

Some Reflections on the Place of Drama in the B.A. (English) Course

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Abstract: In the syllabus of two papers on English Literature for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) main examination there are only five plays against fourteen novels. This makes it imperative to know the place of drama in English studies in India. Here is an attempt in that direction. An elective course in English offered only to the students from the Faculty of Arts at the undergraduate level is known by different names like English (Honours), English (Major), Principal English, English (Entire), English (Special) and Special English. Based on the syllabi documents, this paper is a modest attempt to study the titles, objectives, course content, teaching methods and evaluation procedures of the papers on drama offered mainly in the first decade of twenty-first century in the B.A. (English) courses in six universities in Maharashtra viz. University of Mumbai, University of Pune, Shivaji University, Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University and Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University. In the universities under study, apart from similarity in the objectives of teaching drama and the recurrence of certain texts, a shift is noticed from the study of British plays to non-British plays. Though fiction and drama are considered as equivalent genres, the later is relegated to a secondary place in the BA (English) course. For instance, whenever there is need to delete any prescribed text or introduce a new paper, drama has been the first choice of the policy makers. Paradoxically, it is found that in the B.A. (English) course the students prefer to study plays over other forms of literature.

Keywords: B.A. (English), papers on drama, objectives, course content, British and non-British plays, teaching methods, evaluation procedures, recommended reading, teaching of drama, discrimination.

Introduction: English literature is one of the optional subjects to be studied for Civil Service Examination. A cursory look at the syllabus of English Literature Paper I – (1600-1900) and Paper II – (1900-1990) for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) main examination reveals that in both the papers there are fourteen novels (seven each) against three plays in Paper I (*King Lear* and *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare and *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen) and two in Paper II (*Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett). This makes it imperative to know the place of drama in English studies in India. Here is an attempt in that direction. The focus of the deliberations on drama has always been the study of drama at the postgraduate level. The teaching of drama at the undergraduate level has not received enough

attention. An elective course in English offered only to the students from the Faculty of Arts at the undergraduate level in Indian universities is known by different names like *English (Honours)*, *English (Major)*, *Principal English*, *English (Entire)*, *English (Optional)*, *English (Special)* and *Special English*. For the sake of uniformity and convenience, the term 'B.A. (English)' has been used in this paper.

According to Mohan and Banerji (2003) the syllabus is perhaps the most important referential document of a course. Based on the syllabi documents, this paper is a modest attempt to study the titles, objectives, course content, teaching methods and evaluation procedures of the papers on drama offered in the B.A. (English) courses in some Indian universities mainly in the first decade of twenty-first century. The B.A. (English) course generally consists of two types of papers on literary studies – periodwise (chronological) or genrewise. The present study is limited to some Indian universities offering genrewise papers. The syllabi of the papers on drama offered in six universities in Maharashtra viz. University of Mumbai (UoM), University of Pune (UoP) and Shivaji University, Kolhapur (SUK), Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik (YCMOU), Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded (SRTMU) and Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University, Mumbai (SNDTWU) have been considered for this study. Besides, the syllabi of the papers on drama offered in the universities in Madhya Pradesh (MPUs) and Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi (JMI) have been used for comparison wherever necessary.

Table 1 – The Papers on Drama offered in six universities in Maharashtra

University	Class	Paper No.	Title of the Paper	w.e.f.
UoM	FYBA	Ancillary English P-I	Reading Fiction & Drama	2007-08
UoP	SYBA	Special Paper I (S-I)	Understanding Drama	2010-11
SUK	TYBA	English (Special) P-VI	Understanding Drama	2009-10
YCMOU	TYBA	English-256	Understanding Drama	2002
SRTMU	SYBA	Optional English P-III	Reading Drama	June 2010
SNDTWU	SYBA	Disciplinary Course P- III	Drama —Texts, History Critical Perspectives	In 2010-11

The Objectives of teaching Drama: The 'objectives of teaching drama' is one of the important areas of investigation. As a case in point, the documents of the existing syllabi of two universities – SUK and UoP - have been considered here.

There is striking similarity noticed in the objectives of the genrewise papers in both the universities. One of the objectives of Special Paper I –

'Understanding Drama' (UoP) 'To develop among students the ability to independently read and appreciate as well as critically analyse and evaluate drama' is similar to the one of the objectives of Paper V – 'Understanding Poetry' (SUK) 'To develop among students the ability to read, appreciate, analyse and evaluate poems independently'. Further more, objective no. 2 of the Special Paper I (UoP) is identical to objective no. 3 of Special Paper VI (SUK).

Table 2 – The Objectives of the Papers on Drama offered in SUK and UoP

SUK English (Special) Paper–VI(TYBA) Understanding Drama (w.e.f. 2009-10)	UoP English Special Paper-I (SYBA) Understanding Drama (w.e.f. 2010-11)
1. To familiarize the students with the concept of Drama.	1. To acquaint and familiarise the students with the terminology in Drama Criticism (i.e. the terms used in Critical Analysis and Appreciation of Drama)
2. To acquaint them with the different trends in Drama.	2. To encourage students to make a detailed study of a few sample masterpieces of English Drama from different parts of the world.
3. To encourage the students to make a detailed study of a few masterpieces of English drama from different parts of the world.	3. To develop among students the ability to independently read and appreciate as well as critically analyse and evaluate Drama.
4. To develop among the students an ability of reading and appreciating drama.	4. To enhance student awareness in the aesthetics of Drama and to empower them to independently venture into reading, appreciation and critical examination and evaluation of Drama

Taking into account the identical titles of the genrewise papers and the similarity in the language used in specifying objectives of the papers on drama it could be said that the syllabus document of one university influences the other. It is to be noted that the similar titles and similar objectives are not given by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in the reports either of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) for English (1989) or of the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) for English (2001).

In the past, the periodwise papers used to consider drama as a product of society. Then in the genrewise papers, drama is taught merely as a form of

literature. The background topics prescribed in the papers on drama provide ample evidence for this. Furthermore, 'The resources of spoken language such as stress, intonation, pauses, hesitations, etc are utilized to the fullest extent by the playwrights and hence drama can be an extremely useful tool for the teaching of spoken English' (UoP-English Special Paper I-Syllabus document). As most of the students admitted to the BA (English) course want to develop their spoken English, drama is considered as a tool to develop spoken English. Along with developing literary sensibilities, the teaching of drama in the undergraduate classes can cater to the linguistic needs of the students of English in India. It appears that the focus of teaching drama is gradually drifting from literary to linguistic objectives.

The Course Content:

i) Disparity in the number of Plays prescribed in the papers on Drama: In UoM in the Paper I 'Reading Fiction and Drama' (FYBA) the students are expected to study only two plays in a term. Three plays apiece are to be studied in a year in UoP, SUK and SNTDWU whereas in SRTMU there are seven plays for study. In YCMOU there are only two plays. Similarly, in MPUs in Paper I (BA Part II) there are four plays per semester, i.e. eight plays are to be studied in a year. In JMI a student is supposed to study five plays in SY and four plays in TYBA, of which in each year three plays are for detailed study. As compared to the universities in Maharashtra, the students get more exposure to drama in MPUs and JMI. Thus, irrespective of the length of prescribed texts, the number of plays prescribed in a year varies from one Indian university to another.

ii) The Recurrence of some Texts: The repetition of texts is a common practice in Indian universities. According to Desai (1993) in the syllabus of English in Indian universities a handful of books keep reappearing by rotation. Some examples in the universities in Maharashtra are given below. In UoP *The Importance of Being Earnest* a play by Oscar Wilde was prescribed twice earlier (w.e.f. 1986 and w.e.f. 1994) for English General Paper II (SYBA). In the existing syllabus (w.e.f. 2009-10) the play has been reintroduced in English Special Paper I – 'Understanding Drama' (SYBA). In SUK *Othello* was prescribed for TYBA Paper V – 'History of English Literature from 1579 to 1660' (w.e.f. 1992-93). It is now prescribed again in TYBA Paper – VI 'Understanding Drama' (w.e.f. 2009-10). The case of another play *Pygmalion* is rather different. In the previous syllabi (w.e.f. 2002-03) *Pygmalion* was introduced in TYBA Paper – VI 'English Drama'. In the existing syllabi (w.e.f. 2008-09) the text has been shifted to SYBA Paper - II 'Modern English Literature'. Thus, the representative playwrights and their representative plays recur in the BA (English) course. Shakespeare, Shaw, Miller, Karnad and Tendulkar happen to be the favourite playwrights of the syllabus designers.

Moreover, irrespective of the students' interest and competence, the universities have prescribed same plays at different levels. UoP has prescribed *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller for SYBA students whereas SUK has prescribed it for TYBA students. Similarly, Shakespeare's *Othello* is found in SYBA Paper -III in SNDTWU and in TYBA Paper VI in SUK. G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* has been prescribed for FYBA by UoM while SUK has included it in SYBA paper II. The plays like *Pygmalion* and *Ghasiram Kotwal* (UoM –Paper - I) are unsuitable for the students of FYBA. Such plays may kill the interest of the college entrants in the study of drama. *Pygmalion* is the text disliked most by the students in SUK.

iii) The Proportion of British and Non-British texts in the papers on Drama: In the past, teaching of English literature was done mainly through the periodwise papers on British Literature. The shift from periodwise to genrewise papers in UoP and SUK has shifted the emphasis on the study of British texts to the non-British texts. In genrewise papers it is convenient to accommodate representative literary texts from non-British literatures as well. In its syllabus document of SYBA Special Paper I UoP mentions, 'This course is an amalgam of the representative samples of British, American and Indian drama. This is a shift away from the purely Eurocentric literary canon'.

Table 3 - British and Non-British Full-Length Plays in the Papers on Drama

		UoM	UoP	SUK	YCMOU	SRTMU	SNDTWU	Total
BRITISH		02	01	01	01	03	02	10
NON-BRITISH	OTHER	01	01	01	--	01	01	05
	INDIAN	03	01	01	01	03	--	09
TOTAL		02*	03	03	02	07	03	

* Only 02 plays to be studied

SUK and UoP have prescribed one Indian play each. In UoP and SUK there are 33% British plays. In YCMOU one play is British and another is Indian, i.e. 50% each. In SRTMU the prescribed plays include three British (including one Irish), three Indian and one Russian while in SNDTWU out of the three plays prescribed two are British (66%). All the universities under study, except SNDTWU, have prescribed Indian plays (See Table A in the Appendix). In contrast, in MPUs and JMI the focus is on British plays. Karnad's *Hayavadana* is the only Indian play prescribed in MPUs (out of the eight plays), whereas Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* is the only non-British play prescribed in JMI (out of nine plays) (See Table B in the Appendix).

In its attempt to minimize the emphasis on British literature, UoM has included three Indian plays, two British and one Italian, in its Paper-I 'Reading Fiction and Drama'. UoM has prescribed six plays in two groups for the second term, one play from each group is to be studied.

Table 4 –Plays prescribed in UoM Paper – I 'Reading Fiction and Drama' (FYBA)

Term II	
GROUP A	GROUP B
Bernard Shaw : <i>Pygmalion</i> Sudrak : <i>Mrichchhakatik</i> Bhasa : <i>Swapnavasavdatta</i>	Vijay Tendulkar : <i>Ghasiram Kotwal</i> Luigi Pirandello : <i>Six Characters in Search of an Author</i> John Galsworthy : <i>Strife</i>

The attempt of UoM to prescribe more Indian plays becomes an illusion / farce as the texts of translated plays are not easily available for the students and the text like *Ghasiram Kotwal* is not suitable for the college entrants. Besides, the easy availability of the study materials on British plays make the students to turn towards the study of British plays.

The Teaching Methodology : The teaching of drama in Indian universities is predominantly lecture-based. By providing elaborate suggestions on teaching of this genre in its syllabus document UoP has tried to change this trend. The document mentions, 'The drama is basically a performing art and the teaching of drama should highlight the theatrical aspects of drama. Techniques like solo/group reading, role-playing; using audio/video cassettes (if available) may be employed to give some idea of live performance' (UoP–S-I).

Reading of the play (text) may not substitute its stage performance. Rajani (1993) has already discussed how watching of a play through stage performances, videos and movies has helped him in better understanding of the genre. As many students don't get the opportunity to watch the plays staged even in their mother tongue, in spite of infrastructure and administrative constraints the teachers should try to explore the drama texts to the fullest. It is important to note here that audio-visual aids are available for the plays prescribed. The screening of the movies like *My Fair Lady* (English), *Manpasand* (Hindi) and viewing of *Ti Phularani* (Marathi play) can help the students to understand Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Besides, *Omkara* (Hindi film) can help to understand Shakespeare's *Othello*. The VCDs of Tendulkar's plays are also available in the market.

The Recommended Reading : The course content of a paper related to literary studies is divided into two parts – the background (or general) topics and the texts prescribed. Here is an attempt to explore the nexus between the background topics and the recommended reading. The mention of reference books in the documents of syllabi has become a ritual. Almost all the books mentioned by UoP (15) and SUK (11) in the

syllabi of the papers on drama are related to the background topics which carry only 20% weightage in the examination. In a single sentence objective UoM has mentioned the background topics to be studied. 50% of the reference books (03) included in the syllabus document of Paper - I of UoM are general books by Rees, Hudson and Abrams. UoP has listed three while SUK has five general topics. About 50% of the books listed by SUK are for a single background topic on Shakespeare and a play *Othello*. Two books apiece are on American Drama and Indian Drama. The common feature of the reading list is both UoP and SUK mention a book on *Death of a Salesman*. Similarly, all the reference books listed in SRTMU (03) and SNTDWU (07) are general books on drama. Moreover, most of the reference books listed in the syllabus document are not available either in the college library or in the market. Perhaps, this is one of the important reasons for the students to turn towards *kunjis* on the prescribed plays.

It would be better if the reference books are in line with the objectives of the papers. For instance, the list of reference books may also include a book like *NTC's Dictionary of Theatre and Drama Terms* (1998) by Mobley, Jonnie Patricia and published by Viva Books Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi in order to achieve the following objectives of UoP 'To acquaint and familiarise the students with the terminology in Drama Criticism (i.e. the terms used in Critical Analysis and Appreciation of Drama) and SUK 'To familiarize the students with the concept of Drama'. The list of reference books may also have a place for a book like *Teaching Literature* (2003) by Elaine Showalter published by Blackwell Publishing. Such books will definitely help the students and teachers of drama.

The Evaluation Procedures: In the papers on literary studies written examination is the main evaluation procedure followed. In the universities under study, there is a common pattern of question paper. A question paper of 80/100 marks is generally divided into five/six questions carrying equal (sixteen/twenty) marks each, with or without internal options. For instance, the 80 marks question paper of Paper VI (w.e.f. 2010-11) in SUK contains five questions. The first question is of objective type on the prescribed plays, second question contains short notes on general topics, third and fourth are the essay-type questions on the plays and fifth question includes short notes on the plays.

In the universities in Maharashtra essay-type remains the most favoured question in the question papers on drama. YCMOU gives 50% weightage to essay-type questions and 50% weightage to short-answer type questions. Based on the suggestion of the CDC (2001:27) SUK has included objective questions to test knowledge of the texts prescribed. The objective type questions are not found in the question papers of UoM, UoP, SRTMU and SNTDWU. However, short answer questions (in two or three sentences) are in SRTMU.

For internal assessment, the alternatives like home assignments, project work, seminar, group discussion, oral examination, etc. can be used in SUK while oral tests are conducted in SRTMU. In MPUs there is

project work for 50 marks on the critical appreciation of a literary form – Drama (other than the prescribed text).

One should not forget that the teaching methodology is determined by the evaluation procedures. Unless and until the teaching of drama is connected to the evaluation procedures, it is unlikely that the objectives of teaching drama are achieved. For instance, there is need to develop comparative perspective among the students by including in the question papers a compulsory question on comparison of the prescribed plays with their translations in Indian languages or available film versions. The teachers and the students may make use of the drama texts to develop spoken English, as suggested by UoP, only if oral examinations conducted in SUK and SRTMU test oral fluency along with the subject knowledge.

The Discrimination: The switch-over from one system of examination to another (from annual to terminal) in UoP and SUK has resulted in the changes in the question paper pattern of the written examination. In UoP, for instance, the questions on the extracts from the prescribed plays in the question paper of 'Understanding Drama' (2004 pattern) are totally missing in 2008 pattern (Question paper, April 2010). In the universities under study 'fiction' and 'drama' are considered as equivalent genres. However, the genre of 'drama' gets discriminatory treatment. There is place for such questions in the question paper (April 2010) of English General Paper II (Understanding Fiction) in UoP. Why this indifference? In contrast, though it appears that there are more texts in MPUs for non-detailed study, there are questions on annotations. JMI has a question like reference to context in its papers on drama. In SRTMU and SNDTWU as well there are no such questions. In short, the application-oriented questions are absent in the papers on drama in the universities in Maharashtra considered for this study.

To Sum Up:

Though fiction and drama are considered as equivalent genres, the later is relegated to a secondary place in the BA (English) courses in the universities in Maharashtra. Whenever there is need to delete any prescribed text or introduce a new paper, drama has been the first choice of the policy makers. The next two instances would suffice. In the previous syllabus of FYBA English (Optional) Paper I - 'Introduction to Fiction and Drama' (w.e.f. 2003-04) SUK had a novel, a play and short stories and one-act plays four apiece. But when it was felt that it is difficult to accommodate all the prescribed texts in the question paper pattern, the play *A Doll's House* was deleted (circular Ref. SU/Arts/12009 dated 17/02/04). Similarly, in the existing course in UoM in paper IX an optional paper 'Drama and Theatre' has been replaced by the paper 'American Literature (1900-1990)'. Paradoxically, it is found that in the B.A. (English) course the students prefer to study plays over other forms of literature. In a questionnaire-based study conducted by this researcher in UoM, UoP and SUK, plays are the texts liked most by the

students.

Table 5 –Texts liked most by the B.A. (English) students in UoM, UoP and SUK

University	Texts liked most	Paper No.	Class
UoM	Romeo and Juliet – William Shakespeare	P-IV*	TYBA
SUK	Othello - William Shakespeare	P-VI	TYBA
UoP	The Importance of Being Earnest – Oscar Wilde	Spl. P-I	SYBA

* Paper IV – British Literature 1550-1750

Besides, English Special Paper I 'Understanding Drama' is the paper liked most by the students in UoP. It is high time to reflect on the place of drama in the English studies in India.

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Appendix:

Table A –The Plays prescribed in the Papers on Drama in select universities

University	British	Non-British	
		Other	Indian
UoM	Bernard Shaw : <i>Pygmalion</i> John Galsworthy : <i>Strife</i>	Luigi Pirandello : Six Characters in Search of an Author	Sudrak: Mrichchhakatik Bhasa: Swapnavasavdatta Vijay Tendulkar: Ghasiram Kotwal
UoP	Oscar Wilde: <i>The Importance of Being Ernest</i>	Arthur Miller: Death of a Salesman	Girish Karnad: Hayavadan
SUK	William Shakespeare: <i>Othello</i>	Arthur Miller: Death of a Salesman	Vijay Tendulkar: Silence! The Court Is In Session
YCMOU	William Shakespeare: <i>Julius Caesar</i>	-----	Girish Karnad: Tughlaq
SRTMU	J. M. Synge: <i>Riders to the Sea</i> William Shakespeare: <i>Julius Caesar</i> Ben Jonson: <i>Every Man in His Humour</i>	Anton Chekhov: A Marriage Proposal	Rabindranath Tagore: Chitra Girish Karnad: Yayati Mahesh Elkunchwar: Old Stone Mansion
SNDTWU	William Shakespeare: <i>Othello</i> William Congreve: <i>The Way of the World</i>	Sophocles : Antigone	-----

Table B –The Plays prescribed in the Papers on Drama in MPUs and JMI

PLAYS	MPUs	JMI
British	William Shakespeare: Macbeth, Merchant of Venice Sheridan: The Rivals Oliver Goldsmith: She Stoops to Conquer G.B.Shaw: Saint Joan Galsworthy: Loyalties J.M.Synge: Riders to the Sea	Christopher Marlowe: Dr Faustus William Shakespeare: Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice Ben Jonson: The Alchemist Congreve: The Way of the World G.B. Shaw : Candida T.S. Eliot : Murder in the Cathedral John Osborne : Look Back in Anger
Non-British	Girish Karnad: Hayavadana	Bertolt Brecht: Mother Courage and Her Children

