



Decolonising English Literature Classrooms In The Global South: Reimagining Pedagogy, Canon, And Cultural Agency

¹Dr.Reshma Ganesh, ²Aparna T V

¹Founder, Principal and Campus Director, ²Academic Coordinator

¹Sri Sri Ravishankar Vidya Mandir, Bangalore East, Bengaluru, India.

Abstract: The pedagogy of English literature presently in the Global South has been defined through the lens of our colonial predecessors, who have left a lasting impression through the established canonical texts and present a Eurocentric approach. However, the globalised world has often challenged these Western ideologies and approaches through multilingual and postcolonial approach. The proposal will present its argument calling for reimagining the approaches towards teaching English literature in the Neo-colonial world. It argues that literature when taught through the right context can often empower the young minds to not only educate and innovate, but enhance and empower oneself. The literary landscape calls for cultural production, and a validation in the academic context. Hence, the paper argues for a transformed literary landscape in the academia which can empower the students towards voicing their agency and identity.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, literary canon, academic imperialism, Decolonisation.

Introduction

The language of English has been used as a tool of communication, representing its rich legacy, and cultural plurality beyond the shared borders. The pedagogical structures of the classrooms in Global South have been deeply bound by the shackles of Eurocentrism, which governs the indigenous system of knowledge. Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education (1835) has clearly articulated the agenda of colonial powers to produce 'Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste.' This has percolated deeply in the Indian education system as well, where English has been a language of legacy, that has been dominating the mass, and ironically remains as the language of intellectual and academic discourse. As the system of education is still perpetuated by the canonical texts, the indigenous literature across the Global South had been alienated, dominated by the colonial texts.

Hence, this paper calls for reimagining the pedagogy teaching English Literature to the younger generations, across Global South in the academic and non-academic spheres. The paper presents its arguments upon the need to include non-canonical texts of the 'third world' and demands a reimagining of the existing Eurocentric pedagogy, as it shapes the relationship between culture, heritage and the classroom. Literature can empower students to be speakers of agency asserting identity and empower them critically across the global and local realities. However, it is crucial to note that the problem with the existing system of education is that it still holds on to the hegemony of the colonisers. With many post-colonial critics and thinkers highlighting this inevitable paradox, the cultural agency is still deeply rooted in the Western thought, at the expense of indigenous work. Therefore, it is pivotal to interrogate the authority of western ideology in the academic context of the Global South, calling to reimagine the pedagogy in the classrooms.

Theoretical Framework of Neo-colonialism: An overview:

As the paper explores critical debates interrogating about the dominance of English Language drawing inferences from theoretical framework, who have demonstrated that colonialism is not just an event of history but an effluent influence that shapes knowledge, culture and identity through education. Ankhi Mukherjee has defined decoloniality as “the aftereffects of colonialism; a period of restoration and reparation; a questioning of Western modernity; an interrogation of and resistance to the colluding forces of capitalism, racism and imperialism that structured colonial domination.” Thus, it is important to draw references to the work of Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Gauri Viswanathan, Ashis Nandy, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o as it provides the lens through which the pedagogy of English Literature can be decolonised.

The concepts of Third Space, mimicry and hybridity highlighted by Homi.K.Bhabha is relevant to the discussion of decolonising the classrooms in the post-colonial nations, across Global South. In his work, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha highlights how the colonial discourses often produce texts where individuals often mimic the coloniser but are not accepted as their equal counterparts. This concept of mimicry is seen across the classrooms in Global South where the canonical texts and its interpretations result in the academic conformity in the classrooms. The in-between spaces challenges create a hybrid existence and the colonial authority and they form the Third Space, as they are reinterpreted through indigenous histories and knowledges providing learners means to challenge the hierarchy. Ashish Nandy focuses on how this hybrid existence, or the hyphenated existence of the colonised penetrate deep through the psychological dimensions. In his work, *The Intimate Enemy*, Nandy reiterates the important concept as to how the success of colonialism is seen when it produces feelings of inferiority and dependence in the minds and creates a sense of reverence for the Western texts. This inheritance of psychological colonialism is necessary to be understood to call for a reform of the curriculum at the Global South.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, Spivak highlights the functions of institutional frameworks and cautions the system of education against the peripheral inclusion of the indigenous or marginalized texts as a part of the curriculum, while privileging the Western school of thoughts. She reiterates the importance of teachers being moderators of knowledge and the responsibility of shouldering the representation of knowledge that should engage ethically and not be lopsided.

The concept of coloniality brought in by decolonial theorists such as Quijano and Mignolo states that the persistence of the colonial powers calls for a disobedience, an epistemic disobedience and Mignolo urges scholars and academicians to delink the Eurocentric knowledge and move towards other traditions such as reviving oral traditions, narratives of the indigenous and challenge the Western theoretical assumptions which has been regarded as universal.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o discusses how language is a carrier of culture and a site of power, and the dominance of English in the postcolonial curriculum led to alienating students from their cultural roots. In *Decolonising the Mind and Moving the Centre*, wa Thiong’o calls for an open approach in teaching where students learn to use English as a tool for understanding, and articulation and not assimilation.

In Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquests*, English Literature and its studies were rather institutionalised in the colonial India, used as a tool for proliferating ideology to cultivate loyalty to the colonial masters. This argument clearly outlines how canon in itself is a construct of political powers, and how it has continued to instill dominance even in the neo-colonial times in the curriculum. Decolonising the classrooms especially English Literature would require a confrontation of the origins of these existing ideologies rather than increasing the lists of our reading.

All these theorists have provided a framework, a pathway to reimagine English Literary reading and teaching in the classrooms across Global South. This process of empowering the students who are the agents of culture would require the need to challenge, break and rewrite the colonial interpretations, fostering awareness of the plurality, hybridity and the intellectual awareness of the reality in itself.

Decolonial interventions: Reimagining the pedagogy of English Literature :Through the Canon, Language and Agency.

Canonical writers such as Milton, Shakespeare, Sidney, Tennessee Williams, Dickens, Jane Austen have been representatives of literary excellence and harbingers of cultural identities. Whereas, the third world as Edward Said argues in *Orientalism* that cultural hierarchies are an integral part of imperial power and Western texts often construct an image of the non-canonical texts as inferior. The consistent privilege provided to the western texts have penetrated deep within the academic world, and students in the Global South are required to engage critically with the literary world, that challenges the engagement with the reality. Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* argues that the traditional forms of education reinforces oppression and calls for

a system of education which is deeply rooted in critical thinking, dialogue and experiences as it provides voice for the oppressed, challenging the structures of education. When students are encouraged to read literary texts through the eyes of caste, race, creed, religion, language and gender, the hierarchies are interrogated leading to the breaking of resistance and bondage.

Language plays an important role in decolonising the academia across Global South. As Chinua Achebe points out, the English language can be used to carry the weight of African experience. Rather, using English language can provide voice across boundaries and enables students to learn, reflect and understand their own histories, and identities. As English still continues to be the lingua franca of the global world, teaching the indigenous culture and the voices of the marginalised in English plays an important role in decolonising.

As the voice of articulation is utilised as a tool for learning, a decolonised classroom would call for a revision of syllabi across Global South classrooms, adapting a more transnational approach. Integrating folk narratives, regional myths, stories, and works by native language writers such as Toru Dutt, A.K.Ramanujan, Michael Ondaatje, J.M.Coetzee, Buchi Emcheta resist the first world order, and embrace knowledge. Literary texts, when taught in the right context of culture, can transform the academic spaces by fostering critical thinking, making students question the prewritten histories, stories, and the knowledge that has been conceptualised over many ears. Assessments must move away from the traditional rote memorization and make students as the resource and producers of thoughts, moving away from memorization. Encouraging interdisciplinary approach and study as a part of learning can strengthen learning across borders and boundaries. Literature further becomes a powerful medium of expression, validating the identities of Global South, and breaking the line between the canonical texts and margins.

Conclusion:

The process of decolonising the classrooms would not only be a political process, but an ethical and intellectual requirement as the colonial legacies still mask the marginalised voices. The paper thus argues the important need to reimagine the teaching of English Literature in the classrooms through a multicultural, and a culturally responsive manner leading towards awareness and empowerment. As a voice of authority, literature can enable students to be agents of pragmatism and validate the production of cultural identities and equip the students to challenge alternate framework of thoughts.

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