CHAPTER – 3

RELEVANCE OF TEACHING LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter we need to discuss some of the issues underlying the use of literature in the language classroom. The language teachers in the classrooms at the tertiary level wish to use literature as the main resource, and developing the ‘literary competence has become crucial’.

Ramesh Mohan, the former Director of Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, focuses on this dependence of Indian universities on literature-teaching:

Our university departments of English, through time and tradition, have held the view that their main aim and function is to provide for the study of literature, that the learning of the language, adequate for the study of English Literature or for the study of other subjects through the medium of English should be achieved at school, and that language teaching or any professional training in it was not a proper academic discipline for the rarefied atmosphere of university classrooms

It is this unique situation that has prompted the following theoretical exploration of the relevance of literature to ESL programmes in the undergraduate classrooms in India. In language curriculum, literary texts to be taught in the institutions are in the form of:
(i) Short second-language narratives specially constructed in accordance with carefully controlled and graded linguistic items,
(ii) Simplified or abridged versions of literary classics, or
(iii) Biographies, scientific writings, newspaper articles, and advertisements.

Relevance of Literature

Review of the Arguments in favour of Literature

Most language teachers and teacher trainers feel that literature should be used with students because:

- it is very motivating
- it is authentic material
- it has general educational value
- it is found in many syllabuses
- it helps students to understand another culture
- it is a stimulus for language acquisition
- it develops students’ interpretive abilities
- students enjoy it and it is fun
- it is highly valued and has a high status
- it expands students’ language awareness
- it encourages students to talk about their opinions and feelings

The arguments put forward in favour of teaching literature at the undergraduate ESL classes are worth analyzing at this point. To facilitate a comprehensive overview, the arguments are recapitulated below:

I. Literature enriches the learners’ knowledge of the language system.
II. Literature exemplifies language use.
III. Literature enlivens the process of learning.
IV. Literature provides access to the culture of the target-language speaking community.

V. Literature develops creativity.

VI. Literature paves the way for literary studies.

VII. Literature develops intellectual, humanistic, moral and aesthetic perceptions.

These are the arguments in support of literature; in other words, these are the benefits the introduction of literature is likely to bestow on the ESL learners, and hence form part of the objectives for which an ESL course is designed. However except for the first two benefits that of enriching the learners’ knowledge of the language system and exemplifying the use of language the other supposed effects of literature are of an extremely general and idealistic kind. They fail to qualify as pedagogic objectives, for pedagogic objectives have to be necessarily limited, defined precisely, and within the scope of reasonable attainment. It is difficult to see, for example, how the literature component of an ESL course can be designed so as to develop ‘creativity’ among its learners. It is developed very rarely, if at all, even while learning the literature of one’s mother-tongue.

Secondly, the discussion seems to shift from English Literature to ‘literature in general’. If the objectives are to pave the way for literary studies, to enliven the process of learning, and to develop creativity, there is no reason why these objectives cannot be achieved from the study of any literature, including the one in the learners’ mother-tongue, and not just that in English.

Thirdly, there are a number of other disciplines which might justifiably claim to help ESL learners to acquire knowledge of the culture of a particular speech community and help them develop intellectual, humanistic, moral and aesthetic perceptions. The claims of the sciences of Sociology, Anthropology, History, Mathematics, Philosophy and Fine Arts cannot be easily set aside in this
respect. In fact these are the desirable effects of any branch of education, not necessarily the outcome of any one particular discipline.

Further, the attempt to acquire cultural knowledge and intellectual, humanistic, moral and aesthetic development through literature is to misrepresent the particular character of literature itself. If literature is studied for an exclusively cultural purpose, there seems little reason why it should not be studied in translation, paraphrase, or summary. These higher aims can be realized only if the learners first develop an awareness of the way language is used in literary discourse for conveying its unique message. Unless the literary works are treated in this way, they tend to be studied not for themselves but as evidence for something else: they take on the character of anthropological, sociological, or philosophical documentation.

Thus we come to the conclusion that most of the benefits claimed to be attainable from the use of literature are in fact not central, nor pertinent, to an ESL course. They can be derived from other disciplines and from literatures of other languages as well and hence fail to distinguish the study of English Literature from the study of other disciplines. They misrepresent the essential nature of literary communication and reduce literature to ‘just another source of information’ whereby it forces on literature the status of a conventional statement about ordinary reality. The only relevant advantage or objective that is attainable from the use of literature in an ESL course is thus a linguistic one. It is this feature that distinguishes literary studies from other disciplines. Studying literature involves getting aware of the subtleties of the language used in it and thus becomes indistinguishable from studying its verbal expression. Widdowson affirms:
It is true that a study of literature requires sensitivity, intelligence, precision of response and so on because it takes the reader into unknown territory where familiar signs may be few and where he must often find his own way by following recondite clues. But the signs and clues are linguistic, the sensitivity must initially be a sensitivity to language and the intelligence and precision of response can only be developed as general qualities through literature if they are first shaped by practice in interpreting the unique language use of literary discourse.

**Arguments against Literature**

Let us now look at the arguments made against literature. They are:

(i) Learners do not possess adequate linguistic competence to learn literature.

(ii) Literature disrupts the utilitarian objectives of language learning.

(iii) Literature disrupts the process of language learning by exposing learners to ungrammatical and un-orthodox use of language.

(iv) Literature ignores contemporary language.

(v) Teaching of literature does not lead to linguistic competence.

It can be seen that most of these arguments are not against literature as such but against either the mode of selecting literary works or the mode of teaching them in the classroom or both. If the learners do not possess adequate language ability even at the under-graduate level, it can point to two possibilities: either the literary selections do not correspond to the learners' linguistic achievement, or that the educational system fails to ensure adequate language mastery for the learners at the under-graduate level. In either case, literature is not clearly the culprit. The argument that literature exemplifies archaic and outdated language, and leads to wrong language habits through ungrammatical and unorthodox language use can be evidence, similarly, not against literature but against the mode of selecting literary works for the ESL courses. The accusations that the teaching of literature
does not lead to language improvement and that it cannot serve the linguistic objectives (the utilitarian objectives) are proofs against the way literature is taught in our ESL classes, and not against literature.

The above discussion shows that for literature to be relevant to ESL programmes, it should thus ideally satisfy the following conditions:

(i) The objective for introducing literature in an ESL programme should be a linguistic one: the study of literature should be primarily a study of language use, and as such not a separate activity from language learning but an aspect of the same activity. The recognition of social, cultural, psychological, or philosophical implications of a literary text can be attempted only after the learners’ recognition of how the literary discourse works, and how the language employed in the text contributes to its total communicative effect. All objectives other than linguistic are to be treated as peripheral rather than central to the introduction of literature in an ESL programme.

(ii) The criterion for the selection of literary works to a language teaching course should be pedagogic rather than aesthetic or historical and there should be close correspondence between the linguistic complexity of the text selected and the linguistic attainment of its learners.

(iii) The mode of teaching literary works in an ESL class should help the learners develop sensitivity to language use and attain, primarily, communicative ability in conventional forms of discourse.
The Controversy

A brief overview of the writings on the role of literature in modern second language programmes reveals that there is a wide spectrum of conflicting views. Some practitioners like Brooks feel that the importance of literature for both teacher and student is so obvious that it is unnecessary to discuss it at great length:

...language, mundane and banal as it so often is in everyday use, possesses the remarkable capacity of being able to take on at times an aesthetic quality and, in the hands of the poet and the writer, of being transformed into fine art. An experience with language in this transmuted form should not be denied either to our teachers or to their students. And, apart from literature as an end in itself, a judicious use of literary texts can add immeasurably to the success of language instruction at all levels.

Ryder (1965: 475), attempts to reassess the place of literature in second language instruction, advocating greater importance to literature in the priority list of every teacher concerned. Rivers (1981), maintains that literature is an important avenue to getting acquainted with the culture of the people who speak the language being learnt. In sharp contrast, we have the authority of Chastian (1976: 388) who see no particular value in the literature of the second language which, although inherently interesting in its own right to many teachers and students, may not contribute significantly to the students' ability to function linguistically and socially in the contemporary culture nor to their intercultural understanding. Thus we witness views which range from taking literature as an integral part of the teaching programme, to those who try to re-examine its relevance, to those who see in it largely a means of teaching culture, to those who find in it no particular value at all.
In the face of all this diversity, it is hardly surprising that Brumfit felt that with regard to literature “questions were not often asked very penetratingly. Only rarely is there an attempt to place the role of literature in the context of the total language-teaching process”.

Review of the Arguments for Literature

In the following I shall discuss the various arguments made in favour of teaching literature in greater detail.

Literature Supports and Enriches the Learners’ Knowledge of the Language System

As literature in English sets out the potential of its language, it serves as a means of increasing one’s competence in the language. Exposure to literature will increase all language skills because literature can extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax. Povey recognizes in literature “a valuable transitional material” from the primary to the secondary language skills in particular. He argues that as literature provides examples of the language employed at its most effective, subtle, and suggestive, it can bring about an effective transition from the skills of listening and speaking to that of reading and writing. Literature can thus help the foreign learner to overcome his presently limited linguistic achievement in secondary skills. It is this close relationship between literature and language lessons that has prompted Short and Candlin to think of them as “mutually reinforcing”. The language programme and the literature programme can support and enrich each other meaningfully.
Literature Exemplifies Language Use

Learning the language code is not learning the language. Knowledge about language code should be supplemented by the knowledge about its appropriate use to communicate meaning in varying contexts. One of the problems of language learning is thus the contextualization or the appropriate use of the language code learnt. It is easy in the early stages to provide contexts through demonstrations, pictures and drawings. But at the advanced level, it is literature that brings the ESL learners close to how the language works in real life. Drama and fiction depict people communicating in common situations. Even the least realistic kind of literature, which is usually in verse, can help the learners recognize the rhythmic patterns of the English Language. Thus where the language drills and grammar lessons tend to think in terms of abstractions like phonemes, morphemes, words, clauses, structures etc, literature throws the emphasis on to context, on to how language is used for communication. That is why Widdowson suggests that literature could be used “to mediate between a structural and communicative orientation to language teaching”.

Further, literary texts often contain within them a number of different dialects and registers of English. They can be extremely useful in sensitizing the learners to linguistic variations and the values associated with different varieties.

Legitimizing the use of literature in language classes, Short and Candlin even point out the impossibility of making a “linguistic distinction” between literature and other kinds of language. Despite a widespread assumption to the contrary, they argue, there is no knowledge of any one particular linguistic feature or set of linguistic features which are found in literature but not in other kinds of text. The sorts of features traditionally associated with poetry, and literature in general, like rhyme, metre, ambiguity, metaphor; parallelism and linguistic deviation also appear in abundance in advertising language. Widdowson
considers literary language as an extension of the way language is used in everyday discourse and attributes the distinctiveness of the literary discourse to its structure and coherence:

The question now arises: if poets (and other literary writers) only do what everybody else does, then what is distinctive about literary discourse? Essentially the distinction is that non-literal expressions occur randomly in ordinary discourse whereas in literature they figure as part of a pattern which characterizes the literary work as a separate and self-contained whole\textsuperscript{12}.

Wellek and Warren (1949:13-14)\textsuperscript{13} similarly underline the “deliberate” and “systematic” exploitation of the resources of language in literary discourse and point to its difference from the everyday language only as “quantitative”. Grammatically deviant expressions and emotive features could be located even in scientific and technical English, though occurring at random. So, the argument goes (Chapman, 1982: 51) that if there is “a close relationship between the language of literature and the: language of everyday life”\textsuperscript{14}, there is not a priori reason for banishing literature from the language curriculum and that literature could be exemplified in the language classes as a unique instance of language use.

**Literature Enlivens the Process of Learning**

As enjoyment plays an important factor in any learning process, literature is a potentially useful aid to the language teacher. The actual process of learning both the language code and its use would be stimulated and facilitated if presented through drama, fiction, and poems. For this reason, Pattison (1969: 106) finds in literature a unique opportunity to develop and sustain the habit of reading “so important for getting experience of a language”\textsuperscript{15}. It is this element of enjoyment, which is inbuilt in literature, that even the spirited opponents of literature try to incorporate in second language learning when they advocate the use of abridged
versions of literary classics, advertisements, dialogues, and short specially constructed tales which carry the appearance of literature but unfortunately none of its literary effect.

**Literature Provides Access to the Culture of the Target-Language Community**

The expressions in any language are controlled and to a great extent conditioned by the cultural peculiarities of its native speaking community. Understanding the culture of a particular language community is thus of great importance to its foreign speakers. This is evident not in the learning of its literature alone, but even in the learning of its language, especially in realizing the value of its idiomatic expressions. It is literature that provides the language learners with this link towards the culture of their target language. Proponents of this argument, Povey (1972: 189)\(^{16}\) who from his experience as a teacher reveals that “the whole area of cultural comprehension is more likely than language problems to cause difficulty”.

**Literature Develops creativity among language learners**

Literature may guide a few learners towards creative writing by providing models of successful writers in their target language. Advocates of this advantage point to the already fascinating evidence of a second-language literature in English from several countries across the world especially in India.

**Literature Paves the Way for Literary Studies**

Even if the learners cannot develop their own creativity in the second language, acquaintance with its literary mode of communication, it is assumed, will contribute to their critical ability in reading literature and interpreting it. When literature was accorded high prestige in language study, points out
Widdowson, part of the purpose of language learning and even the most essential part of it was to “provide access to literary works”\textsuperscript{17}.

**Literature develops Intellectual, Humanistic, Moral, and Aesthetic Perceptions**

It has always been argued that the study of literature will foster the learners’ intellectual, humanistic, moral, and aesthetic perceptions even if the literature happens to be that of the second language. The power of literature to provide the learners with deeper insight into human nature has been similarly stressed down the decades and put forward as a justification for the teaching of it in language programmes. In his *The Disappearing Dias*, Whitehead (1966: 15)\textsuperscript{18}, an English teacher, made the typical assertion:

> All children, whatever their ultimate role in life is to be, need experience of literature, they need the uniquely valuable organization of experience which is embodied in literature, if their personalities are to expand and flower into a capacity for fullness or living.

**Arguments against Literature**

There have been several spirited arguments against the use of literature in under-graduate / post graduate classes as well, and they can be grouped as under:

**Learning Literature Calls for Linguistic Competence**

There are teachers who maintain that literature can mean nothing to a student who has only a rudimentary understanding of language, and therefore exposure to literature can lead only to incomprehension, bewilderment and frustration. Faced with this grim prospect, the teacher either
(i) Compels the learners to accept whatever interpretation of a literary work he chooses to thrust on them, or

(ii) Resorts to summarize, translate or paraphrase the factual content of a literary work to overcome the linguistic difficulties.

In the former situation, it develops mental laziness in the learners and encourages habits of uncritical acceptance or rejection. In the latter, literature takes on the character, in the learners’ mind of a mysterious and perversely roundabout way of saying something that could be expressed much more directly and simply in other ways. In both the situations, the results are pedagogically unhealthy; there can be no benefits from such exercises using literature. Sweet (1964: 219) observes:

> When the classics of a language are ground into pupils who have neither knowledge enough of the language to appreciate their stylistic merits, nor maturity of mind and taste to appreciate their ideas, the result is often to create a disgust for literature generally.

Sinha (1993: 27), in this context, takes our attention to the “peculiar predicament” in which the teachers of English in India find themselves “cramped with”:

> The subtle emotion and sublime thoughts in the poetry of Shakespeare and the metaphysical conceits of John Donne are appreciated only by a microscopic minority of our students. It is pathetic to find a student unable to spell the word ‘funeral’ correctly being asked to examine critically the funeral speech of Mark Antony in the play Julius Caesar.

But this predicament is not peculiar to Indian situation alone, as Sinha seems to think. Writing of “Literature Teaching” in Singapore, Liu and Yeo (1984: 13) report:
Literature lessons tend to be largely a form of lecture, with pupils called on to supply information on plots and characters, usually in single word or short answer responses. Examinations I have seen rely almost totally on factual recall: "Who spoke the above words? To whom?" "Who wrote the poem ...? Give a summary of it?" Literature becomes comprehension at best, and history at worst.

That the teachers are forced to paraphrase, translate and summarize the literary texts in the classroom and test only the factual comprehension of the learners in the examination are usually put forward as the pedagogical consequences of the learners' linguistic incompetence to appreciate literary works.

**Literature Disrupts the Utilitarian Objectives of Language Learning**

Advocates of this point of view refer to the theoretical and practical complications that develop when literature is introduced into ESL classes and their basically utilitarian activities. In the midst of changing socio-political milieu and the rapid regionalization of instruction both at the school and the university level, it is argued, the students in general need English for a variety of purposes. They need a command only of its specialized individual skills like 'reading', 'listening comprehension', 'speaking' or 'writing'. They may also require English in the context of learning particular subjects like Commerce, Botany and Business Administration, so as to get familiar with the register of English made use of in these text books. Thus literature, serving mainly cultural and aesthetic purposes, is proved to be of no earthly use to the learners' academic as well as occupational needs. Commenting on this, Widdowson (1984:160) locates in "the current obsession with needs analysis and cost effective accounting which parades as pedagogy" one of the possible sources for the reaction against the use of literature.
Literature Disrupts the Process of Language Learning

As literature frequently employs words and syntax in a manner that would be considered unacceptable in ordinary communication, exposure to such usage, it is contended, can lead to the formation of wrong language habits. It has no place in an approach to language teaching that insists on the gradual accumulation of grammatically verified linguistic items which have been carefully selected and graded prior to their inclusion in the syllabus. How can a teacher accommodate these lines from Coleridge’s (1982: 451) "Kubla Khan"

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:

(1-2)

in a class that is being trained in the learning of the sentence pattern NP+ VP+ NP+ Prep. Phr. as illustrated in the substitution-table below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The teacher</th>
<th>a cat</th>
<th>a dog</th>
<th>On the blackboard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rama</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sita</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>an apple</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an orange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is suspected that the learners exposed to these lines from “Kubla Khan” will see no reason why they can’t use the expression:

On the blackboard did the teacher a cat draw, and thus will develop a wrong language habit.
In short, literature exploiting the resources of language to an unusual degree can offend both the cardinal principles of language teaching—that of correctness and strict control—and can thus become irrelevant to the process of language learning.

**Literature Ignores Contemporary Language**

Literary texts prescribed for the under-graduate ESL courses include mostly classics in English Literature in their chronological sequence (Mohan 1996: 2). It is conceived that such a format will provide the learners with a historical overview of their subject. The selection of literary texts, which ranges from Chaucer to the present age through every major period on the way, is thus determined by historical and aesthetic considerations rather than pedagogical. But unfortunately they usually stop well short of writing which could reasonably be regarded as contemporary. So what students gain from such a course is an acquaintance with the outdated and archaic register of English Language rather than with its contemporary version. Thus it is deplored that the literature-component of the language courses that neglects the contemporary language and focuses instead on the old and middle English cannot function as a model of the current use of language for its learners (Sinclair 1963: 98). When Sinha referring to the situation in Indian universities in particular, underlines the need for reforming the literature-component of the language courses, he is in fact uncovering their current practice:

Should our students whose main aim is to acquire proficiency in the use of the English Language be exposed to the writings of Francis Bacon or Jeremy Taylor or the plays of William Shakespeare? Can the study of Chaucer help in the inculcation of a proper sense of language in our Indian students? Should Dr. Johnson be exposed to these students? In my opinion the students at the under-graduate level need to be exposed to such writings only which may advance their linguistic competence.
In contrast, Marckwardt (1978: 65) subjects the overseas practice to his rigorous evaluation and reaches the same observation about the current language practice in the selection of the literary texts.

......the literature that is read should be contemporary, written in modern idiom. There is little or nothing to be gained from subjecting the student to archaic forms of the language, obsolescent meanings of words, and subject matter that requires historical interpretation ... contemporary being understood as that literature which poses no linguistic difficulties for the pupil because of the time lag.

Teaching of Literature does not lead to Linguistic Competence

It is claimed that the underlying assumption in exposing the ESL learners to literary classics that it will lead to an improvement in their linguistic abilities is a myth. What it leads to instead, says Lewis (1961: 128-129) in a devastating attack on the way literature is used in our classrooms, is mental slavery; surrendering the learners’ independence both of observation and expression to literary critics:

Everyone who sees the work of Honours students of English at a university has noticed with distress their increasing tendency to see books wholly through the spectacles of other books. On every play, poem or novel, they produce the view of some eminent critic. An amazing knowledge of Chaucerian or Shakespearean criticism sometimes co-exists with a very inadequate knowledge of Chaucer or Shakespeare.... Here, plainly, are young people drenched, dizzied, and be devilled by criticism to a point at which primary literary experience is no longer possible.

In short, the study of literature becomes identified with the study of Literary Criticism and there is no attempt to examine how the language is exploited in a text to achieve its unique literary effect.
It is clear that Lewis’ remarks are made with British universities, or at least with universities in English-speaking countries. If this is the case with learners for whom English is the mother-tongue, how pathetic would be the experience—both literary and linguistic—of its foreign speakers? We have the answer to this question, how literature is taught in an average Indian classroom where English is a second language:

unfortunately, the teaching of an average teacher is limited to the glossing of a few difficult or important lexical or phrasal items, paraphrasing or translating (into mother tongue) major portions of the text and practicing a few comprehension questions. To those few brilliant ones, the text provides opportunities for flights of imagination, inspired spells of moral or philosophical discourse or a happy retreat into the glorious past. To a large extent, the subtleties and intricacies of the textual structure remain either invisible or unexplained to a reader. This results not only in partial comprehension and reduced interest in the text, but also flawed, at times completely distorted understanding of the text.

Therefore, it is argued that the exposure to literature or even the teaching of it cannot by itself ensure improvement in the learners’ linguistic competence. I conducted a survey among the students of ESL in India, and the teachers of ‘English Language and Literature’ of Indian universities teaching in Eritria (North East Africa) from 2005 to 2009, with the aim of finding out the contemporary practices in the under-graduate classes where English Literature was taught. The survey examined in particular if the approach to the teaching of literature ensured its linguistic objectives which, as we noted in the last chapter, is of crucial importance in a teaching-learning situation. Based on the analysis of certain selected aspects of teaching literature, the investigation pointed to the presence of certain trends and their underlying approaches which were by and large detrimental to the linguistic objectives of ESL classes. The key approaches underlying the teaching and learning of literature as recognized in the survey are reviewed below.
Underlying Approaches to the Teaching of Literature

Literature is perceived as message

This is the approach the literary critic generally adopts towards literature. He/she searches for the essential artistic vision a literary text embodies; he/she interprets and evaluates it as a work of art. He may be conscious of the way language of the text is organized into patterns but his principal concern is with its underlying message and not with its language patterns, either with their description or their analysis.

The literary critic assumes that the significance of the textual features a work of art possesses and how they lead to its message are available to intuitive awareness that his function is restricted to the exposition of its artistic value alone.

It may be noted that the current practices in the under-graduate ESL classes in India exemplify this approach to literature. The teachers, the students, and the examiners alike are interested only in the aesthetic experience or the perception of reality a literary text is attempting to convey and not in the way the linguistic features in it relate to each other to achieve its communicative effect. In this approach, a literary text is looked upon as 'content' alone. It stands divorced from its form or language. Interpretation of the text is obligatory, but it does not evolve naturally from its textual features but is superimposed on it from outside. The literary text and its interpretation thus become two watertight compartments: the text is pursued for its story element or the content, and its interpretation is considered an extrinsic element readily attainable from literary critics.

The total neglect of the language factor, the deplorably low level of students’ participation in the class work, and the absence of any attempt to develop the interpretative skill among the learners-initially with respect to the texts prescribed in the syllabus and eventually extending this ability to the texts outside the prescribed syllabus-are symptomatic of this approach to literature as message.
Even in the introductory stage of a text, the emphasis is not on the text but on its background information. It is significant that the teachers often give a summary of the text and the critics' opinions on it in the introductory class itself. Nobody in the survey reported that their teachers 'always' made sure that the learners read the text themselves before the lesson began. This trend is further noticeable while explaining words and passages. By giving the meanings of words straight away, by explaining, analyzing and interpreting the texts themselves or with the critics' help, the teachers not only deny the learners their participation in the experience of language used in the text and the development of their reference and interpretative skills but also imply to them the relative insignificance of the text.

How the teachers justify these practices in their classrooms deserves attention at this stage. The justification offered by the teachers is on the grounds of their learners' linguistic incompetence and the defective nature of the evaluation system. If the learners are linguistically incompetent, as the teachers themselves admit and assert, it is difficult to see how we can improve their language skills; first by denying them participation in the class work and second by denying them the experience of language use inherent in the texts. On the other hand, if they are linguistically incompetent only in relation to the literary texts prescribed in the syllabus and not in their general communicative ability, it is once again difficult to see why we don't insist on selecting texts which correspond to the known linguistic attainment of the learners.

As for the blame put on the examination system, two things are worth remembering. No system of evaluation is permanent; it is bound to change. Further, though the learning experience a teacher imparts to his learners can afford to be guided by the demands made by the examination system, it cannot be restricted by them. Thus the major drawbacks of this approach to the teaching of literature can be recapitulated as follows:
**Linguistic benefit is not attainable**

Ideally both the teaching and the testing of literature, should be carried out with the linguistic objective in mind. It should focus on the communicative potential of the target language and on developing this communicative skill among its learners. Let us now review, with this background information in mind, some of the conclusions arrived at in the survey.

a. The texts of literary works are taught perfunctorily through paraphrase, translation or summary and with the minimum of learners' participation.

b. For communication in the classroom—both between teachers and students, and among students themselves—regional languages assume as much importance as the target language.

c. When faced with the interpretation of literary texts, teachers and students alike depend on literary critics and their observations.

d. Students seldom resort to additional reading and reference work to complement their class work.

e. Further, the only skill evaluated in testing is the writing skill and even here the learners can make up for their deficiency in the skill by providing stock responses and prefabricated answers to the descriptive questions based on prescribed texts. This explains why only a small percent of students ever depend on their own understanding of the texts while preparing for examinations and the rest rely either on the teacher's notes or on the guides.

f. Except for the skill of listening, all other language skills are either completely or partially neglected.
Thus it is evident that both the teaching and the testing of literature can lose their linguistic perspective if literature is viewed primarily as message.

**The skill for literary interpretation is not developed**

There is no denying the fact that the development of learners’ skill for literary interpretation is a desirable objective in teaching literature. From the purely literary point of view, this skill helps the reader realize the significance of a work of art at different layers of meaning and adds to his aesthetic enjoyment.

From the linguistic point of view, since the message of a literary text is integrated within its language, the interpretation of the text is bound to reveal how the target language is used in literary mode of communication as opposed to its use in normal kinds of communication. It extends the learners’ knowledge of language system to language use. This is achieved by correlating the meaning of a linguistic item as an element in the language code with the meaning it takes on in the context in which it occurs. This correlating procedure is necessary for the production and reception of any discourse and, as linguists argue, the interpretation of literary discourse can be seen as an “extension” of this ability. Granted the skill for literary appreciation is a very valuable one for the learners of literature, the crucial question remains: how do learners develop the skill for literary appreciation? In spite of the standpoints to the contrary, most of the learners need guidance from their teachers as to what to look for in a literary text and how to arrive at its underlying message. It is precisely this guidance and help that is denied to the learners when the teachers treat literature simply as message and convey to them its interpretation by critics.
The essential nature of literary communication is distorted

It is of the nature of literary communication that the message it conveys is integrated within its discourse. But when literature is perceived as message alone and separated from its language, it inevitably leads to a misrepresentation of its nature in the minds of learners. They fail to view literature as a unique kind of language use; instead they tend to look upon literature as an unnecessarily complex way of saying the obvious.

This approach perceives literature primarily as message, places heavy emphasis on the need to develop an intuitive awareness of literary values, but is silent on how teachers can cultivate this awareness among their learners in the classroom. In short this approach is more literary than linguistic, and hence more congenial to professional literary critics than to learners of literature as subject.

Literature is perceived as factual data

This approach considers literature as a repository of factual data. It assumes that a literary text contains verifiable information about the convictions, beliefs and the biography of its writer, and about the moral, social, historical and cultural aspects of its age. The teachers attempt to establish the preliminary background or context of the literary text by lecturing exhaustively on the biography of the writer and on the socio-cultural milieu of the text. It is relevant in this context that a very high percent of participants in the survey reported that their teachers often lectured on the writer's biography and times by way of introducing the prescribed texts in the class. Perception of literature as factual data thus tends to equate the teaching of literature with the teaching of its background. Short and Candlin affirm:

In practice, the background course tended to displace the texts—not surprisingly, as background is easier to teach. We can link this preoccupation with fact with a generally transmissive mode of teaching, characteristic of many language and literature classrooms throughout the world31.
Another possible consequence of this approach is reflected in the evaluation system where we come across with questions of different kind, will be discussed in chapter 6-Proposed Methodology.

**Literature is perceived as discipline**

It is possible to distinguish between ‘literature as subject’ and ‘literature as discipline’ on pedagogic grounds. The relationship between the two can be expressed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Disciplines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(English) Language</td>
<td>Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(English) Literature</td>
<td>Literary Criticism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Lit:: Relationship between Disciplines and Subjects^^]

Linguistics and Literary Criticism are disciplines which are closely related to their subjects (English) Language and (English) Literature respectively. These disciplines can be pedagogically treated to yield the content of their subjects. The higher the educational level, the more the subjects approximate to their disciplines.

Further, it is the acquisition of the principles of enquiry, abilities and concepts pertinent to a discipline that makes the ultimate terminal behaviour of time learners of its related subject. But at the under-graduate level, our ESL learners are neither linguists nor literary critics; they are learners of English Language and Literature engaged in the process of acquiring principles of enquiry, not putting them into practice, related to their disciplines of Linguistics and Literary Criticism. And very few students of these subjects can be expected to be fully initiated into their disciplines in the long run.
The discussion above takes our attention to a number of important aspects:

i. At the under-graduate level/ post graduate level, it is not feasible to equate the study of English Literature with that of Literary Criticism, or the study of English Language with Linguistics. One belongs to the domain of subject and the other to the domain of discipline and the close approximation between the two is possible only at a stage higher than the level of under-graduation.

ii. Ideally, the discipline of Literary Criticism may constitute the ultimate academic terminal objectives of the learners joining a course in English Literature at the under-graduate level. By taking into consideration the possibility of a number of learners dropping out at the completion of the degree course, it is imperative we evolve non-terminal objectives as well for this stage which will fulfill some general educational purpose.

iii. Thus by reconciling the terminal and non-terminal objectives in the definition of literature as subject at the degree level, it can provide both for those students whose education will stop short well before they encounter the principles of literary study as a discipline and for those who will take up literary study as an advanced speciality.

But the survey undertaken reveals that literary studies are not defined as a subject in this way and what tends to be taught are some critical pronouncements borrowed directly from critics rather than the skill for literary understanding and interpretation which the learners can transfer to other and unknown literary works outside the prescribed syllabus. In short, our ESL courses making use of literary selections are discipline based and the subject of English Literatures thought of as a simplified and abridged version of its discipline Literary Criticism. Instead of being guided towards techniques of individual interpretation students are often provided with critics’ interpretations so that the study of literature becomes
identified with the study of Literary Criticism and commentary. This tendency of both the learners and the teachers “to see books wholly through the spectacles of other books” Lewis has amply illustrated in the survey.

There are instances in which even the introductory lecture on a literary text shades off into an oration on the critical opinions received by the work and when faced with the interpretation of a text the teachers straight away deliver its standard interpretation by literary critics. At the completion of prescribed texts, teachers rarely prompt the learners to extend their skill of literary understanding to other texts outside the syllabus.

The undue emphasis on critics and their opinions on texts with the corresponding neglect of the individual learners and their learning needs is further reflected in the survey. Students practically recognized no difference in the way literary texts were taught in their literature main classes and in their general English classes. This is what Ramesh Mohan, the former Director of Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad (India), has to say on the far reaching consequences of this contemporary approach to literature:

What is mostly taught and studied in our literature classes is not literature, but literary criticism, not the literary text, but what has been said about the text, not the use of literary and linguistic resources for shaping the artistic creation and its artistic significance, but its intellectual, historical or sociological significance, that too borrowed from ready-to-hand second hand sources. It is no wonder therefore that even most of our advanced students of English, who pass their examinations by cramming the so called critical material or teachers’ notes readily available on prescribed selected texts, without reading the texts, know precious little about either the language or its literature. Even most research dissertations, often written in bad English, which get accepted, are usually directed towards a sociological study or a pseudo-literary study, rather than towards critical, literary evaluation and interpretation.
We have now surveyed the contemporary practices in the teaching of literature in India's under-graduate/post graduate classes. These practices have been found to reflect several underlying approaches to literature, literature is perceived as message, as factual data, and as discipline. By and large these approaches have been responsible for denying the learners their participation and language practice in class work, for distorting the essential nature of literary communication, and for affecting the selection, teaching and testing of literature. It is with the intention of rectifying these defects that we now turn to an alternative approach to the teaching of literature in the next section.

Stylistic Approach: An Alternative Approach to the Teaching of Literature and its Advantages

It is the relevance of stylistic approach to the teaching of literature as subject and not to the practice of literary criticism as discipline that is enquired in this section. Stylistic approach considers literature primarily as discourse and studies it from a linguistic perspective. A linguist is primarily concerned with literature as text: he describes how literary texts exemplify the system of language as represented in his grammar and if they do not exemplify it in what respects they deviate from the rules. A critic on the other hand is primarily concerned with literature as message: the underlying significance of a work of art, its interpretation and evaluation. Between these two approaches lies the stylistic approach to literature which treats it primarily as a form of communication or discourse. It mediates between the linguist's and the critic's approaches to show specifically how the use of language patterns in the text creates a form of communication which conveys its particular message. Widdowson clarifies:

The purpose of stylistic analysis is to investigate how the resources of a language code are put to use in the production of actual messages. It is concerned with patterns of use in given texts......It aims to characterize texts as pieces of communication.\(^{35}\)
Now we shall examine how a stylistic approach of this kind is of particular value for the study of literature as subject in India’s ESL situation and how it can rectify some of the defects of contemporary practices noticed in the survey.

**It is language oriented**

Stylistics by defining literary studies as a linguistic subject provides a way of integrating the two subjects, English Language and English Literature which are commonly taught in isolation one from the other. It studies literary works as kinds of discourse and enquires into the communicative potential of the language concerned. This standpoint justifies the use of English Literature in the ESL classes in India. Our learners of English at the under-graduate level can be reasonably expected to have acquired knowledge of the language system—the structures and vocabulary of English. They must also acquire knowledge of how to use this system in the actual business of communication. In this context the stylistic approach under discussion offers the following language benefits to ESL learners:

i. An interpretation of a literary text as a piece of discourse in stylistic approach involves correlating the meaning of a linguistic item as an element in the language code with the meaning it takes on in the context in which it occurs. This can be illustrated with the following lines from Pope

> Here files of pins extend their shining rows,  
Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet-doux

The signification of the word ‘bible’ in the language code is as a sacred religious document. But in the context of the poem the word gets a value other than it has in the language code. It occurs with a number of other linguistic
elements which are all parallel grammatically (nouns), morphologically (plural), and phonetically (alliterative). Being a part of this unique language pattern created by the artist, known technically as parallelism, bible is made a member of the same class of objects as puffs and powders and shares the same value, of triviality with the other items of female vanity. But the interpretation of the line demands that we correlate the signification of bible in the code with the value it acquires in the context. The significance of bible is not recoverable from either the code alone or from the context alone. Nowhere in the language code is bible considered as a synonym for cosmetics and unless we know the established referent for bible the ironic force of the lines would be entirely lost.

Thus it is evident that the stylistic approach to the teaching of literature lays emphasis on the language code or the language system and it will help the learners reinforce their knowledge of the language code already acquired. In this way the approach naturally establishes a link between literature and language teaching.

ii. This correlating procedure between code meanings and context meanings which has been recognized in the stylistic analysis and interpretation of Pope’s lines above is considered by Widdowson as “necessary for the production and reception of any discourse”\textsuperscript{37}. In the conventional or ordinary kinds of discourses, the recognition of the value of a linguistic item in the context may be a matter of either selecting the appropriate part from its signification in the code, or of extending it. This explains how we manage to assign an appropriate value to the phrase ‘break up’ in sentences like

\begin{quote}
He broke up under the strain.
His family life broke up.
\end{quote}

In spite of the phrase always existing in the language code along with concrete and fragile objects. As it is characteristic of literary discourse
to have linguistic elements which show considerable divergence between their signification and value, literature can be useful in demonstrating the kind of reasoning process or correlating procedure which must operate in the understanding of any discourse. Widdowson concludes that understanding literature and understanding other kinds of discourse involve the same correlating procedure of matching code and context meanings but in understanding literary discourse the procedure is made "more overt and self-conscious". The stylistic approach thus relates the language system to the way it is used in communication.

iii. Stylistic approach thus points to the possibility of representing literary works not as totally different ways of using language but as extensions of the way language is used in ordinary kinds of communication. Unlike in ordinary kinds of communication, the literary writer consciously creates language patterns over and above those which are required by the language code. We already discussed how Pope created such a unique language pattern in his The Rape of the Lock with the help of grammatical, morphological and phonological means. It is these language patterns that bestow certain meanings upon the linguistic items within the poetic context. These meanings the linguistic items assume within the context, when fused with the meanings they have in the language code, constitute their distinctive semantic value. As such stylistics considers the study of literature primarily as a study of language use; not a separate activity from language learning but an aspect of the same activity.

iv. If literature is to be taught as a form of discourse, it necessitates that the learners must be introduced to other forms of discourse, of a conventional kind, with which the literary discourse can be compared. This is because what literature communicates is an individual awareness of a reality which by its nature cannot be paraphrased, described or translated into another
language without losing its uniqueness. What it expresses becomes indistinguishable from how it is expressed. This uniqueness of literary communication can however be realized by comparing it with, not paraphrasing or translating it into, normal uses of language. Such a comparison can yield reciprocal benefits: the distinctiveness of the literary mode of communication is revealed by relating it to conventional forms of language use which in turn reveals what it is that is peculiar to ordinary types of communication. Thus stylistic approach can extend the learning of the language system into the learning of language use, and more precisely into different kinds of use.

**It guides in the selection of literary texts**

While concluding the theoretical discussion on the relevance of literature to ESL programmes, I have suggested that the literary texts to be included in the learning programmes should be selected with the linguistic objective in mind. However the results of the survey undertaken hinted at a possible non-linguistic criterion in operation, for one of the most persistent complaints from the practicing teachers of Indian universities was about the linguistic incompetence of the learners to participate in textual discussions and class works. While the fault may lie with the students, the textbooks chosen or with both, the survey indicated beyond doubt the lack of correspondence between the linguistic attainment of the learners and the stylistic features of the texts to be learnt. Sweet comments specifically on this aspect:

> when the classics of a language are ground into pupils who have neither knowledge enough of the language to appreciate their stylistic merits, nor maturity of mind and taste to appreciate their ideas, the result is often to create a disgust for literature generally.\(^{38}\)
However if literature as a subject is given a stylistic basis and treated as
discourse, its textual features must be such as to relate to what the learner knows
of English grammar and vocabulary. That is the selection of literary works to be
taught will be controlled by the learners’ capacity to understand the language
which is used and by the potential of the texts to extend the learners’ sensitivity to
language further. As the stylistic approach regards the teaching of language and
literature as aspects of the same activity, the teacher following this approach will
feel more involved in the selection of literary works which to him are materials of
language use to be used to complement those he uses for the teaching of language
system. The criteria for selection will thus be linguistic and pedagogic rather than
historical, aesthetic and personal. Moody emphasizes

"...the essential educational, principle we are approaching here
is that literary works must always be related to students’ capability,
at any stage.... Just as students’ capacities can be graded, so also all
the works of literature in the world could be graded in terms of
their simplicity or complexity, their remoteness or their
accessibility and no great success can be expected unless a due
relationship between the two parties is observed."

Since a stylistic approach to literature attempts to investigate how the
resources of language code are put to use in the production of unique messages in
literary works, it invariably incorporates the linguistic and literary perspectives
and familiarizes the learners with the conventions and principles of enquiry
pertinent to the disciplines of both Linguistics and Literary Criticism. In this way
stylistics can provide for the progression of an intelligent student from either
language or literature at the degree level towards either Linguistics or Literary
Criticism at an advanced level. It will provide even for the drop-outs at the degree
level an awareness of the communicative potential of the language whose
literature they have been learning. Stylistic approach to the teaching of literature
thus effectively reconciles terminal objectives (those of acquiring the principles of
Linguistics and Literary Criticism) and non-terminal objectives (acquiring a general but useful skill for their later life) of a degree course.

**It helps in literary appreciation**

The survey also revealed a deplorably low level of attainment among the learners in their skill for literary appreciation and interpretation. This is not surprising since even a brief review of the traditional approaches to literary studies shows that the study of literature has been regarded as a branch of aesthetics and is concerned with the total effect of literary texts. The consequence is that literature is put beyond the scope of any linguistic or stylistic investigation. Unlike the traditional literary criticism, the stylistic approach to literature does not assume that the artistic value of a work is readily available to intuitive awareness. This is especially the case with the students of literature who need guidance and training in recognizing the subtle use of "language patterns in literary texts upon which an intuitive awareness of artistic values ultimately depends" Widdowson and Guth emphasize this need for training over and above the critic's help in literary appreciation:

The critic aimed at making students respond more fully to what literature had to offer. But in practice he often succeeded in making literature seem difficult and obscure. It often seemed that literary enjoyment was not to be had without special technical equipment. To become a good reader seemed to require above all arduous, and often discouragingly dry, technical training.

Widdowson makes this more explicit:

I would argue that, in most cases, the individual can only respond to literature as a result of guidance. The *conjunction* Reader meets Text very often simply produces bafflement: one just cannot expose students to literary writing and hope that they will be apprised of its essential message by some kind of miraculous revelation.
This is where stylistics can be of use to the learners of literature. Its concern is with the patterning of language in texts and with the special values the linguistic items in the texts contract as elements in these created patterns, contributing thus to their interpretation. Thus by demonstrating the subtlety of language use, otherwise only accessible to trained intuition, stylistic approach provides a less subjective and more explicit basis for aesthetic appreciation. Consider for example the following lines from Tennyson

He is not here; but far away
The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly thro’ the drizzling rain
On the bald streets breaks the blank day^{43}.

A stylistic analysis of this text in the classroom ensures the learners’ participation in it as the teacher puts questions to them not only on what the text communicates but also on how it communicates. Considering the message as integrated within the text, the teacher guides the learners’ attention to its unique language patterns created and how they lead to its message. The learners are educated as to how the phonological patterning (rhythm created by monosyllabic words in the last line and the alliterative pattern among them) and the semantic patterning (through its lexis: noise, ghastly, drizzling, bald, breaks, blank) within the verse reinforce each other and lead to alter the signification of the text’s key words (life, rain, street, day-break, day) so as to convey the desolation of its speaker.

Stylistic approach to the teaching of literature thus attempts to develop in the learners analytic and interpretative strategies not in relation to a given text alone but in relation to a range of language uses, both literary and non-literary. It is not concerned at all with the transmission of facts and ready-made interpretations.
It Respects the Essential Nature of Literary Communication

Besides the value stylistic approach to literature has for the teaching of language to ESL learners, its relevance to literary studies can be justified on the nature of literature as such. There are certain features about literature as a mode of communication which are unique and distinguish it from any conventional communication situation. It is these unique and distinctive features of literature as discourse that give way most naturally to stylistic enquiries.

In literary discourse, we do not have a sender addressing a message directly to a receiver, as is normally the case in all other forms of language use. The normally indivisible compound of sender / addressee and receiver / addressee is dissolved, resulting in the dissolution of sender / first person and receiver / second person amalgam. Thus the writer is separated from the addresser and the reader from the addressee. Again the third person, which denotes something or someone referred to in the normal interaction but not engaged in it, is drawn into participation in literary discourse by combining it with the first and second persons. This can be illustrated with the following passage, from Dickinson.

I died for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room\textsuperscript{44}.

In this extract, the addresser is a corpse which is neither human nor animate. The addressee in the second extract, a wind, is again non-human and inanimate. Thus both the ‘I’ and ‘you’ of these extracts have in them the features typical of these pronouns in the code (as the addresser and addressee respectively) and the features of third person (as a non-human or inanimate object incapable of participating in communication). So in literary discourse, as different from conventional communication, first and second persons along with the third person
are incorporated into the text. We can represent this difference existing between the two communication situations as follows.

Third Person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Person</th>
<th>Second Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sender</td>
<td>Receiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addresser</td>
<td>Addressee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fig. Normal Communication Situation)⁴⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Person</th>
<th>Second Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/ Third Person</td>
<td>/ Third Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sender</td>
<td>Addresser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fig. Literary Communication Situation)⁴⁶

This shows that we have in literary discourse a communication situation within a communication situation and a message that is text-contained. The message becomes independent of its social environment as well as of the identities of both its sender and receiver. It develops from no antecedent events and anticipates no subsequent activity. It is this dissociation of literary communication from its immediate social context which renders stylistic approach, committed by its nature to the analysis of the textual features of a message alone, most appropriate and naturally related to it. Widdowson makes this relation explicit:

\[ \ldots \ldots \ldots \text{clearly, to characterize the messages in a conventional text, some account must be taken of its social environment. It is this which complicates matters and makes stylistic analysis difficult. With literary texts, this problem does not cause such difficulties: generally speaking we can concentrate on the text itself without worrying about distracting social appendages.} \]
An important corollary of this natural correlation between stylistics and literary studies is that it may prompt the teachers to focus more on the text than on its background, and purge themselves of what Short and Candlin calls “flight from the text” and “teaching about literature instead of teaching the literature itself”\(^{48}\).

**Conclusion**

Literature is found to be theoretically relevant in ESL classes at graduate/post graduate classes. Our language learners are engaged in learning the English Language: this involves in part a learning of the language system—the structures and vocabulary of English— but it must also involve the learning of how this system is used in the actual business of communication. This being so, the manner in which the resources of the language system are used in literary discourse to create its unique literary message will give the learners a practical experience of language use and facilitate the comparison of the literary mode of communication with other conventional forms of communication. This will lead to reinforce their command over the language system and, at the same time, sharpen their communicative skills in the practical use of language. Thus the learning of the language system is extended into the learning of language use and the study of literature becomes theoretically relevant to language programmes. But we have also noted that this is possible in practice only if both the selection and the teaching of literary texts are done with the linguistic objective, rather than cultural, humanistic or aesthetic objectives, in mind. Thus the inclusion of literature in language teaching programmes need not be objected. The teaching of literature can in some way contribute to the learning of language and the approach should ensure its linguistic objective.

The procedures and techniques were determined to a great extent by the constraints of time and environment. But the results of these methods showed that
it is possible to extend their scope and help the students to study literary texts more comprehensively and meaningfully.

This chapter enquired into the contemporary practices in the undergraduate/ post graduate ESL classes in India and noted the absence of linguistic perspective underlying the practices which ranged from introducing a text in the class to its selection for the course. As a consequence stylistic approach was recognized and proposed as an ideal alternative to the existing system. Being a linguistic approach to the study of literary texts, it is claimed to be beneficial to the linguistic objectives of language teaching programmes.

Demonstrating the usefulness of literature, the approach shows how it can develop communicative ability in learners by extending the study of language system to the practice of putting it to use in different kinds of discourses. With its focus on the way language is patterned to create a message form which characterizes literature as a unique act of communication, it helps in the progression of a pupil to the disciplines of both Linguistics and Literary Criticism as well. Stylistics thus renders an essential service to language learners by relating literary studies to their present concerns and to their future needs. This explains why L2 (second language) courses in many parts of the world have come to prefer a stylistic approach to the traditional approaches while teaching literature, especially that of a second language.

Faini reports this change in favour of a linguistic approach witnessed in recent years in Italian Universities:

Language courses in Italian High Schools and Universities include English Literature as essential study. In recent years there has been a tendency to change the organization and structure of the texts: we no longer rely just on the study of the history of English Literature in its chronological, historical, social, and cultural developments but take up the work of an author as a way to introduce students to his language, ideas, the role of the narrator, point of view, setting etc.\textsuperscript{49}
Having recognized stylistic approach as relevant and appropriate to our language teaching concerns, formulation of an ideal methodology will be discussed in chapter 5, which is consistent with this approach.

The basic pattern of the questionnaires administered in the survey was this: aspects identified as relevant to the teaching of literature in India’s ESL classes were given to students for their observations; of those observations the ones which were valid and statistically representative of the sample were given to the practicing teachers for their confirmation and for their justification. The focus was thus on students’ observations, but they were subjected to close scrutiny at two levels: at one level with the help of the format itself to weed out the hasty ‘and invalid observations, if any, and at the other with the help of teachers’ questionnaire to verify the learners responses.

The students’ questionnaire contained a number of statements related to their classroom practices. These statements in turn centred around selected aspects of classroom teaching such as the following:

i. How does your teacher begin a lesson?

ii. How does your teacher explain the meanings of words?

iii. How does he explain and analyze passages in the class?

iv. When faced with the interpretation of a text, how does your teacher interpret it?

v. At the completion of a particular text, what does your teacher ask you to do?

vi. How is the communication between you and your teacher in the classroom?

vii. Do you complement your classwork with additional reading and reference?

viii. Do you get effective help from your teachers for your examination?
The writer does not object to the use of background information in the classroom provided it is absolutely essential to the understanding of the given text. However the objection is to giving it prominence so as to displace the text itself, and the teachers spending their valuable classroom hours lecturing on it instead of asking the learners to find it out for themselves through reference. Besides ensuring learners’ participation in the class work, this activity will help them develop their reference and reading skills in the target language.

It is worth noting that the practicing teachers in India are highly critical of the poor linguistic attainment of their learners and the outdated system of evaluation in force. Whenever they were asked to justify a given contemporary practice, they invariably justified it on these grounds.

Lewis, for example, suggests that the individual response to literature can develop simultaneously from exposure to it. He rejects the need for guidance and confides in intuition.

Widdowson\(^5^0\) points out that this is made possible by the creation of unique patterns of language within literary texts. And this feature in turn makes it self-contained, interpretable internally and in suspense from the immediate reality of social life.

The ability to extract relevant facts from a mass of data can be as well developed by using material other than literature. Any approach to literature should basically respect, and not distort, its essential nature of communication.

If the learners are asked to examine the moral and social implications of a literary text even before they acquire an awareness of how literary discourse ‘works, it will only lead to mystify them. It is advisable that we postpone these higher aims till the learners reach the post-graduate level when, it is assumed, they will be able to relate these aesthetic effects being talked about with their own experience of language.
This is not surprising since most of the lecturers in Indian universities are not trained in the profession they practice. Their only guide to the teaching of literature is the way they were taught themselves and our university courses have been—again, generally speaking—discipline based.

This means that its basic purpose would be to acquaint students with the manner in which literary works in English use the language to convey unique effects and perceptions. To teach English Literature in this sense as a linguistic subject is of course to adopt a stylistic perspective.

This does not mean that a linguist is completely unaware of the meaning a literary text generates. It may even be the case that his linguistic description is dependent on some prior intuitive understanding of the significance of the text. But interpretation is not his aim when he undertakes linguistic description; it is only a means to his analysis.

A literary critic may be well aware of the communicative potential of the language employed by the artist but his concern is not principally with this language aspect but with the underlying message an interpretation of the language use will reveal.

Signification refers to the meaning a linguistic item inheres as an element of the language code or system. Value refers to the meaning a linguistic item assumes when it appears in contexts of use.

This feature is perhaps most strikingly noticeable in the use of metaphors in literary discourse. The recognition of how the absence of structural links takes on unique values in literary discourse clearly depends on an understanding of how structural links operate normally, so that setting a literary use alongside a non-literary one will lead to enlighten both kinds of language use.
The personal interaction with the practicing teachers during the administration of the questionnaire revealed that they did not generally link literature lessons with language lessons and that they were justifiably aggrieved for being denied involvement in the selection of text books.

Stylistics can thus provide a way of mediating not only between discipline and discipline, subject and subject but also between subject (language or literature) and discipline (Literary criticism or Linguistics) and the reverse,

Literary Criticism of the traditional kind makes appeal to a theory of aesthetics which postulates artistic universals and describes literature by reference to them. But the lack of explicitness in the definition of these universals makes literary studies too subjective to be of use pedagogically.

Richards' demonstrated that Cambridge students of English showed crass misunderstanding when asked to reflect on and evaluate simple verse and prose pieces. If this is the case with the native speakers of English, may it not be applicable to foreign learners?

It is crucial that the teacher should 'guide' the learners to the textual message, and not lecture to them using the critic’s impressionistic terminology, or resort to paraphrase or translation. This can be most effectively done using short questions which would relate the literary use of language in the text to normal uses of it outside the text.
Notes


46. Ibid-p.156-176


