



Revisiting
Language and Literature

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**REVISITING LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE**

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The Language of a Play: 'Being within and Experiencing....'

Dr. Shampa Chakravarthy

My paper does not aim to deal with the classical definitions of the genres of literature; nor does it intend to study the theoretical aspects of the various forms in general and drama in particular. As students or rather teachers of literature, we have been dealing with these aspects almost all the time. My observations are solely based upon some experiments that I have dared to conduct in my class while teaching a play.

I am sure you all agree with me that teaching a play as compared to other forms of literature offers a teacher greater creative freedom. A conscientious teacher is free to use all the possible resources at his disposal to make the entire process of teaching drama as innovative as possible. Our method of giving information should try not to provoke the level of student interaction with the source material alone. We as teachers should be conscious of the fact that it is not enough to furnish what we think the students need to know; we must also respond to what they want to know. Hence, a teacher should endeavour to direct the imagination of the students away from the text into the characters and help them study and understand the play against the background of its setting, time and history.

A classroom session in teaching of drama could begin with occasional questions from the teacher followed by a discussion on the background, history, content, form, philosophy and style of the text. However, in order to transform the single human experience in a play into an entire enjoyable experience and to humanize several abstract issues into real life experience, one may have to look beyond the text as a printed matter.

The 'language' of a play is not the same as the other genres of literature in the sense that it must be translatable into audiovisual scenes which can be projected by a group of performers to a group of spectators. A play, must therefore, be regarded as a psycho-physical activity rather than a purely psychological exercise. Mere reading of a play with the text laid out before them may not arrest and sustain the attention of the students as much as when enacted. However, one cannot ignore the fact that enacting a play on stage is enriched by art forms and techniques such as background music, lighting,

sets and costumes but while enacting it in a classroom, we may have to restrict ourselves to the unadorned body of the performer and concentrate on the rituals alone, devoid of any mechanical device.

A play can be enjoyed to its fullest possible extent when 'experienced' rather than when 'taught'. The language of a play is 'being within experiencing' and not just viewing and hearing from a separate sanctum at a distance. The concept of Theatre-in-the-Round in London in 1957-58 that spread to France in 1963 was a form of play presentation in which the audience is seated all around the acting area. Exponents of this form of theatre argued that dramatization of a play does not require to function within the confines of a stage; all it needs is space.

Having understood this, I, as a teacher of drama, dared to make a few innovations. The need for an experimental thrust to understand the incomparable craftsmanship of a playwright proved to be a driving force for some play-acting in a make-shift environment. Thus, an acting area was created in the classroom by moving the benches against walls. Students, except those playing various roles in the play were asked to temporarily do away with the text of the play. The students seated themselves all around the acting area and eagerly watched the play being enacted. As the students played the various characters in the play, there was not a comment, not a murmur, not even a sigh or rustle from the audience. No one had even realized that the bell had gone! All that was heard at the end of the play was a huge applause followed by requests for many more such sessions. I had, for certain, achieved my goal. My students had experienced and felt the play and not just read it.

Theatricalization of a play involves intense emotional communication. There is a man-to-man, gut-to-gut communication of a variety of emotions. When students play the characters, they learn to use appropriate gestures, facial expressions and body language; they also familiarize themselves with other important aspects of play reading or acting such as proper pronunciation, dialogue delivery, pitch level, voice setting, vowel space, exclamations, emphasis and much more. Students' involvement in reading a play by pondering upon its nuances with an uncanny ear for catching the rhythm in dialogue made a class of drama a lively and enriching experience. That, silence or pause too can speak volumes was very well understood through dramatization of a play. An exercise of this kind offered a great amount of flexibility to both, the teacher and the students. It helped break down the

barriers of communication in a classroom and also brought to fore many hidden talents among students. The outcome of this experiment was the realization that a writer's creation- a play when enacted, no longer remained a mere piece of literature to be read and enjoyed privately. When a group of students performed the play, with others assembled as spectators it was easily transformed into an entertaining experience thereby making it a novel way of instruction.

All said and done, limited amount of instructional time is always a big concern for teachers. In our system of text book - oriented teaching and examination - oriented learning, the use of creative and innovative methods has to take into consideration the factor of time effectiveness. But an innovative exercise of this kind once in a while definitely serves to break away from the monotony of the run of the mill education and enjoy the pleasures of experimentation in whatsoever little way.

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