

New Insights on the Cultural Politics of English Studies: Agenda beyond the Traditional Canon in the Second Language Curriculum Development

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 13:9 September 2013

Cultural Imperialism

The firm establishment of English Studies dates back to Macaulay's Minute recommending English education for the future bureaucrats of the British regime and its cultural imperialism being rendered to its literary and cultural artifacts. The Imperialist Ideology exists within the cultural subjects of the so-called Commonwealth even today, as we still celebrate the need to analyse and interpret the traditional canon without much critical examination of their ideology and agenda in most of our classrooms.

Subaltern Studies Not Yet Accepted Fully

The birth of Subaltern studies has yet to become a reality among the privileged apex of our curriculum developers (Ania Loomba uses this phrase in her article *Teaching the Bard in India* in the book "Subject to Change" ed. by Susie Tharu, 1998:33) as most of us are interested in educating the politically apartheid of the marginalised sections of our society with the tools of language in the limited cultural contexts. The idea of education is always conditioned by the appropriation of the rulers in order to maintain their dominance over the subalterns.

Focus of This Paper

This research paper aims at bringing new insights of the cultural studies perspective by identifying new literatures within our regional cultural hemisphere.

Complementary Processes – Language and Literary Studies

Susie Tharu observes the following in *Subject to Change* (1998:17):

Theoretically, the effort to separate the learning of the language from the study of literature, and the move towards comparative literature, were complimentary. The stress on the separation of language and literature was premised on a hard distinction between the referential/utilitarian function of language and the symbolic/aesthetic one which involved a break from ordinary language use.

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Susie Tharu quotes the analysis rendered by Derrida and compares it with the Russian Formalist position of Roman Jakobson on the distinction of Language from Literature. She is the founder of Literary and Cultural Studies in India. She has emphasized on the ideological conditioning behind the stance of distinguishing the English Language education from Literary Studies. She advocates the rejection of imperialist agenda of our curricular objectives by making the Curriculum of English Literature free from the colonialist agenda and introducing a free access to regional literatures and other subaltern studies through comparative literature.

Politics and Ideology behind Curriculum Development

The idea of Curriculum has undergone radical changes as the contemporary literary theories continue to analyse the relevance of politics and ideology behind the literary and cultural artefacts of our academic discourse. There have been instances of this milieu being branded as political overtones of the privileged apex of academics who want to promote the emerging cultural artefacts of the Subalterns. Some of these Curriculum Theorists are in favour of Language Sciences such as Cognitive Linguistics and Other Schools of English Language Education by claiming to make the Pedagogy apolitical and scientific too. Such a stance proves to be a mere extension of Colonial cultural invasion alive even after the death of the British Regime in India or in the Subaltern Society.

The Politics of Curriculum Design and Development revolves upon the question of social relevance and utility today. It is quite significant to cogitate on both these aspects as the idea of social relevance and utility can always be conditioned by the ideological stances of the course designers or the curriculum developers in general. Most of our career oriented courses may not all the time dwell upon the ideological residues and attempt to fulfill the utility oriented language education such as Business English or other courses offered under the rubric of English for Specific Purposes.

These courses are certainly designed to cater to the needs of the industry which requires cross-continental collaboration. The prospective workforce may be trained to fulfill the demands of the Corporates. We need to understand the agenda of the Curriculum Developers who could attempt to actualise the capitalist objectives without providing critical insights on the nature of the skilled labour. The problematization of the Curricular Objectives reveals the politics behind Curriculum Development. Michael Apple dwells upon the problematization of such objectives in his article *The Politics of Official Knowledge: Does a National Curriculum Make a Sense?*. Teachers College Record (1993:222).

Real Challenges in Our English Literary Studies

Mahasweta Sengupta identifies the real challenge that we face in our English literary studies today by pointing out “the most efficient method of legitimizing their ideology of

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culture” through “the system of education”. Hence there is a reckoning moment dawn at the moment through postcolonial discourse in our education system to make people aware of their colonial bonds affiliated with “the ruling race and class”. Michael Foucault has apparently revealed in *The Order of Discourse* (1987) that

Any system of Education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry.

Mahasweta Sengupta uses this premise in the light of some critical observations made by Gauri Viswanathan on the use of the English Literary text functioning as “a surrogate English man”. It is high time that all of us think about the cultural manifesto inscribed through discursive practices of the British Literature and analyse their colonial extensions even in the English Curriculum studies.

Deconstruction of Traditional Canon to Open Doors for Dalit, Women and Tribal Studies, etc.

The use of Curriculum as a political and cultural manifesto continues to be axiomatic in our academic discourse only when we see the politics of our profession as English teachers beyond just inculcating the immediate particulars of a literary text and its projected value system instead of analysing the critical cultural significance and ideology through their (i.e., the colonial masters’) extending cultural invasion amidst the negligence of our regional literary and cultural artefacts. Therefore, it is vital for our literary studies to concentrate on the comparatist paradigm even in our classroom analysis of these texts by rendering localized icons, subcultures, and the subtle nuances of the episteme.

The epicentre of Contemporary Discourse on the ESL Curriculum Studies deconstructs the traditional canon and also engages us through a process of negotiated curriculum development in order to introduce the vibrant discourses on Dalit studies, Tribal Studies, Women Studies and Film Studies.

The idea of Curriculum is itself politicised to a greater extent as most of the existing English curriculum could end up addressing certain legitimate concerns of a privileged few and serve the purpose of social exclusivity without any remote scope of inclusiveness if ever, we, the curriculum developers, do not dwell upon the possibility of a new inclusive canon through Literary and Cultural Studies and adopt the emerging canon in the academic discourses used at EFL University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Hyderabad Central University in India. The politics of this new canon could continue among our academics as it may signify our free conceptual constructions in our academic discourse of contemporary curriculum theory actualising the nuances of gender politics and subalternity.

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