CHAPTER 1
CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF INTENT

1.1 For more than a decade or so, there has been a marked shift in the ESL reading pedagogy which refuses to banish 'literature' from the language curriculum. Time was when ESL pedagogy was an integral part of the business of English teaching in Indian universities. At the turn of the 1950s, however, the discipline divided itself into at least two distinct areas of pedagogy: literature teaching and language teaching. Since then the two activities have traditionally been seen as belonging to two different domains, one drawing its inspiration from literary criticism and the other from linguistics. Following this divide, the trend has been to reduce, if not eliminate the literature component at early and intermediate levels and to concentrate on language skills in ESL curriculum. In recent years, however, many theorists and educators in both fields have again acknowledged the academic, intellectual, cultural and linguistic benefits of the study of literature. An examination of research on the activities of reading and responding to literature reveals these areas of study, usually taught separately, can be viewed as similar processes. What is more, this research also reveals that by interpreting texts and considering alternative interpretations, students come to understand in a
fundamental way how meaning can be created through reading. By focussing on the process of making meaning, reading research has given a new direction to the ESL teaching. Several factors may be attributed to this remarkable redirection in the ESL pedagogy, for example, the communicative approach to language teaching, researches in literary response, concern for needs analysis in relation to the ethnographic background of learners, etc. However, the major source of change has been the growing understanding and acceptance of certain models and theories of reading which have developed over the past several years.

Reading research with a cognitive-linguistic base has brought about a definite shift in the perspective of reading— the perspective which looks at reading not as a passive, bottom-up process but as an active process involving the reader and the text in which both top-down and bottom-up processes occur simultaneously. Although theorists and researchers give varying degrees of importance to the reader and the text in the creation of meaning, most of them hold a transactional view of reading. While reacting sharply against the New Critical view that text contains a static or inviolable meaning, the reading researchers and scholars have argued that meaning emerges in the transaction between reader and text. In the total reading experience the unique contributions of reader and text have been given an
interactional perspective by the reading researchers - interactional in which the text, on the one hand, and the personality of the reader, on the other hand, can be separately analyzed. This interactive view of reading gets support from current psycho-linguistic research which claims that reading is a meaning driven, multi-levelled interactive process. It is multi-levelled in that the reader uses various levels of language simultaneously: graphophonic, syntactic, semantic. It is interactive in that reading is driven by the structure and content of the text and the reader's prior knowledge. Their prior knowledge provides a context for comprehension. Thus, readers both transform and are transformed by literary works, that is the reading experience is influenced by both- the stances readers take towards texts as well as the cognitive and psychological processes they bring to the reading process.

Recent schema theory helps to explain this phenomenon in a much better way. According to the schema theoretic approach, reading comprehension is not simply a straightforward act of retrieving information from a text but is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. The fundamental assumption of schema theory is that the text in itself does not carry meaning. It simply provides direction for the reader as to how he should retrieve or construct the
intended meaning from his cognitive frameworks (schemata) which are formed by previously acquired knowledge, feelings, personality and culture. Thus, the schemata affect reading comprehension for it involves building bridges between what is new and what is known. The goal of schema theory is to specify the interface between the reader and the text. An active exploration of this reader-text interaction can lead students to realize and internalize the idea that the text’s structural features play a powerful role in the shaping of readers interpretation and what they read.

Inasmuch as reading comprehension is an interactive process between the reader’s background knowledge (schemata) and the text, the interplay of schemata in the construction of meaning is foregrounded more significantly if the text is literary. Findings from interdisciplinary researches involving cognitive psychology, linguistics, areas of artificial intelligence and the schema theory in particular have once again brought literature on the agenda of ESL pedagogy. Insights from these studies have established a link between literary text and the readers’ schemata, resulting in the interpretation of the text. The students interest could be captivated by concentrating on the literary texts themselves which not only enable them to perceive the precision and vitality of the language employed by the author but also help them to clarify their meaning.
all of which lead to a deeper understanding of the language. It is through the literary texts that the ESL learner becomes aware of the different modes writers employ in order to create texts to engage readers. By leaving much for the reader to imagine, the study of literature creates a demand for the search of meaning. The use of literature, therefore, becomes important not only because it demands the search for meaning and enables the reader to respond to the text in a much better way, but it also provides students with another useful tool which is a critical feature of language learning: the ability to interpret a discourse. Demand for the search of meaning and interpretive ability have reassured the place of literature in language teaching and have brought it in an active alliance with ESL pedagogy. Drawing on these studies, and the schema theory in particular, What remains to be asked is how much can advanced (and even intermediate) ESL learners benefit from a comprehension pedagogy which focusses on the inter-relationship between literature and ESL? How much gain can be accrued in the advanced ESL situation when literature is the reading content of the course? Can language be taught effectively through a curriculum that does not banish literature from the language classroom? More pointedly, once a poem or a play or a novel is chosen, how can the language teacher best promote student involvement in reading comprehension? What are the implications of the schema-
theoretic view of reading comprehension for classroom practices? Of the two fundamental goals of reading comprehension, namely, increasing comprehension from text and increasing ability to comprehend from text, how does schema theory help in achieving these goals of reading comprehension.

1.2 Along the way to answering these questions, the present study in Chapter Two provides some reflections on the nature of reading in general and second language reading in particular. Of different models and theories of reading that have developed over the past several years, some of these have been discussed in this chapter with a particular emphasis on transactional and interactionalist models of reading. From this interactionalist perspective of reading which is largely shared by most of literary response theorists, the focus has been given to the reader and the stances he takes towards texts and reading. The chapter concludes with a section on reading and comprehension which aims at looking into certain theoretical issues with regard to instructional practices: increasing comprehension from text and increasing ability to comprehend from text.

1.3 Combined efforts of interdisciplinary researchers involving psychologists, linguists and specialists in artificial intelligence have resulted in the emergence of a
new set of instruction for analyzing language comprehension. At the core of this is the notion of schema. The term schema dates itself to Kant who first developed the idea of general schemata as experiences of people collected together in the form of common elements in memory. Schema theory for the first time provides a structure powerful enough to support the interactions among different levels of processing in reading. In fact, reading research, for more than a decade now has been influenced by schema theory. These theoretical discussions on schema theory form the basis of Chapter Three. The chapter begins with a short history of schema. Along with the history, the various types of schema, its attributes and functions have also been discussed here. The last two sections deal with the importance of prior knowledge on comprehension and the interactive effects of cultural origin of a text on the reading comprehension under the heading Prior Knowledge and comprehension and Cultural Schemata and comprehension, respectively.

1.4 Findings from schema theory and advanced research on reading have reassured the place of literature in ESL pedagogy. Literature is no more being looked at as a rival to language teaching, rather it now been seeing as an ally to language teaching. Chapter Four deals with the issues pertaining to literature in the language classroom. After making a synoptic overview of language/literature as
resource, attempts have also been made to look into the research on response to literature and recent composition research for bringing literature back into the fold of language teaching and justifying its alliance with ESL pedagogy. Once the place of literature has been established in the ESL pedagogy, efforts have also been made in this chapter to briefly discuss the differences between literary and non-literary texts and to show how literary text helps in language learning as well as in the development of interpretive strategies. The chapter concludes with a section on role of culture where the text is examined from the point of view of the differing cultural schemata of the reader and the writer. In a situation where the cultural schemata of the ESL learner differ from the presupposed cultural schemata of the text and that of the writer, breakdown of communication and confusion is inevitable in the process of reading comprehension. Some suggestions have also been made towards the end of the chapter for remedying mismatches arising as a result of differing cultural schemata.

1.5 Although the role of literature as resource and the effect of culture have been identified as the two principal influences in the ESL pedagogy and comprehension, there are other factors as well which must be taken into consideration. In Chapter Five, the place of vocabulary,
simplification and translation in the ESL pedagogy has been discussed at length so as to look at the role and place of literature in the language classroom in totality.

1.6 The concluding chapter makes a modest attempt to provide an answer to the questions raised in 1.1 above. In the form of Some Emerging Insights, a three-phase approach to reading in the language classroom has been suggested which are pre-reading phase, reading phase and post-reading phase. The pre-reading phase attempts to activate existing schemata and thereby enhances interest in the reading phase. The reading phase itself draws directly from the text and this enables the reader to extract relevant information from the text. The post-reading phase is consolidatory in nature and it helps the learner to relate the text to his own knowledge or opinions. Based on two different texts, familiar and unfamiliar, certain exercises (Exercise A and Exercise B) have been suggested towards the end of this chapter. The familiar text has been represented by Anita Desai's The Accompanist, while the unfamiliar text has been represented by Somerset Maugham's The Man with the Scar. Both these texts have been reproduced in Appendices A and B.