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# QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

## LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

M.E.G.-5

Time: 3 Hours ]

[ Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer any five of the following questions.

**Q. 1. Bring out Plato's criticism of the role of artists in his concept of the Ideal State.**

**Ans.** Plato's ideal state was a republic with three categories of citizens: artisans, auxiliaries and philosopher-kings, each of whom possessed distinct natures and capacities. Those proclivities, moreover, reflected a particular combination of elements within one's tripartite soul, composed of appetite, spirit, and reason. Artisans, for example, were dominated by their appetites or desires, and therefore destined to produce material goods. Auxiliaries, a class of guardians, were ruled by spirit in their souls and possessed the courage necessary to protect the state from invasion. Philosopher-kings, the leaders of the ideal state, had souls in which reason reigned over spirit and appetite, and as a result possessed the foresight and knowledge to rule wisely. In Plato's view, these rulers were not merely elite intellectuals, but moral leaders. In the just state, each class of citizen had a distinct duty to remain faithful to its determined nature and engage solely in its destined occupation. The proper management of one's soul would yield immediate happiness and well-being, and specific educational methods would cultivate this brand of spiritual and civic harmony.

Suspecting that most writers and musicians did not know the subjects they depicted – that they cast mere shadows of representations of real objects, ideas, and people—Plato feared that artistic works could endanger the health of the just state. Consequently, he wanted to hold artists and potential leaders accountable for the consequences of their creations and policies. This is why Plato advocated the censorship of all forms of art that did not accurately depict the good in behaviour. Art, as a powerful medium that threatened the harmony of the soul, was best suited for philosophers who had developed the capacity to know and could resist its dangerous and irrational allures. For Plato, aesthetics

and morality were inextricable; the value of a work of art hinged on its propensity to lead to moral development and behaviour. For these reasons, the artists should be kept away from the ideal state of Plato.

It would be entirely justified to say about literary criticism what Alfred North Whitehead, the professor of philosophy at Harvard University said about all the western philosophy. Whitehead said that all of western philosophy is "a footnote to Plato." Plato's most famous work which talks about his ideas on poetry is *Republic*. So let us examine in brief.

According to Plato an ideal state should be divided into three classes – the military, the philosophers and the artisans. According to him the philosophers should be in charge of ruling the state, the military should be in charge of defending the state and the artisans should be in charge of sustaining it physically. Both artisans and military are pleased by poetry but, it is something which is strictly against the nature of the philosophers, and since philosophers are the ruling class therefore in the benefit of the state all the poets should either be sent on exile or they must re-channel their creative energy in something more productive and creative. And if such a model will be followed then, we will see the emergence of a mature and prosperous state wherein, poetry is limited only as hymns of praise to the Gods or in the tribute to the most virtuous and worthy men.

The above paragraph may send wrong signals about Plato's thoughts therefore it is necessary that we must consider a couple of facts, that *Republic* is written in the form of verse and neither it is a hymn of the praise to the god nor it glorify some virtuous or worthy man. Plato is using the state as a metaphor for the mind which is divided into three different classes. The artisans in the mind refer to the appetites, the military refer to the spirit and the philosopher refer to the faculty of reason. According to Plato it is the responsibility of the reason to transcend

the basic requirements of appetite and spirit. Considering this model of mind let us try to understand what Plato intends to say about poetry. Contrary to the usual belief Plato is not actually advocating to send all the poets into exile, rather he simply means that a person with true knowledge would not like to go for poetry and also poetry is capable of feeding the appetite and the spirit by holding the reason in check. Plato also takes a step further and compare poets with those of the mad men and says that the madness of these mad men is contagious. But what is ironical is that Plato himself is not able to go beyond the use of poetical power.

It is not that Plato did not understand the power of poetry, he definitely did. He knew what sort of power lies in poetry, but at the same time he also thought that this power would compel people to imitate what can be seen in the art. For Plato this was not good at all. The obvious question comes why? In order to understand this we need to take a look at the metaphysical structure and belief of Plato.

Plato believed that the universe in which we live in is an imitation of the perfect universe of the god. This nature of imitation is also known as the mimesis. This apparently tells us that Plato was an idealist, which he was. Plato believed that the world is made up of different layers, and the topmost layer is that of the idea, the real idea of The Good. The layer beneath is the imitation of the top layer and the layer which comes after that is the imitation of the previous one. Therefore as we go down the layers we are getting away from the reality and getting closer to the evil. For Plato evil was something which originates when someone mistakes something for reality, which is not real, or as Plato puts it as accident for essence.

We can understand this structure with the help of an example. Let us take an example of a table. When a carpenter makes a table, what he does is an imitation of the idea or the form of the table which exist in the top layer and therefore is real. Since the carpenter is imitating the idea of the table, he is getting a step away from the reality. No matter at which part of the world the table is being made, it will still have the essence of the idea of the table which Plato considers to be real. The only thing which makes us get closer to the layer of ideas is reason and it is the philosopher who promotes

this faculty, therefore philosopher should be the ruler. Here we can understand why Plato does not approve of poets or artists. When any artist would write about the table or a painter would draw the table, he would imitate what carpenter has made, therefore the artist is imitating the table which itself is an imitation of the idea of the table. So what artist does is the secondary imitation and therefore moves one more step away from the reality and thus causes evil. This is the reason why Plato did not approve of art and considered it to be contagious.

**Q. 2. Discuss the position of imagination and emotions as opposed to rationality in Romantic poetry.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-13, Page No. 67, 'Imagination' and Page No. 66, 'Romantic Epistemology' and 'The Romantic Theory of Art'.

**Q. 3. Identify some of the important principles of criticism according to I.A. Richards.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-17, Page No. 84, 'Principles of Literary Criticism'.

**Q. 4. Bring out the Marxian concept of 'purpose' in Literature.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-26, Page No. 137, Q. No. 1 and Chapter-23, Page No. 118, 'Introduction'.

**Q. 5. How does *The Second Sex* mark a shift in literary criticism? Discuss.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-32, Page No. 166, 'Introduction' and 'The Age'.

**Q. 6. Evaluate Derrida's concept of Deconstruction and his resistance to it.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-3, Page No. 18, 'Derrida and Deconstruction'.

**Q. 7. Write short notes on the following:**

**(i) Aucitya**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-5, Page No. 29, 'Aucitya'

**(ii) Sphota**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-5, Page No. 29, 'Sphota'

**(iii) Catharsis**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-11, Page No. 59, 'Catharsis'

**(iv) Hamartia**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-10, Page No. 55, 'Hamartia or the Tragic Falling'.

**(v) Primary and Secondary Imagination**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-15, Page No. 75, 'Fancy and Imagination'.

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# **Sample Preview of The Chapter**

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# LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

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## AN INTRODUCTION

### Literature, Criticism and Theory



#### INTRODUCTION

Before we start with our journey into the complex, critical, important and interesting world of literary criticism let first undertake few questions which being the students of literature one should must care to consider. These questions are:

- (a) What is literature?
- (b) What is literary criticism?
- (c) What is theory?

In the following discussion we will find the answers of the above questions. But one should must try and think of the answers on his/her own to know the extent of his/her understanding of literature.

#### What is Literature?

Many people who have taken literature for their undergraduate study would find this question perplexing, this happens because sometimes we take things for granted and think that question regarding these things cannot be asked. The question with which we are concerned now is considered to be an easy question, but yet difficult to answer. Let us try to find the answer of this easy, but difficult question.

According to Raymond Williams the term 'literature' is of recent origin. Originally this term was used to refer to any printed or written document, no matter what the subject. Even today we use this term in the similar sense. We must be familiar with terms like medical literature or scientific literature. The idea is to relate the term with anything which has been printed or written. It is from this sense of meaning the 'literate' originated. It was Matthew Arnold who first made the term available for us in the way we understand it now. Today we understand it in the way in which earlier people used to understand the term 'poetry'. In our understanding of it, we include all the genres of imaginative writing in it, whether it

is poetry, drama, novels, or fictions. An important point which we must not ignore is the emergence of print industry which has its root in the rise of notion of literature as we have today. During the time of industrial revolution a new class emerged which we know as the bourgeois or middle class. As middle class came in to the picture, books became the commodity. The reason was that it was only middle class who had literacy and free time to read the books. In a way the entire concept is related and can be looked in cultural framework. Let us have a look at it. It was first agriculture and then came industrialization which gave way to what we call leisure which in turn made people to carry on with literature and finally developing a culture.

#### What is Literary Criticism?

This question is also not different from that of the previous question which we considered. A more amateurish response would be whether you like a book or not, and if you like then why or if you don't like then why. The answer of these questions would certainly lead to the person in the way of attempting a literary criticism of the book. In the similar manner we attempt for a film critic or an art criticism. But this is not the way which we are concerned with right now. We need to find a proper way in which the term can be understood as it is used by people engaged in literature.

Literary criticism can be defined as an attempt to evaluate and understand the creative writing, the literature of an author. Literature includes plays, essays, novels, poetry, and short stories. Literary criticism is a description, analysis, evaluation, or interpretation of a particular literary work or an author's writings as a whole. Literary criticism is usually expressed in the form of a critical essay. In-depth book reviews are also sometimes viewed as literary criticism. If we talk about it in the terms of history of literary criticism then the names which would come at the fore are not alien to many, for example

2 / NEERAJ : LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

Coleridge, Wordsworth and Arnold. Some of the most important criticism of English literature can also be considered from the 'Defense of the Poetry'. Some familiar names would be Shelly and Sidney. This certainly does not mean that prior to these names we cannot find any trace of literary criticism. The history can be traced to as back as the roots of ancient Greek and Roman civilization. Some of the most considerable work of that era is Republic and Poetics which talk about the grounds of poet in the society. Some of interesting terms used can be found in much celebrated work of Raymond Williams 'Keywords'. In modern literature we have another term used which is 'theory' in order to explain the various forms of literary criticism. Let us now look at this modern phenomenon which holds the key of our understanding of the major part or almost entire modern literary criticism.

**What is Theory?**

The term 'theory' can be simply defined as a system which is used to make senses of experience or to organize them in a manner so that we can comprehend with it. Here theory is not some specific theory but any theory for that matter.

Why there is a need to make a theory? One should remember that theory is an organization of things that means that it is against the chaos which might develop in the absence of a system or organizing principles. It is not mandatory for the things to make some sort of perfect sense these can also be provisional and imperfect, but this is what forms the basis of all dogma, no matter whether political, social or religious.

Coming to the part of the theory with we are concerned, we should keep in mind that our experience of a work of art is not different from our experience of life. The basic aim of literary theory is to discover following things:

- (a) How does a work of art mean what it means?
- (b) How do we make sense of what comes to us, whether it be a literary or non-literary text?
- (c) What are the conditions which help us in concluding the meaning of a work of art?

Above questions might seem to be bit different and out of place but they are not. How can we say that the meaning of the text is in what has been written? If what has been written makes the meaning then one text would mean exactly same to different readers. But this is not the case. So, where exactly the meaning lies, in the text or in the mind of the reader? Is it that the novels and the poems are just like an empty receptacle for the author which is to be filled by meaning by him/her? How does these literary works affect the minds of the reader? Is it that the subjectivity of the reader determines the meaning of the text with which the reader is exposed to, or it is just an objective reality of for the reader which is governed by the subjectivity of the author? Does every reader who reads the text needs to make some sort of special attempt in order to derive the meaning which is hidden in the text? All these above questions are not merely concerned with objectivity or the subjectivity of the readers rather they are highly complex and philosophical problems, as a philosopher is often engaged with such question which relates to the reality of the things.

In their writings, the great philosophers of their time Hobbes and Locke argue about the concept of wit and judgement in respect to poetry. Let us see what Hobbes has to

say about it. He says 'In a good poem...both Judgement and Fancy are required.....Judgement without Fancy is wit, but Fancy without Judgement is not. Another theory of judgement comes from the great eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant, who talks, in his philosophical writings about 'aesthetic judgement' contrary to the 'moral judgement'. Kant describes aesthetic judgement as 'purposiveness without purpose'. Later in late eighteenth century we had Wordsworth whose 'Preface to Lyrical Ballad' is being considered as both the theory of literary criticism and also the theory of poetry.

Theory in literary studies is not an account of the nature of literature or methods for its study. It's a body of thinking and writing whose limits are exceedingly hard to define. The philosopher Richard Rorty speaks of a new, mixed genre that began in the nineteenth century: 'Beginning in the days of Goethe and Macaulay and Carlyle and Emerson, a new kind of writing has developed which is neither the evaluation of the relative merits of literary productions, nor intellectual history, nor moral philosophy, nor social prophecy, but all of these mingled together in a new genre.' The most convenient designation of this miscellaneous genre is simply the nickname theory, which has come to designate works that succeed in challenging and reorienting thinking in fields other than those to which they apparently belong. This is the simplest explanation of what makes something count as theory. Works regarded as theory have effects beyond their original field.

This simple explanation is an unsatisfactory definition but it does seem to capture what has happened since the 1960s: writings from outside the field of literary studies have been taken up by people in literary studies because their analyses of language, or mind, or history, or cultural matters. Theory in this sense is not a set of methods for literary study but an unbounded group of writings about everything under the sun, from the most technical problems of academic philosophy to the changing ways in which people have talked about and thought about the body. The genre of 'theory' includes works of anthropology, art, history, film studies, gender studies, linguistics, philosophy, political theory, psychoanalysis, science studies, social and intellectual history, and sociology. The works in question are tied to arguments in these fields, but they become 'theory' because their visions or arguments have been suggestive or productive for people who are not studying those disciplines. Works that become 'theory' offer accounts others can use about meaning, nature and culture, the functioning of the psyche, the relations of public to private experience and of larger historical forces to individual experience.

**Contradistinction**

So now we are clear with the difference that exist between the terms 'theory' and 'literary criticism'. In simple terms theory, in respect to literature, can be said to be a set of broad assumptions about literature and also the function of criticism. Let us consider an example. When we say that the economic, social and political conditions of a society in a given time period are responsible for the literary production of that society in the course of history, we are but making a theoretical pronouncement. But when we analyze any piece of literature according to the theoretical perspective of that society, we

have already begun literary criticism of that text. Such a reading of the text which depends on the theoretical perspective of the society, is called a Marxist criticism, in other way it can be said as the literary criticism which makes use of Marxist 'theory' of literature.

Another important thing that we need to understand in this context is that the literary criticism is very often a generalization about the literature, no matter if it is classical poetics or any contemporary literary theory. It is theory which makes us enable to put any piece of literary work under the so called literary criticism. It all works like a scientific method, starting with a particular and goes to the general and then from general principle or theory again comes to an individual work.

The term theory was much popularized, for some reason, as opposed to the term literary criticism at the time when structuralism and post-structuralism spoke against the new-criticism. Here the term theory covers a wide range from that of the Marxist to the school of deconstructionist. In 1957, the term changed its wide spectrum and adopted a spectrum which is even wider than that of the previous. Wimsatt and Brooks, during this time, used the term 'theory' to refer to any of the broad assumptions about literature. They included classical writer like Horace in this this and called him 'literary theorist'. And also medieval writers like Thomas Aquinas. Wimsatt and Brooks also talked about the revolutionary changes which took place in context of theory and criticism during the period of general renaissance in Italy and which was later speeded by the western movement. Therefore with this point of view we can very well consider Horace's words about the merit or the demerit of any literary work as literary criticism. There is no doubt that his words about any of the literary work have certain assumptions, wither expressed or not is not a matter of concern. According to Wimsatt and Brooks, "The main thing assumed in the criticism of Horace is the normative value of literary 'species'."

Let us be more specific on what we really mean, or rather what we generally conceive of theory in modern academic framework. When we talk about theory we refer to the modern doings of the term theory. And in this comes the structuralism and post-structuralism getting in the arena of literary criticism; from Marxism to deconstruction; from Foucault to the speech-act theory, and many others.

Another fact that we should be aware of is that the emergence of theory has amalgamated any academic disciplines; the boundary which existed does not exist now. It is very difficult to say that at what time you leave literature and step in to philosophy or psychoanalysis, they all have become one, and even if not then at least they appear to have become one.

## **CHAPTER AT A GLANCE**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION IN THEORY**

We will now try to explore some of the historical reasons which gave way to the emergence of theory in the second half of the twentieth century. Before we really start with the historical fact, one should keep in mind that this version of

history is subjective and must not be taken for granted. As we will proceed we will interestingly notice that such skepticism is also the result of the emergence of the theory. Now let us start with some of historical background of the theory.

The Church of England which was the sole controller of the education system in England until the first quarter of the nineteenth century and apparently it was confined to the Universities like Oxford and Cambridge. These were the two universities which was main arena of intellectual and academic development of England. The teachers of these universities were unmarried churchmen. The subjects of primary concern were ancient Greek and Latin literature, Divinity and Mathematics. The year 1826 marked an important development in the academic history of England, as it was year when a university college was, for the very first time, made available for all men and women of all religions, in London. In the year 1828, English became the subject of study and in the year 1829 the first professor for the English was appointed. Though English became the subject of study but it was not literature which was stressed but the language. It continued until in 1840, when F.D. Morris was appointed as the professor of English in Kings College, the English literature became the part of subject. Morris argued that the study of English literature, would serve "to emancipate us ... from the notions and habits which are particular to our own age." He also emphasized on the 'fixed and endearing' values which literature highlighted. This stance of Morris can be considered as the basic and the one of the first attempt towards the liberal humanism with a certain appeal to high moralism.

It is important to understand the absence of motive and ideologies which are politically charged cannot stand the moment's scrutiny. This can be very well understood by what Morris said and also what Mathew Arnold made a lifelong crusade, suggested an apparent threat by the emerging working class to the traditional ruling of the English society. Another important aspect to look at this is in respect of the losing credibility of religion. The period is marked by the fact that people were losing their faith on the religion and there was an immense necessity for some new ideology, which was to be English, literature to be more specific. This can be clearly seen the prophecy which Arnold made that poetry will replace religion. We will later look at the different stances taken by Eliot and other critics and literary figures like Leavis to save liberal humanism from the growing attack from the rival camps specifically from the political left which had already declared religion as the opium to the masses.

### **THEORY BEFORE THEORY**

So what existed before the theory as we know today? The theory which was the sole ruler of the world of literary criticism, without even getting acknowledged as theory was liberal humanism. Let us look at some of its basic doctrine as described by Peter Barry in his famous book "*Beginning Theory*".

- (a) According to liberal humanism a good work of literature is transcendental in nature, that is to say that a brilliant piece of literary work does retain its values for ever. Such works are not for some specific period of time, but are eternally valuable. Another

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way it can be put as what Ezra Pound has said, “A news which stays news.”

- (b) Another important point of stress is that the meaning of a literary text is within the text itself. And that there is no requirement of any process for placing the text in any context, like
  - (i) Socio-political
  - (ii) Autobiographical
  - (iii) Literary-historical

Considering this point of view it would be justified to say that the liberal humanist critics give primacy to the words printed on the page and consider it as self-sufficient.

- (c) In order to understand the text it is important that the text must be detached with above mentioned context. However, some of the early theorists do not agree with such generalization.
- (d) The nature of human being is essentially unchanging.
- (e) Each one of us has securely possessed ‘essence’ which can be called individuality.
- (f) The prime purpose of literature is to propagate the human values.
- (g) The fusion of form and content in any piece of literary work must be in a way that it becomes inevitable for one to grow with other.
- (h) Sincerity is something which is the part of the language with which literature is formed.
- (i) The value of literature lies in its tendency to show things silently rather than explaining things out.
- (j) The primary job of the critic is to give an appropriate interpretation of the text and act as a mediator between the text and reader.

**IMMEDIATE CONTEXTS**

The form and the texture of literary criticism that we witness today emerged during the modernist period of late nineteenth and early twentieth century and to be more specific the first few decades of twentieth century. According to Aijaz Ahmad, “more advanced sectors of English studies during the period between the two World Wars were dominated by four main... tendencies: the practical criticism of I.A. Richards; the conservative monarchist, quasi-Catholic criticism of T.S. Eliot; some element of avant-gardist modernism which nevertheless remained much less theorized in the English-speaking countries than in continental Europe; and the then newly emerged ‘New Criticism’ of Ransom, Tate and others in the United States.”

It was in England where the resistance against such exclusivist and technicist criticism developed and the reason could be the existence of an older tradition of socially conscious literary study. It was F. R Leavis who assimilated some of the pedagogical strategies of practical criticism and formulated and led the Scrutiny Group which was later developed by I.A. Richards in to the science of literary criticism, by detaching the subjective view of literary works from the course of literary criticism. Leavis also worked towards the objective view for the literary analysis and thus replaced the tradition aristocratic perception of literature. His

attempt situated new texts of English literature in the larger framework of English social life. But the irony lies in the fact that today the entire Scrutiny Group is considered as to be a part of conservative bourgeois concept.

According to Frank Lentricchia, who in his book *After the New Criticism* has tried to trace the history of theory, New Criticism created a critical void. To quote him, “By about 1957 the moribund condition of the New Criticism and the literary needs it left unfulfilled placed us in a critical void. Even in 1940s, however, those triumphant times of new criticism, a theoretical opposition was quietly gathering strength.” The basic idea of the New Criticism was to consider a text as an autonomous entity, but the new opposition which was gathering strength tried to put the text into larger mythic structure. Bodkin’s *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, the first work on the subject of archetypal literary criticism, applies Jung’s theories about the collective unconscious, archetypes, and primordial images to literature. It was not until the work of the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye that archetypal criticism was theorized in purely literary terms. The major work of Frye’s to deal with archetypes is *Anatomy of Criticism*, but his essay “*The Archetypes of Literature*” is a precursor to the book. Frye’s thesis in “*The Archetypes of Literature*” remains largely unchanged in *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye’s work helped displace New Criticism as the major mode of analyzing literary texts, before giving way to structuralism and semiotics. His works really aimed to move away from the debates about taste that were prevalent in the New Criticism, and towards a more democratized approach to literature as an expression of myth. The New Critics had an obsession with the originality of the poetic voice, whereas Frye believed that literature is the product at least of a ‘literary society’, if not society in general (the latter would be the view currently held by most contemporary literary critics).

Frye’s work breaks from both Frazer and Jung in such a way that it is distinct from its anthropological and psychoanalytical precursors. For Frye, the death-rebirth myth that Frazer sees manifest in agriculture and the harvest is not ritualistic since it is involuntary, and therefore, must be done. As for Jung, Frye was uninterested about the collective unconscious on the grounds of feeling it was unnecessary: since the unconscious is unknowable it cannot be studied. How archetypes came to be was also of no concern to Frye; rather, the function and effect of archetypes is his interest. For Frye, literary archetypes “play an essential role in refashioning the material universe into an alternative verbal universe that is humanly intelligible and viable, because it is adapted to essential human needs and concerns” (Abrams 224-225).

Another important and influential figure in the literary arena of the early twentieth century was T.S. Eliot, who not only helped in shaping the literary criticism but also the literature of the age. Later in life when he assessed his own literary criticism, he declared them as the byproduct of the poetry workshop. He further said that in his early essays his idea was to defend the kind of poetry he himself and his friends were writing. This can be apparently seen in his early essays like “*Traditional and Individual Talent*”, where we see him