

***Basavaraju N.**

B. Prasad's ***An Introduction to English Criticism***, RAJIV BERI for Macmillan Publisher India, 1967 – 2007 (21 times) Pages 276

Book Review

The book is an attempt to provide a foundation for the understanding of the basic truths of the art of Criticism. It is a simple and handy reference book written for the Indian student of English Literature. The book briefly covers the basic concepts of criticism, both ancient and modern. The book belongs to the arena of Criticism.

Author's Background : Former Head, Department of English, Agra College, Agra

Other works of the Author:

- **A Background to the study of English Literature**
- **A short History of English Poetry**
- **The Poetry of Thomas Hardy**
- **Milton's Paradise Lost, Book I**
- **Shelly's Adonais**
- **Arnold's Thyrsis**

The kind of audience targeted by the book is the students of English Literature. The book is also useful and handy for the aspirants of competitive exams like UGC- NET.

Outline of the Book:

The book starts with an Introduction in which The Art of Criticism is introduced to the readers

With a brief explanation of the same.

The content of the book is divided into main sections and sub sections as follows;

The Background of English Criticism

1. The Greek Masters
2. The Roman Classicists
3. Enter Romance
4. The Emergence of the Vernacular

English Criticism

1. The Battle of Tastes
2. The Triumph of Classicism
3. The Romantic Revolt
4. The Victorian Compromise
5. The Age of Interrogation

The book has a Bibliography and the Index of Literary Terms in the final part.

The Introduction part of the book discusses the Art of Criticism with basic concepts of the critical method, its limitations and its three forms. These sub topics throw light on the origin of criticism which is born out of questioning and today's criticism which is subjects everything to the closest scrutiny and demands Intellectual freedom. The author explains how the critical approach varies from age to age with respect to the changing times. The three forms of criticism namely; (1) Legislative Criticism (Elizabethan Criticism in England) (2) Aesthetic Criticism (Sidney, Dryden, Addison, Coleridge etc) and (3) Descriptive Criticism (Ben Johnson, Dryden etc) are introduced to the readers. The introduction part also explains the beginning of the criticism in the Ancient Greek with reference to Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripedes, Socrates and Aristophanes.

Section I: The Background of English Criticism

The I Chapter of this main section briefly explains the Greek Masters- Plato and Aristotle. It gives a concise description of their works and theory on criticism. More emphasis is given on Aristotle, his Critical works and their Nature. This chapter throws

light on Aristotle's observations on Poetry, on Tragedy, on Comedy, on the Epic and on style.

The II Chapter of this section deals with The Roman Classicists Horace and Quintilian. It begins with the introduction of the Age and works of Horace, his Classicism, and his observations on Poetry, on Drama and on the Satire. This chapter concludes with the description of Quintilian's work and its Nature, General observations made by him on Style and his theory on Style.

The III Chapter briefly describes the contributions of Longinus and his theory of Sublimity with its components like Grandeur of Thought, Capacity of strong Emotion, Appropriate use of Figures, Nobility of Diction and Dignity of Composition. There is also a brief description of his romanticism in this chapter.

The Chapter IV, which is the last chapter of this section deals with the Emergence of The Vernaculars. This chapter focuses on Dante the author of the work Divine Comedy. It throws light on the work of Dante, his views on the language of poetry and his theory on the choice of words.

It is significant that the author has added a dedicated sub heading "The Value of His Criticism" at the end of the description of each Critic and their contributions, which signifies their role in the development of the tradition of criticism.

Section II: English Criticism:

The second main section of the book which is titled as English Criticism starts with Vth chapter namely The Battle of Tastes. This section witnesses the trajectory of the art of criticism moving from Ancient to modern period. It is significant that the author has used a unique technique of beginning each chapter of this section with a sub heading "General Survey", in which he gives a Bird's eye view of each tradition he explains.

The **V chapter** focuses on the work and 'Argument' of Sir Philip Sidney, his idea of Classicism and its supportive arguments. The description moves from Sidney to Ben Jonson. The chapter explains Ben Jonson and his work along with his theory of Classicism, his idea of the Qualifications of a Poet, his observations on Style and estimates of Bacon and Shakespeare. The chapter also throws light on Jonson's Liberal Concepts of Rules.

The **VI Chapter** begins with the general survey of the earlier Neo-Classical Trends, The rise of Classicism and The French Classical Creed.

This chapter describes the critical works of John Dryden. It has a rather elaborative description of Dryden's theory on The Nature of Poetry, The function of poetry, Dramatic Poetry, on Tragedy, on Comedy, on the Epic, Satire and on Criticism.

The Chapter takes the readers on to the description on the critical work of Joseph Addison. The idea of Joseph Addison that 'a thing well said....a great thought dressed in words so commonly received, that it is understood by the meanest apprehensions' is well discussed under the sub heading True and False Wit. The other arguments of Addison like The pleasure of Imagination, his concepts on Tragedy, on Paradise Lost and on Criticism are also briefly explained.

The chapter takes up the critical work of Alexander Pope along with his concepts of Classicism and also his deviation from Classicism. Remarks made by Alexander Pope on the function of Criticism and on literature are also discussed under separate sub headings.

The next part of the chapter deals with The Critical theory of Dr. Johnson. His theory on Literary Criticism as well as Practical Criticism are rather elaborative presented by the author. Johnson's views on Kinds of Poetry, Versification and Poetic Diction are described briefly. His approach towards Drama is explained under a separate sub heading.

The **VII Chapter** 'The Romantic Revolt' starts with a general survey on Earlier Romantic Trends, The Romantic Creed and the factors responsible for the change. The chapter deals with the occasion and limitations of the critical work of William Wordsworth. The Neo-Classical Poetic diction which compelled Wordsworth to write his Preface is discussed in this part of the book. The concept of Wordsworth on poetry and poetic Diction are focused here.

This chapter also deals with another critic of this period, S.T. Coleridge. There is a brief description on the nature of his critical work along with his theory of Imagination, his view of Art, definition of poetry and his views on diction and poetic Genius. It also has a brief explanation on Coleridge's views on Dramatic Illusion.

The **Chapter VIII** The Victorian Compromise, the author gives a general outlook of the age and the impact of the changed conditions on Literature. French critical theories are also introduced to the readers in the General survey of this period. Critical works of Matthew Arnold find a significant place in this chapter. His theories on Grand style, Criticism of life and Touchstone method, creative and critical Faculties etc are briefly explained. There is a brief explanation of Walter Pater and his criticism in this chapter.

The **IX Chapter** 'The Age of Interrogation' which is the last chapter of this book explains the Revolt against Victorianism along with the Aesthetic and Moralistic Tradition, in the general survey section. The classicism of T. S. Eliot finds an important place in this chapter along with his theory on Impersonality of poetry. I. A. Richards's thoughts on the nature of poetry and on poetry and communication are discussed rather briefly but effectively. The chapter concludes with the discussion on F. R. Leavis, his work and theories on 'Conception of the Business of Criticism'.

Every chapter of this section of the book begins with a 'General Survey' of the particular period. Similarly, at the end of discussion on each critic, there is a dedicated sub heading 'The value of his criticism', which summarizes the thoughts and contributions of that particular Critic.

Conclusion:

The book is well planned, neatly organized and appropriately divided into Sections, chapters and sub-topics. The book has the qualities of a good reference book especially for students. Effort of the writer to put such a vast topic into a very brief format is appreciable but in doing so the author has concised the content more than what is desirable. There is an absence of the in depth analysis of the concepts and theories discussed in the book.

All these shortcomings are over shadowed by the fact that the book is written for the beginners of English Literature as an entry level ready reckoned which helps the readers to have an overall idea of English Criticism in such a concise form. The book is useful for the readers who are also students and aspirants of Competitive exams like UGC- NET.

Since the author himself has stated in the preface that the target readers of his book are students of literature, the book, to a very large extent, would fill the empty space created by the absence of well-organized book on Criticism. The book acts as a foundation, of course, strong foundation within its limitations.

Some of the Scholarly sources used by the Author:

- Literary Criticism in Antiquity, in two volumes by Atkins, J.W.H
- English Literary Criticism, in three volumes by Atkins, J.W.H
- Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art by Butcher, S.H

- Critical Approaches to Literature by Daiches, David
- A History of English Criticism by Saintsbury, George.
- The Making of Literature by Scott-James, R.A
- A History of Modern Criticism, in five volumes by Wellek, Rene.
- Literary Criticism: A short History by Wimsatt, W.K, and Brooks, Cleanth.

