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FYBA OPTIONAL ENGLISH SYLLABUS: SOME SUGGESTIONS

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Abstract:

This article is on some suggestions on FYBA Additional or Optional English syllabus.

By the time students pass Class XII, they are supposed to have mastered structures and essential words. When they select Optional English, they need not be taught grammar for communication. Communication in good English need not be a problem at this level. We should teach them something new. What is this something new? In case of Additional/Optional English, the term 'something new' is related to literature. What then should be the aim of literature? To improve English through literature. What kind of literature? Since it is students' entrance into special class, they should be exposed to Indian English writing. We may take a survey of Indian English literature from the mid-19th century. It should be taken with three representative books. These books should be—one collection of poems, one play and one novel.

Two questions arise in this matter. The first question is: Why not British literature? The second is: why this historical approach and not genre approach? The answer is obvious. Students are entering special English. At this point, it is rather odd to introduce an altogether different culture. Names of Indian English writers (though not actual writers) are familiar to them. Besides, Indian English writing provides them with familiar events. Plot, names of characters, settings are all familiar to them. The answer to the second question is that historical approach is more wholesome than the genre approach at this stage. To view literature from the genre point of view requires much mature mind. Such a framework of mind is not prepared till students reach the stage of MA. Even at MA, it may be restricted to one or two papers only.

INTRODUCTION

This article expresses the researcher's views on optional English syllabus for FYBA.

In this case, it must first be noted that students select this subject on their own. Unlike Compulsory English, it is not imposed on them. Another factor noted simultaneously is that these students need not face any communicative or linguistic competence. Take these two aspects into consideration. From this perspective, the syllabus should not aim at making conscious efforts to improve their language competence alone. The syllabus designers should freely think of achieving other aims.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SYLLABUS SHOULD BE AS FOLLOWS:

1. To introduce phases of Indian English literature;
2. To introduce major Indian English authors and their works;
3. To introduce creative and critical thinking abilities;
4. To make students aware of improving communicative competence;
5. To make students aware of improving linguistic competence.

The researcher intends to explain and justify these objectives one by one. Consider the first objective. As special students, they should begin with the survey of Indian English literature. East India Company was founded in India in 1600. The British had come to trade here. In the course of time, they seized political power. During this entire period, the British and the Indians came in contact with each other. When the British captured the entire country, Indians felt the need of learning English. This is the beginning of learning English by Indians on a large scale. The British embarked on formal education in India. As a result, a new generation of educated Indians flourished. Some of them became creative artists. Since then Indian English creative writing has been in vogue.

Students of special English should know the ABC of Indian English writing at the beginning of the three years' degree course. They must be accustomed to different phases of the Indian English literature. Literature does not take birth in a vacuum. It derives its influence from its society. The term 'society' refers to the society's prevailing economic, political, social and cultural conditions. Society is subject to change. It undergoes certain phases. During the British regime, Indians got exposed to several new and unprecedented phases. These phases influenced the contemporary Indian English writers. Students will be benefited by getting introduced to these writers and literary trends prevalent in different phases.

In this regard, some might raise one problem. English originated in England. Therefore, students should begin with British literature. This proposition is true. But FYBA is the entrance to special English. At the entry point, students should not be discouraged by introducing the survey of that literature which is totally unknown to them. Students should come to know that even Indian English writers can use good English. There are good Indian English poets, playwrights or prose writers. Besides, these authors' description is familiar to them as they write mainly on Indian scenes and events. Once they get accustomed to it, they will grasp native English authors too in the course of time.

Knowledge about authors is equally important. The author's environment makes impact on his make-up. The main source of his disposition is influenced by his surrounding; another source being his inherent mental set-up. All these together determine the nature of his work of art. Students' knowledge of the authors and their works enable them to get acquainted with the literature they are studying.

Literature enables students to know the author's creative sweep. While reading a book, they understand its theme. At the same time, they begin to know the underlying meanings. Knowledge of implications enables them to think critically. At this stage, they should develop their creative and critical ability. It is because independent thinking requires the development of these two faculties. Independent thinking is essential to invent some novel ideas. Therefore, it is necessary to develop their creative and critical abilities.

Students must be proficient in both oral and written communication. Their syllabus should enable them to be so. Through books, they get accustomed to the use of words and sentence constructions. The disputable point is that whether students can learn day-to-day communication by reading literary texts? There are two points in answer to this. One, language competence need not be the major aim of this syllabus. Secondly, conversational passages in literary texts acquaint them with communication.

Same can be argued in case of linguistic competence. Here the aim must be: English through literature. No book consists of unacceptable sentence constructions unless there are deliberate stylistic deviations. In case of stylistic deviations, the teacher is bound to bring them to students' notice. Use of words by master prose writers and use of sentences by them expose students to good English.

Survey of Indian English writing should begin roughly from 1800. Poems written by Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt to modern poets like Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Jayant Mahapatra, Gieve Patel may be prescribed. In case of novel, at least one novel from the three great modern novelists—Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand be prescribed. The survey should aim at literary sensibility too. At the same time, it should make students aware of the changing trends in literature. It is because this period mainly covers the social transition. A vast period ranging broadly from 1830 till today is a melting pot of several movements. These movements are in the form of currents, cross currents or counter currents. Formal education and mass education were hitherto unknown to India. Industrial Revolution was unprecedented. India witnessed a new form of government called parliamentary democracy. The Constitution gave a new approach to Indians. The problem of language arose. International politics was divided into three main ideologies—the capitalism, the socialism and the non-aligned movement. Religious skepticism emerged in minds. The invention of nuclear energy posed new problems. The 21st century witnessed another revolution called the software revolution. Besides, we are almost on the verge of biotechnological revolution. In short, so many movements occurred simultaneously. Especially the mid-20th century was the period of great turmoil. India had then recently won political independence. There was a major question before the thinkers of this period. This question was: How to extend political freedom to economic, social and cultural ones? At the same time, there stood another bigger question of maintaining political freedom. To do so, we needed powerful defense and the growth of food production. All these

problems were being faced by Indians during this period. As a result, literature cannot remain aloof from social trends. Literature of these periods naturally reflected the spirit of their respective age. This course is truly the entry of students into English literature. At this entry-stage, students should know the English introduced in India with all its phases. This should be known with three representative texts. Among them, one may be a collection of poems. The other may be a play. The third may be a novel.

EVALUATION SYSTEM

There are different kinds of evaluation system. One system is the annual evaluation system. In it, students' performance is assessed at the end of the year through a written exam. This examination usually carries 100 marks. In this system, however, students and teachers are likely to remain negligent of the syllabus. Teachers usually do not bother about feedback. Students too tend to study in the last one or two months. This system, therefore, is not much useful.

Another is the semester system. Here the syllabus for one year is divided into two semesters. After taking the semester exam, the student need not bother about the syllabus of that semester. However, in a country like India, this system is quite impracticable. Our policy is that of mass education. Our classes are big. It takes some time to start lectures after the term starts. As a result, teachers have to make haste to complete the syllabus. The academic year broadly begins on 20th June. In very few colleges lectures begin on that day. Usually teaching starts on 1st July. The teacher is bound to finish the syllabus by the end of September. Within three months, he has to discuss all the topics and give them periodical tests. If the teacher decides to administer two periodical tests on a class of about 100 students, he will be loaded with work. A teacher is assigned the workload of about 4 to 5 papers. Suppose, he assesses 30 papers every day without much tension (which actually does not happen). In this case, he can assess 7 to 8 papers of each subject. By that estimate, he will have to spend two weeks. During that period, he will not be able to make teaching preparation. How can he afford to waste two weeks twice in one semester without teaching preparation? This much workload is burdensome on the part of the teacher. In case of students, it is equally burdensome. It takes about 30 to 40 days to adapt to the new syllabus. Then students start working on that syllabus rapidly. As soon as they accelerate study, they are made to face periodical test. The semester system is wholesome where no mass but selective education prevails. A class should consist of no more than 20 students. There the concerned teacher should get full facilities including his own table and chair and adequate space for department. Blind imitation of American evaluation system is pernicious to our education.

Another substitute suggested is that of the Continuous Internal Evaluation (CIE). In it, student is partially tested through a series of tests. Another part of the evaluation there is the annual examination. Students' total evaluation is the outcome of the CIE and the annual examination. This system again is no different from the semester system. Therefore, it need not be accepted.

The 80+20 evaluation pattern is the best of all. In it, the annual syllabus is divided into the First and the Second Term syllabus. The term-end examination is related to the First Term syllabus only. This exam carries 60 marks. At the end of the second term, the student faces the annual examination. This examination carries 80 marks. In the annual examination, some questions are asked on the first term syllabus. In terms of total marks, the percentage such questions carry is approximately 40%. In other words, 30 to 35 marks are allotted for the questions set on the first term syllabus. The remaining marks are spared for the questions set on the second term syllabus.

Marks scored in the term end examination are reduced in proportion to the value of 20 marks. These marks are called the internal marks. They are added to the marks scored in annual examination. The figures drawn as a sum of the two marks is the final evaluation of the student.

As a result of this scheme, student tends to concentrate only on the First Term syllabus in the first term. He is not bound to think about the Second Term syllabus. In the Second Term, student focuses on the syllabus prescribed for the Second Term. However, even in second term, he has to revise the first term syllabus by fits and starts. In this way, the student remains aware of the whole syllabus the whole year. In all aspects, this system is feasible for the existing mass education.

The researcher would like to present a model syllabus of Optional/Additional English as follows:
Additional/Optional English

Indian English literature from 1800 to 2010 with representative texts:

Books prescribed:

1. A collections of poems

2. Hayavadana by Girish Karnad
3. The Financial Expert by R.K. Narayan

Recommended book:

1. A History of Indian English Literature by M.K. Naik

The researcher suggests the question paper pattern as follows:

QUESTION PAPER FORMAT
I. TERM END EXAMINATION

Total Marks: 60
Duration: 2 Hours
Total No. of Questions: 4

The format

- | | |
|--|------|
| Q.1. (a) Long answer question on the survey of Indian English writing. | [15] |
| OR | |
| Q.1. (a) Long answer question on the survey of Indian English writing. | |
| Q.2. (a) Two short notes (out of three) on the survey of Indian English writing. | [15] |
| OR | |
| Q.2. (b) Two short notes (out of three) on the survey of Indian English writing. | |
| Q.3. (a) Long answer question on a collection of poems | [15] |
| OR | |
| Q.3. (b) Long answer question on a collection of poems | |
| Q.4. (a) Two short notes (out of three) on a collection of poems. | [15] |
| OR | |
| Q.4. (b) Two short notes (out of three) on a collection of poems. | |
-

II. ANNUAL EXAMINATION

Total Marks: 80
Duration: 3 Hours
Total No. of Questions: 6

The format

- | | |
|--|------|
| Q.1. (a) Long answer question on the survey of Indian English writing. | [15] |
| OR | |
| Q.1. (b) Two short notes (out of three) on the survey of Indian English writing. | |
| Q.2 (a) Long answer question on a collection of poems | [15] |
| OR | |
| Q.2 (b) Two short notes (out of three) on a collection of poems | |
| Q.3 (a) Long answer question on <i>Hayavadana</i> . | [15] |
| OR | |
| Q.3 (b) Long answer question on <i>Hayavadana</i> . | |
| Q.4 (a) Two short notes (out of three) on <i>Hayavadana</i> . | [10] |
| OR | |
| Q.4 (b) Two short notes (out of three) on <i>Hayavadana</i> . | |
| Q.5 (a) Long answer question on <i>The Financial Expert</i> . | [15] |
| OR | |
| Q.5 (b) Long answer question on <i>The Financial Expert</i> . | |
| Q.6 (a) Two short notes (out of three) on <i>The Financial Expert</i> . | [10] |
| OR | |
| Q.6 (b) Two short notes (out of three) on <i>The Financial Expert</i> . | |
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JUSTIFICATION OF THE QUESTION PAPER FORMAT

I. TERM END EXAMINATION

For the term end question paper, the syllabus is divided into two equal parts. Out of three textbooks, two are left for the second term, whereas one is for the first term. However, the first term prescribes the study of survey of Indian English literature from 1800. Along with the study of survey only, the student is supposed to study the textbook.

Q.1 tests students' knowledge of Indian English writing in general since 1800. Q. 2 tests some specific facets of Indian English writing of the same period. Short notes in these questions may be on the form of literature of a specific period, or characteristics of a certain author and so on. In this way, the first two questions, take review of how much the student has worked on the literature of that period. Q. 3 and 4 exclusively test the poems written in that period. Q. 3 tests a general review of the poems. Q. 4 tests specific aspects.

In this way, the student can fully concentrate on the survey and one form, viz. poetry.

II. ANNUAL EXAMINATION

The second term syllabus carries one play and one novel. Here students can study these two genres in their perspectives. However, the questions in examination should be mainly on theme and the impact of the period. It is because we have adopted the survey approach. In the annual question paper, first two questions are spared for the first term topics. 30 marks are allotted for the first term syllabus. Marks scored in term end examination are reduced in proportion to the value of 20 marks. Adding these 20 marks to the 30 marks of the annual question paper, the emphasis weighs 50%. In this way, the proper share is given to the first term syllabus. One of the benefits of this evaluation system is that, as mentioned earlier, students cannot altogether neglect the first term syllabus. They have to revise it frequently. Q.1 and 2 test the survey and poems respectively. Q. 3 tests broad aspects of Hayavadana. Q. 4 tests specific aspects of Hayavadana. Likewise, Q. 5 tests broad aspects of The Financial Expert. Q. 6 tests specific aspects of The Financial Expert. Different competencies tested in both the exams are presented in the tabular form as follows:

TERM END EXAMINATION		
Question No.	Testing Item (Competency)	% of Emphasis
1(a) & (b)	broad aspects of Indian English Writing	25
2 (a) & (b)	specific aspects of Indian English Writing	25
3 (a) & (b)	broad thematic and other aspects of some representative Indian English poems	25
4 (a) & (b)	specific thematic and other aspects of some representative Indian English poems	25

ANNUAL EXAMINATION

Question No.	Testing Item (Competency)	% of Emphasis
1(a)/(b)	broad/specific aspects of Indian English Writing	18.75/18.75
2 (a)/(b)	broad/specific aspects of Indian English Poetry with some representative poems	18.75/18.75
3 (a) & (b)	broad aspects of Indian English drama with special reference to <i>Hayavadana</i>	18.75
4 (a) & (b)	specific aspects of Indian English drama with special reference to <i>Hayavadana</i>	12.50
5 (a) & (b)	broad aspects of Indian English novel with special reference to <i>The Financial Expert</i>	18.75
4 (a) & (b)	specific aspects of Indian English novel with special reference to <i>The Financial Expert</i>	12.50

From the above discussion, the researcher draws following conclusions:

1. This syllabus introduces Indian English authors and literature.
 2. It promotes creative and critical thinking abilities.
 3. It helps to improve communicative and linguistic competence through literature.
 4. At the beginning of the course, it is appropriate to know the fundamentals of Indian English writing. Introduction of British English literature in the beginning would lay burden on students.
 5. There should be neither semester nor annual evaluation system. The best system in the present circumstances is the 80 + 20 system.
 6. The question paper should test: 1) broad and specific aspects of Indian English writing. 2) broad and specific thematic and other aspects of some representative Indian English poems. 3) broad and specific aspects of Indian English drama with special reference to *Hayavadana*. 4) broad and specific aspects of Indian English novel with special reference to *The Financial Expert*.
- The researcher hopes the article may be helpful in devising the strategy of framing the syllabus for the First Year Optional English.

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