

Methods of Teaching: Performance Text

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Abstract: --“More important than the curriculum is the question of the methods of teaching and the spirit in which the teaching is given”- Bertrand Russell. Teaching is not just some text books or completion of syllabus; it is a feeling of joy, an exchange of ideas. Formal teaching methods cater to a select group of learners who are passive recipients of knowledge, while innovative teaching techniques reach out to a larger group and encourage discussion. From the lecture method to the use of technology, teaching has evolved over generations to suit its learners. Despite the evolution, literary texts have not been able to reach out to universal readership because of the barriers in region and restriction in language understanding. Therefore, to make provincial literature accessible globally, even to the unlettered masses, it is important to adopt a method based on symbolism and appreciation. With this objective, this paper aims to suggest an alternate way to make learning effective and lucid. Using a case study relating a 16th Century provincial literature to performance oriented symbolic learning, the author tries to drive home the message that learning cannot be restricted. The text used for reference is a Bengali MangalKavya, Mansa Mangal which has been adapted in the form of a classical dance drama to target universal readership. As we talk about our core objective of introducing performing arts to literature learning, we must regard the immense value it will add to the technique of imparting knowledge in this realm; like John Carolus said, “We think too much about effective methods of teaching and not enough about effective methods of learning”.

Keywords: --Methods of Teaching, Performance Text, Transcending Regional Barriers, Universal Readership.

Introduction

Gail Godwin aptly said, “Good teaching is one fourth preparation and three fourth theatre.” Teaching is regarded as an art which includes knowledge, presentation, objectivity and every aspect of paralinguistic. Teaching demands broad knowledge of subject matter, complete curriculum with standards, positive and caring attitude combined with enthusiasm, a desire for learning and a unique zeal to make a difference. Hence a good teacher is a motivator who builds an environment in which all students find themselves delving into an ocean of understanding as per their pace. A teacher acts as an aid and asks questions to encourage students to derive at conclusions. The quality of a teacher rests on how well they can involve the learners. William Arthur Ward has rightly said, “The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.” Various methods of teaching from the direct lecture method to the more modern interactive method all come with an objective to provide a better platform for understanding and stimulate thought and analysis. However, forcing to learn is rarely a fruitful way of imparting education especially in case of language learning which is essentially based more on feeling and appreciation. Therefore, learning through examples and experiences would probably be a more successful method than closed door text book learning.

Since literature has always been a reflection of society at large, students have found literature lucid and objective whenever it has been related to performance. Hence, the large numbers of movies that have been adapted from literary texts are accepted worldwide as aids in both teaching and learning. This drives home the necessity to believe that literature has the inherent power to transcend regional barriers. Whether politics or romance, existing social structure to changes in society, literature can reach out to all classes, cultures, language backgrounds, ethnicities, gender and age groups. It has been proven over time that literature and performance are inextricably linked. From Plato’s dialogues to Walcott’s Omeros, from Tagore’s dance dramas to Bob Dylan’s lyrics, from Shakespeare’s plays to Agha Shahid Ali’s ghazals, the interplay of the oral/aural, the performative and the written has always enriched cultural and philosophical thought. Written forms of poetry, fiction and non-fiction have strong dramatic elements and traces of orality embedded in them. On the other hand, the reception of the written text, be it Chaucer’s England or contemporary India has involved not just silent reading but also telling, hearing, seeing, adapting. While we expect theatre to be performance, that is the display and movement of human bodies in space, drama always has been appropriated by literature. However, the notion of performance extends far beyond theatre to a whole range of performance events, ancient and modern such as sports, ritual, political action and resistance, music concerts etc. Therefore, it is worth examining how textuality and performativity develop and reflect different ways of thinking about identity and place especially with the emergence of new technologies of communication. It is crucial at this juncture to move beyond the beaten tracks of learning, scrutinize the interplay between text, sound, spectacle, image and performance, so that learning is not limited to a single language alone and that even

texts in vernacular languages can reach out to a wider readership. Each piece of literature has its own place and each in its own merit demands understanding and acceptance. Hence, newer methods of teaching must be incorporated so that no literary text ever falls short of universal reception. As teachers, instructors, facilitators; we must first believe that not all BomkeshBakshis have to be replaced with Sherlock Holmes, Manihara does not have to lose its essence in The Lost Jewels, PanchParmeshwar does not have to change its form to God Lives in the Panch to attract global readership

Methods of Teaching

Teaching methods can be crucial in the path of imparting knowledge. It inherently depends on the target learners. A good teacher moulds their methods to suit the class and facilitate optimum effective learning. The teaching methods prevalent can be broadly broken down into four categories.

1. Instructor centred method- The teacher here is the master of the subject matter and is looked upon as an expert or authority. Learners are assumed to be passive recipients.
2. Learner centred method- The teacher here plays a dual role of an instructor as well as a learner. The teacher becomes a resource rather than an authority.
3. Content focussed method- Here, the information and skills to be taught are regarded as sacrosanct. Emphasis is laid on clarity and careful analysis of content. In this method, neither the teacher nor the learner is allowed to be critical of the content.
4. Interactive method- This method is driven by situational analysis of the most appropriate thing. It requires a participatory understanding of varied domains and factors.

Keeping these broad ideas in mind, a number of specific methods are used in class room instruction. These methods can be enumerated as follows:

1. Lecture method- A lecture is an oral presentation of information by the instructor. It is the method of relaying factual information. In a lecture, the instructor is active, and the trainees are passive.
2. Discussion method- This involves two-way communication between the participants. Both the instructor as well as the trainees spend some time talking and the rest listening. This method encourages sharing of experiences, ideas and attitudes.
3. Demonstration lesson- Demonstration is defined as any planned performance of an occupational skill, scientific principle or experiment.
4. Buzz groups- This method allows participants to express their opinions. Here, a plenary group is broken into sub groups to discuss specific issues. While buzzing, participants are able to exchange ideas and draw on a wider collective experience.
5. Brainstorming- The purpose of this method is to discover new ideas and responses quickly. It focuses on generating as many ideas as possible within a short span of time. After the session, the ideas are enumerated and evaluated.
6. Role plays- In this method, participants use their own experiences to play a real-life situation. Role plays increase self-confidence of participants and gives them the opportunity to understand and empathize with the view-points of others. Role plays are useful in helping participants to consolidate different lessons in one setting. This technique provides opportunity for the instructor and the participants to raise and access new issues.
7. Seminars and tutorials- This method is often led by an academic tutor and involves a presentation. The format is informal and promotes open discussion around specific topics or theories.
8. Field trips- This method helps to put the theoretical knowledge into practice. It allows participants to explore specific areas or learn particular techniques effectively. This method strengthens the bond between participants and encourages sharing and discussion.
9. Projects- This method is an educational enterprise in which learners research on a particular idea or solve a practical problem over a period of several days. Projects facilitate in-depth understanding of the subject matter and create interest among the participants to delve deeper into their areas of interest.
10. Learning using multimedia- In this method, short films, television clips, written articles, blog postings are used to reinforce concepts and spark discussion. This method aids in learning since content is presented both in verbal and visual forms. The use of media sources help to connect learners with events that are culturally relevant. It encourages students to hone their analytical skills and experience worlds beyond their own.

Table I summarizes the various existing instructional methods and their applications in a nut-shell.

Proposal- Relating Literature To Performing Arts as a Medium of Instruction

The stated methods of teaching have influenced students over generations and motivated them towards learning. With the advent of technology, methods of teaching have also revamped itself to suit the current generation. Use of movies, as an alternate literary text has gained prominence. However, the objective of reaching out still remains a far-fetched idea. The relevance of the proposal links itself to the fact that literature and performance are intrinsically linked. To make literature reading a universal phenomenon transcending regional barriers, it is extremely important to introduce an inter-disciplinary method of learning. Such a method will stimulate audience across all regions, language backgrounds and ethnicities as well as impart information. It will encourage learners to question and demand analysis of symbolism. It is important to remember that literature and performance together can incorporate essential elements of both with an aim to explore the dynamic relationship between the two. Conventional literary study lays emphasis on close reading, critical writing and discussion whereas performance uses practical, aesthetic, symbolic elements. The interaction between the two is the key scope of this method of teaching-learning. A distinctive outcome of this synthesis is the performance of a piece transformed from poetry or prose. In this creative method, text is viewed from different angles in a manner that goes beyond the characteristics of literary or performing art studies as single disciplines. It seeks to develop intellect, imagination and creativity. It encourages intercultural awareness through study of texts from more than one culture.

The link between literature and performance as used as a medium of instruction aims to achieve the following:

1. Equip students with the skill to explore critically and imaginatively a range of literary texts and performance possibilities
2. Develop in students the ability to articulate their responses to literature and performance in a variety of styles and contexts
3. Introduce students to a range of performance skills
4. Broaden the perspective of students through the exploration of texts from different cultures, periods and genres
5. Foster a personal and passionate engagement with literature and performance and guide students towards a better understanding of themselves and the world

Hence, using the performance-text method, it is possible to reach out to a universal readership transgressing the borders of language and regionalism. Since language inherently has a regional approach, every literary text in a vernacular language caters to the sensibilities of only a limited group. In this context, it is possible to argue about the value of translated texts. However, it must be accepted that it would be impossible to translate any text to all the languages of the world. Moreover, with every translation, the point of view of the translator seeps into the main text. Therefore, the readers with every translation, imbibe a different outlook to the same narrative ultimately resulting in the author's point of view replaced by the translator's viewpoint. It is also important to note that written texts limit itself solely to the elite, educated sections of the society while the remaining unlettered masses would definitely be left out of the joy of knowing and the knowledge regarding the social implications of the narrative. To justify the relevance of this method of instruction better, a case study has been used considering a 16th Century provincial Bengali MangalKavya, Mansa Mangal adapted in the form of a classical dance drama in Bharatanatyam style. MangalKavya is a group of Bengali Hindu religious texts notably consisting of narratives of indigenous deities of rural Bengal in the social scenario of the Middle Ages. The MangalKavya tradition is an archetype of the synthesis between Vedic and popular folk culture of India. Lila Ray elaborates, "Indigenous myths and legend inherited from Indo-Aryan cultures began to blend and crystallize around popular deities and semi-mythological figures in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A new cosmogony was evolved, different from Sanskrit tradition but has an unmistakable affinity with the cosmogonic hymns in Rigveda and the Polynesian myth of creation."

In this adaptation of this traditional regional literature, dance is used to render the text lucid and easily understandable without the use of spoken language in the form of words, conversations or even songs. The written and verbal language is replaced by a performative language which can reach out to everyone. Provinciality, a major shortcoming in the propagation of this almost historical account of 16th Century South Bengal in its physicality as well as socio-political and cultural issues can be overcome rendering it easily accessible to the present generation irrespective of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Mansa Mangal is an important account that anticipated major societal changes, raised issues pertinent even today and hence the choice of this text. Since a performance caters to the senses of both sight and sound, hence the learners come to appreciate and retain the lesson better than silent reading. A dull, tedious reading of a society with its internal political turmoil anticipating upheaval for the establishment of democracy is conveyed within a span of a few hours simplistically. Therefore, it can be argued that using performing arts to teach literary texts is a relevant way of not only imparting knowledge but also creating an environment conducive to learning, gleefully overcoming linguistic barriers conveniently.

Case Study: Mansa Mangal

The concept of Devi Mansa had already existed in ancient literary texts like Padma Purana, Devi Bhagwat and BrahmabaibartaPurana. However, the concept came to be popularized in Bengal much later to ward away the fear of snakes. In the late 15th and early 16th Century, the text was composed by Bijoy Gupta, Narayan Deb and BipradasPiplai. Mansa Mangal was primarily performed by singing bards in the outer courtyard of the temples during festivals. The primary aim of a mythical literature is to capture the physical setting of the place of action. The said narrative was set in lower Bengal, heavily forested and snake infested. This setting formed the motive behind the creation of the Snake Goddess or Mansa. Instead of using winding descriptive passages to describe the setting, the idea is simplistically conveyed by dancers emoting the movement of snakes. It is important to note here that an extremely complex idea of man being the real creator of Gods and not vice versa is conveyed effectively through the use of performance alone within a span of a few minutes and through a few expressions, gestures and postures. Since deaths due to snake bites were common in 16th Century South Bengal and commoners knew no cure for snake venom, the Snake Goddess was created; who they believed could cure them of the menace. Symbolism is used in the blue costume and the crown of snakes to conveniently establish Goddess Mansa to the readers. The benevolence of the Snake Goddess is portrayed aptly through a scene where she is seen lovingly tending to the snakes making her a round character. The portrayal of a God-fearing society is evident through scenes where natural phenomenon are ascribed to the blessing or wrath of Gods. Pages of silent reading to arrive at such conclusions is replaced with minutes of visual performance. 16th Century Bengal was highly influenced by class prejudice. Brahmins or the priests were considered to be the only ones educated and knowledgeable. They were believed to have the remedies to everything. The upper handedness of the Brahmins becomes evident when Dhanwantari, the local Brahmin doctor cures those who have succumbed to snake bite. Though ayurvedic treatment is seen to have seeped into the prevailing society, yet evidently it was not available or affordable for commoners. The Vaishyas or the merchant class is represented by the protagonist Chand Saudagar in the text. He is represented as a rich and influential man who dares to defy even the Gods. He is portrayed as a dictator. The use of a bright red costume and a huge crown can be symbolically equated with his pride, anger and ego. His body language reflects tall, straight bold strides making him a man who stands his ground even in the harshest of situations like the death of his sons. All member of the upper caste depicts pure classical movements portraying their cultural refinement, status and education. Contrary to this, the Shudras or the working class are represented by the fishermen in the dance drama. Their costumes and folk style movements loudly proclaim their poverty and lack of refinement. Their short, couched movements convey their oppression and hunger clearly. It is through these have-nots that Goddess Mansa enters the social fabric. Character traits and cultural backgrounds is easily analyzed through performance without having to go through an arduous reading. Not only was the caste system an important feature of 16th Century Bengal but it was also dominated by class prejudice. Two clear economic divisions are portrayed in the dance drama through costumes and style of movement. The class snobbery in its extremity had established a clear hierarchy even among the deities worshipped in Bengal. The upper castes were worshippers of the Vedic or Aryan deities in Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati placed at the apex of the religious hierarchy. The lower non-Aryan Gods of folk traditions like Mansa had to struggle for her recognition and acceptance in society. Chand Saudagar, the devout worshipper of Lord Shiva refused to accept folk deities or the lesser Gods like Mansa. A heated debate between Goddess Parvati and Goddess Mansa where Parvati chides Mansa for her desire to gain public acceptance reflects the heights of class prejudice prevalent in society. The Snake Goddess is easily accepted by the working class but shunned by the affluent Chand Saudagar since his economic condition allowed him a protected shelter away from the susceptibility of snake bites. The patriarchal nature of the existing society acted as a hindrance in Goddess Mansa's public acceptance since Chand Saudagar was the leader and a patriarch. It was his acceptance alone that could bring her the desired objective of being worshipped universally. The role of women in the social fabric of 16th Century Bengal is evident in this narrative. The oppression of women in a patriarchal society is reflected in the pathos of Sanaka, the grief-stricken wife of Chand Saudagar who seeing the death of her sons, pays homage to Mansa in a gathering of the working class. She is rebuked by her husband clearly exhibiting that women lacked the basic rights to even choose their faiths. When Chand Saudagar's youngest son is married to Behula, an important female character emerges who takes her first steps towards a change in society. Behula is the beacon of progress, she is determined, talented and strong enough to defy the norms set by society. Behula breaks away from the societal norm of having upper class women restricted within the boundaries of the house. She sails with her dead husband determined to bring him back to life. She is successful in doing so but by paying a heavy price. She dances to please and entice Lord Shiva who grants her the boon. It is crucial to note here that a woman, no matter how outgoing, progressive and confident had finally had to bow down to the male domination in society. The main idea behind the text was to reflect a desire in women to make their independent presence in society felt but clearly the liberation and enfranchisement of women was still a far-fetched dream. The use of symbolic elements challenges the reader audiences to think and analyze what they see. The use of lights and stage props convey simplistically what would ideally require pages of narration.

Chand Saudgar finally worships Goddess Mansa.

She uses several methods of deception, fear, distress and grave loss to establish herself in society. She poisoned the sons of Chand Saudagar, wrecked his ships at sea. The pathos of a lost and ruined protagonist is aptly reflected in the expressions and body language of the dancer. Severe misfortune forced him to pay his homage to the Goddess though he used his left hand to offer his prayer. The complexities within the internal fabric of the prevailing society, when expressed in words, are difficult to convey. Quick expressions and movements make it poignant and easy to follow. The most important socio-political change portrayed is the rise of the middle class. The working class gained its foothold and equitable distribution of wealth paved the way towards the first stages in democracy. Goddess Mansa bestows food and wealth on the working classes point towards an equitable distribution of wealth. At the close of the performance, clearly dictatorship is overthrown. The most important message conveyed lucidly is that society is made up of people from all walks of life and all religious, economic and educational denominations and that society cannot be governed by a single man alone no matter how powerful or influential.

Table I: Comparison of Existing Instructional Methods

Method	Uses	Advantages	Disadvantages
Lecture Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To orient students To introduce a subject To present basic material To introduce demonstration, discussion, performance To illustrate application of rules, principles, concepts To review, clarify, emphasize or summarize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saves time Permits flexibility Requires less space Permits adaptability Permits versatility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involves one way communication Poses problems in teaching skills Students remain passive Poses difficulty in gauging student understanding
Discussion Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop imaginative solution to problems To stimulate thinking To secure student participation To supplement lectures, readings To determine student understanding To summarize, clarify, review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase student interest Increase student acceptance Utilises student knowledge and experience Results in more permanent learning because of student participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires preparation on part of students Limits content Consumes time Restricts size of groups
Demonstration Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To teach manipulative operations or procedures To teach trouble shooting To illustrate principles To teach team work To set standards of workmanship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise damage and waste Saves time Can be presented in groups Builds confidence Enables learning evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires careful preparation and rehearsal Requires special classroom arrangements
Buzz Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop and express imaginative ideas and opinions Stimulate thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help trainers to draw breath Gauge the mood of participants Change pace of discussion Encourage participants to reflect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unfamiliarity in use Time required Need for group leaders
Brainstorming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To discover new ideas, thoughts and responses quickly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads to animated and energised sessions More reserved participants feel free to contribute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time consuming May not work with trainees who are not familiar with each other
Role Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore interviewing techniques and examine complexities and potential conflicts To consolidate different lessons in one setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energizer Promotes empathy among trainees Encourages creativity in learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants might be reluctant May not work with trainees who are unfamiliar
Seminar Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide general guidance for advanced study To exchange information and approaches of members of a research group To develop new and imaginative solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides motivation and report Stimulates active participation Permits adaptive instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poses evaluation problem Expensive
Tutorial Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reach highly complicated skills easily To provide individualised remedial assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permits adaptive instruction Stimulates active participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demands time and money

Performance and text are two sides of the same coin. They go hand in hand, always complementing each other for better understanding and reception. Both are heavily dependent on one another such that one is probably incomplete without the other. Monotony sets in with silent arduous reading or lecture method of teaching of a lengthy text strewn with figures of speeches and complicated connotations. But the same narrative is rendered charming, lucid, spreading an aura that takes its readers back in time

when expressed through performance. Erudition occurs through both visual as well as auditory mediums of reception. Performance-text evidently justifies the value of this statement. Music used within the scope of the dance drama conveys within limited time crucial details that add to the value of the reading. The benevolent nature of Goddess Mansa behind her apparent wrath is effectively conveyed with the use of Raga Sama. The protagonist merchant, Chand Saudagar's role as a defiant dictator is evident in the use of Raga MargaHindolam. Raga Kalyani is used an effective tool in driving home a feeling of anger and utter disgust on part of the Aryan Goddess Parvati towards the folk deity Mansa. Raga Reethigowla becomes a symbol of Behula's subjugation, a mark of sacrifice of her self-esteem within the set norms of patriarchal society. Conspiracy and fear in Raga Chakravakam, compassion in Raga Amrithavahini forms the soul of the dance drama conveying essential emotions at the root of the core text. These psychological elements are important factors in the understanding of a text that is set in the 16th Century time frame and brings it back to life even in the 21st Century with equal charm and poignancy. The performance closes with a society united in prayer, the feeling of devotion in Raga Jaganmohini, reinstates a change within the societal structure and clearly establishes the feeling of the old giving way to the new. Knowledge is like a vaulted gateway that recedes the more one approaches it. It is never-ending and probably a life time is not enough to master it. It is capable of breaking down the known barriers to establish itself as a beacon of hope. It can enlighten all those in quest of it. Closed door teaching and text book learning was shunned by William Wordsworth in the 17th Century in his celebrated Lucy poem, "Three Years she grew in Sun and Shower." He wrote,

"The Girl, in rock and plain,

In Earth and heaven, in glade and bower, Shall feel an overseeing power

To kindle or restrain...."

He emphasized that learning outcomes are most effective when learning occurs without restrictions, beyond the known realms, effectively from the known to the unknown.

Using the Performance method to teach narratives beyond language barriers, the aim is to move towards a global set-up where dialect isn't a hindrance, where the world is not broken into fragments, where no men are foreign, where knowledge and understanding is just a meagre grasp away.

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