Chapter 2
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Literature and language are the two most important aspects of learning any language. The relation of literature and language has always sparked controversies in terms of teaching techniques. The methodologies have revolved around ‘literature or language’, ‘literature through language’ or ‘language through literature’. The present study attempts to justify the use of teaching English language through its literature and this chapter is an attempt to define literature and language and their relation and use in terms of teaching of English in India.

2.2 What is Literature?

Defining literature, some very prominent and widely used dictionaries all over the world quote:

- Pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels plays and poems (in contrast to technical books and newspaper, magazines, etc.)

  (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 7th edition)

- Writings those are valued for their beauty of form, esp. novel, poetry and play.


- Writing in prose or verse; esp.: writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest.

  (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, on-line edition)
Understanding the exact meaning of the term 'literature' has always been an enigma for the scholars and educationalists. Nelson Brooks in his book *Language and Learning* (1960) defines literature as a form of fine arts. He states, "Literature is best thought of, along with music, painting and sculptures, as one of the fine arts." He also believes that oral literature which still persists today could be traced back to much earlier times than the written form. Brooks also raises an important question whether everything written or in print is literature?

Freda Mishan (2005) quoted the renowned literary critic F. R. Lewis who defined literature as "an established, elite canon with intrinsic textual and moral value, the study of which could hone intelligence and sensitivity". McRea (1991) further adds to the definition of literature as "any text whose imaginative content will stimulate reaction and response in the receiver".

Eminent scholars like F. R. Lewis and McRae seem to answer the question raised by Nelson Brooks. They were of the view that literature was not everything or anything written down on paper. According to them texts which taught some moral values to the reader and could trigger the sensitivities and add up to their intelligence could be termed s 'literature'. Meyer (1997) suggested that "texts should meet certain conditions for a work to be considered literature: they must be written; demonstrate distinct use of 'careful' language; are written in what is traditionally considered a literary genre". (Judge, 2012). The scholars had set up some rules and guidelines for a written piece to be termed as literature.

Not all scholars favoured the above definition for literature. They felt that texts are just written pieces and it is the reader who decides on how to read a particular text. It is the intention of the reader which makes a piece of writing trigger some sensitivity
into the person. Eagleton (1983) was among the scholars who refuted the idea of describing a piece of writing as 'literature' based on a set of inherent features of the text. He states “it would not be easy to isolate, from all that has variously been called ‘literature’, some constant set of inherent features”. He goes on to add that “If I pore over a railway timetable not to discover a train connection but to stimulate in myself general reflections on the speed and complexity of modern existence, then I might be said to be reading it as literature”.

Moody (1971) described literature as “something more than the language from which it is constructed”. Literature is basically language and thus “as function of language is to make references to the experience of the people who use it, so works of literature must be regarded as highly complex, elaborated statements about the world of the writer and his readers”.

Literature means different things for different persons. “Linguists, teachers, writers, literary critics and classicists would all have very different understanding of what is included or excluded from that label”. (Judge, 2012)

2.3 What is Language?

Language is the means of communication and for communication language is needed. The transfer of thoughts between two people in termed as communication and language is the medium of communication. The notion is supported by Brooks (1960) who defines language as “dim reflection of thoughts” and as “the medium by which thoughts are conveyed from one person to another”. He further adds that “all words or combination of words used orally or by writing must be considered as coming within the scope of language”.
2.4 Literature and Language

Literature and language are heavily dependent on each other for their learning and understanding. Widdowson (1975) opines that language and literature are inseparable because the study of literature is basically a study of language in action. Thus literature can be termed as an activity involving the use of language. Munroe (1983) supporting his view for the use of literature to teach language states that “the major concern must be to concentrate on the literary texts themselves, clarifying meaning and assisting students to perceive the precision and vitality of the language the author has employed”. Moody (1971) studied the intrinsic relationship of language with literature which dealt with internal structural features at the grammatical and lexical level. Similarly Rosenblatt (1986) believes that literature is “the ability of a text to inspire a unique reaction in an individual reader” and further adds that “it is in the transaction between the reader and the text that meaning is made”. (Judge, 2012)

The study of language had from the very beginning used literature as its resource. The ability of literature to motivate students to learn the language use in various contexts had allowed literature to be a part of language teaching process for almost a century. The emergence of English in the colonial parts of the British Empire led to the introduction of British literature to these countries where English language teaching had started as a need for the natives to be included in the smooth working of the British government. Literature and language teaching came to pave separate paths with the “distinct differences between literary and non literary discourses” which is referred by Short (1986) as “border dispute over territory”. This divergence, from the unified traditional approach of teaching English to literature teaching based
on principles of literary criticism and language teaching based on linguistics techniques, led to the ousting of literature from the language teaching strategies which resulted in, to quote Imtiaz (2000), “the establishment of the two pedagogical disciplines” and the separate teaching of literature and language, which Carter and McRea (1996) termed as “disconnected pedagogic practices”.

The controversy of literature and language started with the different approaches to language learning and literature teaching. Scholars like Joanne Collie, Stephan Slater, Susan Bassnett, Peter Grundy and Nelson Brooks favoured the unified approach of literature and language while ELT experts like Peter Stevens, Keith Morrow, Chris Kennedy and Usha Nagpal believed that the material for teaching language should not be literature.

This shift in the teaching strategies led to the formation of special material for language teaching termed as “English for Specific Purposes” or ESP whose function was “to meet the needs of scientists, engineers, lawyers and other people with very special though somewhat limited linguistic requirements”. ESP solved the problems of “motivation, materials and methods” (Kennedy, 1980).

Morrow (1977) questions the authenticity of the literary texts when used for the teaching language as he believes that “as authentic text is a stretch of real language produced by real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some of some sort”. Collie and Slater (1987) were of the opinion that city plans, railway timetables, cartoons, forms, pamphlets etc. are the authentic samples of language. They also believe that such samples must be used for the main teaching purpose in the language classroom and the literary texts can be used to support to these texts. The focus was on developing the spoken abilities of the student so that
they could be fluent in the real world whereas the written aspect of language was ignored.

Contrary to the views of the above scholars, McKay (1986) strongly believed in the presence of literary texts in the language classroom. Literary texts prove to be the motivators for the learning of English language and provide an interesting atmosphere for learning to take place. Literary texts held within them the richness of the culture, society and the language. Moreover, they were long lasting and always interesting to read as compared to the real time samples like timetables, pamphlets, advertisements etc.

Carter (1986) believes that to avoid the isolation and rejection of literature from language classroom, an approach should be taken up to closely integrate and harmonise the literature and language teaching. He further adds that some language activities based on the literariness of the text can help in the integration and harmonisation of literature and language teaching. According to him such an approach can be developed by “working with a language using a variety of integrated activities, with language based hypothesis in classes where student-centered learning is the norm”.

The separate study of language and literature has unique qualities but do not fulfil the complete aim of teaching English language. Language is the means of communication and literature is an art for the communication of feelings and thoughts so literature can be termed as the art of the language. Literary texts can be exploited to understand the structures and the vocabulary of the language. Exposure to the systematic works of literature can gradually lead to development of literary competence.
2.5 Literature in Language Classroom

Using literature in a language classroom offers many benefits which were lost on the learners while being taught language separately. While helping the student to achieve the knowledge of lexical and grammatical structures, literature also allows the learner to know about the various cultures of the world and to excel in the production of personal expressions.

Collie and Slater (1987) identified four main reasons for why literature should be used in a language classroom:

- **Valuable authentic material**: Literature is authentic because it is not tailor-made for the purpose of teaching. Although it also includes editorials, cartoons, advertisements, banners, posters, newspaper, timetables, menu cards, plans/maps, etc. which can be used for teaching language based on the method used for drawing out hidden meanings but these real-life materials lose the interest and their credibility with time. On the other hand, literary texts survive the complexities of time and are always enjoyed in all the ages. While reading a literary text, the learner is exposed to a language which belongs to a different culture and many times a different era. This proves to be an enhancement for the learning of the student as it provides additional information about the culture of a different place and different times.

- **Cultural enrichment**: Though the world of literature is fictional yet it reflects the mindset of the writer. The writings of the writer are largely based on the real-life experiences and feelings. Literature of a particular country is the reflection of the culture and language of that country. The reader is exposed to the social background, thoughts, feelings, customs and beliefs of
the people of that country. It helps to understand the mind-set of the people of that area, what they do, how they do and why they do it, their behaviour, faith, etc.

- **Language enrichment**: Exposure to literature helps in exposure to many forms and functions of the language. Careful selection of literary texts helps to learn many words which are used in various different settings and their meanings according to the situation. It provides rich context in which many lexical and syntactical items are made easy to learn. Learners get familiarity with many aspects of language functions like variety of possible structure combinations, different ways of connecting ideas and many ways of sentence formation. It also helps the students with the ability of deciphering the meaning of the word from its context thus enriching the learner with the vocabulary of the language. The knowledge of these various aspects of the language function enables the learner to be good at written and spoken skills.

- **Personal involvement**: Literature allows the reader to draw out personal meanings and significances of the texts. The learner can relate the text to his or her personal life and can also relate the incidences of the text with his or her experiences. A particular character may resemble the reader and may help in better understanding of the self. A situation or twist in the text might feel like a situation in real life and the reader can infer solutions from the text for that personal situation. Personal involvement allows the reader to enjoy the richness of the culture, traditions, life and situations as well as the richness of the language aspects to the fullest.
The purpose of using literature in the language classroom is to help the learners to excel in communication. For acquiring the skills for communication, the ability to interpret the literary text in all its social and cultural contexts should be added to the mastery of structures and forms of the text.

Wessel (1987) believes that the introduction of literature in the language classroom helps the students to overcome the resistance to learn new language. Allowing the students to connect the text to their real life experiences helps in the proper understanding of the various cultures, helps to motivate the learner and makes the entire process of language learning thoroughly enjoyable.

Valdes (2000) adds to the beliefs of Wessel by stating that “one of the major functions of the literature is to serve as a medium to transit the culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written”. Carter and Long (1991) also believe that the works of literature are the relics of culture and by studying these works the learner can understand and appreciate the various cultures and ideologies different from their own.

Goodman (1986) and Smith (1971) opine that all the functions of the language are inter related and that language cannot be learned in parts as was the process when language and literature were being taught apart from each other. The students have to learn language as a whole and for the effective learning of language teachers need to combine various teaching techniques to enable the students to achieve all the benefits from the learning process.

Carter and Long (1991) suggested three models for the use of literature in the language classroom. The ‘cultural model’ relates to the use of texts to teach the culture of the target language. The background and the history of the chosen texts
help the learner to form an understanding of the culture of the time when the text was written. The ‘language model’ allows the learner to focus on the process and function of the language and how it is actually used within the text. The learners gain vocabulary and exposure to a vast variety of language. The ‘personal growth model’ is student centered model where the personality and individuality of the learner is enhanced. The texts allow the learner to develop a critical view, become intellectual and to have a personal thought about the world. Simon Bibby (2012) added a fourth model to the earlier three models of Carter and Long. The ‘context model’ added by Bibby dealt with the reason for teaching English language. He suggested that the language taught with no specific reason leads to confusion in the learner while if the reason of teaching the language is obvious it leads to greater motivation and involvement in the learning process. The emphasis is on the selection of text based on the needs and interest of the learners.

Some academicians focus on using a particular genre for effective teaching of English language. Nakagawa (2012) believes “poetry never fails to be meaningful, it can be part of communicative classroom, a content course, student-centered teaching, stimulus based teaching- it can fit just about anywhere a creative teacher would like it to.” (p18) She feels that “various interpretations of poems are always possible”, “they are good stimuli for pair and group discussion” and “students enjoy listening poetry due to its musicality”. Scholars like Alschuler (2006), Leedy (2006), Gardner (2006), Mazza (2003) and Lawrence (1993) also support the notion of teaching language through poetry. (Nakagawa, 2012). Similarly, Judge (2012) emphasises the use of storytelling through television for the language learners and brings Green (2004), Cavanagh (1998) and Cardwell (2012) to support his notion of
learning through small screen. He believes that television provides a very good enactment of the human nature and instincts when a story is enacted on television.

Atsushi Iida (2013) focuses on the potential of using literature as a way for developing L2 literacy. According to Iida, literature can be helpful for “linguistic knowledge, language awareness, communicative competence, cultural knowledge of the target language, critical thinking skills, improves motivation levels and emotional engagements”. (p9)

Gillian Lazor (1993) firmly believes that literature can immensely help language learners to learn much more than just language. Her book *Literature and Language Teaching* deals with the various activities which can be designed to enable the learners achieve various abilities and functions of the language.

**2.6 Summing Up:**

Using literature to teach language is a major turning point in the language studies. Many teachers believe that language has to be taught independently while many believe that the use of literature in the language classroom enables the student to learn many forms and functions of language apart from the language itself. The use of literature to teach language was the initial process of language teaching. With the growth of interest in learning languages, especially English, focus shifted to ‘language only’. Various methods were developed to make the learning of a foreign language easy without taking help of its literature. The use of literature to teach language came back with the academicians observing the various functions and benefits of using literature in a language classroom apart from learning the language. Great language experts like Widdowson opined that the teaching of English language becomes more learner-oriented if the study of literature were used as a discourse to
the use of English language based on the needs of the learners. Widdowson was among the most dedicated supporters for the return of literature in the language classroom. He argues, "Language learning is surely not simply a part of training, an element in actuarial estimates and calculation of manpower needs. Surely, we might murmur wistfully, it should also have something to do with education as well?"
(Widdowson 1981/1984:161)
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