CHAPTER II
ENGLISH COURSES AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL
2.1 Preview and Introduction

In the previous chapter the evolution of English education in Kashmir has been briefly discussed. The system of education passed through an evolutionary course and the development of the educational process was uneven. Several factors contributed to the slow and gradual unfolding of the system of English education in the valley. This discussion laid out the broad framework within which instructional programmes are organized, defining the mode and characteristics of the instructional programme and the learner's attitude and response to it. Specific study situations in which the learners function develop within this framework.

2.1.1 In this chapter, we shall attempt to present an in-depth study of the Kashmir University teaching-learning situation operating in the general educational environment. For our empirical investigation into the English teaching-learning situation we selected the students of all the three levels of undergraduate English courses. We shall examine now the manner of organizing and conducting the Instructional Programme for the teaching of English to these learners. This will involve a review of course objectives, teaching materials, teaching methods and the examination scheme generally followed by the Kashmir University.
2.2 Desired Objectives of English Courses

Right from the time the English education began to be imparted at the college level, the objectives of teaching English language were not spelt out anywhere. The implicit objective of teaching English at the undergraduate level, however, was to produce a cultured, informed, useful and perceptive citizen, through his ability to understand, speak, read and write in English with a measure of ease, fineness and determination. The English courses thus aimed at developing in the students a taste for English literature.

After some years there was a certain amount of specificity in the objectives of teaching English for functional use, i.e., to develop in the students the skill of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

2.2.1 Even at present the implicit objectives of teaching English as a compulsory subject at different levels of education are not spelt out anywhere. As such the implicit objectives and aims of teaching English should be

a) to enable the students to read English with facility;

b) to understand spoken English as used by the teacher in the classroom;

c) to be able to make notes and to write well enough to use it as his/her medium of expression at examination;

d) to develop the skills of speaking and expressive writing;

e) to enable the student to use language effectively so that he/she can pursue his/her studies further;

f) to equip the student with the communicative skills he/she is likely to need in the occupation or the vocation he/she opts for.

All these objectives can be summed up in Gokak's words:

The first objective would be the ability to read and comprehend any modern English writing for cultural purposes and another
objective would be to promote the student’s ability to express himself with ease, in speech and in writing on a variety of topics and specially on his own subject. (1964:12)

From the time of demarcation of English into English language and English literature in the Indian educational system, English literature has been taught as a separate optional subject at the undergraduate level. This course at the undergraduate level prepares the student for specialization of the subject at the higher level. The English literature courses at the two levels, thus, ought to form one integrated scheme for specialization in English language and literature.

2.2.2 The implicit objectives of the literature course would be

a) to introduce students to the finer graces of style which are not expected of the student of Compulsory English;

b) to make them familiar with modern literary classics in English as a general cultural attainment;

c) to enable them to translate standard Indian writing on their subject into English and to present Indian thoughts in powerful and graceful language;

d) to enable them to master the finer graces of Spoken English such as intonation and the stress patterns of English speech;

e) to enable them to attain an intimate knowledge of English prose and poetry suited to their comprehension level;

f) to enable them to develop literary sensibility;

g) to enable them to develop literary competence required for analyzing and evaluating a piece of literature.
2.2.3 The M. A. course in English should, in addition, aim at greater coverage than the B.A. English course. It should enable the student to study the subject in depth. The objectives of the M. A. course may be broadly stated as follows:

a) A thorough acquaintance with the classics of English literature and a grasp of the main movements in the history of English literature.

b) The development of taste and maturity of mind, the ability to think independently and form sound critical judgement.

c) An awareness of language as a social phenomenon, its structure and behaviour; a proper understanding of the phonetics and structures of the English language, and some knowledge of its evolution through the ages.

With these implicit objectives in mind an attempt was made by the researcher to find whether and to what extent these objectives are achieved by making an analysis of the prescribed syllabuses and the question papers.

2.3 The Syllabus Defined

The term ‘syllabus’ has been most ambiguous and even confusing for teachers as well as for learners, and most often the significance of the term and its implications are lost sight of, particularly, when it is taken as a synonym of ‘curriculum’.

In Britain the ‘syllabus’ refers to the content or subject matter of an individual subject, whereas ‘curriculum’ refers to the totality of content to be taught and aims to be realized within school or educational system (White, 1988:4). In the U.S.A., ‘curriculum’ tends to be synonymous with ‘syllabus’ in the British sense (Ibid). In other words, the term ‘syllabus’ is often used alternately with ‘curriculum’. However, as is generally accepted, the
‘curriculum’ has a broader framework, which includes the syllabus. As pointed out by Allen, the distinction between the two can be specified thus:

Curriculum is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational programme. Syllabus, on the other hand, refers to that sub-part of curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught (as distinct from how they will be taught, which is a matter for methodology) (Allen, 1984:61).

Curriculum in its broader sense is used to refer to all the learning experiences that a person encounters at school (college), including those aspects which influence only sub-consciously. In its narrow sense it refers to a person’s experience in one specific subject on the school time-table. In the words of Robertson,

A curriculum includes goals, objectives, content, processes, resources and means of evaluation of all the learning experiences planned for pupils both in and outside the school community through classroom instructions and related programmes, while a syllabus is a statement of the plan for any part of the curriculum excluding the element curriculum evaluation itself (1975:114).

A syllabus can be compared to a blue-print, it is the plan which the teacher converts into a reality of classroom instruction. Nunan, comparing the two, says:

Curriculum is concerned with planning, implementation, evaluation, management and administration of educational programmes. Syllabus, on the other hand, focuses more narrowly on the selection and gradation of content (Nunan, 1989:87).
Breen has defined syllabus as a “plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students’ learning” (1984). Accordingly syllabus is a shareable plan and the framework for a course of study testing the contents of that course. It signifies the time to be taken by the teachers for teaching various parts of the syllabus. In other words, syllabus refers to that sub-part of curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught (For details see Brumfit, 1984).

A syllabus is a means of activating and motivating the capacities of the students to acquire language. As Yalden has rightly stated.

The syllabus is now seen as an instrument by which the teacher, with the help of the syllabus designer, can achieve a degree of ‘fit’ between the needs and aims of the learner (as social being and as individual), and the activities which will take place in the classroom (1984:14).

A syllabus, thus, is concerned with what is to be done in the classroom. It is a specification of what is to be learnt in terms of a conceptual model which aims to provide an understanding of the nature of the subject area concerned. In the words of Prabhu, “Syllabus is a form of support to the teaching activity to be carried out in the classroom, and a form of guidance in the construction of lesson plans” (1987:86).

A syllabus is primarily concerned with what is to be learnt but, as Corder points out, it is more than just an inventory of items (1975:11). In addition to specifying the content of learning, a syllabus provides a rationale for what content should be selected and ordered (Mc Kay, 1980:179-186). In Wilkins’ words, “Syllabuses are specifications of the content of language which has been submitted to some degree of structuring or ordering with the aim of making teaching and learning a more effective process” (See 1981:83-9).
The syllabus has also been defined as an educational programme, which states

a) the educational purposes of the programme (the ends);

b) the content, teaching procedures and learning experiences which will be necessary to achieve this purpose (the means);

c) some means for assessing whether or not the educational ends have been achieved (Richards et al. 1985).

2.3.1 Types of Syllabus (A Brief Summary)

*Grammatical Syllabus*

According to D.A. Wilkins, this type of syllabus speaks in terms of learning units to be defined in grammatical terms (1981:83-9). The content of learning is made possible through grammatical items like the definite article, the position of adjectives, the past tense, conditionals, comparative and superlative, etc. Most textbooks have as their basis a grammatical syllabus. However, it is very difficult for many learners to appreciate the applicability of the knowledge they gain through such an approach. The process of being taken systematically through the grammatical system often reduces the motivation of those who need to see some immediate reason for their learning. Also, this approach is inefficient since its aim is to teach the entire system regardless of the fact that not all parts of the system will be equally useful for all learners. There is again the danger of identifying the learning of grammar with the learning of grammatical form and the subordination of grammatical form to this. Finally, the bringing together of grammatically identical sentences is highly artificial, since in real acts of communication it is sentences that are alike in meaning that occur together and not those that are alike in structure. The meaning of words and sentences is taught but as isolates and not within
stretches of discourse. The grammatical syllabus, thus, fails to provide the necessary conditions for the acquisition of communicative competence.

*Situation Syllabus*

This type of syllabus identifies situational needs as its starting point and is thus concerned with language in a social context. This type of syllabus comprises units indicating specific situations. Accordingly everything ought to be taught in a situation or context that "links the words with the things they refer to" (Hill, 1967:116). They put the students in a natural situation, a contextualized example of each unit of the grammatical patterns is presented at the beginning. These examples, entitled ‘problem situation’ or ‘illustrative situation’ are followed by drills and inventions and by ‘practice situations’. The situations are described as typical instances for the patterns which are being drilled.

One of the objects of such a curriculum is to increase the number of situations in which the student can perform actively in the foreign ambience, as well as enhancing the student’s ability to use the four basic skills in the foreign language.

This syllabus focuses teaching upon what is most relevant to a particular group of students who, in consequence, become highly motivated. The resulting materials will, of course, be linguistically heterogeneous, since natural situations do not contain language of the uniformity of structure which characterizes a grammatical syllabus. This syllabus does not cater to all aspects of language teaching and learning. Besides, the situational syllabus lacks the functional component thus limiting its capacity in terms of preparing learners for real life situations.
The Notional Syllabus

This type of syllabus is based on the assumption that a syllabus should be consideration of the ‘content’ of probable utterances from which it will be possible to determine the ‘forms’ of language that will be most valuable to the learner. The result will be, in the words of D.A. Wilkins, a ‘semantic’ or ‘notional’ syllabus which establishes the grammatical means by which the relevant notions are expressed (See Brumfit and Johnson, 1979:84-85). The lexical content of learning is partly derivable from the notional analysis, but it may also be influenced by pedagogic and situational considerations. The selection and sequencing of the content of the syllabus is, however, vitally important. Ordering of the content is to be followed by the presentation of material in the classroom. No ‘levels’ are to be defined in terms of items of the target language (Yalden, 1983:42). Levels of proficiency will be stated in terms of the degree of capacity of the learner to perform certain tasks. Alternatively, target levels may be specified, as outlined in Munby (1978), in the terms of such communicative features as size and complexity of utterance or text, range and delicacy in control of forms, functions and micro-skills, and speed and flexibility of communication. The central feature of a test system will be to confront the testee with a communicative task (Carroll, 1980:31), since his language performance will be assessed in terms of communicative competence.

Such a syllabus provides a path along which new advances can be made in defining the content of language curricula.
Contextual Syllabus

This type of syllabus ultimately leads to learning of communication. This type is more important, because language, after all, is communication and communication is a two-way process. It has a creative side – speaking and writing; and a receptive side – listening and reading (See Hill, 1967:115-16). The syllabus design is viewed as primarily a matter of specifying the content that needs to be taught and then organizing it for teaching of appropriate learning units. The syllabus is, thus, designed to combine relevance and appropriateness with power. This implies that the content should reflect the predictable communication needs of the learner while containing a high generative capacity. The syllabus includes grammar for its generative capacity and discourse for its international capacity.

To analyse in detail the relative merit of these various types of syllabuses is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is to be pointed out that these syllabuses differ mainly in terms of approaches/methods rather than in terms of the items and contents. All these types of syllabuses, directly or indirectly, highlight the main aim of ELT syllabus: developing the language proficiency of a learner by acquisition of all the four language skills as well as the use of language for communication.

2.4 Analysis of Syllabuses and Question Papers

Syllabuses and question papers are closely related to one another. No discussion of one without the other is likely to be realistic and useful, for the validity of a question item must be judged in terms of its conformity to the syllabus prescribed for the examinations. This, therefore, calls for a careful study of the syllabuses as well as of the question papers.

A study of the complex problems of syllabus designing is beyond the scope of this study. As such an attempt is made to indicate, in general terms,
certain practices in the construction of syllabuses and the setting of question papers, which have hindered, instead of promoting, language learning on the part of the students. With this purpose in view, the syllabuses of all the three levels of Undergraduate English Courses are analysed hereunder:

English is taught as a compulsory subject for three years in the three-year integrated degree course at the University of Kashmir. The syllabus, prescribed by the University is distributed into two parts. One part lists the prescribed textbooks and some instructions for the paper-setter regarding the questions to be asked on these texts. The second part of the syllabus details the various language items such as letter-writing, essay writing, grammar and usage to be taught in the class.

The textbooks used for the students of various disciplines like Science, Humanities and Commerce are the same. The subject is divided into paper ‘A’ and paper ‘B’: paper ‘A’ is based on the prescribed textbooks whereas paper ‘B’ comprises practical Grammar, Remedial Grammar, Translation, Letter-writing, Paragraph writing, Report writing, Precis writing and Composition writing.

The syllabus indicates the distribution of marks and prescribes the texts, but it ignores the most important item in a good syllabus, i.e., a neat statement of clearly spelt out teaching objectives in terms of the desired terminal behaviour of the student. A good syllabus, as Gayan et al., suggest, gives “a concrete shape to the teaching objectives which aim at bringing about desirable changes in the student behaviour” (1962:17) at the end of a given course. And the level of proficiency in the use of English the students are expected to attain is not defined and detailed in the syllabuses explicitly in terms of the language skills and sub-skills such as report-writing, reading with a view to locating the required information and facts.
The other two omissions in the syllabus are:

a) These syllabuses do not provide any guidelines to the teacher with regard to the teaching strategies to be followed.

b) These do not provide any objective criteria to the paper-setter as to what to test and how to test. Perhaps, the only factor that provides some clue to the teacher about the targets to be achieved and the way the content material is to be taught is the final examination. This is not to suggest that the syllabus has been framed without the syllabus-framer having any objective in his mind. But it is also true that the objectives of teaching the prescribed courses have nowhere been clearly defined. And, since what and how the teacher teaches is, to a large extent, determined by the objectives, it is difficult for him/her to visualize what he/she is expected to achieve by teaching these texts. The field survey has also borne it out (see Chapter III).

In this situation, it is not surprising if the teacher plans and organizes his/her teaching activities to cater to the requirements of the examinations only. Whatever little language learning is produced as a result of such teaching is only incidental and incidental teaching cannot be but marginal.

Secondly, vagueness about the objectives of teaching leaves much to the subjective interpretation of both the teacher and the paper-setter. The wording of every teaching item and instruction in a good syllabus should be so clear as to leave no scope for any subjective interpretation by the teacher or the paper-setter. And, in such situation, the only available frame of reference for the paper-setter to do his job is the ‘tradition-old’ question papers. This accounts for preparation of the same stereo-typed ways of asking questions in the examination.
The teacher, the paper-setter and also the evaluator, therefore, need to know the objectives of teaching as a valuable reference so that their work becomes meaningful. The co-ordination between these three is essential for the successful implementation of any ELT programme.

For ‘General English’ included in part (b) of the syllabus, no textbook is ‘prescribed’ although only a few books have been ‘suggested’ for reading. The items listed in this part include letter-writing, paragraph writing on a given topic, precis writing, essay writing, translation and grammar and usage. In the absence of any standard grammar book prescribed, teachers and students readily rely on the ‘bazaar guides’ which cover these items. This also reduces the teacher’s motivation to prepare his/her own exercise material to teach those language items.

This part of the course seeks to test the expressive ability of the students. The syllabus does not suggest any guidelines to the teachers to improve the writing skills of their students.

2.4.1 While taking a look at the existing situation, it is essential to know that the syllabus prescribed (see Annexure-I) and the textbooks used at the undergraduate level in the colleges affiliated to the University of Kashmir have not been scientifically prepared to develop any specific language skill. These books are modeled on the old British texts when university education was controlled by British professors. The textbooks are mainly literature-oriented and the main aim of the framers of the syllabus has been to familiarize the learner with various literary genres. There is a gradual progression from essays and short stories (in the First Year) to poems and plays (in the Second Year) and then to fiction (in the Third Year). This is obvious from the titles of the below mentioned textbooks which are currently used for teaching, what is called, paper A.
I. **First Year:**


*Selected Modern Stories*, edited by K.G. Seshadri (Macmillan) India.

II. **Second Year:**


*Six Famous Plays*, edited by Satya Narain Singh (Macmillan) India.

III. **Third Year:**

*Inimitable Jeeves* by P.G. Wodehouse.

However, ‘Paper B’ mainly comprises such language components as Practical Grammar (for First Year), Remedial Grammar, Translation, Letter-writing, Report writing, Paragraph writing (for Second Year). Precis writing and Composition writing (for Third Year). The books that have been recommended for ‘Paper B’ are:

*Communication Skills*, 1,II, III (for three classes respectively).

In addition

*Essentials of English Grammar*, by Richard Murphy has been prescribed for First Year; and

*Written Communication in English*, by Sarah Freeman has been prescribed for Second Year and Third Year.

After analysing the syllabus for the undergraduate compulsory English courses, we shall now attempt an analysis/review of the textbooks prescribed.

Three anthologies of essays have been prescribed for all the three levels of undergraduate compulsory English course. These include:

*Twentieth Century English Prose*, for First Year;

*A Selection of English Prose*, for Second Year; and

*Enlightenment: A Selection of Essays for Awareness*, for Third Year.
These anthologies contain extracts which are representative of the prose of the eighteenth, nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. In the absence of any specific directive from the University, the aim of the compilers of prose anthologies appears to be to introduce the students to the great masters of English prose of the eighteenth, nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. In selecting the prose extracts, the anthologists seem to be guided by their personal predilections. For teaching twentieth century English prose, the primary objective seems to create in the students a taste for English literature and to provide a perspective for them to appreciate the beauty of the 'period' prose.

The prose anthologies include essays from Bacon to A.G. Gardiner. While selecting the essays the anthologists, it appears, have not taken into consideration the abilities of the students. The essays are not properly selected and graded to suit the various levels of undergraduate courses. They do not, also, cohere with the text materials immediately preceding and following them. The collection of essays prescribed for the First Year, for example, consists mainly of biographical sketches and topics related to Science, Education, Culture, Politics, Human Values, Adventures and Ethics.

The essayists frequently represented are J.B. S. Haldane, Raymond B. Fosdick, Maurice Cranston, Jim Corbett, Albert Einstein. Essays on Science like 'A Layman Looks at Science' are followed by essays on politics (What Is Democracy): which in turn is followed by essays on culture and education represented by E.M. Forster (Notes on the English Character) and Albert Einstein (On Education). The student is thus exposed abruptly to a variety of experiences and varied styles. Even the essays selected have been written by men whose writings can be characterized by styles peculiar to each of them. This stylized English is not needed by our learners. Our learners need language for daily use and such language cannot be learnt by exposure to literature of
varied styles. The editors claim that notes of reasonable length are appended to each passage, which provide information relevant to the text, followed by a brief glossary, comprehension questions, and exercises on language and composition (See English Prose, 1986:iii). However, no guidance has been offered to the teacher as to how these essays are to be used in order to improve the language skills of the learner.

The most frequently represented essayists of the eighteenth century are Johnson, Swift, Goldsmith and Addison. Of the nineteenth century the most frequently represented essayists are Lamb and Hazlitt. Of the twentieth century the most frequently represented essayists are Robert Lynd and A.G. Gardiner. The essay of Charles Lamb is full of local colour and allusions, e.g., ‘Dream Children; a Reverie’. William Hazlitt’s essay ‘On Going a Journey’, Gardiner’s ‘On Habits’, Stevenson’s ‘An Apology for Idlers’ figure among the prescribed prose anthologies. The essays demand of the students an intimate knowledge of the English social customs.

The explanatory notes and other critical aids that are appended to the books are meant for the teachers to enable them to appreciate the essays better. These explanatory notes offer very little help to the prescribed texts. There are very few language exercises based on the prose texts. The prose anthologies, as is evident, seem to take care, more of the literary component of English than of its language component.

In addition to the prose anthologies, the students of compulsory English at the undergraduate level have to study non-detailed texts and the single works of certain authors. The non-detailed texts include *Modern Short Stories* (Macmillan) and *Six Famous Plays* edited by S. Singh. Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and The Sea* figures among the single works of certain authors while Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* represents modern problem play.
Selected Modern Stories, prescribed for the students of ‘First Year Compulsory English Course’ is a collection of some short stories in English representing various types. On the one hand, the students are introduced to moving allegories (The Young King), and on the other gruesome tales of murder (The Well). ‘The Dying Detective’ and ‘The Invisible Man’ represent detective stories while as the Judgement of Paris and ‘After Twenty Years’ reveal unexpected surprise endings. The Apple represents a delightful and thought-provoking fancy. Red is a typical Somerset Maugham story whileas the last two stories are written by famous Indian writers.

The stories, it appears, have been prescribed with the intention of developing reading skills among the students. The stories are followed by very brief sketches of the authors which bars one from knowing much about them and their ‘period’. The questions given at the end of each story are related to various scenes, the significance of certain events, the significance of the ending of the story and the like. The stories encourage rote learning among the students. The students, as such, memorize the answers to certain questions. The stories do not demand the development of any language skill. They do not demand any language drills, which, in turn, is proof enough that they have been prescribed for exposing the students to yet another genre. Even the editor of the book admits that the story is the most popular literary form today. What use the book has for ELT class has not been indicated either by those who have prescribed it or by the editor himself. Actual observation has, however, proved that such materials hinder the learner’s exposure to living natural language.

The anthology of ‘plays’ includes a range of international playwrights: American, British, German, Italian and Russian. The students are introduced to a variety of themes and characters. In subject, treatment and setting the range is from farce to tragedy. Each play has its unique mode of treatment and style of presentation. The themes include life’s tragic dilemmas and the tenderness of
human feelings in the midst of agony and death (*The Man with the Flower in His Mouth*, *Hello Out There*), irony of circumstance and the dehumanizing effects of poverty (*Lithuania*), selfless action and self-centred egotism (*The Little Man*), false sentiment and genuine passion (*The Boor*), the comedy of suspicion in Nazi Germany (*The Informer*). The plays are followed by a brief glossary and comprehension questions.

Plays are written with the intention of enacting them. They are not, therefore, written to be read and, that too, to be read by the students for academic purposes. Plays are a source of entertainment and relief from the dull routine of daily life. At the same time, they bring us into contact with some of the most pathetic and gruesome realities of life. They provide live dramatization of persons, people, events and periods and thus capture the attention and interest of a large number of people who do not want to go through the experience of reading books.

Moreover, while prescribing the plays for the students of undergraduate level the framers of syllabus have not, presumably, taken into consideration that teaching of plays in the classroom requires an enthusiastic atmosphere of experiment, innovation and a particular treatment on the part of the teacher. The framers of syllabus, it seems, have left it to the teacher to communicate things artistically. The teacher is expected to possess imaginative quality and develop the same among the students. He is even expected to possess the mastery in presenting the play to the students and that too, to those students who are ill-equipped even with the basic language skills.

In actual observation, however, the teacher delivers a brief lecture regarding the author, gives a brief summary of the play and then explains the meaning of the lines.
The objectives of prescribing 'plays' seem to enable the students to read the unsimplified texts, pick out relevant facts, follow an argument intelligently and evolve their own response to the texts.

Poetry

It has been generally accepted by ELT experts, as well as by teachers, that poetry has no place in the Second Language teaching situation because a student struggling with the elements of English structure should not be exposed to the complexities of poetry. The poems prescribed for the Second Year degree level can 'mean' nothing to a student who has only a rudimentary understanding of language. Under the circumstances the student is compelled to accept whatever interpretation of a poem his/her teacher chooses to thrust on him/her. Shakespeare's Sonnet LX, John Donne's Sun Rising, Yeats' Adam's Curse and W.H. Auden's The Unknown Citizen are full of complex words and syntactic structures which have been used in a manner that could be considered often 'unacceptable' in ordinary language. Also, the students are exposed to different forms of verse, various styles of poetic compositions and diverse thoughts. Poems of different periods are prescribed for a language class. Exposure to such usage can hardly lead a student to learn any language skill. In fact, there is every possibility that such texts will lead to the formation of wrong language habits.

Among the various literary genres prescribed for undergraduate Compulsory English Course, fiction is yet another addition prescribed for the students of the Third Year. The text prescribed is the Inimitable Jeeves, by P.G. Wodehouse. Fiction is an important means of acquiring the skill of communication which, in turn, involves complete mastery of all the four major skills of language acquisition, namely, reading, writing, speaking and listening. Proficiency in reading and listening (therefore comprehending) is of prime importance for understanding a piece of fiction since it is through the medium
of reading that a particular piece of fiction is introduced in the class. The
students, in turn, comprehend it through the medium of listening/
communicating. Fiction, being the highest form of creative and expressive
writing, demands the students to be able to express themselves in a language
that is both correct as well as appropriate. But the books prescribed can hardly
be used to develop the skills of comprehension or to provide drills with the
structures of English or to teach essential vocabulary. In fact there is hardly any
need to prescribe these literature-oriented texts in a language class.

Paper ‘B’

The ‘Paper B’ of the three-year integrated degree course forms half of
the syllabus. This part of the syllabus is supposed to develop the writing skill of
the learners by teaching them Grammar, Letter-writing, Report-writing,
Paragraph-writing, Precis-writing and the art of composition. The textbooks
recommended are the readymade ones like *Communication Skills in English*
published by Oxford University Press, India. Since the book consists of three
volumes, one volume has been recommended for each class respectively (Vol.I
for First Year; Vol. II for Second Year; and Vol.III for Third Year). The
syllabus for First Year General English ‘B’ comprises six units: articles; tenses;
direct and indirect narration; paragraph writing; informal letter writing; and
translation of a modern Indian language into English. The first three
components of grammar are also prescribed as well as taught at 10+2 level as a
result of which very little attention is paid towards teaching these to the
students at the undergraduate level. Besides, these components hardly demand
any writing drills and in no way help to develop the writing skill of the learner.
Such components are, therefore, mostly irrelevant in terms of the writing tasks,
though they form only a part of the ‘pre-writing’ teaching plan/strategy. The
remaining three units of grammar demand extensive writing practice given to
the students in the classroom. The student is expected to possess sufficient number of vocabulary items.

For acquiring the art of informal letter writing the students usually resort to ready-made guides and 'bazaar notes' and memorize some informal letters which they expect would be asked in the examination. Thus the language-oriented course (Paper ‘B’) loses its efficacy and gets transformed into examination-oriented course.

Writing of paragraphs receives no better treatment. The writing of paragraphs demands, in terms of examination, the expansion of a particular statement. Some such statements are as follows:

a) Make hay while the sun shines  
b) Look before you leap  
c) Fools rush in where angles fear to tread  
d) Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war  
e) "If youth knew, and the age could…"

Paragraph writing demands the highest form of expressive ability as is needed in writing of an essay. The only difference between the two is that the former could not be as long as the latter.

The translation part of the grammar receives the least attention both from the teachers as well as from the students. Translation demands the acquisition of sufficient vocabulary items, the rules of punctuation, structure of the language, especially mastery in translating the main idea from one language into another in a correct, appropriate and communicative language. This requires, in addition, a complete mastery of comprehension and writing skill. By prescribing this unit of grammar at the First Year General English course, the framers of syllabus, it appears, have assumed that the students might already
be in possession of the ingredients required for acquiring mastery in this component. Translation is the most complex language exercise since it demands the conversion of the idiom of one language into another while keeping the communicative aspect uppermost.

Paper ‘B’ of the Second Year General English course consists of the components like, formal letter writing; comprehension passage with questions; vocabulary testing including grammatical units like spelling, use of idioms and phrases into sentences, use of a word as different parts of speech. Translation has been again prescribed at this level. All these units demand extensive writing practice given to the student in the classroom. The student at this stage is expected to have mastered the basic structures of the language and to have acquired sufficient number of vocabulary items. The actual classroom observation, as well as the question papers set for the examination, reveal that the students are expected to learn these expressive writing skills on their own. The whole syllabus is, therefore, reduced to a set pattern of questions (in the examination) for which the students require readymade answers.

Paper ‘B’ of the Third Year General English course has been divided into four units: essay writing; precis writing; translation from any modern Indian language into English; and applied grammar which involves pairs of words, modal verbs, change of narration and prepositional phrases. The first three components are, beyond any doubt, the highest forms of expressive writing which expect a student to be able to express himself in concrete terms. It is a complex process involving many activities such as an initial probing into experience, an analysis of it, identifying items of specific and definable significance, their subsequent organization into a meaningful sequence and finally their expression in a language that is both correct and appropriate. In actual practice the students usually rely upon ‘bazaar notes’ for getting ready-made essays/compositions because they are neither able to express themselves.
nor are they given any training in achieving proficiency in this communication skill.

2.4.2 The Question Papers: (A critical analysis of the sample chosen)

Since the syllabus does not state anything regarding the essential components of curriculum, a look at the Question Papers might reveal some of the main objectives the syllabus framers might have had while framing the syllabus. A critical analysis of the Question papers of all the three classes of General English at the degree level, therefore, becomes obligatory.

For the purpose of examination the syllabus is divided into two parts: Part I dealing with the prescribed textbooks is titled ‘Paper A’ while as Part II dealing with grammar is titled ‘Paper B’. In our analysis, therefore, we will stick to the same division (For Question Papers see Annexure-II).

In the syllabus prescribed for undergraduate General English courses, there are certain instructions regarding questions to be asked on the texts. Here is one such example: “One question from the book of poems, short stories or prose selection”. Such instructions specify neither the nature nor the focus, nor the purpose of the question to be asked in the examination. In the absence of any clarity regarding the objectives of testing through the questions of this type the teacher cannot judge which component (such as language, contents or the stylistic nuances, simple paraphrasing of the content material) of the text to emphasize and to what purpose. Consequently, a majority of teachers tend to lecture on the contents of the text or adopt some such method as would make their job easy.

When the teachers read the instructions such as ‘no passages will be set from the following essays

a) The Night The Ghost Got In
they either tend to skip the essays or ask the students to read those essays on their own. The students in turn, do not read the essays which leads to selective reading.

The type of questions found in the examination papers are bound to encourage students to resort to memorizing the ready made answers and the teachers to dictate notes on such questions. This is clearly a test of students’ memory rather than the language proficiency they are expected to develop. Such questions do not provide any incentive and motivation to students to acquire any language skills.

For bringing about reforms and improvement in the system of examination several commissions and committees were appointed by the Government of India from time to time. The University Education Commission of 1948-49 in their report viewed with great concern the sad neglect of written work in colleges and universities. In its Report, the Commission stated:

At several places we found that there were neither tutorials nor terminal examinations, so that a student got through his two years of study without having done a single written exercise and his very first exercise, was the answering of his papers at the final examination. He has had no practice whatever in writing and no wonder he writes badly, his answers are not properly arranged and his facts are not marshelled in proper sequence (University Education Commission Report 1948-49:143).

The Commission went so far as to declare, “If we are to suggest one single reform in the university education, it should be that of examination” (Ibid).
The Kothari Commission (1964-66) while commenting on the efficacy of examinations made the following statements:

In the present system, when the future of the students is totally decided by our external examination at the end of the year, they pay minimum attention to the teachers, do little independent study throughout most of the academic year and cram desperately for the final examination. The crippling effect of external examination in the quality of work in higher education has become crucial to all progress and has to go hand in hand with the improvement in teaching ...(11. 52:524)

In spite of the recommendations of several committee with regard to change and improvement in the structure of the examinations, hardly anything was done by the authorities of the University of Kashmir. The only examination that is conducted by the University at the end of the year is the annual examination or the ‘qualifying test’. The subject is divided into two papers: A and B. Paper A involves the testing of textbooks while Paper B tests the grammar component of the students. For the purpose of analysis the researcher selected the Question Papers of the year 2000.

2.4.2/a Paper A

Question Paper A of all the three classes follows rigidly the pattern laid down in the syllabus itself. The syllabus specifies that Question Paper A should consist of one compulsory question on “explanation with reference to context” from the prescribed textbooks and a student is supposed to attempt ‘three out of six passages’ given in the question paper. The remaining questions are mainly ‘essay type’ questions, mostly four in number (with internal choice) and a student is asked to attempt all the four. Since all the questions ‘carry equal marks’ and the ‘total marks’ specified are 75, each question, therefore, carries the weightage of 15 marks. There is an internal division within the syllabus of
each year and the topics/writers/poets have been grouped into units and sub-units. The student is supposed to study all the units.

The analysis of the question papers reveals that the primary skill required from the students is the reading comprehension whereas the responses of the students are achieved through writing skills.

The questions asked in the examination papers vary from annotations to writing of summaries. The question on ‘reference to context’, for example, expects a brief annotation from the student. The student is supposed to identify the passage and locate its context in the essay/poem from which it is extracted. Hence the question is more information-oriented. The following question of the second year General English Degree Course of the year 2000 can be cited as an example:

1. Explain with reference to the context the following lines (Do any three)
   
   a) When I consider how my light is spent,
      Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide.
      And that one latent which is death to hide
      Lodged with me useless.

   b) Sophocles long ago
      Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
      Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow.
      Of human misery.

   c) In every cry of every Man
      In every infant’s cry of fear
      In every voice, in every ban,
      The mind forged manacles I hear.

   d) Over his own sweet voice the stock-dove broods;
The Joy makes answer as the Magpie chatters.
And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters

c) The seed you sow another reaps;
The wealth ye find another heeps;
And robes ye weave another wears.

f) And yet times in hope my verse shall stand.
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

Besides being factually-oriented no specific instructions have been given in terms of length as well as the kind of explanation which a student is expected to write in response to the question.

The remaining four questions are essay type questions. These questions are ambiguous in the sense that they are hardly related to any particular framework within which a student is expected to express himself. Most of the questions asked are composed of grouped items, and within the group the items are alternative in character; and sometimes two questions are interlocked and balanced against two other questions of the same value which are also interlocked. The following sample questions can be cited by way of illustration:

Q. Discuss the relationship between Santiago and Manolin in the novel, *The Old Man and the Sea.*

or


Q. What is the cause of timelessness of Shakespeare’s verse as outlined in *Sonnet LX*?

or
How does Wordsworth learn the lessons of resolution and independence from the leech-gatherer? (B. A. Part II.2000)

Q. Attempt a character-sketch of Ann Deever.

or

To what extent is Joe Keller responsible for the death of his son Larry in *All My Sons*. (B. A. part III.2000)

Q. What is the significance of the apple in ‘The Apple’?

or

Why was Benson horrified to hear that Olive had dropped her bracelet in ‘The Well’? (B. A. Part I.2000)

Q. What are the pleasures being enjoyed by Hazlitt while going on a journey?

or

How does Stevenson justify the role of idlers in life? Discuss fully. (B. A. Part II, 2000)

Such an arrangement of question items in the question paper makes it difficult to determine the difficulty value of the question items, that is, to determine the extent to which the students fall short of achieving correctness of response to each question item.

A perusal of the question papers set for the undergraduate General English Papers ‘A’ of the University of Kashmir shows that predictability has become a feature of the questions. The question papers are characterized by a set pattern and the topics that have been covered in the examination for one year were not covered by the examination for the next year. For example, if the students are asked to write a note on ‘Sonnets of Shakespeare’ and the alternative to that question is ‘comment on Keats as an aesthetic poet’, the question will not find any place in the question papers set for the second
examination. This leads to predictability of the question items and it has its serious repercussions on the teaching-learning situation. The students usually ignore the topics that have been covered in the previous examination as a result of which their reading becomes highly selective. Examinations loom so large in the minds of the students that teaching is entirely subordinated to examinations. Most of the teachers on being interviewed by the researcher frankly admitted that they usually discuss the probable questions and ignore the topics which were covered in the previous examination. In this regard, the Indian Universities Commission of 1902 had expressed the same apprehension. The Commission, in its Report said, “...the greatest evil from which the system of university education in India suffers is that teaching is subordinated to examination, and not examination to teaching” (1902:43).

In addition some of the questions asked in the examinations are couched in a language which appear vague and ambiguous to the students, and therefore, lack discriminating power. A question like “How does Kate Keller finally become convinced of the death of Larry?” is liable to as many interpretations as there are students. Such questions ultimately lead to subjective evaluation. In order to acquire the required responses the students naturally turn to critics or to the study-aids available in the market. Such questions compel even the teachers to make their lectures a pastiche of the opinion of critics.

The questions asked in the examinations demand intensive reading of textbooks prescribed in the syllabus. Intensive reading, however, does not widen a student’s vocabulary. The textbooks do not demand extensive reading either. As such a student is hardly motivated to develop the habit of extensive reading since it is not relevant in terms of examination. The examinations are factually-oriented and, hence, encourage memorizing. In other words, the examination is more a test of one’s memory than his proficiency in language skills.
‘Paper B’ of all the three levels of the undergraduate English courses seeks to test the students’ knowledge of modern English usage, their power of expression and comprehension through such exercises as writing of an essay, a letter (formal and informal), a paragraph, a precis and translating of a passage from a modern Indian language into English.

The analysis of the question papers set for the students of the Undergraduate General English courses reveals that questions were set on punctuation, change of narration, transformation of sentences, correction of errors and framing of sentences with idioms and phrases. Besides, the students were also asked to bring out the difference in the meaning of pairs of words through illustrative sentences like the following:

Q. Give the meaning of each of the following. Also use them in your sentences: come across; a blessing in disguise; to make both ends meet; first and foremost; maiden speech. (B. A. part II, 2000)

Q. Frame sentences to show the difference in meaning of the following pairs of words:
adopt-adapt; luxurious-luxuriant; exhaustive-exhausting; compliment-complement. (B. A. Part III, 2000)

Q. Turn the following into the indirect form of narration:

i) “This is my lost watch,” said he, “and if I do not prove it, I will give up my claim”.

ii) The teacher said, “What a lazy boy you are! How badly you have done your work!”

iii) “Cheer up mother, I will go and get work somewhere. I am sorry I have not been of much help to you so far”. said Suhail. (B. A Part III, 2000)
It should be noted, however, that questions regarding English usage are also taught and asked at the 10+2 level. Such tasks hardly demand any reading task from the students. As regards the drilling of these exercises, the students are expected to have achieved mastery in these language units at 10+2 level and, hence, these units are paid mere lip-service in the actual classroom situation.

**Paragraph Writing**

No doubt the students are required to write paragraphs on different topics but they are not required to write with a definite focus. The general procedure followed should have been to give the outline and ask the students to substantiate a particular point of view with the help of subordinate areas and establish a logical relation between the topic, the outline, and the subordinate ideas. However, this purpose is hardly served by asking a student to write a paragraph of about 150 words on anyone of the following:

i. Peaceful uses of atom;

ii. Uses and abuses of cinema;

iii. United we stand divided we fall;

iv. Prevention is better than cure;

v. Match fixing and its effects on the game of cricket. (B. A. Part I, 2000)

The topics given are vague in the sense that a student can write anything and of any length. Instead of developing any writing skill, the students can do well even by memorizing answers from ready-made ‘bazaar notes’. Moreover, the only difference between an essay and a paragraph is that the latter cannot be as long as the former.
Essay

Essay writing is the highest form of expressive writing which expects a student to be able to express himself in concrete terms. It is a complex process involving activities like an initial probing into experience, an analysis of it, identifying items of specific and definable significance, their subsequent organization into a meaningful sequence, and finally their expression in a language that is both correct and appropriate. However, such topics as ‘Handicrafts of Kashmir’, ‘Importance of Games and Sports’, ‘Tourism in Kashmir’, ‘Pleasures of Reading’ hardly serve this purpose because such topics are found in abundance in ‘bazaar guides’. Thus memorizing replaces the art of expressive writing.

Precis Writing

Precis is believed to be a good indicator of high general language ability. It encourages economy in the use of words and it tests two skills at a time, comprehension and continuous writing. In view of its difficulty, the teachers are expected to spend lot of time on it by lecturing on ‘techniques’ such as generalization, elimination of figurative language, ‘avoidance of words given in the original passage’, etc.

Though the precis tests the ability of the student to express complex thoughts concisely, and encourage economy in the use of words, its disadvantages far outweigh its advantages. As a testing instrument it is imperfect because it tests two skills at the same time, comprehension and continuous writing. When the student fails to develop the precis of the passage, it is difficult to understand whether this was because he failed to understand the meaning of the passage or because he was unable to express the ideas contained in the original passage in his own words. A stereo-typed reduction to one-third of the length of the original passage is unrealistic. As a matter of fact some kinds of writing could be reduced much more than this and others less. By
asking such questions the syllabus framers as well as the paper setters, it appears, encourage the students to practice economy in counting words in the examination hall. The precis only tests the student’s comprehension of a given prose passage and the responses to the questions asked at the end of the passage demand economy of words.

Translation

There is no justification for translation at any but the most advanced, nearly bilingual, level of proficiency. It presupposes a relationship between languages which does not exist at less than the level of the total language systems. At any lesser level, (at phrase, sentence or paragraph level) the differences between the two perceptual grids which reflect and are reflected by the two languages remain unintelligible because they are part of the total set of differences between these two systems. Any attempt to convert one language into another, to see a set of events from the same angle in spite of vast referential, linguistic and social differences must bend one of the languages. It may work with the language of near-neighbouring communities, provided that the text is native, but the result of translation will scarcely be more than a caricature of the original. Translation is an exercise in two cultures, an exercise of style in interpretation, and the assessment of style is notoriously difficult. Hence, the currently used evaluation/markign system which is based upon the notion of right/wrong judgements even at the morphemic level can hardly expect to test any writing proficiency of the learner.

An analysis of the syllabus, the prescribed textbooks and the question papers of the compulsory English course reveals that although the syllabus delineated the scope of each paper, and prescribed the textbooks, it did not spell out a neat taxonomy of discrete objectives in terms of the ‘Entrance behaviour’ and the ‘Desired terminal behaviour’ of the students. As the syllabus does not provide any directive to the teachers regarding the methods of teaching English
to be followed in the classroom, and as the questions which were set in the Annual Examinations, are information-oriented, the teachers’ major objective is the dissemination of facts. There is very little coherence between the course-material and the syllabus.

The syllabus, the prescribed textbooks and the system of examination in Compulsory English, seem to be characterized by a set pattern which continues for the last so many years with little or no alteration.

2.4.3 Analysis of English Literature Courses at the undergraduate level

Since the objective of this research project is to find the relationship between undergraduate English Courses and the Literary Studies at the Post-graduate level, it has become imperative to analyse the literature courses at the undergraduate level which aim to develop ‘literary sensibility’ among the students needed by them at the post-graduate level.

English Literature was brought to India by the British Rulers as part of their total colonizational process. English, they felt, was essential for the modernization of India. As far back as 1835, Macaulay had pointed out that the phenomenal development of England had been due to the study of the ancient classics, and “what Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham, our tongue is to the people of India” (Report of IEC, 1964-66:524).

The purpose of teaching English Literature to the Indians, thus, was two-fold:

a) Through English Literature they would come into contact with western Civilization, and

b) They were to learn the language through literature.
In the Post-Independence India a distinction was maintained between the practical training in English language, and the study of English literature. Also, the fact is that a disproportionate number of students were given literary training. As such the teaching of English literature at the undergraduate level revealed some specific objectives which were:

a) The course shall serve both as terminal and preparatory of M.A.

b) It shall train the students to make a first-hand response to literature with a view to developing their literary sensibility. This implies that the evaluation of the students’ achievement will not rest with mere critical knowledge, but aim at evaluating the development of the student’s literary sensibility and the capacity of responding to a text.

c) The course should give them some insights into language. This was probably included because the course is a second-language literary course, and the question of language teaching and learning can never be ruled out.

d) The course should also provide for the students becoming proficient in note-taking.

In Kashmir University English Literature is being offered as an Optional Course for three years at the Undergraduate Level in the affiliated colleges. The syllabus designed for this course is divided on the basis of various genres like poetry, drama and fiction. The course of each level offers two papers and the students are tested at the end of each year.

* The language-literature divide was recommended by The Kothari Commission of 1964-66. The Commission in its Report said, “A distinction has to be made between the teaching of English as a skill and the teaching of English literature.”
The optional course can be regarded as a terminal or as a transitional course. It is terminal course for those who leave the University on graduation, transitional for those who opt for a study of English language and literature at the postgraduate level. This would obviously mean that the course should be devised so as to be useful terminally as well as transitionally, i.e., it should equip those who terminate their study at graduation with a basic knowledge of what is today termed the mechanics of language and literature, so that if they become teachers of English, they should be able to approach the subject with some confidence. To those who continue to study the subject in the University, the course should serve as a take-off base or a feeder course, providing them with the background and the tools necessary for a deeper understanding and analysis of both language and literature.

The syllabus for teaching English literature at the undergraduate level has also been prescribed by the University of Kashmir. The syllabuses of all the three levels of undergraduate courses have been divided into two papers: A and B for each level (see Annexure-I). Though the syllabuses of all the three levels of undergraduate course prescribes the books to be studied, it does not specify the objectives anywhere. The course in all probability does have objectives, but they are hidden, and hence not shared.

For the First Year of the undergraduate literature course, an anthology of poetry has been prescribed. The poets who dominate the selection are Donne, Herrick, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Blake and Burns. The preface to the anthology of poetry indicates that the aim of teaching poetry was to develop in the students literary taste and the power of discrimination so as to enable them to appreciate and respond to the 'logic of emotion'. Most of the writers included in the syllabus are represented by only one or two of their works. This selection of one or two works of a writer is supposed to be representative of both the author
and the age to which the author belongs. This inadequate representation of both
the writer and the age, makes the syllabus “sketchy”.

The syllabus lists a number of important writers from Milton to Burns. The course seems to aim at introducing a maximum number of well known
literary figures and well known literary works, rather than to teach the subject
in depth. This makes the course more of a “survey” than a “study”. Also, the
students are introduced to various types of poetry pertaining to the period in
which these have been composed. While Milton represents the Age of
Puritanism, Donne figures among the metaphysical poets. Similarly, Dryden
represents Neo-classicism and Pope writes Satire. Blake, on the other hand,
writes about experience. The students are, therefore, expected to gain a
thorough knowledge of all the poetic periods that are represented by the
respective poets. They have to study the poet’s biography and the political,
social and economic background of the contemporary period. In addition the
student is required to possess knowledge of the major works of the poet.

The syllabus fails to introduce the student to the intricacies of the form
and the structure of the English language. The stylistic and rhetorical features
which form a work of art are ignored. Also, the literary terminology, which is
essential for precise literary expression, is untouched. As a result students
cannot express themselves in precise terms.

The History of Literature forms the second part of Paper A. The
University of Kashmir has prescribed *A Short History of English Literature* by
Robert Bernard for the students of the First-year undergraduate course. The
students are required to study the first nine chapters of the prescribed text. The
purpose of introducing the ‘History of English Literature’ is, probably, to
acquaint the students with the past history. But this purpose is not fulfilled. The
result is that the students do not have a clear idea of one age as distinct and
different from another. Students are unable to distinguish the characteristic
features of each literary age. It is a well-known fact that a literary work cannot be studied in isolation and, therefore, attention needs to be paid to contextual information. Contextual information includes political, social, cultural, literary and intellectual history. But this is not possible when the students are confused about the background of a work of art. Moreover, the ‘History of Literature’, seems to be taught for information rather than for application. This can be illustrated from the following types of questions that are quite often asked in the examination:

a) Write a note on the “Metaphysical” poets.

b) Write a note on the Elizabethan Romantic Drama.

c) Discuss the role of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding as early novelists.


Even if questions of “application” appear, they usually require the students to examine a literary work/works, which are not prescribed and the students have most probably not read. For example

a) Consider Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calander* as a pastoral poem.

b) Consider the *Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser as an allegory.

c) Discuss the importance of the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in heralding the Romantic Revival.

d) Write an essay on the world of Jane Austen.

An anthology of poetry is once again prescribed in the syllabus of Second Year of Undergraduate Course. The poets who dominate the selection are Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson and Yeats. The students are required to study the prescribed poems of each poet.
Poetry is prescribed for the students but at the same time the syllabus does not provide for the teaching of prosody. As such the students possess a very limited knowledge of the poetic language or the stylistic features of a literary work.

History of English Literature is again prescribed in the Second Year with some suggested reading slike:

i) *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* by George Sampson.


The students are required to study the History of English Literature of the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. This period includes a study on the part of the students of the various landmarks in the history of English Literature. The students are also required to study writers like Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Dickens, George Eliot, Hardy, the Brontes, Yeats, Eliot, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, E. M. Forster, James Joyce, Lawrence, and Graham Greene.

The framers of the syllabus, it appears, have not kept the abilities of the students and also the lack of time in view while framing the syllabus. Besides, this part forms only the first half of the Second Year Course.

For the second part of Paper B, drama has been prescribed. The prescribed books are Shaw’s *Major Barbara* and Brecht’s *Galileo*. For studying ‘drama’ the students are required to know its ingredients – its definition and historical background, the significance of monologue, dialogue, the division of drama into Acts and Scenes and their interdependence. A drama is always meant for the theatre and hence meant to be enacted. There is not a provision in the syllabus for such a thing. The students depend upon the teacher for all
assistance. The teacher, in turn, explains the dialogues and throws some light on the major events or characters of the play.

Same is the case with the Third Year English Literature students as they have to study two plays of Shakespeare: *Othello* and *Twelfth Night* as prescribed by the University of Kashmir. Study of ‘drama’ expects the students to be fully acquainted with Shakespeare as a dramatist, his contemporaries, the age in which he wrote, the various economic, social, political and intellectual backgrounds.

A text like *Othello*, is written in highly poetic and archaic language whereas *Twelfth Night* and *Major Barbara* are written in a language that is infused with the subtle humour that depends to a large extent on the use of idiomatic English. The students are, therefore, introduced to different varieties of English. Having a low level of proficiency of language and communicative competence, they are faced with a frustrated situation. The texts also appear difficult to the students due to their content and subject matter as also due to their remote setting. *Othello* takes the students to a past setting, and *Major Barbara* takes them to a geographically remote environment. The learners’ lack of such background knowledge further compounds their language difficulty.

The students are also expected to be acquainted with literary terminology and the various literary genres like the ‘blank verse’, etc. But since all such literary terms and forms have never been taught in the classroom, they find it difficult to comprehend Shakespeare’s art and style of writing. The teachers also give the explanations of the verses without letting the students enjoy the piece of work. As such, the students resort to ‘bizarre’ notes for passing their examination.
Fiction is introduced at the First and the Third levels of the undergraduate English Literature Courses. The prescribed textbooks are *Great Expectations*, *Jane Eyre*, *Sons and Lovers* and *The Lord of the Flies*.

The teaching of fiction involves the development of all the four language skills. The teacher usually reads out to the students some extracts from the texts prescribed. In most cases the teacher summarizes the novel or asks the student to read the summary of the text. The text is then divided by way of the significance of its title, the plot, the theme, the ending, major events, major characters and some other minor divisions. As a result the students find the study of fiction dull and resort to ready-made notes.

2.5 The Teaching Situation in Our Colleges

“Everyone who sees the work of Honours students of English at a University has noticed with distress their increasing tendency to see books wholly through the spectacles of other books. On every play, poem, or novel, they produce the view of eminent critics. An amazing knowledge of Chaucerian or Shakespearean criticism co-exists with a very inadequate knowledge of Chaucer or Shakespeare. Less and less do we meet the individual response …. Here plainly are young people dizzied and bedevilled by critics to a point at which primary literary experience is no longer possible.” (C.S. Lewis, 1961:128-29)

“To have children, for whatever reason take from their teachers the analysis of a work of literature, which their teachers in turn have taken over from the critics or from their English Professors .... this is a short cut that fuses the whole system”. (Britton, 1967)

The remarks given in the two quotations seem to hold good for our students too. This is evident in the prolific ‘bazaar’ notes available as guides to prescribed literary texts. The elaborate notes dictated in the classrooms and the students’
exact reproduction of them in the examinations is further evidence of the fact that what goes in the name of ‘literary training’ is very often nothing more than a training for the mastery of ‘informational’ content. There is obviously something seriously wrong with a system which makes a student depend solely on secondary sources to interpret his text for him.

The problem, as has been touched upon earlier, stems from the fact that the majority of our syllabuses do not make a clear statement of aims and objectives. The description of a course normally consists of the titles like ‘twentieth century’ and a list of books to be studied. Thus what is available in the form of syllabuses is not guidance enough for the teaching and learning of ‘literary studies’. As a result the examination becomes the deciding factor in influencing teaching techniques and the learning behaviour of the students.

If the examination is so essential to the whole teaching-learning process it needs to be closely analysed to see how it contributes to the present problem of ‘lack of direction’ in the objectives of teaching literature and a parallel lack of achievement amongst our undergraduate students.

2.6 Analysis of Question Papers of the Optional English Courses of the Undergraduate Level

For the purpose of analysis the researcher selected the question papers of Optional English Courses of all the three levels for the academic year 2000 (Annexure-II).

A study of these selected question papers provides clues to the nature of literary education that prevails at the undergraduate level in the colleges affiliated to the University of Kashmir. The kind of questions asked at the examination – specifically in terms of the ‘abilities’ they demand of the students determine to a great extent the learning behaviour of the students.
It would not be incorrect to make the observation – based on the researcher’s experience as a student and as a teacher of English literature – that the questions asked at the degree level tend to limit themselves to comprehension and analysis of the content.

The above observation could be exemplified through a detailed analysis of the questions asked in the question papers.

2.6.1 While framing questions for English literature courses the paper-setters expect the student to have experienced the prescribed texts in terms of three major abilities:

i) The ability to comprehend and to retell what he has comprehended.

ii) The ability to interpret which includes interpretation of content and character.

iii) The ability to analyse: specifically the ability to see parts in relation to the whole and the ability to see characters in relation to each other.

A perusal of the selected question papers, however, reveals the emphasis laid on general abilities like comprehension and analysis. The tendency, therefore, seems to equate the study of English literature with that of other subjects like history and psychology.

2.6.2 The approach to the study of English literature, so as to say, is a reductive approach. A poem like ‘Round the Earth’s Imagined Corners’, for instance, is seen in terms of factual questions like ‘Why does John Donne ask the angels to blow the trumpet?’ rather than directing the students’ attention to the texture and experience of the poem.
Most of the questions contained in the selected question papers were related to the comprehension of the text, what the text is about and the significance of allusions, references, and the structural organization in the texts. Such comprehension questions usually took the structure of “Explain in your own words...” “Give a detailed account of...” “Summarize...” or “Describe...”. All these phrases denote a textual orientation of literary study which demand from the students an understanding of the textual features, themes, major actions and events, bringing out in the process the literary nuances of the language, style and organization of the text concerned. Such questions focus on the teaching of literature through paraphrasing. The following comprehension questions were asked in examination for the year 2000:

I. Reproduce in your own words the dialogue between the Clod and the Pebble. (B.A. 1st Year, Paper A)

II. Comment on the development of thought of the poem ‘She was a Phantom of Delight’. (B.A. Second Year, Paper A)

III. Write a detailed note on the use of soliloquies in *Othello*. (B.A. Third Year, Paper A)

IV. Describe how Ralph became an outlaw and was chased across the island by the hunters. (B.A. Third Year, Paper B)

In addition to the comprehension questions interpretative questions figured in the question papers. Such questions are usually related to the character, symbols and diction used in the text. The following questions can be cited as illustrations:

Q. Attempt a character-sketch of either Estella or Biddy. (B.A. First Year, Paper B)
Q. Attempt a character-sketch of either Hellen or Bessie. (B.A. First Year, Paper B)

Q. What are the melodramatic elements in Jane Eyre? (B. A. First Year, Paper B)

Q. Give a character-sketch of Ludovico. (B. A. Second Year, Paper B)

Q. Critically evaluate W.B. Yeats' poem ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’. (B.A. Second Year, Paper A)

Q. Comment on the dramatic monologue of Robert Browning. (B.A. Second Year, Paper A)

These questions demand close reading and understanding of the literary texts. The student at this level is expected to critically recognize and evaluate literary effects, to show appreciation of literary form and content, and to make judgements of key passages. What actually happens is that as the student is not specifically taught the techniques of individual interpretation, the interpretation that he arrives at is more often that not the one given to him by his teacher. Moreover, such questions are not conducive to an adequate literary appreciation.

2.6.3 A significant aspect of any literature course is the knowledge of literary history as well. The scope of literary history is not defined. Nevertheless, the students are expected to develop the ability to see writers as part of their age, and fitting into larger pattern, to define literary currents in which a writer or a period is involved and the influence of other writers, to identify the various literary forms, literary techniques, genres, etc. The students are expected to read literary history with the view that criticism must grow out of historical knowledge, cultural and linguistic, as well as intuitive insights. It is expected
that, the student after having acquired this knowledge, would apply his own
critical powers.

To test the students’ knowledge of history of English literature and their
critical abilities the questions asked were:

Q. What was the influence of the Renaissance on English drama? (B.A. First Year, Paper A)

Q. What was the contribution of Fielding in the development of the
English novel? (B.A. First Year, Paper A)

Q. “The drama started from the Church in England”. Discuss. (B.A.
First Year, Paper A)

Q. Describe briefly the main characteristics of the nineteenth century
poetry. (B.A. Second Year, Paper A)

Q. “The play Life of Galileo depicts conflict between the Church and
the new ideas.” Elaborate. (B.A. Second Year, Paper B).

Questions related to literary forms and genres also figured in the question
papers. Some of these were:

Q. What are the melodramatic elements in Jane Eyre? (B.A. First Year, Paper B)

Q. Account for Othello as a domestic tragedy. (B.A. Third Year,
Paper A)

Q. Sons and Lovers presents the Freudian-Oedipus imbroglio in
almost classic completeness. If so, discuss in detail. (B.A. Third
Year, Paper B)
Such questions seem to test the students’ ability of memorizing and then reproducing the same by way of their responses. Questions of this type do not provide any incentive and motivation to the students to develop any literary skill. On the other hand, rote-learning is pedagogically not productive for literature learning.

Students were also required to respond to a quotation from or about a text. The students had to substantiate the content of the quotation citing evidences from the text. The following questions were asked from this category:

Q. Brecht sees church as “an organized and powerful authority of Galileo’s time, interested in suppressing subversive ideas.” Elucidate. (B.A. Second Year, Paper B)

Q. “Stephen of Act III is mature young man and not the dependent boy of Act I.” Discuss. (B.A. Second Year, Paper B)

Q. “Iago is,” according to some critics, “a Machiavellian villain”. Discuss. (B.A. Third Year, Paper A)

This type of questions demands the students to be conversant with the critical writings on the author and the text. As such the students are expected to have a knowledge of the varied ways in which the text has been understood in the past by other readers. At the same time, however, such a knowledge hampers personal judgements which results, in turn, in the students’ dependence on the critics’ opinion which the students usually reproduce in their responses.

The analysis of the question papers reveals that the students are generally assessed on the knowledge they possess about single texts and about books/writers and literary history, around the prescribed text. These are structured into the practical approaches, the comparative approaches and the analytical
approaches (Protherough, 1986:11). All these approaches emerge from a sense of right, correct interpretation of texts which the students’ response is expected to reflect.

Testing of literature demands cognitive understanding of a text and the subsequent rationalization of this understanding through argumentation and evidences from the text. But this academic reading of the literary texts sidelines the ‘aesthetic style’ (Rosenblatt, 1978) of reading. The literature examinations, thus, institutionalize the ‘efferent style’ of reading.

An examination of the current practices in the testing of literature revealed that the essay, the short note and the “annotation” questions are the standard forms used.

The essay questions demand an interrogative task of its learner. It involves the skills of recalling what has been read and interpreted regarding the text itself, its literary critical position, or the use of literary terminology within it. The short note question is relatively more textual and limits its scope and form, but like the ‘annotation’ question and the essay question is again pivoted round the learner’s memory and expression.

Literary ability incorporates a number of sub-skills and, therefore, each needs to be tested separately and systematically. The existing practices do not reveal any attempt on the part of the examiner to visualize the learner’s needs or the level at which he/she stands and the end he/she must move towards. For instance, in the two questions quoted below there is little distinction made between a learner of ‘General English’ and one of ‘Optional English’ though the two courses have vastly different objectives in using the same literary work. The ‘Optional English’ course is primarily intended for the development and reinforcement of sensitivity—or the modification of taste. It also involves the sophisticated use of literary terminology for the expression of response. The
General English course on the other hand, aims at introducing the learner to a literary work and making him respond to its theme and language. The emphasis on a developed, mature form of response is less in such a course. However, let us look at the questions such as following:

**Example I**

**Optional English**

1. ‘Sun Rising’ is a love poem. Elaborate the statement with reference to the poem.

**General English**

2. How does Wordsworth learn the lessons of resolution and independence from the leech-gatherer?

It becomes quite clear that the answers to both these questions would be largely similar in terms of the content.

Moreover, the examination pattern as is revealed by the syllabus (see Annexure-I) is such that it provides the students internal choice for every question.

**Example**

B.A. Third year English Literature paper B

Q.1 Write short notes on:
   a) The death of Mrs. Morel;
   b) Clara’s last meeting with Miriam;
   c) The quarrel between Paul and Baxter-Dawes.  

Q.3 *Sons and Lovers* presents the Freudian-Oedipus imbroglio in almost classic completeness. If so discuss in detail.  

Sons and Lovers is a nice blend of psychology and literature. Elucidate.

Q.5 Show that Sons and Lovers deals with sex without being sexy. 15 or
Describe how Ralph became an outlaw and was chased across the island by the hunters.

The above mentioned example reveals that these questions are asked from one text and carry a total of 45 marks. Since the student is required to secure only 27 marks to pass the examination he may choose to study only one text out of the two. Hence the present examination pattern encourages selective reading.

2.6.4 Moreover, these tests have tended to be of a very traditional order. Echoing Widdowson’s (1985 b) distinction between ‘learning’ and ‘studying’ literature, Carter and Long (1990,1991) and Spiro (1991) have argued that the traditional literature test is characterized by an assessment of knowledge ‘about’ literature (as a body of information, facts, dates, etc.) rather than by an assessment of knowledge ‘of’ literature (as a set of personal responses to the meanings released for the individual reader by the text). The same is also reflected through the low percentage of marks achieved by the students at the post-graduate level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of students appeared</th>
<th>No. of students whose result was declared</th>
<th>Pass %age</th>
<th>No. of students with First class</th>
<th>No. of students with 55 to 59.99% marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>84.21%</td>
<td>1 (2.63%)</td>
<td>2 (5.26%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from the table that although the pass percentage of the students is very high (84.21%), the percentage of students who have secured a first-class is ridiculously low (2.63 %). This leads to the conclusion that the preparation and the calibre of the students admitted to the course are poor, and the arrangements for instruction do not come up to the level of expectations.