

English Studies in Indian Universities

English Studies in Indian Universities:

The Present Scenario

By

Ravindra Baburao Tasildar

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This book is dedicated to

My Mother

Shanta

and

**The teachers of
Sadhana Vidyalaya, Highschool
and Junior College,
Gadhinglaj, Dist. Kolhapur**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	viii
List of Charts	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Introductory Note	xiv
Chapter One..... Introduction	1
Chapter Two..... Developments in the Teaching of English in India at the UG Level	17
Chapter Three..... Curriculum Development and Syllabus Designing	40
Chapter Four..... Analyses of Special English Papers	67
Chapter Five..... Stakeholders' Responses to the Special English Papers	116
Chapter Six..... Findings and Suggestions	222
Appendices	267
References	332
Index	343

LIST OF TABLES

- Table 2.1 Objectives of the conventional and professional GE courses
- Table 3.1 Two types of syllabus as summarized by White (1988)
- Table 3.2 Number of papers offered in the SE courses in some Indian universities
- Table 4.1 The Special English papers offered at the University of Mumbai (UoM), Shivaji University, Kolhapur (SUK) and the University of Pune (UoP)
- Table 4.2 Phrases used in the statement of objectives of Special papers
- Table 4.3 Classification of papers offered in the universities
- Table 4.4 Weighting of background topics in the literature papers
- Table 4.5 Number of texts prescribed in the papers offered
- Table 4.6 Disparity in the number of poems prescribed in the three universities
- Table 4.7 Weighting given to different components in the papers on Literary Criticism offered in the UoM, SUK and the UoP in TYBA
- Table 4.8 Titles of linguistics papers offered in the UoP and SUK
- Table 4.9 Weighting given to different aspects of language in the core papers
- Table 4.10 Changes in the titles of Allied papers offered in the UoM
- Table 4.11 Form-wise arrangement of poems in SYBA Paper II (UoM)
- Table 4.12 British and non-British texts for minor literary forms prescribed in the literature papers
- Table 4.13 British and non-British texts in the papers on major forms
- Table 4.14 The proportion of British and non-British texts in the period-wise paper P-VIII - 20th Century Literature in English (TYBA - UoM)
- Table 4.15 The number of British and non-British poems in the papers on poetry
- Table 4.16 Genre-wise representation of women writers
- Table 4.17 Weighting given to internal assessment
- Table 4.18 Application-oriented questions in the current literature papers
- Table 4.19 Analysis of the question papers of the current syllabi
- Table 4.20 Type of questions in the question papers of the current syllabi
- Table 4.21 Frequency of the question words in the question papers

- Table 4.23 Word limit in the existing course in SUK
- Table 4.24 Question type and word limit in the universities in the April 2010 question papers
- Table 4.25 Relation between time allotted and marks
- Table 6.1 a) Students enrolled for the B.A. (Special English) courses
- Table 6.1 b) Number of students attending classes for the B.A. (Special English) courses
- Table 6.2 Inclination of students towards add-on courses and their demand for inclusion of components in the syllabi of B.A. (Special English) course
- Table 6.3 Section A: Writing skills and Presentation skills
- Table 6.4 Section B: Listening, Speaking and Reading skills
- Table 6.5 Students willing to enter the teaching profession
- Table 6.6 Women students willing to enter the teaching profession
- Table 6.7 B.A. degree in Contemporary English Studies in Lingnan College, Hong Kong
- Table 6.8 a) Proposed substitution of literature papers
- Table 6.8 b) Proposed substitution of literature papers
- Table 6.9 Proposed new optional papers
- Table 6.10 Course components suggested by students, teachers and subject experts
- Table 6.11 Proposed Special English papers for the University of Mumbai (UoM), Shivaji University, Kolhapur (SUK) and the University of Pune (UoP)

LIST OF CHARTS

- 5.1 Sample size
- 5.2 Views on the vastness of the syllabi of Special English papers
- 5.3.1 Views on the availability of textbooks and reference books in the college library
- 5.3.2 Views on the availability of textbooks and reference books in the market
- 5.4 Views on the need to prepare study materials on the lines of Open Universities
- 5.5 Views on the need to include a list of websites in the recommended reading
- 5.6 Views on the preferences to the methods of teaching
- 5.7 Views on the frequency of using methods other than lecture
- 5.8 Views on the need to use DVDs / VCDs of literary works and language units
- 5.9 Views on the frequency of using AV aids
- 5.10 Views on using Marathi while teaching the Special English papers
- 5.11 Views of the students and teachers concerning the promotion of students' self study
- 5.12 Views on the use of evaluation methods
- 5.13 Views on the abilities developed among students
- 5.14 Views on add-on courses
- 5.15 Suggestions for the inclusion of course components in the B.A. (Special English) course
- 5.16 Views on the objectives of B.A. (Special English) course in the 21st century

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—Ravindra Tasildar

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Right from its formal introduction in India in 1835, through Thomas B. Macaulay's Minute, English has been linked with the employment prospects of Indians. Owing to globalization the last few years have witnessed the opening up of thousands of new lucrative job opportunities for the graduates proficient in English. Thus, English has gained importance in India as the language of opportunities. In colonial India English education was a passport to government jobs while in the twenty-first century, proficiency in English is a must for private sector jobs.

This book is divided into six chapters. The **first chapter**, 'Introduction', critically examines the main arguments in the much-discussed books like *Masks of Conquest* (1990) by Gauri Viswanathan, *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India* (1992) by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (ed.), *Provocations* (1993) by Sudhakar Marathe et al. (ed.), *Rethinking English* (1994) by Svati Joshi (ed.) and *Subject to Change* (1998) by Susie Tharu (ed.). The chapter also notes that there are numerous studies on the General English (GE) courses whereas studies on the Special English (SE) courses are very few. The studies by Chakrabarti (1981), Muire (1981), Cherian (2001) and Mekala (2004) consider certain issues unique to the SE courses in India – the background of the learners, the absence of aims and objectives, unsuitable syllabi and obsolete methods of teaching – mainly from the teachers' point of view. Therefore, the present study is a modest attempt to examine, from the students' perspective, whether the Special English papers offered in the three universities of Maharashtra State selected here – the University of Mumbai (UoM), the University of Pune (UoP) [now Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU)] and Shivaji University, Kolhapur (SUK) – cater to the globally changing academic and vocational needs of the students of SE courses which are known as 'English (Major)' in the UoM, 'English Special' in the UoP and 'English (Special)' in SUK. For convenience and uniformity, the term 'Special English' (SE) has been used in the present study as used by Gokak (1964) and the Curriculum Development Centre for English (1989).

The **second chapter**, entitled 'Developments in the Teaching of English in India at the UG Level', is a survey of the state of English Studies in Indian universities in the post-independence period, with special

reference to the GE and SE courses. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the evolution of the GE and SE courses in Indian universities. It is pointed up in the section that most of the universities in the country are busy modifying just the GE courses. The second part is a critique of the vocationalization of English Studies in India. The argument is that the employment potential of students of professional degree programmes is developed through regular GE courses whereas in the conventional degree programmes add-on courses like Career Oriented Courses (COC) in English are introduced. The chapter asserts that in comparison with the GE courses, enough attention has not been paid to enhance the employability of the students of SE courses.

Chapter three, 'Curriculum Development and Syllabus Designing', also is divided into two parts. The first part considers the different views concerning 'curriculum' and 'syllabus' and it further provides an overview of a typical ELT syllabi. The second part, entitled 'Curriculum development in English Studies in India', evaluates the contribution of various commissions, study groups and committees to the evolution of SE courses offered in Indian universities. The suggestions by some subject experts for the development of English Studies in Indian universities are critically examined in this chapter. The chapter also makes an attempt to throw light on the changed role of teachers in syllabus designing.

While tracing the evolution of the SE courses in the three universities, the **fourth chapter**, 'Analyses of Special English Papers', attempts an in-depth study of the objectives of the SE courses, Special English papers (implemented from 2007-08 in the UoM and SUK and from 2008-09 in the UoP), their contents, teaching methods and evaluation procedures. As the specification of objectives for the Special English papers is a recent development in these universities, the chapter argues, the process of revising the syllabi of the SE courses is mostly restricted only to changing the course contents. The chapter also establishes the fact that the proportion of literature papers is more than that of linguistics papers. In the wake of the trend to prescribe texts from New Literatures in the UoM, the UoP and SUK, it is revealed that the shift from British literature to non-British literature is apparent only in the minor forms like the short story and one-act play while there is still the dominance of British literary essays and British poems in all the three universities. The chapter also tries to reveal the mismatch between the background topics prescribed and the reading list provided in the syllabus document. The chapter concludes with the point that the syllabus documents of the SE courses of one university influence the other.

The **fifth chapter**, ‘Stakeholders’ Responses to the Special English Papers’, tries to find out answers to questions like: Why do learners take up Special English courses at the UG level? Do the expectations of the learners match those of the subject experts? This chapter goes on to analyse the extensive data collected through separate questionnaires from three hundred and twenty students and seventy teachers in the colleges affiliated to the universities selected for the present study. It also analyses the responses of thirty subject experts across the country. It is argued here that students seek admission to the SE course since there is a great demand for English in the job market. Furthermore, the analysis of the students’ responses reveals that their preferences differ from the assumptions of the syllabus designers and implementers. One of the important observations in the chapter is that the linguistics papers are liked most by the students and though poetry occupies more space than all the other forms of literature in the Special English papers, plays are liked most by the students in all the three universities.

The **sixth chapter**, ‘Findings and Suggestions’, summarizes the major findings of the present study. Taking into account the reports of various commissions and committees, needs analysis of the students, the inclination of the majority of students of the SE course towards teaching profession, the recommendation of the National Knowledge Commission (2006) vis-à-vis the paucity of teachers of English in India and trends in BA (English) programmes worldwide, this chapter proposes a revamping of the existing syllabi of Special English papers offered at the B.A. (SE) course. It suggests the introduction of new optional papers like ‘Teaching of English Language and Literature’ and ‘English for Career Purposes’ and the need to employ interactive teaching methods like group discussion and seminars in the small SE classes and to modify the existing evaluation procedures by including oral examinations and project work.

The study also emphasizes the need to review the policy of promoting add-on courses in English in the conventional degree programmes. Finally, the study critiques the educational policies of the Government of Maharashtra like the ‘Best of Five’ [the practice of considering the maximum marks obtained by the students only in five subjects to calculate the overall percentage of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination], and allowing SSC students to keep term (ATKT) as an emerging threat to the B.A. (Special English) course.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 English Studies in India
- 1.2 The functions of English in India
- 1.3 Studies related to English syllabi in the Indian universities
- 1.4 Points emerging from the previous studies
- 1.5 The UG education scenario in India
- 1.6 Objectives of the present study
- 1.7 Research Methodology

1.1 English Studies in India

English Studies in India has a history of more than 190 years. The early syllabi of English in the Indian universities were imitations of those existed in British universities (Paranjape 1993, 52-57). For about a century, the study of English was considered synonymous with the study of British literature. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee (1993), the course of English Studies in India remained fairly static from the mid-nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century. She argues: “After a century of stasis, in the sixties of our century, some marginal changes began to take place in the curriculum of English Studies in India. The first fissures in the monolith came with the introduction of American literature in certain universities, to be followed some years later by the grudging academic acceptance of Indian Writing in English and then came commonwealth literature” (Mukherjee 1993, 32).

English Studies in India has always been a topic of serious deliberations. No study about English in India will be complete without making a reference to the recent, much-discussed works like *Masks of Conquest* (1990) by Gauri Viswanathan, *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India* (1992) by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (ed.), *Provocations: The Teaching of English Literature in India* (1993) by Sudhakar Marathe et al. (ed.), *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History* (1994) by Svati Joshi (ed.) and *Subject to Change: Teaching Literature in the Nineties* (1998) by Susie Tharu (ed.). These

books are considered to be serious critiques of English Studies in India and hence it is worth tracing here their contexts of production.

With the publication of Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest*, there has been a serious attempt on the part of Indian academics to question the relevance of teaching British literature in post-colonial India. The book set the tone for further deliberations on the social and cultural functions of English Studies in India. The trend gained momentum at two seminars organized in Delhi and Hyderabad under the aegis of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the British Council in 1988 and 1991 respectively. *The Lie of the Land* by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan is a compilation of the different papers presented at the UGC-sponsored seminar, held at the English Department of Miranda House, University of Delhi (DU), on 'The Study of English Literature in India: History, Ideology and Practice' in April 1988. The essays in this volume, divided into different sections, mainly focus on the teaching of English in colonial and post-colonial India. The book further deals with some Indian classroom experiments based on the teaching of literary texts in the B.A. (Hons) and M.A. courses in some of the elite undergraduate (UG) colleges and English departments of the DU, the University of Hyderabad (UoH) and the University of Mumbai (UoM). Almost all the contributors to this volume are university teachers of English. The other book is *Provocations: The Teaching of English Literature in India* (1993), edited by Sudhakar Marathe et al. This book is the result of a seminar on the practice of 'Teaching English Literature in India' (TELI), organized by the British Council and the Department of English, the UoH, in March 1991. Since the prospective teachers of English literature in India generally receive training in the postgraduate (PG) classroom, the seminar focused on the pedagogical situation of teaching the subject to a typical M.A. (English) class. The book, which includes the papers related to PG teaching in Indian universities, is divided into three parts. The first part pertains to the experiential and philosophical background, the second focuses on TELI in and beyond the classroom while the last part deals with classroom techniques of teaching English.

In addition to the above two books, there are two other seminal books which deserve special attention. One is *Rethinking English* (first published in 1991 by Trianka), a collection of essays, initially presented as papers at a seminar on English Studies in India, held at the English Department of Miranda House, DU. This volume also includes some papers presented at various seminars held in India and abroad. The lengthy and somewhat theoretical essays mostly share postgraduate teaching experiences in Indian universities. The other book is *Subject to Change*. Unlike the other

works, this book is a reprint of essays appeared in a special (1991) issue of the *Journal of English and Foreign Languages* (JEFL) on “Teaching Literature”. It deals with the political, cultural, curricular, administrative and personal implications of English language teaching in India. The canon, the silence of the subaltern student, etc. are the other themes dealt with in the book. It includes some papers presented at other seminars (e.g., papers by Yasmeen Lukmani and Aniket Jaaware) as well. Hardly one or two papers focus on the problems of rural students studying in urban colleges.

These much-discussed volumes, which are serious critiques of English Studies in India, with the exception of some papers in *The Lie of the Land*, deal mainly with the postgraduate teaching experiences in the elite academic institutions in Indian metropolises like Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad.

The teaching-learning scenario at the UG level in rural India is not a major issue in these books.

The scenario of teaching English in post-colonial India has been summed up very well by N. Krishnaswamy and T. Sriraman (1994). They have pointed out that in the curriculum of English Studies in Indian universities certain predilections are evident. They are: western literature, canonical literature, printed literature, the opinions of critics, teacher-centred classroom activities and examination-oriented teaching. Items missing in it, according to them, are the masterpieces in Indian literature, popular literature, literature in oral and visual forms, the study of language, views of the common readers, the learner in the learning process and the place of teaching in the educational enterprise. Very recently ‘English Studies in India’ has begun to move away from the study of canonical texts to Indian literature in English translation, folk literature, immigrant literature, dalit studies, film studies, etc. However, these new trends adopted at the PG level are not easily percolating down to the UG level.

1.2 The functions of English in India

English is now nearly a 400 year old language in India. Its role in the country has changed from time to time. During the colonial period it was an administrative tool of the British. After independence, though the regional languages had been a preferred option for tertiary education, the Education Commission of 1964-66 recommended that English should be a *library language*. Thereafter, English has been promoted as a *source language* to develop Indian languages and is also expected to function as a

service language. In spite of frequent changes in the language policies of the central and state governments (see Parasher 1998), English has been a medium of instruction in many PG courses. It also acts as a *link language* for inter-state communication in the country. In the last decade of the twentieth century it not only became the means of upward socio-economic mobility, but also gained importance as the *language of opportunities*. There is hardly any domain where the use of English has been restricted. English is a de facto *second language* in India. The rise of English as the *global language* has led to a greater demand for it in the twenty-first century. According to Nunan (2003) English is taught as a compulsory subject in most of the Asian countries because of its importance as the global language. Considering its global market, Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy (2006) argue that in India English must be taught for global communication, career opportunities and social mobility.

Right from its formal introduction in India in 1835, through Thomas B. Macaulay's 'Minute', English has been linked with the employment prospects of Indians. During their regime, the British promoted English education to fulfil the requirement of English-knowing Indians for administrative purposes. In 1844 Lord Hardinge, the then Governor General, declared that Indians who knew English would get preference in employment (Chaudhary 2009, 477). With the advent of globalization, the last few years have witnessed the availability of thousands of new urban-centred lucrative job opportunities for the graduates proficient in English and these opportunities are spread across such diverse areas as journalism and mass communication, management, tourism, law, entertainment industry, visual communication, library science, information technology (IT), shopping malls, advertising agencies, etc. In colonial India English education was a passport to government jobs while in the twenty-first century, proficiency in English is a must for private sector jobs (see Graddol 2010). Globalization has thus strengthened the connection between English and employment. The rapid growth of IT and the impact of globalization have resulted in a change in the situation in the first decade of the twenty first century. A proper degree in English definitely can offer better job opportunities than a degree in Marathi, Economics or Sociology. Krishnaswamy and Sriraman (1994), therefore, ask the curriculum designers in India to take note of the increasing demand for English in the job market. Furthermore, as the market for literary English and literature-based courses is fast dwindling, Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy (2006) feel that the English departments in Indian universities should change the content and style of teaching to suit market conditions. The autonomous colleges and some of the university

departments in India have taken this warning seriously and have started offering courses that meet market demands. This implies that courses in English should cater to the contemporary needs by enriching the communicative competence of the learners. Hence the focus in the courses of English seems to shift from the teaching of literary texts to the teaching of language skills. There are views contrary to this shift. Vishwanath (2005), for example, views these changes as an instance of mindless yielding to market forces. She says, “it is therefore imperative at this stage in our history that the enabling potential of critical thinking which can fashion a cultural critique of globalization should be explored with commitment in the English curriculum at the UG and PG levels” This critique is possible, she argues, only if literary studies are promoted.

1.3 Studies related to English syllabi in the Indian universities

The General English (GE) and Special English (SE) courses are the main courses offered at the UG level in Indian universities. The elective course in English Language and Literature, offered only in the Faculty of Arts, is variously called ‘Principal English’ (Study Group 1967), ‘Special English’ (Gokak 1964 and Curriculum Development Centre for English 1989) and ‘English Honours / Major’ (UGC National Workshop 1977 and Curriculum Development Committee for English 2001). For convenience and uniformity, the term ‘Special English’ (SE) has been used in the present study.

Numerous studies have been conducted on GE courses in Indian universities. Das (1977), Parashar (1979), Muire (1981), Banerji (1984), Banerji and Mohan (1985), Sood (1988), Aslam (1989) and Nirmala (1995) are some examples. In comparison with these pieces of valuable research very little empirical work has been done, and that too mainly by women researchers, to evaluate the SE courses. They include Santeswar (1978), Chakrabarti (1981), Padma (1991), Cherian (2001) and Mekala (2004). Some of these and other representative studies on syllabus designing are reviewed here.

1.3.1 Chakrabarti (1981) studies the Calcutta University Syllabus of B.A. Hons. The following are the important observations of the study:

i) *The linguistic competence of the students*: Chakrabarti notes that all the colleges affiliated to Calcutta University are selective about allowing students to take up the Honours course. This selection is usually on the basis of the marks scored which ensures a certain level of competence in the English language. However, she argues that in spite of a 3-year

systematic exposure to the literature course in the Honours class, the benefits that the learners receive at the end of the course are marginal. According to her, the reasons for this are the low proficiency of students in the language, irrelevance of the contents of the syllabus and methodology. Thus it may be said that a paradoxical situation exists in the B.A. (Hons.) course offered in Indian universities.

ii) *The complexity of the situation*: Chakrabarti observes that the recommendations made by the Syllabus Reform Workshops (1977) have not been implemented and admits that large scale changes in the syllabus do not seem feasible. Therefore, the study focuses on a methodology which may be of immediate benefit to the learners. The teacher is considered as the last resort in a situation where large scale syllabus reforms are nearly impossible. However, Chakrabarti is optimistic and visualizes changes in the methods of teaching literature and, finally, asserts that the onus of developing students' competencies rests on the teacher.

1.3.2 Muire (1981) studies the teaching of English Literature at Osmania University at the degree level. The main findings of the study are as follows:

i) *Objectives*: The course does not have any aims or objectives. The researcher notes that eighty-four per cent teachers do not have any knowledge about the objectives of the course. Hence she recommends that the course should state objectives clearly. She also attempts to specify some general and specific aims.

ii) *Content*: The syllabus is designed genre-wise. Literary terminology is untouched. The selection and grading of the texts are done with no particular end in sight. The course fails to introduce students to the form and structure of the English language. At the end of the course the students do not seem to benefit from the history of literature. According to ninety-four per cent teachers the course should be reconstituted.

iii) *Methodology*: Muire notes that the teaching method employed in the colleges affiliated to Osmania University does not provide scope for tutorials or seminars. All teaching is done through lectures and, consequently, the students remain passive listeners and their ability to think critically is not activated. The list of recommended books in the syllabus includes only those on the history of literature. Examinations encourage selective study. Most students do not attempt to read the books prescribed.

Muire also notes the general dissatisfaction, about the syllabus, that exists among the teachers and students.

1.3.3 Mohan and Banerji (1985), after examining 2564 teaching components in 346 syllabuses, pertaining to B.A., B.Sc., B. Com., B.Sc., (Ag.), and B.E. programmes of 79 Indian universities, have proposed a new approach to syllabus designing. The study deals mainly with the GE syllabi at the UG level and notes the following inadequacies of the GE syllabi:

- i) *Objectives*: A negligible number of universities state objectives and, when stated, these are vaguely worded and do not provide adequate guidance to the syllabus user.
- ii) *Content*: In all the programmes, grammar and usage receives maximum emphasis – 36.82%. It indicates that the focus of the GE courses in Indian universities is to impart grammatical competence and much attention has not been paid to the central purpose of language teaching, namely, the imparting of communicative competence.
- iii) The study expresses concern over the heavy dependence on literary texts in the GE syllabuses to impart skills. Another important observation is that listening and speaking skills receive an insignificant place in the curricula. Consequently, the researchers conclude, most of the syllabuses are content-oriented rather than skill-oriented.
- iv) The researchers further conclude that there is no systematic pattern of thought consistent with the requirements of the current social situation. The design of the syllabus of the programmes is also not based on language pedagogy.
- v) Again, they point out that the syllabus exists merely as an administrative requirement.

The researchers also carried out a survey of the needs for English in the professional world. It stresses the need to take into account the specific needs of the learners in India while planning the language courses. The researchers claim that their study suggests a practical path to have access to the learner's needs, formulate objectives and to select content for a syllabus. They also suggest the term 'English for Professional Purposes' for the courses at the UG level instead of 'General English'. However, they do not propose a sample syllabus. It may be said that Mohan and Banerji's study is a milestone in the study of syllabus designing in India and thus has a direct bearing on other such studies.

1.3.4 Nirmala (1995) analyses the data collected through questionnaires from the students and teachers of Arts, Commerce and Science streams. In her study she attempts to suggest a syllabus for the students of Compulsory English. The following are the noteworthy observations in the study:

i) *The purpose of the study*: The study aims to investigate whether the needs of the learners match those which have been perceived by the teachers and syllabus designers, whether the materials and teaching techniques help the learner, the teacher and the syllabus designer to achieve their goals.

ii) *The assumptions of the syllabus designers*: According to Nirmala, the syllabus designers assume that all the teachers are trained and competent, teachers and learners are perfectly aware of the present and future needs of the learners and each learner is trained to use materials in order to fulfil his/her needs.

iii) *The awareness of the learners in relation to their needs*: Nirmala points out the contradiction that although the learners of English are aware of their future needs, the administrators and teachers haven't shown much interest in meeting them. Her findings state that teachers lack motivation and the interest of learners hinders the quality of their teaching. The study further reveals that teachers are interested in the framing of the syllabus. Their claim that they know the learners' needs better than anyone else is justifiable and can be of immense help to syllabus designers.

iv) *The suggested syllabus*: The researcher suggests a skill-oriented, alternative Compulsory English syllabus which includes speaking, reading, writing and reference skills. However, it excludes listening skills.

v) *The suggestions*: Taking into account the multilingual background of the students, the study suggests that the learners should be oriented to the Compulsory English course in the beginning and teachers should be trained for their profession. The study also seeks our attention towards administrative constraints.

1.3.5 Cherian (2001) studies the B.A. English Literature curriculum in the autonomous colleges in Chennai. Interestingly, she has collected the data from senior teachers and not from learners. The study makes the following observations:

i) *Objective of the course*: Cherian observes that the absence of any major academic purpose for a course in English Literature has a negative impact on both teachers and students. Both teachers and students understand that education is merely a transfer of information on literature from the teacher to the students. According to her, this is probably one of

the reasons for the continuation of the traditionally ineffective and fragmented curriculum in the colleges.

ii) *Students*: The study states that the students of the autonomous colleges choose a course in English Literature in the hope of gaining proficiency in the language. However, the linguistic competence of the students who join this course is not up to the mark, and hence their response to literature in English is often weak and superficial. The study reveals that the linguistic competence of the students, their inability to cope with the contents of the courses and lack of administrative support for infrastructure are some of the impediments in starting innovative courses.

iii) *Content and methodology*: Cherian argues that a chronological study is the favoured method of organizing the units in the syllabus. According to her, “the literary texts that are usually studied at the undergraduate level have no connection with the social context in which we live” (Cherian 2001, 2). One more important observation is that since very few Indian critics have international reputation, teachers, while teaching literary texts, quote them less.

iv) *Courses offered*: The study underscores the strong emphasis on literature in the B.A. English Literature courses in the autonomous colleges. Some of the innovative courses introduced by some colleges are: ‘The Novel of Courtship and Marriage’, ‘Folk Studies and Folk Literature’, ‘Autobiography and Travelogue’, and ‘Feminist Perspectives: An Introduction’. The researcher notices greater activity in the introduction of allied courses. The colleges have incorporated skill-based courses in the literature curriculum to make it attractive to students who wish to gain skills for life and for a living.

v) *Courses suggested*: Cherian goes on to state that because of some factors like students with different backgrounds, large classes and the use of the lecture method, tertiary level education is in the doldrums. To address some of these problems, she suggests a new curriculum. Some of the components suggested by the researcher are:

1. Advanced Reading and Writing Skills
2. Introduction to Translation Studies
3. Introduction to Post-Colonial Literature and Post-Colonial reading practice
4. Introduction to Linguistics
5. ELT: An Introduction
6. Introduction to Literary Criticism
7. Contemporary Issues in Modern Essay

8. English for Journalism
9. Creative Writing
10. English for Script Writing
11. Public Speaking and Group discussion
12. Film Analysis

1.3.6 Mekala (2004) analyses the needs of the students majoring in English in the colleges affiliated to the University of Madras (UnoM). The study points out the drawbacks of the existing syllabus and suggests an alternative syllabus for B.A. Part II General English to bridge the gap between Part II General English and Part III English Major offered by the UnoM.

Drawbacks of the existing syllabus:

- i) The existing syllabus does not aim at improving the language proficiency and literary sensibility of the learners.
- ii) The lack of clarity concerning the purpose of teaching English literature has prevented the learner from acquiring the essential linguistic skills.
- iii) The students who join the English Major course lack the minimum English language abilities required to follow lectures in English or read and understand the prescribed texts in English.
- iv) The language of the textbooks prescribed is beyond the linguistic level of the learners; as a result, the teachers resort to lectures, explicating texts, translation and dictation of notes.

The major findings of the study:

- i) Only 17% of the students have opted for the course purely out of their interest in studying English literature.
- ii) The course components of the existing syllabus do not meet the requirements of the students after their graduation, according to 92% teachers.
- iii) It is to be noted that 62% of students want to be teachers and 60% of teachers also state that majority of the students prefer the teaching profession.

The proposed alternative course: To overcome the drawbacks of the existing syllabi and to fulfil the demands of the English literature course students, Mekala suggests a framework of 'English for Literature

Students' at the UG level. This alternative GE course includes the following four papers for the first four semesters:

- a) Dictionary Skills
- b) Grammar and Usage
- c) Rhetoric and Advanced Writing Skills
- d) Language through Literature

Earlier Mekala (2002) had favoured the introduction of papers like the 'Social History of England' and the 'History of English Literature' in the second or third semesters but later on she (2005) suggested the paper 'Language through Literature' in their place.

Thus, this alternative GE course aims not only to help students to have a working knowledge of English, to take and make notes, to refer to source materials and to become independent learners but also to enhance their critical writing. However, the study only suggests objectives and topics but fails to mention reference books and evaluation patterns.

1.4 Points emerging from the previous studies

1.4.1 Study of English at the UG level

These studies focus on the different courses in English offered in various Indian universities. They separately deal with courses in GE / Compulsory English and English (Honours) at the UG level. Mohan and Banerji and Nirmala study the GE course, which is also called Compulsory English in some Indian universities. Mekala (2005) studies the GE course which is known in some universities as Subsidiary English. Chakrabarti, Muire and Cherian are concerned with the B.A. (Hons.) course which is a specialized study of English at the UG level. It may be said that these three researchers view literature as the only component of the specialized study at B.A. (Hons.). Thus, these studies reveal the nature of the syllabi of English courses offered in Indian universities.

1.4.2 The limitations of the existing system

Most of these studies in syllabus designing have mainly pointed out the limitations of English syllabuses in the country. Chakrabarti (1981) notes that the recommendations of various committees and workshops have failed to bring about syllabus reforms. Since making major changes in a syllabus is not feasible, the study of methodology has been undertaken.

Thus, for instance, the study by Mekala (2005) suggests a shift from the communication and function-oriented GE course so that it provides a sound base in language to the students majoring in English. An alternative Part II GE course has also been suggested.

1.4.3 The competence of the students

Cherian (2001) and Mekala (2002) both observe that the linguistic competence of students who join the UG English Literature course is not up to the mark. The former states that many of the students choose to study English Literature because they hope to gain proficiency in the language. Mekala (2002) notes that students with average abilities, who cannot join either professional or popular and highly-rated courses, mostly join the English Literature course. The general complaint of the teachers is that these students lack the language abilities needed to cope with the B.A. (SE) course. Nirmala (1995) and Mekala (2002) both consider the linguistic ability of the students as an academic constraint in designing a syllabus. Mekala (2005) also tries to address the problem by suggesting an alternative framework, resembling English for Specific Purposes (ESP), called 'English for Literature Students'.

1.4.4 The needs of the students

The basic ability expected of learners at the end of the literature course is that they should become 'proficient' in language and communication skills (Mekala 2002, 182). However, it is generally observed that many students of literature lack language proficiency and face problems in communication even after their graduation. According to Sastri (1977), even M.A. students of English literature fail to communicate in English (UGC 1977, 144). The current situation is also not different at all. Most of the above studies on syllabus designing concentrate on the needs of the students and the course contents at the UG level. However, the rigid structure of the evaluation system prohibits academics from suggesting drastic changes in the syllabus. Hence studies by Aslam (1989) and Mekala (2005) stress the need to design ESP courses at the UG level.

1.4.5 The course content

In the B.A. (SE) courses the thematic study of literary texts is preferred to the communicative needs of the students. Though such a predilection exists, literary studies are not directed towards the development of

proficiency in English among the students. Mekala (2002) states that traditionally the teaching of English has centred around the study of literary texts where the learners merely acquire summaries of literary texts. Since the prescribed literary texts seem to be interested in catering to the general objectives of education rather than the academic and vocational requirements of the students, Bose (2006) argues that teaching literature to develop language has been a futile exercise.

1.4.6 The trend of suggesting alternative courses

Indian universities generally do not specify the objectives of the GE as well as SE courses. The absence of objectives has made Chakrabarti (1981) and Muire (1981) attempt a specification of aims and objectives of the B.A. (Hons.) course in English literature. A common trend noticed in the studies of Nirmala (1995), Cherian (2001) and Mekala (2005) is to suggest an alternative course. These studies also attempt to define its aims and objectives, suggest some papers and specify their objectives as well and then suggest the course components. Their focus is on incorporating language components to develop the linguistic competence of the students.

As has already been pointed out these previous studies, the sample of which are limited to single universities, view some issues – the background of the learners, the absence of aims and objectives, unsuitable syllabi and obsolete methods of teaching –unique to the SE courses in India mainly from the teachers' point of view. Therefore, the present study is a modest attempt to see, from the students' perspective, whether the Special English papers offered in the three universities of Maharashtra – the University of Mumbai, the University of Pune and Shivaji University, Kolhapur – cater to the globally changing academic and vocational needs of the students of SE courses.

1.5 The UG education scenario in India

The Report of 'The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education' (2009), also known as the Yashpal Committee Report, sums up the condition of UG education in India very well. The Report is an earnest attempt to reflect on some of the relevant issues pertaining to higher education. It says that the Indian university system considers UG education as a 'lower' form of learning and hence it has not appeared part of mainstream university education. The report further observes that more Indian youths, who are first generation university goers, consider UG education as a stepping-stone for securing a

job. However, the courses offered in the conventional degree programmes, where majority of the enrollment takes place, are not tuned to meet the job market demands. The courses in the faculty of Arts particularly focus on providing only humanistic education to the first generation university goers, whereas employment-oriented education in professional degree programmes is provided to the youths from elite and middle class societies. Private investors are especially interested in offering programmes in engineering, management and medicine.

The problems of the students graduating from Indian universities, like the lack of communicative and analytical abilities, can be addressed by developing curricula appropriate to the needs of the students and by improving the syllabi of the courses offered in the conventional degree programmes. The outdated examination system, devoid of application-oriented questions, fails to test the skills required in real life situations. The curricula and syllabi being examination-centric, the methods of teaching are not conducive to improving the skills and abilities of students. The need of the hour is to cater to the global needs of the students by designing application-oriented syllabi with exposure to work culture and on-site training. In order to redesign syllabi in this manner, the evaluation procedures should also be changed. These observations of the Yashpal Committee are also applicable to the teaching of English at the UG level and hence the present study.

1.6 Objectives of the present study

According to S.C. Sood (1988, 26), there are two main aims of teaching English at the undergraduate level:

- (1) to equip a student to take academic courses, and
- (2) to prepare him to step off the education stream and be ready for the world of work.

In the light of both these aims the present study is an attempt to examine the SE courses from utilitarian perspectives.

It is generally found that while designing syllabi of the UG and PG courses the requirements of the real learners are hardly taken into consideration. 'An imaginary ideal learner' has always got the upper hand in the process and the objectives of the syllabus are set accordingly. The practical effect of this assumption is that almost all the syllabi are imposed on a majority of the learners irrespective of their linguistic and other capabilities. In the light of such authentic observations it is imperative to know how learners, the real stakeholders, perceive their own academic predicament. Do the expectations of the learners match the assumptions of