

# Culture and History: A Critical Reading of ESL Textbooks of Telangana State

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## ABSTRACT

*One of the major themes of post-colonial literature is aiming for identity which can be linguistic, religious, cultural, social, national, gender identity, etc. Furthermore, the NCF-2005 and RTE-2009 specified that the concerns of the marginal classes, regions, cultural and historical aspects would be taken into consideration while preparing curriculum of respective states and subsequently while designing textbooks. After the formation of Telangana as a new state, the people of the state exhibited a pressing need for Local, Global and Global Identity. As a result, the State Higher Education and TS-SCERT (2014) recommended that school subjects should be designed and developed from the perspectives of the cultural and historical issues in order to have a regional identity. To achieve this, a curriculum renewal process was carried out and the textbooks of mother tongue (L1) and social studies were given distinctive changes at the school level. While the concerns of most of the reviews are very general and minimal, only a fewer number of reviews and changes have been brought in the ESL textbooks after the formation of the state. At this juncture, it becomes pertinent to revisit and study how the issues of culture and history of the new state have been dealt in the textbooks. This write-up, is an attempt to reinvestigate the cultural and historical representations of various facets through a critical analysis of the textbooks of the state in the light of the birth of a new state in 2014.*

**Keywords:** Culture, History, Telangana, and ESL Textbooks

## Introduction:

The present study attempts to understand the role of culture within the classroom of Telangana state. In Telangana state, a system of English Education is in place from the academic year 2012-13 in which students from multi-cultures and linguistic backgrounds are expected to study together English language with the help of a single textbook for all learners. It is expected that this common system and multiculturalism

help 'to have parity among students of English and Non-English Medium students and would greatly enhance the child's learning'. It is this diversity that prompted me to study the role of history and culture and how it affects teaching and learning processes within the classroom.

The current practices in the actual classrooms have shifted from classroom-centered to teacher-centered to learner-centered. The role of the teacher, who is co-

learner with students instead of instructor or an agent of transforming of information and knowledge, in this context is more complex in nature. Considering this, all practice needs to be culturally responsive. In order to this into practice which will help the teachers need to make connections with their students as individuals. When teachers make attempts to understand the underlying social, cultural and language networks of their learners, it is more likely that there will be congruence between what content is taught and how it is taught. *Holliday* (1994:29) argues that the typical teacher in that context will be involved in a variety of cultures: those of nation, of the specific academic discipline, of national and international education, of the host institution, of the classroom, and of the students themselves. Teachers' beliefs 'related to teaching and learning' (Calderhead, 1996) and these beliefs assist students in 'negotiating the nature of their learning activities' (Taylor, 1990) or beliefs about curriculum (Prawat, 1992).

### **Review of Literature:**

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his essay *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* emphasizes about language and its constructive role in national, cultural and historical identities. Besides he advocates for linguistic decolonization by theorizing the "language debate" in post-colonial studies and he offers a distinctly anti-imperialist perspective on the "continuing language's role in both combating and perpetrating imperialism and the conditions of neocolonialism in

African nations. Ngũgĩ', in it, addresses the "language problem" for African authors. Ngũgĩ focuses on questions about the African writer's linguistic medium the writer's intended audience, and the writer's purpose in writing. Hence, from the essay, it can be interpreted that the indigenous culture and history are very important for the development of a society or a nation.

*Rita Mae Brown* (2003) explores that language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going. Language is best used and preserved in the works of literature. Literature may be defined as "mirror of life" or "criticism of life" and literature like a mirror reflects all aspects of life (*Abrams, M.H.*, 2015). Furthermore, it is the expression of life in words of truth and beauty, it is the written record of man's spirit, of his thoughts, emotions, aspirations, it is the history, and the only history of the human soul. Reading literary works broadens our imagination and empowers us with the preparedness' to face life's most difficult situations boldly. Literature represents a language or a society, culture, or tradition. And it has wider impact beyond the individual level. It can be a vehicle for public discussions, understanding social issues, building social connections, and fostering community development. It is said that the disregard for literature is a main component of ignorance and constituents like stereotypes, judgments and preconceived notions about different people and cultures. Studying literature helps human kind-hearted, loving, positive,

and understanding both cultural and social issues of a state or a nation.

The encounter between Igbo tradition and Christian doctrine in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe returns to the themes of his earlier stories, which grew from his own background. Achebe spoke from the interiors of the African character, rather than portraying the African as an exotic, as the white man would see him. Apart from this, Margaret Atwood in her essay *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, postulates that Canadian literature, and by extension Canadian identity, is characterized by the symbol of survival. This symbol is expressed in the omnipresent use of “victim positions” in Canadian literature. These positions represent a scale of self-consciousness and self-actualization for the victim in the “victor/victim” relationship. The “victor” in these scenarios may be other humans, nature, the wilderness or other external and internal factors which oppress the victim. Atwood considers (Canadian) literature as the expression of (Canadian) identity which has been defined by a fear of nature, by settler history and by unquestioned adherence to the community.

In the same way, if there is no specific identity to Telangana State within 10/15 years of age, there would be some danger of portraying the identity of the people of Telangana out of India. As in *The Location of Culture* (1994), the theoretician Homi K. Bhabha argued that so long as the way of viewing the human world, as composed of

separate and unequal cultures, rather than as an integral human world, perpetuates the belief in the existence of imaginary peoples and places. Questions of Identity— social , cultural, national identity, etc. — usually caused by experiencing the psychological conflicts inherent to cultural assimilation, to living between the old, native world and the dominant hegemony of the invasive social and cultural institutions of the colonial imperialism of a Mother Country.

### **Methodology- Sample**

The main type of research analysis used in the present study with respect to the data generated from the two questionnaires and the checklist from the sample is descriptive analysis. And the researcher analyzes the data which will be collected using questionnaires based on the Descriptive Analyses and provides the interpretations on that (Burns & Bush, 1995). The stakeholders of this study are the teachers working and secondary students of the secondary schools of Telangana. From different sampling techniques, random sampling technique is adopted in the present study for drawing out the sample.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What are the beliefs of teachers about the cultural content given in the textbooks?
2. What are the beliefs of teachers about the historical content given in the textbooks?
3. Do the ESL textbooks represent the minimal identity of Telangana?

## **Tools**

- Questionnaires to the teachers
- Questionnaires to the students
- Checklists for Evaluation of the textbooks (class VI to X)
- Informal Interviews with the teachers and students

## **Textbook analysis:**

Through the poem *In the Bazaars of Hyderabad*, the poet Sarojini Naidu exposes the culture of Hyderabad, how people roam, mate, have business transactions in the streets of the city before getting independence. The story *Teanali Paints The Horse* provides a humorous account of portraying the culture of the state. In the lesson *The Story Of Ikat*, the culture of Telangana state has been exemplified through the exposure to the handlooms and the fabrics of Nalgonda district through the characters such as Ms. Janaki, the social studies teacher, and her thought provoking interaction with the learners in a classroom and creating a consciousness among them about the process of tie and dye, plight of the weavers, and arousing awareness among them. Through the story *VVS Laxman, Very Very Special*, the places like Hyderabad, Telangana, Zymkhana, etc have been used and exposed to learners so that they talk about the diversity, culture, and nature of people in which they have been living in apart from being aware of the sports that are popular in Hyderabad. Through the discussion of the stories such

as *Maya Bazaar & A Tribute*, the concept of Telugu cinema and its history, language, tradition, etc could be discussed if the teachers are creative in the classrooms. These stories also expose learners to understand various cultural and historical issues of Telugu people.

## **Findings: General**

1. The concepts of culture and history of the state have got somewhat sympathetic treatment in the new ESL Textbooks of the state.
2. In the textbooks from VI to IX classes, the discussion of History & Culture was absolutely absent and this absence of discussion on History & Culture exposes the outlook and negligence of the material designers.
3. When compared to the earlier Textbooks, these books are far ahead on the themes and subthemes taught at the secondary level.
4. The new textbooks of the state, after the formation of TS are oriented towards enhancing the cultural and historical identity through the school curriculum.
5. The discussion on culture and history of Telangana related aspects is wide and study of various events through the culture and history lens is fine but needs further elaboration.
6. To improve the abilities of students, there needs to be congruence between the nature of the content and its teaching practices.

7. The current concerns of common system, multiculturalism and linguistics provide opportunities to the teachers to investigate their own biases and beliefs, reflect on their own classroom experiences and enhance the professional development of the teacher.

I would term this as a very good beginning. However, there are some grey areas which I hope would be taken care off in future. In the end, I must say,

#### **Findings about Cultural & Historical concepts:**

1. There is no *significant amount* of discussion on culture and history of Telangana in ESL textbooks.
2. Cultural and identity issues will enhance learning, including learners' everyday experiences with reading, writing and literacy.
3. The content of textbooks plays an important role in language teaching and learning English.
4. Though the textbooks meet the current and future needs of the learners, the language both in terms of lexical and syntactical aspects (idioms, collocations, phrases, etc) are difficult to most of the regional medium learners. Hence they lack interest and motivation to learn these.
5. The culturally and historically alienated contents do not encourage learners and there will be no facilitation of learning through the textbooks. Hence, these

contents are to be replaced with the local and indigenous cultures and historical aspects of the learners.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Appropriate training modules are to be provided to the teachers of English for effective transaction of the cultural and historical concepts of the state.
2. Appropriate measures are to be taken by the pre and in-service teacher organizations for developing effective strategies of teaching culture and historical aspects through English language teaching.
3. There should be an incorporation of cultural and historical content in the textbooks in order to motivate learners to learn English well at the secondary level easily.
4. Themes and subthemes related to the culture and history of Telangana have to be incorporated in the textbooks
5. A lot of discourses in the form of incidents, activities, lessons, short stories are to be translated and adopted from the indigenous and local cultural and historical concepts.
6. The curriculum designers and material producers should include the contents that are culturally and historically familiar to the local learners to facilitate an easy and smooth process of the language learning.
7. The practicing teachers of English in the local culture and the experts and

other translators of the culture and history are to be encouraged to design to contribute stories, poems, plays, etc in their local culture and heritage,

### **Conclusion:**

One possible alternative is to create critical cultural and historical consciousness among our learners. Creating critical cultural and historical consciousness in the L2 classroom offers immense possibilities for teachers as well as learners to explore the nuances of cultural and historical and their sub-practices in a meaningful way. It involves constant and continual self-reflection guided by one's own value system regimented from one's own cultural and historical heritage. And this critical self-reflection eventually leads to meaningful cultural and historical growth, which has to be constructed consciously and systematically through a meaningful negotiation of differences between the culture and history individuals inherited by birth and the culture and history they learned through experience. The inherited culture and history should be allowed to interact freely with the learned culture and history so that there is mutual enrichment. The key to this enrichment is the lived experiences of individuals, along with their capacity to develop critical cultural and historical consciousness. Hence, in the fast-emerging world of economic, cultural, and communicational globalization,

creating critical cultural and historical consciousness in the L2 classroom is not an option but an obligation.

### **Limitations:**

In this paper I have focussed only ESL Textbooks to show case the representation of culture and history at the school curriculum. And it is confined to only the textbooks from class-VI to X.

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