



INDIGENOUS LITERATURE: EFFECTIVE TEACHING RESOURCE IN ELT CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Having known the fact that mother tongue helps a great deal in second language acquisition, indigenous literature plays an important role in teaching referential and representational functions of communication in target language. Literature, whether canonical or not, can make positive contributions to the language class by being motivating and thought provoking.

It helps in:

- providing meaningful (and memorable) contexts for new vocabulary and structures, thus encouraging language acquisition and expanding students' language awareness
- developing students' procedural abilities to interpret discourse
- providing access to new socio-cultural meanings, offering opportunities for the development of cultural awareness
- stimulating the imagination, as well as critical and personal response, thus contributing to the major aim of educating the whole person

Indigenous literature especially in oral tradition (fairy tales (folk narratives), folk tales, myths, legends and fables) continues to entertain and delight learners, embodying both the emotional and spiritual truths of mankind. The grand narratives like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Panchtantra*, *Jataka Kathas* etc can be used as teaching resources in ELT classrooms for enhancing communicative competence of our learners.

My paper discusses the role of indigenous literature especially oral literature in ELT classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in the globalised scenario should have learner's communicative competence (use of English in a variety of situations, social contexts and professional areas) as the primary objective. Unfortunately our learners are limited to producing formal, curriculum-confined utterances. They never get to know how to exploit and particularly use in their day to day life situations what

they have learnt through their knowledge of formal grammar and exposure to literature. Language and literature are inseparable and their teachings should be complementary to each other. Michael Short's comment in this regard is worth mentioning: "Literature and language teaching should be linked and made mutually reinforcing" (Short and Candlin 1986). Literature studied for aesthetic enjoyment only

and language studied without literary texts; both are insufficient and far from yielding satisfying results.

The literary texts provide rich linguistic input, effective stimuli for students to express themselves in other language and are a potential source of learner motivation. Widowson's claim that 'study of literature is fundamentally a study of language in operation' is based on the realization that literature is an example of language in use and is a context for language use. Thus studying the language of literary texts as language in operation is seen as enhancing the learners' appreciation of aspects of different systems of language organization.

The literature used in ESL classroom today is no longer restricted to canonical texts from certain English speaking countries but includes the works of writers from a diverse range of non English speaking countries and cultures. The works of non-native writers in English are unique in revealing local sensibilities. Mallikarjun (2003) asserts that folk literature which is studied for its intrinsic merit and enjoyment is a powerful educational tool to imbibe values, style of language, and many other important learning items in the minds of learners. We are yet to recognize the pedagogical potential, folk literature offers for creative language curriculum, rhetoric and communication skills.

Folk literature in terms of language pedagogy uses spoken form of language, lexicon and sentence patterns that are more frequently used in daily life and natural form of presentation. However, when the syllabus is converted into lessons for teaching purposes, the prose pieces from folklore undergo major changes in their language. These stories are rendered in standard language retaining only the story line, thus dissolving all the peculiarities, nuances, and imaginative word play it had in its original form. It appears that these are chosen more for their ethical or some such similar values but not as an instructional tool to achieve educational goals relating to language use, concept formation, etc. The curriculum that prepares teachers for the teaching profession does not include a methodology that helps the teachers to exploit folk literature as an important pedagogical

tool. Potential of linguistic aspects of folk literature as pedagogical tool is yet to be exploited.

The narratives told through operas, ballads and songs in our epics; *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Panchtantra*, *Jatakas*, *Kathasaritsagar* are very practical and effective sources for teaching communication skills. The vast plots had much scope in them to accommodate several local stories and anecdotes.

Indigenous literature provides authenticity to the teaching material. The learners take language samples from their own life. It acts as a means of cultural enrichment and acquaints the learner with understanding how communication takes place in their set up. Indigenous literature is representational rather than referential because it involves learners mentally and physically. That makes language learning more interesting and exciting. It acquaints learners with a wide range of language varieties used in different situations, the subtlety and imaginative force of the language and encourages the scrupulous use of words. Besides improving all the four communication skills, it also improves language areas such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc. They learn about the syntax and discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, and the different ways of connecting ideas.

Talking about the use of indigenous methods in language teaching/learning, Wolf and Simo Bobda (2000) assert that the model of teaching English is one of the most hotly debated issues in the field of English as a second/foreign language. They believe it is misguided to think that L1 varieties are inappropriate for a broader international communicative purpose because they are "culturally and geo-politically specific in orientation". They conclude by saying that conceptual diversity, which is realised lexically, enriches the English language, and learners of it profit most if indigenous cultural elements occur alongside native English elements.

Indian culture has emphasized the primacy of 'oral' and 'aural' expressions as against the 'written' or 'textual'. Among the great variety of verbal literary forms such as women songs, ballads, devotional narratives, heroic epics, myths, legends, folk stories and so on, the majority of the forms are sung, spoken

or performed in a variety of social and ritualistic contexts. In a multilingual and multivocal context, the oral often crosses language borders. Imposing Western-literate categories on oral literatures resulted in a failure to understand both the nature and function of the language. Walter Ong has argued that literacy is a 'pre-emptive and imperialistic activity' since it displaces other ways of conceptualizing. Orality uses speech as the dominant medium of communication. It acknowledges the presence of other media but the construction of cultural codes is bound to that which is spoken. Oral performance of stories and poems sustains culture and serves the function of communication.

Pedersen (1995) asserts that oral stories develop listening skills in a unique way. The listeners benefit from observing non-polished speech created on the spot. While listening to stories, children develop a sense of structure that will later help them to understand the more complex stories of literature. In fact, stories are the oldest form of literature. The activities that can be made from storytelling include; comprehension – asking and answering questions about the stories that have been told; introduction of new vocabulary in lexical, rhyming or grammatical sets. Listening activities like comparing, discriminating, predicting, sequencing, classifying and transferring information. Discussion topics can be taken from the story themes. Rewriting, summarizing or paraphrasing a tale could be used in developing language skills.

Indigenous literature especially in oral traditions is of immense value as far as teaching communication skills is concerned. It is for the teacher to innovate and

devise strategies to use the narratives from our native literature as teaching resource in ELT classroom.

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