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Literary Criticism and Its Significance

Literary criticism is the way to discover the aspects a particular piece of literature is based on. It provides us with different lenses through which we can delve into literature very easily. Though early literary criticism is based more on the technical aspects of the writings such as Aristotle's *Poetics* is an ancient version to analyze the plot, diction, character etc. of a literary work, however, modern literary criticism is mostly based on different literary theories such as postcolonialism, Marxism, Feminism etc. That is to say, literary criticism helps us to explore the structure, themes and underlying purposes of a piece of literature.

Why is literary criticism important? To answer this question, we have to explore another question that is "what would happen if we do not see a literary work through the lens of literary criticism?" The answer to this question is we will just have pleasure after reading the very literary works. It is worth mentioning here that, the European people came to know about the other continents, their geography and their socio-economic condition through reading books. It was not an ordinary reading for them, they would not read books just for mere pleasure rather, they would engage in this opportunity to explore, expedite and exploit others. They would read the books politically. Now, it is very clear to us why literary criticism is important. That is to say, literary criticism exposes the hidden politics and policies submerged in the words of a particular piece of literature. So, to understand that politics or, to some extent, the policies, nothing but literary criticism play an important role. Put it into other words, the purpose of literary criticism is to "broaden a reader's understanding of an author's work by summarizing, interpreting, and exploring its value." (MasterClass, 2021)

Literary criticism navigates around several approaches. They are, for example, historical biographical criticism, sociological criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, formalism, new criticism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, feminist criticism, eco criticism etc. We will try to explore several famous literary works to perceive the role and importance of literary criticisms in analyzing literary texts.

To begin with, Daniel Defoe, a prominent English novelist, novel *Robinson Crusoe* is widely known for its adventurous flavor. It is well-read and gossiped about by kids and children all over the world. Even, the mass people all over the world read it to take pleasure. It seems to them as a goose-bumping story or journey of an individual named Robinson Crusoe. However, a political reading of this novel reveals the underlying brutalities that a typical European did to a non-European. Ordinarily, the plot of this novel navigates around the victory of a sea traveler, Robinson Crusoe, over an island and its inhabitants including the well-organized flora and fauna, and the individual, Friday. The island is in Africa and Friday is a black African. However, this is not a mere story like this. A post-colonial reading exposes that the way Crusoe wins the island and its inhabitants is nothing but a dehumanizing way. Crusoe hegemonizes Friday and makes him his slave. This act is purely colonial. An ordinary reading of this novel cannot reveal these sorts of hidden cruelties and, therefore, we need the assistance of literary criticisms.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* provides a post-colonial lens to understand the literature written by a typical colonial writer. His book helps readers dissect the ways a typical European writer puts in his words a literary work. We can consider Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, for example. In this novel, one of the most prominent characters is Kurtz. The way he expands

his domination over the people of Congo proves the European biases hidden in his brain. That so-called grand narratives to civilize the non-European people, eventually, under the lens of Said's *Orientalism* demonstrates nothing but the European hypocrisy.

Again, when we read the play, *Mother Courage and Her Children* written by Bertolt Brecht under the shed of post-colonialism, we may figure out the bad impact of capitalism and war. Then, we can easily relate that there is a close connection between capitalism and war. We will be able to understand how capitalism-imperialism and war go hand in hand. To analyze it a little bit clearly, we may put Arundhati Roy, an Indian writer and feminist, her seminal work, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* as a reference. She shows in this book how capitalists make policies to continue the war and, thus, sell weapons. However, in *Mother Courage and Her Children*, if we read it closely, we will know that a mother, the character Mother Courage, becomes so absorbed with money, she forgets about the destructive nature of war. She does not want the war to stop. In this way, it becomes clear to us that wars and earning money have a close relationship. However, reading without the help of literary criticisms will not aid us in this opportunity to know the secret.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, an American writer, the novel *A Scarlet Letter* is a famous one read by people worldwide. Ordinary people read this book to have some pleasure of romance. They find this book very romantic and a story of a secret love affair. However, a reading from the perspective of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory provides a different scent. Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth are the three prominent characters of this book. The way they act in this novel reveals their psychological condition and suffering. A close Freudian reading helps us realize that each of these prominent characters is somehow or other directed by their basic human instincts Freud terms as Id, Ego and Super-Ego. Dimmesdale's falling in love with Hester or vice-versa is controlled by their Ids. Similarly, Roger's revenge attitude towards Dimmesdale is also directed by his Id. When an ordinary individual reads this novel, s/he will not be able to perceive this submerged flavor, on the other hand, a good reader with knowledge of literary criticisms will easily understand this flavor and will, thus, be able to comprehend the causes of the sufferings of the people around him.

When a common man reads the play, *As You Like It* written by William Shakespeare, s/he will just try to explore the comic elements of this book. S/he focuses on having pleasure. Generally, this book is received for its comic love stories by ordinary readers. However, a critical reading from the perspective of eco-criticism and eco-feminism gives us a diverse taste.

An eco-critic studies both books and the environment holding a book in one hand and the other holding the branch of a tree. When an eco-critic reads this very play, *As You Like It* s/he sees that the way the characters act with the Forest of Arden sometimes mistreats it. Orlando's acts of writing his beloved's name on the bulks of the trees expose his subtle tendency to destroy nature. As soon as he writes the name of his beloved on the bulks of the trees which is an act of nonsense- basically, his so-doing reveals illogicality, an eco-critic sees the exploitation of nature.

Besides, the final union of all the characters – basically a happy ending at the end of the play pokes an eco-feminist to have a deep understanding of it. It is eco-feminism which helps him/her realize the relationship between the woman and the environment and the importance to organize a disorganized situation. As soon as all the characters of the play, *As You Like It* come close to nature- the Forest of Arden, they start feeling better than living at the court. Finally, Rosalind, a prominent female character in this play, her wise leadership to organize all the disorganizations among the characters reveals that a female is like nature. Like nature, she has a good nursing quality and thus it proves the relationship between women and nature.

Begum Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream* is not a mere dream. A feminist literary perspective supports us to understand the history-long gender binaries prominent in our society. An apolitical reading of this very write-up just gives us hints of a daydream of a woman. It will, thus, provide us with a sort of nothingness dreaming in sleep. However, as soon as we take a hand from feminism, we get a hidden message of reformation of gender roles. The way Rokeya raises her voice against the history-long patriarchy and dichotomies of public-domestic issues is a subversive one. Only a critical reading will help us realize the discrimination between genders.

Yet again, a feminist study of Thomas Hardy's one of the most influential novels *Tess of D'Urbervilles* asserts the heinous conditions that a woman is to fall in a society where the patriarchy rules. It is shown in this novel that women are always subject to falling into danger. The protagonist of this book, Tess, can never put her bold voice against patriarchy. She is shown as a puppet in the hands of fate and finally, she is shown to be a murderer. Eventually, she is executed. This implies an important message here that women are made for sacrifice only.

However, in a subversive reading from the aspect of feminist literary theory, a woman should never be shown in this manner. Rather, she should be given a voice to have her due rights. Virginia Woolf, a prominent feminist writer, in her book *A Room of One's Own*, writes for the welfare of women. She tries to establish the notion that like men, women should also be given equal priority in the respect of social, economic and political aspects of a particular society. She writes "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well." While trying to establish the due rights of women, she says "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." Howsoever, without the aid of literary criticism one does not even perceive this hidden fact of society let alone establish equal rights for the woman.

To sum up, while an ordinary reading of a piece of literature provides a reader with just pleasure, reading under the aspects of literary criticism helps a reader to comprehend the concealed politics and policies of the very work. That is to say, literary criticism is important for understanding and interpreting literature. It helps readers recognize the deeper and more complex aspects of a literary work. By engaging in literary criticism, readers can explore the different meanings within a text and develop a greater understanding and admiration for the artistic and meaningful aspects of literature.

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