

Indian Sensibility through English Language: A Critical Analysis of *Keats was a Tuber* by Poile Sengupta

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Abstract— *The study of English language in this age of globalization is essential because English has become global language today. Therefore, to learn and to write in English is an utter need of present time. It is also pertinent to see that all original knowledge of every subject like- Science, Social Sciences- as Political Science, Economics and Arts lies in English language only. If one wants to learn the above subjects he must learn English language. Lord Macaulay in his 'Minute on Indian Education' stated that, "We must at present do our best to form a class, who may be interpreters between us and the millions of whom we govern- a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect..." It is well known fact that British ruled upon this country for more than two hundred years and India got freedom from British in 1947, but they put back their English language for Indians. It is the most important language of communication between different countries. In India, people of different states have their own languages but English language has been brought to us as a connecting link among various states of India. Today, English is essential in educational institutions, trading centers, corporate sectors etc. It has taken over all the regional and vernacular language too. In this paper, the play which I intend to talk about is Keats was a Tuber by Poile Sengupta. The play is a satire on Indian English Language; It questions the importance and ownership of the English language by Indians.*

Keywords— *Poile Sengupta, English Language, Keats.*

Poile Sengupta was born in 1948 as Ambika Gopalakrishnan. She is one of the most promising English playwrights in India today and is especially known as a playwright and writer for children. She completed her undergraduate studies and MA in English literature from Delhi University and later did a course in children's literature at Carleton University, Ottawa. Her plays are set

in Indian contexts and include *Mangalam* (1993), *Inner Laws* (1994), *A pretty Business* (1995), *Keats Was a Tuber* (1996), *Collages* (1998), *Samara's Song* (1999), *Alipha* (2001), and *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* (2001). Her first full length play *Mangalm*, won award for the Most socially relevant theme in the *Hindu- Madras Players Script Competition* in 1993. In addition, she had been an accomplished actor on the stage and owns her own theatre group named 'Theatre Club' in Bangalore.

The play *Keats was a Tuber* is set in a college staff room in a small town of Tamilnadu. The plot unravels the manner in which English is taught all over the country. This particular college is serving more as an example than anything else. The mechanical memorizing of facts, often not the essential ones, is what provides the title of the play. Students are taught to memorize the line '*Keats was a tuberculosis patient*' and '*culosis patient, culosis patient*'. This method is familiar to Indians in a typical Indian context. It is clearly evident that the line so memorized has little to do with Keats' claim to renown in the literary world. Further, the play unfolds how we have adapted English to our convenience and it is evident from the way we use it.

To quote a conversation between Sarala and Mr. Iyer in the play:

Iyer: Is it your attendance register that you are looking for, Sarala?

Sarala: Oh! Yes Sir. I was finding it but....

Iyer: (Gently) you mean you were looking for it but couldn't find it (146)

Another teacher, Dr. Dennis is shown exhibiting his knowledge of the famous English writers whom he can quote and make changes and adjust according to the situations. When Mrs. Nathan announces that her nephew would soon join the college, Dr. Dennis hears and replies:

Dr. Dennis: What is this about new face? Let me not to the marriage of new faces admit

impediments...prepare to meet thy doom. Beware, beware his flashing eyes, his flowing hair ...How long do you think he will survive in our little hades?

He further says:

Ah yes. Class fifty- five empty vessels to be filled with immortal longings. Must I go or shall I say.... Which is it to be oh Queen who walks in such authority, which is it to....

When Raghu, Mrs. Nathan's nephew finally arrives audience anticipates certain much needed changes which would take place in this college. After an enquiry, Raghu was apprised about the teaching system in the college and is also informed that the syllabus has not been changed for many years. Raghu's interaction with other faculty members reveals some flaws in the teaching system which needs to be seriously looked upon. Raghu's objection to the type of syllabus being taught at the college results in a heated debate. He brings a pragmatic approach to the syllabus of the college. He argues to delete things which have no significance. He says:

Have you ever bothered to notice what kind of prose has been selected for non- detailed stuff? Charles Lamb's essay, 'A Dissertation upon Roast Pig'... That's what I have to teach today. I have to take apart Lamb's delicate whimsy to boys and girls who are first generation literate. And worse, much worse, I have to talk about the mouth-watering and irresistible taste of crackling of roast pork to a group of students, a great many of whom don't eat meat and over half of whom are Muslim .(168)

Raghu's suggestion of replacing the present prescribed text with more practical materials like 'newspapers, magazines and advertisements....Real life material' to teach the English language seems a far-fetched idea in the college but it is full of hope and with positive results. His potent suggestions are perceptible below:

First of all, this non-detailed text. It should be banned.

Dennis: So, we are left no tools to neither teach with nor no stick?

...We put together small prose pieces which allow our students to learn language skills that they can use in their immediate environment. And we simulate real life situations in the classroom where they have to weave together their knowledge of English vocabulary, sentence structure etc.

In his short span of stay at this college Raghu also brings forth another important issue that of teaching English to the non-teaching employees of our institutions. Raghu teaches English to Ramanan (peon) by making him write on a slate.

Today, when English has made over the entire world of technology, international commercial world, the voiceless Ramanan epitomizes the aspirations of many Indians who believe that the knowledge of English would help them transform their lives. But question remains unanswered that 'Is it possible to convey our Indian sensibility through the imperial language of the British?' It is beyond doubt that Lord Macaulay had given this jewel of English to Indians but as a matter of fact, Indians have possessed it and given it their own flavor, texture and tone. They adopted the language but then, adapted it to their own needs and now adept in it. The play ends with the narrator on the stage giving her viewpoints about the transformations that the English language has been going through in Post-Independence India, and consequently, raises many questions regarding the language of English as: Is it merely a language? Is it a mode of communication that is functional in many, perhaps in most, parts of the world? Or have we inherited an entire civilization, an alien sensibility that had seduced us from the culture to which we were born? Have we been enchanted so as so wander forever homeless?

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