

Comparative Method of Criticism, New Trends & Pragmatic Approach

Dr. J. K. Khuman

Head, Dept. of English
Shree Parekh College, Mahuva-364290
Bhavnagar, Gujarat.

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Literature, generally speaking, is an expression that is achieved through language. As the word is used in different ways, in a sense it simply means anything that is written, or considering the above-mentioned concept; any expression achieved through language. Then railway time-table, account books and catalogues may also be regarded as 'literature'. In this broad sense, as R.J. Rees writes, an account of football match or an advertisement for soap powder is as much literature as the 'Dialogues' of Plato or the novels of Graham Greene.

R. J. Rees further clarifies that literature is writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feeling and attitudes towards life. But sometimes some advertisements also express thoughts and feelings and attitudes; "yet", says Rees, "it is not literature in the sense we use the word, as it lacks one of the qualities that makes serious literature- the quality of "permanence". Rees also tries to distinguish between 'good literature and 'bad' literature. He points out certain qualities to be expected in 'good' literature, i.e. (i) psychological truth or holding a mirror up to nature; (ii) originality; (iii) craftsmanship; and (iv) a consciousness of moral values. Mathew Arnold has regarded poetry (in particular and literature in general) as the mirrors (reflection) of life. In a sense, literature itself is a criticism of life. So, the best work of art, either a drama, or novel or poetry should be judged on how and to what extent it holds a mirror up to nature, apart from; on the basis of the other qualities.

Arnold has, as we know, recommended the comparative method or 'touch stone' method wherein the judgement is to be brought by comparing the literature with that of the real classics or masters. According to him, we must also set our standard for poetry high, if we conceive highly of the destinies of poetry, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgement. So we should judge poetry in particular and literature in general as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. Thus, a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the joy and the strength we get while reading the literature should be present in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read. Further prescribing the comparative or touchstone method he says, "Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us more good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry", e.g. from Milton's 'Paradise Lost' -

And courage never to submit or yield

And what is else not be overcome ...

He also asks to take even the single, but perfect single line—(from Latin)—*In Suavolontate e nostra pa ce.*
(In his will is our peace)

One more thing to be remembered, especially in the changing scienaric of the world and consequently every single field, even literature that the central themes of all literature — life, love and death - are in themselves unchanging yet the new ways and manners of looking at them are to be constantly found. In his 'Essay on Criticism' Pope focuses on this factor in his well-known couplet:

"True wit is Nature to advantage drest.

What oft was thought, but never so well exprest".

One more thing reminded by Pope is also noteworthy, i.e. technical skill—

"True ease in writing comes from Arts, not chance;

As those move easiest who have learned to dance.”

Inculcation of moral values and ethics is also required to be emphasized in the new sets of rules for judgement, especially in this age when morality is at stake.

The new and comparative method can be very vital in translation studies also. Though very old, translation is still undeveloped. Today more and more books from great English works are being translated, trans created in other languages and vice versa. As Robert Frost says “We must learn to move in harness.” So that the real culture, feelings, attitudes may also be rendered from one language to another—keeping into consideration (i) comprehension of the source culture; (ii) understanding and assessment of parallel texts dealing with the same topic, and (iii) knowledge of the needs and demands of probable readers.

For example, the folklore edited and created by Meghani ‘both prose & verse’ may be compared to that of Scotland, England and similarly the other states of India, like Rajasthan, Bengal and Punjab. One striking example coming to mind here is; ‘SorathiBahàrvatiyàs’ – a great work which has been praised and read with interest and enthusiasm for decades, can be compared to ‘The Outlaws of Kàthiyàwàr’ by Kinkaid, which deals with the same themes. But while comparing we can bring about the change in outlook, the influence and many other factors vital for the study of literature and mankind.

The same works may also be compared with the works (balads and tales) on the outlaws of England, like Robin hood.

While doing the comparison and especially while dealing with translation Pragmatic Approach can serve the great purpose, as the new meanings and ideas regarding the same literature are possible through it. Apart from the three levels of meaning that may or may not be intended by the original writer—factual meaning, suggested meaning and assigned meaning; pragmatic approach, interdisciplinary in nature, can focus on communicative action in its socio-cultural context. By the insights into the way language operates aesthetic phenomenon is also possible.

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