



Need for Multidisciplinary Approach in English Literature: Emerging Trends in Research

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Abstract

Multidisciplinary approach is not a recent phenomenon, it did exist earlier. It was believed that multidisciplinary approach can only be applicable to the field of science and technology. Enormous changes have taken place in the recent past in the field of research. New trends and innovative approaches of research have broadened their scope. Multidisciplinary approach has been practiced by the subjects of humanities, social sciences and other disciplines too. Research in English literature cannot remain alienated from these changes. Writers being part of the society definitely gets influenced by the changes taking place around them. English literature is now not constricted only in analysing texts, studying characters, finding out the themes or linguistic studies. It has now extended its roots and has started expanding it to other disciplines to get the better perceptions of the text under study. Literature is now re-read/interpreted with the help of multidisciplinary approach. Literary text is no longer seen as a piece of aesthetic beauty with only beautiful words and figure of speeches but seen from the perspectives of psychoanalysis, subaltern narratives, histories, philosophy, anthropology, feminism, cultural studies, post-colonialism etc. In English literature text plays very important role, but the concept of text has changed. It earlier meant a piece of writing whether novel, book, essay, poem or drama, now it includes even advertisements, signboards, paintings, songs, films. This paper is an attempt to highlight the importance of multidisciplinary approach in the study of diaspora literature.

Key Words: multidisciplinary approach, literary text, innovations, English literature, research methodologies

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I. Introduction

Human beings being very curious in nature have come a long way in their attempts to find out something new and different. Due to this inquisitiveness man always want to unfold or decode the mysteries hidden in the womb of earth. As a result of this behaviour, tremendous changes are taking place not only in science and technology but in every discipline. Globalization, as a result of development and progression in science and technology, has brought drastic changes at all levels and disciplines. But these changes or advancement has given intensification to many issues and challenges. The issues that arise are not related to any one discipline but to multiple fields. Thus, now a day's research, inventions or discoveries that take place are not confined only to one discipline. The researcher though working into particular field has to travel to other disciplines too. This kind of crisscrossing results in support and collaboration from other disciplines. This paper thus focuses on the importance and scope of multidisciplinary approach in research.

Research is not a very complex concept. It vividly means a journey in quest of knowledge, information related to any specific topic. It can be defined as "... inquiry for truth or solution to a problem. Research is journey of exploration- going beyond the obvious or personal experience/feelings/opinions in search of an idea/cause/solution" (Hans, 2015). People generally use terms like "multidisciplinarity", "interdisciplinarity" or "trans-disciplinarity" very loosely and interchangeably. Definitions of terms such as "multidisciplinarity", "interdisciplinarity" or "trans-disciplinarity" research are also quite inexplicit and not well distinguished. There is not too much simplicity on the features of research collaboration involving different disciplines.

Multidisciplinary approach is not a recent concept. It may not have got its name earlier but it did exist in research or study of literature. If we study the epics like Mahabharata, Ramayana, or Paradise Lost, we can find the embodiment of various disciplines like politics, religion, psychology, philosophy, economy, sociology etc. This collaboration of various disciplines makes us think that in ancient times texts were not distributed into

different fields or discipline but were seen as extensive. As man started progressing in different fields need of classification might have emerged. Thus, a comprehensive knowledge was distributed to specific disciplines and specialization or special disciplines were introduced. In the later stage many new disciplines were also introduced with the development in science and technology.

Multidisciplinary research is an attempt to find out the solutions for the issues with the help of various fields or disciplines. Multidisciplinary approach is defined as:

A multidisciplinary approach involves drawing appropriately from multiple disciplines to redefine problems outside of normal boundaries and reach solutions based on a new understanding of complex situations. (Wikipedia)

International Bureau of Education defines multidisciplinary approach as: 'An approach to curriculum integration which focuses primarily on the different disciplines and the diverse perspectives they bring to illustrate a topic, theme or issue'. Multidisciplinary approach thus focuses on crossing the boundaries set by the conservative methods or approaches and adopting the new disciplines to bring outstanding and different results.

Research in English literature is not confined only to studies based on themes, characters, linguistic studies but now it has started to expand its roots to other disciplines too. When we read a book, story, poem, or a novel, we analyse it, interpret it and give our responses to the work of art. But many times it happens that our interpretations are only literal or superficial. When we probe deep into it, we start peeling the layers hidden underneath. In this process of probing we have to take support or assistance from other disciplines or fields to get expertise view. Whatever be our discipline or area of study our eagerness to unfold the mysteries lead us to follow different parameters. Following multidisciplinary approach means maintaining the essentials of a specific subject and then at the same time stretching hands to other fields with common grounds or different perceptions.

In her essay *The Human Copying Machine*, Dr. Tiffany Watt-Smith says that, "knowledge is not created by vacuum". In this essay she explores the connection between theatre and psychology. Literature also cannot be studied in isolation, only as a linguistic study or analysing the text to extract moral and theme of the text. Literature depicts the life as lived by the people, about society, culture, religion, economy, politics, way of life etc. Thus, when we study literature we cannot restrict ourselves to particular parameters or certain point of views. We need to look beyond the narrow, restricted monodisciplinary approach and go for multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary way of interpretation to look at the literary work of art. Texts are no longer seen as poems, novels or stories, but seen from the historical, social, subaltern, postcolonial, psychological point of views. Attention is given even to the areas that were ignored earlier or given least importance. We can say that the interpretations or conceptions of a text or criticism of a work is incomplete unless and until we cross the restricted, narrow boundaries or the comfort zones of our specific subjects. Critics or the researcher have to deviate themselves from their discipline to the others. If we go back to the history and study Aristotle, we will find that whatever criticism he presented through his works were related not only to drama, poetry or tragedy but also covers history, psychology, philosophy, biology etc. The great psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud also followed multidisciplinary approach while presenting the psychoanalytical theories or arguing about the human psychology. If we study the classics like Ramayana or Mahabharata, we can see that it does not revolve around one specific area or theme but it touches multiple disciplines like politics, economy, psychology, philosophy and others.

While investigating the field of English literature one has to consider two important aspects to find out how multidisciplinary works in literature. These two aspects are: the research methodology applied and the other is the text, which is the object of research. One of the traditionalists and most widely used research methodologies in the field of literature is the analysis of the text. In very simple terms textual analysis is an umbrella term that is used for arrange of research methods to illustrate, interpret, and comprehend texts. In this regard McKee is of the view that, "When people perform textual analysis on a text, people make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text... (and) Textual analysis is a methodology: a way of gathering and analysing information in academic research" (McKee, 2001). Using such a methodology a variety of knowledge can be gathered from a text – including its literal meaning, its symbolism, its implication, its suppositions, and the substance it reveals. Now the method, not to be confused with methodology, would depend on the field and objective of the research. Another important term to focus here is the definition of the "text". A text can conservatively mean something that is traditionally a piece of writing, either a book of fiction or poetry or philosophical discussions on some social issue.

So, the very first change the researcher has to do while applying the multidisciplinary approach is to consider the various innovations in terms of text. With the approval of multidisciplinary research in English Literature, the text has assumed an extensive meaning than what it denoted earlier. Now a "text" refers to a book, an article, or even a transcript of an interview or a conversation or an email. And it does not stop even there. In literary theory now, a text is treated as anything that can be "read", this might be a book, like magazines, newspapers, the captions of the billboards, a street sign, advertisements, movies paintings, television shows,

songs, political cartoons, styles of clothing, or even body language, or anything that has meaning and can draw information from. Thus, according to Barton and Lee:

Texts can no longer be thought of as relatively fixed and stable. They are more fluid with the changing affordances of new media. In addition, they are becoming increasingly multi-modal and interactive. Links between texts are complex online, and intertextuality is common in online texts as people draw upon and play with other texts available on the web. (Barton and Lee, 2013)

It is in these two parameters - the text and the methodology- the researchers analyse the literary piece of art or literature using the approach of multidisciplinary. Thus, for example, the complex nature of diaspora literature, though a specific area of research requires the support of other disciplines. The scholars have to adopt other disciplines to interpret the literature. Especially the literature of Indian diaspora is now becoming an area of interest for historians, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, geographers, political critics, linguists and many others. Thus the scholars reject the uniformity and chose multidisciplinary. Approach in the study of Indian diaspora. They utilise data, concepts, methods, theories of various disciplines.

To conclude, the concept of text and approach to literary texts have now broadened and it has no longer remained only a piece of literature. Multidisciplinary research in English literature is the need of the hour. Through this brief discussion the researcher wants to convey that multidisciplinary research/ approach considers all the aspects of the text, moving beyond the traditional approach of mere analysing the text. The text can be considered or studied from different point of views and dimensions and this could be achieved only through multidisciplinary research. A text can be seen through the lenses of various disciplines and approaches probing deep into the text. But while doing so one must remember that every discipline has its own characteristics and it must be used very carefully without harming the originality.

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