REVIEW ARTICLE

POST-TRUTH AND THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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Abstract
Post-truth is a phenomenon which is now all pervasive. Though much debate about its influence in various fields are happening, it has not become a serious issue of debate in academics in India. The kind of awareness and learning infrastructure that we have creates serious hindrances in engaging with post truth. The paper tries to look into the various issues that post truth situation can bring in to our classrooms. The paper tries to address various issues related to it and concludes by suggesting a few ways to overcome the situation in Indian context. If not properly addressed post truth is a phenomenon which can lead society towards serious concerns.
Keywords: Post-truth, classroom, syllabus, fact-checking

The information that we have access today through print and digital media is now facing a phenomenon namely post-truth. The understanding that people can be convinced by playing with their emotions rather than facts paves way for the post-truth situation and a heavy dose of emotional words and performance can make people convinced about anything as truth. Data becomes very ordinary and trivial and the result of this is that public opinion is now formed based on emotional appeals rather than being based on any objective fact.

The post-truth scenario is not at the same time a synonymous term for lying, but a strategy by which the predominance of objective facts takes a backseat. Facts have less influence and situations are manipulated to form public opinion by emotions and personal belief. It is not a situation where we can plainly claim that a falsification of truth happens, but truth becomes something of secondary importance. The notion that post truth is a new phenomenon is not valid, but it is only that in the first two decades of the twenty-first century post-truth has deeply penetrated into our social and political life. It is very easy to understand post truth has happened as "...there were genuine changes in the way public discourse was conducted." (Davis, Evan)

Post truth in society influences many areas. The first major effect is on journalism as a profession. Credibility to journalism will be at stake after news becomes 'political weapons of disinformation' (Alterman, Eric). Social networks, the biggest communication channels now and thought to be a great voice of democracy, will also be at a crossroad in post truth time. Social networks have the danger as Umberto Eco mentions will become 'place for legions of idiots (getting) the right to speak'. Sharing and spreading of messages which can amount to false news can lead to the loss of credibility to social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and all. Politics and politicians will be another group who will have the toughest time in

getting away with a post-truth scenario. Sensationalism and selective news usage at a point will be hitting back at anyone who uses it

All the studies about post truth leads us to the arguments that the nature of truth has become very complex and complicated. It has to be prioritised that we have to analyse objective facts thoroughly again and evidence on any issue needs to be discussed. This is the time when the huge part of our society is completely discarding facts and so it is said we are in post truth era

The paper tries to look into the dilemmas that these situations create in a classroom. Curriculum and syllabus has been reoriented very much around the world and in India too and syllabus now demands to move out of the physical confines of a classroom. Interaction with society, resource pooling from World Wide Web, online platforms in teaching have all changed the nature of classrooms. Truth itself is a notion that should be debated much but in the classroom but we will surely be in the consensus that lies and fake facts are to be understood and kept out.

The classroom is a huge component of society building process. It is where we create citizens who are reasonable, informed and vigilant. Teaching good democratic skills happen inside the classroom. The child or the student in the classroom is the one who is going to become in future the decision maker in a family, a community or even of a nation. The teacher's role is hence very crucial. Particularly in Indian context where we have a very diverse classroom with students coming from very different backgrounds. One of the objectives of teaching in classrooms is to create ethically oriented citizens. The huge amount of online content in the post truth era creates issues with this.

Classrooms have moved towards including digital and online content. Digital content in classrooms have become essential and they now are a prominent part of teaching. It is not just about providing notes and learning materials in the digital format but also making students submit their assignments, do research work, find resources online and so. When students go to find resources for their learning, then the post-truth situation

creates trouble for them. Students and teachers both come across a whole lot of factual errors and false knowledge which can appear to be true. Students may go for viral facts being shared as 'virality takes precedence' (Viner, Katherine). This will create problems to students as they will be misled by false information which can seriously impair their learning. In Indian political context and social reality the vested interests of different groups can be a problem and there is always a possibility of misusing the situation.

Online content which process fake stories and false information may be overlooked. The learner most often and sometimes always won't be able to identify the factual errors. It can create serious issues in knowledge acquisition that a syllabus demands. The situation can be so problematic that sometimes even the teacher and the student may not be able to find the proper and correct information because of the kind of content that some of the websites provide. It becomes difficult to distinguish between real and fake news and online content. News or stories which earlier would have tagged as rumours or propaganda is now common place news and is read as normal news. Online content which provides fake history and biased history can create citizens without proper idea of their nation and its acceptance. This is a huge threat which will be faced by the society itself as it may create misinformed citizens. It is really a problem for teachers and students who come from rural backgrounds. The lack of resources like books, newspapers, periodicals, connectivity is all hindrances for them.

A great issue that teachers who teach subjects like climate change and environmental science face is the kind of stories on climate change. This is one field where post truth has done much damage. There is a whole lot of vested interest in climate change debates. Corporates and even some governments who are against the debate of climate change and who do not accept the argument of climate change have come out with stories against climate change. Research materials and stories which are fake, altered are presented as authentic and legal. They are available in online digital platforms. It creates problems and students who get

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to read this may be misguided and believes in anti-climate change discussions. This is seriously damaging our fight for our nature. Amy Harmon in her article in *New York Times* states "...public-school science classrooms are also proving to be a rare place where views on climate change may shift". The right wing ideas about climate change have become so widespread through fake story websites and manipulated news. In India where we have serious environmental issues, even now climate change has not become serious part of curriculum. It will be a great concern for teachers and students when they will be faced with anti-climate change debate when they start studying it.

The question then being raised is then are there not any ways to get out of these troubles in the classroom. They are issues which need to be seriously considered by academicians. It is high time that teachers have to be discussing and debating about the post truth situation and how we can take it in the classroom. How can we tackle post-truth. We have to use the same methods in the classroom that post-truth employs. The teacher should be very much aware about the situation and be ready to provide the student with the proper guidelines about which kind and what type and where to find content which suits their syllabus. It should be a guided approach by ensuring enough liberty and freedom. Teachers should take the responsibility for guiding the students to carefully wade through the host of information available to them.

Fact checking is one another method that is employed in tackling post-truth. We can help the students by giving them enough training and the awareness about how to do fact checking. Whether they are searching for resources on the World Wide Web or in any other medium there are tools available for this. But fact checking is a time consuming process and can be a serious hindrance in learning speed.

The dilemma with post truth is not going to end if teachers are not seriously concerned about it. Public reason is made in schools, John Rawls states and it is here the teacher has to be critical. Post truth is not something which one can just obliterate with an alternate truth presented. A student comes

before the teacher with his own understandings and beliefs that would have been formed out of the narratives around him. The way it is being interpreted by the student raises serious concern. It is very easy to move towards one's own biases and it is where a teacher can be quite resourceful. The responsibility of teachers to create vigilant citizens is to be made sure as 'it is only the vigilant citizen that stands watch over a free society.' (D'Ancona, 149). If not properly addressed post truth is a phenomenon which can lead society towards serious concerns. The values on which a society is built can be lost. Tolerance that is a key aspect of a diverse society can be lost and it can lead to totalitarianism and hence the deterioration of a nation itself. People can lose trust in the establishment. One of the great question which the votaries of truth is facing is who gets the authority to control or regulate post truth and whether teachers with their right intervention can do it.

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