

Literature in Primary Classes

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The discourse around language-teaching in primary classes generally centres on methods of teaching children how to read and write, and the effort involved in putting these methods into practice in the class. The dimension of literature in learning to read and write, or the joy of learning is relegated to the background in this discourse, especially since most of the children in our schools are still struggling to 'learn with understanding'. However, in order to 'learn with understanding' one must also learn about facets of literature. In this article, I will examine certain basic ideas related to literature in primary classes.

The teaching of literature begins the moment we start telling stories and reciting poems to children. These stories and poems are then discussed with them. In the process of discussing the stories, children get an opportunity to share and add their own experiences. As they do this, they simultaneously try to understand the experiences of other children, thereby widening their own horizons and thinking. Further, these experiences can also be used to explore socio-cultural values. For instance, if we are reading Premchand's story "Bade Bhai Sahib" with the children, we can discuss the prevalent system of school education with the children, and raise questions about the examination system. Similarly, while reading Mahasweta Devi's story "Kyoon-Kyoon Chhori" published by Tulika, we can talk about the education of under-privileged children. To add to this list, Rabindranath Tagore's "Jorasanko Waala Ghar" and Satyajit

Ray's "Jab Main Chota Tha" expose the children to the milieu of an educated, elite class of children, whereas Premchand's "Idgah" published by National Book Trust and "Zoo ki Kahani" and "Ismat ki Eid" published by Tulika are stories of children belonging to what are generally known as the common, ordinary class of people. The study of such literature can be used to unfold wider perspectives for the children. Teaching of literature thus involves sensitizing the children to various experiences and issues as also widening their vision and thought.

At this point I would like to emphasize that teaching a lesson in class does not just involve telling the meanings of difficult words, writing answers to the questions given at the end of the lesson, and thinking that this is what teaching is all about. What is more important is a good discussion on the content and the subject matter of the lesson. After all, the objective of teaching a language is to create, in the children, an interest in reading, and to develop good reading habits. This naturally involves various dimensions of literature.

Literature is a great source of joy and teaching it with that awareness can really add value to its teaching. When one comes to think of it, children relish and enjoy reading pieces of literature such as "Budhiya ki Roti", "Pyaasi Maina", "Pakki Dosti", "Bus ki Sair", "Lalu Peelu", "Main Bhi...", "Kajri Gaay Jhoolay Par", "Pippi", "Lambay Mozay" etc. In fact they even add details from their own imagination

to these readings; for their imagination is in tune with the imagination of these stories. It is to be noted that the children also enjoy reading foreign books such as “Kajri Gaay”, “Pippi ke Lambay Mozay” for the richness of their content. If they are reading something like “Billee ke Bachchay” published by Eklavya, they feel amused and entertained by the story of the kittens who bathe in the pond and come out of a pipe with smoke.

In order to develop their interest in literature, it is essential to draw the childrens’ attention to the beauty of the language so that they are able to recognize and appreciate this beauty. The poems in the junior classes—with their lyrics, rhythm and pattern of sounds—are a source of joy and entertainment for the children. Some examples of such poems include Prayag Shukla’s “Dhammak Dhammak Aataa Haathi, Oont Chala Bhai Oont Chala”; Shri Prasad ji’s “Haathi Challam Challam”; Nirankar Dev Sewak’s “Titlee aur Kali” and “Tesu Raja Beech Bazaar”; Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena’s “Ibn Batuta”; Ram Krishna Khaddar’s “Bandar Bhoop”; and Nagarjuna’s “Akaal aur us ke Baad”. We should discuss the lyrics, rhythm and patterns of sounds in these poems with the children, and also try to bring to their attention the imagination and pictorial quality of some of these poems. Here is a sample of some poems that are rich in imagination:

Bandar Bhoop

*Bandar gayaa khet mein bhaag
Chuttar-muttar toda saag.
Aag jalaakar chattar-mattar
Saag banaaya khaddar-baddar.
Saapad-soopad khaayaa khoob
Ponchaa munhu khaad kar doob.
Chhalni bichhaa, odh kar soup
Dat kar soye Bandar bhoop.*

Nirankar Dev Sewak’s poem ‘Titlee aur Kali’ also excites the imagination of children:

*Hari daal par lagi huee thee
Nanhi sundar ek kalee.
Titlee us se aa kar bolee
Tum lagtee ho badi bhalee.
Ab jaago tum aankhein kholo
Aur hamaare sung khelo.
Phailay sundar mahak tumhaaree
Mahkay saaree galee-galee.
Kalee chhitak kar khilee rangeelee
Turant khel kee sun kar baat.
Saath hawaa ke lagee bhaagne
Titlee chhoonay usay chalee.*

Similarly, Nagarjuna’s poem ‘Akaal aur us Kay Baad’ is also worth a mention here. In this poem, the poet gives a beautiful account of the scene during and after a famine, which the children can be exposed to. The teacher may also draw attention to the rhythm and sounds in the poem:

*Kaee dinon tak choolhaa royaa chak kee
rahee udaas
Kaee dinon tak kaanee kutiyaa soee
unkay paas
Kaee dinon tak lagee bheet par chhipka
liyon kee gasht
Kaee dinon tak choohon kee bhee haalat
rahee shikast.
Daanay aae ghar ke andar kaee dinon
kay baad
Dhukaan uthaa aangan say oopar kaee
dininon kay baad
Chamak utheen ghar bhar kee aankhein
kaee dinon kay baad
Kauvvay ne khujlaaee paankhein kaee
dininon kay baad.*

In the stories, the attention of children can be drawn to how the language has been used. For example:

Saamnay kee kyaaree mein bhindiyan ke oonchay-oonchay paudhe thay. Ek ore seetaphal kee ghanee bail phailee huee thee. Kyaariyan ke chaaron ore haray-bharay kelay ke vriksh lahraa rahay thay. Dinesh nay jaldee-jaldee bhindiyan ke paudhon ko ulatnaa-palatnaa aarambh kiyaa. Jab wahaan kuchh naheen milaa to usnay saaree seetaphal kee bail chhaan maaree.

(Kirmich kee Gaiid, Shanti Kumari Jain, Rimjhim-4, NCERT, New Delhi).

Donon kee museebat mein jaan thee. Har waqt paabandee, har waqt taqraar. Apnee marzee say choon bhee naheen kar saktay thay. Kabhee Arif ko gaanay kaa mood aata to bhaaijaan daantatay, “Chup hotaa hai ya naheen? Har waqt mendhak kee tarah tarraae jaataa hai.” Baahar jaa to Ammee poochhtee, “Baahar kyon gae?” Andar rahtay to daadi chillaatee, “Haai mera dimaagh phat rahaa hai shor ke maaray! Aree Razia, in bachchon ko zaraa baahar haank day.” Jaisay bachche na hue murghee ke choozay ho gae!

(Ek Din ki Baadshaahat, Jeelaani Bano, Rimjhim-5, NCERT, New Delhi).

Wahaan thee woh! Kajri Gaay pet ke bal letee, pedh ke neechay so rahee thee.

Usne saamnay waalee taangon se apnee aankhein dhak rakhee theen.

Kauvva bilkul unkay saamnay jaa utraa. Hal kay se, Kajri Gaay ke kaan par chonch maar kar usnay poochhaa, “Kajri Gaay, kya tum zindaa ho?”

Kajri Gaay nay lambee jamhaai lee.

“Aary! Lagtaa hai meree aankh lag gae thee”, Kajri Gaay ne kahaa.

“Kaan! Mujhay lagaa ki tum pedh se gir kar mar gae ho!” Kauvva chillaayaa.

(Kajri Gaay Padhnay Lagi, Jujja Wieslandar (2012), Translation – Swati Purandare, A and A Book Trust, Gurgaon)

Mangalvaar kaa din thaa. Kakshaa mein aatay hee Guruji nay kahaa, “Aaj kee padhaaee hai ki aaj skool mein koe padhaaee naheen hogee. Aur is padhaaee kaa vishaya hogaa– chhuttee kaa din. Tum logon ko chhutee kaa din achhay se bitaana chaahiye. Chhuttee kaa din tum nay kaisay bitaayaa, yah mujhay bataanaa. Chhuttee ke din kee padhaai subah uthnay say raat tak chalaygee, jab tak tum so naheen jaatay. Chhuttee kaa din akaylay bitaanaa chahtay ho to akaylay manaanaa, yaa jinkay saath manaanaa ho, unkay saath manaanaa. Ek saath jaisay kakshaa mein padhaaee kaa din hotaa hai, vaisay he ek saath bhee bitaa saktay ho. Apnay ghar mein yaa kisee kay ghar mein yaa ghar ke baahar is upyogee din kaa upyog karogay parantu lautkar ghar sahee samay par pahunch jaanaa.”

Skool thodee dooree par thaa. Skool kaa naam Gol Skool thaa. Skool ke chaaron taraf gol baraamdaa thaa. Skool sach-much golthaa. Baraamday mein har kakshaa ke darvaazay khultay thay. Gol Skool se kuchh door ek lambaa skool thaa. Khadee lakeer kee tarah lambaa. Par donon is tarah paasthay ki oopar se dekhnay mein dusk e ank kee tarah lagtay thay. Lambaa skool dahaai kee tarah thaa. Uskay saamnay aur peechhay baraamday thay. Donon skool ke baraamdon mein lakdee ke khambay lagay thay.

(Hari Ghaas ki Chhappar Waali Jhopadee aur Baunaa Pahaad, Vinod Kumar Shukla, Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi).

Even a peep into most of our textbooks reveals the paucity of good reading material for children, most of it being heavy and artificial in nature. Also, the textbook alone cannot fulfill all the needs of children. If our long-term aims and objectives include reading with understanding, children taking interest in books, and the joy of learning, a library with rich resources that stimulates the interest of children should be a major concern. This incidentally, is also a recommendation by the government in the Right to Education Act.

Currently, there are too few libraries in our schools. Even if some books are available for the students under some scheme, they are not useful from the children's point of view and do not generate any interest in them. Also, classroom processes are limited to only teaching the meanings of words and the focus is on completing the exercises related to the lesson in hand. Most of the talk with children revolves around their knowledge of facts about the lesson rather than linking the text with their experience and reacting to it. All that is expected of children is to answer questions based on rote-learning whereas the attempt should be that they relate to stories and poetry, add their experiences to them, analyse them so that they can develop into good readers. The first attempt for all this will have to be made by teachers – we will have to learn to take interest in literature, especially children's literature, for only then will we be able to talk to children on aspects related to literature.

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