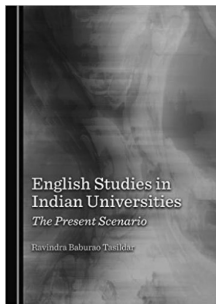


English Studies in Indian Universities: The Present Scenario

Reviewed by Digambar M. Ghodke



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In his ambitious research work on English Studies in India, Ravindra Tasildar reviews the development of English studies and investigates its present scenario in the Indian context. The book is an outcome of systematic investigation of historical perspectives to classroom-specific pedagogies, from sociological and political hierarchies to the dynamics of intellectual development in the English language teaching in Indian universities. Interrogating both policy and practice pertaining to English Studies in the context of Indian higher education, the chapters in the book seek to formulate contemporary perspectives to these debates and envision alternative possibilities.

Ravindra Tasildar has been teaching English to students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Maharashtra (India) for more than 20 years. In addition to two books on the teaching of reading and reference skills in Indian universities, he has published research papers on the syllabi of English courses in Indian universities, ELT and comparative studies. His book breaks new ground for discussion as it examines the development of curricula in English in Indian universities vis-à-vis the needs of second language learners studying in Special English, the term used by Gokak (1964) and Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) for English (1989), programmes of Bachelor of Arts (BA). It also reflects on how globalization has strengthened the connection between English and

employment.

Through his arguments in the book which are based on systematic research, the author has taken a standpoint that English studies in India has failed to meet the needs of rural learners. The author reviews English Studies in India and its history of more than 190 years, and explores the views of Meenakshi Mukherjee (1993), Gauri Vishwanathan (1990), Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1992), Sudhakar Marathe (1993), among others, to support his standpoint. Referring to Mukherjee (1993), the author underlines the status quo in English studies in Indian universities. Questioning the relevance of teaching British literature in post-colonial India, Tasildar refers to two monumental works- Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* and Sunder Rajan's *The Lie of the Land*. The author expresses his disappointment over the fact that even the serious critiques of English Studies in India restrict themselves to postgraduate teaching in the elite academic institutions in the Indian metropolis. Unfortunately, these studies scarcely explore the scenario at the undergraduate level in rural India. Hence, the study can be best described as a significant contribution to the field of English Studies in India and other South Asian countries where more or less a similar scenario persists.

Reviewing the aims of teaching English at the undergraduate level, the author attempts to examine the Special English courses from a utilitarian perspective. With scholarly analysis of the course content and supported by empirical data, Tasildar tries to prove that while designing syllabi of the undergraduate courses the requirements of the learners are not taken into consideration.

The book is divided into six chapters. Beginning with the critical examination of the main arguments in the much-discussed books on ELT in India, he examines whether the Special English papers in Indian universities cater to the globally changing academic and vocational needs of the students of the Special English courses. The survey of the state of English Studies in Indian universities, as put forth in the second chapter, compels the author to remark that in comparison with the General English (GE) courses, enough attention has not been paid to enhance the employability of the students of Special English courses. In the third chapter, Tasildar provides an overview of a typical ELT syllabi and evaluates the contribution of various commissions and study groups to the evolution of Special English courses offered in Indian universities. Here he reminds the teachers of English of their changed role in syllabus designing. While in the fourth chapter, taking the objectives of Special English courses into consideration, the author argues that the process of revising the syllabi of the Special English courses is mostly restricted only to changing the course content, ignoring the needs of the students. Here, the author rightly points out that the proportion of literature papers

is more than that of linguistics papers. In the fifth chapter, the author, through the analysis of student responses, brings out the mismatch between the assumptions of the syllabus designers and students' preferences. In the final chapter, Tasildar, while suggesting a revamping of the existing syllabi of Special English papers, emphasizes the need of introducing new optional papers and reviewing the policy of promoting add-on courses in English in the conventional degree programmes.

Overall, the book is an excellent source of ideas; it is an interesting and informative account of English Studies in colleges in the context of globalization. It breaks new ground for serious academic contemplation on the course content of the Special English papers offered by the selected universities in India. The book will be of considerable interest to those who follow the English for masses approach. Considering the insightful research and observations put forth by the author, the book is strongly recommended to the BoS members of Indian universities, policy makers, syllabus compilers, teachers, scholars and researchers of English literature and language studies, linguistics, and culture studies, and others interested in exploring new paradigms of engagement with the disciplinary formulation of English Studies in India.

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