Chapter V

The Survey

5.0 Introduction

The Pilot Survey described in chapter IV revealed the learners' enthusiasm to learn in a different way, and encouraged the researcher to adopt the oblique method in teaching poetry in the language classes of the same level. And this time it was to be extended to the students of Social Sciences also.

5.1 The Sample

So, two classes where the researcher taught English language were chosen: (i) I B.Sc. Physics and (ii) I B.A. Economics, each having a strength of about 50. They had come from different types of schools: English medium or Tamil medium schools situated in and around Vellore. They had just joined the college and had not been exposed to any teaching at the college level.

5.1.1 Their Background

They had studied English for 10 years from IIl standard to X standard and again in plus 1 and plus 2 classes of the Higher Secondary School. They had been exposed to a few prose essays, a few poems, one or two extensive readers, as well as précis writing, letter writing and dialogue writing. Their examination papers included essays, appreciation questions, and other questions on writing skills. They also underwent aural-oral tests in their school-final examinations. They had been taught poems in the conventional method of lecturing or giving line-by-line explanation, and had been invariably helped by teachers in their composition exercises.
5.1.2 Their Present Study

At the college level, they would be exposed to a similar set of texts and writing skills. Their examination would include essays, appreciation questions, letter writing, report writing, paraphrasing, précis writing and speech writing.

5.1.3 The Expected Terminal Level

At the end of the year, they were expected to have improved their essay writing and answering appreciation questions which might be textual, inferential or evaluative. These would test their knowledge of the content studied, and their appreciation of the given text respectively. They would have improved their letter writing, responding to advertisements, and dialogue-writing which would test their writing skills. Listening comprehension also which would sharpen their listening; and finally the opportunities given to read and to discuss in the class were expected to improve their reading and speaking skills. On the whole, after being exposed to the oblique method in the teaching of poetry, the learners were expected to experience a progress not only in appreciation skills, but also in communication skills.

5.2 The Methods of Evaluating their Standards

In order to find out the entry level, the progress, and the terminal level of the learners, it was planned to conduct a Pre-test at the beginning and a Post-test after teaching 6 poems following the oblique method (each involving a particular technique which can be adopted in the classroom in the present atmosphere).
5.3 The Pre-test

It was conducted at the beginning of the academic year; the learners had just joined the course. This test aimed at testing the entry level of the learners, as they had not been exposed to any teaching at the college level.

5.3.1 The Various Aspects of the Question Paper

Question items:

1. Appreciation questions from poems.
   (i) Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and
   (ii) William Blake’s “The Tiger”
   (Both had been studied in School Final Class).
2. Writing a reply to a letter, using the given clues.
3. Responding to an advertisement, using the given clues.
4. Writing a dialogue, given the situation.
5. Listening comprehension.

Question Pattern: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation questions: 5 to be answered in one or two sentences.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter writing (100 words).</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to an advertisement (100 words).</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue writing (minimum 5 pairs of response).</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening comprehension (5 questions following a trial question with four options under each, of which only one is correct).</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Duration: 90 minutes.

Question papers: About 120 copies of the question paper were prepared with sufficient space given under each question for writing the answers. (Appendix-6a) A sheet containing the two poems was also attached to each question paper. (Appendix 6b).

Clear instructions were given in the question paper, on how to answer each question

A description of the questions:

Question 1: Read the poems given in the Annexure. Then read the following passages and answer the questions given under each of them:

5 passages (3 from Keats's and 2 from Blake's) and two appreciation questions under each passage.

Question 2: Write a suitable reply, in about 100 words, to the letter given below using the hints following it.

A letter from a book company is given. Hints indicating what matter or request for clarification is to be included in the reply, are given.

Question 3: Respond to the following advertisement suitably using the hints given after the advertisement:

An advertisement in its exact shape is given. Hints indicating what matter or request for clarification is to be included in the response, are given.
**Question 4:** Write a dialogue based on the following report

A situation is described in the short report of 75 words.

**Question 5:** Listening comprehension: Listen carefully when each of the statements is read to you; then look at the 4 options given below, only one of them is true. Put a ✓ mark in the brackets near that option.

The statements which were to be read aloud by the teacher, were not printed. (They are given in Appendix 6c)

But the 4 options were printed, with brackets against each.

### 5.3.2 The Conduct of the Pre-test

**Exam Hall:** College Hall.

**Prior notice:** The students mentioned in 5.1 had been informed already that they would be writing a test on some of the items learnt by them in their School Final classes.

**Arrangements:** (i) On that particular day the two classes had English hours as follows: I B.Sc (Phy): 2nd hour, I B.A (Eco): 3rd hour. One more hour was borrowed from their respective departments so that both can write the test for two hours. Seating arrangements had been made in the hall, and the students were asked to sit in an order.

**Supervision:** This test was conducted in the presence of an observer, Mr.S.Thiyagu Kumar, M.A., M.Phil., of the Department of English, Voorhees college He assisted the researcher in the conduct of the test
In the examination hall:

At first the question papers were given.

The learners were asked to read the two poems printed in the question papers and then start writing the appreciation questions. The poems were familiar to them and they did not find any difficulty in going through them. So, after rapidly going through the poem, they started writing answers to the appreciation questions. Most of them wrote the answers at once. Some of them, especially the Economics students expressed difficulty in understanding the questions, the questions were explained to them individually by the researcher and the observer.

Next they started writing answers to the other questions. They were happy to write the answers in the spaces provided in the question paper itself. However they had to be careful because they had to write the answers within the limited spaces.

The last 15 minutes were allotted for listening comprehension. A majority of them had already finished writing the other answers. Others also were asked to stop and listen to the instructions:

The researcher read aloud each statement twice. The learners listened, time was given to choose the correct option and put a √ mark.

These options were not read aloud by the researcher.

The test was over in 90 minutes.

A specimen answer sheet is given in Appendix 16a.
Valuation: The test papers were valued first by the researcher and then by the observer and the average was calculated. A mark list was prepared and these marks were to be placed by the side of the marks secured by the individuals in the Post-test (See Tables-2a & 2b).

Table-2a gives the marks secured by the Science Students in the Pre-test and the Post tests. The marks are placed side by side for each individual. Similarly Table 2b gives the marks secured by the Arts students in the Pre-test and the Post-test.

Key for valuation: A key for valuation was prepared allotting marks for various stages. (See Appendix-6d)

Results: The marks were announced to the students when they met the next day in their English classes.

5.4: An Observation

The general performance of each of the classes was discussed by the researcher and the observer and found to be somewhat moderate. The Science students had performed a little better than the Arts students. But on the whole the feeling of the learners was that there was a lot of scope for improvement.

The distribution of marks in the classes resulted in a sense of dejection in a majority of students in both the classes and especially in the Arts Class. A series of discussions with them individually and collectively revealed that the learners were eager to improve.

The college atmosphere to which they were new and the long gap between their school examination and this test, during which many things could have been
forgotten, might have contributed to this type of performance. This awareness made them highly motivated. This ensured their proper attention in the English classes conducted thereafter.

The researcher felt that given a proper atmosphere in which the learners could involve themselves fully and meaningfully, these initial hurdles faced by them as new entrants to college course, could be overcome.

An interpretation of the results is given in Chapter VI

5.5 The Teaching

The oblique method of teaching poetry was adopted in teaching six of the prescribed poems. The Science students and the Arts students were taught separately on different days in a week. One poem was taught in three hours in a week – two hours at a stretch on the first day and one hour on the very next day

5.5.1 The Observer

The same member of the staff, who assisted the researcher in the conduct of the pre-test served as the observer (see 5.5.2). The parameters used for observation are given in Appendix 7.

5.5.2 The Poems Taught and the Techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. &quot;All the World's a Stage&quot;-</td>
<td>Picture depiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Wordsworth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. ‘If’ – Rudyard Kipling

Converting it into a letter and comparing it with Hazlitt’s “Letter to his Son”.

3. “Say not the Struggle Nought Availeth” – Hugh Clough

Cloze Dictogloss.

4. “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” – Robert Frost

Points of view

5. “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” – John Keats

Pantomime (or) Role playing

6. “The Highwayman” – Alfred Noyes

Dialogues of characters in the next world after their deaths and of those who were alive.

5.5.3 A Report on Each Poem

In the Survey, the method of observing students’ responses was slightly different from the method used in the Pilot Survey where the researcher was the only observer and he did not maintain any record of his observation.

This time the researcher maintained a diary in which he noted down how things went on.

The presence of an observer also was a boon to the class, for he too went round and encouraged the learners to involve themselves in the classroom activity. He too maintained a diary, and used a set of parameters (Appendix 7) for observation.

5.5.3.1 “All the World’s a Stage” – William Shakespeare (Appendix-1)

This poem was taught using the picture depiction technique. The teaching/learning process passed through the ten stages described in the Pilot Survey (see 4.4.1).
Students’ responses to this activity of depicting the seven ages of man in pictures were the same as they were in the Pilot Survey. This time the difficulty caused by abstract ideas was overcome by some learners by writing under the pictures the exact words or phrases which describe abstract ideas like “seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon’s mouth”. The stages of drawing pictures, presenting them to the class and the discussion on them went on well.

The discussion after the class, between the researcher and the observer was of much help to the researcher in teaching the other poems. The Arts student were more hesitant than the Science students, at the beginning, while they were asked to engage in the activity of drawing pictures in the class. So they were to be motivated further.

It was heartening to note that the difficulty of depicting abstract ideas had been overcome to some extent by a few learners.

5.5.3.2 “If” – Rudyard Kipling (Appendix–2)

This poem was taught using the technique of converting it into a letter and comparing it with hazlitt’s “Letter to his Son” (Appendix-3). The teaching was done following the different stages of the Pilot Survey (see 4.4.2). The conversion of the poem into a letter was found to put forth the same level of challenge as in the Pilot Survey. But it had been a real task to the Arts students; and they performed this task very enthusiastically. Many a time they sought the help of the researcher or the observer. The presence of the observer was a boon to those who found this activity somewhat difficult.
The researcher had had an awareness of this difficulty in the Pilot Survey and
had shared this awareness with the observer. So this time both the researcher and the
observer encouraged the learners to plunge into the activity whether they liked it or
not, for they knew that the learners would find the task easy once they got started.

The conversion of the poem into a letter form was successfully done. Again,
as in the past, the learners were thrilled to see that their letters also were somewhere
close to Hazlitt’s “Letter to his Son”, in form and content.

5.5.3.3 “Say not the struggle Nought Availeth”—Arthur Hugh Clough (Appendix
8a)

The Cloze Dictogloss technique which was adopted to teach an unprescribed
poem in the Pilot Survey (4.4.3) was adopted now to teach this prescribed poem. The
activity went on well, though the poem was longer than the poem used in the Pilot
Survey.

The cloze version containing the verbs in the poem (Appendix-8b) the cloze
version containing the nouns and pronouns in the poem (Appendix 8c) and the cloze
version containing the other words in the poem (Appendix 8d) were used in the
activity.

As it was done in the Pilot Survey, the class was dividend into three groups
according to the choices of the above three versions. Stages 1 to 5 were the same as
in the Pilot Survey. But as already suggested by the researcher in the Pilot Survey
(4.4.3.1 stage 5), this time each group was again divided into smaller groups of 3 in
Each. Every individual in this smaller group first reconstructed the poem, checked it with those of the other two and then all the three took it to the bigger group of 15 for further modification.

The activity went on following the stages 6, 7, 8 and 9 without much change. At stage 8, the class realized that they could reconstruct the poem with just 2 or 3 mistakes. It was a real achievement, the researcher felt, in spite of the fact that the poem chosen was longer than the poem “Walling Tall” of the Pilot Survey. At stage 9, the discussion on the mingling of two tenses found in “Walking Tall” used in the Pilot Survey did not emerge. Instead, there was a brief discussion on the use of the imageries of war, sea and the sun used by the poet. This discussion was initiated by the observer and the learners participated with enthusiasm.

The researcher’s Meeting with Mr. Alan Maley

At this juncture, the researcher’s meeting with Mr. Alan Maley in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India added fervour to the teaching of the following three poems.

5.5.3.4 “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” – Robert Frost (Appendix 9)

The learners appeared to be very familiar with this poem. Yet the learners were induced to view it from different angles. They were motivated to use their imagination and contribute to the successful exploration of the poem.

After presenting the poem to the class, the learners were asked through questioning to identify the persons or living things mentioned directly or indirectly in
the poem. They were (1) the poet, (2) the horse, (3) the person(s) the poet was leaving behind, and (4) the person(s) he was going to meet.

The class was divided into six groups. Each group asked to choose one of the following and discuss.

a) The horse expressing his view of the poet’s behaviour in the woods to another horse in the stable, that night. (Appendix 15e: A specimen answer sheet).

b) The poet expressing his view of what he saw in the woods to the friends he met that night.

c) One such friends reporting the poet’s view to another friend of his.

d) The poet writing a letter to his friend he left behind in the town.

e) This friend reporting this to the owner of the woods visited by the poet.

f) The poet writing a letter to the owner of the woods about his visit to his woods.

Each group choose one and discussed how each would have expressed his view to the other. Each one in a group was asked to write down this in the imparative mood. This each one did very enthusiastically. The first session of two hours was over (the observer helped them here and there).

The next day the class assembled One leader from each group read to the class what his group had written (for this, the best writing in his group was taken). The other teams reacted to it and pointed out errors, if any, with the help of the text in their hands. When all the group leaders had read out their exercises, the class felt each view point had something to add to what each group had written.
The researcher asked them to write in their notebooks the substance of the poem.

Each group in their presentation had said something significant about the last four lines in the poem and about the repetition of the last line. Now the class was asked to write an appreciation question on that stanza and also to attempt an answer. This they performed very well.

The only difficulty observed by the researcher was that the learners were somewhat reluctant to use the imperative mood when they jotted down the view points. This was because they were accustomed to write summaries of the poems only in the third person. But they felt very comfortable when they were finally asked to write the substance of the poem in such a way as it would be written in the examination.

5.5.3.5 “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” – John Keats (Appendix-10)

This poem had a lot of scope for role play or pantomime by the learners. This poem also was very familiar to the learners. However they did not know the lines of the poem by heart. Therefore role playing was not possible. After a short discussion, it was decided to adopt the device of pantomime.

The poem was presented to the class, and then the class after proper motivation, was divided into 5 according to the individuals’ interest in any of the following:

a) Stage background setting.
b) **Stage property.**

c) **Make up**

d) **Direction and Pantomime**

e) **Poem reading.**

The first one hour was spent in preparation. The observer supervised the preparation. The blackboard was filled with sketches of hills and a frozen lake depicting the atmosphere of autumn. A bench was to be used as a horse; and there were a garland, a set of bracelets, and a belt — all made of paper; a bowl (supposed to be containing honey), another bowl (supposed to be containing ‘manna dew’), and some bits of paper rolled up like roots were also there. ‘The knight’ and the lady’ appeared with some make up; there were also some to represent the “dead warriors”; they had been instructed by their team how to gesticulate when the poem was read. Finally the poem-reading team was ready: one in the team would read the lines spoken by the poet, another would read the lines of the knight, yet another would read the short utterance made by the lady, and a group of four or five would read the lines spoken by the dead warriors.

In the second hour, the class assembled and the pantomime began. The class watched carefully to see whether there was coherence between what was read and the gesticulations of the actor/actress. When this came to an end, there ensued a discussion. There were questions on the relevance of the background setting, the different stage properties, the make-up, and the different aspects of this activity; there were also questions on the way the poem was read. Each question was put to the pertinent group and the group answered.
On the next day when the class assembled, the researcher asked the learners to go through the poem silently and underline the words/phrases/lines whose meanings were not clear to them even after the pantomime. The following had been underlined: ‘loitering’, ‘haggard’, ‘woe-begone’, ‘I see a lily on thy brow; ‘And on thy check a fading rose/Fast withereth too’, ‘pacing stead’, ‘manna dew’, ‘elfin grot’, ‘woe-betide’ and ‘sojourn’. Of course, the reading of the poem and the role-playing had helped them to guess the meaning of these in their contexts; Yet an attempt at the precise meaning would enhance their appreciation. The researcher helped them in this regard by asking questions to the class, relating each question to the pantomime.

Now they became confident of attempting the appreciation questions in the examination. The class was asked to think of at least two appreciation questions. Each individual should write two questions and discuss them and their answers with his neighbour.

Finally the researcher asked them to prepare a report of the dialogue between the poet and the knight-at-arms, which the learners willingly did. This was in the form of an essay which they could use in their examination.

Asked about this activity, the learners were somewhat vague in their responses, because pantomiming is something entirely new to them. But they were happy and satisfied because the events narrated in the poem were fresh in their memories, they said, as a result of this activity. They could write their own essays which would be useful in the examination. They also said that they would remember this activity for many more days to come.
5.5.3.6 "The Highwayman" – Alfred Noyes (Appendix 11)

This poem was taught through imaginary dialogues that would have ensued if the characters in the poem happened to meet after what had happened in the poem. The learners were asked to listen (without looking into their texts) when the poem was read aloud by the researcher.

The learners could understand the story of the poem; they could also visualize the different scenes of the poem, e.g., the arrival of the highwayman, his appearance, his meeting with Bess, Tim's movements, the highwayman's departure, the arrival of the red-coat troop, their treatment to Bess, Bess's attempt to save the highwayman, the death of the highwayman and the after-effects. What were to be retained in the minds of the learners were the minute details of each scene, which alone would ensure their interest and appreciation.

When the poem was read a second time, the learners followed it in their texts. They felt that in the poem there were many things which were revealed to the readers, but the character were unaware of them. For example, the highwayman did not know the details of Bess's death. If Bess could relate her story to the highwayman after both had died and if they met in the next world, how shocking it would be to the highwayman! As for the reader, what was read in the poem about Bess's death would be intensified when they heard Bess speak about her own death.

The details of the poem could be comprehended easily if the characters could speak to one another. When the learners came to the end of the poem, they had the highwayman and Bess dead, and Tim and the landlord alive. The class could visualize a meeting between Bess and the highwayman in the next world and their dialogue.
touching on the past events. The class could also visualize a meeting between Tim and the landlord and their dialogue about the arrival of the highwayman at the inn, his death, Bess's death, and the after-effects.

The class was asked to work in pairs. Each pair could choose to write the dialogue of the highwayman and Bess, or the dialogue of Tim and the landlord. They wrote for half an hour, discussing and relying on the text. Next the pairs were asked to write the other dialogue (Appendix 15f).

During the next hour, the class assembled and one volunteering pair was asked to read the dialogue to the class, one assuming the role of the highwayman and the other that of Bess. Each was encouraged to use his histrionic ability while reading out his part. There ensued a discussion; the others commented on the details involved in the dialogue and suggested additions and deletions. In a similar way the other dialogue was presented by a different volunteering pair.

The next day the class assembled. The individuals were asked to work in pairs. They could concentrate on any one of the dialogues. They were to rewrite the dialogue in the reported form and this would give them the substance of the poem; of course, they had to supplement it with some ideas given in the introductory part of the poem.

In a similar way, the other dialogue between Tim and the landlord could be written in the reported form.

Then each paid should set a pair of appreciation questions, write answers and discuss. In the next thirty minutes, some of the answers were read to the class.
The learners found this activity interesting and useful. They could tackle a long poem in a meaningful way; they could get a global picture of the poem in one sitting, the learners said. The researcher and the observer also were convinced of the usefulness of this activity.

The learners found this method interesting and meaningful.

5.6 An Evaluation of the Progress

About six weeks had passed after the learners had joined the Course. Now they had been constantly exposed to the oblique method in poetry classes. If a test could be conducted at this level, an insight into their progress could be obtained. So the learners were informed that they would be writing a test in the next poetry class.

5.7 The Post-test

5.7.1 The Aim

The test aims to find out if the learners' exposure to oblique method has enhanced their appreciation of poetry and also communication skills.

5.7.2 The Portions

Similar to the pre-test, appreciation questions were taken from the first three poems taught in the class: (i) "All the World's a Stage", (ii) "If", and (iii) "Say not the Struggle Nought Availeth".

Reply to a given letter, response to an advertisement and dialogue writing were given.
Listening comprehension questions were also included.

5.7.3 Test Items

1. **Appreciation questions** with the same difficulty level as in the questions of the Pretest were given. There were 2 questions from Poem 1, 2 questions from Poem 2, and 1 from Poem 3. The poems were given in the annexure. Marks: 5x2=10.

2. **Letter writing:** A brief letter which required a reply was given. Hints were given underneath to make the learners know what was expected in the reply. Otherwise their replies would be vague and in just one or two sentences. The body of the letter should be 100 words in length. Marks: 10.

3. **Response to an advertisement:** An advertisement which would entice the readers to respond promptly was given. Hints were given so as to make the learners know what was expected in their answers. Marks: 10.

4. **Dialogue writing:** A report of a specific life situation was given and the learners were asked to write the dialogue. The report itself made the learners know what was expected to be written. Marks: 10.

5. **Listening Comprehension:** 5 questions (following a trial question) with four options under each, of which only one was correct, were given. The statements which were to be read aloud by the teacher were not printed in the question paper (Appendix 12b), but were kept by the teacher. But the four options (from which the learner had to choose after listening to each statement) were printed. Marks: 10.

Total Marks: 50.
Duration of the test: 90 minutes.

Question paper: About 120 question papers were made ready through typing and Xerography. Sufficient space had been given under each question for writing the answer. (Appendix 12a) Sheets containing the three poems were also attached to each question paper. (Appendices 1, 2 & 8).

Instructions: Clear instructions were given on how to answer each question, exactly as they had been given in the pre-test.

Key: Key for valuation was prepared (see Appendix 12c); it was decided to have double valuation first by the researcher and then by the observer.

5.7.4 The Conduct of the Post-Test

The I B.Sc (Physics) students and the I B.A (Economics) students assembled in the college hall. The observer and the researcher were in charge of the conduct of the test. A specimen answer sheet is given in Appendix 16b

5.7.5 Evaluation

The test papers were valued separately first by the researcher and then by the observer, and the average taken. The marks were tabulated, and compared with the marks of the pre-test (Tables 2a and 2b). An analysis of their performance is described in Chapter VI.

5.8 Diary Maintenance

The researcher made entries in his diary immediately after teaching each poem in the oblique method. These entries and the observations made by the observer
put together gave the researcher the required feedback on his teaching and the insight into the mode of teaching the next poem. These entries were about the learners' difficulties and how they were overcome, the problems of large classes and how they were solved, and other such things.

The diary entries on how the post-test was conducted, also were useful to the researcher. Though the Science students felt very comfortable while facing the test, the Arts students were still found to be tense. The listening comprehension was a challenge to both sets of learners.

5.9 Students’ Questionnaires (Appendix-13)

They were prepared on the basis of the 'seven recognized principles' of recording achievement described by Don Salter in 3.5. These principles give a sharp reminder of the personal nature in learning. To enable the learners to answer accurately a 5-point scale had been given against each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fully extent</th>
<th>To a great extent</th>
<th>To some extent</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The learners were asked to answer each question by putting a ✓ mark in the appropriate column. They were also asked to write a reason for each answer in the space provided in the questionnaires against each question.

All the learners who had been taught through the oblique method filled in the questionnaires. They not only served as a feedback to the researcher, but also helped the learners in their self-assessment. The learners took up this task very earnestly as it was the first time they had ever responded to questionnaires.
5.10 Conclusion

An analysis and interpretation of these questionnaires is given in the next chapter, along with the analyses of observer’s remarks and the researcher’s diary. A comparison of the results of the Pre-test and the Post-test has also been attempted.