CHAPTER VI

OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

6.1. Introduction:

Many critics, experts and teachers of literature despair that the academic process and the classroom practices distort literature and make it rigid and turn the intense experiences of human beings into mere abstract knowledge. Thus the works of literature, reduced to mere study material are stripped of their ability to touch the reader's emotions. When literature is primarily the text material, it tends to lose its soul and its power.

However gloomy this may sound, innovative techniques may render teaching literature, specially poetry, an emotional experience for the readers. "How do you acquaint students with the great works except by teaching them? On the other hand there is something devious in taking these works of imagination, the distillation of profound individual experience and reducing them to a teacher's notes", observes Das (1996).^1 He goes on to say, "Teaching methods are inevitably schematic and impersonal. Reducing literature to scholastic exercises and homework degrades it...... They (the literary works/the poems) are private and it seems a desecration to analyse them publicly in a large class. They must be read alone..... and they must be measured by the effect they have on the inner life of the reader."^2
Poems have to be taught in the classroom, tests and examinations have to be conducted as part of language teaching programmes. Yet the reading of poetry has to be an intense, personal experience of an individual reader. Is it possible to provide such an experience in our ELT classrooms? If yes, how?

The present study is an experiment endeavouring to find answers to these questions.

Bottrall (1954) strongly criticises those teachers "who refuse to go outside the poem and only succeed in interposing themselves and their reactions between the reader and the poem". They interpret the poem for the students and the students diligently take in what their teachers give them. In this process of teaching—learning in all sincerity, the students are led away from the poem and not given an opportunity to interact with the words of the poem or feel/experience the impact of the poem as a whole. And the sincere teachers are the culprits here.

The present study aims at creating an environment in the classroom wherein students are made to read the poem and freely interact with the poem rather than passively accept the teacher's version and interpretation. The techniques that are adopted have certain basic considerations, namely:
motivating the students to read the poem individually
enhancing individual interaction with the poem
giving an opportunity to accept individual difference
the teacher not dominating the classroom teaching
deviating from the traditional techniques of teaching poetry, so as to ensure more of pupil participation.

After the pilot study, three techniques were selected for the experiment. Poems were selected and the instructional materials were prepared by the investigator. Care was taken to bring in variety in the theme and style of the poem. At the same time the level of the students selected as samples (Std XI science stream - English medium) was kept in mind. In other words, the poems were neither too easy nor too difficult.

Three sets of three poems were selected. Three groups of students were involved in the experiment. Three techniques were evolved and the rotation method was used. These are discussed in detail in the earlier chapter.

6.2. Apathy among Teachers:

Buch (1988) observes "The research institutes, the university departments of education and other national-level research bodies have never considered the school teacher as their accomplice in the common endeavour for improving education. As a result a careful reading of teachers' general opinions on research shows some degree of animosity towards
researches" and he ends in a note of optimism. "There is no reason to regard this situation as unalterable.... Both researchers and administrators should look upon teachers as assets".4

The very idea of an experiment in teaching techniques being conducted in schools or questioning the validity of the traditional practices presently in use was not welcome among the teachers. The majority of them hold the view that if something works, that is good enough for all practical purposes. Any fundamental change would overhaul the entire system of prevailing concepts and the present practices in the classrooms.

Moreover many teachers feel such innovations are not within the range of an average teacher as they call for a lot of imaginative thinking and additional work. Hence, they categorically say that such innovations are not practical and viable and there is no need for them.

However some of the teachers also feel that there is no harm in experimenting with some new techniques off and on; it may bring in variety and enhance the interest of the learners. But none of them would opt for giving up the present practices nor say that there is absolutely no need for the teachers to explain and discuss the poems.
Those teachers who were directly involved in the experiment did not totally agree with the above views. Taking only the examination into consideration the present practices may be necessary, but if a lasting interest in poetry has to be created the objectives should be redefined and the present practices should be modified.

The details of the procedure and methodology have been discussed in Chapter IV.

The data collected were analysed and presented in the form of Tables, as given in Chapter V.

6.3. Findings of the Study:

Technique A, namely exploring the poem with the help of given questions, appears to be effective with the poems of set I in group A (vide Table 5.1)

This observation is further consolidated when the mean scores of the all the three techniques of group A are compared. (vide Table 5.7) It is seen that the mean achievement of Technique A (7.95) is much higher than those of Techniques B (6.15) and Technique C (6.68)

Of all the three techniques used Technique A appears to be more effective than Techniques B and C in group A.
With group B, mean achievement of set I is much higher than those of set II and set III. (vide Table 5.13)

Further, it is seen that with group B Technique B works well with set I (vide Table 5.14).

When the scores of the criterion tests of the three techniques are compared, the mean achievements of all the three techniques appear to be very close to each other.

Technique A - 6.78  
B - 7.03  
C - 6.7

This shows all the three techniques are equally effective with group B (vide Tables 5.17 & 5.18)

With group C, the means of all the three techniques appear to be much different. Technique A records a X (mean) of 5.15, while Techniques B and C score 6.42 and 7.58 respectively and the general mean is 6.38 (Refer to Table 5.27).

With group C, the means of all the three techniques differ significantly at .01 level (vide Table 5.28) With group C, the poems of set III appear to be more effective.

However with group B, there is not much difference in the mean achievement of all the three sets (vide Table 5.20).
All these observations reveal that the effectiveness of the technique depends a lot on the theme of the teaching material i.e. the poem and its appeal.

It is worth mentioning here that the observations of the teachers involved in the project are also similar to these. Whenever a technique is to be used for teaching a poem, the teacher has to judiciously select, adapt or evolve the same taking into consideration the interest and experience of the learners. If the theme is far from the realm of their experience, the appeal and emotional involvement are less; and this in turn affects the students' direct interaction with the poem and appreciation of the poem.

6.4. Observations of Teachers who were involved in the study:

As mentioned earlier, three teachers were involved in conducting the experiment. All the three of them have

(i) Master’s Degree in English
(ii) Master’s Degree in Education
(iii) 12-25 years of experience in reputed English medium schools, (at the secondary and Higher secondary levels) in Gujarat as well as other states.

All the three of them are well-read, fluent in English, efficient in their work and enjoy a good rapport with
the students as well as the school authorities. They have genuine concern for the student interest in reading, appreciation of poetry and the indifferent attitude to languages, especially English. Though they were not very sure about the feasibility of such an innovation in the present circumstances, they were willing to extend their co-operation and were very sincere and enthusiastic on their part. They were very positive in their approach and were willing to re-think and re-define certain concepts in the light of the discussions with the investigator.

All the three of them view their involvement in the experiment as a learning experience for them. They were open-minded to accept a new way of thinking. During the initial discussion cum orientation stages, they raised a number of questions and issues regarding the innovation and each member contributed a lot from the long years of experience of teaching English poetry.

6.5. Observations regarding students' interest in poetry.

In many of their observations they did not differ much from one another. Categorically they said, "Now-a-days students are dead to poetry." which they attributed to the following reasons.

(i) prescribed poems that are not suitable for the age and interest

(ii) place of poetry in the language curricula
(iii) general decline in reading due to various factors like TV, examination-oriented approach, environment at home not conducive etc.

(iv) teachers themselves lacking interest and enthusiasm in instilling interest in poetry

(v) examinations that kill interest in poetry

However, they are not totally pessimistic. They say that some interest can be created, if the teachers are enthusiastic and earnest about it. All of them are emphatic in their views that unless the teachers themselves have a keen interest in reading poetry, they cannot teach with interest nor can they create interest in poetry among the learners.

6.6. Observations regarding the experiment:

(i) Involvement of Pupils, Reaction of Pupils and their behaviour during poetry lessons.

On the whole, the poetry lessons conducted for the experimental study provided a novel experience for the students and evoked a mixed reaction among them. Initially many of the students were hesitant and slow to react and be directly involved in the learning process. They couldn't visualise that their individual responses to the poem constituted the learning process. They could not accept the idea that teachers need not explain the poems in detail.
Later on, they were more open, responsive and even the quiet students could overcome their inhibition and take part in the learning process with interest and enthusiasm.

Though there was some noise as students discussed with one another (as when working in pairs or expressing their views in response to the parallel ideas) classroom management did not pose a serious problem.

On one or two occasions, some students met the teachers after the class to discuss their responses. Also there were occasions wherein the students preferred to write their responses because they felt that they (their responses) were too personal even to be discussed or narrated in front of the class. As clarified earlier, all the individual responses and differences were accepted.

6.7. Students response vs. theme of the poems:

This area was of particular interest to the teachers concerned. They named two important factors as the major influences on the pupil-participation.

(i) classroom climate
(ii) theme of the poem taught.

Involving the students in the initial stages was a little difficult and not very encouraging. After one or two
lessons, the initial inhibition could be overcome and there was positive response from the students.

An open classroom climate wherein

(i) pupils were free to interact with one another

(ii) pupils were free to interact with the teacher

(iii) the teacher was more of a co-learner in the learning process

(iv) individual differences were accepted

(v) fear of wrong answers was minimised was very conducive to such techniques.

The theme of the poem and the type of emotions it evoked was the major factor in facilitating the learning process and also determining the effectiveness of the technique. To quote an example, the poem "Punishment in Kindergarten" by Kamala Das (Set II Poem No.3) could evoke more of direct response from the students. Many of them had had similar or comparable experiences that they were eager to share with others. Hence, Technique No.3 "Teaching through Parallel Ideas" was very effective in terms of learners' involvement. In other words, the words and the ideas of the poem (without the teacher's intervention by way of explanation) could emotionally touch the readers and make the individual readers "re-live" the feelings the poetess has portrayed.
At this juncture, it has to be mentioned that another poem "After Blenheim" by Robert Southey provided different experiences. Though the poem touches upon the generation gap in a subtle manner, the main idea being the evils of war and glorifying victory in war (an experience far remote from their life) it failed to arouse the same degree of individual response from the students, to the same level as Punishment in Kindergarten.

However, Technique C, namely "Suggesting an Alternate Title" provided the challenge for the adolescent reasoning and creativity and so this technique was more absorbing and interesting.

To cite another example, the poem "Expecting Someone" and "The Road not Taken" have better scope for Technique 1, namely Exploring through Questions. The reason may be that both the poems have apparently simple diction, but particular words are charged with meaning.

6.8 Teachers' Observations regarding Time Factor:-

As discussed earlier, the experiment was conducted during school hours, in the periods allotted for English teaching. All the steps as specified in chapter IV could be completed during the scheduled time i.e. 45 minutes.

All the teachers preferred those periods before recess (first half) when the students are fresh.
6.9. Suggestions for further research:—

In the field of education no research can be considered the ultimate truth or the last word in that area. A study generates and mobilises ideas and lays the foundation for further debates, verification of facts and quest for new avenues in the related fields.

Based on her experiment and the outcome, review of study materials and related research projects, the investigator has some suggestions for further research in this area.

Gopalan (1991) points out "the absence of inter-disciplinary research on an organised base.......in spite of efforts to stimulate inter-disciplinary research for more than two decades in the country". But he is optimistic that "the research findings will start influencing educational practices in the near future." Keeping in line with the trends and developments at the national level, some of the suggestions put forth in the light of the present study may be enumerated as under:—

- The same techniques may be tried (with suitable modifications according to the demands of the situations) with different examples.
The same poems can be taught by some other techniques (other than those tried in this experiment) and the result can be compared.

Similar experimental studies can be taken with other forms of literature like drama, short story etc.

The effect of pair-work or group-work among adolescents on their creativity can be studied.

The relation between the personality of teachers and the effectiveness of innovations, with specific reference to teaching of English literature can be taken up.

The attitude of English teachers teaching at Primary/Secondary/Higher Secondary levels towards teaching of poetry can be studied in detail.

Similar experiments can be taken up in other languages also.

Whether such innovations affect/influence sustain students' interest in reading poetry can be studied.

Suitable techniques for teaching English poetry at Primary and Secondary levels can be developed and tried out.

It is the sincere desire of the investigator that the present study would be considered from a more positive attitude by the teaching fraternity, specially those who teach English poetry at senior levels. The experiment was carried out in
actual classrooms without any simulated or specially developed conditions. It has to be remembered that those who were involved in the experiment are also practising teachers working under similar conditions.

6.10. Suggestions to the Text Book Writers:-

During the study and the preliminary survey of students' opinions about the choice of poems, it has been very clearly seen that adolescents have very strong likes and dislikes.

While selecting the poems, the members of the editorial committee should try to include more of poems that the students can read and enjoy on their own and those which appeal to the adolescent taste, interest and emotions.

The questions that are included in the poetry section should not be the re-call type; instead, they should motivate the students to read the poem with the view to explore and create new meaning. The objective of the questions in the poetry lessons should not be limited to testing the comprehension of the poem. The questions should pave the way for appreciation as well.

The introduction that is included before the poems has the potential of a prelude to the poem. The introduction has a significant role to play in creating the right mood.
6.11 Suggestions to the teachers of English poetry:—

Based on the study, it can be stated that teaching of poetry in the ELT classes is a challenge. At the same time it provides ample room to exploit the creative potentials of the learners.

The innovative poetry teacher should also be judicious in selecting or adapting the techniques taking into considerations the psychological make-up, of the learners, theme of the poem and also the interest and experience level of the learners.

6.12 Conclusion:—

"A thing of Beauty is a Joy forever". Every poem is a thing of beauty and if it is to be a joy forever, the suitable technique has to be used in the classrooms besides taking care that the right kind of poem is selected and the right type of approach is adopted.

Every poem is an amalgamation of creativity and imagination. Techniques of teaching poetry have to be creative and imaginative.

The present study is a sincere venture in this direction.
CHAPTER VI - REFERENCE.
Observations, Findings and Suggestions for Further Studies:


2. Ibid

