

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title of The Project:

A Study Of Innovative Practices In The Teaching Of Shakespearean Texts

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Academicians in the Indian Universities have begun to take cognizance of the cultural politics of education at work in the framing of syllabi for any discipline. University curricula- both for undergraduate and post graduate levels have been characteristically governed by the power structures that brought English studies and Literature as a very special discipline to Indians during the time of British rule. Shakespeare in the form of his plays and sonnets is omnipresent in the university syllabi for literature across the country. He is almost a 'given'. At the same time he is the most 'universally' loved writer among the teaching and student community. Conventionally a whole set of ideas get attached to Shakespeare study- a sense of admiration for his comprehensive genius, a sense of awe amounting to difficulty in approaching a writer who belonged to a somewhat distant past and a distant culture internalized through the colonial influence and a yard stick to measure literary excellence by. As a canonical writer Shakespeare was permanently placed on the Indian syllabi with Macaulay's minutes that introduced English education with a definite agenda setting function.

However postcolonial scholarship has adequately exposed the hard facts that form the immediate background to the genesis of English literary studies and the hegemonic Eurocentric intentions at work implicating writers like Shakespeare in the process of manufacturing subservient subalterns whose intellectual dependence on the west was often shaped, ironically by the English literary studies.

It was therefore deemed necessary to problematize this academic convention of canonizing Shakespeare in every syllabus for literature in order to acquire a more informed and politically correct perspective on the study of Shakespeare. Such alternative reading strategies have emerged in the direction of feminist interpretations and postcolonial perspectives in combination with other approaches and ideologies.

The focus of the study is Shakespeare's plays because he is a permanent feature in the Indian syllabi and his texts served colonial intentions which need analysis in the light of two opposing claims- that of globalization and the other seeking cultural decolonization. Since student community in most classrooms is heterogeneous it is left to the teacher to resolve the paradoxical situation. Therefore there is an urgency to map the pedagogical practices employed by the teachers of literature in their engagement with Shakespearean drama .In addition to the Shakespearean texts other media inputs such as film, stage productions and adaptations as well as translations and alternative readings of the texts are available to the teacher and need to be the focus of the research problem.

This research has helped to place possibilities and practices side by side, and has helped discover the extent of innovative initiative possible in classroom interaction .It has been able to articulate concerns pertaining to teaching Shakespeare in the global postcolonial perspective, and

placed important pedagogical concerns in the context of current critical debates surrounding Shakespeare study in India.

A comparative evaluation of practices must begin with a critical look at syllabus formation for English literature at the undergraduate (and postgraduate) levels in Mumbai University in the post-independence period thereby problematizing this academic convention of the dominant Shakespearean presence in every syllabus for literature. The present research indicates how the issue is linked to the perceived functions of English education in India. If English is to serve as a window on the world as some had argued it needs must incorporate diverse writing the world over and avoid transferring a monochromatic world view to the student of literature. Even within the vast field of drama it needs to include perceived parallels among texts that could facilitate debates and deliberations on the genre as well as on literatures that inscribe several different nationalities/cultures.

In my research Innovation emerges as predominantly if not essentially geared towards a decolonizing strategy in the postcolonial classroom that seeks to understand a playwright's work. It is a creative way of weaving around a dramatic situation, in order to comprehend it fully in all possible implications political or sociological, to relate to it from one's personal location, in order to view it in all its hues and human contour.

One could further expand on such tasks by selecting a cross-generic example-a reworked version in film, choose a relatively modern setting in which to view the patterns embedded in the text more bare/d than ever. This is one way to arrest the tendency toward rampant glorification and canonization of certain authors, like Shakespeare, amongst a postcolonial/decolonized learning community. Here, the key question to ask is, what worlds get

mapped/represented in retellings/reproductions? The answer to this would serve as the doorway leading to unexplored/less charted arenas of human intellect and sensibility.

The syllabi of Mumbai university have only just woken up to this long standing challenge/obligation in that, it appears to move towards the aims and objectives spelt out in the model framework provided by the UGC. Are texts being taught with a critical consciousness of alternative reading strategies? Do new perspectives on literature figure in the evaluation strategies of the university examinations?

Findings of my research so far suggest that to trace answers to these questions is to throw out more questions. It appears that the present practices are often inconsistent with the spirit of innovative pedagogy or have a token semblance to the innovative approach/task. It is at times without any real frame of reference/ purpose supporting it. This, results in short-sighted, reductive or merely fun-oriented teaching environments. Even the inclusion of innovative approaches needs to be rooted in the idea of balancing perspectives otherwise it may in itself become a scramble for ideological space. With the sophistication available in the form of e-learning facilities, experimentation and innovative approaches may become easier to adopt. However, ease of access to gadgets does not necessarily mean ease with gadgets among the teaching fraternity. More importantly, it cannot ensure quality of discussions by default. Thus a multidisciplinary approach to Shakespearean studies is urgently required in the classroom to impart a more informed and politically correct perspective on the study of Shakespeare.

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