

Literature And Literary Theory

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Abstract:-

The question of what literature is for—if there is a purpose—is not new. Since the beginning of literary theory as a field of study, the debate has been long and complex and is still ongoing. This article offers a reflection on the concept of purpose in the development of literary theories up to the advent of the cognitive turn in the twenty-first century, when empirical studies of literary reading began to proliferate. The paper argues that discussions on the question of purpose have changed from no purpose to pragmatic and later to more existential purposes. It places transformative reading in the centre of this debate and reflects on the results of the series of empirical studies conducted so far. The paper focuses on the implications and uses of transformative reading in social contexts. It concludes by discussing how empirical work in this area suggests new conceptual distinctions that could contribute to theorizing about purpose in literary studies more generally. It also indicates what lies ahead in terms of challenges while pointing at new research directions.

Keywords: Transformative reading, Literary experience, Cognition, Reader response, Empirical study, Literature education.

There is lot of talk about Literature and literary theory in literary and cultural studies. The impossibility of maintaining a clear-cut distinction between ordinary, day-to-day communication/language and literary communication/language has been pointed out by many scholars but never come to the conclusion. Then one may have to know the definition of literature and Literary Theory to clear this distinction.

According to N. KRISHNASWAMY, Literature is nothing but that transforms a verbal message into a work of art, a thing of beauty, a text with its own literary texture. To elaborate this J.L. Austin says the example of a man and wife when they marry in front of priest it assumes a religious value with no literariness. But in a play and film same statement has a literary and fictional value. We know that there is a connection between literariness and reality or between fiction and fact.

As Ezra Pound says, Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree. It is not for an age but for all time, not for any particular region or people. The purpose of great or timeless literature to humanize life, and

the job of critics is to interpret and measure the worth of a text by testing it against the accepted great texts as the best evidence of taste; great literature needs to be interpreted because it reveals human values only suggestively.

These notions about great literature and ideas about how to appreciate, interpret it were very simple and straightforward. But the world as well as word keeps changing. The continuing change in the formation of social system, attitudes, values and ideas are explained in sociology in terms of what is called the wave theory; the same applies to literature and related notions. Basically, it is assumed that there are three waves. The First Wave was The Agrarian Revolution where was a time when life was more village centered, family centered and community centered. Imagination and perception were based on local experience with a desire for universalizing the local perceptions. Added to this the second wave was the Industrial Revolution which brought the resultant urbanization, Consumerism & Capitalism. Similar to this in third wave information technology has shifted repetitive tasks to machine like Robots, Computers etc. in the information revolution. Towards the end in our thinking every living thing changes the world, the word (i.e. the language), our perceptions, ideas &

attitude; anything that does not change is dead. Notice that the word change is used both transitively & intransitively: we change the world and the world changes us; we change and world changes; similarly, we change the word and changes us; we change and the word changes. The world as well as the word is dynamic and not static; both are living organisms and the interactive process is highly dynamic. Literature being a reflection or imitation-the imaginative or intense expression and interpretation-of life (an escape from personality says Oscar Wilde), when our notions about life change, our ideas about literature too are bound to change; and they have changed.

Criticism has also changed in the course of time. This is revealed by literature in the way we use the word; for example, we talk not just about literature with a capital L but about Classical literature, Oral & Written literature, religious literature, adult literature, Children literature, Folk literature, Pop literature, Tribal literature, Tourist literature etc. This shows that imaginative literature is only one aspect of literature and it can not be equated with the whole says John Varghese in his book, Contemporary Literary Theory.

In earlier part we pointed out the Introduction of literature but in present we will see the definition of literary theory. It is neither the theory of anything in particular, nor a comprehensive theory of things in general. Theory has radically changed the nature of literary studies and the systematic account of the nature of literature and of the methods for analyzing it. Theory is a bunch of names; it means Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Lacan, & Gayatri Spivak for instance.

So, what is theory? According to the Jonathan Culler in his book Literary Theory, it is the part of the problem lies in the term theory itself, which gestures in two directions. On the one hand, we speak of theory of relativity, for example, an established set of propositions. On the other hand, there is the most ordinary use of the word theory (i.e. theory signals speculation).

A theory must be more than a hypothesis: it can't be obvious; it involves complex relations of a systematic kind among a number of factors; and it is not easily confirmed or disproved. If we bear these

factors in mind, it becomes easier to understand what goes by the name of theory. Theory is literary studies is not an account of the nature of literature or methods for it study it is a body of thinking and writing whose limits are exceedingly hard to define. The most convenient designation of this miscellaneous genre is simply the nick name theory, which has come to designate work that succeed in challenging and reorienting thinking in fields other than those to which they apparently belong. This is simplest explanation of what makes something count as theory. Works regarded as theory have effects beyond their original field. Theory in this sense is not a set of methods for literary study but an unbounded group of writings about every thing under the sun, from the most technical problems of academic philosophy to the changing way in which people have talk about and thought about the body.

The genre of theory includes works of anthropology, art history, film studies, gender studies, linguistics studies, philosophy, political theory and sociology. The works in question are tried to arguments in this field, but they become theory because their visions have been suggestive or productive for people who are not studying those disciplines. Works that become theory offer accounts others can use about mining, nature and cultural.

If theory is defined by its practical effects, as what changes people views, makes them think differently about their objects of study and their activities of studying them. The main effect of theory is the disputing of common sense; common sense views about meaning writing literature, experience. For example, theory questions the conception that the meaning of an utterance or text is what the speaker had in mind.

Thus, theory is an attempt to show that what we take for granted as common sense is in fact a historical construction, a particular theory that has come to seem so natural to us that we don't even see it as a theory. As a critique of common sense and exploration of alternative conceptions, theory involves a questioning of the most assumptions of literary study, the unsettling of anything that might have been taken for granted; what is meaning? What is an author? What is it to read? What is the subject who writes, reads, or acts?

To see the example of some theory one may take two celebrated theories which involve critiques of commonsense ideas about sex, writing, and experience. There are several important things to note about this example of theory. For one thing, literature is about sex; literature is one of the places where this idea of sex is constructed, where we find promoted the idea that peoples deepest identities are tied to the kind of desire they feel for another human being. Foucault has been especially influential as the inventor of new historical objects: things such as sex, punishment and madness. His work treat such thing as historical construction and thus encourage us to look at how the discursive practices of a period, including literature may have shaped things we take for granted. For second example of theory, Foucault illustrates some differences within theory as we saw in the writings of Jacques Derrida. Rousseau also follows this tradition, which has passed into common sense, when he writes; languages are made to be spoken; writing serves only as a supplement to speech. Here, Derrida intervenes, asking what a supplement is. But Webster defines it as some thing that completes or makes an addition.

What we learn from these texts is that the idea of the original is created by the copies and that the original is always deferred – never to be grasped. The conclusion is that our common-sense notion of reality as some thing present, and of the original as something that was once present, proves untenable: experience is always mediated by signs and the original is produced as an effect of signs, of supplements.

Foucault and Derrida are often grouped together as ‘post-structuralists’ but these two examples of ‘theory’ present striking differences. Derrida’s offers a reading or interpretation of texts, identifying logic at work in a text. Foucault’s claim is not based on texts in fact he cites amazingly few actual documents or discourses but offers a general framework for thinking about texts and discourses in general. Derrida’s interpretation shows the extent to which literary works themselves, such as Rousseau’s Confessions, are theoretical; they offer explicit speculative arguments about writing, desire, and substitution or supplementation, and they guide thinking about these topics in ways that they leave

implicit. Foucault, on the other hand, proposes to show us not how insightful or wise texts are but how far the discourses of doctors, scientists, novelists, and others create the things they claim only to analyze. Derrida shows how theoretical the literary works are, Foucault how creatively productive the discourses of knowledge are. There also seems to be a difference in what they are claiming and what questions arise. Derrida is claiming to tell us what Rousseau’s texts say or show, so the question that arises is whether what Rousseau’s texts say is true. Foucault claims to analyze a particular historical moment, so the question that arises is whether his large generalizations hold for other times and places. Raising follow-up questions like these is, in turn, our way of stepping into ‘theory’ and practicing it.

So what is theory? Four main points have said by Jonathan Culler in his book, *Literary Theory to study us* such as 1) Theory is interdisciplinary 2) Theory is analytical and speculative 3) Theory is a critique of common sense 4) Theory is reflexive, thinking about thinking in literature. As a result, theory is intimidating. One of the most dismaying features of theory today is that it is endless.

Theory makes you desire mastery: you hope that theoretical reading will give you the concepts to organize and understand the phenomena that concern you. This very short introduction will not make you a master of theory, and not just because it is very short, but it outline significant line of thoughts and areas of debate, especially those pertaining to literature.

Conclusion:-

This paper has reflected on the purposes of literature from the perspective of literary criticism. It has shown how throughout the development of the theories proposed, the debate has shifted from focusing on the text, the author, the contextual conditions, and/or the reader. This brief review has shown how, despite differing perspectives, literature can be seen as a source of self-knowledge, revealing and concealing much of who we are. It can be a rich source of personal meaning and what we do with it and how we use it also reveals its purpose. Art is a source for meaning-making by fostering self-reflection, and more conscientious awareness of how we engage with ourselves and others, it impacts

social cognition, and such abilities as empathy. Literature has, then, both personal and social purposes.

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