

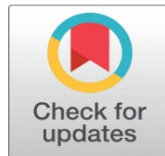


PROMOTING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ELT THROUGH LADAKHI LITERATURE IN ENGLISH: A STUDY ALIGNED WITH NEP 2020

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to determine how Ladakhi literature written in English, specifically A. G. Sheikh (2000) and Lhundup Gyalpo (2020), in promoting “Culturally Responsive English Language Teaching” as aligned with the “National Education Policy (NEP) – 2020”. It analyzes narratives that investigate cultural identity, social values, and local traditions to assess their potential for making English Language Teaching inclusive and pertinent to Ladakh’s socio-cultural setting. The research draws from the investigator’s background in teaching parts of these texts in Ladakhi schools, where they are included in the syllabi of the JKBOSE and the University of Ladakh as well. The study used a qualitative analysis in align with classroom experiences to examine the thematic and linguistic components of these texts, underscoring their congruence with NEP 2020’s focus on multilingualism, cultural relevance, and learner-centered education. Findings indicate that the integration of Forsaking Paradise and Betty’s Butter Tea in ELT improves linguistic abilities and fosters cultural awareness. This study highlights the potential of Ladakhi literature in English to establish a culturally responsive pedagogical framework, offering practical insights for educators and policymakers to realize the goal of NEP - 2020 in varied linguistic and cultural contexts such as Ladakh.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive ELT, Ladakhi Literature in English, Linguistic Abilities, Cultural Awareness, NEP 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English through a “Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Lens” allows teachers to connect their students’ learning in the English classroom to their diverse cultural experiences and backgrounds, thus creating a more inclusive environment and one where students feel welcome and connected to the curriculum as it relates to real life. This form of ELT connects to other important theoretical foundations of pedagogy and adheres to national educational policy in India.

Gloria Jean Ladson-Billings, a U.S. based pedagogical theorist and teacher educator has worked extensively on culturally responsive pedagogy. In 1995 she

defined the term “culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP)” in her article, “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” and further developed this theory in her book titled, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. Ladson-Billings states that culturally relevant pedagogy creates empowered students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by relating cultural elements to what they learn and do; and therefore imparts knowledge, skills and attitudes. Similarly, Dr. Geneva Gay, an emeritus Professor at the College of Education, University of Washington, Seattle, coined the term “Culturally Responsive Teaching” in her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2000). Gay emphasizes that leveraging the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students makes learning more relevant and effective.

In the Indian context, the National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020 integrates cornerstone ideas of culturally responsive pedagogy. Education must be rooted in pride and knowledge of India’s diverse culture, as outlined in its fundamental principles. Indian arts and culture should form the basis of experiential, joyful teaching-learning across all subjects (Clause 4.7: Art-Integrated Education). Additionally, according to Clause 22.2: Promotion of Indian Languages, Arts and Culture, the preservation and promotion of Indian languages, specifically the student’s mother tongue, should be viewed as primary means of expressing Indian culture and identity. As such, these concepts are evident throughout the document with 66+ mentions of the term ‘culture’, representing a movement towards a decolonized, culturally-grounded education system. This could be summed up as:

Love India → Learn through Indian culture → Grow with Indian values and ethos.

Ladakhi literature in English, including works such as [Sheikh \(2000\)](#), [Rabgias’s Ladakh: Tradition and Change \(2004\)](#), [Shakspo \(2010\)](#), [Khan \(2017\)](#), and [Gyalpo \(2020\)](#), provides a rich resource for implementing these principles in ELT.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do *Forsaking Paradise* and *Betty’s Butter Tea* represent Ladakhi culture, identity, and traditions in English?
- 2) To what extent do these texts align with and promote the goals of Culturally Responsive ELT as envisioned in NEP 2020?
- 3) What is the observed impact of teaching these Ladakhi English texts on students’ language proficiency and cultural awareness?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP

A large number of academic papers have been written on culturally responsive teaching as a way of teaching students to use their own cultural references to help them succeed academically and to contribute to the creation of a more equitable educational system [Ladson-Billings \(1995\)](#), [Gay \(2000\)](#). The new National Education Policy 2020 also promotes culturally inclusive learning, multilingualism and the use of local languages, in addition to English, in schools across India [Chaudhary and Gopal \(2024\)](#). While there is a wealth of established methodology in the field of English language teaching (ELT), its application to regional Indian languages and literature is not widely explored. There are also many educational initiatives aimed at preserving the indigenous language and culture of the Ladakhi

people, such as the development of culturally relevant curricula and the promotion of written Ladakhi in schools [Tashi et al. \(2024\)](#). However, despite this growing interest in culturally responsive ESL and the NEP 2020 focus on the integration of local languages and cultures in school curricula, no work has documented the potential of incorporating Ladakhi literature into English to promote culturally responsive ESL, which leaves a clear gap in the existing research.

4. METHODOLOGY

This research is based upon an interpretative qualitative methodology, incorporating thematic analyses of the literary materials with reflective practitioner-based inquiry through the researcher's considerable experience in teaching these materials to Ladakhi school students. The primary sources are [Sheikh \(2000\)](#), which contains 12 stories, and [Gyalpo \(2020\)](#), which contains 6 stories.

[Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#) six-stage thematic analysis framework was used as a guide for developing the analytical approach employed in this study – familiarizing oneself with the data, developing preliminary codes, examining themes, revisiting themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the final report – and opting manual analysis to aid in data coding, more than 300 initial codes were identified. These preliminary codes were organized into categories and further subdivided into sub-themes. In addition, they were combined into broad, overall themes consistent with the research questions.

Additionally, classroom observation data were collected from the researcher's teaching experiences with JKBOSE tenth grade students (n=35). These observations focused on: Student engagement; Examination preferences; Self-reported student feedback.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1. THEMATIC ANALYSIS (ALIGNED WITH RESEARCH QUESTION 1)

The combined thematic analysis of Sheikh's *Forsaking Paradise* and Gyalpo's *Betty's Butter Tea* yielded four overarching themes, as presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Table 1 Themes and Sub-Themes from Combined Thematic Analysis

Themes	Sub-Themes/Examples
Theme 1: Fragile Ecology and Loss of Paradise	Examples from Sheikh's <i>Forsaking Paradise</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Dying Lake • The Last Ibex • Melting Glaciers • Disappearing Wildlife • Tourism Destroying Silence
	Examples from Gyalpo's <i>Betty's Butter Tea</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Glacier is Crying • When the Mountains Turned Brown • Butter Tea without Butter (climate change affecting daily life)
Theme 2: Tradition v/s Modernity Conflict	Examples from <i>Forsaking Paradise</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Amchi's Son (traditional healer vs modern doctor)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Return Journey (Educated youth rejecting village life) Examples from Betty's Butter Tea: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Betty in DelhiThe Monk Who Wanted Wi-FiLosar on Smartphone
Theme 3: Family, Community, and Intergenerational Bonds	Examples from Forsaking Paradise: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Emphasis on joint familiesRespect for eldersVillage cooperation in most stories, evoking warmth and continuity. Examples from Betty's Butter Tea: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Familial ties and homecomingOral traditions
Theme 4: Identity, Community, and Social Fragmentation	Combined Examples/sub-themes from both books: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Gender and class inequalitiesReligious and ethnic dividesPartition's familial riftsGenerational disconnect

These themes demonstrate the ways in which the texts represent Ladakhi culture, identity, and tradition by creating narrative forms that incorporate environmental concerns, societal changes, family structures, and identity conflicts.

5.2. LINGUISTIC FEATURES SUITABLE FOR ELT (ALIGNED WITH RESEARCH QUESTION 2)

The selected literary texts exhibit linguistic features that align with NEP 2020's goals, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Table 2 Linguistic Features and ELT Advantages		
Linguistic Feature	Examples from the two books	Direct ELT Advantage for Ladakhi Learners (Aligned with NEP 2020)
Natural Code-mixing and Code-switching (Ladakhi English)	1) Julley, aunty! How is your health? 2) The Amchi gave me some herbal medicine, but I still have pain-la.	Students already speak exactly this hybrid variety at home and with peers. Seeing it in print validates their real language, dramatically lowers affective filter, and makes reading/speaking tasks authentic and joyful (Supports NEP 2020 multilingualism & mother-tongue facilitation).
Context-embedded vocabulary	Ladakhi cultural words (chorten, goncha, pashmina, ibex, dzo, etc.) are introduced inside the story and immediately explained through context or dialogue. ("Betty explained to her Delhi friend, 'This is our goncha, the traditional dress we wear in winter...'").	Students acquire high-frequency cultural lexicon naturally while learning English. No need for separate vocabulary lists supports experiential, art-integrated learning (NEP Clause 4.7).

5.3. CLASSROOM FINDINGS AND PRACTITIONER EVIDENCE (ALIGNED WITH RESEARCH QUESTION 3)

The story "Abhiley" by Sheikh (2000) was used as a teaching material for Class-10 JKBOSE students (n=35) and had an overall 94% engagement and 92% voluntary choice of Abhiley-based examination questions in comparison to the non-local texts.

In the Ladakh [University \(2024-25\)](#), stories of Gyalpo's *Betty Butter Tea* elicited similar enthusiasm. Students reported greater ease, confidence and enjoyment in Ladakhi English texts, finding them culturally familiar and linguistically accessible as opposed to standard literature like British or American etc., which required a great deal of contextual explanation.

These findings show that integration of these texts results in increased language skills and cultural awareness.

6. DISCUSSION

Forsaking Paradise and Betty's Butter Tea exemplify the ways that Ladakhi English texts illustrate the richness of the local culture, identity and traditions and thus provide an answer to Research Question 1. The themes in both texts – fragile ecology, traditional versus modern, intergenerational ties and fragmented communities – are all relevant to the socio-environmental reality of Ladakh, and echo [Ladson-Billings \(1995\)](#) insistence that culturally relevant stories can empower students by linking what they learn to their own lives. Additionally, [Gay \(2000\)](#) advocated for using cultural knowledge in educational settings, and these texts use this knowledge to create authentic representations that will connect with the Ladakhi learner. Regarding Research Question 2, the natural code-mixing (e.g., "Julley, aunty!") and embedded vocabulary (e.g., "goncha") in these texts reflect the bilingual and arts-infused principles of the National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020 (Clauses 4.7 and 22.2). The hybrid language used in these texts provides validation for students' first languages and reduces emotional barriers to learning while creating joyful, experiential learning environments, supported by current literature about implementing the NEP [Chaudhary and Gopal \(2024\)](#). General ELT approaches [Richards and Rodgers \(2014\)](#) are often applied without consideration of the specific cultural and geographical contexts of regions where ELT is being implemented, and therefore do not address the identified research gap regarding the application of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) to indigenous literatures. Classroom observation data collected for the study of Research Question 3 demonstrated the impact of these texts: 94% of the students were engaged in class when using the Ladakhi texts, and 92% preferred to take the exam using Ladakhi texts over those written in standard English. As reported in the post-exam survey, students also indicated increased proficiency and confidence in the use of English, and awareness of their own Ladakhi culture and heritage. In essence, these texts transformed English from a colonial legacy to a source of pride and identity for Ladakhi students. The results of this study suggest that similar texts could be effective in supporting the efforts of educators in other regions of India who seek to decolonize ELT. While the limitations of this study are acknowledged, including the relatively small sample size (n = 35) and reliance upon reflective inquiry, the study's results have implications for policy makers to develop curriculum materials that support the integration of similar resources in tribal regions.

7. CONCLUSION

The findings from this study illustrate how using Ladakhi literature in English (Forsaking Paradise and Betty's Butter Tea) promotes culturally responsive teaching practices as envisioned by [Ministry of Education, Government of India. \(2020\)](#). Using hybrid language and indigenous themes, students develop their language and cultural knowledge, therefore, it is essential that educators incorporate local languages and literature into classrooms to provide an inclusive,

learner-centered education environment. Student engagement and feedback demonstrate the potential for these resources to help narrow the cultural gap in ELT. This research provides a needed intervention to the lack of localized models for decolonizing ELT pedagogy across the many diverse regions of India. Therefore, regional literature should be prioritized by both educators and policy makers in order to support the vision of the NEP to create a culture of multilingualism where students are immersed in multiple cultures through use of multiple languages, and ultimately empower marginalized communities.

[**Note:** This paper was presented at the Two-Day International Conference on Language Diversity, Social and Technological Development in Educational and Economic Transformation: In Alignment with NEP 2020, organized by the Department of English, Nagaland University, held on 25–26 November 2025.].

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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