

## **Teaching *Pride and Prejudice* Through Critical Literacy and Critical-Affective Pedagogy in Bangladeshi Classrooms**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Reading a Canonical text like *Pride and Prejudice* in a Bangladeshi classroom offers a distinct experience compared to Western classrooms due to linguistic, social, cultural, and racial differences, albeit some overlap. Many Western students cannot discern the stereotypical ideologies embedded in an English text due to their regular involvement and assimilation of such preexisting assumptions, while many Bangladeshi students also struggle to recognize the formulated canonicity of a British text due to a lack of a strategic culturally nuanced approach to the text. Therefore, a stratified society depicted by Jane Austen should fittingly be read with the strategies of Critical Literacy Pedagogy for its challenging qualities of canonical narratives. The present paper draws upon the ideas of how welcoming discursive and subversive opinions not only helps students imagine alternatives but also enhances proficiency in a given subject, fulfilling the goal of both critical literacy and affective pedagogy. Holding onto the creative and analytical notions of critical-affective pedagogy tightly, I contend that students can amalgamate their instincts with interpretive acumen dispassionately. Again, students who are well-taught in these two former pedagogies can concomitantly be acquainted with metacognition – a process through which students become self-aware of their ways of thinking. This process also addresses how pupils, in turn, can shape, corroborate, and modulate their own interpretation of the text by employing their own agency. However, these pedagogies simultaneously cater to the noble purpose of a novel, that is, broaching novel ideas to provide an all-encompassing view, creating incisive critics out of students.

### **Introduction**

With the growing consciousness, in the process of being educated, the duty of students from the tertiary level does not remain only within the basic routine of collecting the text and attending the lecture-based classes on time, thinking them uncritically to be “therapy sessions”,<sup>1</sup> and achieving a mindless degree at the end of the session, even though it is appropriate for them “to hope that the knowledge received in these settings will enrich and enhance them”<sup>2</sup>. Not to mention, to cultivate the conscience and the consciousness of the student, the role of the teacher is preminent and comes first– in fact, it is the teacher who governs and ignites the activator motor of the students, executing effective strategies of pedagogy in expectation of a transcendental outcome from the transmission of knowledge. But today’s scenario mostly resembles Giroux’s apprehension that “pedagogy is now subordinated to the narrow regime of teaching to the test coupled with an often harsh system of disciplinary control, both of which mutually reinforce each other”.<sup>3</sup> Contrastively, Bell Hook’s “engaged pedagogy”<sup>4</sup> heralds educators’ self-sacrificial ability to make students self-actualized, which confirms their well-being and conscientization. But then, a Bangladeshi teacher, in the array of postcolonialism, needs to be more armed and forthcoming with a transparent attitude to dismantle the text from within. The lack of recognition that *Pride and Prejudice*, as a canonical text, prominently and microscopically captures a significant timeframe and concomitantly refers to Victorian literature, which, in turn, helps us comprehend pervasive ideologies and their parallel persistence even today, is largely overlooked, especially in a Bangladeshi classroom. To top it, only aesthetic pleasure is derived in lieu of unearthing the socio-political and socio-cultural disputes, cementing the perceived superiority of

the English canon. Challenging or testifying its authenticity and stereotypes is rarely a task that a pedagogue assigns his students with, even though dismantling these ideologies through germination of consciousness, implanting a sincere and strategic pedagogical process, is an indispensable responsibility of educators.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To construct critical and independent thinkers in a Bangladeshi classroom through a text like *Pride and Prejudice*, this paper broadly draws attention to theories of critical literacy and critical-affective pedagogy for their efficient strategies. Even though the concept of literacy, in a broader spectrum, is predominantly tainted and shaped by cultural and political affiliations from context to context, a critical pedagogical approach to this literacy, engaging with emotion and creativity, can unroll and decode the embedded societal stratification, leading a path toward achieving conscientization against an ideologized world. In this rigorous, yet palpable process, students will integrate their thoughts using their growing consciousness and metacognition process, subsequently enabling them to critically deconstruct canonical texts later in their learning.

Implementing these pedagogical strategies aims to confer upon learners an overarching vision with a “philosophical habit of mind”<sup>5</sup>, mastery over their feelings and consciousness, and the ability to become coherent narrators with confident tongues. Traditional referential reading of a canonical text limits students to the same old dogmatic West-induced interpretations, preventing them from venturing far and diving deeper into the text in the context of their own critical, political, and geographical position. Therefore, this paper sincerely renounces such limited pedagogical approaches, as referential “texts lead to one dimensional learning because it is transaction-based, socially conditioned and limited to everyday use” and thus, incapable of teaching “different range of linguistic, emotional and cultural references or social attitudes”<sup>6</sup>.

### **Projecting a British Text in Bangladeshi Context**

Presenting a canonical text in a Bangladeshi classroom often poses problems, as it evokes both estrangement and strangeness among students. Some feel alienated from British culture realizing its historical background, while others display an uncritical proximity rooted in perceived Western superiority. Besides, questions and issues of cultural hindrance, language barriers, East-West debate, and a plethora of controversies regarding colonial and postcolonial legacies are layered when displaying a text like *Pride and Prejudice*. Conversely, the adoption of English “as a medium of instruction at the primary level, secondary and tertiary level”,<sup>7</sup> particularly in the courses of literature and language within the Arts discipline, serves both as an asset of valuable life experience and an opportunity for appropriating the English language to negotiate ideologies. However, when perceived from the historical background, mastering the English language to comprehend the canonicity of a text requires even more of a long-term mindful vigorous process, for it ties the teacher and learners with an intricate web of British colonial history, converging it with the issue of identity. *Pride and Prejudice* can, therefore, induce a posttraumatic context with a “troubled knowledge” – a “knowledge of a traumatized past such as the profound feelings of loss, shame, resentment, or defeat that one carries from [his direct or indirect] participation in a traumatized community”<sup>8</sup>, forming a classroom more overwhelmed than one can predict.

Therefore, a strategic pedagogical move in reading this text should be employed to avoid biased revolts, complete revocation, or immense enchantment. Moreover, a divorce from the idea of catering to ideologies and cultivation of subversive ethos herald the appropriate way of deconstructing a British text in order to comprehend the underlying politics.

### ***Pride and Prejudice* Through the Lens of Critical Literacy Pedagogy**

To begin with, critical literacy first originated in countries that were then called “third world” – regions that were “undergoing decolonization”<sup>9</sup> – and according to Luke, critical literacy revolves around students’ engagement in “forms of ideology critique: exposing and reconstructing misleading ideological versions of the world”<sup>10</sup>. Whereas “approaches to literacy are expressions of dominant, ruling-class ideology”, critical literacy inspires students to be the “critique of ideology”,<sup>11</sup> as it provides “access to dominant languages, literacies, and genres”<sup>12</sup> while foregrounding change to the

ingrained narrative of power. Implementation of this very trait of critical literacy in the pedagogy creates an unconventional yet useful environment in the classroom where the student-teacher disparity gets blurred in the process of dissipating power and attaining *consciousness*. The thoughts of Paulo Freire on critical pedagogy are even profound and radical in nature, as he sees it as a dialogical platform that challenges normative ideologies through his notion of “problem-posing education”<sup>13</sup>. This unique and radical education system merges with critical literacy pedagogy (CLP) strongly and breaks down the discrepancy between powerfulness and powerlessness, triggering a sense of political understanding among the students that serves emancipation in turn.

Extending this very formula in *Pride and Prejudice* raises a lot of questions, revealing its quality of conforming to imperialism and colonialism by concealing contemporary political scenarios. The very fact that *Pride and Prejudice* comes to the shelf of readers when colonization, as per Alam, in the nineteenth century emanates as “the period when the sun was not ever seen to set on Britain’s overseas possessions”<sup>14</sup> and yet its omission of any traces of mass subjugation only reflects an execution of politics of exclusion carefully designed to avoid stir and trouble in the narrative of imperial expansion. Employing CLP in the classroom means targeting this politics that is disguised in pretty faces, decent drawing rooms, and wealthy families. Moreover, according to Borsheim-Black et al., CLP “weaves together two stances: reading *with* and against a *text*”<sup>15</sup>, for reading *with* a text is catering to the west-induced notions, and reading *against* is the action of deciphering unsaid meanings embedded in the text. For instance, Jane Austen’s smaller world that occupies the thought of marriage and complex psychology around it, conceals news about the then massive industrialization, rampant exploitation of nature, and an arbitrary seizure of lands from different terrains.<sup>16</sup> CLP underscores these insinuations, positing a suspicion of Austen for her involvement as an insider. Edward Said also asserts that “Austen’s awareness of empire is obviously very different, alluded to very much more casually, than Conrad’s or Kipling’s”<sup>17</sup> and this is what also makes her “far less different, far more severe”<sup>18</sup> than people who advocate imperialism outrightly. Her illustration of pretty and polite drawing rooms naturalizes the British imperial business, masking the unequal economy and wealth of powerful characters like Mr. Darcy or Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

The first step, while applying CLP, is to make pupils aware of the historical moments of British colonialism, and to do that, students should be well-equipped with the notions of five major dimensions of CLP that are— canonicity, contexts, literary elements, reader, and assessments.<sup>19</sup> While canonicity makes a text politically biased, context helps to restore the historical and socio-economical background with which the foundation of the text is built, and then literary elements inspect marginalized characters instead of exalting the major ones. Then, maneuvering and assessing questions on implicit socio-economic disparities, how marriage is a means of financial transaction, and whose labor is exploited to provide a lavish lifestyle to the wealthy characters of the text is the second task to analyze. Moreover, a floor for critically exchanging opinions should be provided with great enthusiasm for competence. Luke adopts the Freirian style of pedagogy where language is used to “‘problematicize’ the world – that is to take everyday ideological constructions of class, race, gender relations, and to make them problematic through dialogic exchange”<sup>20</sup>. Following such styles by maintaining a sense of reciprocity will enhance the understanding of other literary works from both the Victorian era and contemporary periods.

### **Converging Critical-Affective Pedagogy, Critical Pedagogy, and CLP**

The convergence of CLP and CAP – critical-affective pedagogy – is in fact a coherent approach to weave the critical and creative faculties conjointly among students as a process of holistic engagement for the shaping of dispassionate yet kind learners. However, the notion of Critical pedagogy centers around the development of sectors such as “‘dialogue’, Ideology Critique’, ‘transformative education’ ... , and ‘praxis education’”.<sup>21</sup> Molina and Miranda also add to the subject that any “educational spaces of exclusion have been the focus of critical pedagogy”<sup>22</sup>, as education and knowledge both can be colonized by building “four walls around it and use it to (one’s) advantage”<sup>23</sup>. Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* takes on the same plight, as knowledge is withheld silently and sinisterly to cater to British imperialism and colonialism, conforming to the

politics of intellectuality. Freire holds this as a “banking”<sup>24</sup> model of education – while explaining critical pedagogy – where selective knowledge is deposited in students without allowing them to get involved in dialectical practice in order to marginalize concepts related to marginalized people.

However, apart from radical criticism in pedagogy, it should also extend to pull out the novel aspects from the text through students’ feelings by engaging nobly. Other than bashing the canonicity, a text invokes scopes for fostering empathy through the commitment of CAP. As Hossain asserts that “doing literature” is “creative and visceral” and “critical and cerebral”<sup>25</sup> at the same time while defining CAP, he implies a text’s dual quality of imparting sensitivity along with empathic reasoning on students. Besides, being compassionate with the ideas and characters moulds students’ hearts with positivity, retaining humanity to create an even society to liberate trapped souls. The fact that both “Darcy and Elizabeth are purged of their pride and prejudice and can therefore meet as reasonable and affectionate people” – because of the “moral and emotional revolutions that (they) experience”<sup>26</sup> – emanates as a didactic literary piece. Affection can be cultivated among students scrutinizing these protagonists to achieve an empathic vision of life for more prudence. Wiesenfarth also assures, “Jane Austen dramatizes the growth of individuals to a freedom of action based on intelligence and affection in *Pride and Prejudice*”.<sup>27</sup>

Asking students about their feelings regarding Elizabeth’s rejection of Collins and Darcy (only to accept him later) or Charlotte’s decision to marry will reveal their psychology. CAP here helps students achieve the vantage point from where they recognize the volition utilized by Elizabeth and Charlotte’s reasons for marrying the obnoxious Collins – which engenders from the fear of being outcasted from the deep-rooted problematic English society. However, the emotional investment should be carried out from the end of both teacher and students to fuse relationships like “teacher-of-the-students” and “students-of-the-teacher”, evolving into an equal term, “teacher-student” to maintain reciprocity of learning.<sup>28</sup> Thus, CAP is involved in construing of a text, personalizing which, boosts students’ creative faculty making them aware of the negotiable surrounding.

### **Metacognition: The Making of a Dispassionate Narrator**

When a text is read both politically and affectively, the metacognition process starts to unfold, enabling students to track their thoughts and navigate analytical power over them. Wilson and Conyers define metacognition that “involves thinking about one’s thinking, or cognition”, engendering “their intellectual performance; to know how, when, where, and why to use particular cognitive strategies”.<sup>29</sup> For Hossain metacognition benefits learners “attain substantial control over their cognition processing”, leaving them proficient in “innovating strategies for problem-solving in the wider arena of life”<sup>30</sup>. In metacognition, scaffolding in education meets its end, as students emerge as independent thinkers, recognize their abilities, and operate them rationally.

Through characters like Darcy and Elizabeth, pupils can be made to realize the fact that their maturity is a culmination of their self-reflection on premature assumptions and prejudices. Activating this self-reflection will lead them to be independent intellectuals. They then neither will subscribe to coloniality nor will revoke its significance; rather, decolonizing a text like *Pride and Prejudice* by imagining it as a part of ‘world literature’, they will transcend boundaries of colonial discrepancies, saving themselves from being intellectual demagogues.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, a blending of criticality, emotion, and intellect in the same mixing dough frees students from being slaves of their own thoughts and their cognitive biases. Integrating pedagogical strategies carefully for fostering an all-inclusive vision in Bangladeshi students is crucial, especially because of their locality and the distance they feel from the exposure to a canonical text. CAP and CLP systems already navigate the malleable hearts of students to be empathic and aware of the politics around; metacognition along with it, prevents them from being futile mechanical intellectuals and ensures full flowering of the mind through ratiocination. A contextual and nuanced understanding of *Pride and Prejudice* through these pedagogical

strategies extends one's view to an extent where conscientization flourishes, subsequently achieving transcendence in thought. Freire's concept of achieving "critical consciousness" with a "structural perception"<sup>31</sup> – a perception from which a student learns that his "living conditions derive from social and economic systems, structures, and institutions" instead of "God, family, and culture"<sup>32</sup> – is fulfilled when we adopt and comprehend an all-encompassing assessment of CLP, CAP, and metacognition in the classroom through the lens of "only connect"<sup>33</sup>.

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