Chapter III - The Goal

3.1 Communicative Tasks.

The cone of ELT had started widening with the stirrings of CLT. The changes were felt mainly in the materials and methodology. And, of course, the focus. To sum up the gradual evolution in a few lines is a worthwhile exercise at this stage when it is important to understand what kind of materials and methodology is CLT leading to? When the grammar translation method was first developed, there was much study of structure, grammar rules, translation and vocabulary lists. The methodology was the deductive presentation of rules and the explaining of structure followed by exercises and translation. The aim was to prepare students to read and appreciate great literature and philosophy. The students were an elite - intellectual, abstract thinkers. The aims determined the materials, the materials led to the methodology and all these decided the kind of student.

The audiolingual approach was demanded by the universal interest in international relations. Language was a system to be mastered by learning a set of habits
through drilling and memorization. The students were those who could master the language since the goal was international understanding.

Natural language learning was built on the premise that human beings have an innate language learning capacity that proceeds by hypothesis testing. Social interaction constituted the course content. It was felt that people have a natural desire to communicate and the teacher could build on it. The learners were individuals who had already learned one language by a natural process and retained the capacity to learn another.

The emphasis on the individual led to the widening of the cone. The learner became the pervasive factor in language teaching. Language teachers started asking themselves: Who are the learners? What are their needs and wants? Why do they want to learn the language? This led to many kinds of answers, all leading to one demand: to be able to communicate effectively.

This realization has led to the cluster of approaches known as communicative language teaching. The basic principle underlying communicative language teaching is that learners must learn not only to make grammatically
correct, propositional statements about the experiential world but must also develop the ability to use language to get things done (Nunan, 1989: 25). Simply being able to create grammatically correct structures in language does not necessarily enable the learner to use the language to carry out real world tasks. Over the years, linguists and language teachers have kept this in mind while devising tasks and activities for language learners. This has led to a weak version of Communicative Language Teaching (Howatt 1984: 27). Thus there are teachers who adhere to a Communicative view of language teaching while incorporating elements of structural practice and grammar teaching into their classes.

In a useful survey of Communicative Language Teaching, Quinn (1984: 61-64) suggests that communicative approaches can be distinguished from traditional approaches to language pedagogy in a number of ways. These are set out in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1 Characteristics of Traditional and Communicative Approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Approaches</th>
<th>Communicative approaches</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Focus on learning: Focus on learning as a structured system of grammatical patterns.</td>
<td>Focus on communication.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How language items are selected: This is done on linguistic criteria alone.</td>
<td>This is done on the basis of what language items the learner needs to know in order to get things done.</td>
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<td>3. How language items are sequenced: This is determined on linguistic grounds</td>
<td>This is determined on other grounds, with the emphasis on content, meaning and interest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Degree of coverage: The aim is to cover the whole picture of language structure by systematic linear progression.</td>
<td>The aim is to cover, in any particular phase, only what the learner needs and sees as important.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. View of language: A language is seen as a unified entity with fixed grammatical patterns and a core of basic words.</td>
<td>The variety of language is accepted, and seen as determined by the character of particular communicative contexts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Type of language used: Tends to be formal and bookish.</td>
<td>Genuine, everyday language is emphasised.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. What is regarded as a criterion of success: Aim is to have students produce formally correct sentences.</td>
<td>Aim is to have students communicate effectively and in a manner appropriate to the context they are working in.</td>
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8. Which language skills are emphasised: Reading and writing
Spoken interactions are regarded as being as important as reading and writing.

9. Teacher/Student roles: Tends to be teacher-centred.
Is student-centred.

10. Attitude to errors: Incorrect utterances are seen as deviations from the norms of standard grammar.
Partially correct and incomplete utterances are seen as such rather than just ‘wrong’.

11. Similarity/dissimilarity to natural language learning: Reverses the natural language process by concentrating
Resembles the natural learning process in that the content of the utterance is emphasized rather than the form.
(Quinn 1984: 61-64)

One word which comes up constantly in connection with Communicative Language Teaching is ‘task’. Task based teaching or communicative tasks is the common usage. What does a linguist mean by the world ‘task’? Here is a definition from a Dictionary of Applied Linguistics:

an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (i.e. as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, listening to an instruction or performing a command may be referred to as tasks. Tasks may or may not involve the production of language. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of
the task. The use of a variety of different kinds of tasks in language teaching is said to make language teaching more communicative, since it provides a purpose for a classroom activity which goes beyond the practice of language for its own sake. (Richards, Platt and Weber 1986: 289).

Breen (1987) defines task:

any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. 'Task' is, therefore assumed to refer to a range of work plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning from the simple and brief exercise type to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making (1987:23).

Both definitions imply that tasks involve communicative language use in which the user's attention is focused on meaning rather than linguistic structure. So what is communicative task? David Nunan defines it as:

a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. (Nunan 1989: 10).
This implies that language is more than simply a system of rules. Language is now seen as a dynamic resource for the creation of meaning. There is a distinction between knowing various grammatical rules and being able to use the rules effectively and appropriately when communicating. Just knowing the rules cannot prepare the learner for the element of surprise in communication. It is this element of unexpectedness and unpredictability which makes communication what it is, and for which it is so hard to prepare a student by conventional teaching methods. (Revell 1988: 1) Thus, the crucial question becomes: how to bridge the gap between linguistic competence and communicative competence, how to develop a smooth transition between skill-getting and skill-using. Communicative tasks claim to bridge this gap (Appendix-II).

At this point, it is a useful exercise to re-capitulate opinions on tasks and activities. What practitioners and advocates of the communicative approach feel about tasks can help in understanding tasks, their components and advantages better.
Yalden (1988: 15-6) thinks that task is the best focus to use in:

i) identifying learners' needs
ii) defining syllabus content
iii) organizing language acquisition opportunities
iv) measuring student achievement.

For teachers practising task-based teaching, Yalden (1988: 152-3) gives the following guidelines vis-a-vis tasks:

i) A task should be realistic; it should be something the learner will do in the target language.

ii) Whenever possible, there should be an information gap: a learner should have information that other learners do not have but need in order to complete the task.

iii) Depending on the level of the class, the activity can allow for freedom of choice for the speaker (in terms of the forms of the language and the meaning to be expressed), which produces a high degree of unpredictable language for the hearer. Neither the language nor the sequence of ideas is specified in advance, and so the learners are free to use whatever
language they have at their disposal to perform the task at hand.

Nunan (1989: 48) has given a framework for designing Communicative Tasks which has three components: goals, input and activities. These three, in turn, imply teacher role, learner role and settings. Goals are the general intentions behind any given task. Input refers to the data that forms the task. Activities specify what learners will actually do with the input which forms the point of departure for the learning task. Role refers to the part that learners and teachers are expected to play in carrying out learning tasks as well as the social and interpersonal relationships between the participants. Richards and Rodgers (1986) devote considerable attention to roles. They point out that in task-based teaching, the learner is the negotiator, interactor, giving as well as taking. The teacher is the facilitator of the communicative process, participants' tasks and texts, needs analyst, counsellor and process manager. Setting refers to the classroom arrangements specified or implied in the task, whether the task is to be carried out wholly or partly outside the
classroom and whether the activity involves the whole class, small groups or individuals.

Chaudron (1988: 7) holds that a task will usually involve: a) the acquisition of certain fundamental units or elements, b) their integration in functional relationships and applications by means of, c) a certain amount of production practice, or other mental operations with those elements.

Penny Ur (1988: 17) thinks that the two essential characteristics of a good task are a clear objective accompanied by the necessity for active language use. The objective should be a simple one so that students are clear in their minds at all stages where they are going, and what is the point of what they are doing. The learners should be able to attain the objective only by exertion of effort in some kind of active language use. And this active language use should provide for repeated exposure to or production of what is being practised.

Prabhu (1987: 53) divides each task-based lesson into two tasks of the same kind. One task is to be attempted publically as a teacher-guided, whole class activity, and the other to be attempted by learners independently. The
two tasks are similar in that they demand similar processes of reasoning, or consist of similar materials. The pattern is roughly analogous to that of a lesson in mathematics, where a problem is worked out publically and a similar problem is then set for learners to work out on their own.

Task thus emerges, in the context of Communicative Language Teaching, as the procedure which is developed by the teacher for encouraging the learner to use the target language confidently and naturally. In the light of the above opinions, task could be a lesson plan chalked out while keeping in mind the needs of the learners, the objective of the lesson, and other related issues. Are task and activity synonymous? No, they are not. Task refers to the whole procedure – right from the planning in the teachers’ mind to the outcome of the task and its effect on the proficiency level of the learners. Activity refers to the specific exercise performed in the class – what the learners do. The activity is the part that makes up the whole, yet is complete in itself. The microcosm within the macrocosm.

One striking difference between communicative tasks and the routine, lecture-based teaching is enough in favour
of task-based teaching. The learner does not feel alienated or isolated in a task-based classroom. She is a part of the process and the task is a challenge for her. In completing the prescribed activity, there is a sense of satisfaction which goes a long way in instilling the confidence to use the language as and for communication. Communicative activities have four important contributions to make to language learning according to Littlewood (1986: 17):

a) They provide whole-task practice.
b) They improve motivation.
c) They allow natural learning.
d) They can create a context which supports learning.

The communicative tasks in Appendix II are just a sample. There are any number of books and a lot of material which sketches out tasks for the communicative class. Appendix III carries a list of such resources. But again, what about the widening of the cone of English Language Teaching? Would evolution stop here? Not so, by any means. Linguists and teachers are exploring a new avenue - the use of literature in language teaching and more specifically, in communicative language teaching. The latter may have fewer advocates but the possibilities are
manifold. In an earlier section the use of literature in language teaching has been explored. The next section explores the implications of teaching communicatively through literature and examining what the notion of task means in relation to literature.

3.2 Literature and Communicative Language Teaching

In his overview of Literature Teaching in India, (1986), Durant had given two reasons for including literature in a language teaching course:

a) Literature can contribute to language learning, by being used to develop an awareness of the operation of grammatical and discursive processes, and to encourage independent interpretative skills.

b) Literature can be used to foster all kinds of extended cultural experience, of different times and different places, as well as allowing students an opportunity to explore their own senses of personal and social identity. Such comparative awareness of culture and experience is one necessary dimension of acquiring communicative competence within the social and historical matrix of the target language, as well as of coming to a balanced view of the relation between the culture
associated with the target language and the students' own cultural background.

Another definition of the role of literature in a communicative framework fits in well with Durant's suggestions while coalescing the past, present and future of literary studies vis-a-vis language teaching. The definition appears in a book devoted to integrated language and literature activities in a communicative framework (Mc Rae and Boardman 1984:1): 'Literature makes an irreplaceable contribution to the development of communicative competence'.

In this definition of the place of literature in the teaching of English as a foreign language, the ability to read literary texts with pleasure and understanding is a fundamental component of that communicative competence of the educated native speaker which is the final goal of foreign students and their teachers.

Proving that literature and language can be integrated through an activity oriented approach, Reading Between The Lines (1984) has set the ball rolling for other materials with an activity-based approach. While earlier literary studies had meant a reflective, analytic and individual
response based on reading, it has now emerged as an engrossing activity demanding interaction in the classroom. Appendix IV carries samples of such activities. This has given an added dimension to language use, making it interesting and content loaded. Communicative Language Teaching means paying attention to meaning that is communicated, and all literature is an effort to communicate. A literary text is real language in context to which one can respond directly. And when it is studied through communicative tasks, it offers a context in which exploration and discussion of context leads on naturally to an examination of the language. What is said is bound up very closely with how it is said, and students come to understand and appreciate this. Literary texts provide examples of language resources being used to the full, and the reader is placed in an active interactional role in working with and making sense of the language itself. This helps in learning about literature as communication through language.

When literary texts are taught through a lecture-based approach, the student is distanced from the text. The text remains somewhere on the periphery of awareness - it
is something to be studied, not interacted with. The motivation for studying literature gets warped at this point. The student cannot enjoy the text or even feel any kind of closeness with it. So it becomes another problem to be tackled like many others which are a part of the prescribed curriculum. Just as communicative tasks bring the learner closer to the target language, similarly they foster closeness with the text even while they are teaching communication. A simple example could explain things better here. When 'Macbeth' is prescribed in the class and the lesson for the day is the character of Macbeth, task based teaching can help in a big way. The teacher could lecture on and about the character of Macbeth without any show of interest from the students. A simple task would suffice here:

The goal : Understanding Macbeth
The input : Questionnaire on actions of Macbeth.
The activity: i) Reading Questionnaire
  ii) Answering questions about Macbeth’s actions
  iii) Justifying Macbeth’s choices

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Teacher role: Monitor and facilitator. Helping reach conclusions.

Learner role: Conversational partner

Setting: Classroom/pair work.

To know the kind of questionnaire here is a sample question:

Imagine you are Macbeth, why did you agree to Duncan's murder? Tick the appropriate reason:

a) You were scared of your wife.
b) You hated Duncan.
c) You were ambitious.
d) You wanted to prove your worth to your wife.

Such questions and the like help the learner bridge the distance between her time, position and status and the time, position and status of the characters in a literary text. Such activity in the class also provides opportunities for positive personal relationships to develop among learners and between learners and teacher. These relationships can help to humanise the classroom and to create an environment that supports the individual in her efforts to learn.

There is another dimension to using literature in
communicative language teaching - the dimension of creativity. When language is presented to the learner as a matter of pedagogic routine, it is reduced to sheer routine, a matter of placing things in sequence in order to arrive at the correct sequence. In this way language loses that creativity, which is involved when it is used without any consciousness of rules or system i.e. language used 'naturally'. But literature represents language as a matter of creating meaning by procedures for making sense. Literary texts create a world with language; human experience is extended and language is at the same time used and learned. In pedagogic presentation, it is first learned and used at a much later stage. Communicative Language Teaching emphasises meaning before form and literature stands for meaning through form, thus enriching communicative teaching.

The formula, 'Vocabulary + Essential Structures = Language' lies at the base of every language syllabus (Maley and Duff, 1987; 7). But, this takes account of only the intellectual aspect of language. Language cannot function without emotion or drama. Much language teaching is done through structures, form comes first, then meaning.
Fortunately the communicative teaching of language places meaning before form. Yet it cannot always take into account the element of emotion, drama which makes language so meaningful. Literary texts help here by bringing in a life of their own which means adding that human touch to communicative tasks which would otherwise be bone-dry exercises.

There is no fixed communicative syllabus Communication Teaching is a methodology. It is this flexibility and open-endedness which makes it the ideal methodology for curing the ills of literary studies. Task based teaching can take away the boredom from routine lectures in literature classes. Literature speaks to the heart as much as to the mind, providing the material with some emotional colour, making fuller contact with the learners' life and counterbalancing the fragmented effect of many collections of texts used in the classroom. While literary texts have much to offer to Communicative Teaching of language, task based communicative teaching of literature offers true distinct advantages. First, it brings the students closer to language used in real life. The students can study language use in the text through
tasks and compare with the language they use in everyday life. The tasks would give them an opportunity to study in detail the language of the text. Second, it fosters closeness with the text. By analysing the text step by step through Communicative Tasks, the students are engrossed in the life of the text. They get the ‘feel’ of the text by working on the details of plot, character and theme. No amount of lecturing can bring about such closeness, as if the students are a part of the life of the text. Third, it relates real life with the world of the text by bringing both into the present. Whatever time and age the text may belong to, once the students analyze it in detail through Communicative Tasks, they feel that it belongs in the present and they feel an affinity with it.

Just as the cone of Language Teaching has been widening over the years, literature teaching has also been evolving. The Grammar-Translation approach meant a tedious paraphrase-translation-analysis routine; the audio-lingual approach brought an obsession with the forms of literature and the Communicative approach has given meaning, (pun intended !) to literature teaching. The time is ripe to combine communicative insights with literary
studies and broaden the perspective of both. Both would be the gainers. Communicative tasks would be richer, successful in bridging the gap between skill getting and skill using. Literary studies would be free from the quagmire of boring lecture routines and breathe freely and easily.

Having dwelt on these developments in our approaches to CLT and Literature teaching, I will consider how the same have been adopted or experimented with in an actual situation in my own university in a teaching context with which I am familiar. The exploration of this situation follows in the next two chapters of this study.