

## Humanities in the Era of Science

by Usha Bande

*Humanities and Pedagogy:  
Teaching of Humanities Today*  
ed. K. C. Baral

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"Words alone are certain good." W.B. Yeats' line came to my mind when I sat down to review K.C. Baral's *Humanities and Pedagogy*. Words indeed have a potency that gives the language its magical power to construct and reconstruct our experiences, renew and revitalize the human institutions and transmit culture. In today's scenario of globalization, the necessity of contextualizing humanistic education and evolving a holistic approach to teaching in which the global, the local and the cultural coalesce cannot be overlooked. It is in this context that the work under review, the first of its kind to focus on the challenging pedagogical situation today, assumes significance. It examines the problematic and attempts to offer through the "discrete and discursive" discourses fundamental insights into the complex texture of Indian culture and the possibility of comprehending its concepts through pedagogical practices so as to make it relevant to the contemporary reality.

Simply and briefly, 'Pedagogy' means the "science and principles of teaching," and as an important practice within the humanities, it "needs to be strengthened in our search for meaning, significance and connections," says the editor. Referring to the teaching of English Literature in particular, Baral points out that it is necessary to invoke our own cultural and pedagogical instruments so that the teaching of English literature in India becomes valuable from the viewpoint of our culture and tradition. *Humanities and Pedagogy* underscores a sensitive Indian approach to the teaching of Humanities. This approach, all the critics seem to affirm, advocates thinking

with and through Indian speculative instrumentalism instead of merely developing parallelism and analogy. It envisages a more relaxed attitude to teaching and learning—instead of the stereotypical, highly intellectual, academic exercise—to ensure a broad-based approach to literary response. The book examines the philosophical foundations of the humanities, both Indian and Western to explore their pedagogical possibilities and offers insightful suggestions.

In his crisp and precise 'Introduction' to the volume, the editor emphasizes the importance of re-examining our "uncritical acceptance" of the literary theories imported from the West and to scrutinize the possibility of revalidating our traditional methods of disseminating and refining knowledge. In this process, the teacher has an important role to play because a teacher of literature is also a critic of literature. The significant issues in teaching literature and literary theory are: to sensitize the students to the mechanics of language, exploit the behavior of words in various contexts and to situate the meaning as it configures their cultural and social milieu. What C.D. Narasimhaiah said (in another context) can well be quoted here, "When criticism wins attention to language as the poetic testament of the genius of a people, culture will take care of itself."

The sixteen papers contained in *Humanities and Pedagogy* focus on the philosophical, traditional, cultural, critical and theoretical aspects of pedagogy in the teaching of humanities in the present context of information technology boom and globalization. I shall refer first to the last essay in the book

entitled 'Continuing the Space of Identification in Anthropological Discourse' by Glenn Bowman as the critic tries to redefine the cultural space in the present post-modern scenario. But before that let us see what Franz Fanon has to say about native cultures, precisely because Bowman's essay focuses on the aspect of cultural identity in the modern and post-modern context. Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* opines, "A national culture is not folk-lore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover a people's true nature. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence." Bowman avers that the categorization of native cultures as 'fixed' in time and space has undergone a radical change in the post-colonial era. Humanity does not have a common identity and pedagogy has to take into consideration the questions of continuity and difference. The anthropological discourse can be of immense value in conceptualizing the method to identify the other by striving "to see the other from the subject positions the others occupy" and "through identifying with the other as subject" (p.151).

In his paper "Education as a Cultural Process," M.M. Agarwal laments that the basic concept of education for the transmission of culture and cultural values has been impaired by the onslaught of the consumer-oriented, materialistic, global approach, with the result that education has "suffered acute cultural alienation" (p.17). The Indian cultural tradition expects an evolved

person to syncretize the inner and outer experiences into a single vision of life. Education is a liberating force (saa vidya yaa vimuchtye); it should therefore awaken the integrated intelligence of the learner and give him the creative urge, which will lead him on the path of quest for Truth, Beauty and Goodness — a concept that lies at the foundation of our culture. Agarwal argues that pedagogy should not aim at equipping the learners to acquire theoretical knowledge; it should lead him to self-discovery through self-knowing.

R.C. Pradhan explores the philosophical foundations of human sciences and offers an alternative account of pedagogy as a method of cultural renewal. Humanities is a study of man, society, language and culture. Together they form the dynamics of culture and together they are called the higher order of life. The most effective method to transmit and revitalize the culture is through pedagogy because teachers are the real missionaries of the culture and civilization. It is imperative, Pradhan contends, to study, interpret and re-interpret the great Eastern and Western masters like Shakespeare, Kalidas, Homer, Virgil, Valmiki, Vyasa and others from a culture-based angle and communicate the meaning to the new generation, thus guaranteeing cultural continuity.

Humanities, claims S. Nagarajan, engages itself in recognizing the humanistic aspects of human achievements through the study of arts, social sciences, languages and literature which together are termed humanities. In the Indian system of thought the *Trivarga* (i.e. dharma-artha-kama purushartha) are given primary importance and the cultural values can be transmitted into the students through the study of values enshrined in the great literature. The philosophical views are rendered by Louis W. Hodges and Nigel Joseph who discuss the moral purpose of education and the significance of 'truth' in pedagogy, respectively and suggest

incorporation of ethical and moral values in the educational pattern.

Imparting education in literature and particularly English literature is seminal to the book under review. A systematic exposition is offered by J.C. Mahanti whose piece 'Literature as a Discipline of Thought: The Why of Literary Pedagogy' makes a convincing reading. Mahanti starts with Vishnu Sharma's *Panchatantra* to show how through "literary frame" the "unteachable" princes were taught the finer points of sociology and governance, making literary pedagogy a pleasurable exercise. Literary pedagogy, which consists of *Kathas*, *Puranas*, the *Bhagwatgita* and the *Kavyas*, can afford a concrete basis for interrogating the origin, status and significance of the native culture and literature. He further states that teaching and interpreting classical/canonical indigenous literature ensures preservation of culture and cultural perspective whereas the teaching of foreign literature is an enriching exercise as it is a comparative method that leads the students to comprehend their culture/ literature.

Kapil Kapoor makes a case for understanding English literature through the Indian socio-cultural context, while Mohan Ramanan and A.V. Ashok draw attention to the teaching of English and the critical paradigms respectively. The anthology also covers important fields like multimedia, global network, the place of our ancient Sanskrit tradition in pedagogy, making the work all-inclusive.

K.C. Baral's piece 'Critical Theory and Pedagogy' turns the gaze from culture and the teaching of English literature to the critical aspect of pedagogy. Baral systematically critiques the traditional critical practice of considering a work of literature as an organic and unified entity and points out that in the post-modern, post-structuralist era, the author-text-reader nexus has been replaced by the all-too-significant question of cultural/social identity. Pedagogy should beware of the dangers of narrowing the definition of identity to constricted individual and

sectarian identity and strengthen the concept of the broader national identity. The main thrust of Baral's argument is that along with creating regional and national identities, the aim of literary pedagogy is to have a global vision attained by "turning his/her learning as an ice-axe to break the sea frozen within him" (p.65).

On the whole the sleek and beautifully brought out book *Humanities and Pedagogy* with attractive jacket, is one of the seminal works scrutinizing the significant issues relating to pedagogical possibilities in the teaching of humanities, including the teaching of English, in the era of science and technology, and suggesting viable methods for a purposeful humanistic teaching in India. The important thing is to make the teaching of humanities an effective bridge between cultural and national identities on the one end and the requirement of the global market on the other. The present work re-examines the contemporary reality of Indian culture and literary challenges in the light of recent theoretical debates and makes a plea to reinstate faith in the possibility of Indian aesthetic tradition. The essays are erudite, convincingly argued and precisely written in a language that is free of jargons and incomprehensible terminology. The book is well documented, indexed, and meticulously handled both with regard to printing and proof-reading. The Pencraft's initiative in publishing *Humanities and Pedagogy* is commendable as it gives a new perspective on teaching making it an invigorating exercise and generating new critical sensibilities. It is, indeed, a significant addition to the shelves of scholars in the field and of immense value to research students in the disciplines of pedagogy, cultural studies, humanities, and literary studies.

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