



PEDAGOGICAL VALUE OF CONTEMPORARY SUBCONTINENTAL LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE CLASS / TEACHING LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The people of the Subcontinent have had exposure to English as the second language (L 2) since the sun of Stamford has risen in the East. However, now a days the sub continental writers, like writers of all colonized nations, are using English as a weapon to write back, if not curse back; a situation where, in Rushdie's words the Empire is writing back to the centre. Sub continental writers are now attempting to celebrate local culture and give the foreign language a local color. Besides, contemporary sub-continental literature in English is a vibrant and a powerful mixture made out of the English language and local experience tuned to the sociopolitical changes. Therefore, sub continental literature can be vehicles of culture as well as communication helping the teacher create a congenial educational atmosphere which can help students overcome their constraints regarding foreign language learning. The literary piece which talks about our daily life will be able to create motivation and a feeling for literature. Contemporary sub continental literature can be used in teaching reading, writing, and speaking to the students who are the beginners (Tertiary level) of learning English. Therefore, we believe this practice will pave the way for an assertion of local culture and essence and acceptance of global/hybrid/communicative language. This paper focuses on the use of contemporary sub-continental writings in the English Language Teaching class, with which we can keep students in direct touch with our culture, which is often celebrated in this type of writings, without creating any hindrance to the process of language proficiency.

Keywords: English language, second language, subcontinent literature

Introduction

Education has always been a weapon in the artillery of empire. The people of the Subcontinent have had exposure to English as the second language (L 2) since the sun of Stamford has risen in the East. As a result, knowledge of English is required for entry into the civil service of our country even now. Who can forget the famous resistant confession of Caliban?

You taught me language and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse.

(The Tempest: Act I, scene ii:

77)

In this subcontinent, English is forced upon us as it was once on Caliban. Here knowledge of English is essential for most jobs. However, nowadays, the sub continental writers, like writers of all colonized nations, are using English as a weapon to write back, if not curse back; a situation where, in Rushdie's words "the Empire is writing back to the centre". But



this has not lessened the importance of English in this subcontinent. With the English language, English literature has intriguingly intruded into our conscious. This imposition of a foreign language and the intrusion of a foreign literature into a colonized people have resulted in their writings in English, for they have appropriated English to write about their local experience exploiting the vital scope and dimension of the language. Subcontinental writers are now attempting to celebrate local culture and give the foreign language a local color. If we use contemporary subcontinental writings in the English Language Teaching class, we can keep students in direct touch with our culture celebrated in this type of writings without creating any hindrance to the process of language proficiency. Besides, contemporary sub-continental literature in English is a vibrant and a powerful mixture made out of the English language and local experience tuned to the sociopolitical changes. Achebe (1975) in his essay, "The African Writer and the English Language", approving the universal currency of English, says that "there is certainly a great advantage of writing in a world language". Though the English language is a legacy of colonial rule Achebe (1975) believes that it is capable of carrying the weight of local experience; he, moreover, emphasizes, "it (English Language) will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new (Foreign/Local) Surroundings". Similarly, subcontinental contemporary writers have been adapting and adopting English language to share their experience with the rest of the world. Though written in English, subcontinental literature is different from English or American literature in its use of words, images and the inflexion of voices to affect different tones. But we can also cite, Ngugi Wa Thiongo to our advantage, when he says: "Language, any language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture" (1994). Therefore, sub continental literature can be a vehicle of culture and a medium of communication helping the teacher create a congenial educational atmosphere which can help students overcome the constraints regarding foreign language learning.

Why contemporary sub continental literature and why not literature of Earlier Periods

Contemporary means related to the present. Contemporary subcontinental literature is thus the literature produced at the present time by the sub continental writers. The things which are familiar will motivate students to read and to learn. A writer

unquestionably writes about his/her time. Therefore, contemporary writings speak of our everyday life so that the context will be more student-friendly, particularly, in the present scenario of education in our country. For instance, the famous Christmas dinner-scene of Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* needs to be explained to our students because of its political-cultural-social context. But the birthday-party scene from Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* speaks of a time which can be more easily grasped by today's students in ESL/EFL classes in Bangladesh.

Language is a process which allows students to learn and grow. We learn or acquire a language either for integrative or instrumental needs. If teachers use a foreign literature to teach a foreign language i.e. English, the purpose of literature, which is to make students grow imaginatively and also learn, will not be easily achieved. In different public and private universities this method has been used for years. However, these methods are not successful all the time due to several reasons. For example, the prose piece or the poem which the teacher chooses for a class may not be culturally appropriate since it may not match the background of the students or it may be too difficult for students to comprehend. Sometimes being over influenced by foreign culture, learners may become negligent to their own culture. They may forget that they are Bengalis. Therefore, if teachers use contemporary subcontinental literature in English, it will solve the problem to a great extent.

A good literary piece has the potential to teach speaking, reading and writing. But if that piece is written in an American context or in a European one, it may become too difficult for a student to understand. In contrast, contemporary sub-continental literature can create a feel for the language by engaging students fully. Since the purpose of language teaching is to make students, especially, the freshmen speak and write English, the use of this literature is going to be more effective than that of American or English Literature.

Literary texts give students, according to Kramsch, and as quoted in Alam's (2007) essay "Using Post-colonial Literature in ELT" "access to world of attitudes and values, collective imaginings and historical frames of reference that constitute the memory of a people or speech community." Sub-continental literature, if used with profit-seeking goals, will give students that access. Alam (2007) talks about Amit Choudhury's *A Strange and Sublime*



Address and says that there is an evocative passage on *Kalboishakhi* or the season's first thunderstorm in Calcutta which is something every learner of Bangladesh or West Bengal can identify with. Alam suggests:

In addition to "warm-up activities" (discuss your experience of *Kalboishakhis* verbally with your class friend and write a few sentence about it), students could be made to see how the passage is built to give us the sense of the storm unfolding. The passage would also allow for questions on the way words are combined in special ways and the use of repetition to create effects. In addition, the passage could introduce students to the use of imagery and figurative language. Question could also be designed to give the students the feeling of that they could incorporate their lives (the clothes they wear, the food they eat, and the place they live in) in language work. This is to say, the passage can be used to focus on the individual apprehension of reality and to encourage students to think that they could see their world in their own special way using when necessary their own special and untranslatable words in special ways. I am sure that the passage is no more difficult as far as vocabulary is concerned than the textbook paragraph and yet it is much more vivid and concrete and located in our own world because of its dramatic elements and its use of figurative language. To put it differently, it is authentic text and thus ideal for nurturing the creative impulses of learners. (2007)

If we take the first few paragraphs of *Great Expectation* for language teaching for beginners (Tertiary level) and then ask some questions on prediction, or summary writing, subject-verb agreement that could be de-motivating and could confuse students, and they would perhaps find it very difficult. Most of our students are from mofussul towns or villages. It will not be easy for them to imagine the Victorian Age and the churchyard background of the scene. Moreover, there are obscure new words for students to understand in that passage for which students will have to look up the dictionary again and again. Even sometimes the original meanings of the words do not give the sense and inference may not work with the students because they are not aware of different connotations and associative meanings. Sometimes this kind of interruption make the texts boring and students will not be motivated at all, rather, they will be afraid of

it. Students will think that they will be attending a boring class with a boring teacher. At the beginning they should be given something which is easier like contemporary sub-continental literature to prove this point. We can compare the two passages reproduced below.

Passage 1

My FATHER'S family name being Pirrip, and my **Christian** name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his **tombstone** and my sister - Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my father's gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the **inscription**, "*Also Georgiana Wife of the Above*,". I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five brothers of mine - who gave up trying to get a living exceedingly early in that universal struggle- I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence.

Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seem to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this **parish**, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with **dykes** and **mounds and gates**, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it



all and beginning to cry, was Pip.

“Hold your noise!” cried a terrible voice, as a man started up from among the graves at the side of the church porch. “Keep still, you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat!”

A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. **A man with no hat**, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by **flints**, and stung by **nettles**, and torn by **briars**; who limped, and shivered, and **glared and growled** and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.

From *Great Expectation* Charles Dickens (Dickens 1965)

Passage 1

- *Difficult to understand
- *Victorian Background
- *Long /elastic Sentences
- * Culturally different imagery
- * Full of unknown vocabulary

Passage 2

It is December 1972 in Dhaka (then Dacca). A brilliant mid-morning on a back verandah in Rayer Bazaar. My mother and I are comfortably perched on old cane *moras* watching my maternal grandmother about to cut a fish. She is seated behind the dark, curved blade of an old *boti*, holding down its scarred, wooden stock with her right foot. The sharpened edge of the blade glints. A small, stained *pati* (reed mat) is spread beneath the *boti*. By her side, on the coarse red cement, is a small wicker basket. She is a small woman with a white, stiffly starched sari like a crackling cloud around her. I haven’t seen her since I was a child. Our family, my parents, I, my brother and sister, had escaped from Karachi, from the old West Pakistan, to Dhaka, to the newly-risen state of Bangladesh barely a month back, and were staying with my *mama* (maternal uncle), till we could find our footing. I look up at the sky bordering the verandah roof, at the day glowing with the same liquid light in which we, five refugees lugging three suitcases, had crossed the Indo-Bangladesh border at Benapole. My grandmother had come down from Chittagong to visit with us, marvelling at her grandchildren’s growth and clucking sympathetically at the stories of our flight from Pakistan.

“*Ilish mach*,” (hilsa fish), she had informed me with a smile, holding the fish up in the air. From the

Padma. “*Taja* (fresh),” she had added, pointing to a startlingly clear, protruding eye. And indeed, the sleek body, silvery as a sitar note, faintly bluish-green on its back, had winked in the vivid sunlight. It is a medium-sized *ilish* (“They’re small in the wintertime”), the downward slant of its mouth and the angular line of its lower jaw giving it a vaguely determined air. I cannot remember the last time I had seen one. Born and raised in dry, dun-coloured, sprawling Karachi city, all this, fish rivers, relatives, Dhaka’s sudden swathes of green grass and ty-sized post offices, is new to me.

My grandmother is talking about 1971. Every Bengali in 1972 talked about 1971, about the war, refugees and subsequent release from the daily horror.

“1971 was 1947 all over again,” she says as she holds both ends of the fish with her hands and vigorously saws it back and forth across the blade. Fish scales fly in all directions and a few sizzle upward, float momentarily at the top of their arc, aquamarine and topaz spangles, before gliding down on the cement. In 1947, during the Partition, my grandparents had fled from Calcutta (now Kolkata) along with other Muslims. Whole *paras* (neighbourhoods) slaughtered in a day, my mother had said. Babies thrown over walls. Trembling adults and crying children fleeing pell-mell.

.....
.....

“*Taja*,” she says again and nods approvingly, the corona of sprung hairs around her head stirring with the motion. Behind her against the wall are two empty flowerpots and a red earthen bowl with drained rice starch or crisping her saris. Their shadows, peasant-dark doubles, are sharply etched on the peeling yellow limewash. A column of ant is marching up the sides and round the rim of the bowl.

From An Ilish Story

Khademul Islam (Islam 2005)

Passage 2

- *Easy to understand
- *Modern contemporary life
- *Short easy sentences
- *Few new words
- *known context

We can compare the passage from *Great Expectation* and the one from Khademul Islam’s “An Ilish Story” given above to prove our point. “An Ilish Story” by Khademul Isam is unique in many ways. Its introductory passage is preferable to a passage



from the *Diary of Ann Frank* which describes the brutality of Second World War or a passage from *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* which describes the conflict between England and Ireland. Since this passage mentions familiar places, such as Dhaka, Rayer Bazar and Chittagong, and familiar materials, like *mora, boti, pati, sari* and familiar word, like *mama* --- students will easily internalize the passage. Therefore, we can engage students with it to identify the adjectives, clarify the nouns, preposition, etc. Even for literature students the passage can be beneficiary as it offers stylistic elements like wordplay in phrases such as, “mid morning”, “crackling cloud”, “liquid light” etc.

A British or American writer writes in standard and formalized English. But a subcontinental writer writes in sub-continental English since it is not her/his native language. It has been "appropriated" by her/him. This does not mean that subcontinental prose is not grammatically correct. Such writing is grammatically rich as reading material to be used in language class. But our point is, in this type of literature language, has been used flexibly(learner-friendly) and sensitively(keeping the culture in mind). Besides, these writings carry very familiar imagery which helps students to get into the text smoothly.

Motivation

The literary piece which talks about our daily life will be able to create motivation and a feeling for literature. When we feel for something, we start to love it. The picture and the condition of the Sundarbans as we find in *The Hungry Tide*, Fakrul Alam's English translation of Jibanananda, the condition and essence of Dhaka City as we find in Kaiser Haq's poetry in his book *Published in the Streets of Dhaka*, contemporary events or history like the liberation war as we find in Khademul Islam's "An Ilish Story" will be very helpful for students and will easily motivate them.

Teaching Reading

Reading is a receptive skill. To Ticco, "the interactivity is triangular: between the *reader*, the *text*, and the *message*". (22) Reading skill depends on the balanced interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world (schemata). Most students of Bangladesh are not able to read English fluently. When they are asked to read anything written in English they read it with difficulty and sometimes with hesitation. Books written in American context are not easy for them to

understand at all. In this case they don't understand the meaning and are never in a position to do the exercises. The names and events are all unfamiliar to them. As they cannot use their schemata, that is, knowledge of the world to reconstruct meaning from the text. From my personal experience I can say when I teach my students "compare and contrast" paragraph and take the paragraph "My First Prom" from John Langan's *English Skills*, it becomes too obscure for students to understand. Students ask innumerable questions about it. In our Bangladeshi context some of the questions become very difficult for a teacher to answer. But reading a passage on *Pahela Baisakh* creates a different image in the mind of the reader. Thereby the gap between EFL learners' competence and performance can be reduced.

Teaching Writing

One of the main purposes of teaching English is to teach writing. The sentence construction/structure, use of time and tense, use of prepositions, use of subject-verb agreement everything can be learnt easily by using contemporary pieces. If students are given to write a normal story about daily life, it will be easier for them to do so, as they will be cognizant of what is expected of them as writers. After reading "An Ilish Story", they can be asked to write a story on ilish since Ilish is a fish that is very much part of our lives. Ilish is a delicacy. Khademul Islam's story is of course a story about Ilish but at the same time it has a deep significance since it deals with the Independence War of 1971. Therefore, at the same time students can be asked to write about Liberation War.

Teaching Speaking

To start talking about familiar things will make the process of speaking easier. Khademul Islam's "An Ilish Story" can be a great piece for the activities of teaching speaking. The areas the story contains can be good topics for beginning speaking rather than starting with topic like "Thanksgiving Day". The story has different subject matter all of which are familiar to our students, like Dhaka, Ilish, the War of liberation of 1971 etc. To start talking about Dhaka can be a good example to start talking in English. If the students are asked to talk about the war during 1971, they will be able to do that. When they will be asked to say something on "Ilish" at least for five minutes, they can share their personal likings for "Ilish" and make stories concerning "Ilish" of their own. In this way they can begin the process of speaking.



Teaching English language to Students as a Service Course through Subcontinental Literature

In private universities thousands of students study English not as literature students but as a “service” subject to increase their ability to read, speak and write correct, error free English. As their main subject of learning is not English, they will learn easily by working with interesting topics. Boring or difficult things will not make them learn anything. It will spoil the whole process of learning. As most students are from villages or suburbs and are not interested in English, they want to escape from their lessons. As teachers, we have to remember that very few of the students are from English medium backgrounds; in fact most of them are from middle class and lower middle class families. In private universities all students are not of the same caliber. The methods they used to learn during their school and college life are not adequate. Somehow there is a gap in their learning process. Even there are students with study-gap who are often fossilized and reluctant to learn. So as university teachers we think they should be provided with some interesting passages. Rather than giving an exercise on prediction from Dickens’s *Great Expectation* or from Second World War poem, they will be benefited if they are given a passage from *Shadow Lines* or from a poem by Kaiser Haq. These types of students always want very short concise answers. Since teachers have to fulfill the need of students, they have to be given a very concise but effective passage. As they don’t have the scope to read a whole novel or a complete play, teachers have to give them significant extracts. These things will give them an idea of words and at the same time sentence construction. Moreover, they can predict easily if a familiar topic is given.

Some Examples

According to Alam (2007) “material used in language teaching must be interesting, enjoyable and stimulating.” Here are some examples of this quality.

There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, rivers from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometers inland and everyday thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily – some days the water tears away entire promontories. And peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and

sandbanks where there were none before. (2005)

This paragraph from *The Hungry Tide* is useful in this context. In *The Hungry Tide* we find description of the Sundarbans. For our students it will be very relevant context since they are quite familiar with the area. We are the people of a lower delta and people become victim of flood. The novel depicts how currents are so powerful that they can destroy existing shore lives and then throw up new land.

If we take Kaiser Haq’s poems from his book *Published in the Streets of Dhaka*, it will give students an essence of Dhaka. Here are two poems: “Bunny Sen” and “Civil Service Romance”.

been bugging around this goddamn city
for god knows how long-
feels like a thousand bloody years,
no kidding;

from bongshal’s rancid restaurants
to gulshan’s toxic lake

I’ve trod every effing inch
& on pitch-dark nights
of power outages as well.

i’ve been in burra kuttra
In grey twilight
& in distant rayerbazar
in moonless dark,

.....
i feel also bloody lutely
Knackered, i tell you,
just couldn’t go on
if it weren’t for a few moments
with ms bunny sen
of banglamotor.

.....
O her hair is like the dark sky
above sangsad bhaban
& her face is just
like aishwariya’s.

(from “ms. bunny sen”, Kaiser

Haq)

This piece can be utilized to give the essence of Dhaka city life to students, since it deals with elements, such as Gulshan’s toxic lake, Bongshal’s rancid restaurants, Rayerbaazar, Burra Kutra, Sangshad Bhaban etc. If students are asked to talk about Aishwariya, it will be easier for them to talk about her and in this way they are going to have an idea about the object of description and write a descriptive paragraph themselves.

The poem below by Haq can also be used as



an example of the use of preposition exercise.

Preposition Exercise

My love is in bathroom – but that is personal
cultural also
With neighbouring daughter going to cinema
And singing matter
To begin enjoyment of tourism you stay
In Dhaka hotel I suggest, Intercontinental
Or international, depending on taste and budget.
Both have modern bathroom and bar for
drunkenness
But former have swimming pool
And ball dancing facilities also.
Climate is no problem like Arctic or Shahrara.
In summer you may like birthday suit. (From
Civil Service Romance, Kaiser Haq)

The extract below from still another Haq
poem talks about familiar food of our country. It is
noticeable that the names of the food are not
translated that talks about Bengal tigers, deers,
Hindus and Muslims – in another words things of
our own culture and country which will make our
students feel a familiar world.

Food is Western if you desire, but please try
Local Moghul dishes – biriani, chicken
pilau, dahi barra
And sweetmeats – rashgolla, shandesh,
chom-chom And many more to name a few.
Sweetmeats give
Sweet taste in mouth to take home
For kissing near and dear ones sweetly.
Many are the places of interest
Like natural sceneries, rivers,
Forest with royal Bengal tiger and deers
(also monkeys) and longest sea-beach.
Also because of ancient history heritage
We are in many ruins, two very important,
Full of Hindu and Buddhist idols.

(From “Civil Service Romance”,
Kaiser Haq)

(Haq

97-99)

Jibanananda Das’s poetry is known by almost
every Bengali. “Banalata Sen” is his most famous
poem. Therefore, it will be a good idea if we take
Fakrul Alam’s translation of “Banalata Sen” or “I
Have Seen Beautiful Bengal”. The theme of the poem
is already known to most readers as well as the
students. The Bengali words that are used inside
make it wonderful. Some students are going to
benefit from the translation and it will stimulate their
imagination. Students are going to learn about
sentence structure, use of direct/indirect quotation,
capitalization, and use of punctuation marks etc.

This extract from “Banalata Sen” can be
served as an example of Punctuation and
capitalization.

Use of Punctuation and Capitalization

For a thousand years I have walked the ways of
the world,
From Sinhala’s Sea to Malaya’s in night’s
darkness,
Far did I roam. In Vimbisar and Ashok’s ash-
grey world
Was I present; farther off , in distant Vidarba
city’s darkness,
I, a tired soul, around me, life’s turbulent,
foaming ocean,
Finally find some bliss in Natore’s Banalata Sen.
.....

....
At the end of the day, with the soft sound of the
dew,
Night falls; the kite wipes the sun’s smell from
its wings ;
The world’s colour fade; fireflies light up the
world anew
Time to wrap up work and get set for the telling
odd tales;
All birds home = rivers too = life’s mart close
again;
What remains is darkness and facing me –
Banalata Sen!

(From “Banalata Sen”, Translated by
Fakrul Alam)

Another Das poem in translation is the following:

I have seen Bengal’s face, and seek no more,
The world has not anything more beautiful to
show me
Walking up in darkness, gazing at the fig tree, I
behold
Dawn’s swallows roosting under huge umbrella-
like leaves.

I look all around me and discover a leafy dome
Jam kanthalbat hijol aswatha trees all in a hush,
Shadowing clumps of cactus and zeodary
bushes.

When long, long ago, Chand came in his
honeycomb boat
To a blue Hijal bat Tamal shade near the
Champa, he too sighted

(From “I Have Seen Bengal’s Face”, Translated
by Fakrul Alam)

Again, this translation can help students to
take a look at an English poem where not a few of
the original Bangla words have not been translated.

Amit Choudhui is another contemporary
subcontinental writer whose writing can be made to



serve the purpose of teaching language through literature. His fluid language is more motivating and graspable than the polished ones of Dickens or Hardy.

'Now,' she said between clenched teeth, her voice shaking with her shaking body, 'now we turn the "jaam" into pulp, and mix it thoroughly with the mustard-oil and sugar.' She sounded like a woman on a cooking programme on radio. Politely, Sandeep enquired if he could have the opportunity of shaking the pan. With his aunt's permission, he took it in his hands and shook it vigorously, a mildly spiteful expression on his face. No mercy, no restraint was to be shown towards the 'jaam'. One by one, they took turn-his aunt, Sandeep, Abhi, even Babla-abandoning their civilized facades and letting themselves to the moment they held the pan, like prophets on the verge of a vision or epileptics surrendering to a seizure. In the end, the 'jaam' became soft and moist and pulpy, purplish in colour, both sweet and tangy, delicious. (2001)

We can use the passage to teach preposition, punctuation, past tense, subject-verb agreement, synonym-antonym etc. Since the names, the context and the atmosphere will be familiar, students will be comfortable with the text. The scene of pulping *jaam* can engage students more than the cryptic description of pork, pie, marmalade in a Christmas dinner of Joyce or Dickens. For literature students the passage is no less interesting. They can find out the images or work on the mood tone, atmosphere or overall setting of the text. To take another example, this passage by Nirad C. Choudhury has almost all the images – visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile and so on.

Our town was the gift of the river. We drank its water, although this water never allowed us to see the sides or the bottoms of the tumbler unless fetched very early in the morning. We bathed in the river, paddled in it, and when we got dry after our bathe we looked fairer than we really were with a coat of fine white sand. Sometimes we even glistened in the sun, thanks to the presence in the sand of minute specks of mica. The cows and elephants of the town also bathed in the river but, as a rule only after we had had our turn never alongside us often we ran

after our cow when the servant took her down for a wash. We took up the water in our folded hands and sniffing it, found it charged with the acrid smell of cattle, we also looked on with delight when the elephant of Joyka, a near neighbor of ours, waded majestically into the river and disported herself in it. She had a young companion, not her own calf though, who also came with here on occasion and had his bath in the river. (1998)

Teachers can also take the writing of Nirad C Choudhury as a material in language class. For example, the passage, taken from his auto biography, Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, offers a host of familiar sights and sounds as well as scope for grammatical activities. This passage is preferable to Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" or Shirley Jackson's "Lottery" as students will be more at a loss with the concept of a garden party or with the dogma of Puritan Society depicted in the English stories. If the teacher asks the students what they know about a garden party or the Puritan Society as warm-up exercises, there are few chances of their feeling ease and motivated. But we can ask for descriptions of a river in rain or to talk about the different purposes for which we use rivers, before going to the text like that of Nirad C. Choudhury which will engage the students emotionally and enable them to go ahead for grammatical exercises.

The following passage from Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* will remind students of the history of our country, 1947, Partition, and East Pakistan.

She had no time to go back to Dhaka in the next few years. And then, in 1947, came Partition, and Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan. There was no question of going back after that; she had never had any news of Jethamoshai and her aunt again. (1999)

Another passage from the same text can also be used in the language class.

And as I watch, the rickshaw begins to grow. It becomes huge, that rickshaw, it grows till it's bigger than the shops and the houses; so big that I can't see the old man sitting on top. But those men are running towards it, as fast as it grows,



they're scrambling up its wheels, up its poles, along the sides. They've forgotten us now; there's no one around us-they're all busy climbing up the rickshaw. The security guard jumps in, grinning, and shouts sometimes to the driver; he's telling him to start the car and get going while he can-to think about his face later.(1999)

This passage talks about the condition of the streets of Dhaka during a political upheaval. All the cars and rickshaws are rushing because of the tumult in the street is a sight familiar to our students as they are fully aware about Hartal day situations.

Conclusion

It was the British who introduced the study of English literature to the subcontinent. Macaulay (1835) had declared in his infamous Minute of 1835 that introducing English language was a good imperial policy because it would “form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”(qtd. in Alam 386). “Their purpose was to introduce European Literature and science among the native of India.” (qtd. in Alam 386) Therefore following those colonial texts blindly will be another name of submission. Here we must add that, this paper emphasizes using contemporary subcontinental literature in English language classes, not to claim its tigrity, if we borrow Wole Soyenka’s term but to make sure that our students should not forget that we are tigers. Besides, to survive in the increasingly competitive capitalist job market there is no alternative for the English language. Therefore, we believe this practice will pave the way for an assertion of local culture and essence and acceptance of global/hybrid/communicative language. Doesn’t it save us from being neo-colonized?

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