

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF DILIP CHITRE'S "FATHER RETURNING HOME": ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING, CONCRETIZING LEARNING, AND FOSTERING EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITY

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Abstract :

This study examines how effective a multidimensional pedagogical framework is in teaching Dilip Chitre's renowned poem, Father Returning Home. Traditional literature teaching often depends on one-way lecture methods, which can restrict active student participation and reduce complex thematic exploration to passive memorization. To address these challenges, this research adopts a multi-faceted instructional approach with six core elements: in-depth textual explanations, focused vocabulary building, collaborative critical thinking discussions, student-led multimedia (PPT) presentations, real-world thematic interviews, and selected supplementary readings centered on the father figure.

It was anticipated that involving students through this varied, hands-on strategy would make literary concepts more tangible, enhance higher-order critical thinking abilities, and considerably deepen socio-emotional awareness of urban isolation, aging, and generational gaps. Using qualitative discourse analysis, reflective student journals, and pre-and post-instruction assessments, the intervention showed that multi-modal engagement helps learners connect poetic devices with real-life empathetic understanding. The results show a notable improvement in analytical comprehension, vocabulary retention, and empathetic responsiveness toward the central character. This research offers strong support for incorporating multidimensional, student-centered approaches in secondary and tertiary literature classrooms. Ultimately, this paper argues for the deliberate integration of multidimensional, student-centered methodologies within secondary and tertiary literature curricula to bridge the gap between text and lived experience

Keywords : Dilip Chitre, Father Returning Home, Multidimensional Pedagogy, Critical Thinking, Emotional Sensitivity, Reader-Response Theory, Poetry Instruction, Urban Alienation.

Introduction :

Teaching poetry in contemporary tertiary classrooms presents a persistent challenge.



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FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In an era dominated by hyper-digital stimulus and rapid information consumption, educators frequently encounter an affective disconnect when introducing nuanced literary texts. This disconnect is particularly pronounced when dealing with themes of silent existential alienation, rural-to-urban displacement, and the quiet indignities of aging.

Dilip Chitre's autobiographical poem, *Father Returning Home*, serves as a poignant masterpiece detailing these exact human conditions. Set against the chaotic, industrialized backdrop of mid-twentieth-century Mumbai (then Bombay), the poem records an elderly commuter's journey home on a late-evening train, followed by his silent, solitary routine within an indifferent household.

Despite the raw emotional power and rich visual imagery embedded within Chitre's verse, conventional instructional paradigms often strip the poem of its human warmth. Standard lecture modes tend to treat the poem as an assembly of literary devices—such as synecdoche, simile, and imagery—to be cataloged for summative evaluations. Consequently, students often memorize standard explanations ("the soggy shirt symbolizes misery") without developing an authentic cognitive or emotional connection to the subject matter.

To break this cycle of passive learning, this research introduces a **Multidimensional Pedagogical Framework**, designed specifically for undergraduate literature classrooms, this approach moves beyond simple lecture delivery. It activates multiple learning modalities—auditory, visual, analytical, reflective, and field-based—to transform the poetry classroom into an active laboratory for empathy and critical inquiry.

Thematic and Structural Nuances of Chitre's Poem :

To design an effective pedagogical framework, one must first recognize the structural and thematic richness of Chitre's text. Written in free verse with an informal yet deeply melancholic tone, *Father Returning Home* is divided into two distinct stanzas that map the inner and outer landscapes of the protagonist's alienation.

The first stanza presents the public space of the suburban train. Chitre captures the overwhelming sensory overload of Mumbai's commuter network, contrasting it with the father's internal isolation. The father stands among "silent commuters in the yellow light," his eyes "dimmed by age" unfocused on the passing landscape. Imagery of dampness and decay—"soggy shirt," "black raincoat stained with mud," and "bag stuffed with books... falling apart"—mirrors the father's physical and psychological exhaustion. His exit from the train is described not as a purposeful action, but as a minor shift in the background: "He crosses the railway line, he enters the lane, / His sandals greasy with mud bag flashes past." He drops off the train like a "word dropped from a long sentence," a powerful simile illustrating his complete irrelevance to the fast-paced city around him.

The second stanza shifts from the public sphere to the private space of the domestic home. Rather than offering comfort, the home reinforces the father's isolation. He drinks



"weak tea" and consume a "stale chapati," physical markers of neglect. His interactions with his family are characterized by avoidance; his "sullen children have often refused to share / Jokes and secrets with him." Stripped of meaningful human contact, the father retreats to the bathroom—a private sanctuary—where he contemplates his isolation. Finally, listening to the static of a radio, he drifts into thoughts of his ancestors and descendants, seeking refuge in historical memory and dreamscapes.

Teaching these subtle shifts requires more than asking students to highlight poetic devices. It requires an instructional model that helps them feel the weight of the father's wet raincoat and understand the quiet tragedy of his solitude.

Theoretical Framework :

The design of the multidimensional model draws upon three foundational theories in educational psychology and literary scholarship:

Reader-Response Theory (Louise Rosenblatt) : Rosenblatt posits that reading is a transactional process between the reader and the text. A literary work does not contain a single, static meaning waiting to be decoded. Instead, meaning emerges through the "event" of reading, where the student brings their own personal experiences, values, and emotional readiness to the text.

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl) : To move instruction beyond low-level recall and comprehension, the framework incorporates activities explicitly designed to activate higher-order cognitive skills: *Analyzing* structural choices, *Evaluating* social dynamics, and *Creating* synthesis projects.

Experiential Learning Theory (David Kolb) : Kolb emphasizes that deep learning occurs when concrete experience is coupled with reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. By requiring field interviews and multimedia projects, this framework ensures that literary analysis extends beyond theoretical classroom discussion into lived social reality.

The Six Modules of the Multidimensional Pedagogical Model :

Implemented over a four-week unit in an undergraduate English classroom at Smt. Binzani Mahila Mahavidyalaya (SBMM), Nagpur, the multidimensional intervention was structured into six distinct, interconnected modules:

Module 1: In-Depth Textual Decoding and Structural Analysis

The unit begins with a guided close reading. Instead of delivering a standard lecture on the poem's meaning, the instructor leads an exploratory line-by-line reading. Students annotate their texts directly, identifying shifts in tone, structural line breaks, and enjambment. Emphasis is placed on Chitre's choice of free verse, helping students understand how the



absence of a rigid rhyme scheme mirrors the chaotic, unstructured nature of modern urban life.

Module 2: Focused Vocabulary Building and Imagery Mapping

To build linguistic confidence, specific vocabulary items—such as *sullen*, *estrangement*, *commuter*, *suburban*, and *stagnant*—are isolated for study. Rather than consulting standard dictionary definitions, students create "Imagery Maps." Working in pairs, they visually map out sensory words from the text across five categories: sight, sound, touch, taste, and movement.

Sensory Domain	Textual Evidence	Pedagogical & Emotional Impact
Tactile	"Soggy shirt," "greasy sandals," "cold tea"	Connects physical discomfort directly with psychological depression.
Visual	"Yellow light," "eyes dimmed by age," "black raincoat"	Highlights the dreary, monochrome palette of the father's routine.
Auditory	"Static," "humming," "muttering," "silent commuters"	Contrasts overwhelming city noise with the father's internal silence.
Kinesthetic	"Crosses the railway line," "dropped like a word"	Emphasizes mechanical, habitual movement devoid of personal joy.

Module 3: Collaborative Socratic Seminars

Moving away from teacher-centered Q&A, students participate in structured, small-group Socratic seminars. The instructor provides open-ended, thought-provoking prompts designed to encourage varied interpretations rather than simple binary answers:

- *Why does Chitre describe the father exiting the train as "a word dropped from a long sentence"? What does this reveal about his place in the city?*
- *Is the father's isolation purely a result of urban modernization, or is it an inevitable part of aging across all generations?*
- *How does the domestic space of the kitchen fail to serve as a home?*

Students are required to support their arguments using direct evidence from the text while respectfully challenging or expanding upon their peers' insights.



Module 4: Student-Led Multimedia (PPT) Presentations

To engage visual and digital learning styles, student groups are assigned specific analytical lenses through which to present the poem using presentation software:

- **The Spatial Lens** : Mapping the physical journey from the crowded train station to the quiet home, contrasting public transit with domestic space.
- **The Socio-Economic Lens** : Examining the father as a representative figure of the middle-class urban workforce during post-independence India's industrialization.
- **The Generational Lens** : Analyzing the communication gap between the father and his children, exploring how modern priorities isolate older generations.

This module turns students from passive recipients of information into active instructors, requiring them to synthesize visual images, textual quotes, and audio soundscapes to communicate their assigned theme to the class.

Module 5: Real-World Thematic Fieldwork (Interviews)

To make the poem's theoretical themes tangible, students undertake an experiential field assignment. Each student conducts a brief, structured interview with an elderly family or neighborhood member—specifically targeting a father or grandfather figure.

This module builds a bridge between literary analysis and real-world empathy. It challenges students to view elderly individuals in their own lives not merely as background figures, but as complex individuals with rich histories and quiet struggles.

Module 6: Curated Supplementary Readings

To expand their perspective, students explore supplementary texts that address the father figure, aging, and generational distance across different cultural contexts. Comparative texts included:

- **Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays"**: Focuses on unappreciated parental sacrifice and silent love.
- **A. K. Ramanujan's "Self-Portrait"**: Explores identity, lineage, and generational reflection.
- **Excerpts from Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry**: Connects personal isolation with broader Indian landscapes and traditions.

By analyzing these complementary texts, students learn to recognize that the father's isolation in Chitre's poem is part of a broader, universal literary tradition exploring human connection, family obligations, and the quiet weight of responsibility.

Methodology and Data Collection :

This study utilized a mixed qualitative action research design to evaluate the impact



of the multidimensional intervention. The participant cohort comprised 60 undergraduate students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) English program at Smt. Binzani Mahila Mahavidyalaya (SBMM), Nagpur.

Data was gathered across three primary instruments to ensure thorough triangulation:

1. **1.Pre- and Post-Unit Diagnostic Assessments** : Students completed written evaluations before and after the four-week intervention. These tests assessed three core dimensions: textual comprehension, analytical depth, and correct application of newly acquired vocabulary.
2. **1.Qualitative Discourse Analysis** : Classroom discussions, Socratic seminars, and student multimedia presentations were recorded and analyzed. Attention was paid to changes in how students formulated arguments, cited textual evidence, and engaged with alternative viewpoints.
3. **2.Reflective Student Journals** : Students kept ongoing reflection journals throughout the unit, recording their personal reactions to the poem, discoveries made during fieldwork interviews, and shifting perceptions of aging and family dynamics.

Results and Discussion :

The data collected across the four-week study demonstrated measurable improvements across cognitive, linguistic, and affective domains.

1. Quantitative and Qualitative Cognitive Gains :

Comparison of pre- and post-instruction assessments revealed a clear shift in how students approached literary analysis. Prior to the intervention, 72% of students relied on generic, rote-memorized explanations when asked to analyze poetic devices (e.g., stating simply that "the train represents the city"). In the post-intervention assessment, 84% of participants demonstrated high-level analytical skills. They moved beyond simple identification, using textual evidence to construct nuanced arguments about how specific stylistic choices mirror psychological states.

2. Linguistic Competence and Vocabulary Retention :

The integration of visual imagery mapping (Module 2) led to a notable increase in vocabulary retention. In the pre-assessment, only 21% of students correctly used advanced literary and thematic terms (*estrangement*, *alienation*, *synecdoche*, *monotony*). On the post-assessment, 79% of students applied these terms accurately in their analytical essays. More importantly, students used these words with precision, demonstrating a clear understanding of how word choice builds the poem's melancholic mood.

3. Affective Transformation and Socio-Emotional Sensitivity :

The most profound shifts occurred within the affective domain, largely driven by the



real-world field interviews (Module 5) and reflective journaling. Initially, many students viewed the father in Chitre's poem as a distant, tragic figure with little relevance to their day-to-day lives. However, conducting structured interviews with elderly individuals in their own homes transformed their perspective.

Excerpts from student reflective journals highlight this personal connection:

Student Journal Excerpt A :

"Before doing the interview project, I thought Dilip Chitre's poem was just an exaggeration about modern cities. But when I sat with my grandfather and asked him about his daily routine after retirement, he described feeling completely invisible in our house while everyone rushes to work and college. I realized my own grandfather is Chitre's father. He drinks his tea alone while we are all busy on our smartphones."

Student Journal Excerpt B :

"The phrase 'dropped like a word from a long sentence' never really clicked for me until I talked to an elderly neighbor. He told me how suddenly retiring felt like being erased from the world. Analyzing the poem alongside real life showed me that poetry isn't just about passing English exams—it's a mirror showing us things we ignore every day."

These entries demonstrate how the multidimensional framework helped students bridge the gap between academic study and human empathy. The literary text ceased to be an isolated academic exercise; instead, it became a lens through which students could observe, understand, and value the lived experiences of elderly people in their own communities.

Pedagogical Implications :

The findings of this study offer several practical insights for educators seeking to modernize literature instruction in secondary and higher education.

Reimagining the Teacher's Role :

Literature educators must shift from being sole authoritative lecturers to active facilitators of learning. By designing structured, student-led activities, teachers give learners the space to construct their own meaning and build confidence in their analytical voices.

1. Integrating Experiential Fieldwork into Humanities Curricula :

Experiential projects—such as community interviews, local case studies, and reflective journals—are often restricted to the social sciences. Integrating these tools into literature classrooms grounds abstract poetic themes in real-world observations, showing students how literature reflects daily life.



1. Intentional Cultivation of Empathy :

Academic rigor and socio-emotional development are not mutually exclusive. When literature instruction explicitly aims to foster emotional sensitivity alongside critical analysis, students gain both academic capability and greater personal maturity.

Conclusion :

Dilip Chitre's *Father Returning Home* offers a powerful exploration of urban isolation, aging, and generational disconnect—themes that remain deeply relevant today. However, traditional lecture-based instruction risks turning this emotionally rich text into a series of static literary facts to be memorized for exams.

The multidimensional pedagogical framework evaluated in this study offers a dynamic alternative. By combining close textual reading, vocabulary mapping, collaborative seminars, multimedia projects, fieldwork interviews, and comparative reading, this approach engages multiple learning styles and encourages deeper involvement. The results show that this multi-faceted model enhances critical thinking and vocabulary retention while cultivating authentic empathy for the elderly.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that when literature classrooms adopt student-centered, multidimensional strategies, poetry stops being just a subject to study—it becomes a powerful tool for self-reflection and social understanding.

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