



RESEARCH PAPER

**The Curriculum of Erstwhile MA (English) Program: Reviewing the
Canonicity of English Literature in Pakistani Public-Sector
Universities**

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the curriculum of the MA English (a two year program) of the departments of English that had been in practice in the public-sector universities of Pakistan until recently. The research employs a broader postcolonial transformative perspective to analyse the curriculum while looking at how Pakistan (being a former-colony of the Great Britain) has dealt with its colonial legacy. The study, thus, focusses on understanding the canonicity of English literature in the curricula that remained an inevitable part of the curricula in the selected Pakistani universities since the colonial times. The research draws from the existing postcolonial critiques of English literature. It combines the contents' analysis of the MA (English) curricula with survey research to bring to light the issue of the curricula of literary studies in English in Pakistan. The study finds that the departments of English in Pakistan (which historically retained the legacy of colonial literature) have started transforming in recent times as new literatures in English (from the non-native regions) have emerged to represent their societies on the global scale.

KEYWORDS Canonical Texts, Colonial Legacy, Curriculum, Literary Studies, Postcolonial

Introduction

Postcolonial transformation refers to how former-colonies have responded to colonialism, especially after decolonization. The transformation of the British colonial education in India and Pakistan has been a focus of scholarly attention since the decolonization of India and Pakistan and it has provided a crucial line of inquiry in understanding the postcolonial south Asian context. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and subsequent debates such as those initiated by Bill Ashcroft and others regarding the transformation of the postcolonial societies have given a new perspectives to understand the relationship between the British colonial legacy and English studies in the context of the so-called postcolonial South Asia. Gauri Viswanathan's seminal work regarding the function of literary studies in colonial India has been influential in conceiving this idea of analysing the colonial legacy of English studies in the context of Pakistani public-sector universities.

This study analyses the syllabi of MA English (a degree program of two years/ equivalent bachelor's degree) that had been in practice in the departments of English in the public-sector universities across Pakistan since the time of independence in 1947 and in some cases even before. The program has recently phased out as the universities have shifted to BS (four years program) as per international nomenclature of degrees. This study is based on one of the researchers' graduate research project (that was initially conducted almost ten years ago to understand the formation of curricula and its role in

Pakistan, especially after decolonization). The study holds a renewed importance in the present context as the trademark MA (English) has now been replaced with interdisciplinary program of BS (English). That is why it is considered to be the time to look at the development of curriculum of English in Pakistan in retrospect as a former colony of the Great Britain in order to understand how has MA (English) contributed towards building canonicity of British classical literature among its colonies (especially Pakistan). It would be interesting to analyse the British colonial legacy in the context of literary studies and the function of the department of English in the so-called postcolonial Pakistan. Thus, this study is an attempt to help understand the politics of curriculum and syllabus revisions in Pakistan by presenting an analysis of the curricula of MA (English) in Pakistan's selected public-sector universities. The study focuses on the formation of the curricula of MA English program in light of the colonial legacy of the departments of English in Pakistan. The basic assumption that drives the study relates to how Pakistan (as a former colony of the Great Britain) has not been able to decolonize itself as the legacy of colonialism lives on in different forms of which English department is just one. It draws from Gauri Viswanathan's 'master discourse' into a critical framework. Thus, the study intends to contribute to the debates around the critique the literary studies in English in the context of colonial legacy of South Asia by introducing the Pakistani perspective.

Literature Review

Viswanathan believes that English literature was imported to colonized India by the British colonizers long before it got the acceptance as an academic discipline in the universities of the United Kingdom herself (1989 p. 7). The fact remains that the literary studies in English (which in the context of the selected Pakistani universities happen to be predominantly the study of English literature) have been a part and an extension of colonialism. That is why perhaps the curricula as well as the syllabi have not been transformed even after the decolonization and creation of independent countries of Pakistan and India. On the contrary, in the US universities and even in the British, the departments of English have grown and incorporated literatures in English from many non-native English-Speaking regions like South Asia, Africa and Caribbean islands, inter alia. On the other hand, in the ex-colonies like Pakistan (and India) the curricula remain dominated by British canonical writers such as Shakespeare, Milton, Donne and others.

The departments of English in the former colonies of Great Britain have been in the centre of debates in many postcolonial societies. There have been diverse views about the role of English literature in the postcolonial world. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the famous Kenyan critic and novelist, has challenged the place and role of English literature in the postcolonial African context. He questions the superior position held by English literature in Africa where most people do not know English language in the first place (Thiong'o, 1972). Although Thiong'o abandoned writing in English in protest and chose to write in *Gikuyu*, his native language, yet he could not help adopting the European form of the novel. He, however, suggests that English department should be abolished and a department of African languages and literature be established because, he argues, the European literature was taking the Africans far away from their culture and world (Thiong'o, 1972, p.146). His abrogative strategy, therefore, rejects the idea of resistance literature by appropriating the language of colonizer. Ashcraft (1989) argues that the British brought and used English literature with a clear agenda to serve their political interests in India (p. 3-5). In this regard, Edward Kamau Braithwaite exposes how Africans/Caribbeans were forced to learn things that did not have any relevance to them in a foreign (European language). They were seldom told about their own heroes but rather they were changed with the Europeans counterparts (1995, p 310-312). In many

ways, the canonical English literature has served the same purpose in the former colony of South Asia.

Besides, numerous other scholars from South Asia and elsewhere have tried to respond to the questions of colonial legacy by examining the colonial Education in the wake of decolonization and the subsequent challenges of their respective postcolonial societies. Many of these studies have provided insights for this research. While reviewing English literary studies in the colonized India, Gauri Viswanathan critiques how the colonial education with the introduction of English language and canonical English literature, following Macaulay's model, proved to be an ideological apparatus designed and deployed to enhance the process of colonization. According to Gauri Viswanathan literature was brought to India in order to make it work as a tool of colonialism while following the non-interference policy towards the indigenous religions i.e. Hinduism and Islam. To explain this, she gives the example of funds allocated to promote Western literature particularly English literature. Lord Macaulay made it clear that Western literature should be promoted in India at the expense of Oriental languages and literatures so that English language and literature would replace the privileged position occupied by the local languages and literatures such as Hindi and Persian (Viswanathan, 1989, p. 45-46). This approach served the purpose of detaching Indians from their culture and civilization (p. 113-114). Terry Eagleton has analysed how the canonicity of English literature advocated by Harold Bloom (1994) has led to create literary hierarchy where the conservative canonical Western/English writers get popularized and become a major part of the curricula (Eagleton, 1996, p. 28). Developing on Gauri Viswanathan's critique of English studies in India, Rita Raley has traced the politics of English studies for literary and literacy purposes in British India. She opines that English studies was incorporated in the curricula of Indian universities in order to achieve two purposes – first to “civilize” the natives through English literary studies and second to enable some of the Indians to work as agents of the colonizers – to help them establish the hegemony of the empire (Raley, 2000). According to Alastair Pennycook English department was established and teaching practices and theories were designed by English colonizers with the view to enhance their imperialist plan (Pennycook, p. 19). Dewi Candraningrum Soekirno (2006) has studied the relationship between colonialism and the curricula of English language and literature. He underscores the role of canonical literature in the propagation of British colonial values and its intellectual hegemony. He says that the canonical texts that formed the curricula of English departments of the colonized countries produced and maintained a “fixed discourse” to determine the power relation between the colonizer and the colonized (p. 71-72). Golam Gaus Al-Quaderi and Abdullah (2010) have looked into the state of English language pedagogy in the English medium schools of Bangladesh. The findings of their study emphasize upon reshaping and localizing the curricula and the practices of teaching English to the Bangladeshi students. They also emphasize upon the need of teachers' training in order to devise a suitable methodology to teach English literature. Fizla Waseem (2014) has reviewed the historical background of the English language in Pakistan from a postcolonial perspective. She views that the propagation of English language has marginalized the local languages like Persian and Urdu. She explains how linguistic imperialism has led to the failure of what she calls indigenous system of education. Monazza Makhdoom and S. M. Awan (2014) have also studied the ramifications of neo-colonialism in relation to the curriculum of literature in the context of University of the Punjab. While reviewing the history of curriculum development the authors note that the department of English at University of the Punjab continues carrying the colonial legacy and has not evolved itself in line with the changing trends.

The present study can be better understood as an aspect of the postcolonial transformative—that includes the changed/redefined role of educational institutions/universities in the wake of decolonization. The basic question, thus, relates to if the idea of postcolonial transformative has been realized in the context of Pakistan and whether and to what extent the revisions in the curricula of the departments of English have been influenced by the indigenous/postcolonial literature/theory including the emerging trends of literary studies. In fact, these questions are often encountered by students and teachers of the department of English in Pakistan, a so-called postcolonial country. Therefore, the present study has focussed on finding answers to the following questions:

How and why has the curriculum of MA English been lopsided in favour of the canonical British literature in the selected public-sector Pakistani universities? And/or, what is the relationship between colonial ideology and history of literary studies in the context of literary studies in English in the public-sector universities of postcolonial Pakistan?

Hence, this study analyses the curricula/syllabi of literary studies in English of Pakistani public-sector universities. Therefore, it does not include the historical reception of English language and literature in post-independent Pakistani academy. However, we have based the study of English literature in the Pakistani context to Gauri Viswanathan's (1989) investigation of English literature in the light of colonization of India by the British Empire. The study is delimited to the public-sector universities only—I have not selected any private university for the analysis owing to the focus and limitations of this research. The study also concentrates on the curricula/syllabi and teaching practice at university level alone—it does not consider the curricula of English studies at the college and school levels. Since the research is at a small scale, it focuses mainly on the syllabi of MA (English) being taught at present in English departments of six universities of Pakistan, however, the findings would reflect the overall situation of the curricula/syllabi and the teaching practice of literary studies in English in the state sponsored Pakistani universities. The study, we believe, will benefit the departments of English of Pakistani universities in formulating syllabus and developing their curricula especially for undergraduate degree programs. It will help in designing and developing research based curricula/syllabi in English departments of Pakistani universities. It will hopefully become a part of the efforts that aim to change and/or reform the curricula and syllabi of English departments in Pakistan which is of paramount importance for making a case for the postcolonial Pakistan.

Material and Methods

Edward Said (1983) and Viswanathan (1989) have proposed to redefine the relationship between English literature and colonialism in India and elsewhere. Their contributions have been helpful in devising critical framework for this study. Besides, Ashcroft (2001) has provided insight for the postcolonial transformation of the former colonies while exposing the role of English literature and in what ways the new literatures have been marginalized or responded to the colonial legacy (Ashcroft, p. 10-15). Thus, the study offers a postcolonial transformative perspective to understand the role of canonical English literature and its discursive fixity. Moreover, it was considered appropriate to devise an integrated methodology which combines the content analysis of the curricula of literary studies in English in the selected public-sector universities of Pakistan with survey research. For content analysis, the contents of the syllabi of MA (English) being taught at the departments of English of the selected universities at present was chosen and analysed. Most of the universities' contents of the scheme of studies for MA (English) were obtained from their official websites. However, in some

cases, the material was attained by requesting the universities' English departments and the faculty members through email and personal contacts. The choice of the contents of the syllabi of MA (English literature) was made due to the following reasons:

- i. MA (English) had been the oldest and the main degree program of all the selected universities since their inception.
- ii. It was among the first program initiated in all the universities.
- iii. MA (English) had been attracting the students more than any other program related to English literature.
- iv. MA (English) was initially offered in annual examination system but has also been offered in the semester system in many of the selected universities.
- v. MA (English) had been a competitive program for which students had to compete more vis-à-vis other programs of humanities and social sciences.

The universities selected for the content analysis as well as for the questionnaire-based survey (involving teachers and the students) included:

- University of Karachi, Karachi
- University of the Punjab, Lahore
- Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan
- University of Peshawar, Peshawar
- National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad
- International Islamic University Islamabad, Islamabad

The sampling of the universities was made keeping in view the following criteria:

- i. The university had taught English literature at graduate/under-graduate level for at least one and a half decades.
- ii. The universities were sponsored by the state of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.
- iii. The selected universities were spread all over Pakistan; hence, they attracted students from around the country.
- iv. All the universities attracted students from the lower and middle class Pakistani society; that made the population representative in a way.

The contents of courses offered in the syllabus of MA (English literature) were qualitatively analysed. The findings of the content analysis was discussed in the light of the hypothesis, aims and objectives of the study. The findings/results and recommendations/suggestions based on the analysis of the contents of the syllabi and the survey research have been put forward in the conclusion. In order to authenticate the assumptions drawn from the contents' analyses and to verify them further, a survey consisting of two versions of questionnaire was conducted. For this purpose, a questionnaire having two versions (i.e. one each for the teachers and the students) had

been designed and sent to the teachers and the students of English literature of the selected departments following certain criteria outlined below. While designing the questionnaires, the rules of qualitative-quantitative survey were taken care of. Besides, some of the important considerations taken into account included:

- i. to understand respondent's views about the curricula and the practice of teaching English literature at MA level;
- ii. to find out the popular notions about English literature such as universality of British canon, and the legacy of the departments of English in Pakistani context;
- iii. and, to comprehend as to why the classical/canonical English literary texts made an essential part of the syllabi since the inception of these universities and continued until recently.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Based on the Syllabi of MA (English) of the Selected Departments of Public-Sector Pakistani Universities as of 2010-2014

S. No.	University/Institute of Higher Studies	Number of Courses on British literature	Number of Courses on Non-British literature	Percentage (%) of British vs. Non-British Courses	
1	University of Karachi, Karachi	08	01 (Optional on American literature)	88.88 vs. 11.11	
2	University of the Punjab, Lahore	Semester System	13	06 (But doesn't include any course on South Asian Anglophone literature)	68.62 vs. 31.57
		Annual System	08	01 (Optional on literatures around the world)	88.88 vs. 11.11
3	Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan	06	01 (Optional: American or South Asian literature in English)	85.71 vs. 14.28	
4	University of Peshawar, Peshawar	08	None	100 vs. 00	
5	National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad	10	01 (American/Canadian literature)	90.90 vs. 09.09	
6	International Islamic University Islamabad, Islamabad	10	07 (Multiple courses including one on South Asian literature in English)	58.82 vs. 41.17	

The Table 1 (above) shows the ratio of British literary texts vis-à-vis the non-British ones as had been in the practice in the selected universities during the time the research was initially conducted (i.e. 2010-2014). It confirmed that the literary studies in English in the public-sector universities of Pakistan were constituted mainly by the English canonical literary texts. It also verified the basic postulation/hypothesis of the study; that is, the syllabus is clearly lopsided in favour of canonical British literature.

In almost all the selected departments of English, the canonical British literature had held the central position. As a result, the American, South Asian and other literatures in English had historically been either marginalized or conveniently ignored. For instance, Pakistani literature in English was not included in the syllabi of MA in

English of many departments of English of the selected universities until recently. Same is true of South Asian/ Pakistani anglophone literature and others. Moreover, the courses were often found to be not structured keeping in view the multiple perspectives/ interpretations, objectives and modes of instruction; hence, in most cases, it boiled down to an indirect study of British political history. For example, while studying Shakespeare the students had been led to believe that English literature was superior to all other literatures. On the other hand, there was only one course on South Asian literature in English (until recently) and that too only in a few departments (as shown in the table above). This explains the fixity of the colonial curriculum, which had continued until recent times as a part of the colonial legacy.

Interestingly, in all the universities included in this study there had been an essential course on history of English literature that offered invariably the history of British Empire usually starting from Anglo-Saxon to Enlightenment. For example, the objectives of the course on History of English Literature in the University of Peshawar clearly had stated that the course was meant to help the students understand English literature in the light of British and European history starting from the Middle Ages to the 20th Century. Similarly, several other courses consisting canonical English literature such as Classical Drama, Classical Fiction, English Prose, etc. basically aimed at enhancing students' understanding of the British culture and its socio-political history. Thus, students of the selected departments were expected to understand English literature through the study of British Empire and its socio-political history most of the time while doing MA (English) just like the colonial subjects in the former colonies. Some of the curricula, nonetheless, do included, in some cases, important courses such as literary theory, postcolonial literature and literature from around the world but some of these courses were optional and most of them were found not having included some important writers like Edward Said and Terry Eagleton as the core writers. In this regard it is worth mentioning that Edward Said had been taught as an essayist rather than a theorist/critic in some of the selected departments.

The survey questions were asked about the existing syllabi. The data obtained from the survey based on the questionnaires was then organized, tabulated and analysed following a critical framework derived mainly from Viswanathan as has been explained before. A short review of the results of the survey and its analysis shows that English literature incorporated the history of British Empire while it propagated the British cultural values. When asked whether the respondents think that the ideas and values presented in English literature were universal and not provincial. Most of the respondents (both the faculty and students) said that that was true. The basic argument for this inquiry lies in the observation that in most of the universities English literature had been taught and studied with the view that the ideas and values presented in English literature were universal. The notion that English literature and whatever it presents was relevant to every society irrespective of cultural and historical differences was derived from the colonial myth that universalized the British values – which – in our view is a reflection of a long held colonial construction. Likewise, a question enquired whether it was important to understand British socio-political history in order to understand English literature. The results suggest that most of the teachers as well as the students (i.e. 67.5% and 65%, respectively) think that the study of British socio-political history is important in order to understand English literature. When asked whether the critical insight that the English literary criticism (including Sidney, Arnold, Wordsworth, Eliot and others) offered was inevitable to understand any literature, most of the respondents were either unsure or agreed. Questions were also asked about English writers such as Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, Hardy, Dickens, Austen and others. The responses indicated that the faculty as well as the students considered those writers

as universal in their approach. The impression that English writers transcend the boundaries of time and space is based on the enlightenment program to justify imperialism of colonies like India and Nigeria. Similarly, while responding to the question that whether or not the syllabi of MA English (being offered in the English departments of the selected universities at that time) included adequate number of literary texts from the non-native English-speaking world like South Asia, the majority of the respondents (i.e. 80% teachers and 53% students) responded that the syllabi did not have a reasonable representation of other literatures in English or translations from the non-native English-speaking world like Pakistan, India, Egypt, Nigeria and others. Similarly, the respondents were asked if the study of English literature made them socially and culturally alien to their own societies; to which, the majority of the respondents were found unsure. On the same pattern, when asked whether the respondents often or sometimes felt that English literature had nothing or little to do with their indigenous cultures and traditions, the majority of the respondents (especially students) were not sure about that as well. When asked the same questions, the teachers, however, said that they did feel quite often that the literature taught had little to do with the indigenous societies and local cultures/ literary histories.

Conclusion

This study has explored how the departments of English in Pakistani public-sector universities have retained the colonial legacy in terms of the curricula despite claims of decolonization. This has been done by analysing the colonial legacy in education while focussing on the syllabus of MA English (a degree program) that has been a trade mark program of the departments of English in Pakistani-public sector universities since long. Much of canonical English literature and the world-famous writers such as Shakespeare, Milton, and others as well as the canonical texts retained their importance for being part of the British canonical literature and because of their established position as writers in the selected departments. The study has contributed to the postcolonial critiques of canonical English literature and the function of the department of English in the former colonies. Although this study presents a critique of the canonicity of English literature in the selected departments of English in the public-sector universities of Pakistan, it does not suggest abandoning English literature or to abolish the departments. It rather suggests to broaden the scope of these departments by ensuring the diversity of literary studies in English. Moreover, it must not be understood in terms of a nationalist any framework because it follows postcolonial transformative perspective—to identify the issues/ problems in the curricula of the literary studies in English. Viswanathan exposes the way English literature has been influential in furthering the process of colonialism (Viswanathan 41), she also explains how the English literature has been important in emancipating the Indians. We do not agree to the emancipatory element, though. In that sense, we partially follows Viswanathan's position (and not that of Thiong'o's) and do not suggest banning the study of English literature in Pakistani universities but emphasize on understanding the colonial legacy of English studies in Pakistan and to move beyond that by diversifying the curricula and syllabi.

The results from the survey have revealed that although the English literary canon historically carried a legacy of colonialism, there is a growing realization about the ideological function of British and/ or other literatures among the teachers and students of the departments of English in Pakistan. This study contends that the curricula of English literature in the selected departments of English of Pakistani public-sector universities has been influenced by the colonial history of the region and, therefore, it cannot be understood in isolation; it is important to take into account the

colonial legacy while analyzing the question of canonicity of British literature in the former colonies of Great Britain, especially South Asia and, thus, Pakistan.

In recent times, some efforts have been made on part of individual scholars and institutions towards ensuring the revision of the curricula and inclusion of a multiple literary voices by following a broader theoretical framework that remained missing except for a few instances in the selected departments since the time of colonization. There are visible signs of change given the emergence and promotion of South Asian and African literature in English as well as World Literature (in English Translation). In this regard, concerted efforts have been made by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan and individual universities to make their curricula and syllabi more balanced and diverse. However, in most cases the departments have not expanded except for some instances where the departments have launched separate programs for literature and linguistics. Thus, there is a need to expand the department of English along the lines of area study centre by going beyond canonical English literature and related literatures and embarking on interdisciplinary approaches.

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