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A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE AESTHETIC THEORY

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ABSTRACT

The paper tries to have an overview of the shift in the aesthetic theory that was from objectivity to subjectivity, from the depiction of human nature to wild nature, imitation to imagination, satire upon the follies and drawbacks of human beings to glorify the common man, sublimity of language to the language used by a common folk. The path of romanticism was individualistic, decentralized and anarchic hence chaotic and passing from Existentialism and Marxism it led to the ultra- modern deconstruction. An individual was lost in the society in Marxism and the society got doomed in the existentialism ideology. The present age of criticism is a very critical age. It appears to be chaotic but the order will come out of the chaos only. Death of the author means the birth of the reader; death of the teacher means the emergence of the pupil. Decentralization would lead to the upsurge of the margins and the suppressed voice of women or neglected classes of the society in the form of minor characters or dalits or the sub- altern is coming in the foreground in the form of the discourse of the marginalized. Feminist criticism or Marxist ideology or establishment of minority identity has got renewed support and enthusiasm in the present time.

With the change of the focus from the main to the margins the neglected, marginalized, suppressed and silence sections of the society came in the forefront. Though the feminist awareness ensued in the 19th century but it touched new heights and new dimensions in the changed scenario. Feminist criticism with the concept of equality, liberty and justice, to feminine, feminist and female to sexual, textual politics and is so emphatic in its expression that the reputation of many writers are made or marred by the perspective of feminist criticism. Liberated from the tyranny of logo-centricism text is open to the response of reader and from monologist voice of the author the dialogic mutual discourse is established between the text and the one who entangles with it. No text is whole and complete in itself every text is a pretext, polyphonic, plural and interrelated

**Keywords:** aesthetic theory, author, reader, text, criticism.

Literary criticism starts with the literary creativity and the conflict of supremacy of one over the other is difficult to settle. But it can be said safely that only a great creative artist could be a great literary critic as s/he can empathize with the pain and pleasure of creative output. Plato disliked poets or literary figures as they were creating an illusion out of illusion. The genius of Plato could perceive the magic and witchcraft of littérateurs'

creating a world thrice far removed from the reality and infatuation and imitation of this fantasy without understanding may misguide a common man and lead him into strange arrays. But the death of a teacher gives birth to the rise of a disciple and choosing the inductive path Aristotle could be able to turn the ideology of his own master by propounding the first major shift that literature is not a bane but boon giving vent to our hidden desires and malice by the cathartic effect of pity and fear. Literature could have a medicinal effect. Comedy can make human beings realize their follies and drawbacks and by knowing these they have every chance to amend and correct themselves. Tragedy can guide one to purge oneself of the great sins a grand person may commit and thus by arousing the feeling of pity and fear one can feel ennobled and can be a good human being. Thus proving the importance of literature in the life, Aristotle established the status of art and its criticism which none could shake in future.

An artist was compared to a bee that collects his experience from various resources and presents his viewpoint before the world. He was compared to a spider also in contrast to a bee that weaves his own web of different yarns. The mirror and lamp theory came into light with the rise of school of romanticism where the romantic thinkers disapproved the imitation of the world discarding the literature –a mirror-of the society-theory as static, dead, factual, intellectual, imitation and propounded an artist as a lamp that burns within to give the light and by his imagination which is dynamic, live and emotional expresses his self with vitality and force. Literature came out of the burden of correcting and amending the society and sought a new guideline of art for art's sake. Literature was not something abstract to be learnt by reading great masters and meditating them day in and day out. Study of human nature became the main reflection of literature and literature and criticism merged into each other. Coleridge and Wordsworth brought not only poetry from the closets of the drawing rooms but also developed a theory of poetry based upon subjective feelings and emotion free from the objective rendering of the world. Poetry was not something pre meditated or a very thoughtful process but a spontaneous flow of powerful feelings evoked by a beautiful scene, sweet song, natural beauty, however the emotions thus aroused were the emotions recollected in tranquility. Thus, the shift was from objectivity to subjectivity, from the depiction of human nature to wild nature, imitation to imagination, satire upon the follies and drawbacks of human beings to glorify the common man, sublimity of language to the language used by a common folk. The path of romanticism was individualistic, decentralized and anarchic hence chaotic and passing from Existentialism and Marxism it led to the ultra- modern deconstruction. An individual was lost in the society in Marxism and the society got doomed in the existentialism ideology.

Fed up by the romantic impressionism, anarchic imagination and intensive personal reflection, T. S. Eliot again turned to classicism to seek inspiration for his critical evaluation. Emphasizing upon the principle of pure objectivity, creative writing became a scientific process where a critic became just a catalyst to conclude this reaction. One has to represent without getting involved in the representation. Nothing is original in this world. Representation is already represented and writer's work is to follow the tradition and improving the work by his individual talent. T S Eliot's work has shown complexity of expression, indirect rendering and intellectual projection, which according to him was the demand of the time.

If T S Eliot approved escape from personality in a critical evaluation, the new critics focused upon the form itself ignoring any historical, autobiographical or any other external reference. The microscopic study of text made the critics to find figures of speech, study of paradox and irony, effect of rhetoric and connotation in the text and defamiliarisation of the text. Form was an organic part of the content and form was nothing without content and content is nothing without form and there is nothing but form to explicate and interpret the meaning of the text. The hierarchy of the text or the author was put aside in this school and a critic was supposed not to be the victim of the intentional or pathetic fallacy. This was the beginning of the autonomy of the text that was to reign supreme in the later periods. The shift, which was to be observed in the new- new criticism, was from hermeneutics to deconstruction. What the text said was good enough but the unsaid part was more crucial. The authority of the author was already challenged but the author is no more in the present scenario. 'The center cannot hold and anarchy is loosed upon everywhere' –the centrality of meaning –logocentrism is subverted opening up many new vistas in the text. One cannot be forced to listen to the monologist voice of the author but the dialogic discourse, which involves the reader, has become significant. The focus shifted from author to reader.

The present age of criticism is a very critical age. It appears to be chaotic but the order will come out of the chaos only. Death of the author means the birth of the reader, death of the teacher means the emergence of the pupil. Decentralization would lead to the upsurge of the margins and the suppressed voice of women or neglected classes of the society in the form of minor characters or dalits or the sub- altern is coming in the foreground in the form of the discourse of the marginalized. Feminist criticism or Marxist ideology or establishment of minority identity has got renewed support and enthusiasm in the present scenario.

Literature has been considered as mirror of the society. Mimetic representation of the world has been the main issue of the literature but now limitation of the photographic representation is all accepted. The world was broken into the conflict of the mind and body "Let's then you and I" but now it is disintegrated into multifaceted pieces of Doris Lessing world where artist only tries to integrate all the broken pieces. The plasticity in the presentation of the world gave rise to the emergence of expressionistic school. Logical stream from A to B zigzagged with flashback and stream of consciousness technique a new kind of vision changed the entire perspective of evaluation of literary work.

The French revolution broke the myth of the society. Individual aspiration could be sacrificed no more in the name of the society. Lyrical expression of the romantics brought out poetry from cultural artifact and drawing room specialty to spontaneous flow of powerful emotions to be rendered in the outskirts wild open field of nature. The impression of the personality was so emphatically expressed in the works of romantics that irritated T S Eliot and make him exhort the critics to escape from the personality and to be objective in their evaluation, which further took the form of theory of impersonality for Roland Barth. The outcome also resulted in bringing forth the subtlety of pathetic fallacy and intentional fallacy.

New critics and formalists believed in autonomy and uniqueness of form. But the fixity of form disintegrated later and autonomy of the text was challenged as there remains many slants/ gaps/ silences/ distortions/ and every interpretation is ambiguous and incomplete.

Structuralists like Levi Strauss, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes and Jonathan Culler put forth the theory that structures are prior to the author and meaning is conveyed by structures, codes and conventions. Structures are circular and exclusive and by the paradigmatic and syntagmatic arrangement of different sounds and words the meanings of any language emerge. A sign contains a signifier and a signified, which is arbitrary, and it has a correspondent relationship with each other. This arbitrary authority of a corresponding relationship was challenged by deconstructionist who goes beyond the circularity and exclusive nature of structures discarding the fixity of meaning. Text is no longer an organized whole but it has infinite extension, layers upon layers lying one upon the other and meaning is peeled off like the layers of onion. Not only phenomena but *noumena* also come under the purview.

All hierarchies of author or text fades away, canonicity unregarded, author is in the backyard. The emphasis is upon the importance of the reader, a common man who need not be in the awe of the authority of the writer who entices his/her reader knowing beforehand what s/he is going to create and takes advantage of this monopoly.

With the change of the focus from the main to the margins the neglected, marginalized, suppressed and silence sections of the society came in the forefront. Though the feminist awareness ensued in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it touched new heights and new dimensions in the changed scenario. Feminist criticism with the concept of equality, liberty and justice, to feminine, feminist and female to sexual, textual politics and is so emphatic in its expression that the reputation of many writers are made or marred by the perspective of feminist criticism. His/story is to be rewritten as her/story keeping in view Simone de Beauvoir's observation that " it is not the inferiority of women that has caused their historical insignificance: it is rather their historical insignificance that has doomed them to inferiority" ( Simone De Beauvoir 163) . Liberated from the tyranny of Phallogo-centricism text is open to the response of reader and from monologist voice of the author the dialogic mutual discourse is established between the text and the one who entangles with it. No text is whole and complete in itself every text is a pretext, polyphonic, plural and interrelated. Literature has turned into literatures and history is transformed into histories. How can one disagree with M. H. Abrams when he asserts that "Pluralism – is not only valid, but necessary to our understanding of literary and cultural history" (M. H. Abrams, The Deconstructive Angel) One has to discern how the author uses his "power to narrate or to block other narratives from forming

and emerging" (Edward Said, intro, xiii). Criticism today is criticism of the criticism without even consideration of literary values. Literature is pushed back and literary theory giving theory about theories. It affirms nothing and denies nothing. There should be an endeavour to come out of this narcissism.

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