

Executive Summary of UGC Minor Research Project

titled “Decolonising English Studies: A Study on the Restructured English Language and Literature Curricula for Undergraduate Common Courses in the Universities in Kerala”

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The study under reference was an academic venture to analyse the curricula of English Common Courses of non-professional/technical undergraduate programmes of five universities in Kerala (Kerala University, Thiruvananthapuram; Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam; University of Calicut, Malappuram; Kannur University, Kannur; and Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady) that underwent rigorous restructuring under the initiative of the Kerala State Higher Education Council (KSHEC) starting from 2008. The project scrutinised the curricula in detail, mainly the syllabi, against the backdrop of postcolonial theories.

The project report is spread out in four chapters with an introduction and a brief conclusion. Chapter 1, titled “Lingua Franca or Lingua Frankensteinia? English and English Studies in the Contemporary Global Scenario” throws light on the position of English language in the contemporary world scenario and attempts to unravel the politics associated with the emergence of English as a global link language. Chapter 2, “Canonised or Chutnified? English and English Studies in India”, is dedicated to a discussion on the spread of English language and English education in India. The introduction of English during the colonial period and its continued presence even after nearly seven decades of independence is examined here with ample explanation of the international power politics that cater to the domination of English.

The third chapter, which is the briefest of all, is titled “Where there is a Will, there is a Way: Curriculum Revision in Higher Education: The Kerala Experience” and it is a discussion of the initiatives taken by the KSHEC in restructuring the undergraduate programmes in Kerala. The fourth chapter, “What to Teach in a Postcolonial English Classroom: An Excursion through the English Common Course Syllabi” is the core analytical chapter where the syllabi of every UG Common Course in all the universities under reference are analysed in details with postcolonial pedagogy as the theoretical anchor.

The study reveals the postcolonial temper pervasive throughout these curricula, with some possible exceptions. Instead of catering to the monolithic reality of the Eurocentric world as envisaged in the canonical European literary texts which were always the dominant presence in our university English syllabi, the restructured syllabi of these universities are seen to celebrate multiculturalism and polyphony. They take a position that English literature need not be essentially written by the first language speakers; rather the experiences and writing strategies of the non-native speakers are equally legitimate and relevant. They raise powerful voices against all kinds of exclusions and accommodate with due respect the experiences and creative outputs of the muffled and marginalised sections of our multicultural society, such as dalits, women, rural farmers, victims of violence etc.

The syllabi under reference take further forward the mission of dismantling the colonial educational paradigm by placing non-literary and newspaper articles at par with the literary text (establishing the truth that both literary and non-literary texts address the same social

reality from different vantage points, thereby problematising the very issue of ‘point of view’); by celebrating the local culture and myths; by sensitizing the learners against the exploitative measures of globalization and neoliberal economy; by making the learners aware of the pressing needs to preserve our planet and protect the deprived sections; by instilling democratic values properly backed by serious discussions of our constitution and so on.

With respect to the language learning element (in courses on communication skills) significant attempts have been made to do away with conventional approaches. The approach adopted here destabilises the age-old reverential attitude towards British English and sees English as an international language. Rigidities of language that pull the learners back have been sidelined and a more learner-centred approach with practical orientation has been adopted.

The study concludes with the impression that the bold initiatives taken by these universities remind us that there is enough scope for us to try to evolve a paradigm of our own rather than blindly following the heels of the ‘masters’.
