

## MANEUVERING INDIGENOUS LITERATURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CLASSES

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### ABSTRACT

Oral literature was a unifying factor for various tribes to establish civil societies. The 'Veda' is called 'Sruti' as it existed orally. Most of the folk literatures still exist in oral forms. They tell the story of man and nature as the aborigines of the land. The inclusion of such indigenous literature in the curriculum would definitely be a delightful experience for the tribal students in an English Language Teaching (ELT) class.

In most of the ELT classes, it is observed that the teachers never consider their students as 'whole persons'. Whole-person learning implies that the teachers need to understand the feelings of the students, their interests to learn, their cultural and social background as well as their intellect.

In the context of Kalahandi, the tribal students' native language like 'Kuee' and 'Kalahandia' may be used in an ELT class to make the meaning clear and also to build a bridge from the known to the unknown and from familiar to unfamiliar. The tribal students would feel more secure when they understand English clearly transcribed into their dialect. The use of native language can help reduce the threat of the new learning situation among the students. The literal native language equivalents of the English words could be found with the help of dictionaries or that of the local people. This would allow the students to combine the English words in different ways to create new sentences. If the students can translate from one language into another, they will be considered successful language learners.

At the initial level, however, the primary skills like reading and writing may be developed. Little attention may be given to speaking, listening and pronunciation. Learning among the tribal students in ELT classes may be facilitated through attention to similarities between the English language and their native language.

To sum up, it would not be out of place to say here that English cannot be taught in isolation; the indigenous literature ought to be integrated into the curriculum. This paper focuses on the use of grammar-translation method in ELT classes.

**Keywords:** Indigenous literature, whole-person, classroom situation, ELT, LSRW

## INTRODUCTION

Oral literature was a unifying factor for various tribes to establish civil societies. It is the 'East Midland' dialect which marked the beginning of a rich literature in English. In the journey from the hieroglyphics and the cuneiform writing to the multiplicity of languages today, it is an attenuated reality in literature of languages that poets and writers present human consciousness in its virginal simplicity and perhaps in all its protean vitalism and immaculate fecundity. The written and oral literature are closely yoked. Numerous literatures in oral forms are still alive in its pristine purity. It is a perennial struggle of the anonymous writers to keep alive the archetypal expression and innocence of oral literature Oral tradition since its inception continued to exist among unlettered aborigines. It includes ritual texts, epic poems, folk tales, folklores, myths, legends, riddles, tongue twisters etc. The oral literatures are transcribed by word of mouth from generation to generation in a beautiful manner as they tell the stories of man and nature and reveal the mysteries of natural world.

The purpose of oral literatures, however, is to entertain, delight and emotionally bind the listeners to culture and belief which become the very identity of the aborigines. It is believed that language learning ought to be a delightful experience for the students in an ELT class. The observation of linguists revealed that in a large general English classroom not all students will have the equal performance. It is found that most of the students who struggle in ELT classes are tribals as they do not even understand the standard dialect of the province. It's a tough task for the tribal students to learn English through literature that is culturally alien to them. So learning English in an ELT class is a painful experience for them.

In such a classroom situation the prescription of literary texts is one of the necessary ‘evils’ of our curriculum. It is, of course, difficult for an English teacher to select the expected texts for the tribal students out of a large corpus of literature. It is an ‘evil’ as the prescription of the present texts are examination-oriented which ignores the problems, progress and needs of the tribal learners. These texts encourage note taking and rote-learning. The struggling students would never be able to appreciate and interpret the prescribed texts in an ELT class. So there needs to be a room for the selection of texts for the appreciation of a prescribed text for the tribal learners.

It is worth saying here that culturally alien ideas could be demotivating for the tribal students if not taken care of at the beginning. Wordsworth’s ‘Daffodils’ is an example of such a case. The language teacher should judge finally which texts would be appropriate for the language learners. The texts should not be very difficult for which another simpler texts would be prescribed for reference, for example, T. S. Eliot’s ‘Waste Land’. So, the relationship between language and literature is crucial in an ELT class. Literature ought to be used as a resource for the development of language. Duff and Maley agreed with this view in their book *Literature* (1990) “Use literary texts as a resource for stimulating language activities.” It is a fact that sometimes ‘bad’ or ordinary writing is used as a resource by the language teacher for stimulating language activities.

However, in recent years attention has been paid to learners’ feelings or their ‘affective state’ to know about the quality of learning in the classroom. Humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers (1969) and Charles A. Curran (1976) have talked about the ‘Whole learner’. It is studied that the learners bring with them a whole array of personal attributes and feelings. For the development and growth of the learners their feelings are to be respected. As a facilitator of learning, the teacher should ‘make space for the learners’ especially tribal learners through the use of appropriate materials. It is the teacher who need to understand the students’ fears in an ELT class by conversing with them in their native language. When the teacher teaches in the class, he is not teaching a person but the ‘whole person’. Whole person learning implies that the teacher needs to understand the feelings of the students, their interest to learn, their cultural and social background as well as their intellect. When the teacher shares the learning experience of the learners, it allows the learners to get to know each other and to build a community. It is possible to build up a community when the indigenous language is used to make the meaning clear.

The indigenous language may be used as a bridge language. The teacher would translate each word into English for meaning-making. This helps the tribal learners to travel from the known

to the unknown and from familiar to unfamiliar. The students would feel more secured when they understand everything in their native language. So an atmosphere may be created where a desire to learn English among the tribal learners would be strong.

It has been observed since long that the literary texts chosen from the standard varieties of English in ELT classes have a very poor response among the tribal students. This is mainly because of the acceptance difficulty. The students never accept an alien culture and tradition instinctively while learning the second language. When non-native variety is spoken widely in the country, the inclusion of indigenous literature may serve the purpose in ELT classes. The introduction of the indigenous literature and language in ELT class would enhance the tribal students' socio-cultural awareness, sense of self-identify and communicative competence within the community they live in. When the indigenous literature written in English is introduced in the curriculum, the tribal students can easily empathise with that written in standard variety. The pedagogical practices rooted in organic, homegrown traditions is likely to energise the ELT scenario with such innovative curricula.

The integration of indigenous literature into the curriculum would satisfy the learners' expectations and facilitate the attachment of the preconceived notion of their English language acquisition. This may have a positive impact on the tribal learners' enthusiasm.

This enthusiasm and motivation is important in learning a language. The folk literature is good for English teaching as they have social and cultural affinity. Folk talks fit in not only literature but also with sociology, history, religion and anthropology. They are appropriate for listening, speaking reading and writing about the use of folk tales in ELT classes. Taylor (2006: 79) said: "Students learn most effectively when they are working with materials they are attached to interested in, and they are most attached to and interested in materials that are about their own lives or they have composed themselves – that is, some forms of self-expression. Folktales are often an important part of people's heritage and cultural identity."

Most of the tribal students can tell a tale which is spoken in their tribes from generations. The student may be asked to tell a folk tale in his native language first that could be transcribed into English. Initially the students' stories may be included in the curriculum.

In the context of Kalahandi, the folk tales collected by Dr. Dola Gobinda Bisi about the creation of 'Rainwater' from Dampadar, Kalahandi Dhamnia Pragana is very interesting.

When the old earth was submerged and a new earth was created, Bhimraja stored all the water in a pool in his courtyard in apprehension of another inundation. For seven long years there was no water on earth. All the creatures survived feeding on air. Observing the gravity of the situation a Kondh named Mardunga prayed Bhima for water. Bhima told him, "How can I give you water? If I open the cap of the sealed pool there would be a devastation again." The Kondh replied, "You should not open the pool for use for a long twelve months but only for four months in a year which could be sufficient for all." At last Bhimarani told, "Okay. In the month of Asadha during my menstruation, when I take my bath I will open the cap and you start sowing your seeds." And then on the exact day Bhimarani took a bath and there was rain everywhere. The tradition continued and there is the rainy season from that very day.

It is felt that the materials related to the interests and experiences of the students should be included in the curriculum at the initial level of teaching in ELT classes. Folk tales and folklores are such effective means as it possesses the inherent vitality of the indigenous literature. They tell the story of common people and their emotions and thoughts. When the folklores and folktales are brought to the English Language Teaching classes the tribal students would easily be stimulated to learn as their literature is taught in English. Dorothy Dakin (1937) in her book *Talks to Beginning Teachers of English* stresses on the importance of teaching folk songs to the tribal students to motivate teaching poetry. Learning is facilitated through attention to similarities between English language and their native language.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, it would not be out of place to say here that English cannot be taught in isolation; the indigenous literature ought to be integrated into the curriculum. It will, in effect, help learners learn English without feeling that learning English is a daunting task or inhibited by it. It will, I am sure, make learning English fun and real.

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