join English courses for various purposes – to enhance their social mobility, status, matrimonial prospects, prepare for competitive examinations and the few to enter and appreciate magical world of English literature and thereby enrich their literary sensibility. A good number of them are “immigrants” or “leftovers” from other faculties – would – have – been scientists, doctors or engineers’. 1*

The majority of the population in India does not speak English. Only educated people speak it. That causes a difficulty in learning English literature. Of course their difficulty, to some extent can be overcome by visiting the native countries and study the lives of the indigenous people. For the student of English literature learning English language, studying the English culture and then studying English literature are the steps to be followed. The learners go through a phase where they think of the new culture as having everything that is good or



mission from their culture. The question also arises whether the English literature teaching acts as a motivation to keep learning.

Teaching any literature is to teach the culture of that literature, and culture goes on changing with the generations. The English literature teacher has to only generalize the things in the classroom.

The way out of this situation for the teacher and learners is to take help of the sources of information about English culture which include the course book, films, the news on television or radio, literature in general, tourist brochures and papers, magazines in the departmental library, the internet, international visitors and newspapers particularly letters to the editors and cartoons.

It is generally anticipated that the students of B.A. (ELT) and M.A. (English) can communicate through English. It is a fallacy. In Indian Universities students from vernacular mediums join the B.A. (ELT) and M.A. (English) classes. They are tested or examined by the Universities not for their communicative skill but for the skill of writing mainly. Naturally the thrust of English literature teaching is to give knowledge and information regarding the English society, their culture.

In the above existing scenario, while teaching English literature in the classroom through prose and poetry, the teacher has to be a counsellor for the students. It is imperative that the teacher of English literature should make the use of audio-visual aids available in the language laboratory and ask the students to refer to the books, magazines and available literature in the departmental library. Language laboratory and the Departmental Library can be arranged in the same room. With the help of Language Laboratory (if the audio-visual reading is recorded) a native speaker may be asked to read the poem with feelings, emotions or thoughts coming through it. To develop the interest of the students in the English literature - learning dramatization of the plays in the syllabus should be followed. Pair work, group work, tasks and projects are also to be followed. Films throwing light on the social, political and economical development of English people and the people wherever English is used should be made available for watching. The teacher may inculcate universal values in life through English Literature to the students. ELT teaching also gives the opportunity to the teacher to compare and contrast the two cultures and civilizations. The comparative study of literatures expands the understanding of students from national to international – from individual to universal. The ELT students can be guided to have some idea of cultures beyond their own and draw useful and significant inferences and thereby enhance the insight of the students. Thus, the teacher has to connect literature and culture to make ELT teaching delightful and useful.

Literature, even ELT is to be taught through language.



*“We must recognize that language is the foundation on which literature is built and without a language sensibility there is no question of understanding or appreciating any kind of literature. To those who do not have basic language competence is like building the ceiling without the walls and the foundations”. 2*

Some say that the most difficult area of literature is to appreciate poetry in a foreign language like English. To make the poetry teaching easy and interesting students may be asked to dig for the sources of the metaphor, imageries and symbols in the poem, collect the information as to what sort of people in society are being written about and find out whether the themes are universal or country specific.

Literature improves learner’s language. ELT study leads to the improvement of the learning of English. While teaching prose and poetry the students should be asked to analyse the style of the writer. It will involve the students to look at the effect the writer tries to create. The tension, the sustainable interest and the surprise in the literary writing are to be analysed by the learner under the guidance of the teacher. At the under graduate or post graduate level discussion among the students should be encouraged on prose and poetry. Even the abstract ideas in literature gets cleared through discussion under the guidance of the teacher.

Listening to the music concert, building up personal library by the teacher and visits to the churches, attending the Christian festival and reading the Bible are certain habits to be cultivated by the teacher and the learners of ELT. For background references in ELT these habits help a lot. There is always difference between the language in real life that people use in actual speech communication or conversation and the language used in the variety of fiction and poetry. The students of ELT in India communicating with people in England or America will be surprised at the overlap between literature and conversational language.

If literature is taught merely to pass examination then naturally it destroys the pleasure in learning ELT, because the examination seems to be like more of struggle than a way of enjoying literature. Real study of literature without the burden of examination takes the students to another world opening up to him in the long term.

Thus, the goal of ELT teaching should be to increase proficiency when English language is being used across India. It concerns intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability. It should lead to international communication through interactions. Students may be exposed to varieties of English from many different parts of the world where English is spoken like UK, the US, Ireland, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, which will help them to know the international character of the English language and the English literature



## REFERENCE

- (1) Singh, Avadash Kumar, 'Between the Metro and Municipality :Contemporary Teaching of English literature in India' in Studies in ELT, linguistics and applied linguistics" Edited by Mohit K. Ray, Atlantic Publishers & Distributers, 2004, New Delhi – 27 p. 31.
- (2) Krishnaswamy, N. and Krishnaswami Lalitha, "Teaching English", Macmillan, India Press, Chennai, p. 213