TEACHING PEARL S BUCK: AN INNOVATIVE EXPERIMENT WITH THE POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LUCKNOW

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Abstract
The present paper shows an innovative experiment that I conducted with my postgraduate students at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, the University of Lucknow way back in 2010. I gave them an assignment for giving a presentation on Pearl S Buck. After an introduction of the author, I asked them to visit different available primary and secondary sources. Although challenging up to a certain extent, it was a quite interesting and fruitful experiment, and the inquisitive learners, in a week's time, expressed exceptional understanding of the topic. Her writings show the complexities of the human condition, the conflict of innovations and tradition, civil rights, women's rights and personal freedom, cultural understanding, compassion, tolerance, immigration, adoption, missionary work, war, the atomic bomb, violence, and the true picture of life and times in transition in the tone of a tireless philanthropist. Her art of characterization presents a photographic representation of a society in transition, transitions of various kind, social, cultural, economic and political. Her prose is beautiful and fluent, although some critics assail her repetition. It was a quite fulfilling experiment. I was satisfied at the end when the students expressed the research acumen and inclination towards research after completing this task. They were masters now in the area concerned. Their motivation level was quite high, and they were able to show an extraordinary understanding of the author and the text. I am sure such exercises are motivating, and they can remove the monotony of academics in the universities.

Keywords: Modern European Languages, human condition, philanthropist, etc

Introduction:
The present paper shows an innovative experiment that I conducted with my postgraduate students at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, the University of Lucknow way back in 2010. I gave them an assignment for giving a presentation on Pearl S Buck. After an introduction of the author, I asked them to visit different available primary and secondary sources. Although challenging up to a certain extent, it was a quite interesting and fruitful experiment, and the inquisitive learners, in a week's time, expressed exceptional
understanding of the topic. The task was to read Pearl S Buck from different available primary and secondary sources and to come up with an annotated bibliography of the secondary sources the next week.

About Pearl S Buck: In the Introductory class, I spoke the following content to the students:

Born to Absalom and Caroline on June 26, 1892, in Hillsboro, West Virginia, Pearl S. Buck was the fourth of seven children. Her parents were working in China with Southern Presbyterian missionaries. Pearl lived most of her time in China until she reached 40. From her childhood days, Pearl learned English and Chinese Languages and culture. Mr. Kung, a Chinese teacher taught her Chinese. Pearl got enrolled in Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Lynchburg, Virginia in 1910, and graduated in 1914. Immediately after graduating she returned to China to take care of her mother. Pearl married John Lossing Buck, an agricultural economist, in 1917. After marriage, she settled at Nanhsuchou (Nanxuzhou), the rural Anhwei (Anhui) province of China. Nanhsuchou was a poor community, and the experience she gathered here prepared the backdrop of *The Good Earth*. Her marriage, although unhappy from the very beginning, could sustain eighteen years. Carol was born to the couple as the first child. Carol suffered from a disease called phenylketonuria, which made her a specially able child that could not keep well. The couple adopted Janice, a baby girl. In 1921, she moved to Nanking with her husband, where she got a position to teach English literature. Pearl and John divorced in 1935, and Pearl married Richard Walsh. Pearl died in March 1973 and is buried at Green Hills Farm.

She published her first novel, *East Wind, West Wind*, in 1930, and has approximately seventy published works to her credit that cover different genres like novels, stories, biography, autobiography, poetry, drama, children’s literature, and translations from Chinese into English. Besides *The Good Earth* her major works are; her father’s biography *Fighting Angel*, (1936), her mother’s biography *The Exile*, (1936), novels- *Dragon Seed* (1942) and *Imperial Woman* (1956), short stories; *The First Wife and Other Stories* (1933), *Far and Near* (1947), and *The Good Deed* (1969), and a nonfictional work, *The Child Who Never Grew* (1950). She wrote her autobiography as *My Several Worlds* (1954). Pearl wrote under the name John Sedges too, and published novels like *The Townsman* (1945).

Her writings show the complexities of the human condition, the conflict of innovations and tradition, civil rights, women's rights and personal freedom, cultural understanding, compassion, tolerance, immigration, adoption, missionary work, war, the atomic bomb, violence, and the true picture of life and times in transition in the tone of a tireless philanthropist. Her art of characterization presents a photographic representation of a society in transition, transitions of various kind, social, cultural, economic and political. Her prose is beautiful and fluent, although some critics assail her repetition.
The Good Earth is her second novel published by John Day Publishers in 1931. Standing as the best seller of the 1931 and 1932, The Good Earth was honored with the Pulitzer Prize and Howells Medal in 1935. In 1938, Pearl won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Telling the story of the rise and fall of a farmer named Wang Lung, The Good Earth is her masterpiece. It has received major critical attention from the perspectives of expatriate patriotism at odds with native jingoism, racism, and sexism, women's rights, and the trends promoting international/interracial adoption.

The Select Bibliography presented by the students: As a result of the task, the group of ten motivated students brought many significant readings on Pearl S Buck. The works that were common are given as under:

Criticism

Stephen Spencer’s article is one of the most significant examinations of The Good Earth from cultural perspectives. The issues of race are discussed at large from the viewpoint of the Chinese and American middle class. Spencer gives different layers of connotations of Pearl S Buck’s statements and arguments in the novel. It also evaluates the ‘psyche of whiteness’ in different cultures, and presents an authentic commentary on the socio-cultural interpretation of different social values.


As clear from the title, the present essay focuses on the writing and style of Pearl S Buck. Phyllis Bentley evaluates the literary oeuvre of Pearl S Buck from the existing rules and patterns to judge literary works in the 1930s. Although a piece of criticism in the early phase, it holds its seminal space and importance even today.

This book chapter by James L. Jr Hoban evaluates the making of The Good Earth into for the visual media. Different trajectories of a piece of literary work have been evaluated in conjugation with its reel version. The patterns of code mixing, code switching and the shifting of genres are also visible.

Pearl S. Buck is known for writing “rich and truly epic descriptions of Chinese peasant life, and masterpieces of biography,” the present essay evaluates this statement. It also evaluates her description of China and its people in a comprehensive way. Cevasco studies the interface of Pearl S. Buck with the existing Chinese literature and the reciprocal influences.

Snow Helen’s essay is an interesting piece of literary journalism cum criticism. She presents an authentic account of the life and works of Pearl S. Buck in brief but containing manner. The making of the artist, various influences on her, and her interface with the socio-cultural patterns of the literature of the time are charted in a clear and simple way.

Spencer, Stephen.
As clear from the title itself, the present article is a comprehensive account of the making of The Good Earth. Stephen Spencer has evaluated the contexts and connotation of the text from the existing theories and criticism in popular culture, in particular, and a general gamut of cultural studies, in general. It is one of the most significant commentaries on the connotations of the novel in the culture(s). Besides focusing the text in question the critic touches upon the socio-cultural history of China.

One of the early day criticisms of Pearl S Buck, the present essay evaluates the art and craft of the author from the perspective of that day canons of criticism. It evaluates the writing of Pearl as the mirror of society. The inclination of the novelist towards social concerns is well highlighted. Henchoz finds her as a classical writer looking and writing beyond the boundaries of a specific culture, race and socio-political echelon.

Hunt, Michael H. “Pearl S.
In a way, the inclination of this piece of criticism is on political and social commentary in the writings of Pearl S Buck. Michael H Hunt finds Pearl as a magnanimous author looking beyond certain set patterns of political and cultural upbringing and proves her a novelist giving ample consideration to the regional elements in her works.

Elizabeth Janeway presents a candid account of Pearl S Buck’s point of view towards cultures, societies, gender stereotyping and thinking patterns. Written quite long back, this is an evaluation of the author in the postwar phase, rather presenting an evaluation in the phase of cultural crisis and compartmentalization, and it adds to the worth and significance of the essay.

Thomas Lask’s essay is a tribute to the author. Published the next day to Pearl's death, it evaluates the life, works and times of the novelist. It is rather a comprehensive account of the literary oeuvre of Pearl in a sympathetic and broad manner.

Conclusion: It was a quite fulfilling experiment. I was satisfied at the end when the students expressed the research acumen and inclination towards research after completing this task. They were masters now in the area concerned. Their motivation level was quite high, and they were able to show an extraordinary understanding of the author and the text. I am sure such exercises are motivating, and they can remove the monotony of academics in the universities.

References:
- Nobel Lecture (1938) *The Chinese Novel*