


Chapter 5


Decolonizing English Studies in India: Teaching of Native American Literatures in South Indian Universities

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary higher education emphasizes glocal frameworks that accommodate both global and regional priorities in development. Decolonization of education becomes crucial in this context, where colonization led to the marginalization of Indigenous cultures, including Native American cultural traditions and knowledge systems. Multicultural inclusivity in higher education observes marginalized epistemic systems and gives them a place in the curriculum. By incorporating Native American texts in the English studies university syllabi in India, decolonization is brought into purview. This chapter deals with how the South Indian universities introduce Native American texts. The authors argue that multiculturalism in this context contributes to decolonial pedagogy, and the existing epistemic gap due to colonial oppression is problematized by inspecting the epistemic traditions of former colonies outside India. Content analysis of syllabi in the Central and state universities is the qualitative method used.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-8196-0.ch005

INTRODUCTION

Examining the knowledge systems in the peripheries also involves exploring the lived experience of marginalized people connected to those systems. This raises the question of the hierarchization of knowledge traditions by the hegemonic forces that have operated for centuries (Clammer, 2003). Recent university curricula worldwide encourage incorporating textual traditions of such marginalized sections in their syllabi (Longkumer, 2024). This includes Native American literary texts too. In discussing the socio-cultural contexts of the Native American or American Indigenous communities, the colonial aftermath of Native dispossession is uncovered (Baldonado, 2022). The ongoing colonial hegemony in epistemic structures is challenged when education is decolonized (Mignolo, 2018). Therefore, decolonization of education “seeks to provoke epistemological conflict in order to make vulnerable the arguments of hegemonic thinking” (Fontella Santiago, 2012, p. 2). This epistemological dissent is introduced by including Anglophone literatures and other textual forms in the English Studies curricula across universities (Tom et al., 2017). The decolonizing curriculum thus accords legitimacy to epistemic traditions that have faced erasure due to colonialism (Mignolo, 2016). Surveying cultures beyond one’s environs enables the development of this multicultural sensitivity (Cuyjet et al., 2023). This chapter deals with how South Indian universities introduce Native American texts to foreground the aspect of multicultural education that furthers the cause of inclusivity. This chapter aims to identify the link between multiculturalism and decolonization in South Indian higher education by examining the incorporation of Native American texts in the English studies syllabi.

BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW

Multicultural education originated during the 1960s in the USA due to civil rights movements and questioned the “Eurocentrism” in the curriculum (McCarthy & Apple, 1988; McCarthy, 1990). The gradual spread of multicultural education worldwide can be associated with globalization (Bigelow & Peterson, 2002; Gough, 2004). Multiculturalism promotes inclusivity in education for diverse cultural groups and “aims to support cultural diversity and social justice as well as counter marginalization and discrimination in education and society” (Zillacus et al., 2017, p. 232). Like the inclusive approach to students in multicultural classrooms, the inclusivity of multicultural content in the curriculum remains crucial (Cuyjet et al., 2023). Through curriculum reforms that accommodate intercultural diversity, awareness about cultures other than their own is created among students (Banks, 1993). The contemporary sense of multiculturalism recognizes the shift from mono-

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