

TEACHING OF ENGLISH POETRY IN CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Poetry is the integrated bond between ideas and emotions. A teacher of English has to ensure that the learners of English should develop ideas out of their day today observations. Only after the proper visualization of the ideas one can connect them with the relevant feelings which are the essential norm for understanding poetry. It is important to recite a poem and give it the grooming of the proper intonations since reading a poem is an enactment. It is like rekindling the black imprints on paper into dancing images inside the readers mind. Poetry is the recollection of enchained memories housed in our conscious and unconscious self. Reading a poem has a cathartic effect purging and alleviating the high emotions. It is process of channelizing the artistic pleasure from the poet to the reader. It ranges from the subjects of happiness and life to gloominess and death. It can be called as a journey, a cycle of life in totality. It acts as a mirror to the society, culture, psyche, and individual personality. It is a biographical representation of a poet's observation. By versifying a poem the poet gives it its first life and the reader lends it a second life. There are different stages of understanding a poem which needs to be taught by a teacher who could build up the like-mindedness with his subjects and slowly carry them with the wings of poesy to the world of eternity and bliss full of poetic pleasure.

KEY WORDS: Poetry, Ideas, Emotions, Intonations, Cathartic, Alleviating, Channelizing, Versifying, Poesy

INTRODUCTION

Teaching of English poetry has a different vision when seen at different levels at different age groups. For beginners it comes out as a melodious routine of rhyme and beat. But its emotional, critical and analytical manifestation is explored at the later stages of learning. In the present time we look at learning from a utilitarian point of view, here teaching of poetry comes out as a challenge socially and culturally. It is difficult to enlist the benefits of any art form without actually internalizing it. Versification is a creative art which purges the poet of the overflowing emotions. These emotions are assimilated by the readers and lovers of poetry making it a syncretic process. The poetic interpretation is based on the Saussure's sign, signifier and signified concept. The signs and signifiers leading to the signified are different in the different psychosexual stages. A teacher of poetry tries to emphasize on the poetic merits and motivates the students to appreciate these merits. Teaching of English poetry triggers imagination from the black marks to recollections of referred images. The effectiveness of the teacher's voice with proper intonation paves the way for imagination. The way a teacher recites a poem creates a poetic atmosphere which essentially is the most important facet for teaching and learning of English poetry.

STAGES OF LEARNING ENGLISH POETRY

For the teaching of poetry in English there are different levels of learners, based on their age and the psychosexual

levels. The first stage is the pre- primary stage involving learners in the kindergarten classes. The second stage is the 'primary level', involving the students of junior school that is from first grade to fifth grade. The third stage is that of 'secondary level' involving students of sixth to eighth grade. The fourth stage of learners is of 'high school and Senior high school' meant for the students of classes ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth. The fifth stage is that of college or university students. Poetry at the pre-primary level is based on lyrical pattern and the rhythmic beats in the poem. The poems taught at this level are the nursery rhymes or the jingles. Major focus is on the clarity of pronunciation and distinguishing speech sounds, that is why the nursery jingles contain a good number of alliterations. For e.g.

- Baa, baa, black sheep, have you any wool? Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!
- Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
- How I wonder what you are!

This stage is purely the stage of understanding the rhyme, melody, song and the musical effect of the poem, the thematic relevance is not touched upon. The teacher recites and enacts the poem in the classroom and encourages the students to follow him. The teacher at this stage uses tongue twisters also for teaching the proper articulations of sounds. For e.g.

Betty Botta bought some butter;

“But,” said she, “this butter’s bitter!

Swan swam over the sea, Swim, swan, swims.

The second stage is the formative stage and the students correlate the received pronunciation of the teacher with the actions. These actions get registered as signs for further reference. Nowadays the videos and the pictures associated with the poem help in the proper manifestation of poetic references. Poetry in the second stage is correlative in nature. Extending from the alliterations, the learners are able to decipher the morals out of the poems. The contrasts and comparisons are comprehended well at this stage. Poetry and real life seem to in symbiotic association for the students. Without any doubt the skilled intervention of the teachers and the socio cultural observation and interaction help a student understand the intricacies of poetry. The examples of the poems at this stage are:

Little drops of water,

Little grains of sand,

Make the mighty ocean

And the pleasant land.

Little deeds of kindness

Little words of love,

Help to make earth happy

Like the heaven above.

The purpose of teaching poetry at the third stage is to make the learners derive pleasure and happiness. The

students are not expected to critically review the poems, but still they are able to make their liking and disliking for different types of poems. The learners develop a consciousness for the actions of the poem. They become the projective readers and listeners of a poem, and imagine themselves to be the part of the poem. In a patriotic poem for instance, they are pumped up with the spirit of jingoism; perceive themselves as a soldier or a freedom fighter. In a poem based on a mother and child's relation they imagine themselves to be a child interacting with their affectionate mother. In a spiritual poem, they look at themselves as praying to God. The good examples of poems in this stage are:

WEAVERS, weaving at break of day, why do you weave a garment so gay? . . . Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild, we weave the robes of a new-born child. Weavers, weaving at fall of night, why do you weave a garment so bright? . . . Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green, we weave the marriage-veils of a queen. Weavers, weaving solemn and still, what do you weave in the moonlight chill? . . . White as a feather and white as a cloud, we weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

Sarojini Naidu

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;

The winds that will be howling at all hours,

And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;

For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be

A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,

Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;

Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn

William Wordsworth

The learners in the fourth stage are in the transitional phase since either they are about to attain puberty or they have just attained puberty. The biological changes take place in their body but still the understanding of sexuality, libido and phallus is in its beginning phase. The examples of poem taught at this stage are:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free; where the world has not been broken up into fragments, by narrow domestic walls, where words come out from the depth of truth; where tireless striving

stretches its arms towards perfection; where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way, into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; where the mind is led forward by thee Into ever-widening thought and action, into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Rabindranath Tagore

Freedom from fear is the freedom I claim for you my motherland! Freedom from the burden of the ages, bending your head, breaking your back, blinding your eyes to the beckoning call of the future; Freedom from the shackles of slumber wherewith you fasten yourself in night's stillness, mistrusting the star that speaks of truth's adventurous paths; freedom from the anarchy of destiny whole sails are weakly yielded to the blind uncertain winds, and the helm to a hand ever rigid and cold as death. Freedom from the insult of dwelling in a puppet's world, where movements are started through brainless wires, repeated through mindless habits, where figures wait with patience and obedience for the master of show, to be stirred into mimicry of life.

Rabindranath Tagore

The fifth stage the learners are burning like a furnace, since the energy level is high. The learners are able to decipher both the denotative as well as the connotative meaning. They graduate to become a critic more than a reader. The explicit and the implicit becomes part of their understanding. They try to look around for poetic devices like metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, oxymoron and personification in a poem. They are able to distinguish a poem based on its theme into the genres like elegy, ode and satire. Based on their metrical patterns they figure out whether there is a usage of a blank verse or the poem is a sonnet. For instance Keats in Ode to the Grecian Urn (1819) refers to "Thou still unravished bride of quietness, Thou foster-child of silence and slow time". The word 'unravished' here refers to pure, but it can also be referred as without losing virginity or escaping molestation. The words like 'quietness', 'silence' and 'slow time' are the metaphors for gloominess and passivity. Poetry taught at the college and the university level is covered in this stage. It is for a student to review a poem by referring to the poet, the milieu of the poet or the chronological frame of reference of the poem. Other than that a student can also isolate the poem from its poet and review it with his own poetic wit and wisdom.

EXPLORING THE POEMS PSYCHOANALYTICALLY

Sigmund Freud is the father of modern psychology. He has contributed the theory of psychoanalysis. This theory is based on the working on human thought and its analysis. Many of the theories given by Freud are used by the psychologists and the psychiatrists. Along with the clinical view of psychoanalysis it is used predominantly by literary critics and readers to decipher the text for its multiplicity of meanings. The theory of psychoanalysis in poetry firstly act at the level of imagery created by the poet and then at the level of the psychological state of the poet. Along with it the socio-cultural ambience of the poet is also reviewed. The major premise of the psychological theory is based on the working of the unconscious and the sub conscious mind both at the end of the poet and the readers/critics. The psychoanalytical principles proclaim that there is always a suggestive undercurrent of meanings hidden under the superficial meaning. These hidden meanings can be explored by canny critics who look for the influence of those feelings which otherwise are socially prohibited, censored and tabooed. It is important to explore how much of the id (unconscious) is affecting the ego (conscious) and the super ego (conscience) state of poets mind. Charles Lamb has referred art as narcotic and artist as neurotic, which principally works in the case of poet penning the poems. The poet by using the symbolic imagery

influenced by his unconscious state, try to purge his neurosis that is the psychological strife. In order to critically review a poem psychoanalytically it is important to work on the following points.

- What is the connection between the poet and the symbols/ metaphors?
- Is there any parallel between the poet's social, cultural and personal life with the action and theme of the poem?
- What is the limit to which psychoanalysis can be applied?
- What is the psychological inclination and state of the critic?

Based on the above mentioned observations Freudian theory can be applied for the critical understanding of the poems.

ANALYSIS OF THE ARCHETYPES IN A POEM

Under the influence of Sigmund Freud his follower C.G. Jung has contributed with extended version of psychoanalysis. The term unconscious is replaced by collective unconscious. This collective unconscious is a reservoir of embedded experiences which have become a part of one's psyche by virtue of birth in a particular tradition and society. These embedded experiences are not known to us but still they indirectly influence our writing, utterances and perceptions. The contents of the collective unconscious are called archetypes. There are no fixed numbers of archetypes. Sometimes the archetypes overlap and mix with each other based on the subject, situation and the theme of reference. Few of the important archetypes which can be reviewed while analyzing a poem are mother archetype, father archetype, Christ/ God archetype, hero archetype, animal archetype, trickster archetype, colour archetype, along with shadow, persona, anima and animus. These archetypes can be divided into four groups' culture, romance, myth, tradition and realism respectively. The numeral four for instance, represents wholeness or the cycle of life, number three refers to spiritual awareness, and seven refers to perfection. The different colours also have a different meaning associated with it for instance colour white represents purity, innocence and timelessness. The blue colour is considered to be the colour of holy mother and it also refers to the truth, feeling of security, purity and peace. The colour green is associated with hope, sensation, and fertility and negatively it also refers to death. The colour red refers to violence and energy. The image of tree refers to generative and regenerative process, while that of desert represents nihilism and death. The image of snake or a serpent refers to phallus or libido. There are enormous numbers of archetypes which make the process of critically evaluating a poem interesting, meaningful and joyful.

In order to get a fair idea of the postulates given in the theories for analyzing the poem a good example of the poem "Falling Leaves" by E.E Cummings can be considered for reference:

(a (A Leaf Falls with Loneliness) Analysis

L (aleaffalls) onellness

At the very face of it the word outside the parenthesis referred to is "loneliness". At the second level there is a phrase "a leaf falls" inside of the parenthesis. Thematically referring the word "loneliness" and the phrase "a leaf falls" it can be opined that when there is loneliness a leaf falls. Now if we review this psychoanalytically the image of a falling leaf implies death. The life of the leaf is over for the season. If we add the facet of collective unconsciousness the loneliness is always an attribute of gloominess and death in all socio cultural setups. Now, if the psyche of the poet is to be viewed,

Cummings expressed his hatred for war and its consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude it can be stated that a poem has a body and a spirit which needs to be framed with methodologies. But getting into the true meaning of the poem demands a maturity of mind and a poetic consciousness, which as discussed in the various stages can be achieved by the learner. The role of a teacher is very important in making a student think beyond normal thinking, feel beyond normal emotions, become intuitive and evaluative simultaneously to get the gist of the poem. The deciphered meaning of the two learners may vary on account of different psychological bent of the readers. For interpreting the verses it is not important that poem must be in harmony but the critics/readers frame of mind must be harmonious.

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