HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING IN LITERATURE CLASSES: ON THE EXAMPLE OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S SHORT STORY "SUBHA"

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Abstract. This article examines the development of students' critical thinking skills in literature classes through the example of Rabindranath Tagore's short story "Subha." It argues that a profound analysis of the characters' inner world and the evaluation of the author's intentions from different perspectives contribute to the formation of independent thinking among students. Furthermore, the symbolic interpretation of the human qualities and relationships embodied in the protagonist Subha provides valuable opportunities for fostering students' skills of analysis, interpretation, and logical conclusion.

Keywords: critical thinking, literature education, Rabindranath Tagore, "Subha" short story, literary analysis, character, pedagogy, didactics, analytical thinking.

INTRODUCTION. In today's globalized world, it is no secret that one of the primary tasks of the education system is not merely to impart knowledge, but to shape independent and critical thinking skills in students. In modern society, individuals encounter various information flows every day. The process of distinguishing which of these is reliable, and which is subjective or false, requires critical thinking. Therefore, in school education, every subject—especially literature classes, which invite students to reflect deeply—must serve to develop students' critical thinking.

Critical thinking is often confused with merely criticizing. In reality, it is a process of analyzing any information or phenomenon based on evidence, comparing different points of view, and drawing logical conclusions. It is worth noting that:

"The technology of developing critical thinking through reading and writing emerged in the United States in the 1980s, based on the theoretical views of educational scientists such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and others" [2.115].

In literature classes, this process manifests through students evaluating the characters of a work based on their own personal worldview, striving to understand the author's intent, and explaining events while understanding their causes and effects. There are many works in world literature that possess such potential. One of them is the short story "Shubha" (Subha) by the great figure of Indian literature, Rabindranath Tagore. Although the story is small in volume, it profoundly expresses complex issues such as human psychology, society's attitude toward disability, love, and loneliness through artistic expression. In this regard, this work serves as an effective material for developing critical thinking in literature classes.

The great Indian writer, poet, public figure, and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861 in Calcutta. He was the youngest of 14 children in the family. Inspired by the beauties of nature, he began writing poems at the age of eight. His first collection of poetry, published in 1882, was titled

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"Evening Songs" [1.229]. Furthermore, the writer's poems became the national anthems of the Republic of India and the People's Republic of Bangladesh. R. Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913. With the prize money, he opened a free school in India, which was later transformed into a university.

DISCUSSION. One of the main characteristics of Rabindranath Tagore's work is the artistic depiction of the delicate layers of the human soul. He does not place his characters at the center of sharp, fast-paced events, but rather into complex psychological experiences. Therefore, studying his works requires the student not only to understand the plot but also to feel the inner world of the characters. This practically enhances the educational and intellectual significance of the literature lesson. In the story "Shubha", which we are analyzing, we encounter these aforementioned aspects multiple times.

The story begins with sentences that can intrigue the reader about how the events will unfold: "When they named the girl Shubhashini (sweet-tongued), who could have known that she would be mute?" [1.230].

She does not possess the ability to express her feelings through words like others. However, the author does not establish the character's physical disability as the central problem. Instead, he portrays it as a tool to expose society's habit of judging a person by their external traits. If we read the story superficially, we might simply pity Shubha. Yet, through deep analysis, we come to the conclusion that her true tragedy is not her muteness, but the fact that she lives in an environment that makes no effort to understand her.

In our view, particular attention should be paid to Shubha's connection with nature when analyzing her character. The author depicts nature as a mirror reflecting the character's inner world. Even though people do not understand her, nature accepts her. The murmur of the river, the singing of birds, the gentle swaying of trees, and the interaction between the animals and Shubhashini are depicted in harmony with the character's emotions. This allows students to understand the function of artistic details and symbolic images. Gradually, the student realizes that the writer used every description with a specific purpose.

One of the crucial issues in the work is related to human dignity. Although the character's physical capabilities are limited, her spiritual world is shown to be remarkably rich. This prompts students to think about the criteria used to evaluate a human being. We often encounter the stereotype of determining a person's place in society based on their appearance, wealth, or status. Tagore demonstrates the exact opposite. He emphasizes that a person's true worth lies in their heart, sincerity, and spiritual beauty. This idea holds great significance in the education and upbringing of today's youth as well.

It is no coincidence that Rabindranath Tagore's short story "Shubha" is included in the literature textbook for the 8th grade of general secondary education schools. This is because 8th-grade students have entered an important stage of adolescence—a period when their need for independent thinking, expressing attitudes toward surrounding events, and understanding human values intensifies. Therefore, this story can be considered an artistically appropriate choice that matches the age and psychological characteristics of the students. In fact, every piece of fiction creates a foundation for readers to think freely and reflect broadly, while also developing the skills necessary for their future lives. After all:

"To be happy, wealthy, healthy, strong, and successful, almost all the books intended to be read have already been written" [3.42].

Issues raised in the work, such as love, human dignity, tolerance, and understanding others, are particularly relevant for adolescent students. During this period, an individual's attitude toward

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themselves and others is formed. Through the character of Shubha, students realize that it is incorrect to establish a relationship with someone based solely on their external capabilities or physical condition. Through literature, readers can rid themselves of existing vices. As the enlightenment writer Cho‘lpon stated, literature is:

"The water of enlightenment that washes away the stains of a sharp heart" [4.37].

CONCLUSION. In conclusion, Rabindranath Tagore's short story "Shubha" possesses great didactic potential for shaping critical thinking skills in literature classes. The system of characters, psychological depictions, and symbolic meanings in the story encourage students to approach events from various perspectives, determine cause-and-effect relationships, and draw evidence-based conclusions.

Utilizing modern pedagogical methods when teaching the work increases student activity, teaching them to express independent opinions and defend their views. At the same time, the story serves to cultivate universal human qualities in the younger generation, such as empathy, tolerance, and respect for human dignity. Thus, "Shubha" is not only an artistically and aesthetically valuable work, but it also carries significant importance as an effective tool for developing critical thinking competence in literature lessons.

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