CHAPTER 1

LOCATING ENGLISH: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
CHAPTER 1

LOCATING ENGLISH: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 Place of English: A Global Perspective

English has been fast emerging as a very useful language in the modern world. English as a second language (SL) today ranks well ahead of other rivals like Chinese, Spanish. In terms of the number of its native speakers English stands second only to Chinese (Crystal 2003: Figure no. 1.1). But the number of people who use English as their SL or L2 far outnumber the mother tongue speakers in other languages of the world. Apart from being a native tongue, English enjoys two other roles, i.e. as a SL and as a foreign language (FL); in Kachru’s model (1987) these two belong to outer and expanding circles respectively.

People in the outer circle number about 1.5 billion. And those belonging to the expanding circle are obviously on the rise. Graddol (2006) feels that even in places like China, Russia or Japan English would rather be treated as an SL in lieu of FL. It will mean that outer circle absorbs the members of the expanding circle. And for him India would be a very crucial case in the further growth of English as a global tongue. The inner circle, as he thinks, remains rather stagnant and it implies that the outer and expanding circles may grow into a single circle.

Chinese remains confined to a few countries, whereas English has spread across the globe. The first language speakers of English today belong to the U.K., U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The total number of its users today stands at 1.5 b. (Crystal 2003). This huge number of people is well distributed internationally across the globe. It is from the politico-historical association of English that is mostly lacking in its close competitors like Chinese, Spanish, French, German, or Hindi. The role of English as a global language is further bolstered by the emergence of the US as the most powerful
military and economic power in the world today. Even in the 18th century some far-sighted people like the then US President James had predicted the growing importance (Howatt 1984). In the 19th century Webster produced the great masterpiece, *International English Dictionary*, which too helped immensely towards its present growth of the language. So in the last two centuries the language had developed very steadily to acquire an international status. English also enjoys different recognised roles across the world, such as a second language, a foreign language, an official one, an associate one, a pidgin and so on. In the last fifty years English has grown largely and rapidly like never before (Crystal 2003).

The total number of native speakers of English presently stands as follows. It is 380m (approx.) which is only second to Chinese Mandarin -1.1 b. (110 crores), followed by English, Hindi, Spanish, Bengali, Arabic in that order (Fig. 11, David Crystal 2003). However, the following is another estimate in which Chinese Mandarin stands at the top with 874m speakers. Hindi comes second in the number of its native speakers (366m), followed by English (340m), Spanish (322m), Bengali (207m), Arabic (201m) (Fig. 1.2: World Almanac and Book of Facts MLA of America).

The rapid progress in international trade and communication technology in recent time has further given English a shot in the arm. The globalization and liberalization of trade and economy has pushed the language ahead. English today becomes the second important language in non-native contexts in many places of Africa, Asia, West Indies and Latin America. The wide variety of approaches to the language at several places fits in well with its international status and adaptability. In today’s bilingual world where above sixty per cent of the people are bilingual (Richards and Rodgers 1986/2001), English makes a strong bid for the second or associate position.

As stated earlier, English has a diverse role ranging from that of the First Language (L1) to the second language (L2), foreign language (FL), Associate Official Language (AOL). In countries like South Africa, Nigeria, outside the Inner Circle (Kachru 1986), the native population accepts it as their L1. In India, in the main, English is retained as a second language; it is listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution (1950) as an associate official language (AOL) along with Hindi, the state official lan-
guage (SOL). In recent times countries like China, Japan and Russia have welcomed English as a foreign tongue (FT). More and more people there are adopting English as a subject of study. The total number of non-native speakers of English the world over today is above 1.8b. (Crystal 2003).

a) Total number of users of English in the world today is about 1.5b. (150 crores), about a quarter of the world population and the number is still going strong. The number may vary between 1.2b to 2b, according to other accounts. Crystal has preferred to take that safe middle line of 1.5b.

b) Out of 1.5b users of English today just about one-fourth of the total is the native users of English. Kachru’s ‘Inner Circle’ includes around 400m or 40 crores (Braj B. Kachru 1999); World Almanac and Ethnologue presents a more inclusive account of 450m (Crystal 2003:65-66). The Inner Circle actually contains 380m L1 speakers while the Outer Circle – 300-500m. (L2) and the Expanding Circle – 1000m\1b (FL, Russia, China, Japan etc.) The total goes up from 1.5b to 2b in the total global population of 600b (Census 2061). According to Crystal (2003: 141) the Inner and Outer Circles share now the same status, The ratio of native speakers on the one hand and the L2 and FL speakers on the other is just 1:3 today (Crystal: 69). According to one projection, the native speakers in the world would decline from the current 8% in 1950 to less than 5% in 2050 (Graddol 1999).

1.2 INDIAN CONTEXT
English teaching in India, particularly in West Bengal, has a long history of over two hundred years. As a result of the endorsement of Lord Macaulay’s Minute (1835) English was formally introduced by the then British Governor General in India, Lord Bentinck. Of course, it had got the full support of the upper elitist class of people in Bengal, mainly in Kolkata in the second half of the 18th century. So, Kolkata, the epicentre of the British power, soon emerged also as the centre of western education, at first, informally among the rising upper-middle class of people in Bengal who had got the blessings of the new foreign rulers by virtue of their close association with them from the
very beginning. That is how much before 1835 Raja Rammohan Ray had set up a school of western education in order to cater to the demands of the elite class. It is mainly because of this drive that the ground was ready for the arrival of English in an officially recognised role in 1835.

Initially, the British rulers had preferred to maintain a safe distance from the Indian education system. Their first direct involvement came when Warren Hastings set up Kolkata Madrasa in 1781, followed by the establishment of Sanskrit College by Jonathan Duncan at Kashi in 1792. This is just an effort in the same line of action to extend the traditional and native Indian education system further.

Ironically, however, the Bengali elite people in Kolkata looked forward to the western education system through English. In the 18th century the new aspiring middle-class people had already started informally adopting English education in general (some western sciences, philosophy) and the English language in particular (later referred derogatorily as ‘Babu English’, i.e. the ‘broken’ and mixed English). Around 1800 Jagamohan Basu set up an English-medium school at Bhabanipur and Mr Drummund had established another in central Kolkata. In 1817 the Hindu College (at present the Presidency College, Kolkata) was established. This year also saw the establishment of a premier academic institute, ‘Kolkata School Book Society’. These two institutes together played a very significant role in the spread of English education in Bengal. The English education had its beginning in India in these institutions even before the introduction of Macaulay’s education in 1835.

At the district level too, the educational scenario kept fast changing to keep up with the pace of change taking place in Kolkata. This shift from the traditional native system of Sanskrit education at tols and chatuspathis (the conventional Sanskrit schools in India) to the school and college-type western model was afoot on a broader canvas. In 1800 itself the English Missionaries like Sir William Carey, Joshua Marshman, Robert May and Ward in the main, had set up the Serampore College. It started imparting western education and knowledge to the native subjects in return to the Indian education in Sanskrit and Bengali that they received themselves. Many other schools came up in several other places like
Tamluk, Bardhaman, Krishnagar, Berhampore, etc. In the year 1822 Raja Rammohan Roy set up an English School, named Anglo-Hindu School in Kolkata for the education of the children of the upper-caste Indian elite class. Then followed a number of other schools like the one run by the Kolikata School Society-run School at Pataldanga (1818), now known as Hare School; another such notable school was Oriental Seminary (March 1829) set up by Gour Mohan Addhya, or the Scottish Missionary Alexander Duff’s School (1830), later known as General Assembly Institute. In the districts also several such schools were fast coming up.

For the sake of modern scientific education people like Raja Rammohan Roy launched a frontal fight mainly against the British Rulers for their apathy to the development of a modern education system for the Indians. In that struggle he had to face the internal resistance from his fellow countrymen in the General Committee of Public Instructions (GCPI, founded in 1823) and the external apathy from the Government. In the GCPI there was a sharp divide among its native members over the issue of a choice between the traditional native education system and the modern western education. In his individual capacity on December 11, 1823 Rammohan gave vent to his opinion in a now historic missive to Lord Amherst by strongly arguing in favour of a Baconian approach to knowledge in place of the medieval Schoolman’s. He opposed the Government’s move for a Sanskrit College (1824) at the expense of the desired western education for the Indians. Rammohan’s plea however fell on the deaf ear of the rulers. Only after Lord Macaulay’s arrival in India as the president of the GCPI, Rammohan’s efforts got a fresh lease of life. Macaulay’s report, _Minute_ (February 2, 1835) was accepted by Lord Bentinck on March 7, 1835 and with this English was formally launched in the general education system of the country (Sriraman 1986).

In 1854 Sir Charles Wood prepared his Despatch wherein he re-appraised the progress resulting from the introduction of English as proposed in _Minute_. After assessing its pros and cons Wood recommended for the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the primary level, while English was to be retained at the higher level of education. Despite Wood’s recommendation, English was much in use at the primary and secondary levels. The
spread of English received further boost with the foundation of Calcutta University (1857) and two other Universities at Madras and Bombay. The Higher Education Commission (1882), popularly known as Hunter Commission, again pointed to the same measures as suggested by Wood for revamping the primary education through mother tongue and with a greater Governmental favour. The next assessment came from Lord Curzon’s Resolution (1904). Despite its recommendations for the further development of MT in primary education, the growth of English education still went on unchallenged in British-ruled India.

English has deep roots in the Indian soil for over two centuries. Since its official introduction in 1835, English has become a language of prestige, of social status and opportunity in this country. Education in general is popularly equated with English education eventoday. It is so much so that English has become a basic component of education here for its non-native learners (Graddol 2006: 14). And in such a vast multilingual country, people are generally bilingual, knowing at least one more language other than their Mother Tongue (MT/L1). There is also a sizeable group of L1 speakers of English among the Indians despite their MT being an Indian language. As a nation of 1 billion people India is now a fertile ground for further spread of English. Graddol (2006: 14) further predicts that the number of learners of English would reach 2b. mark in the next 10-15 years the world over. India has already got a greater number of English users than the combined strength of the U.S. and British users of English. Of them, 200m are the L2 users and 35,000 L1 speakers (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2002: 796). Both in usage and in administration English is a recognized language. Educated Indians use it as a language of their own through the process technically termed as ‘Indianization’ or indigenization of English (Kachru 1983) or ‘nativization’, to use a broader term. The last one covers all non-native contexts in the world. The non-native speakers of English had sought to internalize the language as their own, and to write creatively in it. This transfer of non-native literary sensibility to English has found its expression in the writings of Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Raja Rammohan Ray, Sri Aurobindo down to Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and a host of others. This vast body of non-native English literature in India has achieved a distinct identity or even a canonical status known as Indian English literature.
(Naik 1982:5).

In the sub-continental ‘plurilingual’ (John McRae 1996) context English enjoys almost an unchallengeable position. Hindi cannot be an alternative because it does not enjoy as much popularity as English across the country. It offers a bright career prospect even within the country. However, in India English has a strong colour brought about by the phenomenon known as ‘Indianization’ of English. This Indianized English is part of what is known as ‘New Englishes’. (Malachi Edwin Vethamani 1996: 204, in Carter and McRae eds.). Researchers like Braj Kachru, Kamal Shridhar (1992) have sought new identities for ‘Englishes’ on the basis of characteristics acquired in the local bases. As for Graddol (2006: 11), in place of ‘native English’ it is the ‘global English’ that is to be considered as a lingua franca. Edge and Widdowson reveal the new phenomenon of diversification of English into several fresh identities. For Julian Edge (1993: 26) an international language like English does no longer belong to a nation, but to those who use it regularly. The same stand is adopted by Widdowson too (2003).

1.3 ELT Situation in Post-colonial India

Soon after Independence (1947) efforts were undertaken with a great deal of zeal for overhauling the education system. The Radhakrishnan Commission (1949) had favoured the retention of English as an AOL along with the state language (that is, Hindi), (Krishnaswami and Sriraman 1995: 36). While many favoured the idea of abolition of English, there was also a strong wind in its favour. Hindi was not acceptable to many, particularly in the South Indian states. English had a role to play in the context of the tension between two linguistically opposite groups. The Kothari Education Commission (1967) recommended a 3-language formula for the Central Government’s general language policy. In respect of the growth of English worldwide in the post-50s several post-colonial states all over the world took varying stands on the future of English. The Indian government had shown a special interest in English in the multilingual context of the country, and as such, founded Central Institute of English (CIE, now Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages or CIEFL) at Hyderabad in 1958.
1.4 West Bengal Context: A Historical View

The state of West Bengal shared most of the pre-Independence ELT development plans along with the rest of the nation. After Independence, English as the language of the erstwhile rulers in some states took a backseat, and at several places the demand for regional tongues was made. In some states English was removed completely from the primary syllabus, and was inducted in the secondary syllabus as an optional paper having varying pass marks for promotion to higher classes. In West Bengal, English had been retained all along as a compulsory paper in primary classes until 1982 when English was shown the door. The new secondary English course came into effect from Class VI to Class X. It introduced a new approach – functional-communicative – of teaching English as a second language. It introduced a newly-framed teaching materials (TM), titled ‘Learning English’ Series, and did away with the earlier structural syllabus through the *Peacock Readers, Parijat Readers Series.*

The early 1980s Reforms were further accelerated with the economic liberalization and telecommunication revolution worldwide. The importance of English grew tremendously as a result of the globalization of industry and commerce, and its ‘global spread’ was perceptible more clearly than ever before (Crystal 2003). The Union Government adopted the New Education Policy (NEP 1986, in Biswas 2004), and in 1989 the University Grants Commission (UGC) had appointed the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) for syllabus reforms at the Degree level. On its recommendation the return of English as a compulsory paper of 50 marks in place of Compulsory Additional English, a full paper of 100 marks, can adequately show the change.

At the primary- and secondary-level English courses the quick changes were evident. After the recommendations of the Ashok Mitra Commission, English was introduced in class V in 1992. In 1998 ultimately the Government conceded to the long-standing popular demands for English study at the primary level – from class III (Pabitra Sarkar Commission). Then, amid much controversy, debate and dithering, triggered by the Ranjugopal Mukhopadhyaya Commission (2000), English was introduced in class I. All these steps and trends were further vindicated by McKinsey in 2001. In the H.S. level
English course, the syllabus apparently remains stereotyped. Yet, there is some new orientation in teaching methods and evaluations. For instance, the objective-type questions are set from textbooks, and to urge them to read in between the lines. The language-based items and composition work are meant to focus on comprehension skills, grammar, composition, etc. In the case of methods, the Council issued a circular (1989) to all the schools under its purview clearly suggesting a communicative approach at the H.S. level in continuation of Madhyamik English Course with effect from the session of 1989-90 onwards. The H.S. syllabus has now been freshly overhauled, and it has been operational from the 2005-06 academic session in the state.

In the earliest stage of English education the English classes were attended by only a privileged few belonging to the upper-class urban people with high motivation. And the scenario was fundamentally different in every respect from that of the present, English was, first of all, invariably the first language of the learners, and the method of teaching was direct, The textbooks originally meant for the L1-speaking learners in the native context, pose various hurdles for the L2 learners of the same age-group in a non-native background. Besides, the teachers were mostly native English-speakers, and even some few of their Indian counterparts closely approximated the native English standard. That’s why English had a high success rate.

The picture has drastically changed in the post-Independence India when a legion of people came up in higher studies with the universalisation of education. English still retains the high prospect and opportunity of success for the young learners (Biswas 2004). The introduction of free mass education leads to the increase in the number of learners. Teachers are now exclusively non-native speakers of English. While exposure is a key to a foreign language learning (Bright and McGregor 1978), this exposure is not only restricted, but also to a regional variety of Indian English dialect. All this seriously hampers the process of actual learner development. Teachers as well as learners prefer the use of their mother tongue in place of the target language. Thus, the use of the target language is further reduced under the pressure of actual circumstances. Poor language skills on the part of the learners get in the way of any fruitful interaction between the teacher and learners. It is lecture-based, with the
teacher being the most fluent and glib while the learners remain a charmed audience to it (Quirk 1963). Teachers as concerned with covering portions, can hardly pay heed to learners, utterly ignoring their needs. The teachers continue to look upon English as a subject for teaching, and to produce like-minded students, scholars and teachers.

Widdowson (1988) makes a similar comment, and considers literature teaching in that traditional way as very sacrosanct outside Britain, to be rather called a ‘literary-critical’ tradition. This heavy leaning on one aspect of a language and literature programme rather presents a lopsided practice in English classroom, called ‘critical orthodoxy’ by Widdowson. By it the teacher offers a set of readymade judgement for rote learning by the learners who just ‘clone’ (Simpson 1997: 6) the views of critics in their examinations. In a similar vein C. S. Lewis (1961) referred to the cases of British Honours students in English who look at texts through ‘another’s spectacle’; and naturally they are prone to reading books on the texts, and not the texts themselves. F. R. Leavis also refers to the similar situations prevailing in non-native speaking countries where benefits of ‘literary-critical’ discipline of the British model are not available for the establishment of English literature as a subject of study there. The bias in a way, either for literature or language is termed by Roman Jakobson as an ‘anachronism’ (Kramsch 2001).

These analyses apply to a large extent to the Indian ELT setup where English as both literature and language is treated as a cultural, moral subject to be taught at the expense of language components. This picture is projected the other way round where literature study precludes the language study at the outset, and thus perhaps in return it harms itself beyond repair. Randolph Quirk has made such a critical comment on English language teaching situations in India in the 1960s in the Study Group Report of the Government of India (1979).

1.5.0 Syllabus and Pedagogical Context

In the previous section we have given an overview of the position of English both in its global and local contexts. We have also discussed the English language teaching situation in
West Bengal as well. In this section we shall specifically concentrate on the syllabus at the H. S. level and its pedagogical implications.

1.5.1 Teacher and Syllabus

The earlier H.S. language syllabuses were the mere lists of literary pieces, apart from some linguistic components. Literary pieces included some poems, essays, a story and a play from the mainstream British literature. Only one or two pieces were from outside the canon. In the Revised Syllabus there have been some innovations like a strong stress on Indian English writings, not just a poem from Tagore’s as before, but also a short story from R. K. Narayan, one essay each from Tagore, Manikuntala Sen, and Amartya Sen, et al. The linguistic components now appear to be the same as earlier; authentic texts from newspapers are increased this time with the addition of advertisements, notices, and report writing. The rapid reader makes a re-entry after a gap of about two decades. Our senior teachers are acquainted with most of them which are now presented in a new light.

The selection of textual pieces follows the traditional path of reshuffling exercises. Some of the previous pieces like ‘Packing’, ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and ‘The Owl’ are retained while new pieces from authors in the earlier syllabus are brought in. This time the grammatical items like synthesis of sentences, change of narration, the use of articles, prepositions, wh-questions, etc., are made text-based. This orientation would be very likely to make the teaching of grammatical items contextualized, not just abstract, theoretical obsession with the form only (Harmer 1996). The syllabus, in original, had put a special emphasis on these ‘language-oriented’ exercises. Thus, theoretically, the literary pieces are quite justifiably rendered open to a linguistic treatment for the general benefit of the students of all stream arts, science, commerce or even vocational. As the probability of some change in the language-literature ratio was envisaged through Question no. 9 in the questionnaire for teachers, there is now an increase of 15 marks for the language component from 100 marks in the erstwhile Paper II. In the revised syllabus, it is no longer the usual paper divisions, but the mode of class division of the whole course into Class XI and Class XII at the H. S. level (Appendix I). And in that break-up for Class XI the literary study would get just 40 marks.
out of a total of 100 marks. In Class XII it is allotted 45 marks out of 100. So, it runs short of 15 marks from the previously allotted 100 marks in a single paper. This, along with some other changes, marks a positive change, and reveals a well thought-out plan behind it. The inclusion of contextualized grammar in literary pieces is meant to adopt a linguistic approach to literature which seems to be prompted by the recent study on the utility of using literature for the development of some language skills.

In its concentrated focus on skills development, the revised syllabus makes it clear through the allotment of a total of 20 marks to comprehension in Class XII (Mohan 2001: 200). Out of 60 marks for language-based areas in Class XI, 25 marks are allotted for comprehension questions on the rapid reader, a set text. It entails practice in extensive reading through authentic texts. The Council took some time to provide the sample questions or exercise models. As regards the rapid reader (RR) senior teachers may recall their experience with the original one. The difference of this text with the original one is that it is in its authentic form. The earlier one, David Copperfield was in an abridged and simplified form. It may, as such, include the question type on vocabulary, like multiple-choice, matching tables, search for word meaning, questions on context, etc. the RS makes it obvious through the allotment of a total marks of 20 to comprehension in Class XII. Out of 60 marks 25 marks are allotted for the seen text of the RR, and the rest 35 marks are on the unseen prose text. As no specific model for the comprehension questions is provided there, the practice is very likely to boil down to the prevalent pattern. It may, as such, include questions vocabulary (multiple-choice, matching, words for their given meanings), questions on content, etc. These are not obsolete and outdated. The comprehension section would involve students in a lot of reading practices, requiring little productive skills from them. This respite for the students implies greater involvement and engagement of teachers in the exercise. A skill-based approach requires its craftsman to be well-versed in that skill manipulation, and a master of the skill. At least, she should have an awareness of that particular skill and its sub-skills.

Letter writing (personal and official) for example is a common component, and drawn from the earlier syllabus; teachers are agree of this practice in their
own school days. So, they would have hardly any problem with it all. Paragraph writing is equally a common popular feature in the syllabus. These two aspects are just retained from the previous syllabus. The ESP or English for Special Purposes, is a current concept in ELT worldwide for some time, and is only new in our present context. From the full range ESP includes five features such as reporting, dialogue and summary writing, notice, newspaper advertisements. 'Reporting' as an indirect way of narrating dialogue is well-known to our teachers and learners. It is the same with the practice of 'summary' writing. The other three are all the more new and interesting. Dialogue reporting ('short dialogue', p1, N) is somewhat like the writing of direct narration.

Another important skill involved is to prepare a report ('composing reports' p1, N). Notice writing is very useful and interesting, though of what type is not specified. Yet, the experienced teachers can conceive of the types like some newspaper notices, such as Lost and Found, Legal Notice for the change of names or other official ones like the academic ones used in schools, etc. In the latter cases, where one finds those announcing the holidays, vacations, suspensions of classes, those for games, invitation of write-ups from the students for the annual school magazine, and many others. This would serve for practices in both areas of reading and writing. The teacher has been offered a very common source of materials for the learner introduction to a store of materials for reading practice. But as the students are reluctant in reading in general and reading newspaper in particular (about 38% of informants responded), the syllabus puts a strong stress on reading the TL newspapers through its added emphasis on comprehension. The target there set forth would be the hundred per cent of readership of newspapers among the learners. Because, newspapers contain a lot of things like letter writing, notices, articles providing contents and style for composition, reports, even dialogue or direct reporting.

There are two types of writing associated with the tasks in the curriculum. These are not new, but part of the syllabus over decades. Apart from the composition, the textual pieces too require writing skill. Composition is the basic area to develop writing, and so needs the foremost attention. It is rightly set for Class XI so that it can be nurtured from the beginning of the course. This apart, there are other writing tasks to be performed. For
instance, writing notices, newspaper advertisement or writing dialogues need special tending in the classroom hour. The practice in writing notes on textual pieces had better follow the former. Or if the teacher feels that the two can better be pursued simultaneously, it may be made more interesting and engaging. But in that case, a special care need to be taken of so that the learners do not get frustrated.

Rather than the previous H.S. syllabus, the RS is sort of a definitive advancement on those earlier ones. And this type of a syllabus at this level is a long-standing need as a step-up on the well-planned Madhyamik syllabus. The demand was there for a sequential syllabus in the follow-up of the Secondary English course, as the two courses had been wide apart and inconsistent. Such a great lacuna was alleged from all quarters as being one of the causes for a great number of failures in the H.S. examination since its inception in 1976 here.

The RS, of course, marks a step forward to that desired harmony between the two successive levels. The syllabus makers made the point clear in the opening statement as such: to ‘effect a smooth transition from the Secondary to H.S. …level’ (RS 2003, 1, (a): 46), etc.; Kramsch 1993/2001). The very sentence includes as its objective another skill, that is ‘communicative skill’, practical and useful, suitable for a job (RS ibid.). Yet, that much elaboration does hardly elucidate the specific skills and sub-skills subsumed under the skills of communication. It is not made clear there to our teachers if they include the speaking skill. Of course, 1. (b) specifies one, i.e. the ‘writing skill’, leaving aside the other communicative skill, i.e. speaking. A number of writing exercises are included in Class XI as well as in Class XII. All these diverse ways and variety of genres may prove highly motivating and rewarding for the learners.

The teachers find it less distinctive in the shift of focus from the traditional explicatory nature of teaching of the texts to the promotion of language ‘activities’ on the basis of the text (ibid.). Further, the targets set forth in the syllabus through certain altered practices, are not so specific for the actual teaching conditions. Perhaps, in the light of the Council’s statement the teachers would be provided with the necessary support in this new method. One or two suggestions are left in the syllabus in a ‘Note’ in the draft issue (Note (f)): ‘Extensive tutorial classes should be introduced from the beginning of Class XI’. The very
note also stresses the importance of writing skills thus: ‘The skill in independent writing has to be developed at the H.S. stage’. And for that, enough writing exercises are incorporated for Class XII. The ratio of comprehension and writing skills exercises are incorporated in terms of marks allotted to them is 1:4...

The syllabus has adopted a new approach in the selection of the text material. The prose pieces are purely literary with a ‘naturally occurring’ (Carter and Newman 2001: 43) language as earlier. But the emphasis this time has been placed on more ‘modern texts, texts by authors of Indian or other non-Western origins and texts by women authors’. Here the list of authors for study accommodates writers like R. K. Narayan (‘Rajam and Mani’ from Malgudi Days), Manikuntala Sen, a woman writer of Indian origin (‘The Struggle against Dowry’) or R. N. Tagore (‘Our Culture, Their Culture’). The other point of familiar contexts for the students refers to writings like Corbett’s ‘Extracts from Life at Mokemah Ghat’. All these selected articles cater well to the stated methods of the Council, such as ‘thematic and stylistic variety’, ‘scientific and environmental issues’, ‘communal harmony’ or ‘gender issues’.

The poems in the RS are however strongly tilted towards the western or British authors, excepting R. N. Tagore. The previous syllabus has had more or less the same structure in this respect. Indian poets or other non-western poets have not been selected. Some of the prose writers were given a similar deal in the Selection. Jim Corbett has staged a comeback almost after a decade into the syllabus with a separate piece. A greater such re-entry is achieved by none other than Norman McKinnel with his one-act play, The Bishop’s Candlesticks after more than a decade. In place of Secondary English course, now it is in the H. S. English syllabus. The rapid reader (RR) is another such item which has made a comeback with a new piece (The Story of My Life by Helen Keller). The text is this time bound to be difficult for the teachers, and would likely be less arresting than the previous piece, David Copperfield. For, the comprehension on RR cannot, first of all, be of the same type as they were with the original text in the + 2 English syllabus (Dickens’s David Copperfield). The questions there were mostly on the contents of the passage quoted and some vocabulary-based questions, which characterize the pattern of questioning
as a mix of both short and essay-type questions. The content-based questions can be of various lengths and nature, whereas the vocabulary-based activities by nature are bound to be shorter, narrower and more objective. The ‘objective’ type of questions is relatively shorter and linguistic in nature. So far, the comprehension test has had no focus on syntactic form. This is in order to lay stress on the greater scope of respective skills of ‘reading’, in the main.

Second, the two sets of comprehension exercise in the syllabus are then thoughtfully distributed among two classes (RR for Class XI and comprehension for Class XII) through the latest announcement of the split-up. The comprehension questions from the unseen prose texts can prove themselves to be interesting and challenging. Both paragraphs may be quite different, one literary and the other from non-literary field, yet authentic and ‘real’. Though nothing is specified as regards the pattern of questioning, the selection of the second (prose) text and their questions may have a strong tendency to be similar in nature, the type being mentioned earlier. It had better follow the Madhyamik model, however, for the convenience of the teachers and their learners.

In several interviews, the teachers showed some sort of familiarity with the grammatical units to be taught. First, most of those units were in the previous syllabuses, and the teachers have had all their career-long experience of dealing with them in the classroom. Second, as almost all the English teachers in the schools have had some professional training/degree/diploma in their career, they are not completely unaware of those things in their professional life. Further, their two-decade-long experience of handling ‘New materials’ (my quote) has acquainted them with some fairly novel contents like radio/TV programme, medicinal instructions and information, reporting of processes of production, etc. So, notice writing or newspaper advertisement may not be fully unknown to them, as those things had already been in use in the earlier syllabuses.

Yet, there are some disadvantages in this current development which were not there in the early eighties when the ‘new’ Madhyamik English course (‘Learning English’ series) was introduced in Class VI. Though the experiences were quite unexpected for our teachers and others like guardians, scholars, the authorities took every care to face the challenge. The
English teaching community was given a thorough shake-up to rise to the challenge. The teachers were put to the severest tests, and awarded some additional levers to get control of the situations. Besides the textbooks with numerous instructions, there was a 'Teacher's Manual' for the teachers to equip themselves for the classroom exercises and introduction of the course to their students.

Now, the H.S. English teachers are not that way geared up to meet the new techniques, which are novel for them, at least for their implementation on the basis of a number of textual pieces in a linguistic way. This bringing together of the two, to their control, like literature (of naturally flowing English), linguistics and/or stylistics which is the meeting ground of those two disciplines (Widdowson 1975), is beyond the grasp of our teachers in general. They are not experts in linguistics and stylistics. They mostly revealed their lack of knowledge of the nature of change there. During our interview some of them had received their maiden idea about the RS from the interviewer. Many of them had not got any copy of the RS till then; they had their first look at it from my copy.

Only when the individual teachers were consulted, and given a chance to express their views, they felt encouraged. The teachers, as earlier reported, showed their eagerness to interact with this interviewer, after they were taken into confidence, sounded with full faith in their knowledge of the subject and experience. And in the interview informally taken, the teachers came out free, and were eager to express their views about the RS as well as its predecessor. One common point in all our talk was the general view of the teachers to express their dissatisfaction with the performance of the students and their competence, and the gap between the two successive levels of the Secondary and the High Secondary courses, and the course materials. They then felt a strong desire for some change; it is not that teachers are inert and prefer the status quo. They showed a keen interest in the proposed change. But once some change is afoot, they mostly showed their lack of preparedness for it all. The proportion of their responses, though, was not here counted statistically. Because, this is part of general experience of all practising teachers.

Yet, certain newly introduced items in the RS and the questionnaire, appear to be new to many of them. Such as, ESP (English for Special Purposes), c.v. in the RS 'draft', or
vocabulary, are technical terms in the ELT. Our teachers in most of the cases have not that much access to the development in it. Mostly, it is our senior-most teachers in English who suffered from the lack of some sophistication in the art and science of the profession besides their long professional experiences. The syllabus framing, as it has been done in the present case, marks an orientation from the earlier notional, literary one to a ‘task-based’ linguistic one (Nunan 1986). So, the teachers who would ultimately implement their project, are to be involved with the exercise in a greater number for better and more positive response.

It was again revealed in our meeting that the teachers are overwhelmingly concerned with the teaching of writing skill for the learners at the cost of the reading skill among the two target language skills (that is, reading and writing) set forth in the syllabus. Speaking and listening skills are hardly taken care of. Even in the writing skill its sub-skills are not distinctly and systematically taken into account in the teaching-learning activities. Sub-skills of writing such as coherence of sentences, cohesion of paragraphs, logical development of thought, linguistic style (for instance, the formal one in official letter or the informal or the intimate one in personal letters, etc.), are left to take care of themselves. In short, the organizational part followed by the expression activities or in other words the collection and ordering of ideas and the subsequent exercise of writing them down do not appear so distinct to the learners from their classroom experiences. And this is what should be the process in the practice of writing skill activity (Lucantoni 2002: 53; Hedge 2000: 306).

Thus, the reading skill practice actually falls far short of the desired rate. It is actually the only other skill besides listening (both receptive skills, Harmer 1996: Chapter 11) that ought to take a ride over other skills like writing; but actually the case is the opposite. Obviously, it suffers doubly thus. Next, the amount of practice that reading skill usually receives, further suffers from its fall in quality in our school education. Such a poor quality of reading skill in practice and its scanty amount in both ways cut down the chance of listening and reading in an L2 for the students that the syllabus plans and envisages. It cannot make the adequate contribution to the development of writing skill, as the former contributes to the development of the latter which together with other skills practice can promote the integrated skill development approach (Lucantoni 2002). Sufficient amount of reading skill
adequately promotes writing skill, not the other way round. Thus, the whole thing goes away with the objectives and the modes of the syllabus, and can hardly produce any satisfactory results, which is actually the case. The students and their syllabus therefore travel the opposite ways, leaving a gaping space between the two. So the humble, straightforward goals, thereby the course, appear too ambitious and unrealistic to the practising teachers.

Another area that occupied a greater space of the interview between the teachers and the investigator, is necessarily the revision of the H.S. syllabus that was in progress then. And the talk solely revolves round the draft copy of the revised syllabus of English (Group B), deferred for introduction from the 2005-2006 academic session in place of the original plan of 2003-2004. Meanwhile, the results of the H.S. examination 2004 and 2005 for the previous syllabus were published. The feedback from these, despite all the proposed reforms and revisions (though it is never called ‘revisions’) that were on the anvil, was highly shocking, both generally and specifically in English. The percentage of overall success in the H. S. Examination and the success in English (Group B) in particular have still remained very low, and the decline in the overall success was generally related to the poor performances in English (Group B). The poor result in English (Group B) was held responsible in a great majority of cases for the poor show on average. However, this transitional phase in the H. S. course had got much to contribute to that interaction. With the RS in the pipeline, the poor scores in the subject did hardly get much to address in the RS thereon. At the final stage, the Council did take into account the chronically low scores in the Humanities stream in general vis-à-vis the science papers. Those eleventh-hour steps for some reforms in evaluation are not a direct issue here for discussion, yet whenever it would be relevant, a proper focus would be cast upon them.

There are some major changes in the course as well as in the syllabus. This time along with the changes in the syllabus, i.e. in terms of its contents, it did not remain just a routine exercise. Apart from that, there are some very crucial decisions taken at this time to address several shortcomings in the previous course. As a general policy decision it was decided that the total two-year structure of the syllabus for the final examinations, both at the Secondary level and at the H. S. level had to be reduced to a year-wise programme. Because, this age-
old system of a two-year programme for the final public examinations like the Madhyamik Examination, the Higher Secondary Examination, the university examinations like the B. A. and B. Sc. Part I Examinations until now, or even the erstwhile M. A. and M. Sc. Examinations, had been putting a huge burden upon the examinees. So, now, like elsewhere, at the Secondary as well as at the Higher Secondary levels, the integrated two-year syllabus had been replaced by separate syllabuses for each year. And the public examinations would cover just the final year syllabus. Naturally, this is reflected in the English course along with the other subjects. And the second crucial decision is also of the general type. It has tried to put at par the Humanities subjects with the science subjects through the necessary changes in the evaluation pattern. The question patterns are being framed in a learner-friendly way. So, the question types would follow the pattern used in the science subjects. It is hoped that through this change the conventional arts-science ranking can be streamlined.

However, again, the revisions are this time two-pronged, and there are not yet fully decided still now. These are still in a flux. At the time of the survey, it was fully at the decision-making stage, and so the survey done there had got some inherent advantages and disadvantages of a transition, like some particular setback(s) to be addressed, some new measures and their efficacy, etc. The present survey is not free from them. This sort of things had not helped much to frame a fully structured questionnaire to meet the teachers with. At the time of preparing this paper, the contents of the syllabus are finalized, and put into operation. Yet, its paraphernalia like evaluation system, its pattern, the course pattern, etc. are at its nascent stage.

The reforms in general curriculum and those in English (Group B) in particular, have been further vindicated and justified in such a situation. The process of revision is still going on unendingly even after the commencement of the course. For instance, the split-up of the syllabus in two separate classes of XI and XII, along with Class IX and Class X, was announced after the session had already started. There are still a number of things to be stated in vivid terms and to be revised, like the question patterns, the status of the Class XI test to be centrally conducted by the Council itself. In the face of all these changes the teachers who would for all practical purposes implement the changes, seem to be lacking in
motivation. They do feel rather skeptical about the success of the much-hyped syllabus reforms. For a positive result their reservations are to be taken into a serious consideration.

1.5.2 Teaching Materials

As usual, most of the teaching materials (TM), mainly the text pieces, are provided through some Selections prepared by the Council in collaboration with some renowned publishing house. This time it is no exception. The publication takes some time beyond the schedule, and it arrives late in the market causing some initial inconvenience to the learners in the very first year. In the H. S. course since its introduction in 1976, it has been a collection of some text pieces like poems, essays, stories and plays, and put into two books. One book contains essays and stories, and the other one the poems and plays. And the two books termed ‘Selections’, however, do not provide any student support like annotations, notes or even glossary. About the textbook selections for this syllabus, the Council has come out late. Yet, this time the prescribed texts are well edited with sufficient annotations. Earlier selections were just collections without any notes and support materials. That had been in consonance with the usual practice in preparing anthologies. Whereas in many other state boards and universities it has been a sustained practice to provide annotations with the collected pieces. For instance, the textual anthology prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education, Assam, *(An Anthology of English Prose and Poetry* published by MacMillan and Company Ltd. 1966) was seen to be well-annotated in the past. Even the very early selections made by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education in the sixties and early seventies, were supported by notes on texts and brief biographical notes on their authors. But in the intermediate period, however, that practice was given up, and just the texts were published by the Secondary Board and the Council. In the remotest parts of the state the teachers had to fend for themselves. Sometimes they found it quite hard to trace the necessary sources of the texts they were to handle in the classroom. Those unaided texts led the concerned teachers to their own individual ways and means of dealing with them in the classroom. This uncontrolled approach has led further to the lack of a uniform practice in teaching all over the state. Of course, one can notice a great deal of uniformity in teaching
practices among the teachers despite all this, and this uniformity emerges only due to the prolonged traditional model of ‘teacher-fronted’ teaching. This uniformity, however, is rooted in teacher and their teaching whereas diversity is greatly learner-oriented.

The emphasis of the syllabus on the promotion of ‘independent’ writing skill in students thus hardly produces much hope among the teachers. Though it is highlighted as a teaching point in the syllabus (objectives of the course, 1, b: 46 and Note (f) 49), it is appropriately pointed out as being a precious skill (productive) in a formal situation of learning English as an L2. The use of an L2 in a non-native situation is usually confined to formal situations like officialdom, education, journalism, etc. It takes a much higher priority over a similar other skill, that is, speaking which is further restricted to a narrower sphere in our situation. Yet, teachers can find it quite difficult on their part to impart or develop the more sophisticated skill of independent writing in their learners.

Many other factors are operational behind such a situation. First of all, the evaluation system is partly responsible for most of it. For instance, the text-based objective-type questions made the learners more closely dependent on text pieces, and now they have been totally dropped from the revised course. This fact makes the teacher as well as the students less happy, as they feel shaky and unstable from the withdrawal of this heavy dose of textual support. Teachers, however, react in some cases to their abolition that is just result-oriented. They apprehend that this would lead to a low score in the examination. Because objective-type questions based on a few set pieces ensure a standard performance on close reading of the textual matters. Further, these questions, if not very intelligently framed, become banal and too easy for the intelligent students. So, had it not been properly utilized, it had better not occur at all.

Above all, the teachers in general express some sort of helplessness at the advent of a reform or syllabus change. They feel the dearth of new teaching materials to be launched within two months’ time. This time the changes are extensive, and such a change makes a great demand on the teachers, apart from others. In the RS, only one essay, ‘Packing’ by Jerome K. Jerome is retained, the other seven are the new entrants. Of these seven just one, that is, ‘Our Culture, Their Culture’ by R. N. Tagore, is reflective, and the author is a great
favourite with our teachers. But the other six are not just fresh and unfamiliar, their sources are almost beyond the reach of our teachers. Their source books are not available in the school libraries.

Among the poems, some become ‘academic’ as well as ‘anthological’ (my quotes), and without them as if the classroom teaching would be valueless. So, there are Wordsworth’s ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and Edward Thomas’s ‘The Owl’ from the previous syllabus. Some of the poets are quite common with a new set of their poems. The change of focus occurs in the case of poets like Shelley, Owen and Tagore. The fresh entrants are C. G. Rossetti (‘Uphill’), another war poet Siegfried Sassoon (‘The Hero’), and H. W. Longfellow (‘Nature’). The poets, who have made their exit, include Keats, Tennyson and de la Mare. There is hardly any qualitative change in it. Tagore’s ‘Where the mind is without fear’ again is not new to the senior teachers who had taught the Secondary English course even before the Functional-Communicative course, i.e. the ‘Learning English’ series, was introduced.

Crippled by infrastructural constraints, the teachers in that case would have to look for the textual resources in vain. This appears to be an additional burden on our teachers who have to accommodate both the learner variables and the materials variables within their severely restricted conditions. The teachers sometimes have to rely on some secondary sources for their relevant data which are often of very poor standard and full of mistakes. This time, the Council has timely issued the textual selections with sufficient annotations for the teachers to compensate for the rest with their experience and wisdom. The return to the initial practice of the Board, when only one school education body was there in West Bengal during the sixties and early seventies, would facilitate the teachers’ challenging job which is all the more strenuous this time. The revision this time is made with the change of time and its demand and needs. The inclusion of such current topics like the environmental and the women’s causes would demand a new awareness on the part of our teachers. Manikuntala Sen’s ‘The Struggle against Dowry’ needs to be treated not only with the awareness of earlier days of Saratchandra, but also very much with that of today’s feminist movement. Or again the essay by Amarta Sen et al. would also require an understanding of the environ-
mental pollution and its root cause. R. K. Narayan’s story (‘Rajam and Mani’) opens up a new horizon of Indian literary tradition in English. This too demands some basic knowledge of the history of the Indian writing in English and its origin. An additional awareness of Narayan and Raja Rao’s writings and their attitudes there would be essential to follow any such writing in English here in India. This Indian English discourse is a necessary evolution for the proper placement of English as a second language in the sub-continent.

Any such situational handicaps might have thrust an unwelcome burden upon the classroom teachers of English in relation to their dealing with text pieces like Aldus Huxley’s ‘Benares’ or Thomas Hardy’s “In time of the ‘Breaking of Nations’”. In dealing with Hardy’s poem the teacher’s awareness of the sense of the quote made by Hardy himself is essential for a proper understanding of the text. There the teachers must have the awareness of its reference, both Biblical and contemporary political contexts of Europe. Similarly, in Huxley’s case, one would need to have the knowledge of Huxley’s keen interest in India, and his travels and writings on several aspects of the contemporary situations of India under the British rule. In relation to this article, one would be better informed for its classroom presentation if one would read alongside it Huxley’s other essay on his visit to Kolkata in ‘Bose Institute in Calcutta’. Now, in the current syllabus, our teachers handling the play, ‘The Bishop’s Candlesticks’ would do well with their knowledge of Victor Hugo’s novel, *Les Miserables*. The teacher awareness of the full text of ‘Benares’ would do immense service to the classroom teachers themselves, though its source is not very difficult to get to here. Either the teachers or their school authorities could have just taken some extra pain to collect one or two copies of its source book, *Modern Prose*, edited by Michael Thorpe (Oxford India 1969/1991). This time the two sets of *Selections* made by the Council have got some relevant materials and information about the sources and contexts of the selected pieces. There is still some space both for the teachers and the learners to work out for the benefits of their cause. For instance, the data as regards the play with its source from Hugo’s novel, is too scanty and too insufficient to create interests for the learners in it. The very absorbing work of Hugo would otherwise remain dull or uninteresting without the very potential topic of the whole novel.
In the case of Huxley the learners’ introduction to his concern with India through his visit to India and his writing on it would help to inculcate love and respect for the author and his work. The readers would not feel hurt and insulted by the author’s comment against the Hindus in relation to their superstitious beliefs. To deal with Narayan’s ‘Rajam and Mani’ the teachers would better have some access to its source, *Malgudi Days*, with the reference given in the text. The same is true to Jim Corbett’s ‘Life at Mokemeh Ghat’.

The teachers who are otherwise found to some extent ‘fossilized’, have still shown keen interests in these issues. They have expressed their eagerness to have an access to such knowledge whenever necessary. They opted for an easy, economical means to get an access to those relevant sources in a single place, rather attached to the textbooks, like an annotated or aided anthology as suggested earlier. This suggestion is rather pragmatic too. The feedback in this respect must have enlightened one to take up the text pieces rather more confidently. These types of selections of course pieces can help to reduce the teacher dependence on external help-books, notes and ready-made answers, which have proved, in most of the cases, as unreliable and misleading. In most of the cases, they are hastily prepared with commercial interests, and often with little care for student interests. These help-books are often written in Anglo-Bengali mode, like the one on the RR, *The Story of My Life*, by Helen Keller. The text is exhaustively translated into the L1 of the learners, that is, Bengali. Prescribing such texts, or even their very presence in the market, would allure the weak learners to them, particularly their Bengali rendering.

A well-guided, well-supported anthology can hope to wean away both the teachers and the taught from their over-dependence upon those crippled market-volumes, sometimes attached to the original textbooks, or worse, just the notes without the original text pieces anywhere around them. And such official efforts by the Council would go a long way with the classroom teachers, and help both the teachers and the taught in a number of ways. Particularly, in a literature-based curriculum, such anthologies provide for special space of individual interpretations on and inferencing from the texts. Further, the annotations given there are reasonably provided, well enough to cover the significant items. They seem to be balanced in such a way that the weak students can find them as a very reliable support. On
the other side the advanced ones may be led to further inquiry for some exhaustive treatment. And for the teachers the annotations can show them some ways for their proper classroom utilization. It would help to facilitate the teacher to manipulate the text pieces depending upon the context variables of learning. The annotations should neither be too long and detailed or exhaustive for the classroom teachers to exploit the textual pieces to suit the learner needs and their learning conditions. So, primary annotations may help to develop teacher as well as learner autonomy. The ‘bazar-notes’ would do a great harm to that end. The optimal notes to the texts would go a long way leaving enough space for the free play of student imagination and thinking (‘cognitive’ development); it should not equally be too scanty to be called a support. Those notes thus ought to be a dependable support, but never a scratch to heavily lean over. The texts handled by the teachers along with the students ultimately become a ‘pretext’ for both, and their activities greatly lean towards them, despite some other authentic language materials for linguistic studies.

Apart from the textual pieces, there are several other teaching items which are language-based. Of course, as stated earlier, grammatical items are included in the textual pieces with some model exercises at the back of each of those pieces. But other items like compositions (no. 5 Paragraph Writing and Letter Writing, no. 6 ESP) are usually covered in books published by private agencies. Out of a crowd of them the classroom English teachers have to suggest and select one or several of them for themselves and for their classroom use. Here, the major responsibility lies with the teachers themselves. It is the Council which actually gives approval to those textbooks published by private publishing houses following the Council’s guidelines. In spite of that the quality of some such textbooks are not up to the standard. Sometimes some of them may be very poor in several respects, like information, organization, language, general get-up, etc. So, ultimately, the teacher is in a key position to give them a final stamp. These textbooks are otherwise beyond their control; they can neither improve them in a major way nor stop their circulation. Yet, the teacher’s choice, rejection or selection, would be the final verdict upon those books.

The syllabus has got a number of elements in it now, however. The present one may serve as a good resource for a right kind of utilization. Though, in actual counting the number
of pieces are limited, the scope they offer is enormous. For instance, it lies in the use of newspaper items, like reports, advertisements, notices, letters, etc., newspaper articles for writing paragraphs, report writing, or even summery writing from it. These features are to offer a great opening with a lot of potentials for the teacher and learners to exploit optimally. This is how one should treat a somewhat open-ended syllabus to serve the purpose of the learners. And that is where the diversity of the learners can be purposefully addressed for their own benefits.