

English Studies in India and the Problems of Literary History

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This paper examines the features of English literary history that has been recommended at the graduate and postgraduate levels in India. Looking at the features, it attempts to see the various forms of alienation that this literary history produces among students. It also studies the ways in which alienation has been defined as irrelevance of the subject. Having studied two major dimensions of irrelevance/alienation, it looks at the pedagogical changes that have been brought forth in the field of English studies in India. It then claims that the conventional literary study and contemporary English language study are not structurally different from each other. In the end, it also tries to seek a methodological resolution for avoiding this crisis by drawing upon the renewed task of the historians variously signified in theory today.

The Problem

One of the invariable features of most academic disciplines has been to ignore the study of the processes by which they are institutionalised. The early works on this feature have been studies of the systemic beginnings of modern knowledge in the West.¹ In India also, in its own different ways this ignorance continues to characterise the academies where most of the modern disciplines are taught. This is, however, not to say that efforts to critically look at this curricular feature have not been made in India. The ideological placement of English studies in India is arguably a significant instance based on which critical histories of the hierarchical formations of communities and social classes have been written.² These rewritten histories, which are otherwise disregarded, have been interrogating in nature. Scholars in India have explored various constituent elements of English studies such as curriculum, teachers, students, their socio-cultural backgrounds including gender and their combinations both in order to write these critical histories and in order to confront the problem of the ignorance (which is in fact the problem of the unself-conscious discipline).

In this article I will argue that literary history is another such constituent element of English literary studies in India. I refer only to that literary history which is recommended as a 'background' study to English literature, or taught as a 'subsidiary' to the same.³ I will outline the broad features of the literary history prescribed in the graduate and the post-graduate programmes in English. A critical consideration of these features; will help us see how literary history causes omniscience about those events in which a writer or a scriptwriter is recognised as a literary author, and an event recognised as a contemporary 'knowledge-event', and how it represents those authors as originally authors in English literature and events as pure and 'real events'. I will also look at the impact of the features of

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literary history on the students of English literary studies, at the kinds of crises those features have eventually brought in, and also at certain professional changes subsequently introduced into the field. I will argue that structurally new readings and histories are possible only if we address the features of literary history, and that most professional changes do not do so. I will then consider some alternatives suggested elsewhere for restructuring social science disciplines in general. This will enable us to study the conditions under which literary ages had become the knowable ages, that is, we study the history of the institutionalization of various English studies as well, which can be seen to have a transforming effect on their nature, content and scope.

Politics of Literary History

English literature curriculum in India traditionally did not advocate a study of the history of its own institutionalisation. Instead it has mainly centred on the teaching of humanistic values associated to the classical literatures in general. Literary history has been rarely a history of literature- it has been reluctant to deal with the navigation of the discipline of literature as such. Literary history has been dealing with texts which are already defined as literary. In the traditional conception of English literature, 'literature' is axiomatic, it is as though the discipline of literature were an ontological factor, without historical moments of beginning and valorization. In other words, literature is pre-eminent in its traditional conception and literary history is something that confirms this pre-eminence. Given this primary character, the function of literary history has also been to determine the *kind* of literature that should be valorised. It achieves this function through a group of apparent features, outlined below, in which we can recognise literary history itself.

Chronology : Like every traditional history, literary history locates literary movements, trends and works in a chronological sequence. In literary history we enumerate ages --the age of Chaucer, the age of Shakespeare, the age of Milton, and so on.⁴ We also count writers as producing a chain, often one influencing the other. We construct a chain of generations and events and perceive them as necessarily connected within the frame of a national history. For this, we include the necessary information - notes on Spanish Armada for the Shakespearean times, Puritanism for reading Milton and Bacon, the political Restoration of monarchy for considering Dryden, and the French and the Industrial revolution for understanding the romantics.⁵ This division of history into stages is part of most literary history books we read today.

Representation : Each age is supposed to have been represented by one writer whose writings are interpreted to be reflections of the socio-cultural and political trends of his time. The question of representation arises in the very form of literary history, that is, in its chronological design itself. Rather than taking a historical event to mark and identify an age, most literary history books prefer to use a literary author's name in order to define and christen an age. This makes them obviously works that belong more to the boundaries of literature itself than to socio-political history.⁶ For example, Wordsworth's poetry initially represented the libertarian enthusiasm inherent in the French Revolution (as in *The Prelude*), and the age corresponding to this is known in English literary history as 'the age of Tennyson' since his works were held to be proper reflections of the Victorian ambivalence between religion and science.

Canon : The question of representation takes us to a writer's ability to represent whole age. It is assumed that one writer from each age had evinced this unique representational quality. On this count, we consider such as writer and those who wrote along his lines of perception as great. The variance in the number of such writers and the quantity of literary output determined that certain ages were 'golden'. The ability of writers for representation (or also the so called mastery in the use of language) has been termed as a divine gift which shapes an extraordinary genius. Besides, and because of their 'talents', these writers are said to hold relevance for all time some of the Shakespearean lines are taught as eternal truths. One can recall Dr. Johnson recommending to us 'Shakespeare for all times'. Thus literary history canonises writers as models to be followed by the future generations.

Gender : A majority of writers dominant in literary history are invariably male writers. Most of the texts identified as 'great', according to many initial versions of feminist criticism, are also essentially texts that glorify masculinist fields of action. Moreover, every literary age is represented by a male writer. Although initially it had created an unsustainable impression that women did not write as much as men did, later the problem was with the question of representation, whether women writers did not a representative ability at all. Recently, one of the objectives of feminisms has been to show that women were always writing, though women writers have been neither represented nor allowed to represent an age in literary history. However, the contemporary debate has centred on the question whether the unrepresented female writers need to be restored to the same tradition of literary history.

Background : Literary history prompts us to look at a writer as essentially entrenched in the spirit of his times. We refer back to the actual authorial moments of Shakespearean or Miltonian texts. For the understanding of the meaning of every element in these texts, a study of that particular age/time has been considered essential. This has also been referred to as the 'background' study. Without literary study has been thought to be incomplete.⁷ However, literary history treats these backgrounds as a stable and unchanging past. It is as though one can have a straight and unmediated access to the past. It does not consider that the meaning of the past itself might undergo transformations in the subsequent ages.

Traditions : Although the history of English literature covers a pretty long duration through centuries, literary traditions appear to vary only alternately between the echoes of classicism and romanticism. In short, the central ideals of English literary traditions emerge only from these two. A typical case of English literary history begins with the detailed accounts of Chaucer and Middle English, and then moves on to the Renaissance-romantic spirit of 'quest' and 'individual man' these include Marlowe's Doctor Faustus as Renaissance hero and Shakespeare's tragic heroes determined to achieve self-realisation. From this, it passes on to the Puritan rigour and morality; most of the religious (and) didactic writings, strictly adhering to rules, belong to this age. From thereon, literary history shuttles itself between versions of the Renaissance spirit of freedom on the one end and versions of morality and classical rules on the other. Thus it moves from the 'immoral' times of the Restoration (where man is again uncontrollable and supposed to be at liberty to act on free will) to the new classical revival of literature through the writings of Dryden and Johnson. It passes through the romantic age of Wordsworth in which the individual prefers to be in solitude to the Victorian morality (where Matthew Arnold tells us that classical values from which his own middle class was now away should be revoked. It is in the same Victorian age that D.G. Rossetti had argued for Puritan simplicity).

Impact of Literary History

The features of literary history become in several ways also the features of English literary study leading to its legitimization in India. Based on the features listed above, I will discuss in this section various instances in which literary history constructs and perpetuates myths about English literature; 'myths' because the features of literary history are highly exclusivist and therefore alienating. Individually or together, these features place at the centre of almost every debate on English studies in India the concept of alienation. Alienation as a critical concept explains the isolating experience of the students both in the classroom/discipline and elsewhere Susie Tharu's explains the term alienation in the context of literary studies in India.

alienation emerges as an effect of the power relations structuring the discipline, its curricular theory and classroom practices as well as the world of which the classroom is only a part. *Alienation is therefore—and that is its magic rub—also a means of wedging open, interrogating and engaging with these power relations.* It is not something either to be overcome or to be set aside. As a mark of exclusion or subjugation, a border line, it is something to be confronted, elaborated and engaged with, politically and epistemologically (1998 : 28)

In almost all the features that we have identified in literary history, we can find various forms of power relations at play. Although alienation can be treated as a general result of all the features, it articulates in each of the features mostly in independent ways.

A general expression of alienation however comes from chronology. The classification and arrangement of texts and writers into successive periods conveys a sense that their chronology is something which comes into being in the natural course of time and development. While valorising the texts/writers and constructing the historical narrative of literature, literary history denies us the access to those moments in which, say, Shakespeare's popular stage productions and Joseph Addison's journalistic writings are arranged in a single frame to be called literature. Moreover, literary history does not also convincingly elucidate any necessary connection between a form of pure entertainment and periodical journalism although genre distinctions might be often indicated as the possible factor for the relation. However, it does not tell us under what conditions the genres (those to be included in literature) were selected, and by whom. The one striking feature of chronology is, therefore, its pretence that, in literary history, writers are received as already automatically, and on their own genius, canonised. This is notably reflected in the syllabus itself. As Srividya Natarajan points out in a different context,

[the] canon is....presented as something that shaped itself (by a natural coalescence of "great works") independently of institutional politics, or as something shaped by criteria consensually developed....The criteria, needless to say, are "aesthetic" ones, assumed to be distanced from relations of power (1998:75)

In literary history, or in the canon (as we can also call it now), it appears as though the discipline of English literature existed in the same strength as it is today even in Shakespeare's days. It seems to show that Shakespeare was intentionally producing straightaway certain 'literary pieces' rather than writing scripts for immediate stage performances in the royal court he belonged to. It also seems to

show that in every age such pieces (at once recognised as 'literary') were consistently produced. This makes us believe that their historical order, the chronology itself, is an actually existing one. Further this assumption emanates from the idea that history is strictly chronological.

But contrary to such beliefs, it has been argued in various branches of critical theories that the contemporary disciplines are also philosophies produced by contemporary world-systems. About social sciences in general, Immanuel Wallerstein and his associates have argued that it was the need of the modern state itself to categories zones of knowledge :

The need of the modern state for more exact knowledge on which to base its decisions had led to be emergence of new categories of knowledge already in the eighteenth century, but these categories still had uncertain definitions and frontiers.....The intellectual history of the nineteenth century is marked above all by this disciplinarization and professionalization of knowledge, that is to say, by the creation of permanent institutional structures designed both to produce new knowledge and to reproduce the producers of knowledge (1997: 6-7).

The ideas about the moments of such 'disciplinarization' apply to English/literary studies as well. It has been Gauri Viswanathan's (1987) achievement to explain that English literature as a discipline is of a recent origin and that the introduction of English literature is a consequence of Britain's colonial interactions with India.⁸ English literature, as Vishwanathan argues, uniquely resulted from the resolution of the tension between the British involvement in Indian education and its non-interference in religion. The transparent teaching of the Bible would have replaced the Oriental religious knowledge in India, provided there had been no instances of riots breaking out against the British missionary attempts to teach the Bible. The need of the nineteenth century British imperial state in India was 'a secular discipline' imbued with the values of Christian morals. The consolidation of English literature therefore has to be located in this context. Viswanathan tells us about the Christian concerns by which texts were catalogued into a chronological form and an initial version of literary history shaped: the British initiated 'steps to incorporate selected English literary texts into the Indian curriculum', and in this, Macaulay and Charles Trevelyan were

engaged in a minute analysis of English texts to prove the 'diffusive benevolence of Christianity' in them. The process of curricular selection was marked by weighty pronouncements of the 'sound Protestant Bible principles' in Shakespeare, the 'strain of serious piety' in Addison's *Spectator* papers, the 'scriptural morality' of Bacon and Locke, the 'devout sentiment' of Abercrombie, the 'noble Christian sentiments' in Adam Smith's *Moral Sentiments*.....(18)

The long literary history is thus a nineteenth century claim, and all its successive periods and ages (the chronology) are a simultaneous identification rather than recognition by the subjective experience of each age by each generation. In its own way, this dismantles the assumption that history is necessarily chronological. Perhaps our students confound the literary periods and writers with one another precisely because all the historical periods 'occur' to them in a single stroke. Moreover, one does not have the straight and unmediated experience of the history proper of various periods. A knowledge of the real age lived by the English literary texts as literary texts would not be fully possible even in a critical history of British colonial administrative measures and the reception of

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Western knowledge in India. In other words, it cannot be defined in the usual terms of national history: either as the history of Britain or of India alone, or as something that affected (or was initiated by) the whole population of one of these territories. But the long traditions covered by English literature are generally taught in our academies in a subsidiary subject, the social and cultural history of Britain. One question that can be raised in a critique of literary history therefore is whether such a subsidiary would be the much celebrated 'background' to the study of literature. It is not surprising to see that the teaching of British history is an ideological means of claiming of a greater authenticity and time-tested tradition for English literature on the one hand, and of covering over the hegemonic project and the anxieties of power that contributed to its introduction and continuity on the other hand. The knowledge about English literary history should therefore destabilise at least three things : (i) the conventional definition of 'history' as a linear happening of events (ii) the notion of 'background study' and (iii) the concept of historical perspective. Literary history, with its sense of a chronological and incandescent past and of writers representing the spirit of that past, makes the contemporary student develop an implicit nostalgia and to learn from the 'good old days' rather than from today. Its 'event-dominated', empiricist and episodic format is 'dust in a double sense: and it spoke about ephemeral phenomena; and that it got into our eyes, preventing us from seeing the real underlying structures' (Fernand Braudel cited in Wallerstein 2005:15).⁹

Instead of making any reference to the colonial beginning of the discipline, most of the literary periods are perceived as reflections of socio-political events of the West itself, such as the French Revolution in William Wordsworth and the Industrial Revolution in Charles Dickens. The question of representation arises alongside the study of these Western events. While the writers represent the Western events, literary traditions also correspond to the progress of modernity in the West.¹⁰ Whenever the spirit of modernity favoured the bourgeoisie, one form of the renaissance-romantic tradition falls in place. When it shows its libertarian potential for the working classes, one form of classicism (in the form of rules, regulations and morals) is celebrated. The influence of the ideals of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, fraternity—on Wordsworth is an instance for the former while the advocacy of the Victorian morality and discipline in Arnold's effort to distinguish culture (which the middle class should recover) from anarchy (the unruly working class) would be a typical point in case for the latter. Therefore, the alternating literary traditions take their shape as results of the spirit of freedom embodied in revolutions or in the spirit of morality that emerges as a reaction to such revolutions. Furthermore, although the generality of these traditions is to be found indigenously in India itself, the narrative structure of literary history which embodies these traditions does not open up any representative space for many of those who study English here.

To pursue this aspect further, I will discuss how representation relates to gender. The minor presence of women writers in literary history has relegated the discussion of gender issues. The marginalisation of women writers and the subsequent absence of gender issues in traditional studies are factors that alienate a large group of students. Natarajan draws on the statistics of women writers in the English M.A. syllabus of the University of Hyderabad, and says that about 200 out of the total number of 224 texts prescribed in the syllabus 'fall into the white male Anglo-American tradition.' Looking at the general composition of literature classrooms, she adds that the 'unreflective adoption

of the male-centred canon is particularly distressing in a discipline in which women students tend to outnumber men' (76-77). While the classroom composition still continues to be the same, most of the core courses (that is, British literature courses) also continue to have almost the same number of male writers. However, this little number of female writers must not be treated as something to be enlarged within the confines of the prevailing literary historiography. The restoration of the 'lost' writers to literary history would imply a notion of 'fullness' for literary history. As literary history itself can be perceived as that which serves the legitimacy of the institutions of literary studies, Tharu and Lalita tell us that it should be the institution itself that the 'feminist scholars must invoke when they voice their grievances' (1993 : 23). Such a restoration project might expose the barriers which prevented women to be part of literary history. But while one opens the doors of literary history for a few women to get in, Tharu and Lalita add,

the deeper political commitments that govern the teaching of literature are not subjected to serious theoretical scrutiny. Neither the legitimacy nor the function of the sacred monument itself can be radically questioned by those who wish to restore its fullness and thereby endorse its authority (25).

Literary canon produces yet another form of alienation. In a literature classroom, the Shakespeare's plays, Milton's poems, Dickens's novels and so on are taught as documents of the master user of English. The canonical history glorifies the writes as those gifted with language, imagination, appreciation and aesthetic sensibilities. Students are expected to write notes of acclaim on playwrights, poets and novelists. Such demands from both the traditional literary criticism and the teachers create a belief that the canonised authors are beyond criticism especially if made by the economically and culturally deprived student. Since the authors are beyond criticism especially if made by the economically and culturally deprived student. Since the authors are assumed to possess a unique aura, a certain level of cultural sophistication is expected from the students who read them. In order to cover up these problems while facing a single standard of examination and evaluation, the students often tend to make hymnic commentaries and statements without conviction.

However, this must not be construed as a general form of alienation applicable to all students irrespective of their identities. One can see a system at work in most universities and colleges in which students still excel in Shakespeare and Milton with ease. The sophistication required by literary criticism for the 'critical appreciation' of the gifted authors was indigenously possible since the introduction of English literary study did not happen in a blank society without internal hierarchies. Viswanathan argues that the introduction of English was not a replacement of native learning in India. She says that the British administration maintained an alliance with the traditional ruling class (or the custodians of religious texts and knowledge) and did not contest the worth of Orientalist religious knowledge. In all the British hegemonic programmes, 'an influential native class was to be co-opted as the conduit of Western thought and ideas' (1987 : 10).¹¹ English was taught alongside Oriental studies, although it was formally separated from them. English literary study was characterised as intellectual production and Oriental knowledge as mythical, and this characterization of English 'suggested a different process of reading, requiring the exercise of reason rather than unquestioning faith' (20). The making of a literary history is part of establishing the rationale for this 'mpderm' discipline. Perhaps the participation of the educated native elite in the process of valorizing the

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English language and literary studies in India is a historical reason for certain communities of students still excelling in the discipline while certain others constantly remain alienated.

Although alienation is the effect of the features of literary history, it is often treated as a genetic shortcoming of the student. The absence of a curricular provision for historicizing the discipline renders the impression that disciplines are ontological and thus beyond shortcomings. In the canonical system, the blemish has been the inability of the students to reach up to the 'sophistications' of the canon. It is the organic limits of literary history (in the sense that it excludes so many fields) that are defined as the incapability of the students to master and memorise the events and figures charted in it. In the contemporary debates on English studies in India, one of the topics of investigation, as Thru says, is the shift 'of inefficiency (of the system) into indiscipline (of students and of Indian generally)' (15). This can relate the caste question as well to literary studies. Manohar Reddy explains this relation by reversing the usual reason.

... claims of the traditional guardians of the faith (English teachers and policy makers) regarding the causes of the "failure" of the "disadvantaged"/"rural" and SC/ST students is no longer valid. On the contrary ... what is to be taken a serious note of is the failure of the discipline of English studies in India to address the new and challenging issues that the Dalit students have posed to the established knowledge systems and institutions (1998 : 108).

One distinctive result of alienation has been the interrogation of many aspects of the discipline. It has been possible today to discuss the issues of caste, class, gender and so on, which have been treated hitherto as external to the discipline. These concerns have created spaces for including new genres in literary studies, and established links with many other disciplines notably in the areas of social sciences. There have been questions raised about the utility of literary history and the humanist tradition for the contemporary employment market. As a result of alienation, there have been also efforts to think of new directions for literary studies, especially for those in English. One could therefore find a series of professional changes moulding the field of literary studies especially in the past one decade, although they are not of a uniform character or in the same direction.

Crisis of Literary History – Academic and Professional Changes

One of the important means to recognize the crisis of literary history, produced by alienation, is to look at the design of many newly emerged courses which relate English literature and language to the 'other' questions of gender, caste and minority. More than a classroom appreciation of literary texts, these issues call for studies of interventionist nature. The myriad instances of immediate struggles waged along the lines of these issues from the '60s onwards in various parts of India also contributed to changes in the nature of studies.¹² Such changes have now given importance to the broader field of culture in which one can locate literary studies. Satish Poduval calls this 'a voyage out' of the conventional spaces of disciplinary practices : 'the changes in the offing that could redeem the present English literature courses from its alienating irrelevance' (1998:147). He argues that literature has been one of the fields which could incisively discuss ideology and the implications of Western and India/vernacular mainstream writing. The departure from the New Critical practices of the 1940s, and the subsequent elaboration of critical theories such as various feminisms and Marxisms,

psychoanalysis, deconstruction and New Historicism for the study of literary and cultural texts have facilitated debates on ideology and resulted in breaking away from the traditional approaches to them. The indigenous population groups who did not figure in national histories has radically transformed the reading of literature also. The issues of gender, caste, and minority have necessitated studies inclusion of a variety of genres such as the commercial film and popular fiction in the frame of study. These have raised issues for which there is no organic space in the edifice of literary history. One of the important changes resulted from the limitations of literary history is a critical elaboration of literary studies into cultural studies. And literary history, whose idea emerged along with the sense of nationhood and the aesthetics of the privileged, today faces its much awaited crisis of relevance.

Alienation might be defined in the upper class parleys simply as irrelevance. However, this sense of irrelevance has not been something that affected the students' ability of comprehension or intellectual interest. In this, English literary study in the traditional form was said to be irrelevant to the needs of the day; that is, its humanism was not what was required in the 'competitive' world of modern industry and science and information technology. Many contemporary instances of restructuring English studies and preparing new courses are therefore examples of adapting the curriculum to the needs of the capitalist market.

For a utilitarian rational, English literary study has been restructures as what is more generally called English studies. Tharu notes that the reorientation of English studies in the post-Independent India has been marked by two major moves :

... the separation of the acquisition of the English language from the study of literature, and the shift from the definition of English literature as the literature of Britain to a broader characterization of English studies as now concerned with all literatures in English. The theoretical justification for this shift was drawn from the new discipline of comparative literature (1998 : 16).

In the new nation-state in India, the imperial curricular agenda, among many other British programmes here, was also abandoned. English started to be seen without its colonial baggage, as a language which now meant a 'skill'. While the efficient study of English literature can be hampered by the students' lack of 'cultural background', the acquisition of English language skill has been free from this problem. As Tharu says, the English language 'was represented as a culturally and political neutral, international currency, access to which was potentially available to all Indians' (19). The argument was that English was no longer a 'foreign' language to be acquired, but necessarily and simply the only one which can cater to progress in science. Technology, commerce and industry and hence a window to the world. This shift of approach, according to Tharu, 'involved, among other things, equipping different sections of the people with skills that would be necessary for the development of the "nation"' (18). Though the acquisition of language as a skill was perceived to be culturally neutral, the questions 'who constituted that nation' or whose interests English language 'was so confidently serving' are perhaps the ones that can reveal the prevailing forms of dominance. Apart from fixing a contemporary relevance for English language, literary texts are also selected and prescribed for the acquisition of skills today. There have been attempts to perceive literary texts as depositories of instances in crisis management, techniques of motivation, managerial skills, leadership

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qualities, and so on. The teaching of language through literature has been another method by which literature is found to be relevant. A new need for teaching American English to the potential professionals in the Third World is yet another instance of adapting the curriculum to the needs of the BPO industry. It is possible to see these as examples of doing away with the problems of background knowledge and the subjective, political and personal stakes in studies.

Broadly in these academic and professional changes, there are chiefly two ways in which the crisis of literary history has been resolved. Firstly, the shift from literary studies to language studies posited the irrelevance of literary history as its irrelevance to the professional front. This avoids confronting literary history as well as the critical issues it raises. In other words, this idea of irrelevance is more of a requirement that comes from the market. There is no formative link between the irrelevance of literary history and the emergence of the idea of language as skill. Secondly and on the contrary, in the elaboration of literary study into the fields of culture and politics, the new areas which students and researchers handle today address the features of literary history. Such a reorientation of literary studies emerges from the irrelevance of literary history to the subjectivity of the students, and not from any external need.

However, teaching language as a skill, like the traditional literary studies, language study also does not disclose in its curricular system whose interest it is actually serving and who all would be excluded from its programme. In fact the disciplines of traditional literary study and the contemporary language study do not and cannot reveal factors pertaining to their institutionalization. The traditional literature/contemporary language curriculum survives on an inability of the discipline to be objective, honest and vocal enough about its own beginning and its so-called successful syntagmatic development. Today the emphasis on language does not involve a structural alteration to the discipline, therefore does not signify the restructuring of the academic practice itself.

Pedagogical Changes in the Concept of Literary History

Since the 'border lines' (or the limits) of literary history are exclusivist, the attempts of various segments to address them produce alongside alternative and radical histories of literature. The critical responses to the features of literary history would also include studies of historiography methods themselves, that is, investigations of the criteria adopted for the making of the literary history. One distinctive result of these is the awareness that literary history cannot be monolithic and that the search for a uniformity of theory or reading practices is increasingly in crisis. Every fresh attempt to write a critical history of literature would then also mention the criteria it has chosen for its purpose. This would signify conscious reference to the cultural and political identities of the segments engaged in writing critical histories of literature which, in another sense, would, mean writing the histories of the segments themselves. Although these are also histories, the ideological silence of the traditionally celebrated literary history does not therefore characterize them. In writing such histories, historians will ensure, as Walterstein puts it, a kind of coherence which does not hide their 'values and preferences' and therefore will also 'assume the task of contributing to dialogic truth' (2004:141). To the interests of the policy makers and the privileged, the multiple voices in the histories of literature constructed by

women, Dalits, and the disadvantaged and rural groups might still remain unacceptable. The new literary histories should not be confounded simply as a few segments now added to the existing structure of literary history, as those that the traditional literary history in fact cannot hope to be loudly self-conscious. If it hopes so, it ceases to remain any longer in its 'eternal order'. Therefore, the crisis of literary history or its 'lack' cannot be simply solved or filled out, nor can prevailing literary history be subjected to certain adjustments, inclusions and corrections so that it remains as yet the same discipline, free of problems. This is because both literature in its strictly disciplinary form and its *aide* literary history are an 'intellectual expression' of a given system. The study of the features of literary history would also be a study of the features of that system. A self-knowledge of the discipline would be a self-knowledge of the system which constitutes and divides knowledge into disciplines, creates exclusive boundaries for them, and lends them a semblance of autonomy.¹³ The self-conscious literary histories emerge from the critiques of the system itself by raising existential questions to literature and literary history.

The new range of topics which address the limits of literary history cannot be elaborated in a method of isolated disciplinary enquiry as well. Wallerstein and his associates teach us that it is the intellectual activity without attention to current disciplinary boundaries, and not the efficient organization of already existing disciplines, that must be emphasized. As they say,

to be historical is after all not the exclusive purview of persons called historians. It is an obligation of all social scientists. To be sociological is not the exclusive purview of persons called sociologists. It is an obligation of all social scientists.... Nor is it absolutely sure that professional historians necessarily know more about historical explanations, sociologists more about social issues..... In short, we do not believe that there are monopolies of wisdom, nor zones of knowledge reserved to persons with particular university degrees (1997 : 98)

However at the same time, Wallerstein does not mean to recognize the intellectual legitimacy of various disciplines since he considers knowledge as fundamentally unidisciplinary and its categorization an expression of various historical developments in the modern world-system.¹⁴

Perhaps these will be critical steps by which the pedagogy can undo the canon and assure the students that the authors they read are not divinely gifted and unquestionable lords of language but human beings whose views can be contested. This will also create conditions in which students write about what they authentically know and make commentaries with convictions. To initiate this, it is desirable to create many narratives that delineate the history of the discipline of literature. I borrow the concept of narrative from Fredric Jameson who argues that traditional literary history was a subset of representational narrative, a kind of narrative realism. It has been a literary historical narrative. He says that its task today must be that which is proposed as the task of historiography itself in general. Narrative must be there 'not to elaborate some achieved and lifelike simulacrum of its supposed object, but rather to "produce" the latter's "concept" (1981 : 11-12).

Notes

1. There is a notable size of work which has interrogated from many standpoints the processes of institutionalizing, revising, and changing the disciplines and curricula. There are some master texts within the body of Western

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- scholarship which attempted to historicize not just literary texts but academic disciplines as such. For instance, the Hungarian thinker Georg Lukacs, in his chapter 'The Changing Function of Historical Materialism' gives insights for critically looking at the 'autonomous' sciences and disciplines produced by totalitarian systems. See Lukacs. *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971). Pp. 223-55. More generally about social sciences there has been the Gulbenkian Commission headed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1993-95) which prepared a significant report-cum-recommendation for restructuring the social sciences. The Commission argued that the making of the disciplines as the 'rules' in the nineteenth century was also a rationalization of a particular type of social change. Wallerstein, et al. *Open the Social Sciences-Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on restructuring of the social sciences* (New Delhi: Vistar Publications, 1997), p.8.
2. In India, sufficient debates on English literary studies are available, and they have centred on the 'other' questions of caste, class, gender, etc. In this, two important and useful instances here are Gauri Viswanathan's 'The Beginnings of Literary Study in British India'; published in the *Oxford Literary Review* (9:1-2, 1987) and Susie Tharu ed., *Subject to Change: Teaching Literatures in the Nineties* (1998).
 3. The most widely sold texts of literary history belong to authors like W.H. Hudson, Sir Ifor Evans, Boris Ford, A.C. Baugh, Legouis and Cazamian, and David Daiches, to name a few.
 4. Most English literary history books invariably follow this pattern. The most obvious and handy examples would be the chapters in Hudson's and Evan's literary histories. Evans, however, divides English literature first into four genres (poetry), drama, novel and prose) and then each one of them into chronological periods. Hudson's chapters correspond to the chronology of history straightaway. See W.H. Hudson, *An Outline History of English Literature* (1966), and Sir Ifor Evans, *A Short History of English Literature* (1966).
 5. It is interesting to note here what Hudson had to say in the 'Preface' of his book, 'A history of English literature.... must be interested primarily in English literature as a whole. Its chief aim should be to give a clear and systematic account, not of the achievements of successive great writers merely, as such, but of national changes and development'(1966:v). The words, 'successive', 'great writers', and 'national' are to be noted especially.
 6. Hudson would again be a good example for this. Every chapter's title in his book, excepting the 'Introductory' and the last one titled 'The Present Age' added later by A.C. Ward in 1930, carries the name of the representative author. One writer from each age is selected to represent the whole life of that historical age. Hudson writes in his 'Introductory' that 'it is very usual to label them [various period] with epithets derived from history, and to speak, for example, of the Elizabethan Age, the Age of the Restoration, the Victorian Age, and so on. But perhaps it is better to take our descriptive terms from literature itself, and to designate each period by the name of its most characteristic and representative writer'(1966 : 7)
 7. Hudson here believes 'that the literature of any age is necessarily shaped and coloured by all the elements which entered into the civilization of that age' (1966 : v). He also adds thus, 'Every man belongs to his race and age, and no matter how marked his personality, the spirit of his race and age finds expression through him'(5).
 8. The British colonial establishment in African territories did not give shape to this discipline, for the teaching of the Bible itself fulfilled much of its need there. Moreover, the British also did not adopt a policy of non-interference in African religions. The history of baptism in colonial Africa would be a good evidence for this. The native resistance to the Bible was less or could be mitigated in Africa, whereas in India, it was important to appease the native elite educated groups.
 9. 'Ephemeral' because chronology supposes an end to each age. But at the same time, literary history, like any other chronological history, takes this 'end of an era' an essential in diverting one's attention from the present to a bygone past and develop nostalgia for it. If an era does not end, nostalgia (and thus the helplessness of the student) does not emerge. The 'Shakespeare-for-all-times' formula is in fact an attempt to demand the students to learn from the past, from an age which has technically come to end. Another example would be Sir Walter Scott who romanticizes the past in order to escape the chaotic present. However, Braudel's and Wallerstein's idea of 'ephemeral phenomena' has a different implication for the comprehension of long-standing structures of the modern world-systems.
 10. For example, Hudson insists on the national character of English literary history while writing his introduction to it : 'A history of English literature has.... A national as well as a personal character and interest. It is not only an account of the work done by a number of separate English writers; it is also an account of a great body of literature which in its totality is to be regarded as the production of the genius of the English people.....Ordinary English history is out nation's biography; its literature is its autobiography.... (1956:5-6).
 11. In the nationalist movement and later in the processes of national building, this native class took the leadership.

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- This had later to the argument that colonialism can be duplicated within by the upper classes that possess the national today. Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and Its Fragments* discusses the various ways in which a bilingual elite' took the lead in mobilizing a "national" effort'. Nationalism in India was shaped by the characteristic efforts of the elite to provide 'the mother tongue with the necessary linguistic equipment to enable it to become an adequate language for "modern" culture', to start 'printing presses, publishing houses, newspapers, magazines, and literary societies.....outside the purview of the state and the European missionaries' to fashion a new narrative prose in the form of the novel and 'to start schools in every part of the province and then to produce a suitable educational literature' (1999: 7-9).
12. The women's movement, the Naxalbari and other regional uprisings, the Dalit movements now, the subsequent critique of traditional aesthetics, work on arts and cinema, etc could be a few examples here.
 13. While on the discipline of historical materialism, Georg Lukacs makes an insightful formulation which may be applicable to understand the formative nature of literary history. Lukacs argues that 'the totality and the driving forces' of capitalism 'cannot be grasped or conceptualized by the crude, abstract, unhistorical and external categories' of its own science. These categories may show a semblance of independence, but they cannot simply be corrected. 'It is rather,' as he puts it, 'the intellectual and conceptual expression of the objective social structure of capitalist society. To annul it and transcend it means, therefore, to transcend capitalist society-in thought' (1971 : 229-30).
 14. Wallerstein uses the term undisciplinarity in the context of his insistence on the primacy of knowledge activity and his critique of the professionalization and categorization of disciplines in the modern universities. He says that in the world-systems analysis, the analysts 'seek to abolish the lines between economic, political and socio cultural modes of analysis' (2005 : 21). In a critique of this categorization elsewhere, he says that 'we are seeing a tremendous overlapping, virtually a total imbrication, of the so-called separate disciplines., The solution is distinctly *not* to be found in becoming "multidisciplinary," since multidisciplinary, far from overcoming the irrationalities of the disciplines, presumes their solidity. Multidisciplinarity builds on the sand, for today our "disciplines" are reduced to sand' (2004 : 117)

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