

## READING THE REGION: HOW EXPOSURE TO REGIONAL LITERATURE SHAPES CIVIC AWARENESS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

**Dr. Dilip M. Bawane**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of English  
Dr Khatri Mahavidyalaya, Tukum,  
Chandrapur  
Mob. No. - 8788399233,  
Email - [dilip3bawane@gmail.com](mailto:dilip3bawane@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract :**

*Regional literature, encompassing narratives, poems, memoirs, and oral traditions unique to certain languages, localities, and social circumstances, imparts understanding of local memory, societal complaints, everyday ethics, and collective identities. This paper asserts that sustained engagement with regional literature in university curricula can augment civic awareness and social responsibility by (1) humanizing marginalized experiences, (2) promoting empathy and perspective-taking, (3) developing critical consciousness regarding power dynamics and exclusion, and (4) reconceptualizing belonging as plural and contested rather than singular and homogeneous. Employing scholarship in cultural theory, civic education, and literature-and-empathy research, and situating the argument within India's multilingual, caste-divided, and regionally diverse context, the paper articulates conceptual linkages between regional texts and civic outcomes, while suggesting pedagogical strategies and policy implications for higher education.*

**Keywords :** Regional literature, university curricula, civic awareness, social responsibility, higher education, etc.

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### **Introduction :**

People usually think of higher education as more than simply technical training. They also think of it as a place where people learn the attitudes, knowledge, and skills they need to live in a democracy. In heterogeneous cultures like India, choices on what to teach are very important. What students read, including whose stories are told and how they are told, helps shape how they see their fellow citizens and what they think their duties are as a group. Regional literature, written in the many languages and sub-regions of India, is full with information about local histories, structural injustices (such caste and losing land), linguistic identities, and the connections that people make in their daily lives. People often ignore these texts in favour of canonical global literatures, metropolitan literatures, or literatures that are published in English. This article aims to examine the following inquiry: In what ways does exposure to regional literature affect the social responsibility and civic attitudes of college students, and via what mechanisms does this exposure occur? The significance of the response lies in the promotion of inclusive civic habits, which are essential for both social fairness and



democratic resilience.

### **Review of Literature and Theoretical Foundations :**

This research is informed by three bodies of literature.

First, theories of cultural and political imagination emphasize the significance of narrative in shaping civic identity. Benedict Anderson famously said that nations are "imagined communities" that are made feasible by common cultural artefacts (Anderson). Regional literature competes and enhances the national imagination by illuminating regional diversity and alternative narratives (Bhabha). Homi Bhabha's scholarship on cultural diversity elucidates how local narratives disrupt dominant historical narratives and foster alternative forms of belonging (Bhabha).

Second, studies on reading and empathy indicate that literary fiction—particularly books that explore interiority and intricate social contexts—can enhance theory of mind and foster empathetic care for others (Kidd and Castano). A lot of this empirical work is about literary fiction in general, but regional literature often puts the spotlight on marginalized identities, oral histories, and moral quandaries that encourage readers to step into worlds that are different from their own.

Third, critical pedagogy and civic education stress how important school is for developing critical thinking and public reasoning. Paulo Freire's concept of conscientização posits that education ought to enable learners to see social inequalities and engage in transformative actions (Freire). Regional literature serves as an educational tool for conscientization by exposing localized power structures—such as caste, gendered violence, or governmental neglect—that conventional curriculum can overlook.

When you put these threads together, they point to three ways that regional literature could change how people think about their civic duties: emotional (empathy), cognitive (knowledge and perspective), and moral-political (critical consciousness and feeling of duty).

### **Thoughts that connect text to civic attitude :**

Empathy and Perspective-Taking (Emotional Pathway). Regional narratives frequently recount the experiences of individuals and communities marginalized in public discourse, including landless laborers, female survivors, forest communities, and linguistic minorities. A close study of these kinds of works can help students understand how other people feel, which can make them more empathetic and more likely to help those groups (Kidd and Castano).

**Cognitive Pathway :** Knowledge and Counter-Memory. Regional literature keeps local histories and counter-memories alive. These are stories about events and ordinary life that official historians could leave out or clean up. These kinds of literature help students learn more about the social environment, which helps them understand and interpret it better. This cuts down on ignorance and stereotypes that get in the way of civic unity (Anderson; Halbwachs).

**Normative Pathway :** Critical Consciousness and Moral Imagination. When used alongside dialogic education, regional literature may make people think critically about structural injustice, their responsibilities to vulnerable groups, and ways to participate in civic life that go



beyond voting, such collective action, community service, or public testimony. Freire's pedagogy posits that reading, when coupled with contemplation and action, cultivates civic agency.

Language and Identity (The Identity Pathway). Reading literature in regional languages, or high-quality translations that keep local idioms, helps students from marginalized backgrounds feel more connected to their culture and language. This acknowledgement cultivates a sense of belonging that can lead to enhanced civic participation within pluralistic democratic systems.

### **Why Regional Literature is Important in India :**

India's social structure is characterized by language variety, caste stratification, religious and ethnic heterogeneity, and severe regional disparities. Historically, the canon in Indian higher education has favored English and metropolitan cultural forms, a consequence of colonial schooling and post-colonial elite continuities (Tharu and Lalita). Consequently, several students graduate with a deficient understanding of the lived experiences of significant segments of the population.

Regional literature—Marathi Dalit autobiographies (e.g., Baluta), Tamil Dalit women's narratives (e.g., Karukku), Bengali tribal chronicles, and the oral songs of Adivasi communities—encodes firsthand knowledge of marginalization and resistance. These books can fill up the gaps in representation and provide students with chances to feel empathy and responsibility for others from different regions when they are added to the curriculum. India's National Education Policy (2020) and other policy papers clearly say that more regional languages and local material should be included in schoolwork. Putting these ideas into practice at the undergraduate level might help civic learning (Government of India, NEP 2020).

### **How to Teach Regional Literature for Civic Outcomes: Pedagogical Design :**

Pedagogy is important for turning exposure into changes in civic attitudes. Being on a reading list is not enough. The following teaching methods are suggested:

- Reading and Reflective Assessment in Dialogue. Use close reading and structured reflection projects together. In these assignments, students should talk about the social concerns that a work brings up and how they connect to current civic problems.
- Projects that are linked to the community. Combine texts with community involvement, such as field trips, oral history projects, or partnerships with local NGOs, to help students see how literary themes relate to the real world and learn how to be more active citizens.
- Comparative Syllabi. Include regional texts with classic works to show how they differ in terms of voice, representation, and moral imagination. Comparative modules assist students in figuring out whose tales are important in public narratives and whose are not.
- Using more than one language. Encourage people to read in their native languages wherever feasible, along with good translations and commentary on the translations. Language laboratories and peer translation workshops can help people from different regions understand each other better and promote language empathy.



- Civic Learning Assessment. Use civic disposition assessment tools (such as empathy measures and civic duty inventory) before and after the training to keep track of changes in attitudes.

### **Evidence and Assessment: Our Knowledge and Requirements :**

Research on literature and civic outcomes is in its early stages but shows promise. Psychological studies demonstrate that interaction with literary fiction enhances perspective-taking and empathy (Kidd and Castano). Research in education indicates that humanities classes connected to the community might enhance students' civic awareness and involvement in college (Astin et al.), but the situation may differ. Nonetheless, comprehensive studies concentrating on regional literature in India—assessing changes in civic views among university students—are still few. There is an urgent necessity for mixed-methods research that integrates pre/post attitudinal surveys, focus groups, and longitudinal monitoring to evaluate enduring impacts. Furthermore, research must be intersectional, examining how caste, class, linguistic background, and urban/rural provenance influence the effects of regional literature on pupils.

### **Policy Consequences and Institutional Suggestions :**

For regional literature to serve as a widespread civic pedagogy, institutional and policy initiatives are necessary :

#### **Changes to the curriculum :**

To make sure that students get a wide range of experiences, universities should include at least one course module on regional literatures and cultures as part of their general education requirements.

#### **Funding for translation and archives :**

To make literature available to a wide range of students, governments and institutions need to pay for translation initiatives and the digitization of regional archives.

#### **Development of Faculty :**

Hire and educate teachers who know a lot about the area literature and community-based teaching. Also, set up multidisciplinary institutes for studying the region.

#### **Frameworks for assessment :**

Create verified tools to gauge civic attitudes and include them in standard course evaluations to enable programs to showcase results.

#### **Alignment of Policies :**

Follow national criteria (such NEP 2020) when making changes to schools to encourage regional content in syllabi and provide credit to community collaborations in academic evaluation.

### **Constraints and Guidance for Subsequent Research :**



This research mostly puts together theoretical reasoning and evidence from other fields, rather than presenting new actual data on Indian students. Subsequent research should utilise experimental and quasi-experimental methodologies at Indian institutions to measure alterations in civic attitudes resulting from regional literature courses. Research should examine which genres (autobiography, oral narrative, folk song, contemporary fiction) are most efficacious for various civic objectives, and how digital affordances (multimedia presentations, digital storytelling) might enhance reading.

### Conclusion :

It is important for democracy that people read about the region. Regional literature introduces the lived experiences of marginalised individuals into classrooms, safeguards counter-memories, and engages students in ethical interactions with diversity. When taught through dialogic, community-linked, and multilingual pedagogies—and supported by institutional reform—regional literature may enhance empathy, augment civic knowledge, and cultivate a feeling of social responsibility among university students. In pluralistic cultures like India, fostering individuals who acknowledge diversity, address local inequities, and engage in collective responsibility is not only an intellectual aspiration; it is a democratic need.

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