

# Muse in Manacles

## English Poetry in the Indian Classroom

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Once upon a time, poetry was the central force to Indians, formulating their attitude to the myriad forms of life around them and the universe. It prospered through times of oral poetry to the period when 'word' acquired 'print' to its old 'sound' structure. However, in recent times, the old Indian tradition of poetry, as a force defining the Indian face, has been replaced by its sad spectacle of its reification and denunciation by the readers. Regrettably, this attitude is evident not only in the general reading public but also in the student community who study English poetry formally as a process of academic growth. Poetry forms an integral part of every educational Board or University. Despite this exposure, they do not respond positively to the form. What could be the reasons for this attitudinal swerve? Is teaching the culprit? What is the approach, method and technique adopted by the teachers to teach English poetry to the students? What can be done to improve the situation? In order to arrive at reliable conclusions, the paper draws on the research data collected from both the students and the teachers. In this paper, an attempt is made to study the teaching scene prevalent in the Indian classroom of English poetry at the graduate level with a view to introduce fresh optimism in teaching and responding to poetry as a literary form. Muse will thus be hopefully freed from the manacles restricting its growth in the classroom and playing its rightful role in humanizing humanity.

Indians' love for music is comparable only to their passion for cricket<sup>1</sup>—'the mark of India'. If *Lagaan* loses the Oscars, many blame the westerner's inability to appreciate songs and music in the Indian cinema; so intense is their love for music. 'Poetry' which is so inextricably woven with music is naturally expected to enjoy an enviable place in the Indian classroom. But India is a land of surprises. Robert Hamburger described its 'enigma' through the advice given by Mankekar to his writer friend. He says: "If a writer visits India for two or three weeks, he writes a book. If he spends a few months here, he writes an article. If he lives here for a year, he writes nothing."<sup>2</sup> The writer agrees with this and concludes that "India is overwhelming." India is certainly 'overwhelming', defying logic and is symbolized in Forster's "Baum"<sup>4</sup>. It challenges our logic to see that the same set

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of people who relish a lilting music are unable to appreciate poetry. On the contrary, they are resentful of it being included in the syllabus, and find it difficult to comprehend even as an easy poem. It reminds of a savage African practice<sup>3</sup>, where the singers were invited to perform. They were offered wealth and honor for entertaining them but were later buried upside down in a hollow tree! This was a symbolic act to show that honor comes compounded with contempt. This may surprise us, but it is equally true that in our own land similar treatment is meted out to 'poetry'. In our social and family life it gains entry in the form of childhood lullabies, film songs, religious chants or mantras or prayers and in the performance of various rituals and ceremonies. In our academic life, there is no stage of education where poems of one kind or another are not prescribed, ranging from nursery rhymes to complex Miltonic creations. However, it intrigues our rationality to see that the same 'poetry' which sets feet of many tapping, is not able to enjoy the favor of the same people, as students in a classroom. Let us try to explore the problem from the teaching perspective.

## Part-II

Some ancient man discovered fire and wheel, Newton found the Law of gravity, Galileo his telescope, Pt. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt invented his Mohan Veena, Charles Babbage the computer.... the list is never ending. The phenomenon of invading the 'unknown' and unraveling mystery has been the driving force of man through ages. Life for man has been a continuous quest for knowledge. What would it have been like, had the hard-secured knowledge been confined to the discoverers and inventors? The whole edifice of development and progress rests on the complementary impulse of 'sharing' and 'passing on' of knowledge. The crucial link between the light of the past, penumbra of the present and the illumine of the future is established by the teacher.

Poetry is nothing but printed words without life on a sheet of paper. It is the teacher who invests those 'dead' words with life. T Githesh while describing poetry as an "expression of aesthetic experience of a poet" says that the same experience changes to "merely a colorless record of this emotion and music", which a teacher is expected to "recreate and convey to the student this original musical beauty and emotional intensity, for the printed words are only symbols, which may or may not arouse the imagination and feelings of the reader to the required degree."<sup>5</sup> In the same context, he also suggests the teaching methodology of poetry, which should be "simple, natural, and spontaneous, stressing the emotional and sound values of the poem." Before we accept or reject such suggestions, it is advisable to have a close-view of the scenario.

## Part-III

The very utterance of the word 'poetry' conjures the associated images of pedagogy-as-punishment. It reminds one of the smack of a ruler on the knuckles for not being able to memorize, imitate and recite the poem in the class. On the other extreme end of pedagogical association, we have the new play-way method of teaching, which has turned 'poetry' as something 'funny'. The act of exploring the genre can certainly be great fun, but also a learning experience. Whether the approach is extremist or moderate, it requires a teacher. For better or for worse, the teacher assists the students explore the beauty and meaning in poetry. Interestingly Tom Henihan equates explication of the piece with teaching of poetry and advocates against it. He minces no words in condemning the act of teaching of poetry at all levels of education as the "single most damaging force to the creation and appreciation of the genre."<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the criticism of teaching, “teaching of poetry” has come to stay in classrooms. Teaching poetry is different from teaching information-based subjects like Biology, Economics, Statistics and so on. It is an art where the teacher is to work through sensibilities. If poetry is expression of ‘spontaneous emotions recollected in tranquility’, teaching is assisting the learners in experiencing that “recollection”. The task seems to be deceptively simple. Teacher needs to establish “a link between mere existence and life itself, thereby uplifting mortals to a higher plane of excellence”<sup>7</sup>. In order to realize this goal a teacher needs to overcome many factors, which hinder the teaching process. The learning bottlenecks can be described in the following manner:

Poetry and imagination are inextricably linked but if the same faculty gets overactive, it can have an appalling result. J H Walsh<sup>8</sup> related the firsthand experience of a teacher with a student while reading Tennyson’s *The Splendour Falls*. When the student was asked to explain the meaning of line 10: *The horns of Elfland faintly blowing*—the reply was surprising. The student said, “A bugler was blowing; the bugle from the castle walls, and in the glens below some elves equipped with fairy horns were having a little concert on their own....” The student had failed to read the words beyond their sonorous and imaginative potential. The teacher’s role gains significance in situations like this. He tries to help students soar beyond sound and find meaning from the mass of red-herring words and sounds.

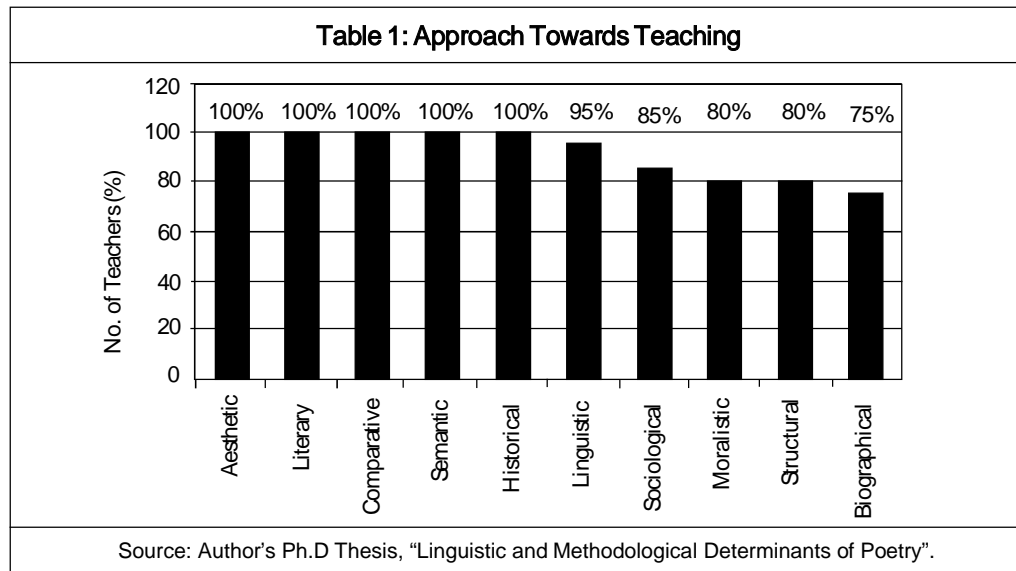
Poetry being characteristically dense and compact has an ocean of meaning packed in a grain of sand. It is the teacher who makes efforts to let the hidden treasure of meaning spread forth in front of the students. Images and metaphors are very important tools that poetry is made of. The faculty of visualization is a variable factor; as for a handful of learners, even a small word is able to excite strings of images while for others even the greatest evocative line fails to draw attention. Its genre-specific complexity makes the teaching even more arduous. Poetry allows for several allowances at different planes like grammatical licenses (ellipsis, pleonasm, enallage, hyperbation, anacoluthon, and transferred epithet), orthographical licenses (elision, prosthesis, paragoge, synaeresis, diaeresis, tmesis, archaism, periphrasis, coinage and anachronism), metrical licenses and semantical licenses (oxymoron, paradox, synecdoche, and pedantic diction). These factors invest the form of poetry with more complexity and the meaning turns to be a riddle or a lost object in the labyrinth of sophisticated art form. It is for the teacher to solve and navigate it. For students, the process of decoding despite the teacher’s mediated comprehension is a Herculean task. The syllabus and the structure of testing further aggravate the already grim situation. They are not learner-friendly and do not encourage right reading and appreciation of poetry. It gets even more appalling for the teacher when the language in itself turns menacingly complex. English being a second language in the Indian context assumes seriousness. The first step towards solving the riddle called poetry is to overcome it. The language may have graduated from being a foreign language to second language, but the problem stays with little difference in the degree of its viciousness. The cultural and the regional forces that shape a language also create communication gaps that are too wide to be dismissed and thus, adversely affect the students’ comprehension of the form.

It is not uncommon to see the same pieces of poetry being repeated in different classes. The curriculum designers choose to defend it by arguing—“This would enable the students to see how the same piece can be approached at different levels.” Good logic indeed, but practically students find it boring to see the same pieces getting repeated. Too much familiarity can breed contempt.

We can also see that the syllabus is sometimes not in consonance with the requirements of the students; it lacks a touch of contemporaneity and general appeal to students. The curriculum is not revised frequently to take care of the students' need. For instance, in CBSE board, poems like "Mary had a little Lamb", "Where are you going my pretty maid" etc., have been there in the course for more than a decade. It is important to carefully grade the material and present the rich varied literature of poetry to the learners. There may be many dimensions to the subject of teaching of poetry in the Indian classroom, however, the scope of the paper does not allow us to explore them. We shall restrict ourselves to the intricacies in teaching poetry, its aims and methodology.

## Part-IV

Teachers and students are the lynchpins of a classroom scene. Any study is, therefore, incomplete without a survey of the two communities. Let us begin with the data collected from the teaching community. A questionnaire was administered to the teachers (50) engaged in teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students of English. The first question opened with a query pertaining to their response to the existence of genre influencing the teaching and students' response to poetry. There were only 5% who refrained from answering, 20% of them completely disagreed with the thought of 'form interfering with comprehension and therefore teaching'. However, most of them (70%) agreed that 'the figurative language of poetry made comprehension difficult' and therefore, teaching required to be geared to it. The next question quizzed them about the choice of 'approach that they adopted for teaching poetry' in the classroom. The result showed a tendency towards a 'pluralistic approach towards teaching literature' where all the teachers (100%) claimed to follow a blend of Aesthetic, Literary, Comparative, Semantic and Historical approaches. All the teachers emphasized the prosodic devices and the characteristic linguistic assets of the genre. A big chunk, of about 95%, favored the linguistic approach, followed by 85% for sociological, 80% of them equally supporting the moralistic and structural approach and lastly 75% of them taking biographical or the anthropological approach towards literature. The results of the responses are presented in Table 1.



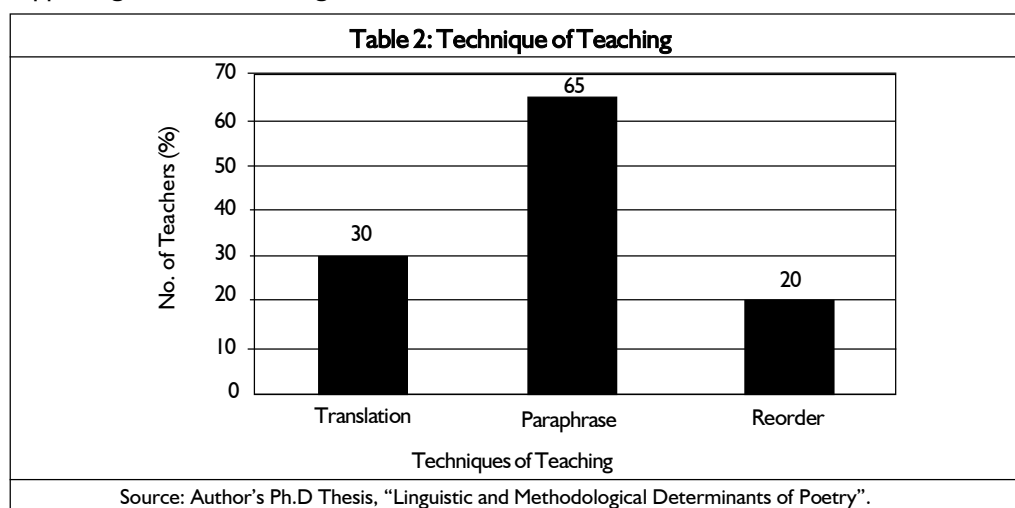
The statistics prove that, teachers agree to the application of all the available approaches in a judicious combination to the teaching of poetry. They believed their approach to be effective in sorting out all the genre-specific problems of poetry. However, when they were asked to comment on identifying the problems that a teacher of poetry confronts, very few responded. Nearly half (45%) of them chose not to comment. Nearly half of the abstainers (20%) did so because of non-applicability of the question (poetry did not form a part of the syllabus they were teaching) and the rest 25%, probably because of their indifference. The small section of teachers, who responded, pointed towards the following problems:

**Large class size** : In literature, especially poetry, teaching is more about sharing an experience, but the large number of students in a class mars the spirit. The average class size in Osmania and Mysore University is round 50, which is far higher than the UGC recommendations.

**Obscurity** : Teachers also pointed out the inherent abstruseness of poetry contributing to the already grave problem.

**Erroneous attitude and lack of interest** : Students approach the genre with a prejudiced mind, believing the form to be very difficult for an ordinary person to understand and appreciate. Absence of complementary critical literature in the market complicates the problem further.

The next question tried to know the technique of teaching. They were given four options: (a) Translation in vernacular language, paraphrasing; (b) the poem in simple prose; (c) by reordering the poetic expressions grammatically and the last one and (d) gave them a free option of mentioning any other method which did not appear above. Since teachers can employ combinations of different methods, the room for multiple answers was offered to the respondents. There was not a single teacher who suggested and elaborated on methods other than those mentioned. Everybody found their expression in the choices given in the first three options. Among them, 30% of the teachers opted for the traditional method of teaching, through translation. Although both (b) and (c) are direct methods of teaching, there was a big gap between the positive responses favoring the two. The second option of paraphrasing had 65% and the third option of reordering had 20% teachers supporting it. The details are given in Table 2.



A few questions were administered to elicit information about the method of teaching. There were questions asked regarding the usage of audio cassettes in the classroom. There was a complementary question to this—If yes, with what frequency? The survey revealed that only half of the teachers were using audio cassettes in the class. The rest did not. But of those who did, only 20% were found to “always” use it, remaining 30% were occasional users who had marked “sometimes” in their response sheet. There was no explicit question as to why teachers did not use audio cassettes or did not use it frequently. But actual observation and direct conversation revealed that they did not have access to a modern well-equipped language laboratory. In Mysore University, the mention of this concept of laboratory in arts or ‘language’ was found startling. But the place where it did exist, as in Punjab University, the number of cassettes available in the poetry section were far lesser than the requirement.

It is a historical fact that teaching had been seen as a monologue delivered by the teacher where students were viewed no better than ‘dumb’ empty vessels into which ‘teacher-determined’ information is poured. Sudha N Vadlamani says, “Classrooms that were earlier dominated by teachers are today giving way to classrooms where the learning is child-initiated.”<sup>9</sup> There has been a radical change in the role of the teacher—he motivates the learners, facilitates learning, guides them and offers them support in the hour of academic crisis. This made room for another question that elicited answer on teachers’ response to the new development. The teachers showed interest in student participatory methods of teaching. Seventy percent of the teachers claimed to use the discussion method to teach poetry.

To summarize, the teachers agreed to the existence of students’ bias against poetry due to various reasons relating to inherent characteristics of the form of poetry. However, they tried to overcome the problems pertaining to the genre in the classroom. They adopted the pluralistic approach and a method that made the students participate in the process of teaching by using direct methods (not translation). However, they also identified areas which adversely affected their teaching like the large size of the class, lack of infrastructure like the absence of a language laboratory and the unavailability of audio and video cassettes for teaching poetry. However, the report on self-assessment by teachers was not very encouraging. They were asked to comment on their success and identify the level on which they were able to make their students understand the piece. More than half of the teachers (55%) chose not to reply to this question; while those who did, divided themselves in the following manner. Twenty percent of them thought they were able to make the students comprehend the ‘literal meaning’ (reading the lines of the poem) of the text, 15% claimed to have made the students comprehend the ‘connotative meaning’ (reading between the lines) of the poem. Only a small number of 10% claimed to have successfully made the students appreciate the poem in its entirety (reading beyond the lines).

The success in teaching gets reflected in the students’ performance or responses. Therefore, it is very important to study the students’ opinions and problems. The database rests itself on undergraduate students of English from all the three streams namely, Arts, Commerce and Science, given in Table 3:

Table 3: Choice of Technique of Teaching	
Class of Students	In Support of ‘Paraphrase’ Against ‘Reordering’ (%)
B.A.	40.9
B.Com	47.6
B.Sc	76.2
Source: Author’s Ph.D Thesis, “Linguistic and Methodological Determinants of Poetry”.	

Table 4: Approaches Adopted for Teaching of Poetry																					
	Sociological (%)			Moralistic (%)			Structural (%)			Linguistic (%)			Comparative (%)			Literary (%)			Anthropological (%)		
	Yes	No	Never	Yes	No	Never	Yes	No	Never	Yes	No	Never	Yes	No	Never	Yes	No	Never	Yes	No	
	Always	Some-times		Always	Some-times		Always	Some-times		Always	Some-times		Always	Some-times		Always	Some-times		Always	Some-times	Always
Class																					
B.A.	39.4	54.5	6.1	5.2	74.2	20.6	15.1	66.7	18.2	7.6	59.1	33.3	09.1	53.0	37.9	80.3	7.6	12.1	18.2	72.7	
	93.9			79.4			81.8			66.7			62.1			87.9			90.9		
B.Sc.	31.7	47.7	20.6	42.9	55.5	1.6	12.7	60.3	27.0	9.6	57.1	33.3	4.8	69.8	54.4	54.0	15.9	30.1	17.5	65.0	
	79.4			98.4			73.0			66.7			74.6			69.9			82.5		
B.Com.	32.9	42.3	24.8	47.6	48.1	4.3	4.8	66.7	28.5	19.1	47.6	33.3	19.0	38.1	42.9	51.9	18.5	29.6	33.3	47.6	
	75.2			95.7			71.5			66.7			57.1			69.4			80.9		
Teachers	85	15		80	20		80	20		95	5		100			100			75	25	

Source: Author's Ph.D Thesis, "Linguistic and Methodological Determinants of Poetry".

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Form is an accepted hindrance in the way of appreciating poetry. The student respondents considered form of poetry difficult and suggested that paraphrasing or putting the meaning of the poem in simple prose would help them a great way in understanding the genre.

However, Tom Henihan believes, "...one of the underlining advantages of studying poetry at a university or college is that if you fail to create any poetry of merit you can always fall back on teaching it. This ensures that the damage will be perpetuated onto the next generation. I think the people who elect to teach and de-mystify poetry and make it accessible should keep Mallarme's dictum in mind. "To suggest is to create, to explain is to destroy." This assertion is particularly important when the explanations offered are misguided and wrong. If someone wants to write, they should work quietly, trust their instincts and study literature."<sup>10</sup> But it is the teacher who stands between the problematic form and the students. Teaching can melt down the physical form to make it transparent, letting the students an access to the core. Therefore, students were asked to identify the teaching approach adopted by their teachers in the class. The results showed the teachers adopt a discriminatory teaching strategy for different streams of students. For instance, the most preferred way for teaching Science and Commerce students was the moralistic approach (98.4% and 95.7% respectively) and the least used was the comparative one (74.6% and 57.1% respectively). Though the students did not explain the phenomenon, this can be attributed to teachers' awareness of students' lack of exposure to poetry and literature. The results of the investigation are given in Table 4

An attempt was made to find out the teaching method adopted by the teachers. The study showed direct methods of teaching to be more popular than the traditional translation method. It was also seen that the teachers of B.A. were

more innovative and relied more on 'right' recitation of the poem. A few of them also used the discussion method to arrive at meaning and appreciation. However, the figure in Arts stream was only relatively better than that in the other streams; otherwise on the whole, teachers still adopted the monologue or the lecture method of teaching on a large scale. The figures are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Method of Teaching Adopted in the Classroom							
Classes	Translation (%)	Reordering (%)	Recitation (%)	Paraphrase (%)	Discussion (%)	Synectics (%)	Guides (%)
B.A.	40.9	24.2	78.8	92.4	24.2	4.8	42
B.Com	19.1	52.4	61.9	71.4	4.8	–	60
B.Sc	20.6	68.3	71.4	82.5	4.8	–	55
Teachers	15.0	20.0	65.0	65.0	70.0	30.0	–
Source: Author's Ph.D Thesis, "Linguistic and Methodological Determinants of Poetry".							

One can also see the new method of 'Synectics' being tried in Arts class only. In fact, all the methods of teaching appear to be followed more seriously only in the Arts class. This certainly calls for an explanation. Is it because the Arts students are poor in knowledge fund as generally believed and require more efforts? When probed in personal informal talk, it was found that both for the teachers and students "English" appear to be a subject, which requires to be studied just because it was compulsory. Students' interest lies elsewhere but University has made it mandatory to pass in the subject for acquiring the degree. This makes the teachers also little lax in their approach towards teaching English poetry. The poetic beauty gets lost in the maze of numbers in 'commerce' subjects or loses itself in the rising fumes in the laboratories for 'science' students. It is only the 'Arts' students who show some interest in English and, therefore, teachers are forced to shed the perfunctory attitude and try to make them realize the inherent beauty and the literary import of the form. It was seen that a few teachers adopted methods that encouraged students' participation in the teaching process, inviting them to discuss the related issues of poetry. However, primarily the teaching was lecture dominated, where the teacher comes and delivers a speech (if not purely, it certainly borders on being a monologue) on the "appreciation of the text".

Another finding of the research was that although on the surface, everything appeared to be quite conducive (at least for the students of Arts) for sharpening the sense and sensibility to appreciate poetry; at bottom there were only a handful of students who could respond positively to poetry. This can be attributed to their internal impulses rather than the external encouragement through teaching. What are the facts that could elude both—the students as well as teachers? Perhaps Tom Henihan's observation can be a pointer. He suggests another potential danger—of turning poetry reading into a fun-activity. Since the class becomes entertaining, even the students do not realize their loss. A subject so sublime as poetry gets reduced to a farce. Poetry should be therefore, "protected from fun". He says:

When student poets get up to read they almost always thank their teacher for making poetry fun. Poetry should be protected from fun. There is so much fun in the world it isn't funny anymore. Poetry is essentially a solemn and devotional form. Funny poetry is a contradiction in terms...it's the equivalent of kneeling in a church and saying funny prayers



or chanting a funny ritual. I am not saying that there is no room for humor in poetry but I am saying that there is very little room. We need things that are serious. What could be more pessimistic than wanting everything to be funny? Like failed musicians and actors who become children's entertainers, I sometimes suspect that comedians that aren't that funny decide to be poets.<sup>11</sup>

This may amount to stretching the generalization little too far, anyhow it point towards the possible perils in teaching of poetry which may escape notice, both by the teachers and the students.

### Part-V

The findings raise many important questions crucial to the issue. There were a very few students who appeared to be dissatisfied with the manner in which poetry was taught to them. On the whole, both students and teachers seem to be complacent with the teaching structure. Does it imply that teaching of poetry is flawless? And the problem or the reasons for students' poor response to poetry lie elsewhere? Are we looking for pearls in the conch instead of an oyster?

Teaching helps the teacher "reinvent" and rediscover himself but it is not a cakewalk. L B Barakonska tried to bring out the inherent sophistry and complexity of teaching, in the following words. He said, "To teach is to stage a spectacle, it is to teach how to look, not what to look at, it is to teach to look not through, but at a spectacle, at the process of looking itself. Teaching is an art of the eye which is always already enmeshed in the eye. The gesture of the body is always implicated in the spectacle of teaching. The body of the text is also the body of the class: the spectators enter the stage of speculation, thus becoming the speculating and the speculated upon entity. The spectators depart from their ascribed part; they perform a spectacular movement of departing, of digressing, transgressing their part."<sup>12</sup>

Teaching of poetry is all the more complex and requires more effort. Teacher is like a midwife who assists the students with the poem, delivering the baby of rich meanings to them. This goal also undergoes change with the age of the students, level of learner or class and the aims of learning. Fredrick Noronha makes interesting observations, "In the primary classroom, an evocative poem transports you and your pupils into a verdant rainforest. In middle and high school, one poet shows how another can be interpreted, appreciated and understood. Reading poetry is to open a window into a new way of looking at life."<sup>13</sup>

The bothersome question is, "Are the teachers able to discern the goals and adopt the 'right' approach?" This requires a little more reading into the data. Although the students show their satisfaction, an objective researcher can see that very few teachers experiment with creative techniques and modes of teaching. The poetry classes are generally lecture-oriented and one-man shows. The discussion method or any other method that would encourage active participation of the students in the learning and teaching activity is not much in vogue. This situation warrants poor response towards the form. It naturally raises the question—"Then why didn't students point towards this teaching deficiency?" Probably he, who has never tasted nectar, may pass even his whole life without ever knowing it or complaining about it, but that he, who has tasted it even once, will like to taste it again and even complain if it is not there. Therefore, students who have never tasted the nectar of 'generative' teaching of poetry would in ignorance always feel good and satisfied with what they get.

When studying students' poor response to poetry it is imperative to examine the structure of 'syllabus' and 'testing' which defines the teachers' attitude and the students' response to poetry.

Since the scope of the present paper does not allow for a detailed deliberation on the subject, we are restricting ourselves to just 'teaching'. However, the observation on this aspect can be summarized in the following words: The syllabus designers, and therefore, the teachers too were torn between their choice of teaching English as 'literature' or just as a tool to teach 'language'. The old conflict between language and literature appeared here, too. There were not many who favored the idea of teaching English (which practically may have become a second language but is still a foreign language for them) to be taught for its literary aims. In language paper, there is no room for 'poetry'. One of the respondents clearly said, "Poetry does not use a language that can be used in real life, so why teach poetry to language learners?" In the context of rising popularity for English for special purposes, poetry has become redundant. The connotative implications of 'poetry' are 'unreal' or 'impractical'; its 'sublimity' has rendered it too sublime to be of any earthly (academic) use and barred its inclusion in the syllabus. It needs to be explored against the backdrop, its relevance to teaching of English as a communication skill and English for special purposes. The truism of the declarative is fallacious. On the contrary, it is poetry which can most effectively introduce the students to the rhythms and the sound (pronunciation) of the English language. For instance, read the following lines:

### **The Blind Men and Elephant**

It was six men of Indostan  
To learning much inclined  
Who went to see the Elephant  
Though all of them were blind  
That each by observation  
Might satisfy his mind...

The poem is very simple, yet it can very effectively realize the aims mentioned above. Effective communication, which is the general aim of the English papers for Science and Commerce graduates (and even Arts graduates who opt for English as a compulsory or core paper) rests on students' ability to have a refined ear for language and its sound patterns. Which other form of literature can answer the call, but poetry? Poetry is language in its most compact form. It can effectively initiate the learners in the art of condense and precise writing. The general preliminaries of appreciating a piece of poem involve the act of relating the title to the theme, hunt for and understand the cardinal indicators of meaning, realizing the importance of 'opening' and 'conclusion', faculty to discern the tone of the poet, the words that emphasize the poet's attitude, the structure of progression of the thought, relationship between feeling, images and meanings, and so on. This realization is based on the linguistic and analytical aptitude of the learner. Poetry with its linguistic paraphernalia and latent potential to yield multiple meanings can certainly prove to be an effective instrument to hone students' communication skills, which figure out prominently in the domains like "English for Communication Skills" and "English for Specific Purposes". They are not mutually exclusive terms. 'Poetry' very appropriately answers the bill. The rest of the exploration of the form is the domain of the teachers.

## **Part-VI**

Those engaged in the teaching of English are the only privileged ones who get the maximum opportunity to note and shape students' response to poetry. Their ability to supply the most reliable judgment was tapped but it was realized that many motivated factors kept poetry out of bounds. According to the teachers (80%) most of the students responded favorably to poetry. But students' replies point in a different direction. Even teachers' informal personal talk was in congruence with

the students' statements. Probably taking this to be a negative reflection on their teaching abilities, most of them found false reporting to be an easy option.

It was found that both students' and teachers' replies suggested employment of pluralistic approach to the teaching of literature but the aspect which was conspicuous by its absence was the promotion of 'creativity'. Teachers on the whole chose to take the easy beaten-track approach and not experimenting with novel ideas and methodologies. Very few of them used audio-visual aids or encouraged role-play or creative application either because of infra-structural deficiency or a disinclination to 'stretch'. Students' involvement was skeletal, the lecture-delivery method of teaching reduced them to be sleeping partners in the 'learning'-concern.

It was also observed that very few teachers had received any formal training in the teaching of English. The feat of teaching was considered synonymous with a postgraduate or doctorate degree in the subject. Perhaps it is the 'innovative sloth' of the teachers that has resulted in the poor response of the students towards poetry. It is suggested in the context that teaching be made more learner-centered and some qualification in teaching be made mandatory for the teachers.

A proposal by one of the student respondents is noteworthy. The respondent suggested the introduction of the practice of teachers' assessment by senior students as the defining factor for the renewal of the teachers' term. This radical change in the pedagogical structure may require further verification in the Indian milieu; its implication and other intricacies need to be ironed out before execution. However, the suggestion is likely to imbue teaching with creativity.

It was also observed that even the students of the same class were not of homogeneous composition. They had drastically varying length of exposure to English language. A few of them had studied in private or convent schools which introduces the language right at the beginning of the educational career and had complete 12 years of exposure, while there were students who came from vernacular or regional language-medium schools with just six years exposure to the language. Overlooking this glaring difference all were put in the same class and fed on the same syllabus. This forced the teachers to tone down the rigor or the level of their teaching! It is advisable that Universities undertake some kind of remedial teaching to bridge the gap between the two extreme groups—high achievers and non-achievers. Treating unequals as equals is disguised injustice.

It is of significance that poetry is not perceived as not something esoteric but something that is very human—which is very interesting to be both the cause and the effect of external changes. An interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of poetry, where other fine arts like cinema, painting, music, sculpture etc are assimilated, would be a more effective approach. It is expected to democratize the elitist domain of poetry. This may sound a little disagreeable. Cinema is an art form that is viewed with apprehension in a literary talk. A mere reference to that is considered a sacrilege of the literary value of the paper. Even the opening of the paper that made direct reference to one of the Hindi films met with spontaneous disapproval. Appalling effect of prejudice! Ironically, it is this feature that justifies its usage in poetry classroom. The very fact that cinema democratizes is a reason why it should be employed to teach something considered to be high-brow activity (poetry). It would facilitate immediate identification and comprehension of the component subjects of its language, inherent music, prosody etc. Adoption of the suggestions in the executive machinery of the teaching of poetry is likely to emancipate the Muse from Manacles in the classrooms of India and breathe the vitalizing spirit into the ailing segment of the student community. **B**

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