

Current Changes and Challenges in English Literary Studies Curriculum

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Abstract:

Literary studies emerged as the oldest means of transferring knowledge in the form of poems, ballads, dramas, epics, etc. And cultural, traditional history as part of it is written, rewritten, and consumed and has been transformed multiple times since the beginning. Literary studies throughout the age have never been a neutral way of imparting knowledge, and it is being used as an institutional tool for controlling hegemonic power through various ideological and cultural subversions. It creates various forms of imaginative identities to pass through different ideologies, authors' perspectives, texts, and works. It has the power and ability to spark various movements and reforms and also reflects human society and its understanding of it. English literary studies, especially at present times, have had many twists and turns in the curriculum, and new paradigm shifts have emerged in discourses, themes, and rhetoric. English literary studies have diversified into many multidisciplinary approaches. Social sciences and humanities have collaborations with literary studies with various genres coming up and reinterpreting new approaches to texts with new analytical theories. With digital media globally connected, this innovative era is causing transformation in every field, affecting literary studies and connecting it with different fields of studies like science and technology, which are influencing the societal aspects of literature. The archaic ideals of literary studies are reexamined and research in the English literary field is diversified. The present paper seeks to understand and address the changes that took place in English literary studies and to examine the challenges that English literary studies have at present as a

curriculum. And seeks to address the pedagogical changes that occurred through various means.

Key words: Curriculum, Digital Media, English Literary Studies, History, Institutional changes.

One of the buzzing questions in the humanities at present is about the future of literary studies. With fast changes and diverse fields of studies emerging daily, the answers are more entangled with another set of new theories emerging out of it. Literary studies, being one of the oldest means of transferring knowledge that reflects the values, traditions, beliefs, and ideologies of society, is changing its course with recent trends and adopting new approaches to the learning experience. Literature being one of the great tools for imaginative pursuit to expand one's own individual entity and thoughts through various ideas reflects on different approaches to society and its people easily. Literature can be considered a beautiful piece of art or a new idea to examine a thought, thing, person or anything. It has a vast variety of scope and outlook on the approaches of the world in general. It can convey an idea or a message across a global level and connect different landscapes, regions, cultures, and people. With growing trends at present times, the gaps in academic subjects like science and technology and humanities are bridged together with new perspectives. Current trends in literature are going global, which facilitates strong relationships between different societies across the world. The question of how literary studies survive the onslaught of revolutionary new-age multimedia is to be examined, researched, and answered with ongoing trends changing its multifaceted innovative ideas emerging daily across the globe. This is the current dilemma in academic debates. But the answer is right there, Literature has the capability of

adoptability with whichever medium it is consumed. Every time there is a new paradigm shift in society, literature adopts it and grows with the paradigm shift.

Though the history of English Literature starts with the Anglo-Saxons and Germanic settlers in Anglo-Saxon England in and around the fifth century. English literary studies as an academic curriculum are a recent phenomenon that came into existence during the mid-eighteenth century. Before that, in European history, Latin and Greek dominated the knowledge systems that were spread throughout the continent. Those civilizational systems of knowledge focused on philosophy, theology, law, medicine, art, rhetoric, reason, drama, linguistics, etc. rather than focusing and glorifying on an individual's idea of craft as we do now. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, nobody considered English literature as an academic discipline, and it was indeed confined to a small set of people in and around England. Classical European literature, like Latin and Greek, enjoyed prestigious positions with regard to pioneers of European civilization, whereas English literature came a little later but spread around the world because of the colonial pursuits of the British empire.

The present-day version of literature studies is far different from the eighteenth-century version as it was completely taught only to elite groups of people, and then slowly the middle and lower strata of people were involved in the process of putting themselves in the upper strata in society. The romantic period in English Literature paved the way for commoners to be involved in the process of a new wave of writing. Slowly, the art form delves itself into the process of political opinion, satire, and criticism of society and it's been in use till today. English literature as a tradition has changed from the subject taught in academic circles of England, Scotland, and Ireland to expanding and building upon the new approaches in different countries and continents. Though English society bumped upon a great deal of wars, reformation, and economic and political changes it still kept its tradition of

continuity from old Anglo-Saxon poems, writings of Chaucer to present day diversified fields of approaches in literature due to its adoptability to new paradigms throughout the ages.

When it comes to India, it is the colonial rule of the British that introduced English literature to the country. Gauri Visvanathan says,

“British parliamentary documents have provided compelling evidence for the central thesis of the investigation: that humanistic functions traditionally associated with the study of literature - for example, the shaping of character or the development of the esthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking - are also essential to the process of sociopolitical control. My argument is that literary study gained enormous cultural strength through its development in a period of territorial expansion and conquest, and that the subsequent institutionalization of the discipline in England itself took on a shape and an ideological content developed in the colonial context.”

(Visvanathan,1)

In this argument, it is clear that the British wanted to control and expand their influence in the subcontinent and they tried it with English education. With English education came English Literary studies, which indeed became an academic discipline in the country. Though English literary studies gained respect and learning and writing in English became an elitist thing in the country, which in turn created another group of elite people rooting for anything that is Western-oriented and disdaining the native culture and its orientation. They recount the occidental view of the Orient living in the Orient.

Literary studies have never been a neutral process of imparting aesthetic knowledge but has proved an institutional mechanism of cultural (re)production. Since its inception in the colonial time, English literary studies has been engaged in

forming the hegemonic cultural practices in India. Earlier it was a tool of cultural domination in the hand's colonial rulers, today it is an institutional stratagem to construct a kind of cultural elitism (Luhar, 76).

As English literary studies grew in India, apparently, it also paved the way for the ideological apparatus for the new-age capitalists using it for their own convenience by funding many of the influential writers and publishers with their corporate agendas. As long as people are aware and not to fall into the trap of these corporates, on the other hand, English literary studies gave rise to many new forms of approaches that gave identity to many people. Also, the new age of social media gives many opportunities to writers who are writing in English from various parts of the country to make their voices heard at global levels.

The curriculum is another thing that has rapidly changed in English literary studies. With or without knowing, the approaches in literary studies have been diversified since the mid-twentieth century. Earlier English literary studies mainly consisted of learning about poems, novels, dramas, fables, fiction, folklore, fantasy, and other pieces of literature from various authors through literary devices, language, and form. The text was interpreted with subtle theories of formalism, but in current times, the literary studies curriculum has seen a sea of changes with new political, social, and cultural influences on it and diversified into streams of new studies like Queer theory, Ecocriticism, Trauma studies, post-colonial studies, Dalit and subaltern studies, Native American studies, Afro American studies, Indian literature, Australian, Canadian, South American studies, and the list goes on.

It's a good thing that new horizons are touched in literary studies, but the problem as it appears that sub-themes like, for example, cultural studies, have gained more importance than literature itself. The rise of new studies within literature has slowly broken the borders of literary studies, moreover, dissolving the borders to merge another set of canons in literary

studies. Due to this reason, many academicians believe that English literary studies are no longer literary studies and express their dilemma that the future of traditional literary studies is at stake and its concern. It is indeed really alluding to whether literature is to be studied for the sake of literature or for learning language and the educational goal of expression and communication or is it understanding the cultural ethos and self-expression. The answer to this dilemma is not a single entity at all, it is all of them together. Literary studies put forth many aspects of the world with various entities.

The politicization of literature in the curriculum is another main problem of concern that is bothering the current trend in literary studies. Commercialization of the literary studies curriculum is happening and higher education has become the target for political propaganda. Though literary studies are the face of social empowerment and a voice for the voiceless, it is complexly oriented towards social problems and can be used to understand the world through critical thinking and also destroy the fabric of society with false literary narratives.

Richard B Schwartz in “Literature’s Year 2000 Problem” talks about how politicization of literature is happening and he advises the theorists by saying

“If one’s interests are political, study political science. If one’s life commitments are political, pursue them. Move to Washington. Become an agent of change. Work for a non- profit organization that addresses the plight of the world’s victims on a direct, human level. This is good and decent and important work. However, please stop trying to twist literary study into a form of activity it cannot pursue without abandoning its central preoccupations and methods of proceeding.”

(Schwartz, 13)

There is definitely a need for re-examining the curriculum according to the preferences of student's interests and changing trends. There is a need for an increase and encouragement for multidisciplinary approaches to research in English literary studies. The modern research needs collaborations of different fields like humanities, social sciences, science, and technology, with cultural studies appropriately used and analyzed with separate institutionally provided research centers and new collaboration courses. It is not just that the curriculum provides value to Literature by aesthetic means and artistic sense but it needs to broaden its shoulders to accumulate the new trends that are original and have vital, convenient, analytical tools to re-examine the text or any other piece of literature.

At present times, technological advancement has reached new heights and global connectivity has really changed the perspectives around the world. There is a special need to connect traditional research in literary studies with science and technology. Digital humanities is the talk of the town at the current time. Specifically, literary studies, which can be manifested in comparative literature studies and cultural studies. The rise in science fiction and sci-fi movies and series with metaverse concepts and all, it is empirically and theoretically applied to literature in fiction categories. Slowly, this field of study can be expanded to analyzing texts with theories of scientific psychoanalysis. Data analysis can be easily done through technology in the literature. Digitalization of literary studies necessarily opens up a great opportunity in the humanities and social sciences to connect with science and technological innovation in research. The curriculum in literary studies can be filled with new ideas and perspectives, with a significant impact on cultural transitions around the world. In this modern day, we can access any information within seconds and this brings great opportunities for us to encapsulate the theories with a better understanding of the worldview and conduct research with precise accuracy. With little updates in the curriculum, we can

connect old traditional methods of teaching and pedagogy with new trends globally. We can be able to learn and understand cultures, languages, heritages, and ethos, embracing new academic disciplines and can create better research and also, a better world.

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