



Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Students bring in their own experience.

Professor Meena Kumari: Their own experience

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay

Professor Meena Kumari: And I try to say even we have the similar experience. When I just ask them, do you have anything that How do you feel about this poem? Do you have any experience like this? We do have similar experience. So, they share their experience.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Is there any one example that you can recall?

Professor Meena Kumari: That is what I told you about this Richard Cory.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay.

Professor Meena Kumari: Okay. So immediately they said like what we are going through right now. There are so many people starving here.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay.

Professor Meena Kumari: Okay. So, they bring out such experience and we just got ourselves diverted from poem to Covid-19 and even that I said you can bring even that part of a poem. Like for example like among school children if I remember, Yeats speaks about 'he comes as a senator entering the school and looking at the school, he thinks about his own school days. The second stanza he goes little away okay. He goes little away and then he speaks about the muses and third stanza again he comes to school.' That is the beauty of poem. It is like for a prose piece you know, we have to, it is like a sculpture who sculpturing the whole thing. For a prose like he starts with the hair and the forehead and the nose, it is my own view of interpreting okay and then this is structure it gives.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay. Yeah, yeah.

Professor Meena Kumari: Whereas a poet can bring his polish from the fingers nails. He can go like this and leave it here and then he can start from the toe and he can collect it.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: That is poetic.

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, that is poetic and that is how like we just go into lots of discussion like this. They enjoy the classes.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Very good.

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, it is always beyond the teaching hour. Okay? And somebody like other lecturer comes and say it is time for your class. Only then the even the student will disperse. So, they really enjoy. Yeah.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay. What about your students ma'am? How do they respond to you?

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: Yeah. Like as I told they enjoy a lot but also, they going through a lot of challenges in the interpretation. Particularly it reminded when Ma'am was explaining about that, I have to take Jewish poem where I felt very difficult. There are moments of emptiness where I would stand and stare at them of how to bring about the particular feeling to them, more with the war poetry or even with the Jewish poetry. And it becomes very important for us to foreground the poem at something.

So, I just try to put in just the documentaries or some movie clips for them to understand the perineal refugee status of the Jews, for them to go with more sensibility towards the poem. So, these are some of the challenges faced by the teachers that particularly the country like India which had not, for the contemporaries they have now seen war.

And how do we bring in that kind of more of what easily to call as the unified sensibility in these things. So, all that had been just read as the historical facts for them but when it comes as a poem, how do we take it up to the students? So, there are lot of scaffolding that needs to be done onto the students and we try to supplement it with the movies which I could recommend for them, so that they could watch in the

weekends or taking the documentaries or the clips which they can watch, for them to understand who the Jews and or what their problem is, even though we are not going to engage all the time in the storytelling class or support all these things.

So, these visual mode of looking at and understanding their status really gives them more pleasure and also a challenge. So, the poem might be just a piece with 14 lines and 15 lines or 20 lines but the effort that the students need to take in order to do good justice to the poem demands multidimensional aspects. That is why I usually tell the students that taking up English literature does not mean that we are going to speak stories all the time. So, it is going to be multidisciplinary not even just interdisciplinary. It is going to be multidisciplinary in its approach. And it is very important for you to have good understanding about the history or the anthropology or psychology and many other fields.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: True.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: So, they understand the seriousness of it and they also, do enjoy when they come out with the exploration. So, as we say poetry is the better understanding of the known and then even exploring the unknown.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yeah, it does.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: It does. So that is how I think they enjoy the poetry classes.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Do you have any specific Jewish poet or text that you discuss in the class?

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: Yes Sir. I was actually discussing about the Jewish poem where they are unable to identify themselves because identity becomes very very important for anyone. But for the students in India elsewhere, this might not be a very great problem for them because we, as Indian we also enjoy the diversity.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: True.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: We are so used to this idea of it. But for the Jews who keep or even with Nizam's poetry that comes up with. So, we find that it is a lot of struggle, the poem, the refugee itself brings in a good view or presentation and that just comes

as a nutshell of history of the Jews. So, that is where we need to facilitate the students to understand that.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay. With all these can we say something that this is what our students gain from our teaching of poetry in the class?

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, they do gain a lot, not only students, anybody who reads a poem.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay. That is good.

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah. For example, let us take a poem. When we read the poem, for example, like Road Not Taken I already quoted it, two roads diverged. When a person is not able to understand the meaning of diverge, it is an example, immediately he will go and refer. So thereby is developing his vocabulary.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yes.

Professor Meena Kumari: Okay? His verbal thinking and then as he is reading the poem, he is able to have some sort of an understanding with the poet. Sometimes a poem might make him very sad. So, he develops empathy.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Oh, That's Great.

Professor Meena Kumari: okay! And then when I try to analyze the poem, critical thinking okay? and some poems will give him a spark. A poem ignites a spark in a human being and it has got a lot of dimension and perceptions in a poem and such dimension, perception will definitely help him when he is facing a problem in life.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: True. Very true.

Professor Meena Kumari: When somebody is passing a comment on him, let us just take an ordinary example, he need not get angry immediately at that person. He has to think and this thinking and dimension, perception only a poem is teaching him. Suppose he is facing a problem in his life, immediately can think of Ode to the West Wind.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yeah.

Professor Meena Kumari: The winter comes can, spring be far behind.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yeah.

Professor Meena Kumari: How long all of us are very happy sitting at home right now at lockdown. Thanks to our literature. How long this is going to be there? Only for a short while. So, poems always give you what is known as a soothing value to you and a soothing feeling to you and makes you very comfortable and you can face any situation in life and no problem will be a poem when you have read a lot of poem. And you can enjoy nature even sitting at home for 90 days of course by looking from a window you can be very happy.

You can be somewhere heavenly because thanks to poem, You can imagine yourself as a Wordsworth. So, many things we can do, only when thanks to poems. So, I think students can gain all these quality, verbal thinking, critical thinking and then vocabulary and then he can develop his words and then any poem.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Empathy you mentioned.

Professor Meena Kumari: Empathy and then igniting a spark in him okay. Why not? When he can do it, why not me? Okay? And when he is feeling of having a problem all these, what he has written his life, anybody that matter, not only a student should learn a poem, everybody should read poem to develop his overall personality. In the end of it you will be a better human being.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: That is true.

Professor Meena Kumari: You will just avoid all sorts of negative qualities, no anger, no jealousy, no pride. Thanks to poem. That teaches you a wonderful lesson. It moulds one's personality.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: So, can I summarize it like this, poetry has a refining power on human beings?

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, yeah. Literature is a reflection of life. I say it is a refraction of life.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Good Good

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, it is not only reflecting, also a source of refracting.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay. Yes ma'am, what about you? What do you think your students gain from your teaching of poetry or anyone's teaching of poetry for that matter?

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: Yeah so, the first thing is, poetry is for pleasure.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: of course.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: So, they enjoy doing that and particularly I find that when they are able to meet several characters, several dimensions of the human mind, so I think they develop more skills in understanding humanity better and I am just reiterating the point as Madam said that it is more to do with their own judgement about the people living around.

So, it also has a touchstone here that they could have a better sense of humanity. They will be able to deal with their lives better and literature is not the very abstract subject as such which we could dismiss as a part of that. It connects them with life. So, it is a very lively experience and I think they will be able to be better citizens in the world by good understanding, making better judgments and meeting so many characters through literature though very imaginative that we also see the reality that exist in life.

So, that way I think it not only just helps them with language, with the communication skills, it also helps them with the critical thinking skills also and to have a better understanding of humanity which would make their lives very happier.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: From you I understand that students become better citizens of the country and the society.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: Definitely Sir. There is more refined sensibility which they develop.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Now, we have something very important for students. Whenever they come to poetry classes, they have one problem. How to write answers

for questions on poetry in the examination, in the test and in the university examinations? Do you have some suggestions for you students?

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, I always tell them what is happening in classroom is totally a different scenario because that way I am trying to mould you as a better human being. We are having a collaborative discussion to make you a better person. I too learn from you all, from your experience. It is just a teaching learning experience in the classroom. When it comes to examination you must always think of the evaluator's mind.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yes. What is that in his mind?

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah. Yeah. Do forget about the poet. Forget about everybody around you. Only evaluator should be there in your mind. How will he mark my answer?

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay.

Professor Meena Kumari: So, first I tell them like you just write about the poet and then the age and then come the summary of the poem, the critical summary interpretation okay.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay.

Professor Meena Kumari: And then the theme of the poem and in this include the style of writing also. If going for a PG class a little more of a discussion where you can bring the theory part and try to justify.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Hmmm

Professor Meena Kumari: If it is going to be a graduation class the questions will be more direct. What is the theme of Robert Frost's Road Not Taken and what does Shelley say to Ode to the West Wind? Whereas in a PG class like just a statement of Robert Frost says, "A poem begins with delight and ends with wisdom" justify that with reference to your poem. So, you must try to justify it. So, in that way you must present your answer. This is how I teach them sir.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay then your students are satisfied?



Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, they are satisfied. The evaluator is also satisfied. They are getting good marks.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yeah, the ultimate test is getting good marks.

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, Yeah, yeah that is true.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay what about you ma'am?

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: I slightly differ in my view. I mean of how I look at the students I just tell them that you go and sit in the examination hall and you look at the questions, you just contemplate a bit on the poem and you just start presenting it of course in a very structured manner. So that is you enjoy.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: What is the structure? What kind of structure you are talking about?

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: So, I just tell them to go on. As Madam said to introduce the poem, the poet and then going on with the title of the poem and then go on with the structural analysis of the poem then the thematic analysis of the poem and also the stylistic devices, the poetic devices that are embedded in it and then conclude it with your views on how and you can also add your personal note too, what you understood with that poem.

So, that way they will have the structured presentation but at the same time I tell them that you just think about that poem, enjoy yourself but present it in a very structured way. So that, the evaluator will be able to see that you have a good understanding of the parts of the poem.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: So that is how...

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay. When the students give their own opinion, personal experience, how do you think it will be marked by the evaluator?

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: I think the evaluator would only enjoy, how the student has connected it with life.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: So, as the evaluator I would not be dismissing it. We often find that in the answer scripts.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Very good.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: And so, the teacher would have actually shared some sort of comparisons in order to illustrate her point. And we find that same example being quoted in the answer scripts and so we only enjoy it and so I think the evaluation gets better with that the student has been very sincere in the class and also able to come up with, that is what we are actually expecting it from the students. They need to be creative and just not...

Professor Meena Kumari: And moreover, it will be better if they can quote a few lines from the poem.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yeah, very good.

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, we have to quote. Sometimes we mark them, this is an important quotation. Sometimes like I ask them what you feel is important. So, quoting lines of the poem plays a very important role in structuring the answer.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yeah, that is where exactly I wanted you to ask what kind of personal experience the students writing in the exam will receive more marks. So, from you I understand that the students writing about his own experience with reference to some quoted passages would be more suitable.

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, suitable, yeah, yeah.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay. Okay

Professor Meena Kumari: Like for example the popular lines or well said lines often spoken lines can be quoted. If you take Shelley's like we do not speak about the first stanza at all, because it just starts as the delight. That is delight everywhere. But we speak always about the winter comes can spring be far behind.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yeah

Professor Meena Kumari: Actually, winter is much nicer for us in India but we still just go along with the European culture.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: That we consider it metaphorically.

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah, yeah that way.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yeah, okay so we have considered several questions in our discussion today. I think we should end our panel discussion with some readings by you. You have already rendered one poem.

Professor Meena Kumari: Yeah.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: You have some poem to read ma'am?

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: Yes Sir.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Please.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: So, I would just like to recite Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach.' I am not going with the whole poem but some of the stanzas which I could share.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Okay.

Professor G Kalvikkarasi: So, as I already told that it starts with "The sea is calm tonight..." and then I go on with the second stanza.

"The Sea of Faith,

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore,

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear,

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath,

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear,  
And naked shingles of the world.”

And then the poem makes a transition to the domestic setting and...

“Ah, love, let us be true,  
To one another! for the world, which seems,  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain,  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.”

And I feel that this poem is a clarion call made by Matthew Arnold, not to give a very negative vision of life but for us to understand the vicissitudes of life and also develop that kind of mental attitude that we have to understand the challenges and look for a better world and that is how I understood Matthew Arnold's Dover Beach that he is making a call for all of us to look for a or rather to create a beautiful world where we all could live in peace.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Thank you Ma'am.

Professor Meena Kumari: Sir, I just like to read this Louise Gluck poem

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yes Please.

Professor Meena Kumari: Because she has won the Nobel prize.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: That's nice

Professor Meena Kumari: So, I thought we can pay a tribute to this in the final discussion.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yes.

Professor Meena Kumari: The poem is from a village life. The name of the poem is 'Crossroads.'

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Yes.

Professor Meena Kumari: Okay!

“My body, now that we will not be traveling together much longer,

I begin to feel a new tenderness toward you, very raw and

unfamiliar,

like what I remember of love when I was young,

love that was so often foolish in its objectives,

but never in its choices, its intensities.

Too much demanded in advance, too much that could not be

promised –

My soul has been so fearful, so violent;

forgive its brutality.

As though it were that soul, my hand moves over you cautiously,

not wishing to give offense,

but eager, finally, to achieve expression as substance:

it is not the earth I will miss,

it is you I will miss.”

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: That is great ma'am. The title itself is metaphorically relevant to all of us all the time 'Crossroads.' We refer to Two Roads of Robert Frost and this Dover Beach is also, not one beach, many beaches. Crossroads, cross beaches and that is excellent. I am very happy that you have brought this poem by Gluck to us for to this panel discussion.

I hope we had have an enjoyable panel discussion on serious questions about the poetry; on what is poetry, why do we teach poetry, how do we teach poetry, the common questions that our students may ask us in our classrooms when we discuss poetry and some strategies that we may learn from others or we may develop on our own as we teach poetry in the class and some of the favourite poems that we often refer to as a kind of lighthouse, some kind of light for us to see some path in the darkness all the time in our life.

And then, we also paid attention to the kind of responses that we get from our students and the benefits that our students gain from reading poetry and for us also as you were mentioning several benefits of reading poetry in the class for your students. I think we are also learning, gaining so much from reading poetry. In one sense I understand a poetry is all about positivity, even a poem which has negative experiences, somehow finally at the end indicates a kind of positive note for which I think Gluck also received her Nobel prize this year.

There is an element of hope at the end of every poem that we can feel happy about, and most importantly for the learners of our course we address this question on how to write an answer in an examination hall about any question on poetry. Both of them gave, both Professor Meena Kumari and Professor Kalvikkarasi gave their responses regarding some structured way of answering the question.

First understanding the question is important. Then depending on the nature of the question we have to give some background about the poet, about the context in which the poet wrote his/ her poem. Then brief summary of the poem, critical summary of the poem, some comment on the theme and if the learner is in the post graduate level some critical account applying some kind of theory and most importantly for all of us it will be good for us to share some of our own experiences and relate these experiences with the key lines from the poem.

I think we would do a very good job and we have also shared some of our poems. We would like to end this discussion with a small poem from a poet called A. R. Ammons on whom I did my PhD. I could relate to him in so many ways as I could do many other poets. Poetry opened up the gates for relating with others with all kinds of experiences in my life.

That is why I have 2 teachers with whom I could relate through poetry. The poem is called 'Small Song.'

“The reeds give way to the wind  
and give the wind away.”

Let me read it again. “The reeds give way to the wind and give the wind away.” It is a beautiful message; the reeds give way to the wind. Receive the wind and then give way to the wind. We have received some poems from our teachers, from our courses and we have passed on these poems and experiences to you. All the best. Thank you, ma'am.

Professor Kalvikkarasi: Thank you. Thank You.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Thank you ma'am.

Professor Meena Kumari: Thank you sir.

Professor S. P. Dhanavel: Thank you for your participation in this panel discussion on these various questions. Let me hope that our learners will find them very helpful. Thank you very much.

Professor Kalvikkarasi: Thank you sir for the opportunity. Hail the poets.