Chapter VII

Summary and Conclusion

7.0 Introduction

Traditionally, English has been taught in colleges as a literary and humanistic discipline. The object has been to introduce learners to some of the classics in English, in the belief that the exposure can serve important educational objectives. The teaching of English at the college level has scarcely been intended to provide language instruction. Although it is accepted that exposure to literature can result in the consolidation and sharpening of the language skills, it is doubted whether college teaching ever has the imparting of language skills as a conscious aim.

7.1 The Aims of the Present Study

People who have lost sight of the fact that literature is language, and those who equate the mere acquisition of the four language skills with the learning of language, rise against teaching literature in the general English classes; their main target of attack is the teaching of poetry. The present study builds up a case not only for poetry-teaching in the general English classes, but also for teaching it effectively.

7.1.1 The Reasons for Opposition

The reasons behind the opposition to the teaching of poetry are many--some valid, and others baseless. Some of the oppositions stem from the way it is taught, namely the traditional method of lecturing, paraphrasing and dictating. There has been a growing awareness, during the last few years, that the teaching of poetry in the traditional method is no longer relevant and effective.
The tendency to oppose oblique approaches seen among the administrative authorities, the syllabus makers, the material writers and even among a group of teachers has been referred to in different sections of this study.

The syllabus makers who are not teachers, include all sorts of poems, arranged in any order; the teacher has no control over it (see 2.9.3.c); this thwarts his enthusiasm to make poetry class lively and interesting. The material writers also play havoc with the assignments attached to the lessons in the textbook, giving priority to traditional exercises and assigning secondary importance to language activities. Conservatism affects the authorities of educational institutions and even some of the teachers; eyebrows are raised when anything different from the traditional is attempted (see 3.2.2).

A defence of the oblique method and the necessity to guard oneself against the opposing tendency have been attempted in section 3.2.3.

7.1.2 A Historical Perspective

Down the ages English language had been taught through different methods and for different purposes. Until recent years the lecture method had been regarded as a convenient method both by the teacher and the learner. Now the teachers have become aware of the effectiveness of other methods also, which involve the learners' fullest participation. The oblique method is one such method which involves group activities and discussion.
7.1.3 An Analysis of the Present Scene

The present study acquaints us with the present scene of teaching poetry and studies the reason behind it. The academic set up in general and the pedagogy in particular are to be blamed. There is no clear statement of the objectives of teaching poetry, made anywhere by the curriculum designers. There is a general lack of interest on the part of the teacher as well as the taught.

7.1.4 Making Poetry-Teaching Meaningful and Effective

The present study stresses the importance of equipping the learner with the communication skills necessary to cope with the situation he is likely to encounter. It emphasizes the teaching of specialized, high-order skills (not the mere basic skills) related to specific areas of professional specialization. It points out that for the realization of this aim, there must be reforms in the syllabus, in the materials, in the methods of teaching, and in the examination pattern. In short, it declares that students should be encouraged to express and develop original responses and not rely on critical opinions. The classroom teaching should involve activities and interaction. Group work is to be encouraged. The examination in its turn should aim at testing the learners' sensibility, and not become a stereotyped invitation to an exhibition of second-hand scholarship.

7.2 Its scope

The present study puts forth the oblique method in the teaching of poetry as one which moves towards the achievement of this objective. It is possible to acquire a sophisticated command of a language through an assiduous study of its literature. The
oblique method treats poetry as discourse and aims at individualization of learning, which is the need of the hour.

The present study has taken care to prove, with the help of its Survey, the hypothesis that, the oblique method of teaching poetry develops not only appreciation but also communication skills. It also proves that the oblique method in the teaching of poetry is not only a solution, but an asset.

7.3 The Salient Features of the Present Study

The Pilot survey done in the previous year encouraged the researcher to adopt the oblique method in his poetry classes. The pre-test conducted at the beginning of the academic year revealed that there is a lot of scope for improvement in the standard of the learners. Six prescribed poems were taught using the oblique method in the presence of an observer; a diary was also maintained by the researcher. This, and the observer's comments gave insight into the difficulties faced by the teacher and the learners, and also into the ways in which the difficulties were overcome. Then the Post-test was conducted which showed an improved standard of the learners.

The comparison of the marks obtained in the two tests reveals that their writing skill is improved to a great extent. Now they can face their examinations confidently and get good marks also. They have learnt to appreciate lines of poetry and interpret them in an effective way.

They can read and understand the contents of a letter received and write a suitable reply. They can respond to an advertisement, which mostly advertises a
vacancy, by writing back the necessary details, or asking for more details – this will go a long way in their job-hunt after their studies.

The dialogues written by them are interesting and to the point. They have had sufficient practice in this in the form of discussions in the class, many aspects of spoken English such as greeting, enquiring, questioning, arguing, upholding a specific point without giving in, and leave-taking have been picked up by them during the discussions and the classroom activities.

The listening comprehension has been a challenge to them, because it is something new to them.

On the whole each learner—both from the Science section and from the Arts section—has secured a total of marks which is much higher than the total in the Pre-test.

Another salient feature of the present study is to compare the overall performance of the Science students with that of the Arts students in the different aspects of the tests. The graphs show that the Arts students have progressed as much as the Science students.

The Science students have ample opportunities in their subject classes, to work in twos or in smaller groups, for example, when they do laboratory work in batches, or when two or three students are asked to do an experiment jointly. For them the classroom activities in the language classes, done in groups, are not new, though they may be different. On the other hand, the Arts students have not been exposed to team work in their schools; yet they have become enthused once they are introduced to this
type of classroom activities. The oblique method has improved their standards also to a considerable extent.

7.4 The Survey and the Modern Pedagogical Assumption

According to the changed concept of teaching, teaching is not ‘telling’, but it is to cause the child to learn and acquire the desired knowledge and skills and also desirable ways of living in the society. The main aim of teaching is to help the child to respond to his environment in an effective way.

The Survey shows that ‘causing the child to learn’, by urging the learner to discover for himself, and by persuading him to respond to the teaching questions, is not only a possible way of teaching, but also the only effective way of developing knowledge, skills and behaviour. The study proves Burton’s definition of teaching. “Teaching is the stimulation, guidance, direction and encouragement of learning”. (qtd. in Chauhan 4).

The main responsibility of the teacher is to awaken awareness, freedom and responsibility in his students. The oblique method is an effective tool to awaken these. Teaching should proceed in a highly permissive way within which each individual develops, largely of his own, through the exercise of his feelings. In the oblique method, freedom is given to each learner to respond to the poem in his own way provided it has the sanction of the text. This freedom has resulted in excellence and rich variety in the responses.
7.5 Oblique Method, not Entirely New

As stated already in 4.4.1.1 (stage 5) the oblique method of learning/teaching poetry is not entirely new to the learners and the teachers. The learners have been exposed to it in one form or another during their school days, though not in a systematic way. A casual talk by the researcher with the colleagues also reveals that they too have used this method occasionally.

7.6 The Present Study and Innovations

7.6.1 Innovation Is Inevitable

Both the learners and the teachers are for innovations in the field of poetry-teaching. The word 'innovation' means the introduction of novelties, the alteration of what is established. Generally, in the field of education, to innovate is to create something new which markedly deviates from traditional practices. Educational institutions, each being a miniature society, inevitably participate in the educational reforms and social transformations.

7.6.2 Rapid Changes in Western Educational Scene

The western educational scene is marked both with rapid changes in educational programmes, and with innovations that have created wholly new programmes in the recent past. The changes and innovations are being introduced at such a high speed that James Cass observed, "Education reporting today is very much like snapping a photo of a moving object – by the time the shutter has clicked, the picture has changed […] we do know the direction the change is likely
to take, and we can identify many of the ingredients, but we do not know how fast they will come, and in what combinations they will appear or what innovations will develop as spin offs of the changes already taking place” (qtd in Chauhan vi).

7.6.3 Changes in the Context of Indian Education

We are moving in an era of accelerating changes in all walks of our national life, and education is no exception to it. We are moving towards newer educational activities and newer methods of teaching-learning, based on the knowledge of the technocracy that has been developed in the past several years in western countries. We are entering a new phase in education that involves attempts to create totally new theories of instruction. This is the result of the strong urge for change and innovation in education that has been growing since the Independence: parents and the general public have, all these days, been questioning the utility of the traditional system of education inherited from the British; but nothing tangible has been done so far. But today our educationalists are convinced of the fact that without introducing changes and innovations, we cannot cope with the challenges and problems of the modern society.

7.6.4 Conditions Compelling Changes

As a result of the recent research in the field of learner psychology, we have got new insights into the psychology of learning. These have a great impact on the curricula at different levels, and to incorporate these research findings in educational system it becomes necessary to make changes and evolve innovations.
The studies of the structural and organizational classroom activities have revealed to us the right type of activities which make teacher-pupil assignments create more opportunities for effective learning than in the past, and this compels us to introduce changes.

Now all over the world, educationalists and psychologists are engaged in designing materials for instruction that are original and superior, they are designed with an intention of attaching greater importance to the individual learner. A number of teaching-learning strategies have been evolved in recent years which emphasize the individualization of classroom learning.

There is another condition which impels us to introduce innovations; it is the cut-throat competition among the nations of the world. A nation which does not change according to the times is bound to lag behind in the race for achieving excellence.

Finally, in addition to these there are certain other factors which require drastic changes in the existing methods of class-room teaching-learning. Explosion of knowledge, explosion in population, and explosion of human aspirations and expectations in the fast developing society.

The oblique method takes into account these conditions and factors.

7.7 Conservatism Vs Change

7.7.1 Defects of Traditional Methods

The conditions referred to above show the traditional methods of imparting education as ineffective and out of date; we have to overhaul our traditional methods
to keep pace with the developments in the other areas of national life. Traditionally, teaching is the act of disseminating information to the learner in the classroom. It is generally equated with ‘telling.’ This is the concept of teaching held by traditional teachers who follow the traditional methods. These methods, evolved long ago for traditional society, have become outmoded in the present context of technological developments. The problems of the present society are quite different from those of the traditional society; the ‘psychological set up’ discussed in 2.9.4.3 explains this.

The problems of quantity and quality in education cannot be solved by using the traditional methods, as we move towards universalisation of education and accordance of equal opportunity for all learners of different socio-economic strata.

Our efforts to change the defective methods have not always been crowned with success. The main reason for this is our conservatism.

7.7.2 The Conservative World of Teaching

In our country the changes are not commensurate with the expected level. The innovations in teaching-learning are gaining steady but slow grounds in our educational institutions; yet they are always surrounded with oppositions and misgivings, because the world of teaching is conservative – its values are established by a sector of society where competition and growth are not essential for survival. The schools and colleges do not generally adopt the same competitive approach in their affairs as do business and industry. This is why teachers demand proof of the value of a new technique or innovation before they use it.
This tendency is noted by the researcher during his casual talk with the English teachers of different collages. It reveals a certain opposition to the giving up of 'lecturing' and to the implementation of the new method in the teaching of poetry

7.7.3 The Changing Trend

In spite of the above tendency of conservatism, the inclination to change has always remained with us, and now it has gained vigour. Gone is the abject notion that the art of teaching is nothing better than the process of imparting information – the philosophy of someone who knows, telling those who do not. Gone too, or going fast, is the age-old disposition to underrate the capacities of the average learner and, with it, the readiness to write him off prematurely as non-academic. We are ready to accept now the fact that the quality of education largely depends on the quality of instruction we provide in classroom. Now we feel the urge to pay proper attention to change the strategy of instruction and to make efforts to evolve new techniques suited to our present needs.

The present study aims at promoting the quality of instruction in our poetry classes. The results are encouraging and it is hoped that further studies of this oblique method in the teaching of poetry will make it suitable to the present set of learners, and adaptable by the modern teachers.

7.8 Pedagogical Implications

The survey implies the following which are pedagogically important and useful:

1. Certain fallacies stand corrected:
a) Learners are not incorrigible; nor is teaching impossible. Given the right motivation, they are able to show marked improvement.

b) Teachers are ‘helplessly’ aware of the inadequacy of what they do, presented with an alternative, most are willing to try it out – they have an open mind.

2. The survey shows the possibility of working within the constraints and still achieving some good results.

3. We have established the possibility of teaching poetry to the General English learners, and of achieving, to some extent at least, the required communication skills along with the appreciation skills.

4. We have proved the value of participatory pedagogy over teacher-centered approach.

5. Learners have learnt by ‘doing’ – they have been asked to think, and not listen to what the teacher had thought.

6. The study provides a guideline for future editors of poetry anthologies – to include activities useful in teaching through the oblique method, instead of the usual mundane comprehension questions and other exercises.

7. The study also puts forth a suggestion for improvement in the question-pattern in the examination: Students trained in this manner could answer questions similar to those in the method of exploring through oblique method, they could also answer questions on unseen poems. This would reduce the ‘memory’ load and test language competence per se.
7.9 Limitations

Despite the perceivable success of this study, there are a few limitations as stated hereunder:

The study deals with only a very small sample of learners — students of B Sc (Physics) and B A (Economics), both are English medium sections. No Tamil medium section could be involved as English is the only medium of instruction in the college in which the researcher is working.

The study has been restricted to one college only, situated in the semi-urban area.

The researcher is a teacher confined to the prescribed syllabus of one University.

The poems chosen for teaching through Oblique Method are limited in number.

Due to lack of facilities, audio-recording of the classroom activities, especially the discussions mentioned in this study, could not be made as a tool for classroom observation and subsequent analysis.

7.10 Suggestions for Future Study:

1. It is worthwhile to study if the type of group activities used in this oblique method can be made more attractive and challenging in order to make the learners' participation in them and especially in the ensuing discussions, full and voluntary.

2. It will be useful to study if, at the beginning of the year, a 'Bridge Course' in attitudes can be offered to the learners; the aim of this course could be to shape the
attitude of the learner to classroom discussions and group discussions, and to develop a readiness to participate in them. Training can also be given in the method of responding to simple poems they have come across already or those they are likely to come across, in the newspapers and magazines and even in some collections of light poems.

3. One can also study if learners can be given a taste of oblique approach at an earlier stage — sometime in the Higher Secondary School or even earlier.

4. We can also study the mode of acquainting the teachers with the different aspects of this method.

5. Further, we can study the practicability of evaluating and grading the learner's performance in poetry class, by using a scale of measurement, different from that which is in vogue, e.g. by using the principles of recording achievement suggested by Don Salter in 3.5.

7.11 Conclusion

As a result of these studies, the oblique method in the teaching of poetry at the tertiary level may serve as a practical solution to many of the inadequacies found not only in the field of poetry-teaching but also in the wider field of language-teaching. Poetry-teaching should promote essentially communication skills and not stop with appreciation. Poetry is language first and hence poetry-teaching has a role play in effective language-teaching.
The use of this oblique method could possibly be extended to other aspects of the syllabus – prose, drama, extensive readers, etc. and also to the study of literature per se.

If ‘to educate’ is to draw out the best in the learner, the Oblique Method does it most effectively. The learner’s creative potential is stretched to its maximal limits and learning becomes a pleasurable experience. In the theatre of learning, the learner is no more passive spectator; he becomes an active performer fully enjoying the adventure that is learning.