



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

THEORY AND CRITICISM: AN INTRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Theory is a set a set of generalizations which are intimately interrelated. Logically interrelated concepts having conceptual scheme comprise theory. It has reflexive and philosophical concerned with questions of justification. It attempts to give rigorous causes of ideology, social reality and progress. So it is speculation that is based on logic and reasoning. When we talk of the relation of theory to literature, theory develops tools and criticism applies tools to the literary texts. Criticism passes judgement based on theory. This is the actual use of the method for the better understanding of the text and its meaning. Literary theory outlines broad concepts about literature and criticism explores the individual text applying the tools developed out of concepts. Literary theory is the philosophical discussion whereas criticism is the process of evaluation, interpretation, explanation and practical application to the specific literary text.

Key Words: Theory, criticism, methods, concepts, literary text, truth.

Theory and Criticism: Meaning, definition and explication

Theory is a set of statements having scientific law and logic. Literary theory is the process of understanding literature, its functions, the relation of text to author, to reader, to language, to society and to history. According to Buchanan, "The term critical theory was coined by Max Horkeimer in 1937 to describe the work of Frankfurt School" (100). Frankfurt School, institute for Social research, was the collective name for a group of scholars affiliated to Frankfurt University. Raman Selden points out, "The rise of theory in the 1960s did mark a definite break with a predominantly humanistic and often moralistic tradition in criticism"(1). According to Hawthorn, "In the 1970s the term critical theory was often used alongside literary theory to refer to that body of theory associated with the study of literature or literary criticism"(58). Literary theory is reflexive enterprises that gives outlines to externalize the matters that have not been possible through common eyes. Richard J.Lane

in *Global Literary Theory* asserts, "What became known alternatively as "the theoretical turn", "The rise of theory" and in some quarters "the theory wars" began roughly speaking in the 1960s: literary theory underwent a profound shift". (xxiv). He further claims that three domains: language, gender and sexuality, and history dominated the discourse in literary theory.

Theory is defined as the conceptual methods that readers use to understand and analyze literature. Rob Pope says, "For a few people the moment "Theory" –i.e. highly abstract, stand alone Theory with a capital T-has passed. For a few others it never arrived. But for most people in and around the subject the choice of texts and range of approaches have been profoundly influenced by the theorizing of the past century or thirty years"(6) When we use certain methods to help us understand the meaning, those methods comprise literary theory. Even critics have claimed the beginning of post theory. However, Pope remarks "theorizing as an ongoing process of

reflexive practice, not so much theory as a finished product, and still less the institution of an additional or alternative canon of theorists”(7). Literary criticism is the practical application of those theories to particular works of literature. It looks closely at the texts it has chosen to consider and explore them in great depth explaining difficulties and perhaps outlining a position about an aspect of the texts that would not normally be obvious, but which is nonetheless supported by the text. Criticism indicates an indepth exploration of an individual work. Tyson says , “Theory develops your ability to see any given problem from a variety of points of view, which is a skill worth having no matter what career you pursue” (1).

Literary text and the process of perceiving the world has been changed so far due to the development of theory. Literature was treated as the scientific representation by the naturalists. However classicism valued generalized representation of nature. Romanticists gave importance to emotion, imagination and nature. New critics’ motto was the textual reading. During the late 20th New-historicist gave priority to context. This is the reason knowledge of theory is essential to a full understanding of what we are doing when we engage with literature at any level. According to Jonathan Culler, “Theory we are told , has radically changed the nature of literary studies, but people who say this do not mean literary theory, the systematic account of the nature of literature and of the methods for analysing it”(1). Practical criticism itself reflects theoretical assumptions. Criticism is the conscious evaluation or appreciation of a work of art according to some accepted aesthetic ideas. It is the act of passing judgement upon the qualities of anything. An intelligent, sensitive and responsive reader does have his own judgement but the reader has to adopt the certain parameters developed out of theory. Practical criticism ensures that a learner will make personal judgement of a piece of literature that he might have never seen before. Tyson points out, “Critical theory can increase your understanding of literary texts by helping you see more in them than you have seen before. And by giving you more to see in literature, critical theory can make literature more interesting to read” (2). Theory

develops tools to develop a variety of perspectives so as to analyse the text. Buchanan defines, “ Theory is a generic term for the interdisciplinary combination of philosophy, literary criticism and sociology produced by scholars like Roland Barthes, Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze”(467). Theory is not concerned with the exploration of individual texts but rather with outlining broad concepts about the study of literature itself. It is generally agreed that a knowledge of theory is essential to a full understanding of what we are doing when we engage with literature at any level. Baldick defines, “Theory is a shorthand term used since 1970 in this capitalized form to a miscellaneous body of intellectual approaches that had increasingly become interlinked and mutually reinforcing in their repudiation of humanist traditions in literary study, history, aesthetics and philosophy”(334).

Literary theory, as a critique of common sense and exploration of alternative conceptions, involves, questioning of the most basic assumption of literary study, speculative practice, accounts of desires and language. Habib points out, “ Literary theory employs concepts and terminology that are rooted in philosophy and other disciplines” (2). Theory brings many ideas from other field of knowledge to engage in a discussion on humanities, art and literature and different issues like race, identity, mythologies, signs and many other issues that are not directly linked to literature. Theory has made literary discourse interdisciplinary by welcoming ideas from other discipline.

Literary theory is not something that has been developed in a vacuum but has arisen for the most part in response to the problems encountered by readers, scholars and critics in their practical contact with the text. It also provides excellent tools that can not only show us our world and ourselves through new and valuable lenses but also can strengthen our ability and with a good deal of insight.

Literary criticism is the play of mind on the work of literature employing certain techniques and tools. M.A.R. Habib asserts, “Our word ‘criticism’ derives from the ancient Greek term *krites*, meaning ‘judge’(9). However Guerin, Labor, Morgan,

Reesman and Willingham cite the way Susan Sontag has attacked criticism, "She saw criticism- at least, most of it -as a dry-as-dust intellectual operation, the intent of which is to control and manage art and method of which was to reduce the work of art to content and then to interpret that" (2). However other critics have evaluated criticism as an art of making judgement. Lois Tyson says, "Critical theory develops your ability to see any given problem from a variety of point of view" she further points out that "critical theory can increase your understanding of literary texts by helping you see more in them than you have seen before"(1-2). Criticism is the art of making judgement about works of art and literature. Generally it has been thought to be the fault finding process but for others criticism is the process of finding excellences. Both the concepts are incomplete. Criticism is the art of estimating the quality and character of a specific work of art. As Klarer says, "In the English speaking world, the term literary criticism can refer to the literary interpretation of texts as well as their evaluation" (94) The point is that criticism dwells in the text finding the words and phrases that reflect the world. It guides the the way of reading and interpreting the text that in turn reflects the world.

Literary criticism is the study, evaluation and interpretation of literature. It deals with reading, interpretation and commentary of literary texts that have been designated as literature. The main task of the critic is to examine the words on the page. The way writer uses the words, phrases, sentences, organization of language, selection and arrangement of content. It brings into light the new streak of light that has not been visualised by the creative writers. Satya P. Mohanty, says, "Criticism became technical not because it lost the nerve to talk about society but primarily because it took its nature and its role in society for granted" (5). Literature helps to understand life whereas criticism helps to understand literature. So criticism works upon creation and deals with the books i.e. it deals with secondary matters. It is the interpretative function not the subjective and emotional judgement. For interpretative function, there has to be certain accepted parameters that have to be the base to judge literary works. The practice of viewing

literary text from critical lense is viewed from many perspectives in relation to literature, criticism and theory. In analyzing the text, seeing whether the work represents reality of life or partially or completely distorts reality, studying process of mind to read a text, analyzing ideas and concepts from myth and religion, history, social background to determine the meaning and interpretation of the text, readers, thinkers and scholars have practiced various approaches, methods and tools. Satya P. Mohanty views, "Other than literary criticism, for literary theory does not infact refer to a theory of literature today. Rather, it points to a larger area of theoretical investigation informed by film and media studies, anthropology, ethnic and third world cultural studies, feminism, and various kinds of interpretive projects in the social sciences." He means to say that currently literary theory has taken its course to social and political issues. Consequently, different schools, and theories have been developed in the field of knowledge in general and in the domain of literature in particular. The tools propounded for having critical study, observation, analysis, examination and evaluation of literary works are known as literary theories. The implication of theory to interpret a text is said to be criticism. Therefore theory is the base for criticism.

Criticism is the practical application of literary theory because criticism always deals directly with particular literary works, while theory is general. And a critic is not concerned only with the form and language of literature rather it is concerned so as to penetrate the experiences that is going to the making of a work of art. Criticism helps to evaluate the works of literary figures showing the line of thought between the work of art and literature and the common philosophy of life. Moreover the down to earth reality in relation to all spheres of life is pointed out through critical approaches. Buchanan defines, "In general critical theory explores the connections, overlaps, intersections, and interferences between the three spheres of economic development, psychic life and culture" (101). Literary criticism is fundamentally the estimation of the value of a particular work or body of work on such grounds as: the personal or cultural significance of the themes and the uses of language

of a text, the insights and impact of a text. Habib further points, "Literary criticism goes at least as far back as archaic Greece, which begins around 800 years before the birth of Christ" (9). Baldick defines criticism, "Criticism is the reasoned discussion of literary works, an activity which may include some or all of the following procedures: in varying proportions: the defence of literature against moralists and censors, classification of a work according to its genre, interpretation of its meaning, analysis of its structure and style, judgement of its worth by comparison with other works, estimation of its likely effect on readers, and the establishment of general principles by which literary works can be evaluated and understood" (72-73). However Joanna Thornborrow and Shan Wareing show the importance of language to literary theory. They present "If you are studying a course which introduces you to literary theory, and contains information about historical, social and psychoanalytical perspectives on texts, you may find that asking questions which are linked to issues of language and discourse will play an important part in your understanding of those perspectives"(216). They value linguistics so as to understand texts using literary and criticism.

Rob Pope has presented four basic meanings of criticism:

1. Finding fault and pulling to pieces in a negative sense,
2. Analysing and pulling to pieces in the neither sense of taking apart.
3. Interpreting with a view to establishing meaning and understanding,
4. Evaluating with a view to establishing relative or absolute worth. (43)

According to Pope dissection of literary work into pieces, establishing meaning and linking it to the real world are the basic aspects of literary criticism. Rather than showing the effort only to find the pitfalls and holes in the text, criticism links text to the world. This is the reason why criticism is thought to be the conscious evaluation or appreciation of a work of art, either according to the critic's personal taste or according to some accepted aesthetic ideas. As far as possible criticism should avoid temperamental make up and personal

preferences and adopt the varying parameters developed from age to age because it is the act of passing judgement upon the qualities of anything. It is an art of making judgement about works of art and literature. Imagination, knowledge and judgement are the qualities of the critic.

Criticism is the conscious evaluation or appreciation of a work of art according to some accepted tools propounded by theory for having critical study, observation, analysis, examination and evaluation. The implication of theory to interpret a text is criticism. Theory outlines broad concepts about literature but criticism explores the individual text applying the tools developed out of concepts. So criticism makes judgement about the work of art applying certain tools as per the modality of specific critical mode. Its one basic principle is the truth. A work that goes beyond time and captures the universal aspect of life is evaluated through criticism. The existence of literature is based on the critical tools applied to literature. Great works of literature become the concern of critics time and again because they capture the truth of the world. They not only present but also aesthetic aspect of life. The beauty of life presented by the writer draws the attention of the critics and they go on diving into the depth of the work of literature so as to find out the links of work with the social, political, cultural and aesthetic part of life. Moreover it helps the readers to do judgements of the texts that have never been seen and read before. The critic looks very closely into the work and finds words, phrases and sentences the either present aesthetic beauty or social reality. Unrelated and fragmentary aspects are woven through critical approaches. Therefore, theory is the philosophical discussion whereas criticism is the process of evaluation, interpretation, explanation and practical application to the specific literary text.

Conclusion

Theory is a set of statements which are interconnected deductively. Literary theory on the other hand is a body of theory associated with the study of literature. Then only literature can be a stimulating field in which readers examine debate and point out the social and cultural aspects. It includes the works of philosophy, social studies,

history, politics and even pedagogy. Where as textual reading and interpretation can dig out the relation between text and social ideology and find out the way society is structured and functions. Textual criticism values only the pedagogical model related to college classroom. Where as theory can takes its stance on social and political aspects of society. It points out to a larger area of theoretical investigations as well. However the great works of literature which have social, political, cultural and aesthetic gravity draw the attention of critic through out ages. Evaluation, interpretation and explanation of such great works of literature are the bedrocks of criticism. Hence criticism passes judgement on literary works based on theory. Theory develops tools and criticism applies these tools to analyse the text. This is the actual use of the method for the better understanding of the text and its meaning. The role of critic goes on changing as the methods, tools and sign posts of criticism change through time.

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