

turn on and off your superbly expensive TV set, newly shopped camera. As you see the society you live in does determine the level and limit of literacy and learnedness, not good old four language skills. So what that Old Master M. A. K. Halliday, defined as full literacy almost four decades ago, does not work much at present. I noticed and felt this change deeply, when I met an old colleague of mine in the street. There is no need to tell you the name. What I can tell you about this colleague is that he has almost half a century of teaching experience in our universities, is an expert in various areas in language studies. He is a multilingual. I saw him walking in a street sidewalk, hands pushed down into his pockets. I went close and whispered: 'A penny for your thought, professor!' He looked up confused, thoughtful, and replied: 'I am not a professor. I am a perfect illiterate.' And this is how he explained. "You may worry that your old colleague has lost his senses. Let me assure you I am in full control of all my senses. Though my hearing is a bit out of tune with others! Though reading and writing are intrinsic to literacy, but they are subconscious. The important thing is that how it affects you, your life, and people around you. This cellphone in my hand can be used as a computer, as a notebook, as a camera, a radio, and as ten other useful tools. I am using it just to make or take calls. Last week after almost ten years of hard work I decided to put the result of my research in the form of an article and submit it online for publication. I cannot do it because my computer literacy is at its lowest possible level. It is almost the same with most ways and means of modern living. Our TV set at home is digital and equipped with Wi-Fi, but I can only use it as an analogue push-button set. You know what I mean when I say I am not a professor, but a perfect illiterate."

Now we can go back to the beginning paragraph of the note, to a warning and a plea: In any society teachers are pioneers. Whether they want it or not they affect the lives of others. Teachers often teach what

they have not the intention of teaching. To survive, a teacher has to stay learned and literate. If once the use of abacus and ability to write a few cliché sentences were enough to be considered literate, today having a Ph.D. Degree may not be a sure sign. It is true that ability to read and write in your language and one or two others are basic to 'literacy', but there is more to 'Literacy' than ability to read and write. 'Literacy' means more than linguistic literacy. Depending on the role of the individual in a society there are multiple literacies: social and political literacy, research literacy, science literacy, management literacy, foreign language literacy, teaching literacy and computer literacy. So this time when you consider how literate or learned you are add to or take off some of the above from your abacus.

۱. در خلاف آمد عادت بطلب کام که من کسب جمعیت از آن زلف پریشان کردم



mean I accepted the point that our control over the written form of language can be a good measure of being literate and learned. Now that we are on the topic of 'writing' let me refer in passing to a problem that many of our English teachers complain about: 'I know language. I have ideas. But I cannot write.' As the saying goes: *'Now that the oven is hot, let us bake it!'*

It is often complained: "I have a good number of ideas about language teaching in this country. I know our learners, I know my colleagues, and I know people who are in decision making positions. I've even some experience in compiling teaching materials. I wish to share my ideas with anybody concerned: people in administration, anybody. But whenever I decide to put my thinking on the paper I cannot. I cannot put anything, anything substantial, on the paper. Why? Can I do anything about it?"

"I am not so sure!" I often reply. "But I can tell you how I learned it myself. It may or may not work for you." Then I continue. "Make sure that you really have an idea or ideas about something. How? It is not very difficult. Get a chance to talk about things that interest you. Anything, any news, any problem that keeps you occupied. They go with you when you go to bed. They creep into your mind again when you wake up. Talk about them to yourself, to a close friend. The chance is that often you find out that you really have not ideas, just one or two wise sayings and cliché complaints. Then give up writing about them. If you cannot leave them aside and you still think you have something to talk about, then work on them, in small, informal gatherings of friends, colleagues, talk more about your ideas. If you can find some resources read about them. Then when you are certain that you have something to talk about, one day get enough paper or a keyboard. Sit down, and write. The only thing you need at this stage is practice. Believe me practice makes perfect. If you practice writing as much you practice speaking, then as Halliday put it, you will be a perfect literate and learned

person. Now this reminds me we are on the question of full literacy. Having solved the writing problem of language teachers, we can now return to our main concern!

3. Multiple learning and literacies

For quite some time, I followed Halliday's definition and tried to do in writing, whatever I could do in speaking. This again did not last much. As Robert Frost once wrote:

So dawn goes down today,
Nothing gold can stay.

I have lived long enough to experience 'change' almost in everything throughout the world and my own community and profession: the size and shape of traffic; the size, shape, and even the color of fruits

I noted that so far our understanding of being literate and learned heavily and solely lied on language and linguistic capacity. But we all know that there is more, much more to literacy and learning than just linguistic ability and potentiality. This time I noted that social, economic, psychological factors are as influential agents in shaping one's literacy and learnedness as linguistic factors, if not more so. There even seems to be, alongside different levels some different types of literacy and learnedness.

Not long time ago every useful gadget in your life had just one on/off key. It could be a radio set, TV set, washing machine, a camera, etc. If you learned where it was, you had no problem benefitting from all its services. Now the things have changed: Your problem starts when you use the turn on key. As if you have opened the Pandora's Box. As a naïve user you have to either go through a two hundred page manual or attend a training course just to learn how to

We would stand in queues in front of school building and with His orders walk in lines toward our classrooms and leave our parents notes on a special stand. We wouldn't dare walk into the school without those notes. Children whose parents were illiterate or those who have had problems with their parents on the week-end had but only one Savior: The old shopkeeper with a beautiful plume-case and plenty hand-cut pieces of paper. Many children would spend their pocket money in his shop to win his favor. He was a respected celebrity in the neighborhood. My earliest symbol of literacy knew to recite the Holly Book and pen down two cliché sentences for a good number of unlucky school-kids, which could surely save them from going into the Headmaster's Red Book.

2. How long should a man's legs be!

In the years that followed, my understanding of the concept of being learned and literate developed.

In our school English textbook there was a short passage on Lincoln, an American president. It was a short dialogue between him and a nosey newspaper reporter. Lincoln has been a very tall person. The reporter to ridicule asks him: "Mr. President, how long a man's legs should be?" Lincoln prompts: "Long enough to reach the ground."

Likewise my concept of being 'learned and literate, 'developed and changed from 'an old shopkeeper with an abacus' to being 'learned and literate enough to reading of school texts and writing homework.' My hero changed to a student who comes first in his/her class. I lived with this concept quite some time. My assessment of anybody's level of literacy and learnedness was based on their school certificates.

In the course of years when I graduated from schools and got my higher education degrees, once more I had to change my definition of being learned and literate.

This time I took my meaning from a world-famous professional: M. A. K. Halliday (1964: 289). He wrote:

"Literacy is then being regarded as the ratio of written to spoken language control, and 'full' literacy as the ability to perform with the written language all the operations that one performs with the spoken language, mutatis mutandis."

It is true that ability to read and write in your language and one or two others are basic to 'literacy', but there is more to 'literacy' than the ability to read and write. 'Literacy' means more than linguistic literacy

If you check your dictionary, this Latin means: *'with necessary alterations and changes.'*

So as the author says we are fully learned and literate *if we can do with written form of our language whatever we can do with its spoken form.* Got it? For many reasons I stood up for this meaning of being learned and literate. I





Literacy: From Abacus to Online Submission Procedures

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A Preface:

After a fashion, I have decided to focus on the concept of 'change' and on the importance of its realization and actualization in the lives of teachers, more specifically, in the lives of foreign language teachers, who have either been labeled as agents of change and innovation, or agents of foreign interests.

I have lived long enough to experience 'change' almost in everything throughout the world and my own community and profession: The size and shape of traffic; the size, shape, and even the color of fruits. Nowadays all watermelons are 'red' and reference to a 'yellow' watermelon is similar to reference to a 'black' swan. This much preface to the common sense of 'change' seems to be enough. Let's focus on the change in the concept of being 'literate and learned,' it may not be as juicy, but I promise to make it equally useful!

In my school years, almost half a century gone, we had good schools, some with playgrounds as big as a football field, soldierly disciplined Headmasters, fatherly/motherly janitors, and crown of all, experienced/learned

teachers. In this note, first I share with you some of the changes have occurred on the meanings of being 'learned', and then end it up with a warning and a plea, which I expect to be something like: 'Today's 'literate' may turn out to be tomorrow's 'illiterate'. You are well advised to go along with 'change.' Live up and seek out against your habits- bad ones. Our great poet, 'Haafez,' summarized it and more in one line in one of his sonnets:

*Contrary to usage, seek desire. As,
From that disheveled tress the acquisition of
tranquility, I made.⁽¹⁾*

(I agree poems do not 'sound and sense' the same in translation.

I have footnoted the original.)

1. The first 'learned' man I knew

In my primary school years, an old shopkeeper seemed to me to be the rare literate in our neighborhood. He kept *The Holly Book*, an abacus, a beautiful penholder, a good number of hand-cut sheets of paper next to his scales and cashier. In those days, every Saturday we were to take from our parents a note of 'good behavior' to the Headmaster.