

Teaching Poetry in ESL Classroom through Integrated and Communicative Approach

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English language and literature has seen revolutionary changes from the past few decades. The earlier teacher centric teaching methodology is now regarded as outdated, irrelevant and incompetent for understanding language skills as well as mastering foreign or 12 language. The growing body of teaching methods and also with the advent of digital pedagogy, language classrooms are day by day assimilating, adopting and practicing wide range of theoretical frameworks to make teaching-learning an iterative and successful exercise. English, being the world language receives wide attention, in both academic circles and theoretical spheres across the globe. Today, we find a perfect matrimony of different interdisciplinary and interconnected disciplines- linguistics, anthropology, psychology, philosophy and so on, drawing insights from varied concepts in order to have a cohesive, reliable and objective analysis of a literary text. The present day teachers can analyse a literary text from various analytical perspectives such as new criticism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, deconstructive reading, reader response theories and a vast number of postcolonial, cultural and minority discourse. A new and widely emerging stylistic analysis of works of art is also gaining momentum in the 21st century. Similarly, several methods of teaching are presently operational for the classroom teaching such as direct method, audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching and to note few more like suggestopedia, silent way and blended learning. When we talk about poetry, the role of these theoretical developments becomes more challenging in the sense that poetry uses strange diction and lofty style in order to express noble thoughts.

Keeping above arguments in mind, this paper is an attempt to analyse Kamala Das's poem, "Punishment in Kindergarten" in light of the underlying principles of integrated and communicative language teaching, to demonstrate how English language teachers can promote interactive and goal specific language teaching-learning activities in an ESL classroom.

Keywords: *communicative method, analysis, effectiveness, punishment in kindergarten, imagery, simile*

I.INTRODUCTION

Literary texts offer variety of interpretations. It is an admitted fact that theoretical and methodological knowledge of how these texts could be effectively decoded depends mostly on the resources, teacher appropriately uses in the class-room. At the advanced stage, literary analysis of a work is carried out by using broad literary theoretical background. Literary theory, however, is so replete with philosophical concepts and also the ambivalence of language, makes several teachers to switch-over to other traditional and outdated methods. Regarding the honest and sensible interpretation of a text, language teachers, once familiar with literary theory, can explore different layers of meanings in a work, each interpretation based on some assumptions from theoretical and practical criticism. Linguistics, the study of language, also provides an essential and much needed rationale and practical impulse to the study of literature. As language and literature, two different fields, yet their natural connection and tendency to answer certain fundamental questions regarding nature and power of language, ideological positioning of myriad cultures and more importantly, literary stylistics, a branch of applied linguistics going deep into the semantic and syntactic alignments of the sentence formation in a literary text to show how style and structure, form and manner, art and artist, cooperate in the making and co-generate an imaginary world whereby, lifting readers to the exalted state to form aesthetic judgments.

The same inquiry, if applied to the language teaching methods reveals no other genesis and history of evolution than afore mentioned. The field has evolved gradually, encountering several odds and finally emerging ever refreshing like a new spring dawn, blowing gentle breezes in all directions. From the chunks of grammar translation method to the onset of digital technological revolution, human mind has so widened its horizons that enable us to see things in multiple ways. Today we have bulk of language teaching methods, dealing exclusively on effective classroom communication, making way for promoting all the four skills pertaining to understanding of foreign or L2 language. The paper however, is not any critical endeavor to account detailed analysis of all these methods, but is just an effort to venture into the workings of the Communicative Language Teaching by exploring its basic tenets by taking Kamala Das's poem, "Punishment in Kindergarten" into consideration.

II.DISCUSSION

When the teacher follows an integrated and communicative teaching approach, incorporating a set of text-based, student-centred activities, which as Collie and Slater (1987) "add fresh momentum into the teaching of literature by stimulating students' desire to read and encouraging their responses." Activities like predicting, gap-filling, creative writing, role playing, media-transferring, etc. not only establish an interface between language and literature leading to communicative exercises but also create a challenging classroom situation in which students

try to put, with a competitive spirit, all their available resources into action. (qtd. in teaching poetry in school classroom).

The list of activities mentioned above, gives us an impression that a successful teacher in a literature classroom must combine in himself/ herself the intuitive response of a practising literary critic and the analytical tools of a practical linguist. When he/she carries this kind of textual-linguistic enquiry, taking guidelines from sound teaching methodology, the classroom will generate infinite ideas among the interactive groups. These ideas can be further polished and organized to make comprehensive understanding of the text. An integrated approach to teaching literature demands an adaptation and application of at least three principle domains or fields- literary theory, applied linguistics and sound teaching methodology. Since, literary texts do not possess a single meaning and are drawn from multiple sources; as such the single approach will limit the literary horizons of a text. In order to reach to the indeterminacy of a work, the teacher-students' endeavor must rest on these three domains, making use of literary theory and practical linguistic analysis as the theoretical foundation while as teaching method/methodology to work as a catalyst for easy, effective and honest synthesis, with the main aim to generate new and creative ideas. This reminds us of Roman Jakobson's important utterance made at the Indiana Conference some 40 years ago.

All of us here, definitely realize that a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unacquainted with linguistic methods, are equally fragrant anachronisms (Jakobson, p. 23)

Jakobson, here, stresses the need for both poetic and linguistic interpretation of a text and by ignoring these functions of language, would invite a kind of fallacy, because foisting a critic's own tastes and opinions on creative literature, cannot serve as substitute for an objective scholarly analysis of a verbal art. The terminological confusion writes, Jakobson, of 'literary studies' with 'criticism' tempts the student of literature to replace the description of the intrinsic values of a literary work with a subjective, censorious verdict. The label 'literary critic' applied to an investigator of literature is as erroneous as 'grammatical or lexical critic' would be applied to a linguist. (Jakobson p. 2). Keeping in view all these views, the final section of this paper will exclusively analyse the poem, Punishment in Kindergarten, using integrated communicative teaching method.

III. PRACTICAL ANALYSIS:

Communicative tasks/activities are so varied that it would be very difficult to appreciate the full implications of CLT through one or two exercises. These tasks include- warm ups, games tasks, given just in the beginning of the class to develop interest in students. One of the important features of CLT is that it encourages teachers to use authentic varied materials such as news paper/magazine cuttings or similar tasks or activities to stimulate student response. Usually all tasks are completed in three stages- pre-task, while-task and post-task. Pre-reading activities may be carried out with a view to warming up students and arousing their interest in the text. Whilst-

reading activities aim at developing a purposeful interaction between the text and its readers. Post-reading activities are conducted to deepen students' understanding of the text and to stimulate thought and discussion of the problems arising out of the text.

In what follows, we shall try to illustrate how an integrated approach enables a teacher to teach communicatively Kamala Das's poem, "Punishment in Kindergarten", prescribed in higher secondary part-II syllabus by JKBOSE.

(A) Pre-reading activities:

This session is aimed to stimulate students' responsiveness and encourage their pro-active role in the classroom. Before students read the text, it is often helpful to involve them into activities that will create the right attitude for receptivity stimulating students' responsiveness to the text and a willingness to read it. The activities require the students to employ their experience of the world as well as their imagination and intelligence, in order to guess from text properties, what may happen in certain situations. Some properties of the text which may be used for drawing inferences are the title, illustrations, warmers, key words, language exercises etc. (qtd in teaching poetry in classroom)

Title:

The title of a literary text is always pivotal in addressing subject related and thematic issues. In order to arouse students' curiosity, the teacher may first introduce the title of the poem to the class before dealing with the text exclusively and ask students to predict what is going to happen in the poem. The questions asked should be both closed and relatively open ended. As an example following questions may be asked to the students regarding the title:

- (i). Is the title a single word or a group of words?
- (ii). What is the sentence structure of the title?
- (iii). What does it denote?
- (iv). What could it possibly connote?
- (v). Can you predict, on the basis of the title, what is likely to happen in the poem?
- (vi). What makes certain incidents memorable in life? Discuss in groups of six and present your group's views to the class.
- (vii). Is the poem going to be a description of some childhood punishment?

The students will make several predictions about the title, 'punishment in kindergarten'. Each student whether working in groups or individually has to be involved in the process of decoding. Many people have painful memories, and recollecting them usually involves relieving the pain or humiliation of that particular event. As poets such as Wordsworth would say, childhood experiences form a vital part of who we are and what kind of adults we become. The students working in groups will write their responses to the above raised questions. The teacher, after getting the students' response may explain different aspects of the text. He may organize and polish these ideas in order to have an unambiguous reaching out to some common understanding, linking students' previous knowledge with the new learnt content.

Illustration:

Having discussed the title, the teacher may present an illustration that giving a pictorial view of the text under discussion. An illustration can provide important clues for predicting the content of the topic of the text. Many texts have front-cover illustrations, some graded selections accompany every text with a picture. If an illustrated text is not available, the teacher may get an artist to prepare an illustration:

After distributing the copies of the illustration, the teacher asks the students to derive as much information as possible about the setting of the poem by closely examining the details.

The illustration of the text, "Punishment in Kindergarten", should show a green pasture, surrounded by flowers and bushes probably a picnic spot, where most children are playing and sipping sugar cane except one, standing under bushes while an old blue frocked lady with angry looks talking to her. In the background, the shining sun spreads its rays in all directions, making the day very hot.

The illustration should follow the questions like:

- (i). What impression do you get of the playing children?
- (ii). Who is the blue-frocked woman?
- (iii). Why is she angry towards a particular child?
- (iv). What hurts more: physical punishment or harsh words? Why?
- (v). List some synonyms and antonyms of words 'punishment' and 'kindergarten'. Do you find any connection between these words?
- (vi). Try to find out as many details as possible of the setting of the poem from the illustration.

Warmers:

Pre-reading activities can also be carried out with the help of some one-line warmers picked up from the text or chosen from maxims, proverbs and quotations that are closely related to some aspect of the content and theme. Warmers facilitate open discussion and help elicit predictions of what the text is going to be about. They encourage a response to the theme and prompt a prior personal involvement with the topic represented in the text.

The teacher may take few lines from the poem to initiate open discussion or individual student response. He may ask students to comment on the phrase ‘the world is little more my own’? Or take some authentic news paper/magazine cutting to activate students’ responsiveness and creative powers.

(B) *Whilst- reading activities*

Having performed a set of pre-reading activities learners have brought themselves very close to the text they are going to read soon. The whilst reading activities, therefore, are designed with a view to making the text more accessible to the students by developing a purposeful interaction between the text and its readers. Some whilst-reading activities are:

- i) Listening to a good reading of the text;
- ii) Reading the text;
- iii) Language exercises, and
- iv) Checking against predictions made about the text in the prereading activities.

Students enjoy listening to a text either on a tape or when it is being read out loudly by the teacher in the classroom. Listening helps them to achieve dramatic effect created by sounds and intonations. In order to get to the sound of the poem, a poem must be read aloud to the class. The sound of the words makes the words somehow dynamic. It makes the words alive. The heard words open up and disclose subtleties of meaning vaguely felt in the silent reading.

It is now for the students to read the text individually or in pairs or groups. After reading it once or twice, they prepare a list of new words which is likely to include the following:

Punishment, kindergarten, blue frocked woman, pots and pans, honey-coloured day, peculiar, clusters, sipping, sugarcane, mirth, sun-warmed hedge, muffled and steel-white sun

The teacher will help the students to find the meanings of the listed words as they are used in the text. She/he will use these words/phrases in different contexts by making sentences. The teacher will also show the syntactic arrangement of these words, keeping in view the metaphorical use of language in poetry.

During reading session of the poem, the students will come to know what the poem is actually all about. The textual analysis will help them to check their earlier response and teacher will guide them to substantiate their pre-reading response with the new/actual learning. This will help students' to consolidate their knowledge with textual references and clear earlier doubts, misunderstandings as well as enhance their knowledge through various kinds of associations. Reading the text may be viewed as a kind of surface interaction which, through further activities at the post-reading stage, will lead to a deeper understanding and a fuller appreciation of the text. The while-reading session may be surface interaction as:

“The poem we are going to dissect and deconstruct is called “Punishment in Kindergarten”. The poet begins the poem by making a distinction between ‘today’ (i.e., the present) and the past. As an adult, she still does not feel as though the world is her own, but it is a little more her own than it was when she was a child. Note that although she says that there is no need to remember the pain caused by a careless adult who mocked her for her tendency to keep to herself, the poem itself is an act of recollecting that event. The next stanza speaks of the tendency of children to be cruel to others. The curiously joining of the two different oxymoronic words ‘flowers and the pain’ evokes two states of child’s nature- innocence and experience. Similarly, concluding stanza again moves to the present. The repetition of ‘no need to remember’ reinforces the paradox that the poem itself is an act of remembrance. The final image of the poem, ‘the steel-white sun standing lonely in the sky connects the speaker with the sun.’”

(C) Post- reading activities

Post-reading activities are carried out with a view to creating an appropriate situation for the learners to express their reactions to reading the text. The principal aims of these activities are:

- (i) To deepen students' understanding of the text;
- (ii) To generate interest in the creative use of language; and
- (iii) To provide opportunities leading to further interaction.

On the basis of the aims and objectives, post-reading activities may be divided into several sub-categories which are:

- (i) Comprehension questions;
- (ii) Language exercises; and
- (iii) Creative activities

After the second stage is over, the teacher may present advanced level of interpretation of the text to further deepen students' understanding and generate their interest for the creative use of language. He may also give them home assignment which he will collect next morning or asks students to collect each others for peer-correction/edit each other's writing. In this session, the issues raised in first session, answered in second session may be further deepened by engaging students to some advanced stages of knowledge. Some of the hints are given below:

“The poem is very simple in its construction and even colloquial in diction. Yet in its delivery it is very much like the narrative of a film which goes back and forth in time to narrate a tale. The poem is written in three stanzas, each having different number of lines. The first, with seven lines, the second, with six and the third with nine. The poem does not follow any regular rhyme scheme. The subject matter of the poem has two parts, the first of which being the description of a painful experience of the kindergarten days and the second, the adult's attitude to the incident at present when she is no more a child.

Let us first start with some of its obvious features. On the first reading, this poem reads like any poem of recall. It is a poem about memories that refuse to go away, memories that intrude into speaker's inner self insistently. The constant reflection of this stubborn memory establishes a connection between past and present. There is shifting of tense from present to past and past to the present. The past becomes many kinds of past so does the present. The line 'today the world is little more my own' is in present tense but the very next line 'no need to remember the pain' becomes past as it evokes the time present in the poet's mind. It is distinct time outside, the time which we measure in units of seconds, of minutes, of days and of years. The reference to 'a blue-frocked woman' takes us back to the days gone by, when the speaker was a child. The image of a blue-frocked woman' is in the present of the past. It is in the past of the present. It is like to see both sides of the coin together simultaneously. The words 'pots and pans' speaks in a wordless gestural way, just as trees, river or flower speaks. The idea of a past that is really a past is now firmly established by the phrase 'that honey-coloured day of peace'. This idea will further get strengthened by evoking the images of schoolmates, sipping sugarcane and so on. This past is alive only in the poet's mind. It is the death of the past that brings about the standstill nature of these images. This past becomes a kind of take off point for the poet to make a self journey right from the kindergarten stage to the adulthood. Against these images, comes out the charged outpouring of a sheer and unhappy state of affairs. The magic of poetry, the spell and enchantment it costs is so much due to the sound of the words. Poetry is never silent so the words are never silent even in print. The most vivid lines are those where she speaks of the past. The poetic voice rises to the highest pitch with phrases, 'throwing words like pots and pans to drain'. All the pent up feelings of neglect and being down valued are given scant respect. The sound of the words makes them somehow dynamic. It is something like the effect made by sight and smell of a flower. The sound of the words, stir the power of association. It makes the words alive, makes them motile. The heard words open up and disclose subtleties of meaning vaguely felt in the silent reading.”

Poetic devices:

In poetry various poetic devices are used to heighten the emotive appeal of the poem. They enhance a poem's meaning, mood or intensify feeling or create rhythm. Some of the poetic devices used in this poem are as:

1. *Imagery*: poetry communicates experiences and experience comes to us largely through five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling and touching. Imagery, therefore, may be defined as the representation of a sensory experience through language. The visual, taste and sound imagery used in the poem are a 'blue frocked woman', 'taste of sugar cane juice' and 'throwing words like pots and pans'. Similarly, 'sun-warmed hedge' and the 'steel-white sun standing lonely in the sky' are images depicting the world of perception. The image of 'steel-white sun,' the furnace of creation, standing alone in the sky is all the more important. The sun, with its energy spread out, stands alone as the symbol of creation. The child imbued with artistic energy too is alone. Thus this last image underlines the universality of artistic alienation.

2. *Simile*: It is the comparison of two different things having one feature common, but using some word and phrase such as like, as. Following simile is used in the poem.

"Throwing words like pots and pans" lines 3 and 4.

3. *Metaphor*: It is the comparison of two different things. It is an implied simile without using words such as *like*, *as* or *so*. The reference to 'blue-frocked woman' in line 3 and 'honey-coloured day of peace' in line 5 are used as metaphors to represent nun/school teacher and childhood days respectively.

IV. CONCLUSION:

Thus, by utilizing Integrated and communicative language teaching approach, students learn different aspects of target language and can use that language both in class and outside of class. Through this method learners converse about personal experiences with partners, and instructors teach topics outside of the realm of traditional grammar, in order to promote language skills as well as subject understanding in all types of situations.

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Appendix:

Punishment in Kindergarten:

(By Kamala Das)

Today the world is a little more my own.

No need to remember the pain

A blue-frocked woman caused, throwing

Words at me like pots and pans, to drain

That honey-coloured day of peace.

'Why don't you join the others, what

A peculiar child you are!'

On the lawn, in clusters, sat my

schoolmates sipping

Sugarcane, they turned and laughed;

Children are funny things, they laugh

In mirth at others' tears, I buried

My face in the sun-warmed hedge

And smelt the flowers and the pain.

The words are muffled now, the laughing

Faces only a blur. The years have

Sped along, stopping briefly

At beloved halts and moving

Sadly on. My mind has found

An adult peace. No need to remember

That picnic day when I lay hidden

By a hedge, watching the steel-white sun

Standing lonely in the sky.